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BUSINESS | Page 1

Qatar ports record positive momentum in bulk cargo in Q1

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Amir reconstitutes FZA, QLC board of directors

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani issued yesterday Amiri Decision No. 17 of 2026, reconstituting the Board of Directors of the Free Zones Authority.

The decision stipulates that the Board of Directors of the Free Zones Authority be reconstituted under the chairmanship of HE Sheikh Faisal bin Thani bin Faisal al-Thani, with HE Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah bin Mohammed al-Thani as Vice-Chairman, and HE Ahmed bin Abdullah al-Jamal, Hamad Ali al-Khater, Sheikh Ali bin al-Waleed al-Thani, Saleh Maged al-Khulaifi, Ahmed Saeed al-Amoudi, and Abdullah Ali al-Kuwari, as members of the board.

The decision stipulates that the prime minister may add other experienced and competent members to the membership of the Authority's board of directors.

The decision also stipulates that the term of membership on the board shall be four years, renewable for one or more similar terms.

The decision is effective starting from its date of issue and is to be published in the official gazette.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani also issued Amiri Decision No. 16 of 2026, reconstituting the Board of Directors of the Qatar Leadership Centre (QLC).

The decision stipulates that

the Board of Directors of the Qatar Leadership Centre be reconstituted with HE Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani as Chairperson, HE Dr Abdullah bin Ali bin Saoud al-Thani as Vice-Chairperson, and HE Sultan bin Rashid al-Khater, Khalid Mohammed al-Hitmi, Aisha Jassim al-Kuwari, Dr Eiman Mustafawi and Maha Masoud al-Marri, as members of the board.

The decision also stipulates that the term of membership on the board shall be three years, renewable for one or more similar terms.

The decision is effective starting from its date of issue and is to be published in the official gazette. (QNA)

Amir, Greek minister review defence ties



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani met in his office at Lusail Palace yesterday with Greek Minister Nikolaos Georgios Dendias. They reviewed developments in the region and their repercussions on regional and international security and stability, in addition to discussing international efforts to contain tensions, reduce escalation, and promote diplomatic solutions. They also discussed co-operation between Qatar and Greece as well as ways to enhance them, particularly in the field of military and security, in order to strengthen the level of joint co-ordination between the two friendly countries. (QNA)



Qatar launches unified social welfare app

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

The Ministry of Social Development and Family has unveiled a unified digital platform consolidating all its public services into a single mobile application, marking a significant step in the country's broader drive towards e-government.

The app, now available on Apple and Google app stores, allows users to browse, apply for and track ministry services in real time, without visiting offices in person. Officials said the platform had been designed to the highest digital accessibility standards, with particular attention to ease of use

for the elderly and people with disabilities.

Speaking at a press conference in Doha yesterday, Assistant Undersecretary for Social Development Affairs Fahd Mohammed al-Khayarin said the launch demonstrated the ministry's commitment to accelerating digital transformation and adopting the latest technological solutions across government services.

A key feature of the platform is a digital social security card, allowing beneficiaries to access and present their credentials through the app without requiring a physical card. The platform also incorporates an AI-powered assistant to handle user queries and guide applicants through its services. **To Page 11**

Cabinet hails Amir's diplomatic efforts

The Cabinet has praised His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani's regional diplomatic efforts and approved a draft law on fuel station regulation at its weekly meeting.

The meeting was chaired by HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani at the Amiri Diwan yesterday.

HE the Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Ibrahim bin Ali al-Mohannadi said following the session that the Cabinet embraced His Highness the Amir's recent visits to Saudi Arabia and the UAE, where discussions focused on regional and international developments and efforts to enhance security and stability amid ongoing Iranian aggression.

HE al-Mohannadi said talks held in Jeddah between His Highness the Amir and Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud reflected the ongoing co-ordination and consultations between the two countries, marking their deep strategic relations and shared keenness to elevate joint action. **To Page 11**

MSDF gears up to host first 'Rawda Award'

Under the esteemed patronage of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, the Ministry of Social Development and Family (MSDF) will organise the first edition of the "Rawda Award" for Excellence in Social Work on Sunday to honour the winning social initiatives.

The Rawda Award represents Qatar's first national recognition in the field of social work. It was established under Amiri Decision No. 16 of 2025, providing an institutional framework to celebrate the most impactful and sustainable social initiatives across five main categories: individuals, families, non-profit institutions, the private sector, and media organisations.

The Award's Board of Trustees is chaired by HE the Minister of Social Development and Family Buthaina bint Ali al-Jabr al-Nuaimi, and operates under the MSDF in strategic partnership with the Social and Sports Activities Support Fund (DAAM).

The initiative aims to nurture, develop, and encourage a culture of social work in Qatar, promote societal values, and motivate the private sector and all community segments to compete in leading

THE RAWDA AWARD
Qatar's First National Honour for Excellence in Social Work

- FIRST NATIONAL SOCIAL WORK RECOGNITION.** Established by Amiri Decision to provide an institutional framework for honouring impactful social initiatives.
- FIVE DISTINCT CATEGORIES OF EXCELLENCE.** Recognising individuals, families, non-profit institutions, the private sector, and media organisations.
- TRANSITIONING FROM CARE TO EMPOWERMENT.** Fostering a culture of social work that prioritises human-centred, sustainable development.
- ANCHORED IN QATAR NATIONAL VISION 2030.** Directly supporting the national pillars of human and social development.

GT GRAPHICS

community initiatives by recognising outstanding achievements across all contributors to social development, aligned with Qatar National Vision 2030.

The ministry has established the general policies and standards for the award to ensure

alignment with national strategies and the objectives of Qatar National Vision 2030, particularly in the areas of human and social development, and to strengthen the principle of transition from care to empowerment. **To Page 11**

Advanced fabrication boosts access to Islamic heritage

By Peter Alagos
Business Editor

A Doha-based advanced fabrication studio has produced museum-grade replicas of six historically significant Islamic artefacts for the Museum of Islamic Art (MIA), using a hybrid manufacturing process combining 3D printing, digital modelling, and traditional casting techniques.

According to Khalid al-Saegh, the co-founder and chairman of Vectorize, the project was driven by MIA's need to expand public access to fragile historical pieces without compromising the originals.

"The museum was looking for a way to expand access to frag-

ile historical artefacts without compromising the originals... traditional replication methods are often limited when it comes to intricate Islamic geometries, delicate inscriptions, and multi-material compositions," al-Saegh told *Gulf Times* in an exclusive interview.

He said the six replicated artefacts span science, faith, art, and craftsmanship across Islamic history: the Ka'aba Key from the Mamluk period, the Planispheric Astrolabe from the Abbasid 10th century, the Mihrab Tile from Ilkhanid Iran, the Umayyad Dinar Gold Coin, the Tray inspired by Al-Andalus, and the Mamluk Incense Burner.

Al-Saegh said each artefact was chosen both for its historical significance and the fabrication chal-



Planispheric Astrolabe from the Abbasid 10th century.



Mihrab Tile from Ilkhanid Iran.

lenges it presented. He explained, "They were selected because they represent intellectual, spiritual, and artistic excellence within Islamic civilisation. Each artefact also presented unique fabrication challenges."

He noted, "Authenticity was non-negotiable. The process began with high-resolution digital reconstruction to preserve inscriptions, proportions, and historical details." Engineering adaptations were made inter-

nally rather than visibly, al-Saegh pointed out, to ensure structural integrity across resin, brass, and ceramic formats.

"This required a constant dialogue between historical preservation and fabrication science," he added.

According to Vectorize co-founder and CEO Farid Mahfouz, the project was developed in close collaboration with specialists from MIA.

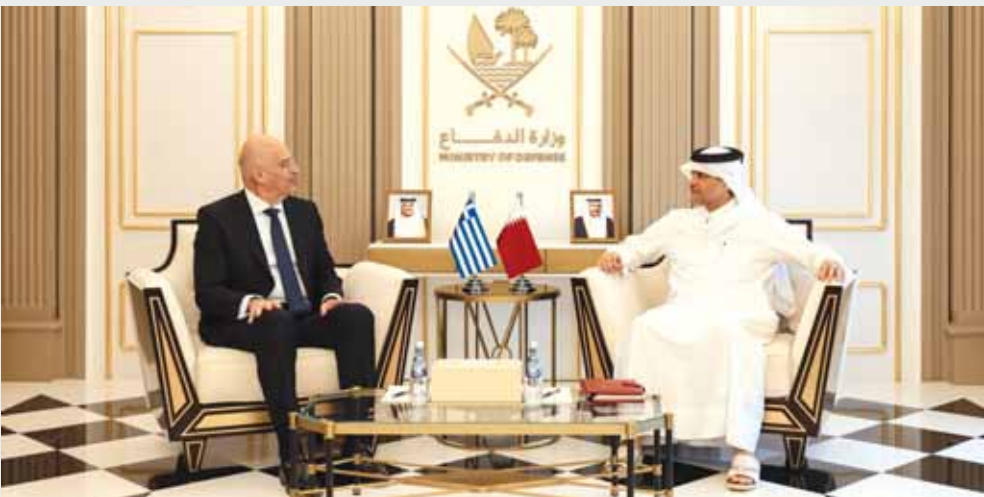
Susan Parker-Leavy defined museum-level technical standards, Marc Pelletreau provided high-definition references and reviewed models before execution, Soumeya Menber ensured technical alignment throughout, and Sawsan Mohdamin Sallam facilitated the procurement framework, Mahfouz pointed out. **To Page 11**

2 missiles repelled, 3rd hits oil tanker

The Ministry of Defence announced that Qatar was targeted yesterday by three cruise missiles from Iran. In a statement, the ministry said the Qatari Armed Forces successfully intercepted two of the missiles, while the third one struck an oil tanker chartered by QatarEnergy in Qatar's economic waters.

It added that the measures and co-ordination necessary were taken with the relevant authorities to evacuate the oil tanker, which had a crew of 21 people. No human casualties were reported and there was no impact on the environment as a result of this incident. QatarEnergy confirmed that Aqua 1, a fuel oil tanker on charter to QatarEnergy, was hit by a missile attack in the northern territorial waters. (QNA)

Deputy PM meets Greek minister



HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Sheikh Saoud bin Abdulrahman bin Hassan al-Thani met yesterday with Greek Minister of Defence Nikolaos Dendias, who is visiting Qatar. The meeting discussed latest security developments in the region, along with aspects of defence co-operation and joint co-ordination in light of the current circumstances. A number of senior military officers from both sides attended the meeting. (QNA)

PM meets Greek minister of defence

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani met yesterday with Greek Minister of National Defence Nikolaos Dendias. They discussed co-operation relations between the two countries and ways to support and enhance them, especially in the field of defence. They also discussed developments in the military escalation in the region and its serious repercussions on regional and international security and stability, and ways to resolve all disputes by peaceful means. HE the Prime Minister stressed the need to stop the unjustified Iranian attacks on Qatar and the countries in the region, warning -- in this context, of the



consequences of irresponsible targeting of vital infrastructure, especially those related to water, food and energy facilities. He further emphasised the need to strengthen co-ordination and intensify joint efforts, return to the negotiating table, and prioritize reason and wisdom, in a way that ensures global energy security, freedom of navigation and environmental safety, and preserves the stability of the region. (QNA)

Qatar partakes in virtual session of Arab Council of Interior Ministers

QNA
Doha

Qatar participated in the 43rd session of the Council of Arab Interior Ministers, held yesterday via videoconference. HE the Minister of State for Interior Affairs Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Faisal bin Mohammed al-Thani led Qatar's delegation participating in the session.

HE Sheikh Abdulaziz affirmed that the convening of this session comes amid the complex security conditions witnessed by Qatar and countries in the region as a result of the ongoing war and the damages -- both human and material -- caused by the Iranian aggression against the affected Arab states. This has doubled the responsibilities placed on security agencies, which have exerted additional efforts to safeguard public security and confront security threats, carrying out their duties with competence and efficiency.

He added that the current phase, with its complexities and overlapping interests and regional and international influences, necessitates that Arab countries intensify efforts to develop joint



security co-operation frameworks, strengthen channels for exchanging information and expertise, and activate training and capacity-building initiatives in line with the nature of contemporary threats.

This is in addition to enhancing the highest levels of security co-ordination and unifying efforts to preserve the security of our countries and protect the achievements of their peoples..

He affirmed Qatar's commitment to supporting all initiatives

aimed at strengthening joint Arab action. The distinguished officials also discussed during the meeting various security issues and challenges facing Arab countries, in addition to reviewing the recommendations issued by previous conferences and meetings within the framework of the General Secretariat, the outcomes of joint meetings with Arab and international bodies, and ways to enhance security co-operation and co-ordination among Arab security agencies.

E-Mobility forum moved to Sept 7

The Ministry of Transport (MoT) has moved the 2nd edition of the Autonomous e-Mobility Forum to Sept 7-9, 2026, against the backdrop of the current regional situation.

Organised by Just us and Otto Marketing Services, the 2026 forum will feature numerous local, regional and international speakers, senior government officials, industry experts, innovators, academia, and community individuals to highlight some of the latest trends and innovations in autonomous and e-mobility, including how electrification of vehicle fleets and logistics networks is reshaping transportation and daily life in the region, the role of autonomous systems in smart cities, the development of digital infrastructure, AI-based traffic management, and the importance of having strong policy frameworks and incentives to govern secure adoption and implementation.

A particular spotlight will be given to the potential for local innovation and ways of supporting the cultivation of homegrown mobility ecosystems. The forum's second edition underpins the recently launched Ministry of Transport Strategy 2025-2030, which is closely aligned with the goals of the Qatar National Vision 2030.

The strategy aims at establishing a secure, integrated, and sustainable transportation system powered by innovation, clean energy, and smart technologies. The event also reflects MoT's continuing efforts to advance next-generation mobility solutions that support the national priorities and address sustainability concerns of global urgency. The forum was initially scheduled for April 7-9. (QNA)

Lebanese president meets Qatari envoy



Lebanese President General Joseph Aoun met yesterday with ambassador of Qatar to Lebanon Sheikh Saud bin Abdulrahman al-Thani. At the outset of the meeting, the ambassador conveyed the greetings of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani to the president, wishing him good health and happiness and the Lebanese people continued progress and prosperity. For his part, the president entrusted the ambassador to convey his greetings to His Highness the Amir, wishing him good health and happiness, and the Qatari people further development and prosperity. The meeting discussed the current situation in Lebanon and the region, with an emphasis on continuing support for Lebanon's stability and its institutions under these delicate circumstances. During the meeting, the president praised the active role of Qatar and its constant support for the Lebanese people, affirming the depth of bilateral relations. (QNA)

Indonesian speaker meets Qatar's ambassador

Speaker of People's Consultative Assembly of Indonesia Dr Ahmad Muzani met with ambassador of Qatar to Indonesia Sultan bin Mubarak al-Dosari. They reviewed bilateral co-operation relations between the two countries. (QNA)



Shura reviews family upbringing proposal



The Committee on Social Affairs, Labour, and Housing of the Shura Council held a meeting, chaired by HE Speaker of the Shura Council Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanim. The committee discussed the statement of the esteemed government regarding the proposal made by the Shura Council concerning "family upbringing," which had been referred to the committee for consideration. The committee decided to submit its report containing its opinion on the statement to the council. (QNA)

Qatar diplomat joins GCC meeting with Spanish FM



Qatari ambassador to Spain Salem bin Mubarak al-Shafi joined a meeting in Madrid with Spain's foreign minister and GCC ambassadors to discuss recent regional developments. Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, Jose Manuel Albares, condemned Iran's attacks on energy facilities as unjustified and in blatant violation of international law, while reaffirming Spain's steadfast support for the Gulf states. (QNA)

Qatar identifies five unlicensed Umrah providers during checks

Qatar's Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs has identified five unlicensed offices arranging Umrah, a minor Islamic pilgrimage to Makkah, the ministry said. The offices were discovered during routine inspection tours carried out by the ministry's Haj and Umrah Affairs Department as part of its ongoing efforts to ensure compliance with regulations governing the Umrah sector. The ministry stressed that operating without a licence is a clear violation subject to legal accountability. It urged the public to deal only with licensed offices and to avoid unapproved providers, warning that doing otherwise could risk procedural errors or the loss of rights. It also advised customers to ensure any contract with a licensed office is clear and complete and to review all details carefully before completing registration, in order to protect their rights and ensure proper procedures. (QNA)

GTA introduces excise tax warehouse licensing service

As part of its efforts to enhance the implementation of excise tax and streamline related procedures, the General Tax Authority (GTA) launched yesterday the excise tax warehouse licensing service, with plans to expand the scope of the service at a later stage to include other eligible entities.

This service enables the licensing premises designated for the production, processing, possession, storage, or receipt of excise goods, whether locally produced or imported, under the tax suspension regime. This regime refers to the deferral of excise tax liability on such goods while they remain within a licensed tax warehouse, in accordance with the provisions of the Excise Tax Law and its Executive Regulations.

The GTA indicated that the tax warehouse regime provides a flexible framework for managing excise tax, allowing the suspension of tax payment until the goods are released into the local market. It also enables the import and storage of excise goods and raw materials under a tax suspension status, thereby enhancing taxpayers' cash flow, supporting production needs, and ensuring supply chain stability. In addition, it contributes to improved inventory management and more efficient operational planning.

It also highlighted that the tax warehouse service is considered a key enabler for supporting the business environment, as it simplifies administrative procedures related to the refund of excise tax on the import of raw materials, such as concentrates, as well as in cases involving the export of excise goods. The implementation of this service eliminates the need to submit refund applications in such cases, thereby reducing the administrative burden on registered taxpayers.

The GTA affirmed that the launch of this service reflects its role of being an active partner in supporting the national economy and fostering an attractive business environment. (QNA)

QIB to reward new salary transfers with up to 125,000 Absher Rewards points

Qatar Islamic Bank (QIB) has launched a new salary transfer campaign, offering each customer up to 125,000 Absher Rewards points when they transfer their salaries to QIB and apply for selected QIB credit cards during the campaign period.

Running until June 30, 2026, the campaign is available to new customers who transfer their salaries to QIB, as well as existing customers who have not transferred their salaries to the bank over the past six months and now choose to do so.

As part of the campaign, customers can apply for one of the following selected cards Visa Signature credit card, Visa Infinite Credit and charge cards, or Mastercard World credit card, and enjoy valuable Absher Rewards points, subject to the campaign's terms and conditions.

In addition, customers can avail financing at attractive profit rates. Under the campaign, eligible customers will receive a generous sign-on bonus Absher Rewards points upon completing their first point-of-sale transaction using their new card. Customers applying for the Visa Infinite Credit or charge card, or Mastercard World credit card will receive 75,000 Absher Rewards points as a sign-on bonus and an additional 50,000 points when spending QR75,000 within the first three months, bringing the total to 125,000 Absher Rewards points.

Customers applying for the Visa Signature credit card will receive 50,000 Absher Rewards points as a sign-on bonus and an additional 25,000 points when spending QR50,000 within the first three months, bringing the total to 75,000 Absher Rewards points.

D Anand, QIB general manager - Personal Banking Group, said: "At QIB, we remain committed to rewarding our customers with valuable



offerings that combine convenience, flexibility, and meaningful benefits. "Through this new salary transfer campaign, we are pleased to offer customers the opportunity to enjoy exceptional value through Absher Rewards points while benefiting from QIB's comprehensive range of banking products and services."

Customers can earn Absher Reward points every time they engage with QIB's wide range of products and services, including transferring their salaries to QIB for the first time, opening fixed deposit accounts, using their QIB credit and debit cards, registering for the QIB Mobile App, and making international transfers through the app. These points can be redeemed locally and internationally for a broad range of rewards, such as booking flights with over 900 airlines, reserving rooms at more than 450,000 hotels, and for online shopping and e-vouchers with selected partners. Absher points can also be used to settle bills with Ooredoo, Vodafone, and Kahramaa or converted into loyalty programmes, such as Qatar Airways Avios, Meera Rewards, and Shukran Points, allowing customers to enjoy even more value from their everyday banking with QIB.

For more information, visit www.qib.com.qa/en-SalaryTransfer.

Microsurgical spine procedure performed at Aisha Bint Hamad Al Attiyah Hospital

The orthopaedic surgery team at Hamad Medical Corporation's Aisha Bint Hamad Al Attiyah Hospital has successfully performed a precise microsurgical spinal canal decompression on a 56-year-old patient. He had suffered from chronic pain and severe difficulty in movement for years due to spinal canal stenosis and lumbar spine compression. This procedure marks the first-of-its-kind at the hospital, as it had previously been performed only at Hamad General Hospital due to its complexity and the need for specialised expertise and advanced equipment.

The team utilised C-Arm fluoroscopy to guide the procedure with high precision under a microscope,

enabling accurate identification of affected vertebral levels and relieving nerve compression without large incisions or compromising spinal stability, supporting faster recovery and reduced surgical risks. Within a few days of the surgery, the patient gradually regained her ability to walk, with noticeable improvements in pain levels and leg function. She is currently undergoing a rehabilitation programme to strengthen her back muscles and improve spinal stability. The success of this procedure supports the expansion of advanced and complex surgical services at the hospital, contributing to reduced waiting times and enhanced access to specialised care for the community in the northern regions.

WCM-Q experts spotlight role of acupuncture in pain management

The Institute for Population Health (IPH) at Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar (WCM-Q) has published a series of papers evaluating the effectiveness and acceptance of Western Medical Acupuncture (WMA) for pain management in athletes, as well as its broader role in modern integrative medicine.

WMA is an adaptation of acupuncture derived from Traditional Chinese Medicine. It encompasses multiple techniques, such as dry needling and ultrasound-guided percutaneous needle electrolysis. Needles are inserted in select acupuncture points based on anatomy, physiology, pathology, and the principles of evidence-based medicine.

The insertions trigger the release of biochemicals, including endorphins, the body's natural painkillers.

In Qatar, patients' and healthcare professionals' perceptions of acupuncture are increasingly favourable, and in 2016, the Council for Healthcare Practitioners approved regulations allowing complementary medicine, including acupuncture, to be available to patients alongside conventional medicine.

In one of the papers, authored by Dr Karima Chaabna, manager of population health research; Dr Ravinder Mamtani, professor of population health sciences and vice dean for population health and lifestyle medicine and professor of medicine at the Center for Global Health; Anupama Jithesh, research projects coordinator; WCM-Q alumnus Dr Ji-



WCM-Q team.

brail Cheema, Class of 2023; and Jasmine Aboughanem, former project manager, the authors combine a systematic review and meta-analysis to assess whether WMA techniques reduce musculoskeletal pain in athletic populations. Titled "Western medical acupuncture techniques for pain management in athletes: a systematic review and meta-analysis," it was published in *Frontiers in Medicine*.

Eligible studies diagnosed pain using conventional medical criteria or validated tools and selected evidence-based acupuncture points based on peer-reviewed research, conventional anatomy and physiology. Findings suggest that WMA techniques, when used alone or in combination with physiotherapy and/or exercise, may reduce musculoskeletal pain in athletes.

In another systematic review, published in the *Journal of Pain Research*, titled "Western Medical Acupuncture Perception

and Use for Pain Management Among Athletes: A Systematic Review," the authors examined the use and perception of WMA for pain management among athletes and healthcare providers.

The review included 11 observational studies and clinical trials. Findings suggest that WMA is not only prescribed by sports medicine professionals and used by athletes for diverse musculoskeletal pain but is also generally perceived positively for its effectiveness, with usage patterns varying across countries.

A third paper, an editorial, published in *Medical Acupuncture* and titled "From Skepticism to Essential: Acupuncture's Position in Modern Integrative Medicine," was authored by Dr Chaabna; Dr Mamtani, Dr Sohaila Cheema, associate professor of clinical population health sciences and assistant dean for the IPH; and Dr Philippe Piccardi, specialist in population health research.

Across the three IPH publications, the evidence suggests that acupuncture should be given serious consideration as a complementary approach in the overall management of musculoskeletal pain in athletes, helping broaden care options for healthcare professionals.

Qatar advances inclusive autism support as awareness deepens

World Autism Awareness Day has evolved into a global platform that promotes a more inclusive and humane understanding of autism - one focused on empowerment and meaningful participation in society.

Experts in education, human rights, and rehabilitation say that Qatar has emerged as a leading model in advancing this approach. They note that recent years have seen marked progress in public awareness and in the quality of services available to individuals with autism, supported by stronger institutional frameworks and legislative reforms. These efforts have helped improve the overall quality of life for individuals with autism and their families.

According to specialists, Qatar's progress is driven by a clear national vision and integrated strategies that prioritise inclusive education, specialised rehabilitation, community awareness, and the advancement of scientific research and modern technologies.

STEADY STRIDES
Dr Mohamed bin Saif al-Kuwari, vice chairman of the National Human Rights Committee, said the country is making steady strides in strengthening the rights of individuals with autism. He pointed to a robust legislative framework and expanding institutional initiatives, particularly in education, healthcare, and social inclusion.

He highlighted the adoption of inclusive education policies that ensure equal access to learning, alongside tailored support services.

Progress in healthcare and rehabilitation, especially in early diagnosis and intervention, has also been significant, supported by national strategies that leverage technology and scientific research. Dr al-Kuwari added that the committee plays a key role in protecting the rights of individuals with autism by monitoring violations,

addressing discrimination complaints, raising awareness through campaigns, and issuing reports that assess compliance with international agreements, particularly the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

He further noted that Law No. (22) of 2025 on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities marks a major step forward, ensuring equal opportunities and full participation in society.

This is complemented by national initiatives such as the Autism Support Strategy (2025-2035), which aims to build a comprehensive system covering education, care, rehabilitation, and research.

INTEGRATED SERVICES
Taleb Afifa, acting executive director of the Qatari Society for Rehabilitation of Special Needs, emphasised that empowering individuals with autism remains a top priority. Current efforts focus on integrated rehabilitation services and training programmes that develop life and behavioural skills, enabling gradual social integration.

He also highlighted growing support for families through specialised services, psychological support, and awareness campaigns, stressing the need for flexible, individualised programmes that address diverse needs and promote broader societal acceptance.

Dr Ghada al-Nuaimi, executive director of the Himem Centre for Persons with Disabilities, pointed to notable improvements in services at specialised centres, driven by increased awareness and a wider range of rehabilitation programmes, including behavioural analysis, speech therapy, and sensory integration.

However, she noted ongoing challenges, including variations in service quality, a shortage of qualified professionals, and limited coordination between educational and rehabilitation services, all of

which can place additional pressure on families. Dr Hala al-Saeed, director general of the Doha International Centre for Persons with Disabilities, described Qatar as a pioneering model in addressing autism-related issues and promoting global awareness. She said this year's theme, "Autism and Humanity - Every Life Has Value," reflects a growing shift towards inclusion, supported by continued efforts in early diagnosis, intervention, education, and research.

INT'L PROGRAMMES
Dr Nihad Abdo, an expert in training individuals with disabilities, stressed the importance of World Autism Awareness Day in correcting misconceptions about autism as a developmental condition and in promoting acceptance. She noted that countries such as Qatar have made significant progress by establishing specialised centres, adopting international programmes, and expanding family training initiatives. She also emphasised that preparing individuals with autism for employment requires a strong focus on daily living and vocational skills tailored to their abilities.

Educational consultant Rashed al-Fadhli highlighted notable progress in integrating students with autism into schools across Qatar. He said the Ministry of Education and Higher Education has worked to create safe, supportive learning environments equipped with specialised staff and assistive technologies. Students are now enrolled in numerous public inclusion schools across different educational stages, receiving quality education that supports both skill development and social integration.

At the same time, he noted the challenges faced by educators, particularly the wide range of student needs, which require flexible teaching methods, individualised approaches, and careful management of behavioural and sensory dynamics within classrooms.

Ministry of Public Health to mark World Autism Awareness Day today

The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) is participating in the celebration of World Autism Awareness Day, observed annually on April 2.

This year's observance is held under the theme "Autism and Humanity - Every life has value," as designated by the United Nations.

The observance highlights the dignity and inherent value of all persons with autism as an essential part of collective progress toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. It also serves as a global platform to raise awareness of the rights of persons with autism spectrum disorder and to support efforts to create more inclusive health, educational, and community environments, enabling their full and effective participation in all aspects of life.

Qatar continues to play a leading role in advancing autism-related issues at the international level. In 2007, Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser supported the initiative to designate World Autism Awareness Day during the 62nd session of the United Nations General Assembly, which all Member States unanimously adopted. In addition to designating April 2 as World Autism Awareness Day, the resolution encouraged Member States



MoPH recently issued a child safety guide for children with autism spectrum disorder.

to take the necessary measures to raise awareness of autism within their societies.

On this occasion, MoPH is intensifying its efforts to enhance community awareness of autism spectrum disorder and encouraging families to benefit from early screening and assessment services, given their significant role in improving intervention outcomes for individuals with autism spectrum disorder.

To mark the occasion, the ministry's main building, along with several prominent landmarks across the country, will be illuminated in blue as a symbol of solidarity with individuals on the au-

tism spectrum. The ministry also continues, in collaboration with partners across various sectors, to develop national policies and programmes that support persons with autism, in alignment with the Qatar National Vision 2030 and the National Health Strategy 2024-2030.

MoPH has recently issued a child safety guide for children with autism spectrum disorder in light of current situations, which includes key guidance to support families and children with autism and outlines the necessary preparedness measures to enhance family readiness and ensure their safety.

Legal action over environmental violation



The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change has identified a company while discharging treated sewage water in the Al Mazrouah area. Necessary legal action has been taken against the violating company in accordance with applicable environmental regulations. The ministry stressed that such violations constitute a serious breach, with potentially harmful consequences for both the environment and public health. It further stressed the need for all entities to comply with environmental laws and regulations to ensure the protection and sustainability of natural resources. Besides, the ministry also called on the public to co-operate in safeguarding the environment by reporting any such violations. Reports can be made by calling the Environmental Operations Room hotline at 16066.

In Qatar, patients' and healthcare professionals' perceptions of acupuncture are increasingly favourable, and in 2016, the Council for Healthcare Practitioners approved regulations allowing complementary medicine, including acupuncture, to be available to patients alongside conventional medicine

REGION/ARAB WORLD

Trump says US may exit Iran war soon

President scales up threat to pull US out of Nato

Reuters
Washington/Tel Aviv/Cairo

The US will end its war on Iran fairly soon and could return for "spot hits" if needed, President Donald Trump told Reuters yesterday, hours before he was scheduled to make a prime-time address to the nation.

Trump also said he would announce in the speech, which is slated later, that he was considering withdrawing the US from the Nato alliance over what he sees as its failure to support the US in the war.

Thousands of people have been killed across the Middle East since February 28, when the US and Israel struck Iran, triggering Iranian attacks on Israel, US bases and the Gulf states, while opening a new front in Lebanon.

The conflict has unleashed one of the largest supply shortages in global energy market history, heaping political pressure on Trump to end the conflict quickly, even as analysts said his objectives had not been met.

The International Monetary Fund, World Bank and International Energy Agency yesterday warned the war was having "substantial, global and highly asymmetric" effects and said they would co-ordinate their response, including through potential financial support to those countries hit hardest.

Asked when the US would consider the Iran war over, Trump said: "I can't tell you exactly... we're going to be out pretty quickly." He was expected to reiterate a two-to-three-week timetable for



Smoke rises following a strike, amid the US-Israeli conflict with Iran, in Tehran, yesterday. (Reuters)

ending the war in Iran during the address, a White House official later said.

US action had ensured Iran would not have nuclear arms, Trump said: "They won't have a nuclear weapon because they are incapable of that now, and then I'll leave, and I'll take everybody with me, and if we have to we'll come back to do spot hits."

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said in a letter addressed to the American people that his country harbours no enmity towards ordinary Americans, Press TV reported yesterday.

Nato Global oil supplies were expected to be hit twice as hard this month as in March, the IEA said yesterday, underlining the urgent need for an end to the conflict.

IRAN DENIES REQUEST

Trump said separately on social media that Iran had asked for a ceasefire but that he would not consider it until Tehran ceased blocking the Strait of Hormuz, a major fuel shipment route. Iran

denied making any such request.

US Vice President JD Vance communicated with intermediaries from Pakistan about the Iran conflict as recently as yesterday, a source briefed on the matter told Reuters yesterday, making clear that Trump was open to a ceasefire as long as certain US demands were met, including reopening the Strait of Hormuz, the source said.

Trump had suggested on Tuesday he could wind down the war in two to three weeks even without a deal, while scaling up threats to pull the US out of the Nato defence alliance if European states did not help stop Iran from blocking the waterway.

In his remarks to Reuters yesterday, Trump said he would express his disgust with Nato for what he considers the alliance's lack of support for US objectives in Iran.

European states took pains to appear unruffled and France's junior army minister Alice Rufo said operations by Nato in the



Iranians attend the funeral of Alireza Tangsiri, commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards' navy alongside others killed in US-Israeli strikes at Enghelab Square in Tehran, yesterday. (AFP)



Israeli security forces and first responders work at the site of an impact in a residential neighbourhood of Tel Aviv following an Iranian strike, yesterday. (AFP)

Strait of Hormuz would be a breach of international law. IEA head Fatih Birol said Iran's effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz had already limited supplies of jet fuel and diesel to Asia and would hit Europe in April or May.

The head of European budget airline Ryanair said jet fuel supply to Europe could be disrupted from June if the conflict did not end in the next month, potentially forcing the airline and rivals to consider cancelling summer flights. Businesses around

the world are struggling, with cosmetics and tea among the latest sectors to report difficulties. Higher fuel prices are already weighing on US household finances before the November midterm elections, with two-thirds of Americans believing the US should work to exit the Iran war quickly, a Reuters/Ipsos poll found.

Drones hit fuel tanks at Kuwait's international airport, causing a big blaze, and authorities in Bahrain reported a fire at

an undisclosed company facility from an Iranian attack.

An overnight strike hit Shahid Haghani Port, Iran's largest passenger terminal, a deputy regional governor told state media, calling it a "criminal" attack on civilian infrastructure.

Iran has fired repeatedly on Gulf countries, some home to US bases, and is using the Strait of Hormuz, which carries a fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas, as leverage.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards have also threatened to hit US companies in the region including Microsoft, Google, Apple, Intel, IBM, Tesla and Boeing, from 8pm Tehran time (1630 GMT) yesterday. Trump has said he was not concerned.

LATEST STRIKES

In Tel Aviv yesterday, evening air raid sirens and air defence systems were repeatedly triggered as Iran fired a volley of missiles.

Israel's fire and rescue service said there had been multiple "impacts" in the greater Tel Aviv area. It was not immediately clear if the impacts were caused by missile strikes or debris from missile interceptions. Shortly after the latest Iranian attack, the Israeli military said in a statement that the Air Force was carrying out strikes on dozens of targets across Tehran.

National Bank of Kuwait shuts HQ amid Iran attacks

A major Kuwaiti bank said it will close its headquarters in the capital for two days starting yesterday, as Iran carries out daily strikes on the Gulf more than one month into the Middle East war, AFP reported from Kuwait City. "National Bank of Kuwait will close its headquarters and Subhan branch today, and tomorrow, due to current developments and in the interest of everyone's safety and business continuity," the bank said in a statement carried by state news agency Kuna.

West Bank on strike against Israeli death penalty law

AFP
Ramallah

Palestinian shops and public institutions were closed across the occupied West Bank yesterday in protest of an Israeli law passed earlier this week permitting the execution of Palestinians convicted of deadly attacks.

In the Palestinian territory's main cities of Hebron, Ramallah, and Nablus, most stores were closed with their shutters down at midday, AFP journalists reported.

Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah



Palestinian demonstrators gather at the Bureij refugee camp, in central Gaza Strip, yesterday, during a protest against the Israeli parliament's approval of a new death penalty bill for Palestinians convicted of deadly attacks. (AFP)

party had called for a general strike the previous day.

In Ramallah, the seat of the Palestinian Authority north of

Jerusalem, entire shopping centres were closed as well as the city's main market.

About 150 people gathered to

march against the law backed by Israel's far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir.

"It's a crazy law to be passed, it's insane," said Mohammed Gussein, a 24-year-old student at Al-Quds University, which like all Palestinian universities, was on strike yesterday.

"It's completely out of touch with humanity, and completely racist," he told AFP.

Riman, a 53-year-old psychologist from Ramallah, told AFP that "there isn't a single person standing here who doesn't have a brother, a husband, a son, or even a neighbour in prison."

There is no Palestinian fam-

ily without a prisoner." "But honestly, today we feel a lot of anger, because there is also a real weakness in solidarity with them. The occupation (Israel) is betting on the weakness of the street," said Riman, declining to share her last name.

Under the new law, passed in parliament late Monday, Palestinians in the West Bank convicted by military courts of carrying out deadly attacks will face the death penalty as a default sentence.

Because Palestinians in the territory are automatically tried in Israeli military courts, the measure effectively creates a separate and harsher legal track.

Israeli strike on Beirut kills senior Hezbollah commander

AFP
Beirut

Israel killed a top Hezbollah commander yesterday, two sources said, in a Beirut strike that Lebanon's health ministry said killed seven people.

A Lebanese security source and a Hezbollah source told AFP that the commander, Youssef Hashem, had been responsible for the group's military affairs in Iraq and was in a meeting inside a tent when Israel struck.

Israel's military said Hashem was Hezbollah's commander for its south Lebanon front.

Lebanon was drawn into the Middle East war in early March when the Hezbollah launched rockets towards Israel to avenge a US-Israeli attack that killed Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Israel has responded with massive strikes across Lebanon and a ground offensive.

A source close to Hezbollah said Hashem is "the highest-ranking official to be targeted since the start of the war".

Another Hezbollah member, Mohammad Baqir al-Nabulsi, was also killed in the strike on the Beirut area of Jnah, the group said.

Several large blasts were heard across the city yesterday and a column of smoke was seen rising from Jnah, which is home to apartment buildings, cafes and shops.

Hassan Jalwan, who lives nearby, told AFP he heard "big explosions" overnight.

"Nobody knows what's happening," he said, adding that "displaced people



A man stands at the site of an Israeli strike in Beirut, yesterday. (AFP)

have been sleeping in the open" across the area.

Lebanese authorities say the war has forced more than 1mn people from their homes.

An earlier strike on a car in Khaldeh, just south of the capital, late on Tuesday killed two more people and wounded three, the health ministry said.

An AFP correspondent there saw a charred vehicle and paramedics taking a wounded person away on a stretcher.

Lebanese state media also reported a strike early yesterday on the Hadath district near Beirut's southern suburbs, which has largely emptied of residents following repeated Israeli strikes.

State media said Israeli artillery and airstrikes also hit Lebanon's south and east.

In the south near the border, Israel has said it intends to reoccupy a swathe of Lebanon to create what officials have

called a buffer zone to push back Hezbollah. Israel already occupied southern Lebanon for around two decades until 2000.

Defence Minister Israel Katz said Tuesday that "all the houses in the villages adjacent to the border in Lebanon will be demolished".

Katz's Lebanese counterpart Michel Menassa decried those plans, while Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney denounced what he called an "illegal invasion".

The Lebanese army announced yesterday "a repositioning and redeployment operation" in the south "as a result of the escalation of the Israeli aggression".

A Lebanese military source told AFP that the army had withdrawn from some southern towns but remained in others.

"Where there is an Israeli incursion or advance, we evacuate," the source said.

Tender / مناقصة					
تدعو شركة مرافق قطر ذ.م.ج إلى المناقصة الآتية:-					
MARAFEQ Qatar LLC invites competent Service Providers for the following engagement:					
رقم المناقصة Tender No.	موضوع المناقصة Tender Subject	قيمة التأمين الإجمالي Tender Bond	جدول التقييم Tender Timelines		
			رسوم المناقصة غير مستردة Tender Fees Non-Refundable*	إصدار Issue	إغلاق Closing
RFP-007-26	توفير خدمات الفحص والتشغيل والصيانة وجمع البيانات لتتظام العادات الفرعية لوحدة التوريد للتلزار المستمر في مشروع تطوير مدينة لوسيل حسب الطلب. Provision of Inspection, Operation & Maintenance, and Data Collection for the DC Submeter System at Lusail City Development (on call off basis)	QR 5,000,-	QR 500,-	Sunday, (يوم الأحد) Apr 05, 26	Sunday, (يوم الأحد) May 03, 26

Document Collection Date and Location:
Starting: Sun (Apr 05, 2026) through Sun (May 03, 2026) (from 09:00am through 03:00pm, working days only)
Location: MARAFEQ Qatar LLC, C&P Department, 7th Floor, Al-Baraha Tower, Marina District, Lusail City, Qatar

Document Collection Process:
Bidders can collect tender documents from the Document Collection Location during the specified dates and times.
Bidder's nominee must present the following documents at the time of document collection:
-copy of a recent date extract of the Bidder's CR
-original authorization letter by the Bidder addressed to Marafeq Qatar LLC authorizing the nominee to collect the relevant tender document; and
-the original proof of payment of the Tender Fees.

Tender Fees Payment Guidelines:
Prescribed Tender Fees must be paid into the bank account below. Kindly mention the Tender No. (as above)
Title: MARAFEQ Qatar LLC
Bank: Masraf Al-Rayyan (Grand Hamad Branch)
Account: 0003-127914-001
IBAN: QA68 MAFR 0000 0000 0003 127914 001
SWIFT: MAFR QA QA

Means of Communication:
Mailto: procurement@marafeq.com.qa
Phone: +974-4012-0358

موعد ومكان استلام وثائق المناقصة:
بداً من يوم الأحد 5 إبريل وحتى يوم الأحد 3 مايو 2026 خلال ساعات الدوام الرسمي (09:00 صباحاً حتى 03:00 بعد الظهر)
في مقر شركة مرافق قطر ذ.م.ج - إدارة العقود والمشتريات - الطابق السابع - مبنى كتارا للصيانة (برج البراحة) - منطقة المارينا - مدينة لوسيل، قطر

استلام وثائق المناقصة:
يمكن لمقدمي العطاءات استلام وثائق المناقصة في المكان المذكور أعلاه وخلال المدة المحددة فقط.
على ممثل مقدم العطاء تقديم المستندات التالية:
- نسخة بتاريخ حديث من مستخرج السجل التجاري لمقدم العطاء.
- أصل خطاب التفويض من الشركة مقدمة العطاء موجه إلى مرافق قطر ذ.م.ج بتحويل ممثلها باستلام وثائق المناقصة.
- أصل إيصال دفع رسوم المناقصة.

إرشادات دفع رسوم المناقصة:
يجب دفع رسوم المناقصة في الحساب البنكي المحددة تفصيله أدناه فقط. ويرجى ذكر رقم العطاء (إعلام).
الاسم: مرافق قطر ذ.م.ج
البنك: مصرف الريان (فرع حمد الكبير)
الحساب: 0003-127914-001
رقم الحساب المصرفي الدولي: QA68 MAFR 0000 0000 0003 127914 001
سويفت: MAFR QA QA
يرجى التواصل عبر:
البريد الإلكتروني: procurement@marafeq.com.qa
الهاتف: +974-4012-0358

تحتفظ شركة مرافق قطر ذ.م.ج بكامل حقها في تعديل شروط المناقصة في أي وقت بدون إبلاغ أسباب وبدون أدنى مسؤولية عليها في هذا الصدد أي كان نوعها أو مصدرها
MARAFEQ Qatar LLC reserves its right to modify the terms and conditions of the tender advertisement and/or tender documents at any time, or cancelling the tender entirely, without justification or any liability on its part.



Commuters queue to board a minibus taxi at Bara Taxi rank in Soweto, yesterday. (AFP)

Fuel prices surge in Africa as Iran war hits supply

Reuters
Accra/Blantyre

African governments have imposed sharp fuel price increases as the Iran war sends global oil prices surging and threatens to spark inflation across the continent.

African countries import most of their petroleum products, leaving many highly vulnerable to supply disruptions.

South Africa, one of the continent's largest economies, yesterday reduced its fuel levy for one month to help curb further price rises in April, after trade unions and business groups pressured the government to intervene.

In Ghana, the National Petroleum Authority raised mandatory minimum price floors for the April 1-15 pricing window, pushing petrol prices up around 15% to 13.30 cedis (\$1.21) per litre (0.26 U.S. gallon) and diesel up roughly 19% to 17.10 cedis.

President John Mahama said on Monday that the government was considering steps to cushion consumers, including reducing fuel margins and reviewing a recently imposed levy on petroleum products.

He also raised the prospect of a formal supply agreement with Nigeria's Dangote refinery to secure alternative sources of refined petroleum. Ghana imports about 70% of its refined fuel.

In Malawi, the Energy Regulatory Authority (MERA) imposed even steeper increases, raising petrol prices by 34% to 6,672



A vehicle is refuelled at a petrol station in Rosebank, Johannesburg yesterday, a day after South Africa lowered its fuel tax for a month to offset a global oil price surge driven by the Iran war, even as pump prices rose in one of the steepest increases on record. (AFP)

kwacha (\$3.89) per litre and diesel by 35% to 6,687 kwacha from Wednesday.

Petrol and diesel jumped by 42% and 87% between January and March on a free-on-board basis, MERA said, and that suppliers had shifted to fortnightly pricing averages.

Tanzania's Energy and Water Utility Regulatory Authority has set a new petrol price cap of 3,820 shillings (\$1.49) per litre in Dar-es-Salaam, up 33% from March. Diesel also rose 33% to 3,802 shillings.

The regulator said fuel supply remained adequate to meet the

country's needs.

Mauritania yesterday raised petrol by 15.3% and diesel by 10%. Economic Affairs Minister Abdallah Ould Souleymane, who compared the situation to the 1973 oil crisis, said the government would offset the impact on vulnerable households by raising the minimum wage and providing cash transfers to low-income families.

Gambia increased fuel prices by 18.79% for petrol and 12.20% for diesel yesterday, a finance ministry official told Reuters.

Authorities in Botswana and Mali have also announced sharp fuel price increases.

Mobs send residents fleeing in Jos city following shooting

AFP
Jos, Nigeria

Mobs formed across the Nigerian city of Jos yesterday morning, an AFP reporter saw, appearing to lead to the deaths of two people, with others wounded by gunshots in the ensuing mayhem.

The chaos comes after unidentified gunmen killed around 30 people in a bar over the weekend, prompting accusations on social media — without evidence

— that a religious community was targeted on Palm Sunday. With violence threatening to spill across the city, the University of Jos ordered the "evacuation" of its student housing over the course of yesterday and today, saying that the state government was providing transport.

Jos, the capital of Plateau state in north-central Nigeria, is home to a mixed population, many of whom live peacefully side by side.

But the city is also riven with ethnic and religious tension that has sparked deadly sectarian riots in the past.



Residents watch soldiers of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) on a patrol as part of Operation Prosper in Mitchells Plain, near Cape Town, yesterday. Right: A man watches as soldiers of the SANDF assist South African Police Service (Saps) officers (right) in searching a car in Mitchells Plain, yesterday. (AFP)

a separate shooting in Mitchells Plain.

"I am afraid for my children," said a 65-year-old grandmother on condition of anonymity, suspecting her backyard was being used as a night lookout.

"All night, I don't sleep," she said, adding that her daughter leaving at 4 am makes her "so anxious."

Shootings happen at all hours, including when children are going to and coming from school,

'Dozens' killed in Burundi after arsenal fire incident

AFP
Nairobi

Explosions that ripped through the city of Bujumbura after a fire in a military arsenal have killed several dozen people in the Burundian economic capital, security sources said yesterday.

The explosions erupted late on Tuesday at the main ammunition depot of the Burundi National Defence Force (FDNB) in Musaga, a southern suburb of Bujumbura.

An army spokesman said the cause was an "electrical accident".

In videos seen by AFP, clouds of smoke loomed over the neighbourhood during the blast, sending panic through the city of more than a million people.

"It is impossible to establish a toll for the moment, but dozens and dozens of people have been killed, and there are hundreds or even thousands of injured," a high-ranking army officer told AFP yesterday.

A senior police officer present at the site said the detonation broke out "where heavy weapons and ammunitions are stored, which is why we immediately heard large explosions".

"There are dozens of dead, but

the toll may be higher," the senior police officer said.

The arsenal in Musaga is located in a densely populated area and adjoins the Higher Institute for Military Cadres (ISCAM), where aspiring army officers are trained and housed.

It also houses numerous army logistics depots and is next to another military base, Muha camp, and the central Mpimba prison.

A source at Mpimba prison told AFP that eight inmates were killed and several others injured, who were taken to hospital by the Red Cross early yesterday.

Authorities have yet to provide casualty figures, and a Western diplomat speaking to AFP on condition of anonymity expressed doubt that "there will be transparent communication".

"The regime here is very reluctant to communicate about deaths, especially military ones," he said.

Burundi, ranked by the World Bank as the world's poorest country by GDP per capita in 2023, has faced years of deep economic crises. The most recent saw a severe fuel shortage that has paralysed the nation for the past three years.

Spurgeon Ngabo, director of the online bloggers' platform Yaga Burundi, said around 10 deaths

had been reported by citizens to his organisation.

"We haven't finished counting yet," Ngabo said.

The senior police officer, who joined the firefighting team late Tuesday, said efforts were immediately slowed by a water shortage.

He said property had been destroyed by the "massive inferno" and that the "base camp was reduced to ashes".

Yesterday afternoon, fire and smoke could still be seen, according to the police officer.

Residents in surrounding neighbourhoods fled their homes at night, the officer said, as fire-triggered projectiles landed nearby.

A witness speaking to AFP called the scenes "horrible", adding that a projectile tore through a neighbour's bedroom, killing him.

President Evariste Ndayishimiye, in a message on X, expressed his "sympathy" to "all those who have been victims of the fire". Burundian authorities have urged citizens to report unexploded munitions by phone, warning: "Be careful and do not touch."

On social media, dozens of posts showed children being searched for by parents who lost track of them while fleeing.

SA farmers grapple with rising diesel costs as harvest season nears

Reuters
Lichtenburg

Derek Mathews watches as an old fuel pump fills a tractor with diesel on his 1,700-hectare arable farm in South Africa's North West Province.

He frets over a nagging concern: how to secure and afford more fuel supplies before harvesting starts.

"It's terribly expensive to buy fuel at the moment, but the question I need to answer right now is can I get fuel?" Mathews, 64, told Reuters.

Farmers in South Africa and many other countries are struggling with a double price blow — fuel and fertiliser costs have shot up as the US-Israeli war against Iran stifles key energy transit routes like the Strait of Hormuz.

While South African government officials and fuel industry executives have assured that the country's stocks are sufficient for April, farmers say suppliers are grappling with higher demand, logistics constraints and hoarding of diesel.

Mathews, who purchased 20,000 litres of diesel in February at 18 rand a litre, said he had about 12,000 litres left by March 30, or six days' worth of fuel for his farm as he prepares to harvest his sunflower and maize crops.

According to a March survey by agricultural body AgriSA, slightly fewer than half of farmers surveyed had difficulty sourcing diesel. Others managed inadequate purchases of between 50 and 500 litres.

"It's the uncertainty that keeps you awake," AgriSA CEO



South African farmer Derek Mathews looks on as he stands next to fuel storage tanks, used for operations on his 1,700 hectare farm, amid concerns about securing supplies and affording rising fuel prices ahead of the harvest, near Lichtenburg, in the North West province. (Reuters)



South African farmer Derek Mathews inspects a cob of maize on a commercial farm ahead of the harvest, near Lichtenburg. (Reuters)

Johann Kotze said, adding that disinformation about fuel supplies has induced panic buying.

Mathews, who also produces dry beans and peanuts, ordered more diesel in March, by which time the price was 24 rand a litre, but the supplier has yet to deliver it. Diesel prices are not strictly regulated in South Africa. However, the government said yesterday that it will temporarily intervene to cushion sharp fuel

hikes by lowering the general fuel levy by 3 rand for April.

In its latest fuel adjustment, the government said that diesel wholesale prices will rise by up to 7.51 rand a litre on April 1 to just under 26 rand, while petrol prices will rise by 3.06 rand a litre.

For now, South Africa has sufficient crop production to keep a lid on food prices.

"South Africa had a favourable agricultural season and has ample supplies that should contain excessive price increases," Wandile Sihlobo, chief economist at Agricultural Business Chamber of South Africa, said during a Citibank client call on March 25.

Mathews, however, fears that could change if the war in the Middle East leads to a prolonged rise in fuel prices.

"If fuel prices remain at these elevated levels, with already depleted profit margins it doesn't make any financial sense at all to grow maize," he said of a food staple in South Africa.

South Africa deploys military to Cape Town townships hit by crime

AFP
Cape Town

South African soldiers moved into gang-ridden Cape Town townships yesterday, as two people were killed in fresh violence, nearly 50 days after the president ordered the deployment.

Troops in full combat gear and carrying assault rifles stepped from armoured vehicles that arrived with sirens blaring in Mitchells Plain, a neighbourhood in the Cape Flats.

The low-lying area, nestled between tourist magnet Cape Town and the scenic winelands, is a hotspot for murder and plagued by gang turf wars and retaliatory attacks.

Two men, aged 25 and 33, were shot and killed in a 5 am (0300 GMT) attack in the neighbouring sprawling area of Hanover Park.

Earlier, around 2:45 am, a 27-year-old man was wounded in



Residents watch soldiers of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) on a patrol as part of Operation Prosper in Mitchells Plain, near Cape Town, yesterday. Right: A man watches as soldiers of the SANDF assist South African Police Service (Saps) officers (right) in searching a car in Mitchells Plain, yesterday. (AFP)



said 69-year-old retiree Malvin Gordan.

The deployment was a welcome relief, he said, with the troop's "presence alone" forcing gang members to stand back.

The Cape Flats saw one of its

deadliest weeks last August when police recorded 59 murders in seven days. The violence and elsewhere prompted President Cyril Ramaphosa in February to announce the deployment to boost the country's struggling police

force, saying crime was one of the biggest threats facing South Africa. Excluding countries at war, South Africa has one of the world's highest homicide rates, with an average of 60 killings reported each day.

Codenamed "Operation Prosper," the deployment will last a year and cover five of the nine provinces, including Gauteng, home to the financial capital Johannesburg, according to a plan presented to parliament.

It mobilises more than 2,200 soldiers to support police in tackling the surge in crime and illegal mining.

South Africa has repeatedly turned to the army in times of crisis, from enforcing strict Covid-19 lockdowns in 2020 to deploying troops during the deadly riots sparked by the jailing of ex-president Jacob Zuma in 2021.

Soldiers were also sent into the streets in 2023 after a wave of truck burnings raised fears of wider unrest.



Stronger polls buy Flavio Bolsonaro time on economic team as Brazil race heats up

Reuters
Brasilia

Rising public support for Brazilian opposition Senator Flavio Bolsonaro's presidential run has allowed him to put off naming key economic advisers, his aides say, even as right-wing rivals enter the field ahead of an October election.

Since announcing his candidacy last year, the senator has spent much of his time travelling overseas to meet conservative allies, or visiting with his father, ex-President Jair Bolsonaro, who is serving a sentence in Brasilia for a failed coup plot.

Yet the 44-year-old has risen to draw even with President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva in opinion polls simulating a likely matchup, as the 80-year-old leftist leader grap-

ples with a cooling economy and a banking scandal rattling Brasilia.

Two sources close to the senator said the momentum he has gained while signalling a platform broadly in line with his father's approach should give him more breathing room to draft advisers and craft proposals to cement a winning coalition.

If the trend continues, the rollout of his economic team, which had been slated for May, could be delayed further, one of the sources said. In December, when Bolsonaro was first scrambling to reassure business, an aide suggested he could present his economic program by February.

It is a sharp contrast with the 2018 campaign run by the elder Bolsonaro, then a backbench congressman, who tapped future Economy Minister Paulo Guedes as his all-purpose economic guru



Flavio Bolsonaro. (Reuters/File Photo)

nearly a year before the election to assuage nervous investors.

Senator Bolsonaro's more cagey approach so far will face a fresh test as other right-wing parties launch their candidates. Brazil's Social Democratic Party this week tapped Ronaldo Caiado, governor

of Goias state, and Minas Gerais Governor Romeu Zema is running for the Novo Party.

"It will be a turbulent campaign," said Carlos Melo, a political scientist at Insper in Sao Paulo, regarding the more crowded conservative field, while noting that

the governors face long odds of overtaking Bolsonaro.

On Monday, Caiado made a direct appeal to supporters of Jair Bolsonaro by pledging a broad amnesty to those convicted for links to a 2023 coup plot, including the former president, who is now serving his sentence at home due to health issues.

Zema told Reuters he will leverage his executive track record in Minas Gerais and his clean record in a country plagued by corruption scandals to offer voters an alternative on the right, playing down the uphill climb he faces in early polls.

"All political campaigns are somewhat unpredictable," Zema said.

Flavio Bolsonaro, who was a Rio de Janeiro state lawmaker before his father's 2018 campaign helped him win a Senate seat, has

offered few details of his economic proposals, promising to cut taxes and spending while improving the business environment.

His advisers said the momentum in the polls should help draw more interest from potential cabinet members.

Sources close to Bolsonaro said his campaign has made informal contact with potential advisers including former Treasury Secretary Mansueto Almeida, now at BTG Pactual, and former central bank governor Roberto Campos Neto, now vice-chairman at digital bank Nubank.

Both worked in the 2019-2022 Bolsonaro administration.

At a conference in Boston over the weekend, Almeida said he remains in the private sector and has not been approached by any candidate. Campos Neto did not respond to a request for comment.

Kast putting conservative stamp on Chile in first 30 days

AFP
Santiago, Chile



Chile's President Jose Antonio Kast speaks next to a group of soldiers near the Chacalluta border post along the Chile-Peru border. (AFP/File photo)

Just three weeks into his term, Chile's new President Jose Antonio Kast has lost no time in tilting the rudder sharply to the right as he looks to slash spending and crack down on immigration, both policies a major about-turn on predecessor Gabriel Boric.

Kast, a lawyer of 60, has promised not to shrink from making radical policy choices to revive the economy but also bring illegal immigration under control.

This week saw Kast's team cancel leftist Boric's plans to grant legal status to tens of thousands of migrants who entered the country without permission.

Boric had prepared a decree giving the green light to 182,000 people who applied for legal status.

But after Kast campaigned with a pledge to crack down on the issue, Migration Service director Frank Sauerbaum told AFP "we are not going to proceed with a massive granting of residency papers as proposed by the Boric government."

Kast had already ordered the start of construction of new barriers on the Peruvian border to crack down on people sneaking in. The border with Bolivia will also be tightened.

He blames a rise in murders,

kidnappings and extortion on undocumented immigrants.

He has also axed more than 40 environmental decrees which he sees as holding back economic activity and cut ministry budgets by some 3%.

One of the new government's most controversial measures is the scaling back of government schemes designed to cushion the impact of fluctuations in fuel prices, which have soared by 30% for petrol and 60% for diesel in a country heavily reliant on imports.

Kast's election brought the most right-wing president to power in Chile since the military dictatorship of Augusto Pino-

chet from 1973-1990.

But the opening gambits of the professed Pinochet admirer have shocked some. "They're undoing everything the left has achieved, and I don't think they understand how ordinary people feel," complains Rodrigo Araya, a 27-year-old chef from Santiago.

For political scientist Rodrigo Espinoza, the change of direction was at least expected.

Espinoza points out that "reversing certain decisions made by the previous administration was part" of Kast's campaign pledges.

Measures such as the migration clampdown were largely introduced by decree, bypassing congress, where the president lacks a majority. "These are tough measures," Kast concedes.

"But we cannot buy popularity with money we do not have."

The government cites a budget deficit running at 3.6% and public debt topping 40%, both as a portion of GDP.

Kast's embrace of austerity measures has already sparked protests, chiefly by students and environmental activists.

Gonzalo Mueller, director of the Centre for Public Policy at Chile's private University of Development, says the goal is to rectify controversial decisions rather than to "dismantle a legacy" of what went before Kast arrived.

Kast has sought to hit the

ground running on policy yet his approval rating has slumped from 57% to 43% since he took office on March 11, says a recent poll by the Cadem institute.

Some of that loss of support is a reaction to scaling back Boric's environmental protections.

One focused on the protection of species such as the Humboldt penguin, which is endemic to the Chilean coast and classified as 'vulnerable' by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

The measure proposed designating the creature a 'natural monument' and extending its protection to the whole of Chile, prohibiting any activity likely to affect it.

"This sends the wrong signal," warns Chilean scientist Alejandro Simeone, a specialist in the species.

"We are in a situation where everything is so negative, so complex, that it is likely" the species will disappear within a few decades.

According to a study he led, the population of the bird slumped 63% between 2022 and 2025, due to the combined effects of avian flu, the El Nino weather phenomenon and pressure from industrial fishing. Cristina Dorador, a specialist in salt desert conservation, said austerity and conservation are not mutually exclusive.

"It is a mistake to frame the issue as a stark dichotomy: protecting nature does not mean giving up all economic activity."

Venezuela will ultimately need transition phase, free elections, Rubio says

Reuters
Washington



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio. (Reuters/File Photo)

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Tuesday said there will have to be a transition phase in Venezuela and the country will need free and fair elections, though he added that there needs to be patience until that point is reached.

"Ultimately, there will have to be a transition phase," Rubio said in an interview on Fox News Channel's "Hannity" show. "There will have to be free and fair elections in Venezuela. And that point has to come." "We have to be patient, but we also can't be complacent."

The US military seized Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro in a deadly raid in January that was ordered by President Donald Trump. The United Nations' human rights office has said the raid was a violation of international law.

At the time, Trump said Washington would "run" Venezuela. Maduro's former vice president, Delcy Rodriguez, subsequently took over and has been governing the country under US oversight.

Following US moves in Venezuela, Trump has talked of acting against Cuba and pressuring its leadership. Rubio said in Tuesday's interview that Cuba needed economic and po-

litical reforms and Washington would soon have more news on that country. "So I think Cuba is in need of two things, economic reforms and political reforms, you cannot fix their economy if you don't change their system of government," Rubio said.

The US cut off Venezuela's oil exports to Cuba after toppling Maduro in early January and Trump threatened to apply punishing tariffs on any other country that sent crude to Cuba.

Cuba's energy crisis has caused blackouts across the country of 10mn. Health officials say the crisis has increased the mortality risk for cancer patients, especially children. Human rights experts say Trump's focus on exploiting Venezuelan oil and his threats against Cuba echoed an imperialist approach.

FBI visits Cuba to probe US speedboat shoot-out: US official

An FBI team was in Cuba to investigate a deadly February shoot-out between the Cuban coast guard and a US-registered speedboat, a US embassy official said yesterday. The technical team arrived on Tuesday "as part of their thorough and independent investigation" into the maritime incident, the official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

The visit comes amid rising tensions between the United States and communist-run Cuba, with US President Donald Trump imposing a de facto oil blockade since January and talking about "taking" Cuba.

Five members of the Florida-registered boat's crew died while Cuban authorities charged the five survivors with terrorism, accusing them of bringing weapons and seeking to destabilise the government in Havana.

The shoot-out occurred on February 25 when a coast guard boat approached the vessel in Cuban waters to demand identification, and the crew responded by opening fire, according to Cuban authorities. The US embassy official declined to give more details about the FBI's visit.

The official cited February remarks by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, in which he said the "majority of the facts being publicly reported are those by the information provided by the Cubans." "We will verify that independently," Rubio said. "But we're going to find out exactly what happened here, and then we'll respond accordingly."

Cuban authorities said the 10 suspects were Cubans residing in the United States. At least two of them were US citizens, according to a US official. (AFP)

Bolivia suspends gasoline contracts with Vitol, Trafigura

The Bolivian government on Tuesday said it is suspending its gasoline contracts with Vitol and Trafigura until investigations into poor quality fuel allegedly smuggled in from neighbouring Chile fuel are completed.

Energy Minister Mauricio Medinaceli made the announcement after the government said 5,000 tanker trucks carrying adulterated fuel have entered Bolivia from Chile through a trans-national smuggling network. Vitol and Trafigura did not immediately respond to Reuters' requests for comment.

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.

Bolivian public transport drivers went on strike last week in La Paz and El Alto over damage to vehicles they said was caused by poor quality gasoline.

Bolivia is currently facing an energy shortage, as it relies on imports to cover more than 80% of its domestic fuel demand.

The fuel originated from three Chilean ports: Arica, Iquique and Mejillones, with investigations ongoing in Mejillones.

The Bolivian government has carried out investigations alongside Chilean authorities to tackle the issue, Foreign Minister Fernando Aramayo said. (Reuters)

Argentina postpones tax increases on liquid fuels

Argentina's government delayed the effects of scheduled tax increases on liquid fuels and carbon dioxide, in a decree published on Wednesday, amid global instability caused by the US-Israeli war against Iran.

The move aims to support economic growth through sustainable fiscal measures, the decree said. The measure postpones the expected tax hike on liquid fuels and carbon dioxide for one month, until the end of April, the decree added. This is the second measure taken by President Javier Milei's administration in recent days amid energy price disruptions caused by the conflict in the Middle East. On Friday, the government relaxed some gasoline quality standards, allowing local refiners to voluntarily blend up to

15% ethanol into gasoline, and reduce reliance on petroleum.

Rising fuel costs risk spilling through into transport and consumer prices, analysts say.

Argentina's monthly inflation rate held steady in February, official data showed, but still came in above expectations as sharp increases in housing costs, including rent and utilities, outpaced most other sectors. Private analysts had already raised their inflation forecasts for 2026 before a late-February surge in global crude prices.

Other countries in Latin America have also taken steps to address the uncertainty stemming from the conflict in the Middle East. Mexico has reached a voluntary agreement with gas station owners to limit fuel prices, according to President Claudia Sheinbaum. (Reuters)

ANNOUNCEMENT

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Maradona's former home is transformed into a soup kitchen

Reuters
Buenos Aires



People cook stew for residents of the working-class neighbourhood of Villa Fiorito at a soup kitchen set up in the house where late soccer legend Diego Armando Maradona spent his early childhood, on the outskirts of Buenos Aires, Argentina. (Reuters)

Every week, hundreds of people line up to fill a plastic container with food in an unlikely place: the humble home where Argentine soccer legend Diego Armando Maradona was born. The house in Villa Fiorito, a poor neighbourhood on the outskirts of Buenos Aires, no longer belongs to the family of Maradona, who died in 2020 after a heart attack, but for the last month, its current owner has lent its dirt yard to a group of volunteers who light a grill and cook for neighbours.

Last Thursday, Maria Torres stirred a stew in two large pots while several others peeled potatoes and chopped pieces of chicken. A mural painted on the house's facade depicts the soccer player next to the words, "The house of god."

Poverty has been trending downward in Argentina, with official sta-

tistics showing it dropping to 31.6% in the first half of 2025 from 52.9% in the first half of 2024, when President Javier Milei sharply devalued the peso and inflation spiked.

While there has been a "very important drop" in poverty, Argentina needs to see more GDP growth in la-

bor-intensive sectors, such as mining, as opposed to capital-intensive sectors, such as agriculture, said Eduardo Donza, a sociologist at the Catholic University of Argentina. The drop in the poverty rate has followed a substantial drop in monthly inflation, from double digits when Milei took office to 2.9% in February.

However, Milei's austerity measures have sharply diminished the public sector workforce and many say they have lost purchasing power as the government has cut transportation and energy subsidies. Leonardo Fabian Alvarez, a pastor who runs the makeshift soup kitchen, said he has seen the demand for food in Villa Fiorito and other neighbourhoods grow as small factories have closed. Deregulation and a stronger peso have led to cheaper imports under Milei.

"People obviously lost their jobs," he said, adding that "they come to the line, pick up food, take what we give them."

Argentina declared the home of Maradona a national historic site in 2021.

Nasa's Artemis 2 on historic Moon flyby mission

AFP
Kennedy Space Center, US

Four astronauts were set to embark on the first crewed journey around the Moon since 1972, an odyssey that aims to launch the US into a new era of space exploration.

The Nasa mission dubbed Artemis 2 has been years in the making after facing repeated setbacks and massive cost overruns, but was finally scheduled to take off from Florida as early as 6:24pm (2224 GMT). Under bright Florida sunshine, the rocket's giant tanks started filling with liquid hydrogen and oxygen at 8:35am.

The team featuring Americans Reid Wiseman, Victor Glover and Christina Koch along with Canadian Jeremy Hansen was set forth on the approximately 10-day mission and hurtle around Earth's nearest celestial neighbour without landing — much like Apollo 8 did in 1968.

The journey marks a series of historic accomplishments: it will send the first person of colour, the first woman and the first non-American on a lunar mission.

It is also the inaugural crewed flight of Nasa's new lunar rocket, dubbed SLS.

The mammoth orange-and-white rocket is designed to allow



Nasa's Artemis II Space Launch System rocket and Orion spacecraft at Launch Pad 39B at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida, yesterday. (AFP)

the US to repeatedly return to the Moon, with the goal of establishing a permanent base that will offer a platform for further exploration.

"It's a stepping stone to Mars, where we might have the most likelihood of finding evidence of past life, but it's also a Rosetta Stone for how other solar systems form," Koch told reporters on the weekend.

The mission was originally due to take off as early as February.

But repeated setbacks stalled the mission and even necessitated roll-

ing the rocket back to its hangar for analysis and repairs.

As of Tuesday afternoon, Nasa officials voiced confidence that engineering operations and final preparations were proceeding smoothly.

If Wednesday's launch is cancelled or delayed, there are more liftoff opportunities through Monday, although weather later in the week was looking slightly less favourable.

Melinda Schuerfranz, a retiree

from Ohio, traveled to Florida for the launch.

"We're looking forward to it, we've never seen anything like this," the 76-year-old swimsuit-clad beachgoer told AFP.

But Schuerfranz remembers the Apollo era, and thinks some of the magic might be lost in today's more fragmented media environment.

"I think it was way more exciting then," she said. "Everybody tuned into it."

Artemis is facing pressure from



From left: Mission specialist Jeremy Hansen of Canadian Space Agency, pilot Victor Glover, commander Reid Wiseman and mission specialist Christina Koch walk out of the Neil A. Armstrong Operations and Checkout Building ahead of the launch of the Artemis II at Nasa's Kennedy Space Center yesterday. (AFP)

President Donald Trump, who has pushed the pace of the ambitious program that's aiming to see boots hit the lunar surface before his second term ends in early 2029.

Artemis 2's objectives include verifying that both the rocket and the spacecraft are in working order in the hopes of paving the way for a Moon landing in 2028.

That deadline has raised eyebrows among experts, in part because Washington is relying on the private sector's technological headway.

The astronauts will require a second vehicle to descend to the moon's surface, a lunar lander that remains under development by rival space companies owned by billion-

aires Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos.

This contemporary era of American lunar investment has frequently been portrayed as an effort in competition with China, which is currently aiming to land humans on the Moon by 2030.

For Nasa head Jared Isaacman, it's a multi-pronged pursuit related to scientific discovery, national security and economic opportunity — as well as some less tangible goals.

"I guarantee after these astronauts fly around the moon, you're going to have more kids dressing up as astronauts for Halloween," Isaacman said during a recent television interview.

"And that's going to inspire the next generation to take us further:"

Trump administration unlawfully revoked status of migrants, US judge rules

Reuters
Boston

A federal judge on Tuesday ordered President Donald Trump's administration to reverse the termination of the legal status of thousands of migrants who had been allowed to temporarily live in the United States after using an appointment app utilised by Democratic President Joe Biden's administration.

US District Judge Allison Burroughs in Boston ruled that the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) acted unlawfully in April 2025 when it sent mass e-mails notifying many of the more than 900,000 people who had entered the country using the CBP One app that it was "time for you to leave the United States."

Skye Perryman, whose liberal legal group Democracy Forward pursued the legal challenge, in a statement hailed the ruling, saying the judge had rejected an effort to "erase lawful status for hundreds of thousands of people with the click of a button."

ADHS spokesperson in a statement called the ruling "blatant judicial activism" that interfered with Trump's authority to determine who remains in the United States. "Cancelling these paroles is a promise kept to the American people to secure our borders and protect our national security," the DHS spokesperson said.

The ruling came in a class-action lawsuit filed in August by three people from Venezuela, Cuba

and Haiti and the advocacy group Venezuelan Association of Massachusetts, who argued the Trump administration's action constituted an abrupt, unlawful move to strip immigrants of their parole status and work authorisation.

Such immigrants had been generally granted two-year terms of humanitarian parole after using a Biden-era app called CBP One to schedule an appointment with US Customs and Border Protection to cross the US-Mexico border.

DHS under Biden had begun requiring many asylum seekers to use that app starting in 2023 in an effort to alleviate chaos at the border. Trump, shortly after returning to the White House in January 2025, moved to shut down use of the app, as the Republican president's administration began to institute his hardline immigration and mass deportation agenda.

In April 2025, many non-citizens who received parole through the CBP One process received an e-mail from DHS saying it was exercising its discretion to terminate their parole. "Please depart the United States immediately," the e-mail said. Burroughs said that DHS failed when sending out those termination notices to comply with requirements that it provide a record showing an official had determined the purposes of parole have been served.

"Accordingly, the parole terminations exceeded the agency's statutory authority and contradicted the procedures set forth in its own regulations," wrote Burroughs.

Republican senator proposes to widen US ban on Chinese autos

Republican Senator Bernie Moreno said on Tuesday he will introduce legislation next month to toughen a US government ban on Chinese automakers from entering the American market, and encouraged other countries to follow suit. The Biden administration imposed a sweeping regulation that effectively bans all Chinese automakers from selling passenger vehicles in the US in January 2025, citing national security concerns about the ability of vehicles to collect sensitive data on American owners. The ban has the strong backing of US carmakers and other auto groups. Earlier this month, major auto trade groups urged the US government to keep Chinese carmakers out of the country, according to a letter seen by Reuters, ahead of President Donald Trump's planned summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping in May. (Reuters)

Reuters
Washington

President Donald Trump signed an executive order on Tuesday aimed at tightening mail-in voting rules nationwide, including by directing his administration to create a list of confirmed US citizens eligible to vote in each state, and said he did not see how the measure could be challenged.

The order would use federal data to help state election officials verify who is eligible to vote

in their jurisdictions. It would also require absentee ballots to be sent only to voters on each state's approved mail-in ballot list and mandate secure ballot envelopes with unique tracking barcodes.

Any move to force changes to state-run election systems is likely to face immediate legal challenges.

Trump said only a judge could block the order and complained that there were many "rogue" and "very bad" judges. "I don't see how they can challenge it," he said about the executive order.

The Republican president for

years has held to his false claim that his 2020 election defeat was the result of widespread voter fraud and has called for a tightening of rules for voting by mail ahead of the November midterm elections, when his party will be trying to defend its narrow majorities in Congress. His vocal opposition to voting by mail did not stop Trump from casting his own vote that way in a special election in Florida last week. Asked about it, he said he cast a ballot by mail recently "because I'm president" and "I had a lot of different things" to do.



US President Donald Trump. (Reuters/File Photo)

Supreme Court justices sceptical of Trump order to restrict birthright citizenship

Reuters
Washington

With President Donald Trump present, US Supreme Court justices signalled scepticism yesterday towards the legality of his directive to restrict birthright citizenship in the US, part of his hardline immigration approach that would upend the long-held understanding of a key constitutional provision. In his historic visit to the top US judicial body, Trump, wearing a red tie and dark suit, sat in the front row of the public gallery of the ornate courtroom after arriving by motorcade from the White House. The Republican president then left midway through the proceedings not long

after the Justice Department lawyer arguing for his administration completed his presentation.

Most of the nine justices, conservatives and liberals alike, grilled the lawyer with questions about the legal validity of Trump's executive order and its practical implications. The court has a 6-3 conservative majority.

The justices heard more than two hours of arguments in the administration's appeal of a lower court's decision that blocked his directive. Trump's order had instructed US agencies not to recognise the citizenship of children born in the US if neither parent is an American citizen or legal permanent resident, also called a "green card" holder.

Trump became the first sitting

president to attend a Supreme Court oral argument, according to Clare Cushman, the Supreme Court Historical Society's resident historian. Joined by White House Counsel David Warrington, Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick and Attorney-General Pamela Bondi, Trump was at the courthouse for a bit more than an hour and a half.

US Solicitor General D John Sauer, representing the administration, told the justices that most nations do not grant automatic birthright citizenship.

"It demeans the priceless and profound gift of American citizenship," Sauer said. "It operates as a powerful pull factor for illegal immigration and rewards illegal aliens who not only violate the immigra-

Trump first president to attend Supreme Court arguments

tion laws but also jump in front of those who follow the rules?"

The US is among 33 countries with automatic birthright citizenship policies, according to the Pew Research Center. Trump wrote on social media after the arguments that the US is "STUPID" for having birthright citizenship.

The lower court found that Trump's directive violated citizenship language in the US Constitution's 14th Amendment as well as a federal law codifying birthright citizenship rights, acting in a class-action lawsuit by parents and children whose citizenship is threat-

ened by the directive.

The 14th Amendment has long been interpreted as guaranteeing citizenship for babies born in the US, with only narrow exceptions such as the children of foreign diplomats or members of an enemy occupying force.

The provision at issue, known as the Citizenship Clause, states: "All persons born or naturalised in the US, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the US."

The administration has asserted that the phrase "subject to the jurisdiction thereof" means that being born in the US is not enough for citizenship, and excludes the babies of immigrants who are in the country illegally or whose presence is lawful but temporary, such as university students or those on work visas.

Conservative Chief Justice John Roberts told Sauer that his arguments limiting who qualifies for citizenship at birth seemed "quirky".

Noting that historically the phrase "subject to the jurisdiction thereof" excluded the children of ambassadors or enemies during a hostile invasion, Roberts said Sauer is trying to expand those examples to everyone in the US illegally.

"I'm not quite sure how you can get to that big group from such tiny and sort of idiosyncratic examples," Roberts said.

Roberts also challenged Sauer to provide evidence for the administration's stated concern over "birth tourism", by which foreigners travel to the US to give birth and secure citizenship for their children.



Philippines seeks safe passage for oil

AFP
Manila

The Philippines has sought safe passage for desperately needed oil shipments in a meeting with Iran, a presidential spokeswoman said yesterday, as the import-dependent archipelago jockeys with other regional countries for fuel.

The price of fuel has hit historic highs in the Philippines since treaty ally the US and Israel launched strikes on Iran on February 28, with Tehran effectively closing the vital Strait of Hormuz to traffic since.

President Ferdinand Marcos declared a state of national energy emergency last week, later saying that “nothing was off the table” as the country of 116 mn tried to meet its need for fuel.

Yesterday, Foreign Secretary Theresa Lazaro said she had explored “key avenues for cooperation” in a meeting with Iranian ambassador Yousef Esmailzadeh that included the Philippines’ energy secretary.

“Building on the momentum of our Political Consultations last November 2025, we are committed to deepening our cooperation across all fronts, particularly energy cooperation,” she said in a post on social media platform X.



Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs Thereza Lazaro (left), Iranian ambassador to the Philippines Yousef Esmailzadeh (centre) and Philippine Secretary of Energy Sharon Garin posing for a photo during a bilateral meeting in Manila yesterday. (AFP)

Presidential spokeswoman Claire Castro later told reporters that Lazaro had sought safe passage through the strait for oil shipments bound for the Philippines.

“Secretary Lazaro requested that Iran formally designate (the Philippines) as a ‘non-hostile country’ and ensure safe passage for PH-flagged vessels and oil shipments,” Castro told reporters via messaging app.

“This is vital for the protection of our seafarers and our energy supply.”

She added the Iranian ambassador had been “awaiting our outreach and reaffirmed their strong willingness to assist the Philippines with our specific requests”.

Lazaro was expected to speak with Iran’s foreign minister today

to formally secure those commitments, she said.

The Iranian embassy in Manila declined to comment on the meeting. In a report to the Philippine stock exchange released Monday, the operator of the country’s sole oil refinery said it had agreed to purchase Russian crude after seeing at least 4mn barrels in shipments cancelled since the start of the Middle East war.

Its purchase of 2.5mn barrels of Russian crude had been made out of “extreme necessity”, the report from Petron Corp said.

Yesterday’s meeting between the Philippines and Iran comes just days after Malaysia announced its tankers would be permitted to pass through the Strait of Hormuz without paying any toll to Tehran.

World does not need a crisis over Taiwan, opposition leader says

Reuters
Taipei/Beijing

At a time of international turbulence the world does not need a crisis over Taiwan, the leader of the island’s largest opposition party said yesterday ahead of a trip to China, adding she is seeking reconciliation.

Cheng Li-wun, chairwoman of the Kuomintang (KMT), is travelling to China starting Tuesday for six days at the invitation of Chinese President Xi Jinping.

China views democratically governed Taiwan as its own territory and has ramped up its military and political pressure against the government of President Lai Ching-te, who Beijing views as a “separatist”. He says only Taiwan’s people can decide their future.

Speaking at a weekly party meeting in Taipei, Cheng said of her trip that Taiwanese people do not want Taiwan to be one of the world’s most dangerous flashpoints.

“What we are promoting is peace and reconciliation, including reconciliation between the ruling and opposition parties within Taiwan, and reconciliation and peace across the Taiwan Strait,” she said.

“No one wants to see the Taiwan Strait once again fall into a tense military crisis at a time when the international situation is already turbulent.”

Cheng’s trip comes against the backdrop of a stalled \$40bn supplemental defence budget, as Taiwan’s opposition-dominated parliament holds up Lai’s US-backed proposal, with the KMT insisting it supports defence — but not “blank cheques.”

Taiwan’s China-policy making Mainland Affairs Council said this week that China’s desire to “annex” the island would never change just because of interactions between a political party or particular person.

Earlier yesterday in Beijing, Zhang Han, a spokesperson for China’s Taiwan Affairs Office did not give further details on Cheng’s trip, which will take in Beijing, Shanghai and the eastern province of Jiangsu.

Zhang told reporters that the visit reflects the commitment of the Communist Party and KMT to “seek peace”.

Since last month — and the outbreak of war in the Middle East — China has renewed its push to sell Taiwan on the benefits of rule from Beijing, touting energy se-



Cheng Li-wun, the chairwoman of Taiwan’s largest opposition party KMT. (Reuters/File Photo)

curity and even a proposed “rapid transit link” across the strait.

“Peaceful reunification will create enormous opportunities for Taiwan’s economic and social development and bring tangible benefits to the broad masses of Taiwan compatriots — this is its greatest appeal,” Zhang told the same news conference.

Opinion polls in Taiwan have repeatedly shown minimal support for accepting Beijing’s sovereignty under its “one country, two systems” model.

China has never renounced the use of force to bring Taiwan under its control.



Japan’s Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi and French President Emmanuel Macron attend a welcome ceremony at the Akasaka Palace State Guest House in Tokyo, yesterday. (Reuters)

Japan, France agree to step up co-ordination on Hormuz

Reuters
Tokyo

Japan and France agreed yesterday to co-ordinate closely in pushing for an end to the U.S.-Israeli war with Iran and the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz to oil and gas tankers, Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi said.

“Because the international situation is so challenging, I believe there is great significance in the leaders of Japan and France deepening their personal ties and making our co-operation even stronger,” Takaichi said after talks with French President Emmanuel Macron in Tokyo on security ties and industrial co-operation.

With the Middle East conflict now in its fifth week, Japan, France and other countries are grappling with rising energy costs. Unless the conduit for about a fifth of the

world’s oil and liquefied natural gas flows reopens, they could face shortages of petroleum products.

Japan, which normally gets around 90% of its oil from the Middle East, has begun drawing on its oil reserves to cushion the economic blow.

Speaking alongside Takaichi, Macron said he shared her position on the need to restore freedom of navigation in the strait.

France has held talks with dozens of countries as it seeks proposals for a mission to reopen the waterway once the conflict ends. Japan has said it could consider dispatching minesweepers, though the scope of any role would be constrained by its pacifist constitution.

The two leaders also said they would pursue closer security ties in the Indo-Pacific and signed agreements on co-operation in critical mineral supply chains.

South Korea, Indonesia discuss energy security

Sign agreements on minerals, tech

Reuters
Seoul

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung held talks yesterday with Indonesian leader Prabowo Subianto, discussing energy security and agreeing to expand cooperation in areas such as defence, Lee’s office said.

The summit talks followed a welcome ceremony at the presidential Blue House in Seoul. “We view Indonesia’s stable role in supplying key energy resources such as LNG and coal as very reassuring,” Lee said in a statement, calling for closer cooperation on energy supply and resource security amid the global uncertainty triggered by the conflict in the Middle East.

In a joint statement, South Korea and Indonesia pledged to accelerate the launch of high-level energy security dialogue and public-private cooperation channels, emphasising the need to keep global energy supply chains stable and minimise disruptions to the flow of energy and essential goods.

Indonesia is the world’s largest exporter of thermal coal, while South Korea has been among the five biggest importers of the fuel in recent years, according to Korean government data.

South Korea also imported



South Korean President Lee Jae Myung shakes hands with Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto during their meeting at the Presidential Blue House in Seoul, South Korea, yesterday. (Reuters)

about 2.1mn tonnes of liquefied natural gas (LNG) from Indonesia in 2025, data showed. The Indonesian president arrived in Seoul from Japan where Jakarta agreed to step up coordination with Tokyo on energy security.

Prabowo described South Korea and Indonesia as natural partners with “complementary roles”, pointing to South Korea’s industrial and technological strengths and Indonesia’s abundant resources and large market.

South Korea’s exports to Indonesia stood at \$7bn in 2025, while imports were \$11.3bn,

trade data showed.

Lee and Prabowo also oversaw the signing of multiple preliminary agreements, including support for projects in renewable energy and data centres as the countries elevate their relationship into a strategic partnership.

Prabowo, a former general, also said that strong defence capabilities were essential, saying peace and stability required “robust security and defence”.

No deals were announced on defence co-operation, but in the joint statement the leaders confirmed the countries’ joint project

to develop South Korea’s home-grown KF-21 fighter jet, underway for over a decade, is on track for completion in June 2026.

They committed to co-operate on a follow-up project — called IF-21 — as well as other defence items such as trainer aircraft, anti-tank guided missile systems and ammunition.

The countries were expected to also strengthen co-operation in new growth areas such as artificial intelligence, infrastructure, shipbuilding, nuclear power, energy conversion, and cultural industries, the Blue House said earlier.

Albanese warns months ahead ‘may not be easy’

AFP
Sydney

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese warned yesterday the months ahead “may not be easy” because of the Middle East war, in a rare address to the nation across television networks.

“The months ahead may not be easy. I want to be upfront about that. No government can promise to eliminate the pressures that this war is causing,” Albanese said.

The conflict that began on February 28 with US-Israeli attacks on Iran has mushroomed throughout the region, sending energy markets into a tailspin and threatening to torpedo the global economy.

Facing historic spikes in petrol prices, Albanese urged Australians to switch to using public transport, preserving fuel for rural communities and essential services.

“Australia is not an active participant in this war. But all Australians are paying higher prices because of it,” he said.

“Farmers and truckies, small businesses and families are doing it tough. And the reality is, the economic shocks caused by this war will be with us for months,” he said.

Albanese has previously



Prime Minister Anthony Albanese reacts after delivering a pre-recorded address to the nation in his office at Parliament House, Canberra, Australia, yesterday. (Reuters)

sought to reassure motorists that shipments of fuel continue to arrive in Australia, and petrol shortages in rural towns stem from panic buying and distribution bottlenecks.

Australians can help the situation by switching to taking the train, bus or tram to work, he said.

This will preserve fuel for nurses, shift workers, trades people and miners who rely on driving.

Australia this week announced temporary tax relief for small businesses and halved a fuel tax

to help motorists experiencing soaring petrol prices, but has resisted imposing fuel restrictions.

Geographically isolated and with only two working oil refineries, Australia is heavily exposed to disruptions in global fuel supply and imports most of its petrol.

Australia holds roughly 37 days’ worth of petrol in reserve, according to government figures, far below the 90-day minimum dictated by the International Energy Agency.

“No government can promise to eliminate the pressures that this war is causing. I can promise we will do everything we can to protect Australia from the worst of it,” he added.

Australian prime ministers typically reserve an address to the nation for only the gravest of circumstances.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd made one at the height of the Global Financial Crisis in 2008, while Scott Morrison did the same as Covid-19 swept the globe in 2020.

US President Donald Trump is due to address his nation later Wednesday night (0100 GMT Thursday).

Trump, whose statements on the war have swung from combative to conciliatory, said Tuesday the war could be over in “two weeks, maybe three”. “But we’re finishing the job,” he insisted.

China opposes Philippines renaming disputed islands

China accused the Philippines of breaking international law and threatened “measures” to protect its sovereignty yesterday, after Manila said it would rename disputed island features in the South China Sea. Beijing claims the South China Sea in nearly its entirety, despite an international ruling that its assertion has no legal basis.

Under an executive order by Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos on Tuesday, Manila will rename more than 100 reefs, islands, atolls and other features belonging to the Spratly archipelago, the site

of repeated confrontations between Philippine and Chinese vessels.

At a press briefing yesterday, China’s foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said the move “infringes upon China’s territorial sovereignty and violates the UN charter and relevant international laws”.

“China firmly opposes the Philippines undermining China’s sovereignty and rights and interests, and will take necessary measures to resolutely safeguard its territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests in the South China Sea,” she said. (AFP)

Chinese robotaxis stall in apparent ‘malfunction’

A string of self-driving robotaxis owned by Chinese Internet giant Baidu stalled in central China, stranding passengers after an apparent “system malfunction”, police said yesterday.

Local authorities in Wuhan, Hubei province, began receiving calls “one after another” on Tuesday night about “multiple Apollo Go cars stopped in the middle of the road, unable to move”, police said in a statement.

Apollo Go is Baidu’s driverless taxi service which began charging for rides in Beijing in 2021 and operates in designated areas across several cities.

“After investigation, preliminary findings suggest the cause was system malfunction”, police added, without specifying how many cars were impacted.

Social media users shared videos of themselves

attempting to contact customer service from inside their stalled robotaxis as other vehicles passed by.

“Apollo Go, are you paralysed?” one person wrote on social media, alongside a video of unanswered calls to the company dialled from an in-car tablet.

The light green Apollo Go logo was visible on the steering wheel. The social media user said they were “stuck” in the middle of the road for more than 30 minutes. Baidu did not immediately respond to AFP’s request for comment.

The company has announced deals to have its cars on popular rideshare apps Lyft and Uber and is seeking to expand its presence outside China. The company has a fleet of more than 500 driverless cars in Wuhan. (AFP)

Malaysia starts enforcing total ban on e-waste imports

Malaysian customs officials started enforcing a total ban on e-waste imports yesterday, seeking to close loopholes on illegal shipments that still plague the southeast Asian nation. Many countries, including Malaysia, have banned the import of e-waste, but weak enforcement and reports of systemic corruption continue to make it an attractive target

for unscrupulous brokers. Malaysian authorities in February decided to impose a total ban on e-waste imports without exemptions.

From Wednesday “the importation of electronic waste (e-waste) to Malaysia is completely banned at all entry points nationwide,” Customs Malaysia director general Amran bin Haji Ahmad said. (AFP)

India hikes jet fuel, commercial LPG cost

AFP
New Delhi

India's oil ministry said yesterday that domestic jet fuel prices would rise as the Middle East war pushed up energy costs, but that it had cushioned airlines from an expected 100% jump.

Aviation turbine fuel (ATF) makes up a substantial chunk of airlines' expenses, and sustained increases could translate into higher airfares.

State-run refiner Indian Oil Corp said that ATF prices rose by 8.5% in the capital Delhi, with similar rises in other major cities.

"Due to the closure of Strait of

Hormuz, and extraordinary situation in global energy markets, price of ATF for domestic markets was expected to increase by more than 100% on April 1," the Ministry of Petroleum said in a statement.

The Strait of Hormuz is a crucial shipping route for oil and gas virtually paralysed by the Middle East war.

But the ministry said it had "passed only a partial and staggered increase of 25 percent" to airlines in order to "insulate the domestic travel costs from the substantial increase in international prices".

Foreign travel routes "will pay for the full increase in ATF prices consistent with what they pay in

other parts of the world", it added. Commercial cooking liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) gas prices have also risen.

India is the world's fourth-largest buyer of liquefied natural gas (LNG) and second-largest buyer of LPG, which is used for cooking and predominantly sourced from the Middle East.

For commercial LPG, 19-kilogramme (42-pound) cooking gas cylinder prices increased by around 200 rupees (\$2.13) on average across four key cities of Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai and Chennai.

Domestic household LPG prices were left unchanged in this round of revisions.

Nepal sharply raises aviation fuel prices to avoid supply disruption

Reuters
Kathmandu

Nepal more than doubled the price of aviation fuel from Tuesday midnight, triggering a sharp rise in airfare, as the Himalayan nation looks to avoid supply disruption caused by the conflict in the Middle East.

Nepal Oil Corp raised fuel price by 84.7% for international flights from Kathmandu, by 116.2% for jets operating from Pokhara and 117.4% from Bhai-

rahawa, saying it needs to make payments to refiner Indian Oil Corp for supplies.

Jet fuel prices for domestic flights have been raised by 97.6%, Nepal's state-run agency that imports, stores and distributes petroleum products in the country, said.

This has resulted in a surge in domestic airfare of as much as 50%, according to Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal.

"The increase is because (of) the abnormal situation existing now...and will hurt the passengers. But the airfares will de-

crease as soon as the fuel prices fall," its spokesperson Gyanendra Bhul said.

The fare hike will especially hurt tourists, trekkers and mountain climbers as it comes ahead of the peak tourism season, industry officials said.

Nepal had earlier this month increased petrol and diesel prices by 9.55% and 7.0%, respectively, and started rationing cooking gas.

Wedged between India and China, Nepal is fully dependent on imports for fuel supplies.

Cambodia extradites accused cyberscam boss to China

AFP
Beijing

The China-born former boss of a financial services firm, accused by the US of laundering illicit funds for North Korean and Southeast Asia-based cybercriminals, was extradited from Cambodia yesterday, Beijing said.

China's state broadcaster CCTV showed Huione Group's former chairman Li Xiong, 41, shaven-headed and in handcuffs being escorted by Chinese police off a China Southern plane.

Phnom Penh-based Huione Group served as a "critical node for laundering proceeds of cyber heists" carried out by the North Korean government and for transnational criminal groups in Southeast Asia perpetrating crypto investment scams, the US Treasury said last year.

The Treasury's Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) said the conglomerate, which owned several companies offering e-commerce, payment and cryptocurrency exchange services, had received at least \$4bn worth of illegal proceeds between August 2021 and January 2025. That included proceeds from scams, stolen funds and illicit cyber attacks.

State news agency Xinhua said Li was central to a "major cross-border gambling and fraud syn-

dicare", citing China's Ministry of Public Security.

"Investigations found that Li Xiong, the former chairman of Huione Group under the Prince Group, is suspected of multiple crimes," the ministry said in a statement.

Phnom Penh extradited Prince Group's China-born founder Chen Zhi in January after his Cambodian conglomerate was sanctioned by the US and UK governments months earlier over its alleged involvement in cyberscams.

Beijing called Huione's Li "a core member of Chen Zhi's criminal gang" yesterday.

Li was arrested in Cambodia and deported at the request of Chinese authorities following a months-long joint investigation, Cambodia's interior ministry said in a statement.

Cambodia has emerged as a hotspot for cyberscam operations in recent years. Transnational crime groups initially mostly targeted Chinese speakers before widening their reach and stealing tens of billions of dollars annually from victims around the world.

Organised criminal gangs have used casinos, hotels and fortified compounds across Southeast Asia as bases to carry out sophisticated online scams, defrauding people through cryptocurrency investment schemes and fake romantic relationships, according to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime.



China-born accused scam boss Li Xiong arriving at an airport in handcuffs and escorted off a China Southern Airlines plane yesterday. (AFP)

FinCEN designated Huione Group a "primary money-laundering concern" in May, later prohibiting US financial institutions from maintaining accounts for it or processing transactions involving the firm.

Criminal actors affiliated with the North Korean government have "extensively used the Huione Group to launder" stolen cryptocurrency for the benefit of Pyongyang's ballistic missile programmes, in violation of US and international sanctions, FinCEN said.

Huione's crypto services and online marketplace made the group a "one stop shop" for criminals to launder cryptocurrency gained through illegal activities and convert it to money, it said.

AFP's phone calls to several numbers listed for Huione companies on Cambodia's official business registry went unanswered yesterday.

Chen and Li had both been granted Cambodian citizenship, which was later revoked.

Chen had served as an adviser to both Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet and his father, former leader Hun Sen. Hun Manet told AFP in February that the government "did not know that he was the kingpin" and pushed back against allegations of government complicity.

Cambodian authorities have vowed to close all online scam centres by the end of April, with Hun Manet saying they were giving the nation a bad name.

15 deaths are confirmed after measles outbreak in Bangladesh

Reuters
Dhaka

A measles outbreak in Bangladesh has led to 15 confirmed deaths, officials said yesterday, as the government readies to launch an emergency immunisation programme as part of efforts to try to contain the disease.

Health Services Division Secretary Kamruzzaman Chowdhury said the deaths were confirmed after laboratory testing of 33 samples, conducted with support from the World Health Organisation. "Of the tested samples, 15 deaths have been directly linked to measles infection," he said.

Measles, among the most infectious of pathogens, requires that 95% of the population be vaccinated in order to prevent its spread. It has been breaking out across the world as vaccination rates had fallen, although now

many parents are rushing to get their children immunised and in some places paediatric hospital wards are overwhelmed.

In Bangladesh, the government plans to launch an emergency nationwide immunisation drive from Sunday, beginning with high-risk areas.

The outbreak has hit hardest in the northwestern Rajshahi region, where health authorities have stepped up surveillance and case-tracking.

The Directorate General of Health Services said unvaccinated children or those who have not completed the two-dose measles schedule face the greatest risk and that malnourished children are particularly prone to severe complications such as pneumonia and encephalitis.

They have urged parents to keep children's routine vaccinations up to date and to seek medical care quickly if symptoms such as fever, cough, red eyes or a rash appear.

North Korea hackers suspected of attack on widely used software tool

Hackers linked to North Korea are suspected of an ambitious attack on an inconspicuous but widely used software package, Google analysts and other cybersecurity experts said yesterday. The cyberattack on a technical tool called Axios, which has tens of millions of weekly downloads by developers, could have far-reaching implications. A Google Threat Intelligence blog post said the impact of the attack "by North Korea-nexus actors" is "broad and has ripple effects" as other popular packages rely on Axios. "Hundreds of thousands of stolen secrets could potentially be circulating as a result of these recent attacks." That could enable further cyberattacks including

ransomware, extortion and cryptocurrency theft, it said. Google yesterday described Axios as "the most popular JavaScript library used to simplify HTTP requests" — a behind-the-scenes part of computer programming targeted in the so-called "supply chain attack".

The tools used were similar enough to those wielded in previous attacks to point the finger at a "financially motivated North Korea-nexus threat actor active since at least 2018", Google said.

A UN panel estimated in 2024 that North Korea had stolen more than \$3bn in cryptocurrency since 2017. The stolen money helps fund the country's nuclear weapons programme, the panel said. (AFP)

PM Starmer calls for closer Europe ties as Iran war strains US relations

Reuters
London

Prime Minister Keir Starmer said yesterday that the global instability caused by the Iran war means Britain should pivot to focusing on closer economic and defence ties with Europe, following repeated criticism from US President Donald Trump.

Starmer said building stronger relations with Europe would be at the centre of a summit with the European Union in the summer, as he warned the consequences of the Iran war would last for a generation.

"It is increasingly clear that as the world continues down this volatile path, our long-term national interest requires closer partnership with our allies in Europe," Starmer told reporters at a press conference in Downing Street.

Trump has repeatedly insulted Starmer, calling him cowardly because of his unwillingness to join the US war on Iran, saying he was "No Winston Churchill" and describing Britain's aircraft carriers as "toys".

In a sign that British foreign policy was shifting away from the



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer speaks during a press conference at Downing Street in London, yesterday. (Reuters)

US, traditionally its closest ally, Starmer said he saw his country's future being more aligned with Europe.

After Trump was elected as president for a second term in 2024, Starmer tried to position himself as a conduit between Europe and the US. But their relationship has publicly deteriorated over the Iran war.

Starmer initially denied a request from the US to attack Iran from two British bases, but later agreed to allow what he calls defensive missions aimed at protect-

ing residents of the region, including British citizens.

Asked about Trump's criticism, Starmer said he would not give in to "pressure" from Trump to be dragged into the war.

Starmer instead said the government was focused on deepening its relationship with Europe and it was necessary to undo some of the "deep damage" done by Brexit.

Although Starmer called for an "ambitious" reset in relations, he ruled out rejoining the EU's customs union or its single market.

The opposition Conservative

Party criticised Starmer, saying he was trying to "reopen the old wounds of the Brexit years", while the populist Reform UK party said he should have announced measures to reduce energy prices.

Starmer did not announce any new policies to help households at the press conference. But he did say that Britain would this week host meetings with allies aimed at opening the Strait of Hormuz, the vital energy shipping route that has been effectively blocked by Iran since it was attacked by the US and Israel, and 35 countries were now involved in efforts.

Foreign Minister Yvette Cooper would host a virtual meeting of the group today to assess diplomatic and political measures to reopen the Strait "after the fighting has stopped", Starmer said.

France, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Japan, Australia, South Korea, Canada and the United Arab Emirates are among the countries who will attend the talks, according to a British government statement.

A British official said it was expected that any first phase would focus on mine-hunting, followed by a second phase to protect tankers crossing the area.



People stand in line to offer condolences for Praka Farizal Rhomadhon, a United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) peacekeeper killed in an Israeli strike in southern Lebanon, at his parents' house in Kulon Progo regency, Yogyakarta, yesterday. (Reuters)

Indonesian peacekeeper's family shocked by his death in Lebanon

AFP
Cimahi

The father of an Indonesian soldier killed amid fighting between Israeli troops and Hezbollah in Lebanon said yesterday he was shocked that peacekeepers were losing their lives.

Zulmi Aditya Iskandar was one of the two Indonesian peacekeepers killed Monday in "an explosion" that blew up their vehicle, the Southeast Asian country's defence ministry said.

"We were really sad and regretful, because this is a UN troop, a peacekeeping troop, not deployed for war," 60-year-old Iskandarudin told reporters at his house in West Java province, with photos of his deceased 33-year-old son on the wall.

Iskandarudin, who like many Indonesians has one name, said he was not worried when he learned his son was being sent to Lebanon.

His oldest son had also been deployed to the country as a peacekeeper in 2012. The 60-year-old said he would have been more concerned had Zulmi been sent to Papua where

Indonesian security forces battle a low-key separatist insurgency in the country's easternmost region.

"His mission was a peace mission, not (to fight the) enemy," said Iskandarudin, himself a retired soldier.

He said the family was hoping to receive the fallen soldier's remains soon to perform the necessary rites before he is laid to rest.

The UN Security Council convened Tuesday following the deaths in recent days of three Indonesian peacekeepers from the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in two incidents in the country's south.



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GULF TIMES

China was ready for an oil shock and now investors are reaping rewards

China's readiness for an energy shock has helped its financial markets to turn in a world-beating month and has global investors looking to boost their exposure as the Iran war drags on. Oil stockpiles and resilient energy supply chains have been behind the performance in stocks, bonds and the yuan and money managers and dealers say it is starting to drive a positive view about the economy and buying tech and consumer companies.

Since the US and Israel's war on Iran all but stopped the movement of oil and gas from the Arabian Gulf late in February, soaring oil prices have upended global markets. Over that period, China's benchmark CSI300 equity index has fallen about 4.6%, compared with losses deeper than 10% in India, Japan and South Korea and an almost 8% decline for the S&P 500.

The yuan is the steadiest in Asia against the dollar – remaining flat through March – and China's debt market is without peer, holding firm as other credit markets have sunk. By holding up in a month where there have been few places for investors to hide, the moves have added to the case for owning China as both a short-term shelter and longer-run ballast for global portfolios, which have taken a drubbing of late.

"The uniqueness of China's energy dependence is the differentiation factor," said Jacky Tang, chief investment officer for emerging markets at Deutsche Bank's Private Bank. "Because of this, investors prefer to allocate to Chinese assets at this point relative to other markets ... they realised the resilience."

The yuan is the steadiest in Asia against the dollar and China's debt market is without peer, holding firm as other credit markets have sunk

Tang said his portfolio was slightly overweight on China and that some clients were gradually switching some technology exposure to China from Japan and South Korea. Paradoxically, China is the world's largest importer of oil that passes through the Strait of Hormuz and also one of the best placed to weather the waterway's closure.

Domestic production, a freeze on fuel exports and a pipeline network allow it to diversify away from seaborne imports and source oil and gas from Russia, central Asia and Myanmar. It also boasts an electric vehicle fleet about as large as the rest of the world's combined, oil stockpiles estimated at seven months of imports and an electricity grid that is almost insulated from imports thanks to domestic coal and renewables.

At the same time inflation is low – so the economy can absorb higher prices – while recent

indicators have shown improvement. So relative to the rest of the world, what had been a steady growth outlook is suddenly looking impressive. "We feel (the) domestic China economy is going to stay robust, whatever happens," said William Yuen, a Hong Kong-based investment director at Invesco, who added some exposure to tech and consumer firms last month.

"It may have its little ups and downs, but comparing to a lot of other economies in the world, there will be some sort of buffer given how diversified, how self-sustaining the economy has become." There are other attractive tailwinds and sectors. Investors have already scooped up stocks in China's renewables industry, a bet on worldwide demand for solar panels, batteries and green energy equipment to reduce dependence on fossil fuels.

The wall of household savings stashed in bank deposits has kept downward pressure on bond yields. And investors say they believe Chinese authorities are standing by to keep things steady, citing a recent regulatory crackdown aimed at market stability and selling from state investment funds last year, leaving them ready to prop up stocks if they fall. "The 'slow bull market' remains the mantra," said Christopher Wood, Jefferies' global head of equity strategy, in a note. "The goal remains clear: For the stock market to replace the deflating property market as the main source of wealth generation." – Reuters

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Pakistan's diplomatic tightrope in search of Middle East peace



By Kamran Rehmat
Doha

In 1971, a specially arranged Pakistan International Airlines aircraft carried US National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger on a clandestine journey from Islamabad to Peking – an unpublished flight that redrew the geometry of global power. That secret mission ultimately paved the way for President Richard Nixon's historic visit to China, unlocking a realignment that defined the Cold War's final decades.

More than half a century later, Pakistan again finds itself standing at a similar inflection point – this time in full public view. Its foreign minister, Ishaq Dar, retraced parts of that corridor to Beijing the other day amid a rapidly escalating conflict between the United States, Israel, and Iran that has disrupted global energy markets and strained great-power relations. The parallel is not just symbolic. It reflects a recurring structural reality: Pakistan's unique ability – and perilous challenge – to act as a bridge in times of geopolitical fracture.

Over the past week, Islamabad has quietly re-emerged as a convening point in the Middle East crisis. On March 29, Pakistan hosted a quadrilateral meeting of the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, and Egypt, marking a rare alignment among regional heavyweights. The meeting signalled not just concern over the war's regional fallout but also a coordinated diplomatic push toward de-escalation.

Following the talks, Dar revealed that both Washington and Tehran had expressed "confidence" in Pakistan's capacity to facilitate engagement where both sides were prepared to consider "meaningful negotiations" hosted in Islamabad. The joint endorsement was unprecedented in recent Middle Eastern diplomacy, where mutual distrust has long blocked even indirect communication.

"War benefits none," Dar told reporters, stressing that "the unity of the Muslim world and the pursuit of peace through dialogue must take precedence over all else." His statement followed consultations with visiting ministers who, discussed proposals to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, which Iran had effectively closed to shipping after US and Israeli strikes that began on February 28.

Pakistan's mediation credentials did not materialise overnight. They are rooted in precedent as much as proximity.

From its secret facilitation of the US-China rapprochement in 1971 to its behind-the-scenes role during the US-Taliban negotiations in Doha five decades later, Islamabad has often served as a diplomatic bridge when formal pathways collapsed.

Its geography – straddling South Asia, the Gulf, and Central Asia – gives Islamabad a natural vantage point. But geography alone does not guarantee influence. What has historically distinguished Pakistan is its ability to maintain working relations across ideological divides: deep strategic coordination with Beijing, a sometimes fragile but enduring relationship with Washington, pragmatic ties with Tehran, and strong security partnerships with Riyadh.

Few capitals can claim that spread. Fewer still can exercise it amid simultaneous crises.

The next step in Pakistan's evolving role came two days later in Beijing. Dar's one-day visit at the invitation of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi culminated in the joint release of a five-point initiative for restoring peace and stability in the Gulf and Middle East. The plan called for an immediate ceasefire, a halt to attacks on civilians and critical infrastructure – including energy, desalination, and power facilities – and the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz to secure global energy supply lines.

"The sovereignty, territorial integrity, and security of Iran and other Gulf states must be safeguarded," the joint statement said. "Dialogue and diplomacy remain the only viable means to resolve disputes."

Wang Yi praised Pakistan's "untiring efforts and mediation diplomacy," emphasising that restoring freedom of navigation through Hormuz was not simply a matter of regional security but

of global economic survival. He described the initiative as part of a growing "China-Pakistan community with a shared future," hinting at a long-term alignment between Beijing's economic imperatives and Islamabad's regional influence.

For China, whose economy depends heavily on Iranian crude imports and whose Belt and Road energy corridors traverse Pakistan, stable shipping routes are non negotiable. The inclusion of Hormuz in the framework's language reflects that urgency.

The underlying calculus is not only geopolitical – it is deeply economic. China's dependence on Iranian oil, coupled with its dominance in rare earth processing, intersects with American vulnerabilities in supply chains crucial to defence, semiconductor production, and clean energy transition. A prolonged blockade of Hormuz threatens to derail both energy security and inflation control in Western economies, intensifying US pressure to find an off ramp.

For Islamabad, this emerging energy security matrix provides both opportunity and risk. The ability to convey a US origin fifteen point ceasefire proposal to Tehran underscores Pakistan's usefulness to both Washington and Beijing. Yet it also places the country in a cross current, balancing between competing strategic priorities while trying to avoid being turned into an instrument of either.

Diplomatic signals suggest that time is increasingly scarce with military posturing continuing in the Gulf. Against this backdrop, Pakistan's proposal for confidence building measures – including monitored energy shipments and humanitarian corridors – seeks to slow a slide toward full scale confrontation.

But success depends on sequencing: trust must precede

negotiation, and yet delays heighten the risk of irreversible escalation. That delicate balance is why both Beijing and Islamabad are pressing for early engagement, citing the symbolic power of initiating a ceasefire.

"Every hour lost brings new dangers," Dar reportedly told Wang Yi, according to diplomatic notes. "Peace is still possible – but the clock is ticking."

The historical echo is unmistakable. In 1971, Pakistan's facilitation produced the Nixon Mao handshake – an act of creative diplomacy that redefined global power alignments for half a century. Today, Islamabad's task is not to enable a rapprochement between two superpowers but to stabilise a multi actor conflict threatening vital global trade arteries.

Whether this latest initiative succeeds may ultimately matter less than the fact that Pakistan is again attempting to operate within this narrow corridor of opportunity. The distinction between a facilitator and a true mediator will hinge on whether Islamabad can influence outcomes rather than merely transmit messages.

Still, the optics alone are significant. A nuclear armed state of 240mn people, situated at the crossroads of Asia and the Middle East, is once again demonstrating its capacity to shape diplomatic currents far beyond its borders.

It is a reminder of continuity: how Pakistan's geography, its alliances, and its persistent diplomatic instinct to mediate place it at recurring pivot points of history. As the Gulf crisis deepens, Islamabad's challenge is to transform that position from symbolic to substantive – to convert access into agency, communication into consensus.

• The writer is Deputy Managing Editor

What has historically distinguished Pakistan is its ability to maintain working relations across ideological divides: deep strategic coordination with Beijing, a sometimes fragile but enduring relationship with Washington, pragmatic ties with Tehran, and strong security partnership with Riyadh. Few capitals can claim that spread. Fewer still can exercise it amid simultaneous crises



Foreign ministers of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Türkiye attend a meeting on Middle East tensions in Islamabad early this week.

Cabinet hails Amir's diplomatic efforts



From Page 1

The Cabinet also welcomed tripartite talks between HH the Amir, Saudi Crown Prince and Jordanian King Abdullah II, which focused on the challenges and impacts of the Iranian attacks and highlighted the importance of close co-ordination and consultation to address regional challenges. Ministers also praised Tuesday's discussions held in Abu Dhabi between HH the Amir and UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al-Nahyan, which reflected the close fraternal relations and strategic partnership between the two nations and addressed escalating regional tensions and their potential impact on energy markets and global supply.

The Cabinet further welcomed the outcome of talks between HH the Amir and President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine, held on Saturday during the latter's recent working visit to Doha. Ministers noted that the discussions covered the Iranian attacks on Qatar and the wider region, the latest developments of the Ukraine crisis and the growing bilateral ties between Doha and Kyiv – manifested in the signing of a defence co-operation agreement. Turning to domestic matters, the Cabinet approved a draft law on the oversight of fuel filling and storage stations and referred it to the Shura Council. The proposed legislation aims to strengthen environmental protection, public health and safety standards,

and to define the responsibilities of station operators in line with technical regulations. The Cabinet also approved a draft memorandum of understanding on diplomatic training and studies between Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its Syrian counterpart. The meeting concluded with a review of several reports, including those related to the work of the National Committee for the Prohibition of Weapons; fuel station oversight; agricultural and food safety co-operation within the GCC; and Qatar's participation in the 8th Abu Dhabi Dialogue Ministerial Consultation between labour-sending and labour-receiving countries from Asia and the Gulf, alongside international organisations. (QNA)

'Iranian attack on Qatar's energy site undermines regional stability'

HE Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the UN Office in Geneva Dr Hind Abdulrahman al-Muftah took part in an event titled 'Diplomacy and Security: Shaping Peace in a Fragmented World', held at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy. In her remarks, HE al-Muftah said that in the context of the ongoing conflict involving Iran, Israel, and the United States, Iranian attacks on Gulf states represent a serious and dangerous escalation.



She stressed that such actions constitute a clear and unacceptable violation of national sovereignty and international law, warning that they risk expanding the conflict beyond the region with potentially severe global consequences.

She reaffirmed Qatar's strong condemnation of attacks targeting its territory, emphasizing that such actions cannot be justified under any circumstances. She added that Qatar has consistently sought to distance itself from regional conflicts and has remained committed to facilitating dialogue between Iran and the international community.

HE al-Muftah noted that while Qatar had from the outset condemned Israeli strikes on Iran's en-

ergy infrastructure, the subsequent Iranian response, which directly targeted Qatari territory as part of a broader pattern of attacks on civilian sites, represents a troubling escalation that undermines regional stability. She added that such actions only contribute to further instability and increase risks for all countries in the region, reiterating Qatar's firm position that disputes must be resolved through diplomatic means.

She also highlighted that Qatar had worked in good faith with several regional partners to prevent the outbreak of war, but these efforts were unfortunately met with repeated and unjustified attacks on its territory from the beginning. She warned that the continuation and expansion of

these hostilities will only deepen the crisis and widen its consequences.

She stressed that in light of these developments, there is a need for a comprehensive reassessment of regional security arrangements, calling for Gulf states to unite in establishing a more effective and inclusive framework for collective security based on co-operation and proven defence partnerships.

Al-Muftah pointed out that Qatar's experience demonstrates the ability of diplomacy to achieve tangible results even in highly polarized environments, whether through humanitarian facilitation or mediation efforts in various regions, noting that maintaining channels of communication remains both possible and necessary.

She concluded by emphasizing that human rights and security must go hand in hand, underscoring the importance of strengthening multilateral institutions to ensure constructive engagement and preserve their credibility. She added that the collective security framework must evolve to become more inclusive and reflective of current geopolitical realities, giving a stronger voice to all nations. (QNA)

Qatar Airways eyes over 120 destinations

By A Staff Reporter
Doha

Qatar Airways has unveiled a revised flight schedule signalling a steady recovery of its global operations, with services set to resume to more than 120 destinations to and from Doha by mid-May 2026.

The airline said yesterday in a statement that the updated timetable reflects a phased ramp-up across its international network, as operational conditions gradually stabilise following recent regional disruptions.

The carrier confirmed that all flights continue to operate via designated air corridors, coordinated closely with the Qatar Civil Aviation Authority to ensure safe and efficient routing amid evolving airspace restrictions in the region.

Qatar Airways noted that while services are expanding, schedules remain subject to change or cancellation due to operational, regulatory and safety considerations, as well as external factors beyond the airline's control, including airspace access and security developments.

Passengers holding confirmed bookings on affected routes will be notified directly of any changes to their itineraries. The airline urged travellers to regularly check flight status through its official website or mobile application and ensure their contact details are up to date to receive timely notifications.

In a further advisory, the airline asked passengers not to proceed to the airport unless they possess a valid and confirmed ticket, in order to avoid congestion and facilitate smoother airport operations during the transition period.

Russian drones kill five, destroy postal terminal in Ukraine

Russia fired hundreds of drones at Ukraine yesterday, killing at least five people and destroying a postal terminal, Ukrainian officials said. The attacks came a day after the Kremlin rejected a Ukrainian proposal for a temporary ceasefire over the Easter holiday. Diplomatic efforts to end Russia's four-year invasion have stalled in recent months, in part because the United States has shifted its focus towards the war with Iran. Zelensky said yesterday he had had a "positive" call with US negotiators Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner

about reviving the peace process. The two sides had agreed to "strengthen security guarantees", he added, without elaborating. "Ukraine is doing everything it can to support efforts for peace," Zelensky said in his evening address.

Russia fired 339 drones at Ukraine overnight, and more than 360 drones during the day, according to the Ukrainian air force. A Russian drone killed four people in the central Cherkasy region. An earlier drone strike on a car in Ukraine's frontline Kherson region

killed a woman and badly wounded two other people, regional authorities said. Ukraine's Nova Poshta mailing company published an image showing a warehouse in the western city of Lutsk in flames following a Russian attack, thick smoke pouring from its roof. Russia meanwhile stepped up pressure on the front line, claiming yesterday to have taken two villages in eastern Ukraine and fully captured the Lugansk region, which its forces had already largely occupied. (AFP)

MSDF gears up to host first 'Rawda Award'

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The Board of Trustees oversees the award's governance and organisational structure, approves the executive and sub-teams, and ensures maximum transparency, integrity, and fairness in selecting the winners.

The ministry also enhances strategic partnerships with government entities, the private sector, civil society institutions, and media organisations to expand the award's impact, promote a culture of excellence and social responsibility, and encourage sustainable social initiatives.

The Minister of Social Development and Family emphasised that the award continues Qatar's approach to supporting high-quality initiatives that enhance quality of life and create a lasting positive impact on society.

She noted that the award provides a leading platform to exchange experiences and showcase inspiring social work practices, contributing to the development of innovative practices, allowing successful initiatives to expand their reach, reflecting the maturity

and integration of Qatar's social work ecosystem, and highlighting the importance of investing in human-centered initiatives guided by clear standards of efficiency and sustainability.

MSDF's Undersecretary and Deputy Chairman of the Award's Board of Trustees Khalifa bin Issa al-Kubaisi stated that the award's final ceremony, which honors distinguished achievements, contributes to realizing the social development pillar of Qatar National Vision 2030.

He highlighted that the award represents a national journey built on appreciation, encouragement, and motivation, supported by a rigorous evaluation and judging system that ensures transparency and credibility.

The award's launch is based on the Amiri Decision, which emphasises its aim to promote and develop a culture of social work in Qatar, strengthen societal values, encourage the private sector and all community groups to compete in pioneering social initiatives, document winning initiatives, and build a national database of distinguished social practices. These efforts aim to en-

hance integration between community and institutional initiatives, raise the quality of projects, and support the development of Qatar's social work ecosystem.

The Award's Executive Director Abdulaziz Ibrahim al-Ishaq stated that the award has undergone key stages in its establishment, including setting standards, frameworks, and governance for participation. Committees were formed to screen, evaluate, and judge the entries leading up to the final ceremony.

Initially, the scientific committee reviewed all entries against the award's core criteria, followed by assessment committees for each category, and finally the Supreme Judging Committee selected the final list approved by the Board of Trustees.

He expressed gratitude to the evaluation and judging committees, the Social and Sports Activities Support Fund (DAAM) as a strategic partner, and wished success to the winners, while encouraging those who did not win this edition to further develop their initiatives for future participation. (QNA)

Advanced fabrication boosts access to Islamic heritage

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He emphasised that the replication process also yielded historical insights: "Digitally reconstructing objects like the astrolabe or Ka'aba Key offers a deeper understanding of their mathematical precision and craftsmanship."

"You begin to appreciate the engineering sophistication achieved centuries ago. The process becomes both fabrication and discovery," Mahfouz further stated. The replicas are being used to support educational workshops, public engagement programmes, institutional exhibitions, and hands-on learning environments, he said.

The most significant technical challenge was material translation, with each artefact required to perform across resin, brass, and ceramic workflows, Mahfouz explained.

"Intricate detailing, thin geometries, and multi-layer surfaces required both digital precision and casting



Umayyad Dinar gold coin.

expertise," he said, noting that Vectorize implemented dual casting approaches using castable resin and wax to ensure precision and quality control.

Mahfouz said the project sets a benchmark for museums across Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the broader Middle East. "This project demonstrates how hybrid advanced fabrication can enhance heritage preservation, expand accessibility, and maintain institutional integrity," he added.



Ka'aba Key from the Mamluk period.

Qatar launches unified social welfare app

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The ministry said the rollout would be phased, with around 24 core services in the areas of housing and social security available at launch. Coverage is set to expand throughout the year to include services related to associations, private institutions and family affairs, with full digitalisation the stated end goal.

The platform also provides a complete record of previous applications, a direct channel for submitting complaints and suggestions, and real-time visibility into the status of pending requests – measures the ministry said would enhance transparency and reduce processing times.

Ahmed Khalil Abdullah, Director of the Information Systems Department, described the launch as a pivotal step towards delivering an integrated, user-centred experience as Qatar presses ahead with its digital transformation agenda.

Pakistan, Afghanistan open fresh talks in China to end conflict, say sources

Reuters
Peshawar

Afghanistan and Pakistan have opened a new round of talks in China to end the deadliest fighting between two Muslim nations since the Taliban returned to power in 2021, sources said yesterday.

Beijing has been trying to mediate a negotiated settlement to the conflict, which has claimed heavy losses on both sides, although many more on the Afghanistan side, since Pakistan launched air strikes in late February.

Islamabad accuses the Taliban of harbouring and supporting militants who carry out attacks inside Pakistan. Kabul denies that claim, saying the militancy is Pakistan's domestic problem. The new round of talks coincides with Pakistani Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar's visit to Beijing to seek Chinese support for Islamabad's initiative to broker a peace deal between the US and Iran.

Foreign and defence ministry delegates from both countries have travelled to the northwestern Chinese city of Urumqi, four sources in Pakistan and Kabul said.

The four spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to disclose the information, saying the talks involved mid-level officials.

Pakistan's foreign ministry and the Kabul administration did not respond to requests for comment.

The talks will focus on a po-



Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Pakistani Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar speak in Beijing. (Reuters)

tening of border crossings to allow trade and travel, they said, adding that the new round of talks was a Chinese initiative.

"Our top leadership agreed with them and decided to participate in the process," a Taliban leader in Kabul said.

Both sides traded heavy fire this week after a temporary ceasefire along their 2,600-km (1,600-mile) border.

The pause in hostilities was announced for the Islamic festival of Eid al-Fitr, and was also requested by Turkiye, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, which Islamabad ended last week, saying it was responding to an attack from the Afghan side.

Afghanistan has not yet an-

nounced officially whether the ceasefire was still holding on its side. Kabul said more than 400 people were killed in a Pakistani air strike on a drug rehabilitation centre in Kabul last month before the neighbours suspended the fighting. A Reuters reporter counted more than 100 bodies at one hospital after the air strike.

Pakistan has rejected the Taliban's statements about the strike, saying it "precisely targeted military installations and terrorist support infrastructure".

The Chinese mediation efforts come as Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkiye, who hosted talks between Pakistan and Afghanistan during previous clashes in October, find themselves embroiled in the US and Israeli war on Iran.

First fish auction after suspension draws strong turnout at Umm Salal

Around 32 tonnes of fish and crustaceans were displayed at an auction held at Umm Salal Central Market following the resumption of fishing activities, attracting strong participation from retailers, traders and restaurants.

The total included 29 tonnes and 625kg of locally caught fish and 2,444kg of crustaceans, along with 4,961kg of imported fish and 1,300kg of imported crustaceans. The auction, held in the market yard for one hour after the dawn (Fajr) prayer, drew representatives from retail outlets, commercial shops and the hospitality sector.

The sale marked the first fish auction since fishing operations resumed after a temporary suspen-



sion linked to precautionary measures implemented in recent days.

Dr Raed Abdulillah Shibl, second veterinarian at the Health Control Section of Umm Salal Municipality, said all fish displayed at the auction undergo strict health in-

spection by municipal veterinary teams. These checks begin upon the arrival of shipments, typically between 11pm and 4am, to ensure products are safe, fresh and properly preserved before the auction.

He explained that inspections

are conducted in multiple stages. Transport vehicles are first examined to ensure compliance with standards, including proper refrigeration and the use of sufficient crushed ice that meets health requirements. The use of block ice is not permitted as it does not meet approved preservation standards.

Vehicles are also checked for cleanliness, and the absence of unpleasant odours before unloading is authorised. Indicators of fish quality include bright, bulging eyes, firm texture, no strong odour, and pinkish-red gills.

Once cleared, porters receive and sort the shipments under veterinary supervision between 11pm and 4am. Sorting is carried out



based on commercial grading and health classification.

The municipality's Fish Unit, which includes 19 specialised veterinarians, conducts daily inspections of both local and imported fish and crustaceans to safeguard consumer health and ensure product quality. If spoilage is detected, the affected quantities are immediately discarded, and the remaining stock is reassessed to ensure safety. Additional unfit products are destroyed as necessary.

In the auction process, fishermen appoint representatives to deliver

their catch to the foreman, who then transports the fish to the designated auction area for bidding.

In cases where large quantities are discarded, an official destruction certificate is issued, detailing the type and volume of rejected products under the shipment owner's name.

Following sorting, the auctioneer opens bidding using indicative starting prices set by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, with competitive offers continuing until all lots are sold to the highest bidder.

International research discovers potential cure for fatty liver

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

In a major breakthrough and providing a powerful treatment for millions around the world, an international team of researchers have identified vitamin B3, a safe and widely available vitamin that could be used for curing fatty liver disease, an international team of researchers has identified vitamin B3, a safe and widely available vitamin that could be used to cure fatty liver disease.

According to the latest figures, metabolic-associated fatty liver disease (MASLD) impacts roughly 30% of people globally and has long lacked effective, targeted therapies.

Now that the researchers have uncovered a key genetic factor that worsens the condition, the interesting fact is that the most effective way to target this factor may be an already-approved, widely available treatment: vitamin B3.

The research has identified microRNA-93 as a key genetic driver of fatty liver disease and discovered that vitamin B3 can effectively shut it down. These findings are



About 30% of people globally are affected by metabolic-associated fatty-liver.

published by the Ulsan National Institute of Science & Technology, South Korea, the lead institution of the research, and are featured in many leading science journals worldwide.

The research team was led by Prof Jang Hyun Choi from Ulsan National Institute of Science & Technology, South Korea. Prof Hwayoung Yun at Pusan National University, South Korea and Prof Neung Hwa Park at Ulsan University Hospital, South Korea, were the other members of the team.

The research team identified that microRNA-93 (miR-93) as a central regulator in MASLD and it marks the first time this

molecule has been clearly linked to how the disease develops and progresses.

MiR-93 is a small RNA molecule found in liver cells that controls the activity of certain genes. The researchers discovered that miR-93 levels are unusually high in both people with fatty liver disease and animal models. Their analysis showed that miR-93 drives fat buildup, inflammation, and scarring in the liver by suppressing SIRT1, a gene that plays a key role in regulating fat metabolism inside liver cells.

To better understand its role, the team used gene editing to block miR-93 production in mice. These

animals showed significantly less hepatic fat accumulation, along with improved insulin sensitivity and better overall liver function. In contrast, mice engineered to produce excess miR-93 experienced more severe metabolic problems in the liver.

The researchers then screened 150 FDA-approved drugs to see if any could reduce miR-93 levels. Niacin (vitamin B3) stood out as the most effective option. In mice treated with niacin, miR-93 levels dropped sharply, while SIRT1 activity increased. This helped restore normal fat-processing pathways in the liver and improved overall lipid balance.

The research team explained: "This study precisely elucidates the molecular origin of MASLD and demonstrates the potential for repurposing an already approved vitamin compound to modulate this pathway, which has high translational clinical relevance."

"Given that niacin is a well-established and safe medication used to treat hyperlipidemia, it holds promise as a candidate for combination therapies targeting miRNA pathways in MASLD."

Qatar steps up rescue of rain-damaged wild trees

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC) has intensified its efforts to rehabilitate wild trees damaged by recent rainfall, as part of its ongoing initiatives to protect vegetation cover and preserve biodiversity across Qatar.

MoECC's Wildlife Development Department deployed field teams to assess and treat damage caused by heavy rains and runoff. These efforts include re-stabilising trees that partially collapsed due to water-saturated soil and strong flood currents, ensuring their stability and continued growth.

The ministry pointed out that these additional measures have been implemented, including reinforcing surrounding soil to prevent further impact and repairing damage to trunks and branches to enhance the trees' chances of survival and long-term sustainability.

Trees that were completely uprooted have been transferred to the "Mothers Field" at Al Ghashamiya Nursery, where they will undergo specialised rehabilitation programmes. These programmes aim to preserve their genetic stock and enable future propagation as part of wild plant



cultivation initiatives.

The ministry stressed the importance of such interventions during the rainy season, noting that natural environmental changes can significantly affect plant stability. Further, rapid response and field intervention play a crucial role in minimising tree loss and maintaining ecological balance.

It also called on the public to cooperate by reporting damaged trees, avoiding areas near flood channels, and refraining from tampering with vegetation during and after rainfall, to ensure public safety and support national environmental protection efforts.

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23 QR.75

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13 QR.50

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