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BUSINESS | Page 1

Doha Bank shareholders approve distribution of 15% cash dividends

Family العودة المدرسية BACK TO SCHOOL

Ready to GUAC AND ROLL? Only on talabat

Amir, Italian PM underpin energy security

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani met with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni at Lusail Palace yesterday, where the two leaders discussed regional and international developments.

At the outset of the meeting, His Highness the Amir welcomed the Italian prime minister and expressed his appreciation for Italy's position, praising the strong ties between the two friendly countries.

Both sides stressed the need to de-escalate tensions and prioritise political dialogue and diplomatic solutions as the most effective means of containing the ongoing crisis in the Middle East and its impact on energy and supply chains, and of safeguarding regional energy security.

The two leaders also reviewed bilateral co-operation and explored ways to enhance and develop it across various sectors, particularly in the economy and energy.

According to a statement from the Italian Prime Minister's Office, the

Italy offers infrastructure rehab as both countries eye defence co-operation

two leaders discussed energy issues in depth, in light of the consolidated relationship between Italy and Qatar in this area, including possible measures to mitigate supply shocks. In that context, Prime Minister Meloni conveyed Italy's readiness to contribute — through the strengths of its industrial and production base — to the rehabilitation of Qatari energy infrastructure, which the statement described as fundamental to global energy security.

The two leaders also agreed on the urgency of ensuring freedom of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz.

The Italian Prime Minister's Office further stated that Prime Minister Meloni and His Highness the Amir agreed to work together to deepen

bilateral co-operation and joint investment, with the aim of strengthening every dimension of security — particularly in the strategic areas of defence, critical infrastructure, food security, and multilateral co-operation on the management of migration along Mediterranean routes.

Later, Meloni departed Doha following a working visit to the country. She and her accompanying delegation were seen off at Doha International Airport by HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaf, and Italian ambassador Paolo Toschi. **Page 12**

Italian ambassador highlights strong commitment — Page 12



GCC renewables surge

By A Staff Reporter
Doha

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries posted a sharp rise in renewable energy output in 2024, driven by explosive growth in solar and wind capacity, even as the region experienced notably higher rainfall amid broader climate shifts, according to the GCC Statistical Center's "Climate Statistics 2024" report. The findings, released yesterday, highlight the GCC's accelerating transition toward sustainability while documenting measurable changes in key climate indicators across the six member states. Solar capacity recorded an average annual growth rate of 88.1% between 2013 and 2024, with electricity generation surging from just 0.13 GWh in 2013 to

23.5 TWh in 2023. Wind capacity expanded significantly over the same period, rising from 4.8 MW in 2015 to 567 MW in 2024. Rainfall across the GCC jumped 49.4% in 2024 compared with the long-term 1980-2010 average, pointing to evolving weather patterns in the arid region. At the same time, temperature readings from 23 approved monitoring stations remained relatively stable, with no recorded extremes exceeding 49°C between 2012 and 2024. The report also notes progress in climate resilience measures. All GCC states now operate advanced mobile-based early warning systems using cell broadcast technology, and climate change adaptation and awareness topics have been integrated into national school curricula. **To Page 2**



Launch of financial claims payment service via Metrash

The Ministry of Interior (MoI) announced that the General Directorate of Passports' Search and Follow-up Department enabled a service to pay financial claims electronically via the MoI's website and the Metrash App.

In a post on its X account, the ministry said yesterday that the service allows users to pay fees and fines, as well as travel ticket costs with ease.

It added that this can be done by going onto the "Security" window, clicking on "Financial Claims", choosing between the "Personal" and "Establishment" options, selecting the due payment (fee, fine, ticket), clicking on "Records", and paying the required amount directly.

In a separate post, the MoI indicated the requirements and conditions for obtaining a driving licence in accordance with the procedures approved by the General Directorate of Traffic.

The ministry pointed out that the basic requirements include: Proof of Identity, Personal Photo, passing the Medical Examination, and presenting a valid Residence Permit for residents.

A minimum age of 18 years old is required to obtain a light vehicle driving license and a minimum age of 21 years old to obtain other types of vehicle driving license, it added.

The ministry highlighted the need to enroll in an accredited driving school and pass both the theoretical and practical tests. Upon passing the tests, the driving license can be printed via Metrash, the MoI website, and via Traffic Offices at Driving schools, the MoI said. **(QNA)**

Earthna launches blueprint for Qatar's industrial diversification

The policy 'should align with 2030 green, economic goals'

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

Earthna Centre for a Sustainable Future (Earthna), a member of Qatar Foundation (QF), has launched a new report, 'Industrial Policies for Economic Diversification in Qatar: A Research and Policy Agenda', to support Qatar's economic diversification ambitions through an industrial policy.

Published in collaboration with the UN Industrial Development Organisation, the report highlights the need for a broad research programme for the design of an appropriate industrial policy in Qatar.

"There has been a recent resurgence of industrial policy as a tool for development planning. And we believe, it has great potential to support Qatar's development ambitions and environmental commitments," Dr Gonzalo Castro de la Mata, executive director of Earthna, told *Gulf Times*.

Dr de la Mata said designing an appropriate industrial policy requires a strong evidence base and further research to understand the local context and achieve diversification and structural transformation.

"We published this report, in collaboration with the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation, to encourage discussions on industrial policy and suggest a research and policy agenda to support the government's



Dr Gonzalo Castro de la Mata.

polymaking process. The report presents a comprehensive framework on potential avenues to help advance the country's economic diversification, aligned with Qatar National Vision 2030 and other key national policies," explained, Dr de la Mata.

The report notes that inquiry is needed into productivity, skill requirements, and labour migration patterns to support future needs, suggesting that research should also explore integrating green and blue economy principles and identifying specific policy packages and governance reforms relevant for long-term impact in Qatar.

Another proposal in the report is to align industrial policies to existing national strategic frameworks and embed them in future strategies. **To Page 2**

Numbers that tell a compelling story

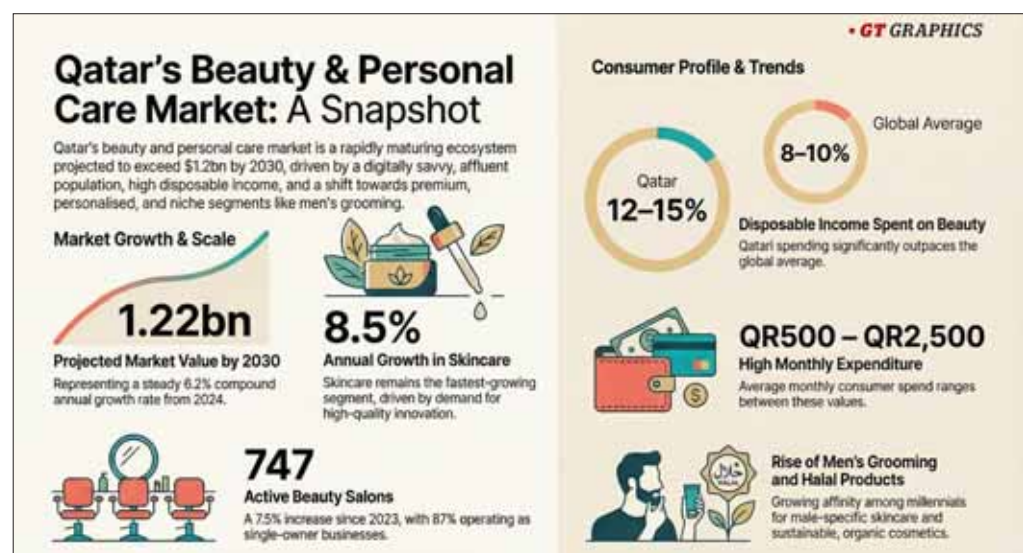
By Santhosh V Perumal
Business Reporter

Qatar's beauty and personal care market is coming into its own — a fast-maturing, high-spending ecosystem shaped by affluent consumers, a young digitally savvy population, and a retail landscape increasingly calibrated to global luxury standards.

The numbers tell a compelling story. The market — which also comprises hair salons, beauty clinics, spas, wellness centres, and personal care services — is projected to expand from

\$851.3mn in 2024 to \$1.22bn by 2030, a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 6.2%, according to StrategyHelix Group, which provides data-driven market insight and analysis. Qatari consumers allocate about 12-15% of their disposable income to beauty and wellness products and services — well above the global average of 8-10% — underscoring the sector's remarkable consumer depth.

For global brands and investors eyeing the region, the opportunity is clear. Businesses that combine luxury positioning, innovation, and a culturally aligned product portfolio — in-



cluding men's grooming and gender-neutral beauty — are best placed to capture long-term growth in this fast-evolving ecosystem, particularly as strong potential for market consolida-

tion and franchise-based expansion continues to draw serious commercial interest.

Qatari consumers allocate about 12-15% of their disposable income to beauty and

wellness products and services, which is higher than the global average of 8-10%, said a study released by the organisers of Qatar Beauty and Wellcare Show. **To Page 2**

Trump gives Iran a new 48hr deadline

US President Donald Trump said yesterday Iran had 48 hours to make a deal or face further action, as Iranian and US forces searched for a missing American pilot after two warplanes were downed over Iran and the Gulf. Trump said time was running out on Tehran to open the Strait of Hormuz, warning that "all Hell will reign down on them" if his demand was not met. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, meanwhile, signalled Tehran was open in principle to Pakistan-mediated talks, saying Iran had "never refused to go to Islamabad" and was grateful for Islamabad's mediation efforts. He said any agreement would have to bring a "conclusive and lasting end" to what Iran calls an illegal war.

The prospect of a US service member alive in Iran has raised the stakes for Washington as the conflict entered its sixth week, with scant prospect of peace talks and low public support. — Reuters

Italian PM, delegation leave Doha

Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni departed Doha yesterday following a working visit to the country. The prime minister and her delegation were seen off at Doha International Airport by HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi and Italy's ambassador to Qatar Paolo Toschi. - **QNA**



OFFICIAL

Amir sends cable of congratulations to Senegal president on National Day

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani has sent a cable of congratulations to Senegal's President Bassirou Diomaye Faye on the occasion of his country's National Day.

His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani likewise sent a cable of congratulations to Faye on the occasion.

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani meanwhile sent a cable of congratulations to Senegal's Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko. - **QNA**

Numbers that tell a compelling story

From Page 1

The skincare segment alone is expected to grow by 8.5% annually, reflecting the rising demand for high-quality and innovative products, they had said.

The Doha Festival City 2025 Consumer Survey revealed that shoppers spend between QR500 and QR2,500 monthly on beauty.

While Qatar has a large affluent population, there is also a sizeable expatriate community with more price-sensitive consumers.

The country's demographic profile - characterised by a young, digitally connected population and a large expatriate community - forms a strong foundation for the trend-driven market, whose direct contribution to gross domestic product (GDP) is modest, but the sector's indirect economic impact is higher in terms of employment and retail linkage.

Data released by Rentech Digital, a comprehensive business tech platform, found there are 747 beauty salons in Qatar as of October 15, 2025, a 7.48% increase from 2023.

Of these locations, 650 beauty salons, which is 87.01% of total, are single-owner operations, while the remaining 97 (12.99%) are part of larger brands.

Geographically, Doha had 352 beauty salons, Al Rayyan 303 and Al Wakra 26.

Although purchasing power is high, limited population size constrains overall retail volume growth in the country, requiring brands to rely on tourism and premium positioning to maintain scale.

As Qatar continues to attract global tourists and expand its lifestyle economy, the demand will continue to rise for premium cosmetics, advanced skincare, and professional salon services.

Major luxury shopping destinations have created premium retail environments where international beauty brands can establish flagship stores and immersive consumer experiences.

Qatar's beauty and personal care sector has been witnessing fierce competition, featuring global giants such as Unilever, Procter & Gamble, Beiersdorf, L'Oréal, LVMH, and Coty Inc., alongside regional and local names including Abdul Samad Al Qurashi, Arabian Oud, Al Jazeera Perfumes, and Ajmal International.

The landscape includes brands like Chanel, Clarins, The Estée Lauder Companies, Kiko, Dabur, Haleon, Reckitt Benckiser, Colgate-Palmolive, and PUIG.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is playing a pivotal role in shaping Qatar's personal care sector.

From personalised product suggestions to predictive analytics, virtual try-ons, and intelligent customer service, AI is enhancing the consumer experience and operational efficiencies for brands.

Predictive analytics can better forecast demand trends for various products, allowing brands to optimise inventory.

Factoring in the fast growth in digital retail platforms, beauty salons are establishing strong digital presence across many platforms to penetrate the market through Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, X, and YouTube channels.

Opportunities exist in premium salons, medical-aesthetic clinics, halal-certified products, and male grooming, which are high-margin sub-segments attracting global investments.

The Qatar cosmetic products market, which was \$133mm in 2025, is expected to reach \$205.2mm by 2034, showing a 4.79% CAGR (compound annual growth rate) during 2026-34, according to IMARC Group, which provides sector-specific research and consulting solutions.

Men's grooming, especially skincare and beard care products, is one of the fastest-growing segments, said an employee of a leading retail hypermarket.

Younger generations, particularly millennials, are increasingly showing affinity, which is reflected in the growing popularity of men's cosmetics brands in the region.

There has also been a noticeable shift towards natural, organic, and sustainable cosmetics in Qatar, with consumers becoming more health-conscious and opting for skincare and makeup products that are free from harmful chemicals and artificial ingredients.

The market's evolution suggests that the next few years will be crucial for identifying the right product offerings and marketing strategies to cater to the diverse needs of Qatar's consumers, even as the personal care sector is subject to stringent regulations, especially regarding the ingredients used in cosmetics and hygiene products.



Govt scholarship plan for clinical psychology lauded

The inclusion of psychological counseling and behavioural health, in particular clinical psychology, within Qatar's government scholarship plan for the 2026-27 academic year is a step toward building qualified national cadres capable of addressing rising psychological and behavioural challenges amid rapid social and technological change.

A number of academics and specialists in the field of mental health, education, and community development have stressed that the need for such expertise is now urgent to bridge shortages in specialists and enhance service quality through culturally informed care, strengthening trust and improving outcomes.

Dr Khalid al-Khanji, assistant professor of Mental Health/Counseling at Qatar University, said that psychological counseling is a cornerstone of mental health sys-

tems, noting that "it is not limited to treating disorders but extends to prevention and promoting mental well-being among individuals".

He said that "specialists from the same environment have a relative advantage in building trust with clients, which directly improves the quality of services".

Behavioural therapy specialist Dr Abdulrahman al-Abdullah highlighted the rising demand for psychological counselling services as the social transformations and the impact of modern technology have led to behavioural challenges, particularly among children.

He noted that "qualified national cadres bring deeper cultural and social understanding, which enhances the accuracy and effectiveness of interventions".

Professional development expert Dr Hessa al-Marwani said that "this reflects an advanced awareness of the importance of in-

vesting in mental health as a pillar of sustainable development".

She noted that "mental health is closely linked to professional performance, helping individuals manage stress, make balanced decisions, and reduce burnout".

Dr Abdunaser Fakhrou, associate professor of Special Education, said that there is significant pressure on mental health clinics due to the growing number of cases.

He noted that this initiative could strengthen Qatar's position as an advanced regional centre for mental health services.

Latifa al-Kuwari, international trainer in the administration and education fields, emphasised the potential impact on schools.

"Having specialised national professionals can create a qualitative shift within schools by enhancing psychological support and building trust with students and parents," she said.

Writer and psychologist Dr Moza al-Malki highlighted the therapeutic dimension, noting that "cultural and linguistic alignment between therapist and patient creates a safe environment that enhances treatment effectiveness".

However, she said that social stigma continues to be a major barrier to accessing mental health services.

Human development consultant Dr Lulwa al-Obaidi stressed that "mental health is a core element in building individuals capable of productivity and adapting to change".

Family consultant Noura al-Mannai called for wider integration of awareness, noting that "studying psychology is not just academic knowledge, as it is life knowledge that helps individuals understand themselves and their families".

SJC holding online auctions of vehicles and real estate today

The Department of Judicial Evictions and Auctions at the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) has announced the organisation of a vehicle auction via the "Court Auctions" application today (April 5) from 8.30pm to 10.30pm, where a number of vehicles will be offered for the highest bidders.

The department will also hold an auction to-

day on real estate units on the same application from 9.30am until 11am.

The auction will include a number of residential building, farms, and land plots.

The department has also announced scheduled online auctions on vehicle fancy plate numbers, heavy equipment, real estate, movable assets, and vehicles, all of which were sub-

ject to judicial verdicts and the outcomes will be used to settle the related cases.

On March 29, the department conducted a number of auctions which generated QR34.53mm worth of proceeds that were allocated to settle 1,073 related cases.

These included vehicles, heavy equipment, and real estate units.

GCC renewables surge amid wetter weather, stable heat

From Page 1

The data underscores the dual reality facing the Gulf: a determined push to diversify the energy mix and build resilience, even as climate variables show signs of change.

Solar and wind expansion reflects ambitious national visions aimed at reducing reliance on hydrocarbons while capitalising on the region's abundant natural resources.

Analysts view the rapid renewable growth as a positive step toward the GCC's collective sustainability goals, though overall renewable penetration remains modest relative to the region's total energy needs.

The GCC Statistical Centre, based in Oman, compiles the report using national, regional, and international data to support evidence-based policymaking on climate adaptation and mitigation.

This latest edition arrives as Gulf nations continue to balance economic diversification with environmental stewardship amid global calls for cleaner energy.

Earthna blueprint for industrial diversification

From Page 1

"Industrial policies must align with the Qatar National Vision 2030 and the Third National Development Strategy. This alignment supports the transformation into a knowledge-based, competitive, and sustainable growth model," the report explained.

According to Dr de la Mata, policies should be embedded in future strategies, while ensuring coherence, green structural transformation, and incorporation of climate-conscious sustainable development principles.

The report also calls for target investments and capacity building into new innovation-led sectors, such as climate technology to enable necessary diversification and innovation-driven upgrading. It points to Qatar's commitment to emission reduction positions, low-carbon industries and clean technologies as key enablers as well as developing a hydrogen production base and expanding carbon capture and storage infrastructure.

"Qatar's Nationally Determined Commitment (NDC) to a 25% reduction in emissions by 2030 positions low-carbon industries, clean technologies, and blue economy solutions as key enablers of its diversification goals," he highlighted.

Another focus in the report is to strategically support export-focused sectors that align with the needs of growing economies across the Global South.

CONDOLENCES

The Management and employees of



Al Balagh Trading & Contracting Co. W.L.L
express their deepest sorrow on the passing
of our long-serving colleague,



Henry Andrew D'Souza

(Date of Birth: 08 June 1949)

who had been a valued member of our organization
since 22 December 1982.

May God rest the departed soul in peace and give
fortitude to the bereaved family to bear this great loss.

Trump gives Iran deadline while US hunts for missing airman

AFP
Washington

President Donald Trump said yesterday that Tehran had 48 hours left to cut a deal or face action, as US and Iranian forces scrambled to find a downed American airman.

Iran command rejects Trump's ultimatum

Iran's central military command yesterday rejected US President Donald Trump's threat to destroy the country's vital infrastructure if it does not accept a peace deal within 48 hours, AFP reported. General Ali Abdollahi Aliabadi, in a statement from the Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters, said Trump's threat was a "helpless, nervous and unbalanced action". And, echoing the religious language of Trump's social media post, he warned that "the simple meaning of this message is that the gates of hell will open for you".

Trump's latest threat came after a strike near an Iranian nuclear power plant prompted evacuations, and as Tehran announced fresh attacks and the Israeli military said it had detected another missile launch from Yemen.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards said they hit a commercial ship in Bahrain, as they maintained their tight grip on the Strait of Hormuz shipping lane and continued to strike economic targets in their Gulf neighbours they see as linked to the US-Israeli war effort.

The economic strikes are also going the other way.

An Israeli or US strike on a petrochemical hub in the southwest of Iran killed five people, according to the deputy governor of Khuzestan province.

The war erupted more than a month ago with US-Israeli strikes on Iran, triggering a retaliation that has spread the conflict throughout the Middle East and convulsed the global economy — particularly due to the closure of the strait, a vital conduit for oil and gas.

"Remember when I gave Iran ten days to make a deal or open up the Hormuz Strait," Trump wrote on Truth Social, referring to an ultimatum issued on March 26.

"Time is running out — 48 hours before all Hell will reign (sic) down on them."

Tehran said on Friday it had shot down an F-15 warplane and US media reported United States special forces had rescued one of its two crew members, with the



Iran's Minister of Science Hossein Simaee Sarraf inspects the damage at the research building of the Shahid Beheshti University, which was damaged by a strike, amid the US-Israeli conflict with Iran, in Tehran, yesterday. (Reuters)



A group of cultural heritage lovers gather to condemn the strikes on Iran's historic sites, at the Golestan Palace in Tehran, yesterday. (AFP)

other still missing.

Iran's military also said it downed a US A-10 ground attack aircraft in the Gulf, with US media saying the pilot of that plane was rescued.

The local Mehr news agency yesterday quoted the deputy governor of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad province, Fattah Mohammadi, as saying the search for the missing pilot involved "presence of popular forces and tribesmen alongside military forces and is still ongoing".

He added that "last night, people fired at enemy helicopters with rifles and did not allow them to land".

Images posted on social media and verified by AFP TV showed Iranian police firing at a US helicopter in southwestern Iran as US forces searched for the airman.

Retired US brigadier general Houston Cantwell, who has 400 hours of combat flight experience, said a pilot's training would likely kick in even before he or she

parachuted to the ground. "My priority would be, first of all, concealment, because I don't want to be captured," he said.

NUCLEAR PLANT

A strike near Iran's Bushehr nuclear plant yesterday killed a guard and led Russia, which partly constructed the facility and helps operate it, to announce it was evacuating 198 workers and to condemn the strike as "an evil deed".

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi warned that continued attacks on the plant on the southern coast could eventually lead to radioactive fallout that would "end life in GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) capitals, not Tehran".

Bushehr is considerably closer to Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar than it is to the Iranian capital.

Rafael Grossi, head of the International Atomic Energy Agency wrote on X that no increase in radiation levels had been reported at the site, but nonetheless

voiced "deep concern" at what he said was the fourth such strike in recent weeks.

There were also more strikes on Tehran, where an AFP journalist saw a thick haze of grey smoke covering the skyline.

"This war wasn't for freedom... we just ended up trapped with something even more savage," 31-year-old Paezeh told AFP via messenger app from Tehran.

"They bomb randomly, there's no sign of any specific target these recent days."

Maryam, a 35-year-old from Khansar in Isfahan province said Iranians are divided between those hoping for an end to their government and those more fearful of economic disaster.

"I'm honestly really scared about our future," she told AFP. "Things are a disaster right now. Mass layoffs, widespread shutdowns... everything feels overwhelming."

Strikes by all sides have increasingly targeted economic and industrial sites, raising fears of wider disruption to global energy supplies.

US-Israeli strikes yesterday hit a petrochemicals hub, a cement plant and a trade terminal on the Iran-Iraq border, where one person was reported killed.

Iran has retaliated with missile and drone attacks on Israel and US allies in the Gulf.

Shrapnel from intercepted drones injured four people in Bahrain yesterday, and two buildings in Dubai were hit by debris, including one housing the US cloud computing firm Oracle, authorities said.

In Tel Aviv, hundreds of Israelis marched to protest against the war and demand peace talks.

Qatar condemns attacks targeting UAE embassy in Damascus

Qatar expressed its strong condemnation and denunciation of the riots and attacks targeting the embassy of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the residence of its head of mission in Damascus as well as the violation of the inviolability of diplomatic missions that accompanied them. In a statement issued yesterday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) affirmed that targeting diplomatic premises constitutes a flagrant violation of international

law, stressing the need to hold the perpetrators of these acts accountable and ensure that such acts are not repeated. The ministry reiterated Qatar's full solidarity with the UAE, emphasizing the importance of taking the necessary measures to guarantee the protection of diplomatic missions and ensure the safety and security of their personnel, in accordance with the provisions of international law and the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. (QNA)

Bushehr: Iran's only N-power plant

Bushehr nuclear power plant, Iran's only operational civilian nuclear facility, was built by Russia and officially handed over in September 2013, after decades of twists, turns and delays linked to Iran's turbulent history. The facility, located in the south of the country and equipped with a 1,000-megawatt reactor, was hit yesterday by a US-Israeli airstrike, killing a security guard, Iranian state media reported. It had already been targeted four times since the start of the war on February 28.

Yesterday, Russia, which sends technicians to help operate it, began evacuating its 198 Rosatom employees. Yesterday's strike was just the latest episode in the plant's turbulent history.

The project began in 1975 during the Shah's reign, and was initially awarded to Germany's Siemens. But work on it was interrupted by the 1979 Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988).

Although a major oil and gas producer, Iran sought to revive the project in the late 1980s to diversify its energy resources and reduce its dependence on fossil fuels for domestic consumption.

But Germany's government persuaded Siemens to withdraw over concerns about nuclear proliferation. Tehran then turned to Russia, which took over the contract in January 1995, aiming to commission the 1,000-megawatt pressurized water reactor in 1999. But a series of problems led to an 11-year delay.

Russians and Iranians also had several financial disputes over the cost, estimated at over \$1bn. Washington exerted pressure on Moscow not to complete the plant, which the US feared would facilitate Iran's potential acquisition of nuclear weapons.

Moscow obtained a waiver to complete Bushehr by concluding an agreement with Tehran that included supplying Iran with the fuel used by the plant — then repatriating it back to Russia to reduce the risk of proliferation. Many analysts and diplomats believe Russia delayed the plant's completion to maintain leverage over Iran, particularly to compel it to co-operate with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

CIVILIAN USE

Unlike Iran's Natanz uranium enrichment facility or the future Arak heavy water nuclear power plant, the Bushehr facility is not considered a proliferation risk.

For years, Western nations have accused Iran of seeking to develop nuclear weapons, an accusation Tehran denies. Iran has repeatedly accused or suspected Israel — the country considered the only military nuclear power in the region — of sabotaging some of its uranium enrichment facilities.

While the US has insisted on a total ban on Iranian uranium enrichment, Iran defends its right to civilian nuclear programmes, even though it has reached a 60% enrichment level — far beyond what is required for civilian use. (AFP)

US satellite imagery firm announces blackout on Middle East war pics

US satellite imagery company Planet Labs said yesterday it will stop publishing high-resolution aerial pictures of the area involved in the Middle East war, following a request from President Donald Trump's government. The US and Israel have conducted joint strikes against Iran since late February, prompting the Islamic Republic to retaliate with daily missile barrages targeting Israel and several neighbouring countries across the region. Planet said the US government had asked satellite imagery providers to implement an "indefinite withhold of imagery".

"Effective retroactively from March 9, 2026, Planet is moving to a managed access model, extending the publication delay for all new imagery within the designated AOI (area of interest), and releasing imagery on a case-by-case basis and for urgent, mission-critical requirements or in the public interest," the company said in a message to clients received by AFP. This area was defined in a previous announcement as all of Iran and allied bases in the area, as well as in regional states and existing conflict zones. Planet, founded in 2010 by

former Nasa scientists and whose images are widely used by media and researchers, said it expected the new policy to last until the end of the conflict.

On March 10 the company said it would impose a two-week delay on access to its images of the Middle East because of the war, extending an initial 96-hour delay.

Vantor, formerly Maxar, the other major provider of satellite imagery, had also announced major restrictions.

Under normal circumstances, Planet's images are available to its clients — including AFP — within hours of their satellites passing overhead, providing a valuable resource for businesses, researchers, and journalists, but also potentially for militaries seeking to target enemy military bases or radar sites.

US law provides that any company headquartered in the US that commercially operates high-resolution satellite imagery may be subjected to restrictions for reasons of national security or foreign policy. In practice, satellite data providers, which operate under licence, put in place restriction protocols in order to avoid sanctions. (AFP)

Several injured in Israel by Iran missile fire: medics

AFP
Jerusalem

Israeli emergency services said it rescued five people who were injured yesterday in Tel Aviv and surrounding areas after Iran fired several rounds of missiles toward Israel.

Since midnight, eight waves of Iranian missiles have been launched towards Israel, according to the Israeli military.

The military also detected a missile fired

from Yemen, the fifth such attack from there on Israel.

Israel's Magen David Adom emergency services said a 45-year-old man was treated for minor injuries from glass shrapnel in the central city of Bnei Brak and taken to hospital.

As the day progressed, rescue teams said they had treated three additional casualties — two men in their 20s hit by glass fragments and one injured by a blast.

A 52-year-old man "lightly injured by the blast wave" was also transferred to a hospital in Ramat Gan, in central Israel, the emergency

service said. In a residential neighbourhood of Ramat Gan, AFP images showed the top floor of a house completely blown out, exposing its gutted interior, with a crushed bookcase and an exercise bike amid the debris.

Numerous impact marks were visible on the walls.

Nearby, another home was largely destroyed, stripped of its outer walls, according to AFP photographs.

"All this is from shrapnel," Joy Frankel, a social worker, told AFP near one of the affected sites.

GCC condemns acts of vandalism at UAE embassy

QNA/Reuters
Riyadh

The Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) strongly condemned the riots, assaults, and attempted property damage targeting the Embassy of the United Arab Emirates and the residence of its head of mission in Damascus, Syria.

In a statement yesterday, GCC Secretary-General Jassim Mohammed al-Budaiwi emphasised the importance of Syrian authorities holding those responsible for these attacks and the disrespect shown towards UAE national symbols accountable. He also called for strengthened protection of diplomatic buildings and embassy personnel in accordance with conventions and protocols governing diplomatic work.

Earlier, the UAE yesterday condemned what it described as "riots, acts of vandalism, and assaults"

outside its embassy and the residence of its head of mission in Damascus. In a statement, the UAE's foreign ministry called on Syria to uphold its obligations to secure the embassy and its staff, investigate the incident and hold the perpetrators to account. A Reuters reporter saw dozens of protesters gathering outside the UAE's embassy in Damascus at midday on Friday.

A Syrian security official told Reuters that the incident occurred after some participants split off from a pro-Palestinian demonstration being held at the nearby Umayyad Square and tried to storm the embassy. "Internal security forces prevented them from doing so and dealt with the situation," the official said, speaking anonymously because he was not authorised to speak to the media.

Syria's foreign ministry said in a statement that it took a "firm and unwavering stance" against any attack on or attempt to approach embassies and diplomatic missions.

Tens of thousands of Sadr supporters rally in Baghdad against conflict

AFP
Baghdad

Tens of thousands of supporters of Iraqi leader Moqtada Sadr rallied in Baghdad and across the country yesterday, condemning Israel and the US and demanding an end to the war.

The massive crowds came as the Middle East war was due to enter its sixth week after strikes launched by the US and Israel against Iran on February 28.

Iraq has been unwillingly drawn into the conflict, with strikes targeting US interests on its soil as well as attacks against some groups in the country.

Tens of thousands of men and some women packed into the streets around Baghdad's central Tahrir Square yesterday, waving the national flag and chanting: "No, no to Israel" and "No,



A drone view of supporters of Iraqi leader Moqtada al-Sadr taking part in a peaceful protest against US and Israeli actions in the region, amid the US-Israeli conflict with Iran, in Basra, Iraq, yesterday. (Reuters)

no to America". "What America and Israel are doing in their aggression against the countries of the region is not a war of a military nature, but a senseless war," Dhirgham Samir, attending the rally, told AFP.

"Today's demonstration is an

expression of rejection of aggression, arrogance, and injustice throughout the world, not just in Iraq," he said.

Samir, who was in his forties, added that "this is a senseless war, targeting civilians".

Across the region since the on-

set of war thousands have been killed.

In a statement, Sadr called for peaceful demonstrations "to condemn the Zionist-American aggression and to establish peace in the region".

Under the giant Freedom Monument, commemorating Iraq's declaration of independence, demonstrators also rallied against what they said was US and Israeli meddling in the region.

"They violate the rights of all the peoples of the region first, and then the world," cleric Ali al-Fartousi told AFP.

"Humanity must speak out against these people and stop them," he said, adding: "The time has come for the entire world to stand united against global Zionist-American arrogance."

Sadr retains a devoted following of millions among Iraq's population, and has previously mobilised huge crowds.



Israeli strikes kill two girls in southern Lebanon

AFP
Beirut

Israeli strikes on southern Lebanon killed at least two girls and wounded 40 people yesterday, Lebanon's health ministry said, while the Israeli military announced the death of another soldier in battle.

Israel has carried out strikes across Lebanon and launched a ground invasion in the south since March 2, when Hezbollah entered the war in the Middle East on the side of its backer Iran.

In separate statements, the Lebanese health ministry reported that an Israeli strike on Habush killed at least two girls and wounded 22 people, while a strike on Al-Hawsh near the coastal city of Tyre wounded 18, including a child, three women and three paramedics.

The ministry had said in an earlier statement the strike on Al-Hawsh damaged a nearby major hospital.

The director of the Lebanese Italian Hospital told the state-run National News Agency (NNA) that it would "remain open to provide the necessary medical care" despite the damage.

Tens of thousands of people have left Tyre, but around 20,000 remain, including 15,000 displaced from surrounding villages, despite Israeli evacuation warnings covering most of the city and a swathe of the south.

Hours after the attack, the Israeli army struck three buildings in and around Tyre it had warned people to evacuate, according to the NNA. An AFP correspondent said a missile hit an 11-storey building northeast of Tyre, completely destroying it and reducing it to a pile of rubble that covered a nearby gas station. A second raid



A rescue worker inspects the debris of destroyed buildings at the site of an Israeli strike in the southern Lebanese area of Maarakeh near the coastal city of Tyre, yesterday. (AFP)

on a five-storey building near the city levelled half of it, leaving the other half standing.

The third strike was on the Burj al-Shamali Palestinian refugee camp, southeast of the city.

Overnight strikes destroyed two buildings nearby, an AFP correspondent saw, shattering windows and also causing suspended ceilings to collapse in the hospital, management said.

Another Israeli airstrike targeted and completely destroyed a mosque in the town of Baraashit in the Bint Jbeil district, the NNA reported, along with other bombings across the south.

The Israeli military announced yesterday the death of a soldier who "fell during combat in southern Lebanon", the 11th killed since the army began ground operations in the country. It also announced

having struck "more than 140 Hezbollah fighters' infrastructure targets" over the previous two days.

Dawn strikes targeted Beirut's southern suburbs, a largely evacuated Hezbollah stronghold that has been attacked repeatedly during more than a month of war.

In a statement yesterday, Israel's military said it had "completed an additional wave of strikes targeting command centres belonging to the Quds Force Lebanon corps in Beirut", referring to the Iranian Revolutionary Guards' foreign operations arm, and "two headquarters of the (Palestinian Islamic Jihad)".

After attacking a bridge in the West Bekaa region in eastern Lebanon on Friday "to prevent the transfer of reinforcements and military equipment", Israel hit

it again yesterday, destroying it completely, the NNA said.

West Bekaa is right above Lebanon's south, where Israeli troops have been advancing on the ground.

The NNA also reported that, in Shebaa near the eastern side of the Israeli border, Israeli forces abducted a man at around 3:00 am yesterday.

It was at least the third time Israeli forces have seized someone from southern Lebanon after infiltrating their home since the war with Hezbollah began.

The group claimed responsibility yesterday for a series of attacks on northern Israeli towns and Israeli troops in southern Lebanese towns near the border, particularly Marun al-Ras, Hula, Ainata and Bayada.

The war has displaced upwards



A collapsed building is pictured following Israeli bombardment on Abbasiyeh, near Tyre in southern Lebanon, yesterday. (AFP)



A member of the media walks near a damaged building in the aftermath of an Israeli strike, amid escalating hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah, as the US-Israeli conflict with Iran continues, in Tyre, Lebanon, yesterday. (Reuters)

of a mn people in Lebanon and killed more than 1,400 people in the country, including 54 medics and three Indonesian UN peacekeepers in the south.

The UN force said on Friday that three peacekeepers were wounded in a blast inside a UN facility near Odaise, and were rushed to hospital.

Jakarta slammed the incident as "unacceptable" after the UN office there confirmed the wounded were Indonesian.

Indonesia's government said "these events underscore the ur-

gent need to strengthen protection for UN peacekeeping forces amid an increasingly dangerous conflict situation".

Yesterday, a UN security official told AFP that Israeli forces destroyed 17 surveillance cameras linked to UNIFIL's main headquarters in Naqura.

The UN peacekeeping force has been caught in the crossfire in southern Lebanon since the start of the war, with Hezbollah launching attacks on Israel and its troops, and Israeli forces pushing into border towns.

Explosion rocks Khartoum, police blame war-era landmine

AFP
Khartoum

A large explosion was heard Friday in the military-controlled Sudanese capital Khartoum, an AFP journalist and witnesses said, with authorities blaming a landmine left behind from the war.

Khartoum has seen relative calm since the army, which has been locked in conflict with the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) since April 2023, regained control of the capital last year.

An AFP journalist in Omdurman, Khartoum's twin city just across the Nile, reported hearing one blast from the direction

of central Khartoum. A witness in the city centre also described a "single, loud explosion" but said there were no immediate signs of fire or rising smoke. Other residents across the capital confirmed hearing the blast. Sudanese police said in a statement the explosion occurred in the Burri neighbourhood in eastern Khartoum and was caused by a landmine, a remnant of the war, which detonated after "some residents set fire to waste" in the area.

Police added no casualties or material damage were recorded.

Burri lies near several strategic and military sites, including the military's General Command headquarters and Khartoum International Airport.

Two Palestinians killed in Gaza airstrikes

QNA/AFP
Gaza

Two Palestinians were killed and several others injured yesterday in Israeli airstrikes on the Gaza Strip.

Medical sources reported that Israeli forces struck a civilian vehicle at the entrance of Al-Maghazi refugee camp, resulting in the killing of one Palestinian man and injuries to others. A Palestinian woman was announced dead yesterday after succumbing to injuries sustained in Israeli shelling in Khan Younis, southern Gaza Strip.

The overall death toll from the Israeli offensive has reached 72,291, with 172,068 injured since the aggression began in October 2023. (QNA)

FRENCH BOATS SET TO JOIN GAZA AID FLOTILLA

Some 20 French boats set sail from Marseille yesterday to join up with an international flotilla making a renewed effort to break an Israeli blockade and deliver aid to Gaza, AFP reported from Marseille, France.

"Gaza, Marseille is with you" shouted around a thousand people who had come to the docks to support the initiative.

The ships, mostly sailboats, set off to a round of applause and songs shortly after 5:00 pm (1500 GMT) to join the "Global Sumud Flotilla", named after a Gaza fisherman. The international flotilla of some 100 boats, mostly setting sail from Barcelona on April 12, will head towards Gaza around April 20, according to the organisers. A week-long stopover is planned in southern Italy for "non-violence training".

"The goal is to give Palestine more visibility. We're not talking about it much right now, because of the international context," said Manon, a crew member who declined to give her full name.

In late 2025, an initial flotilla of about 50 boats, composed of political figures and activists such as Sweden's Greta Thunberg, was boarded by the Israeli navy – illegally according to the organisers and Amnesty International.

The crew members were arrested and expelled by Israel. The Gaza Strip, governed by Hamas, has been under an Israeli blockade since 2007. Israel and the Palestinian movement accuse each other of violating a ceasefire that came into effect on October 10, 2025, after two years of war.



First responders and Palestinians inspect a vehicle targeted by an Israeli strike in Al-Maghazi camp for Palestinian refugees in the central Gaza Strip, yesterday. (AFP)



Qatar Shell GTL Limited

INVITATION TO TENDER

The Qatar Shell GTL Tender Committee Requests Property Owners to Tender for the following Services:

SR No.	Tender Ref.	Title	Tender Fee	Tender Issue Date	Tender Closing Date
1	WS2704357779, CW998540	Al Khor lease	N/A	5th Apr	12th Apr

General Instructions:

- Requirement for one or two adjacent residential compounds totalling 506 units (apartments and villas).
- Compound(s) must be located within the city of Al Khor (within 30 km of Pearl GTL; Al Khor proximity preferred).
- All units must be air conditioned; minimum 3 bedrooms per villa/apartment (family units).
- Buildings must be completed and ready for immediate occupancy, with valid Municipality Building Completion and Civil Defense certificates.
- Compounds must comply with Shell Health and Safety & Worker Welfare requirements.
- Minimum capacity per bidder: 25% of total scope (=125 units).
- Facilities & services (Landlord scope): full facility management, security & maintenance; gated access; clubhouse (gym & games room); at least one sports court; for family packages—children's playground and swimming pool.
- The tender will be administered exclusively online via SAP Ariba Platform; Tender Documents will be shared only with registered and approved bidders.
- Eligibility: valid Commercial Registration (CR) and an authorization letter on company letterhead to obtain access to Ariba.

Contact (registration of interest & Ariba onboarding):
Reem Al Abdulla - Real Estate Qatar Department
Email: Qatar-Accommodation@shell.com



INVITATION TO TENDER

ORYX GTL Limited is pleased to announce the following tender(s):

S. No.	Tender Ref.	Tender Title:	Tender Bond (QAR)	Tender Reg. Fee	Bid Closing Date & Tender Bond Validity Period
1.	TC-CN-014-26-MC	Thermal Spray Coating for MOL Adsorbers & Separator	45,500/-	Applicable	22 April 2026 at 12.00 noon & 180 days
2.	STC-MT-029-26-MT	Supply of Heat Transfer Compound	45,500/-	Applicable	22 April 2026 at 12.00 noon & 180 days
3.	STC-CN-006-26-HS	Call-off Contract for Industrial Hygiene Monitoring and Reporting	45,300/-	Applicable	06 May 2026 at 12.00 noon & 180 days
4.	TC-CN-011-26-IT	Implementation of ICT Application Backup Infrastructure Refresh Project	378,000/-	Applicable	29 April 2026 at 12.00 noon & 180 days
5.	TC-CN-009-26-EN	Call-Off Contract for Engineering Consultancy and Support Services	408,000/-	N/A	29 April 2026 at 12.00 noon & 180 days

Companies wishing to register their interest and obtain Tender Document(s) for the above Tender(s) must pay a non-refundable registration fee and register with ORYX GTL as detailed below:

Tender Registration Fee	QAR 500/- (Non-refundable) per Tender
Payable to	ORYX GTL Limited
IBAN (29 Digits)	QA23QNB000000000013010705001
Bank	Qatar National Bank – HQ or any branch (cash only)
Registration Dates	From 05 Apr 2026 to 09 Apr 2026
Registration Process and Requirements:	Write an e-mail to oryxgtltenders@oryxgtl.qa with the following attachments: 1. Copy of Commercial Registration (CR) 2. Copy of bank deposit slip of the Tender Registration Fee. 3. Copy of ICV Certificate

COMPANIES WHO HAVE PAID THE NON-REFUNDABLE REGISTRATION FEE BUT FAILED TO FORMALLY REGISTER AT THE DATE AND TIME STATED ABOVE WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED AS ACCEPTABLE TENDERER. TENDER BOND SHALL BE ISSUED BY A BANK REGISTERED IN THE STATE OF QATAR. Effective from 1st July 2023, bids from Local Suppliers and Contractors (companies established under the Laws of State of Qatar with local Commercial Registration) who are not in possession of an ICV score in the ICV portal by Tender Closing Date (or commercial bid submission date if separately mentioned/notified) will not be accepted. Local Company that has been established for less than 2 years are exempted from this requirement. For further details please visit ICV Digital Portal-<https://icv.qa>

For more information about ORYX GTL and its tenders, please visit our website: <https://www.oryxgtl.com.qa>

Cameroon approves role of vice president to Biya

Reuters
Dakar

Cameroon's parliament yesterday overwhelmingly approved a constitutional amendment to reintroduce the position of vice president, a measure the government says will ensure continuity but which the opposition says will consolidate executive power.

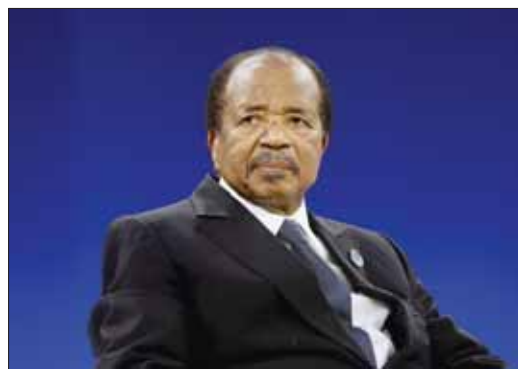
In a joint session of the ruling party-dominated National Assembly and Senate, lawmakers voted 200 to 18 in favour, with four abstentions, to pass the bill.

The bill stipulates that the vice president will automatically assume the presidency if President Paul Biya dies, resigns, or becomes incapacitated. Biya, 93, has led the oil and cocoa-producing Central African country since 1982 and is the world's oldest serving head of state. Public discussion about his health is banned.

According to the legislation, a copy of which was seen by Reuters, the vice president will be appointed and dismissed by the president, serving for the remainder of the president's seven-year term.

However, the interim leader would be prohibited from initiating constitutional changes or running in a subsequent election. The government has argued that the reform is intended to safeguard institutional stability in case of a sudden leadership vacancy.

Biya has 15 days to promulgate the bill. Critics, including opposition lawmakers, argue the amendment weakens democratic institutions and exacerbates centralisation. Joshua Osih, a member of parliament and chairman of the opposition Social Democratic



File photo of Cameroon President Paul Biya. (Reuters)

Front, said the changes were a missed opportunity to boost national unity and democratic governance in the nation torn by a civil conflict since 2017.

"This text weakens legitimacy, reinforces centralisation, and ignores a major historical grievance," Osih said, calling instead for a system where the president and vice president are jointly elected, reflecting Cameroon's origins as a union of British and French-administered territories.

The reintroduction of the vice presidency marks Cameroon's first major constitutional revision since 2008 when presidential term limits were scrapped in a move that sparked nationwide protests, which were met with a violent crackdown by security forces.

The vice presidency was previously part of Cameroon's governance structure but was abolished in 1972 following a constitutional referendum.

Gunmen kill seven, kidnap dozens in northern Nigeria

AFP
Gusau

Armed gangs killed seven people and kidnapped dozens others in raids on six remote villages in northern Nigeria's Zamfara state, residents told AFP, the latest attack in the unrest-weary west African country.

Police yesterday confirmed a "mass" abduction in raids that occurred on Thursday, without giving any figures.

"Heavily armed men suspected to be bandits" invaded Bukkuyum local government area, police said in a statement, adding they came in "large" numbers.

Zamfara is one of several states in northwest and central Nigeria plagued by criminal gangs locally called bandits that carry out deadly raids on communities, kidnap residents for ransom and burn homes after looting them.

Bandits motivated by financial gains are increasingly collaborating with militants from the northeast who have waged a

17-year-old armed insurrection for a Caliphate.

Residents said dozens of motorcycle-riding bandits raided the neighbouring villages late Thursday through Friday, shooting and abducting residents.

"We are aware of the mass kidnapping in the affected villages but we are waiting for a detailed report from the divisional police officer in the area," Yazid Abubakar, Zamfara police spokesman said.

Three residents estimate around 150 were kidnapped.

Aminu Ibrahim who hails from Kurfa Danya community but lives in Bukkuyum town, the district headquarters, said the bandits "killed seven people across the villages" and "abducted around 150".

Phone communication to the area is difficult. Another Bukkuyum resident, Jamilu Aliyu, who has relatives in some of the affected villages, said the gangs "kidnapped more than 150 people".

In Kuryar Madi village the attackers took livestock, Aliyu said. Umar Abdullahi, another resi-

dent gave the same figures of captives, saying the attackers came from a vast forest in the area where they maintain camps.

District lawmaker Sulaiman Abubakar Gumi confirmed the attacks, but gave no numbers, accusing the central government of focusing on fighting militants in the northeast while "banditry festers in Zamfara".

The area has long been terrorised by bandits who kidnap at will and extort ransom, the lawmaker said.

Bandit violence started years ago as clashes between herders and farmers in conflict over limited water and land resources impacted by climate change.

The internecine violence morphed into organised cattle rustling and kidnapping for ransom syndicates.

Despite the government deploying anti-banditry troops a decade ago, the violence persists.

The state authorities have on several occasions brokered peace deals with the bandits, offering amnesty in exchange for surrendering arms but the gangs keep returning to violence.

Kenya fuel executives resign as state probes supply chain irregularities

Reuters
Nairobi

Senior executives in Kenya's energy sector have resigned following accusations of manipulating fuel stock data and procuring an emergency cargo at inflated prices, President William Ruto's office said on yesterday.

Ruto accepted the resignation of Mohamed Liban, principal secretary for petroleum, while the Kenya Pipeline Company confirmed that its managing director, Joe Sang, had also stepped down, the statement said.

The Energy and Petroleum Regulatory Authority's director

general, Daniel Kiptoo Bargoria, has also resigned, according to the statement.

A formal investigation has been launched into alleged irregularities in Kenya's petroleum supply chain, it said.

The government said the manipulated data was used to justify the emergency importation of fuel, despite standing contracts with Saudi Aramco Trading Fujairah, Abu Dhabi's Adnoc Global Trading Ltd, and Emirates National Oil Company Singapore Ltd., all of which are meeting their contractual obligations.

It alleged that the emergency shipment was overpriced, of sub-standard quality, and procured

at rates significantly higher than those agreed under existing deals.

"This appears to have been done to exploit rising global prices and public anxiety, thereby creating a false impression of an impending supply shortfall," the statement read.

The investigations have been launched amid the fuel supply concerns linked to the Iran conflict, which has affected global energy markets.

Administrative action has been taken against additional officials and arrests made by investigative agencies, the statement said.

It did not identify those who had been arrested. No one has been charged.

Senegal bans government travel as Iran war oil shock hits public finances

Reuters
Dakar

Senegal's government has suspended all non-essential foreign travel by ministers and top officials, warning of "extremely difficult" times ahead as the US-Israeli conflict with Iran drives global oil prices higher, straining the nation's budget.

The war and Iran's effective closure of the vital Strait of Hormuz have roiled global energy markets, sending the price of benchmark Brent crude soaring and pushing governments around the world to take steps to mitigate the negative impacts.

Addressing a youth event in the coastal town of

Mbour on Friday evening, Senegal's Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko pointed to oil trading at about \$115 a barrel, nearly twice the \$62 per barrel assumed in Senegal's budget projections.

"No minister in my government will leave the country unless it is for an essential mission," he said, announcing that he had already cancelled his own planned trips to Niger, Spain and France. Governments across the West African region and globally have scrambled to respond to the crisis with measures including fuel price increases, subsidies, and remote work. Sonko cited such measures as justification for debt-laden Senegal's own steps.

He said additional measures would be announced next week.

US upends global supply programme for malaria amid warnings of gaps

Reuters
Nairobi/London

The US is upending the way it delivers medical supplies for diseases such as HIV and malaria to lower-income countries, according to seven sources and an internal email, risking a second dislocation of life-saving services in just over a year.

The US has until now managed its medical donations through the Global Health Supply Chain Programme - Procurement and Supply Management - run by the private contractor Chemonics. From its establishment in 2016 to 2024, it delivered a total of more than \$5bn of HIV and malaria products to 90 countries, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. That programme was halted when President Donald Trump froze international aid on the first day of his presidency in January last year, stranding millions of dollars of supplies in ports and warehouses - from drugs for HIV, which causes Aids, to insecticide-treated bed nets. Much of that work restarted after the US issued a waiver for products that were life-saving. However, its future has been up in the air as the administration has reduced and reshaped foreign aid, dismantling the US Agency for International Development (US-AID), cutting budgets, and switching from management by contractors to bilateral agreements with other countries.

AID UPHEAVAL MAY CAUSE MEDICINE SHORTAGES

Five sources said the speed of the change could cause shortages or gaps in the provision of life-saving products in some countries, with grave impacts. The US State Department asked US staff in 17 African countries and Haiti in an email on Tuesday to cease implementing the supply programme by May 30.

It said the contract with Chemonics was ending on September 30, in line with all USAID awards - although its official end date is in November. The email, seen by Reuters and verified by two sources, also said there could be "immediate risks



File photo shows a malnourished child being fed with Ready-to-Use Supplementary Food (RUSF) by her mother, at the emergency ward of Dikwa Primary Health Center, where children are stabilised for severe malnutrition, following the withdrawal of USAID support, in Dikwa, Borno State, Nigeria. (Reuters)

to service continuity if (the) transition is rushed or incomplete". It did not lay out a clear transition plan, instead asking each US country of office to set out how it would implement the handover, and to inform Washington of any risks or need for more time. A spokesperson said the State Department had "not provided any technical direction to Chemonics to cease operations by May 30 or any other date". Chemonics declined to comment.

Six sources said the US was talking to the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria about using its supply platform to procure and deliver donations of global health products in future. The Global Fund, a Geneva-based health initiative, already manages the purchase and supply of around \$2 bn a year in health products for the three deadly infectious diseases, alongside partner organisations in the countries where it works. It also has an online procurement platform used by partners.

Two of those sources said earlier discussions between the organisation and the US government had focused on a November 2027 transition. They said the new timeline was unrealistic as ordering medical products for use in hard-to-reach locations could take up to a year,

rather than the matter of weeks now being envisaged. The Global Fund declined to comment. The State Department did not respond to specific questions on whether it was talking to the Fund, but said it would use available pooling mechanisms to buy supplies at the lowest prices from private manufacturers.

Last year, the Trump administration said its global health plans would prioritise funding front-line health supplies, health workers and technicians, and working directly with individual countries. The America First Global Health Strategy, published in September, said contractors were part of the "significant inefficiency and waste" that it was trying to root out of the system. But the speed of the changes to how the US delivers aid has already caused problems around the world.

In recent months, Washington has pledged to provide funding directly to the governments of countries including Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda, alongside promises of increased national spending. But details are still being hammered out. The Kenya agreement faces a court challenge by Kenyan activists over data privacy concerns, while negotiations with the Zambian government have been delayed.

Landslide kills mother, six kids in Eq Guinea

AFP
Malabo

Landslide triggered following torrential rain in Equatorial Guinea killed a mother and her six children, the central African country's rescue services said.

The bodies of the victims buried by the landslide were recovered on Friday, including that of the 36-year-old mother, who was eight months pregnant.

Witnesses said the landslide happened on Thursday afternoon when downpours fell on the city of Malabo.

"A concrete retaining wall collapsed onto their house... followed by a landslide," neighbour Dominica Ada said.

"The mother and her six children were all inside," she added.

The father, who had left the house just before the wall collapsed, was the sole survivor.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Voluntary liquidation notice for the company and the closure of the licenses issued by the Qatar Financial Centre, this notice serves as an invitation to any party who has a debt or claim against the company to come forward.

TADWEEN MEDIA LLC.
License No. (02720)
Establishment No. (17-2673-09)

All creditors or claimants are requested to submit their claims, supported by relevant documents, within fifteen (15) days from the date of publication of this notice.

Submissions may be made via email at: info@yhaikal.com
Or by phone at: **44423159**

GULF HELICOPTERS COMPANY (GHC) Q.P.S.C.

Invites prospective suppliers to participate in the following tender

Tender Reference and Description	Submission of information & willingness for bidding	Tender fee (non-refundable)	Tender publication	Tender Bond	Bid Closing Date
Tender No. RFQ-GHC/SCO/007/2026 Provision of Security Guards for a period of 3 years	Until 9 th April 2026	QAR 750/- Until 12 th April 2026 12:00 pm	14 th April 2026	QAR 40,000. 00	10 th May 2026 12:00 pm

Brief Scope: GHC invites reputable and qualified suppliers to submit their bids for the Provision of Security Guards for a period of 3 years. The contract covers the provision of comprehensive security services for Gulf Helicopters Company (GHC) facilities. The scope includes performing all required security duties and responsibilities to ensure a safe, secure, and well-controlled operating environment. Services must be delivered without any interruption to aviation safety or operational continuity.

i. Interested bidders to communicate their willingness to bid and send contact details to GHC email (procurement@qulhelicopters.com) indicating company name, address, telephone, official email, authorized company representative, etc. latest by 9th April 2026.

GHC tender reference numbers and description must be mentioned in the email.

ii. Non-refundable tender fee of QAR 750/- is payable to GHC, only through QNB account # 0013-036531-001 IBAN # QA80QNBAA00000000013036531001 via online or at any QNB branch. Interested bidders shall attach the evidence of the tender fee payment and send it via bidder company official email to GHC email: procurement@qulhelicopters.com, latest by 12th April 2026, 12:00 pm for GHC approval.

iii. Tender package will be sent via email to the confirmed participants from tender@qulhelicopters.com by 14th April 2026. GHC shall provide the necessary instructions and guidelines for the bid submission.

iv. Original of the Tender Bond (Bank Guarantee) must be submitted by hand to the following address:

Gulf Helicopters Company,
P O Box: 811, Al Areeesh Street,
Ras Abu Abboud, Doha, Qatar
Tel: +974 44 333 888
Attention: Supply Chain Manager

Attach a copy of tender bond to the technical offer. Offer without Tender Bond will not be considered.

v. For any clarifications on the above, please send your queries with tender reference and description addressed to Supply Chain Mail to email procurement@qulhelicopters.com

vi. For the submissions of technical and commercial proposals shall be submitted to tender@qulhelicopters.com

Note: Bidders who are not registered in GHC will be requested to complete the supplier registration process during the tendering period.



Trump 'cannot force colleges to provide race-related data'

Reuters
Boston

The Trump administration cannot force public universities in 17 US states to turn over sweeping amounts of data so it can examine whether they have ceased considering race as an admissions factor, a federal judge ruled on Friday.

US District Judge F Dennis Saylor IV in Boston issued a preliminary injunction at the request of those states' Democratic attorneys-general, who are suing over a new data reporting requirement that the Department of Education adopted in a survey used to gather information from colleges.

The department sought seven years of admissions data on the race and sex of students to track compliance with the Supreme Court's 2023 ruling ending affirmative action in higher education.

New York Attorney-General Letitia James hailed the ruling, saying in a statement that "schools should not have to scramble to produce years of sensitive information to satisfy an arbitrary and unlawful demand".

The Education Department did not respond to a request for comment.

The states, which include California and Massachusetts, sued last month, arguing that the survey's rushed implementation left universities vulnerable to inadvertent errors that could lead them to face penalties and investigations into their practices.

The department requested the data through an Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System survey that it created at the direction of President Donald Trump, a Republican.

In an August memorandum, he cited a lack of data to assess whether race remained an admissions factor given the "rampant use" by universities of what he called "hidden racial proxies".

Judge Saylor ruled that the Education Department had the statutory authority to seek such data but he said the "rushed and chaotic manner" by which it adopted the new requirements led it to not properly engage with universities about problems they foresaw.

Such problems were compounded by the administration's efforts to dismantle the Education Department, leaving few employees in its National Centre for Education Statistics to manage the surveys following job cuts, the judge said.

After the states sued, Saylor, who was appointed by Republican president George W Bush, issued temporary restraining orders that extended the deadline for their schools to complete the survey while he considered the case.

On Tuesday he issued an order similarly extending the deadline for dozens of other public and private universities while he considers whether they too deserve an injunction.

Argentina's Milei targeted by Russia disinformation campaign: investigation

AFF
Buenos Aires

Russian agents infiltrated Argentine media in 2024 to try to discredit libertarian President Javier Milei, paying for hundreds of articles to paint a bleak picture of his economic record, an international media consortium revealed on Friday.

The investigation showed that a Russian spy network known as "The Company" set up a system to amplify bad news or plant fake stories about Milei's economic policies on local news sites and social networks.

"The espionage that has come to light is of an institutional gravity rarely seen in history," Milei, one of US President Donald Trump's closest allies, said on X.

The firebrand economist added that "the 'journalists' and 'media outlets' linked to this are just the tip of the iceberg of something much bigger".

The Argentine government had last year already announced that it had uncovered a Russian espionage and disinformation ring called "The Company".

It said that a Russian husband-and-wife team headed the organisation, which disseminated content on social media, influenced civil society groups and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and

spied on Moscow's behalf.

The latest revelations are based on leaked documents obtained by an investigative consortium comprising of African news outlet The Continent, Britain's openDemocracy, Russia's own iStories and Dossier Centre and France's All Eyes on Wagner and Forbidden Stories.

In the leaked documents, Russian agents confirmed that they spent \$283,000 to place around 250 articles in over 20 Argentine news sites between June and October 2024.

Most of the media outlets targeted told the consortium that they received no money to publish the articles, which had been submitted by news agencies, consulting groups or other intermediaries.

Two sources, however, admitted to being paid to publish content from businessmen who said they were concerned about Milei's budget-slashing policies.

The media investigation also revealed a Russian attempt to trigger a diplomatic standoff between Argentina and neighbouring Chile, which at the time had a left-wing president.

It involved circulating a fake news story claiming that Milei had sent a "sabotage group" to attack a gas pipeline between the two countries.

Argentina's intelligence secretariat said it had already investigated the Russian meddling and that the affair was in the hands of the judiciary.

Nicaraguans mark religious week amid ban on street processions

AFF
San Jose

Thousands of Nicaraguans celebrated Holy Week in church atriums and interiors on Friday as the government maintained a ban on street processions that the United States has criticised as a violation of religious freedoms.

Nicaragua's leader Daniel Ortega and his co-president wife Rosario Murillo have forbidden public demonstrations, including religious processions, over the past four years.

"Once again this year, the Ortega-Murillo dictatorship is denying the people of Nicaragua the right to profess their faith... by banning such public processions," US Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau wrote on X on Wednesday.

"I look forward to the day when our Nicaraguan friends reclaim their religious freedom," he added.

The Ortega-Murillo government said in response that it "categorically rejects the perverse and false accusations" from Washington.

Worshippers who attended Friday's religious celebrations in Managua told AFP by telephone that the Stations of the Cross commemoration was organised in the gardens of a plaza inside the cathedral walls, while under police surveillance.

Cardinal Leopoldo Brenes estimated that more than 25,000 people had gathered in the cathedral plaza to mark the occasion, according to pro-government media.

Murillo said on Friday that the outpouring from the faithful in churches contradicted those who "distort" the situation.

Ortega and Murillo consider anti-government protests in 2018 as a US-backed coup attempt and accuse the Catholic Church of backing the demonstrations.

More than 300 people were killed when authorities cracked down on the protests, according to a United Nations estimate, while hundreds of thousands of Nicaraguans - including Catholic priests, politicians, students and journalists - were sent into exile.

Trump signs emergency order for back pay from shutdown to all DHS workers

US President Donald Trump has signed an emergency order to pay "each and every" employee at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) the equivalent of compensation and benefits lost during the partial shutdown of the agency, according to a memo published by the White House.

Trump said that the funds would have a "reasonable and logical nexus" to DHS functions, possibly alluding to legal questions surrounding the potential reallocation of funds appropriated by Congress for specific purposes.

US lawmakers have failed to agree on legislation to fund the agency in the wake of deadly shootings by immigration agents earlier this year.

Tens of thousands of civilians at the US Coast Guard, Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security

Agency, Federal Emergency Management Agency and other agencies have not been paid since the government funding standoff began in February.

The US Senate cleared the way early on Thursday for the House of Representatives to pass a DHS funding bill through September 30 that would end a nearly seven-week partial shutdown.

The US House of Representatives met on Thursday but did not vote to approve a funding bill.

On Monday, 50,000 Transportation Security Administration (TSA) airport security officers began getting paid after Trump signed an order last week to pay them.

The standoff led to daily absences of 10% or more of TSA workers and brought chaos and long security lines to US airports. - Reuters



This picture taken on April 2 shows activists protesting the Trump White House East Wing ballroom project in Washington, DC. - Reuters



Right: This picture taken late last month shows Trump holding a rendering of the East Wing modernisation as he speaks to reporters aboard Air Force One en route to Joint Base Andrews, Maryland. - AFP

Trump administration files motion to resume work on ballroom, citing national security

Reuters
New York

A judge's order to stop construction work on a White House ballroom poses security risks, the Trump administration argued in an emergency motion that seeks to set aside the ruling.

The emergency motion filed on Friday in the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia argues that US District Judge Richard Leon's decision has left the executive mansion "open and exposed" and is "threatening grave national-security harms to the White House, the President and his family, and the President's staff".

On Tuesday Leon ruled that construction work on a White House ball-

room must pause while a lawsuit works its way through the courts.

The lawsuit seeks to halt the \$400m project on the site of the recently demolished East Wing, with plaintiffs arguing that it needs approval from Congress to proceed.

Leon, an appointee of Republican former president George W Bush, said that he was pausing his order for 14 days in order to allow the administration of President Donald Trump to appeal his decision.

The new motion filed by the National Park Service said the federal district court lacks the constitutional authority "to entertain this suit, which rests on a single pedestrian's subjective architectural feelings".

The initial lawsuit against the construction was brought by the National

Trust for Historic Preservation, a non-profit organisation, alleging that Trump exceeded his authority when he razed the historic East Wing and launched construction on the new building.

Friday's motion by the administration argues that the claims by the Trust are "legally baseless" and that "no Trust member has standing".

In addition, it claims that "the President has complete authority to renovate the White House".

The East Wing was originally built in 1902 and expanded four decades later during Franklin D Roosevelt's presidency.

The ballroom is part of Trump's broader push to reshape Washington's monumental core, which includes plans for a 250' (76m) arch and changes at the Kennedy Centre.

Senators urge Trump to prevent Chinese automakers from building cars in US

Reuters
Washington

Three Democratic senators have urged President Donald Trump to bar Chinese automakers from building vehicles in the United States and to prevent Chinese cars assembled in Mexico or Canada from entering the United States.

Senators Tammy Baldwin, Elissa Slotkin and Chuck Schumer cited Trump's comments in January in Detroit that he is open to Chinese automakers building US factories.

Currently, high barriers already exist for Chinese autos in the United States, including tariffs of around 100%, but US consumers have become more interested in the vehicles, according to recent surveys.

"We must be clear-eyed that inviting China's automakers to set up shop in the United States would confer an insurmountable economic advantage impossible for American automakers to overcome, and it would trigger a national security crisis that could never be reversed," the lawmakers said in a letter to Trump first reported by Reuters.

Asked for comment, the White House said that "while the administration is always working to secure more investment into America's industrial resurgence, any notion that we would ever compromise our national security to do so is baseless and false".

In January, Trump said that he was open to Chinese automakers building vehicles in the United States.

"If they want to come in and build a plant and hire you and hire your friends and your neighbours, that's great, I love that," he told the Detroit Economic Club.

The Biden administration imposed sweeping regulations that effectively ban Chinese automakers from selling passenger vehicles in the United States in January 2025, citing national security concerns linked to the ability of vehicles to collect sensitive data on American owners.

The ban has the strong backing of US carmakers and other auto groups.

Last month, auto trade groups representing nearly all major car companies urged the US government to keep Chinese carmakers out of the country ahead of Trump's planned summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping in May.

Earlier this week, Republican Senator Bernie Moreno of Ohio said he will propose legislation to seal off the United States so "there's never a scenario where a Chinese automobile will enter our market, that's hardware, that's software, that's partnerships".

"While a new plant opened by a Chinese automaker in the United States may create some assembly and temporary construction jobs, that small number of jobs will not make up for the lasting job loss," the letter from Slotkin, Baldwin and Schumer added.

The Chinese embassy in Washington did not immediately comment on Friday.

Earlier this week, the embassy said China's door has been open to global auto companies, but the United States has "engaged in trade protectionism and set up obstacles including discriminatory subsidy policies to obstruct access to the US market by Chinese-made cars".

The senators noted that in February automaker BYD was among a group of companies briefly added to a list of Chinese firms allegedly aiding Beijing's military.

"The administration should move without hesitation to designate BYD and other Chinese automakers as military-connected entities," they wrote.

ANNOUNCEMENT

I, ERATTUPARAMBIL ABDUL RAHIMAN AKBAR

holder of

INDIAN Passport No. ZA399382
QID No. 27135611196

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from

ERATTUPARAMBIL ABDUL RAHIMAN AKBAR

to

AKBAR ABDUL RAHIMAN
ERATTUPARAMBIL

Any objection, please contact
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Bangladesh Passport No. EH0427429
QID No. 29105017612

hereby change my name

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MOHAMMAD MOHAMMAD HARUN SHAHADAT

to

MD SHAHADAT HOSSAIN BHUIYAN

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Trump signs order to regulate college sports

AFP
Washington

US President Donald Trump has signed an executive order aimed at regulating US collegiate sports in the wake of rule changes that allow student athletes to be compensated financially.

The order, which is the second that Trump has issued on college sports, directs the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) to create rules that allow college athletes to play for “no more than a five-year period”.

He also asked that rules be put in place that would allow them to transfer schools just once before they graduate without having to sit out a season.

The changes are scheduled to go into effect on August 1, and institutions who allow athletes who don't meet the criteria risk losing federal funding.

Trump said that the loosening of “consistent rules or limits concerning eligibility, transfers, and pay-for-play schemes has created an out-of-control financial arms race... that is driving universities into debt”.

Friday's order came as the hugely popular NCAA basketball tournament reached its closing stages.

The women's semi-finals took place on Friday and the men's Final Four semi-finals were scheduled for the weekend.

In addition to demanding eligibility and transfer limits, it calls on governing bodies to ban “improper” financial arrangements and urges Congress to pass legislation to address the issues.

It follows an order issued by Trump in July that sought to block some recruiting payments by third parties to college athletes in big-money sports like football and men's basketball in order to preserve funds available for women's and non-revenue sports.

The president said last month that the rising value of name, image and likeness (NIL) contracts for players in high-visibility sports like football has created a burden

for colleges that forces some to abandon other sports.

Some of those sports – such as athletics, swimming and gymnastics – have long been pipelines for US Olympic teams.

The NCAA long prohibited student athletes from accepting any compensation for use of their name, image and likeness, but after a 2021 Supreme Court ruling, the rules were changed so that some collegiate athletes could receive financial compensation.

Canadian astronaut describes ‘phenomenal’ journey

Artemis 2 astronaut Jeremy Hansen felt like he was “falling out of the sky” as his spacecraft followed its complex flight path to the Moon, the Canadian said in a video call yesterday.

The four Artemis astronauts have passed the halfway point between Earth and the Moon yesterday morning – more than 150,000 miles (241,000km) from home – as they zipped toward the first crewed lunar flyby in more than half a century.

Hansen, a 50-year-old former fighter pilot on his maiden voyage into space, said that he saw “some extraordinary things” during the first hours aboard the Orion.

“By the time we had a bit of a nap and got up, the Earth was just so far away,” Hansen, flanked by American crewmates Victor Glover and Reid Wiseman, told a question-and-answer session hosted by the Canadian Space Agency (CSA).

Hansen then described the translunar injection burn – a manoeuvre that brought Orion within 200km of Earth before swinging around onto a new course for the Moon.

“It just felt like we were falling out of the sky back to Earth, and I said to Reid, ‘It feels like we're gonna hit it!’ Hansen said. “It's amazing that we're actually gonna go around and miss this thing. It was just so close and so to take all of that in was really phenomenal.”

Hansen, who joined the CSA in 2009 following his career as a fighter pilot in the Royal Canadian Air Force, will be the first non-American to fly around the Moon.

Orion's next milestone, set to take place on day five

of the 10-day mission, is to enter the lunar sphere of influence, where the Moon's gravitational pull exceeds that of the Earth, according to Nasa.

Hansen said that he is looking forward to an up-close view of the far side of the Moon and seeing “an eclipse of the Sun behind the Moon, which will be pretty neat”.

He once cited a childhood encounter with a photograph of Neil Armstrong on the Moon as the seed of his passion for space exploration.

Asked about advice for children, the father of three urged youngsters to “follow your passions, but also share your passions with other people”.

“To get big things done like we're doing in this capsule, to travel to the moon, to fly around the moon, you need a big team behind you. And that's true for all of us in our lives!” – AFP

Wary of news media, Silicon Valley seeks to build its own

By Alex Pigman
AFP

When OpenAI acquired the tech podcast TBPB this week, it wasn't just buying a show – it was buying a message.

The move laid bare a strategy that Silicon Valley has been perfecting for years: ditch the tech-sceptics of the traditional press, and build your own media.

TBPB is in many ways a tribute to mainstream news, with co-hosts John Coogan and Jordi Hays – both from the venture capital world – presenting a three-hour show daily from a studio in Los Angeles that resembles a business or sports programme on a cable news network.

However, Coogan and Hays insist they are not journalists, even if they line up interviews with key figures in the industry who offer insightful access to the Silicon Valley world.

The show – like a whole ecosystem of podcasts and media orbiting Silicon Valley today – operates in a world where the benefits of tech for society need no explaining, and tech enthusiasm runs deep.

Fidji Simo, OpenAI's chief executive of AGI Deployment, said the acquisition was driven by a need for “constructive conversation about the changes artificial intelligence (AI) creates,” and said TBPB would maintain its editorial independence.

AGI is short for artificial general intelligence.

The show and its team now fall under the responsibility of OpenAI's public affairs chief Chris Lehane, a veteran Washington lobbyist who made his name handling scandals for the Clinton administration.

“You could read this as OpenAI needing help translating complexity to decision-makers. You could also read it as buying favourable narrative positioning during a period of intense scrutiny. Probably both,” said Monica Kahn, chief executive of brand advisory Creator Revolution.

“They're buying the layer where interpretation happens,” she added on LinkedIn.

The transaction follows a movement spearheaded by Elon Musk and venture capitalist Marc Andreessen in which the most powerful figures in tech are circumventing mainstream news media to avoid an establishment they describe as anti-tech or left-wing.

The roster of shows where Silicon Valley's elite now prefer to make news constitutes a parallel media ecosystem.

Andreessen Horowitz has invested heavily to build its own media empire, putting out podcasts to showcase its portfolio of tech investments and push a deeply pro-tech agenda without confrontation.

Lex Fridman's podcast draws millions of viewers or listeners and has attracted tech luminaries including Musk, Meta chief executive Mark Zuckerberg, DeepMind chief executive Demis Hassabis, and OpenAI chief executive Sam Altman for two-to-three-hour discussions ranging from business to the personal.

The unabashedly right-wing All-In Podcast has featured the top chief executives, as well as executives closely linked to the Trump administration who avoid the mainstream news coverage they see as unsympathetic.

Zuckerberg used a three-hour January 2025 appearance on Joe Rogan's podcast to defend Meta's rollback of content moderation.

Whether bypassing the news media will actually benefit tech's cause remains an open question.

“I think the TBPB deal is a mistake,” said former BuzzFeed reporter Alex Kantrowitz of the Big Technology Podcast. “Under the OpenAI umbrella, the network loses credibility and everything it says will be seen as OpenAI marketing.”

The deeper problem, he argued, is one of reach.

While OpenAI may be looking to reshape public opinion at a moment when AI is polling poorly in the United States, TBPB's audience – like on other Silicon Valley-made podcasts – is already a converted one.

Astronauts now more than halfway to the Moon

AFP
Houston

The Artemis 2 astronauts passed the halfway point between Earth and the Moon yesterday as they sped toward a planned lunar flyby, with Nasa releasing initial images of Earth taken from inside the Orion spacecraft.

Astronaut Christina Koch said the crew had a collective “expression of joy” upon being told of the milestone, which was hit around two days, five hours and 24 minutes after the spacecraft blasted off from the Kennedy Space Centre in Florida.

“We can see the Moon out of the docking hatch right now, it is a beautiful sight,” Koch said around 11pm (0400 GMT) on Friday, according to the space agency's official live broadcast.

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (Nasa)'s online dashboard showed early yesterday that the Orion spacecraft carrying the astronauts was more than 229,000km (142,000 miles) from Earth.

The space agency earlier released images from Orion that included a full portrait of Earth, featuring its deep blue oceans and billowing clouds.

After a flurry of high-stakes activity including a dramatic blast-off and an engine firing that catapulted them on their historic trajectory to circle the Moon, the four astronauts aboard were able to catch their breath, even as they continued to perform a variety of equipment checks and tests.

“There has been a tremendous amount of disbelief for me, it's just so extraordinary,” said Canadian Jeremy Hansen during a Q&A session with press late on Thursday.

“I really like it up here,” said Hansen, on his first ever journey to space. “The views are extraordinary.”

“It's really fun to be floating around” in zero gravity, he added. “It just makes me feel like a little kid.”

Hansen is on the crew with Americans Koch, Victor Glover and Reid Wiseman.

They are due to loop around the Moon early next week – a feat not accomplished in more than 50 years.

Nasa official Lakiesha Hawkins praised the photographs taken by commander Wiseman, calling them “amazing” during a briefing on Friday.

“We continue to learn all about our spacecraft as we operate it in deep space with crew for the first time,” Hawkins said. “It's important to remind ourselves of that as we learn a little bit more day by day.”

The to-do list on Friday included a CPR demonstration and medical kit checks, the US space agency said, as well as preparation for the scientific observations that they'll need to document when they are closest to the Moon on day six of their journey.

Nasa officials reported on Friday that all systems were performing well, and that the astronauts were in “great spirits” and had spoken to their families.

The next major milestone of the approximately 10-day journey is expected overnight today, at which point the astronauts will enter the “lunar sphere of influence” – when the Moon's gravity will have stronger pull on the spacecraft than Earth's.

If all proceeds smoothly, as Orion whips around the



This handout picture by an Artemis II crew member provided by Nasa shows an illuminated sliver of Earth set against the blackness of space, seen through a window of the Orion spacecraft. – AFP



This handout picture by an Artemis II crew member provided by Nasa shows Koch illuminated by a screen inside the darkened Orion spacecraft on April 3. Hansen peers out of one of Orion's windows. Lights are turned off to avoid glare on the windows. – AFP



A view of Earth taken by Wiseman from one of the Orion spacecraft's windows after completing the translunar injection burn on April 2. The image features two auroras (top right and bottom left) and zodiacal light (bottom right) as the Earth eclipses the Sun. – Reuters



This handout picture provided by Nasa shows the Moon taken by an Artemis II crew member through a window of the Orion spacecraft. – AFP

Moon the astronauts could set a record by venturing farther from Earth than any human before.

“There is nothing normal about this,” said mission commander Wiseman late on Thursday. “Sending four humans 250,000 miles away is a Herculean effort, and we are now just realising the gravity of that.”

The Artemis 2 mission is part of a longer-term plan to repeatedly return to the Moon, with the goal of establishing a permanent lunar base that will offer a platform for further exploration.

Hide, find water: Former airmen detail how to survive being shot down

By Ullyse Bellier
AFP

As American forces race against time and Iran's military to locate an aviator reportedly shot down on Friday, a former Air Force pilot and a rescuer told AFP what it takes to hide, survive and extract someone behind enemy lines.

“You're like, ‘Oh my God, I was in a fighter jet two minutes ago, flying 500 miles an hour, and a missile just exploded, literally 15 feet from your head,’” said retired brigadier-general Houston Cantwell, who is now at the Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies.

That said, a pilot's training – known as survival, evasion, resistance and escape (SERE) – would likely kick in before he or she parachutes to the ground.

“Your best view of where you may want

to go or where you may want to avoid is while you're coming down in your parachute,” Cantwell said.

He has logged 400 hours of combat flight experience, including missions over Iraq and Afghanistan.

Parachuting to the ground risks foot, ankle, and leg injuries, the former airman explained.

“There are many stories of survivors from Vietnam that had severe injuries – compound fractures – just from the ejection,” he said.

Upon landing, “take an inventory of yourself to figure out, what condition am I in? Can I even move? Am I even mobile?”

Aviators then figure out where they are, whether it is behind enemy lines, where they can hide, and how they can communicate.

“Try to avoid enemy capture, as long as you can,” Cantwell said. “And if I were in a

desert environment, I'd want to try to find some water.”

Simultaneously, Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR) teams – highly trained soldiers and pilots already on alert – would be activated.

“It gives you tremendous peace of mind, knowing that, you know, they're going to do everything they can to come get you,” Cantwell said. “At the same time, they're not going to come on a suicide mission.”

That's where the missing crewmember can increase the odds of a safe rescue.

“My priority would be, first of all, concealment, because I don't want to be captured,” he said. “I want to try to get to a location where I can get extracted.”

In a city, that may be a rooftop. In a rural setting, a field where helicopters can land.

Movement is best at night, he said.

Cantwell said that when he flew, he also carried a pistol.

Meanwhile in a “ready room”, CSAR soldiers like retired master sergeant Scott Fales suit up.

Experts like Fales – a pararescue jumper who played a key role in the 1993 “Black Hawk Down” incident in Mogadishu – are always standing by whenever US aircraft are over enemy territory.

“Before any operations are conducted... there is always a CSAR plan,” he told AFP.

Simultaneously, an immense amount of intelligence is gathered and analysed on the location and status of the missing aviator.

“Everything from human intelligence to imagery intelligence, to you know, all the different drones we have looking – signals intelligence,” Fales said. “It's all being used to try to find this guy.”

Once the missing aviator is located, a rescue plan is formulated in real time inside the helicopters.

“Those gunners are spotting and looking for threats, the pilots are looking for a place to land, we're reaching out to that downed aviator,” he said.

On the ground, they ensure the pilot is actually the person they are searching for, and a threat-versus-medical-needs assessment is done.

In their minds, Fales said: “What kind of immediate threat are we in? How much time do we have to get this person out? What kind of injuries do they have? And then we'll make up our mind on the type, amount of treatment that's needed on the scene – or do we just grab and go depending on the threat?”

With a fellow soldier still unaccounted for in southwest Iran, Fales said he's “very hopeful” the aviator will be located.

“I'm hoping that friendly people have found him and are hiding him,” he said. “Or he's still evading.”



Reusable rocket's maiden flight fails: China's Space Pioneer

Reuters
Beijing

Beijing-based rocket developer Space Pioneer said on Friday that the maiden flight of its reusable rocket Tianlong-3 failed, highlighting the challenge China's rocket developers face in catching up to Elon Musk's SpaceX.

Space Pioneer, also known as Beijing Tianbing Technology Co, offered few details about what went wrong, disclosing the failure only in a brief statement posted on its official WeChat account.

It is among a small group of rapidly growing private-sector rocket developers, spurred by Beijing's push to turn China into a major space power, as well as policy support that has made it easier for such firms to raise capital and pursue initial public offerings.

These companies are now in a

race to become the leading Chinese developer of reusable rockets, a technology so far mastered only by US-based SpaceX.

The ability to launch, recover, and reuse the main stage of an orbital rocket is key to lowering launch costs and making it easier to put into orbit satellites used for purposes ranging from communications to military surveillance.

After raising nearly 2.5bn yuan (\$363mn) six months ago, Space Pioneer said that Tianlong-3 was similar to SpaceX's Falcon 9, the world's only rocket model to have proven its reusability and reliability via hundreds of launches.

The company says Tianlong-3 is capable of putting 36 satellites into orbit per launch, making it well-suited for China's ambitions of building constellations made up of thousands of satellites in a bid to reduce the monopoly SpaceX and its satellites have in Earth's lower orbits.

This is not the first setback for Space Pioneer's reusable rocket.

In June 2024, the company completed a separate fundraising round of more than 1.5bn yuan (\$207mn) meant to finance the development of its reusable rockets.

Weeks later, the first stage of a Tianlong-3 rocket under development detached from its launch pad during a test due to structural failure and landed in a hilly area of the city of Gongyi in central China.

Tianlong-3's second mishap highlights the gap between China and the US in reusable rockets. While Chinese firms including LandSpace have had better success in launching reusable rockets, no Chinese firm has yet demonstrated the ability to recover and reuse a rocket's main stage.

LandSpace is planning to launch its reusable rocket Zhuque-3 on its second flight during the first half of this year.

Australians cancel Easter travel as worries mount over fuel crisis

Reuters
Sydney

Every Easter, Sydney retiree Elsa Ulcak is one of the millions of Australians that hit the road to travel during the four-day-long weekend.

But this year, she has cancelled her trip with her husband because she could not justify how much petrol her getaway would use.

"We usually go to the countryside, but because of the petrol situation, we decided to stay at home this year," said Ulcak, 67.

A long trip would be costly and also consume fuel that could be used by people who needed it more, she said.

"(It's) six or seven hours drive to the countryside ... it's expensive. Also we've got to think about it - working people need their petrol, (but) we're retired, we can stay at home."

"We usually go with a group of friends, everyone cancelled."

The Easter long weekend is typically one of the busiest travel times of the year in Australia. In 2025, more than 4.5mn people had been expected to travel over the period, spending A\$11.1bn (\$7.67bn) on their trips, according



A woman looks at signs displayed on empty fuel dispensers at a Shell petrol station that ran out of fuel, in Sydney, Australia. (Reuters/File Photo)

to research firm Roy Morgan.

But many plans this year have been disrupted by the outbreak of the Iran war on February 28 and the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, which has choked global energy supplies.

Australia, which imports about 90% of its fuel, has experienced localised shortages and seen prices soar, with diesel costing more than A\$3 per litre and petrol more than A\$2.50 last week before the government cut fuel taxes to help bring prices down.

Rachel Abbott, a 27-year-old art director, has also shelved her travel plans this Easter.

While she would typically go home to north-east Victoria, both the cost of driving and flights made her decide to stay in Sydney.

"Work's just been quite busy and flights are very expensive, and then if I were to drive, obviously it would be a lot more expensive," she said.

Aid worker Stav Zotalis, 59, said her holiday plans were unaffected since she prefers to stay at home for Easter, but this year "does feel very different" due to the conflict in the Middle East.

"I don't know that we can celebrate. It feels like the world is shaky, it's unpredictable. And I feel that we don't know where things are going."

While she has felt the strain of higher costs at the petrol station and supermarket, she said she was more concerned about those in the conflict zones.

"I've been an overseas aid worker for 25 years and I lived in Asia for 14 years, and I know people that live closer to the conflict are having to forgo food. Not just trips interstate or to the coast, like some of us here in Australia," she said.

Magnitude 6.0 earthquake strikes off north Indonesia

A 6.0-magnitude quake struck off Indonesia's remote northern Talaud islands yesterday, the US Geological Survey said, with no immediate reports of casualties or damage. The tremor struck at a depth of 99km (61 miles), some 90km southeast of Sarangani province on the

Philippine island of Mindanao. Harry Sauro, a provincial disaster official, told AFP the quake was only "slightly felt" and there were no reports of damage or injuries. Indonesia's Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysics Agency said there was no threat of a tsunami. (AFP)

Human remains found on Thai ship attacked in Hormuz strait: firm

AFP
Bangkok

Human remains have been found aboard a cargo ship struck by Iran while transiting the Strait of Hormuz last month, the vessel's owner said on Friday, after three crew members were reported missing following the attack.

US-Israeli strikes on Iran late February prompted Tehran to respond by effectively closing the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial artery for global oil supplies.

The Thai-flagged Mayuree Naree was struck in March while travelling through the strait after departing Khalifa port in the United Arab Emirates.

"Certain human remains were found within the affected area of the vessel," a statement from transport company Precious Shipping said on Friday, adding it could not yet confirm the identities or the number of individuals.

Twenty Thai crew members returned home in mid-March, while three of their colleagues were missing and presumed trapped in the damaged engine compartment.

A search was carried out under "challenging conditions" as the vessel's engine room had been flooded and damaged by fire, the company said.

Thailand's foreign ministry said it was "saddened" by the development and that families of the missing crew had been informed.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards said in March they had struck the Mayuree Naree, as well as a Liberia-flagged vessel, in the strait because the ships had ignored "warnings".



Smoke rising from the Thai bulk carrier 'Mayuree Naree' near the Strait of Hormuz. (AFP/File photo)

Japan PM plans Australia visit to discuss rare earths, Nikkei reports

Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi is planning a visit to Australia, seeking to discuss supply chains for rare-earth elements and cooperation on safe navigation in the Strait of Hormuz, the Nikkei newspaper reported on Friday.

Takaichi's initiative comes shortly after Tokyo signed a rare earths deal with France, which Japan's public broadcaster NHK reported on Wednesday.

Japan and Western governments have been aiming to diversify away from the supply chain largely dominated by China,

the world's largest rare earths producer and supplier. The Japanese and Australian leaders will also discuss the "free and open Indo-Pacific" initiative, the Nikkei report said.

The attempt to lessen dependence on China has allowed Australian miners to secure deals, with Lynas agreeing a potential rare earths deal with South Korea's LS Eco Energy last week.

The Australian resources minister said on Thursday that France was among the countries that were set to invest in Australian critical mineral projects. (Reuters)

Indonesia receives bodies of peacekeepers killed in Lebanon

AFP
Jakarta

Indonesia received the bodies of three peacekeepers yesterday who were killed while on deployment in Lebanon and called for security guarantees for blue helmets a day after another three of its soldiers were injured.

The soldiers' coffins, draped in the Indonesian flag, arrived at the international airport and were carried into a hall on the shoulders of uniformed comrades for a ceremony attended by President Prabowo Subianto.

Family members of the men wept over the coffins, each fronted by a photograph of the dead soldier in a gold frame.

Prabowo saluted each portrait and held the hands of grieving loved ones, some weeping unconsolably. Another three Indonesian peacekeepers were injured in Lebanon Friday, two seriously, officials said.

Foreign Minister Sugiono told reporters after yesterday's ceremony that Indonesia wanted a thorough UN investigation.

"This is a peacekeeping mission. Incidents such as this should not happen," the minister, who like many Indonesians has only one name, told reporters at

Indonesia slams 'unacceptable' peacekeeper casualties in Lebanon

The Indonesian government yesterday slammed as "unacceptable" an explosion that injured three of its peacekeepers in Lebanon within days of three other blue helmets from the Southeast Asian nation being killed.

The UN Interim Force in Lebanon (Unifil) said three peacekeepers were wounded in a blast that



Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto (centre) salutes the coffins of Indonesian soldiers killed while serving with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon as they arrive at Soekarno-Hatta International Airport in Tangerang yesterday. (AFP)

occurred inside a UN facility near El Adeisse on Friday afternoon, and rushed to hospital.

Two were seriously wounded. "Repeated attacks or incidents of this kind are unacceptable," the Indonesian foreign ministry said in a statement.

"Regardless of their cause, these events underscore the urgent need to strengthen protection for UN peacekeeping forces amid an increasingly dangerous conflict situation."

The government urged the UN Security Council to investigate the events. Friday's incident came just days after an Indonesian peacekeeper died when a projectile exploded on March 29 in southern

Lebanon, where Israel and Hezbollah have been fighting since Lebanon was drawn into the Middle East war.

The Indonesian National Armed Forces has said it will deploy more than 750 personnel to Lebanon next month as part of the scheduled Unifil peacekeeping troop rotation.

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Waste water to clean energy: Japanese engineers harness the power of osmosis

AFP
Fukuoka

Japanese water plant is harnessing the natural process of osmosis to generate renewable energy that could one day become a common power source.

The possibility of generating power from osmosis - when water molecules pass from a less salty solution to a more salty one - has long been known.

But actually generating energy from that has proved more complicated, in part due to the difficulty of designing the membrane through which the molecules pass.

Engineers in the city of Fukuoka and their private partners think they might have cracked it, and have opened what is only the world's second osmotic power plant.

It generates power from the transfer of molecules between treated sewage water and concentrated seawater, a waste product from a desalination plant in the city.

"If osmotic power generation technology advances to the point where it can be practically used

with ordinary seawater... this, in turn, would represent a major contribution to efforts against global warming," said Kenji Hirokawa, manager at Sea Water Desalination Plant.

Osmosis is familiar to most people. It is the process that, for example, causes water to seep out of a cucumber or eggplant when sprinkled with salt.

Water molecules move across membranes from an area of low solution concentration to an area of higher concentrated solution.

At scale, that movement can be significant enough to turn a turbine and thereby generate electricity.

Desalination solution - Fukuoka is particularly well-placed to benefit from the technology because it has a readily available source of extremely salty water - the brine leftover from desalination.

With no major rivers to sufficiently source its water, the city and wider Fukuoka region of 2.6mn people have relied on a major desalination plant to produce drinking water since 2005.

That left the city with large quantities of concentrated saline



A staff member changing a part of the osmosis membrane facilities at Sea Water Desalination Plant in Fukuoka. (AFP)

waste water to deal with.

Ordinarily it is diluted and released back to the sea. Previous attempts to find alternatives, including salt making, failed to gain traction.

Then engineering firm Kyowakiden Industry approached the city about harnessing the salty wastewater for osmotic power.

"When our company rolls this out as a business, we aim to build plants roughly five to 10 times the scale of this current facility," said Tetsuro Ueyama, research and development manager at the Naga-

saki-based company.

In Fukuoka's system, a generator is attached to a local desalination plant located near a sewage treatment facility.

It draws in highly saline waste water from the desalination plant and receives treated sewage.

The two separate streams of liquid go through a number of chambers separated by semi-permeable membranes through which water molecules travel from the treated sewage toward the salty water.

That process increases the vol-

ume, pressure and speed of the saline water flow, spinning a turbine that generates electricity before the now-diluted mixture is discharged to sea.

The 700mn-yen (\$4.4mn) power generation system came online last August, and once running at full capacity, it should generate up to 880,000 kilowatts annually, equivalent to the electricity consumption of 300 households.

However it will remain devoted to supplying the power-thirsty facility, although it covers just a tiny fraction of its energy needs.

Not 'a pipe dream' - The engineers involved, however, are dreaming big.

The system will go through a five-year test to monitor its performance, including costs and maintenance, particularly for the membrane and other parts exposed to salt.

Financial details of the project have not been disclosed, but engineers admitted that for now the system's power costs "a lot more" than either fossil fuel or renewable energy.

Pumping the water into the system also uses energy itself, and scaling up osmotic power for grid-

level energy production has not yet been done anywhere in the world.

Still, officials and experts believe the power source has a future, noting that unlike solar and wind, it is not dependent on weather or light.

And the current high costs are partly because the company had to build a one-of-a-kind power plant, Ueyama said.

Osmotic power has often been seen as primarily useful for estuary areas, where freshwater river flows meet the salty ocean.

But Ueyama said the technique being used in Japan could be useful for countries with large desalination facilities like Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern nations.

Kyowakiden is also working on technology that could generate similar power levels from less salty regular seawater.

"First we want to popularise this technology from Fukuoka to the rest of Japan. In order for us to do that, we want to further upgrade our technology to create osmotic power generation that can use ordinary ocean water to generate electricity," he said. "We don't think this is a pipe dream."

UK Police arrest suspect in ambulance arson case in court

AFP
London

London police announced yesterday they had arrested another man over an arson attack on ambulances run by a Jewish charity in London — after officers recognised him at a court hearing over the incident.

Two men and a boy charged over the March 23 attack appeared at a court in Westminster yesterday and were remanded in custody until later this month.

During the hearing, prosecutor Emma Harraway said another person had been arrested, but did not elaborate.

Then London's Metropolitan Police issued a statement saying officers in court had recognised a 19-year-old man as involved in the attack.

They arrested him for "arson with intent to endanger life", the statement added.

Already on Wednesday, two young men and a boy were ar-

rested at separate addresses in east London and charged over the attack.

They will remain in detention until their next hearing on April 24, the court ruled.

The defendants, charged with arson that was "reckless as to whether life would be endangered", spoke only to confirm their identity.

The trio showed "significant premeditation and planning, including actions to hide" their offence, said Harraway.

She told the court there was strong evidence that this was "a premeditated and targeted attack against the Jewish community".

One of the lines of inquiry is to determine "whether this case falls under the National Security Act 2023", she said, referring to anti-terrorism legislation.

The vehicles targeted were run by Hatzola, a volunteer organisation that provides free medical transportation and emergency response in north London.

University Boat Race in London



Oxford and Cambridge in action during the men's University Boat Race in London, yesterday. (Reuters)

Sri Lanka struggles to avert economic collapse over war

AFP
Colombo

Sri Lanka is struggling to prevent a repeat of its spectacular economic collapse four years ago, as the prolonged Middle East war compounds the fallout from a deadly cyclone in November.

President Anura Kumara Disanayake has rationed fuel, raised its price by a third and increased electricity costs by up to 40% since the war began disrupting global energy supplies.

Panic buying fuel in Sri Lanka has brought back memories of 2022, when the economy tanked, with inflation hitting 70% after Colombo defaulted on its \$46bn external debt.

The accompanying protests toppled the once-powerful president, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who was accused of mismanagement and corruption.

But the Frontline Socialist Party (FSP) that led the "Aragalaya", or struggle, that ousted Rajapaksa has warned that Disanayake's administration may be facing an implosion.

"We believe that a response to this economic crisis will come politically," FSP politburo member Duminda Nagamuwa told AFP.

"Because of the strength of the (government's) mandate, this economic shock is still being absorbed by the people without exploding politically," he said.

Disanayake's leftist JVP, or the



An employee at Sri Lanka's government Information Department works without air conditioning and lights in Colombo. (AFP)

People's Liberation Front, won a two-thirds majority at the November 2024 parliamentary elections after his own victory two months earlier in the presidential poll.

A vendor at Colombo's Pettah night market, Wasantha Jayalath, 55, said he voted for Disanayake in 2024 hoping for better times, but felt the situation was getting worse.

"We voted... thinking that a good, self-sufficient era would dawn for our country," Jayalath told AFP. "There is no such situation; instead, what we realise is that the country is going further into an abyss."

A trader at the capital's main wholesale market, Priyantha Sudharshana Silva, 53, is not blaming the administration for the crisis.

"Protesting won't help because the country is already in a difficult

position," Silva told AFP. "We believe that moving forward, even with these difficulties, is a significant achievement."

Human rights lawyer Bhavani Fonseka said protests have been subdued because people are preoccupied with the day-to-day challenge of securing supplies.

Fuel rationing has shortened queues, but on Thursday, the government began limiting water supply hours to conserve reserves and save pumping costs.

"Compared to what we had in 2022... you're not seeing that level of protest," Fonseka told AFP. "Sri Lanka was just coming out of another disaster — Cyclone Dityah — and the government imposed a state of emergency to deal with that."

Fonseka said the wide powers that emergency laws give the au-

thorities to arrest and detain suspects could be used to stifle any popular protests, raising serious concerns for rights activists.

"We are in a situation where... laws that are in place, and the way they are being used, raise the question of whether rights could be further eroded in the coming weeks and months," she said.

Cyclone Dityah, the worst disaster since the 2004 Asian tsunami, killed 641 people and affected almost the entire country late last year.

The cyclone, which triggered floods and mudslides, caused an estimated \$4.1bn in damage, according to the World Bank.

The government announced plans in December for 500bn rupees (\$1.6bn) in extra spending to fund the country's recovery.

The money will be used to rebuild devastated homes, roads, bridges and railways, as well as for cash handouts to help people regain lost livelihoods.

Colombo also secured \$206mn in emergency financing from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in December to deal with the aftermath of the disaster.

An IMF delegation is currently in Sri Lanka to review its four-year \$2.9 bn bailout loan before releasing a \$700mn instalment.

Sri Lankan authorities have said they may ask the IMF to modify the loan's austerity conditions, given the country's worsening economic circumstances due to external factors.

Virginia Giuffre's family urges King Charles to meet Epstein survivors during US visit

Reuters
London

The family of Jeffrey Epstein accuser Virginia Giuffre yesterday urged Britain's King Charles to meet with survivors during his state visit to the United States later this month, saying the trip coincides with the anniversary of her death.

In a statement shared with Reuters, Sky and Amanda Roberts said the visit would take place two days after the one-year anniversary of Giuffre taking her own life.

"We strongly urge King Charles to meet with us and survivors and hear what we have to say," they said. "We are thankful to him for heeding our sister's allegations against Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, and for his decisive action in stripping his brother from his position as a prince."

Buckingham Palace didn't respond to a request for comment. Palace officials have previously said the king could not become involved while investigations connected to sexual abuse by Epstein and his circle remain ongoing.

Giuffre accused the late US financier Epstein of trafficking her to King Charles' younger brother, Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, when she was 17.

Mountbatten-Windsor has always denied the allegations and reached an out-of-court settlement with Giuffre in 2022 without admitting wrongdoing. He has said he had no recollection of meeting Giuffre.

Charles and his wife Queen Camilla are due to visit the US from April 27-30 on a trip timed



Britain's King Charles. (Reuters/ File photo)

to mark the 250th anniversary of American independence.

The state visit comes as Britain seeks steady relations with US President Donald Trump after tensions over the Iran war, placing additional attention on the monarch's programme in Washington.

After renewed scrutiny over Mountbatten-Windsor's friendship with Epstein, the king moved to remove his brother from public life, stripping him of military roles, patronages and the use of his royal titles.

Mountbatten-Windsor was arrested earlier this year on suspicion of misconduct in public office over allegations he passed confidential documents to Epstein. He has denied wrongdoing.

The Roberts said they hoped the king would meet survivors of sexual abuse by Epstein and his circle directly and that dialogue with survivors and their families could lead to action by the British government against Epstein's co-conspirators.

Buckingham Palace has previously said that the royal family's "thoughts and utmost sympathies" were with victims and survivors of abuse.

Streaming channel for pets launched in China

AFP
Beijing

Cats and dogs can now fill the hours their owners are at work with a dedicated all-day streaming channel for pets launched by Chinese tech giant Tencent.

Clips of a duckling swimming in a bath or two happy pooches patrolling their neighbourhood are examples of the curated programming on "PetTV".

The new channel on Tencent Video — China's most popular online streaming platform — is meant to keep pets company while alone or can act as an activity for animals and humans to enjoy together.

"This is all dog content, when will the cat programme be on?" one person engrossed in the service wrote in the chatroom on PetTV's streaming page.

The new channel on Tencent Video — China's most popular online streaming platform — is meant to keep pets company while alone or can act as an activity for animals and humans to enjoy together

Tencent Video described PetTV as a "24-hour happiness hub specially designed for your furry kids" in a post on social media app WeChat introducing the service last weekend.

Dogs and cats' senses are different to humans', so the channel's colours, refresh rates and audio frequencies have been designed to suit their specific needs, it said.

PetTV is available to paid subscribers of

Tencent Video, which said its market research found that 66% of dog owners leave the television on for their pets when they are out.

But the streaming service isn't the only pet specific media on the market.

Popular Headspace mindfulness app posted a YouTube video this week titled: "When your pets miss you, play this: 6 hour calming music for dogs and cats".

Tencent Video will also take advantage of third-party content including airing America's DogTV — the world's first TV channel and streaming service for pets.

The value of China's growing urban pet market is estimated to reach 405 bn yuan (\$59 bn) in 2028, according to a recent report by PetData.cn.

On average last year, Chinese households spent more than 3,000 yuan (\$435) on each dog and more than 2,000 yuan on each cat for their care needs.

India's March palm oil imports fall to 3-month low

Reuters
Mumbai

India's palm oil imports fell nearly 19% in March to a three-month low as a rally in tropical oil prices, tracking energy markets, prompted refiners to curb purchases and wait for a correction, five dealers said.

Lower imports could deplete stocks and support local oilseed prices, but may force the world's biggest edible oil importer to step up overseas buying in coming months to replenish stocks.

Palm oil imports fell to 689,000 metric tonnes in March, the lowest since December 2025, down from 847,689 tonnes in February, per dealer estimates.

Soyoil imports eased 3% month-on-month in March to 290,000 tonnes, while sunflower oil shipments jumped 36.3% to 198,000 tonnes. India's overall edible oil imports fell nearly 9% from February to 1.18mn tonnes in March, the lowest since April 2025, as palm oil and soyoil purchases declined, estimates showed.

The figures exclude duty-free shipments arriving via land bor-

ders from Nepal, the dealers said.

India is estimated to have imported 60,000 tonnes of edible oils, mainly soyoil, from Nepal in March, said Rajesh Patel, managing partner at edible oil trader GGN Research at Rajkot, Gujarat.

The Solvent Extractors' Association of India is set to release its March import data by mid-April.

Refining margins for crude palm oil turned negative in March after overseas prices surged, prompting Indian buyers to scale back imports, said Sandeep Bajoria, chief executive of Sunvin Group, a vegetable oil

brokerage and consultancy firm.

Malaysian palm oil futures jumped 19.47% in March, marking their strongest monthly gain since April 2022, on expectations that a rally in energy prices, driven by the Middle East conflict, will boost biodiesel demand.

"Supplies are now coming in from the new-season rapeseed crop, which is also helping to curb imports in the short term," Bajoria said. India sources most of its palm oil from Indonesia and Malaysia, while soyoil and sunflower oil are imported mainly from Argentina, Brazil, Russia and Ukraine.

India-flagged LPG tanker crosses Strait of Hormuz

AFP
Mumbai

An Indian-flagged tanker carrying LPG has safely passed through the Strait of Hormuz, India's government said yesterday.

Iran has effectively halted maritime traffic in the waterway, a critical route for global crude oil and gas, since US and Israeli strikes began on February 28.

However, New Delhi, the world's second-largest buyer of liquefied petroleum gas, has managed to secure passage for several Indian-flagged vessels over the past three weeks.

The shipping ministry confirmed on Saturday that LPG carrier Green Sanvi had passed through the chokepoint.

"Green Sanvi has safely transited the Strait of Hormuz, carrying 46,650 MT of LPG cargo with 25 seafarers on board," a statement said, without giving further details of its final destination.

It said 17 Indian-flagged vessels, carrying 460 Indian crew, "remain in the western Persian Gulf region".

Data from ship tracking company Marine Traffic's website confirmed that the Green Sanvi was an Indian-flagged tanker.

Public broadcaster All India Radio said it was the "seventh India-bound LPG tanker" to cross the Strait of Hormuz since the

Middle East war began.

India's petroleum and natural gas ministry also said yesterday that Indian refiners were buying crude oil from Iran and other nations to help deal with the global energy crisis.

"Amid Middle East supply disruptions, Indian refiners have secured their crude oil requirements, including from Iran," it said in a post on X, adding that there was "no payment hurdle for Iranian crude imports".

That comes about two weeks after the US Treasury said it was temporarily lifting sanctions on Iranian oil already loaded onto vessels.

The ministry also confirmed that an LPG vessel carrying around "44 TMT Iranian LPG" was berthed and "currently discharging" at the southwestern Indian port of Mangalore.

India imports about 60% of its LPG needs and has been grappling with a gas crunch over the past month.

The Indian government has imposed tighter controls over natural and cooking gas following import disruptions, prioritising supply towards households and limiting the amount available for industrial use.

New Delhi maintains strong relations with Tehran but has steadily expanded cooperation with Israel in defence, agriculture, technology and cybersecurity.



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GULF TIMES

Hungary's opposition surfs grassroots wave ahead of key election

Like many of her fellow volunteers, Hungarian beautician Krisztina Menczel sat idle in the past elections that kept nationalist Prime Minister Viktor Orban in power. But opposition leader Peter Magyar's hopes of ending the longstanding premier's 16-year reign in Hungary rest in no small part on first-time campaigners like Menczel.

"Canvassing has a big impact," the 41-year-old told AFP in Jaszfenyszaru, a central Hungarian town long considered a stronghold of Orban's Fidesz party. "Even those who wouldn't dare reveal their political preferences come over and chat with us."

Magyar, a former government insider turned critic, is offering voters a radical break from Orban's self-described "illiberal" system, vowing to crack down on corruption and improve public services. Thanks to his party's on-the-ground network, Orban's grip on small towns like Jaszfenyszaru, population 6,000, appears to be weakening ahead of the April 12 vote.

Orban, who has criticised neighbouring Ukraine and acted as a spoiler at many European Union summits, has long counted on his media dominance to promote his platform.

Instead, Magyar's TISZA party has had to rely on grassroots word-of-mouth to promote its message.

While the ruling party puts up billboards, TISZA has asked its supporters to hang party signs on homes and shopfronts. Menczel said she decided to help the party after Magyar visited the town last August on his nearly non-stop nationwide tour. She now spends up to three hours a day campaigning, on top of managing TISZA's local social media pages.

When he shot into prominence in 2024, Magyar had no party apparatus behind him.

But his rise came in the wake of a child abuse pardon scandal which shook Orban's tight grip on power. With many Hungarians already dissatisfied with the economy, the scandal proved a "tipping point", when many voters "realised they had enough of Orban's system", according to Zoltan Lakner, the editor-in-chief of the 'Jelen' weekly newspaper.

After tirelessly criss-crossing the country and a prominent social media campaign, Magyar led a previously dormant TISZA to second place behind Fidesz at the 2024 European elections.

A month after the vote, he called supporters to set up loosely connected associations to handle on-the-ground organising, dubbed "TISZA islands", a nod to the party sharing its name with the country's longest river. According to the party, around 4,000 "islands" have since been established, including in rural areas which the old opposition parties had effectively abandoned.

These groups organised local community events, such as charity drives, cookouts and political discussions, before switching to full-time campaigning. Key to these events' success was the involvement of small and medium-sized businesses, according to Lakner, who describes the movement as a "revolution of entrepreneurs". "This also affects the islands' attitude towards politics: They approach it pragmatically instead of ideologically, simply wanting the country to function well," the analyst explained.

Dozens of "islanders" ended up being chosen as party candidates during November's primaries. Many of them are locally respected professionals, such as doctors, who are completely new to politics. "This lends them credibility, given the widespread disillusionment with professional politicians," Bulcsu Zsiga, a researcher at the Centre for Fair Political Analysis, told AFP.

But their political inexperience carries a "danger" which TISZA is "clearly trying to mitigate", the expert noted, pointing to the party's much criticised policy of restricting media access to candidates. Even so, drawing in local figures has helped to break the "spiral of silence" some Fidesz-dominated rural communities, where opposition supporters previously felt isolated or reluctant to express their views, Zsiga added.

In the Hungarian countryside, activism often comes at a price, some dearer than others, as campaigners in Jaszfenyszaru can attest. Menczel, the beautician, said that a close relative of the local Fidesz lawmaker stopped frequenting her salon after she posted a picture with TISZA's candidate on social media. Others have suffered more serious consequences.

Forty-eight-year-old retailer Eszter Somfai had her home address shared online, after an internal party database with some 200,000 supporters' personal details was leaked last November. "But we will not let them deter us, we proudly campaign for Tisza," Menczel said.

"I feel people here are increasingly opening up... If everything is conducted fairly, then we will be victorious." —AFP

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Under global spotlight, Australia plays hardball on social media ban

Global attention on Australia ban linked to tougher stance, experts say

US jury verdicts against Big Tech also likely emboldened Australia

Many teens still on social media after ban, report shows

Countries worldwide asking Australia about ban rollout

By Byron Kaye
Reuters

Since Australia banned children from using social media in December, lawmakers from Spain to Malaysia have expressed interest in following suit, while US courts have found tech firms negligent toward young users.

This global spotlight on the first such ban on people under 16 using popular apps appears to have encouraged Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's government to ramp up enforcement this week of what it was touting as successful co-operation with industry two months ago, tech policy experts say.

In getting more aggressive with apps such as Instagram and TikTok, Albanese's centre-left government is pleased with the overseas interest -- at least eight countries have said they want similar curbs -- but keen to counter the news that many teens are still scrolling on their phones, experts say.

'WHOLE WORLD'S WATCHING'

"The whole world's watching Australia in this experiment, and therefore it looks like weak government to back down or pretend that the failures in reasonable efforts aren't happening," said Jeannie Paterson, co-founder of the Centre for Artificial Intelligence and Digital Ethics, who regularly advises government on tech policy.

A spokesperson for Communications Minister Anika Wells said she had not toughened her stance due to global attention, declining to comment further. A month after the ban took effect, the government reported in mid-January that social media platforms had deactivated 4.7mn suspected underage accounts, prompting industry participants to expect a grace period of up to a year on enforcement of the ban.

The British and Canadian governments and some US lawmakers have sounded out the Australian authorities on the social media ban -- a policy overwhelmingly backed by parents but opposed by the multi-trillion-dollar industry that must comply with it. Those signs of progress, however, have been undermined by a series of headlines about minors staying on social media.

On Tuesday the government said it was investigating Meta's Instagram and Facebook, TikTok, Alphabet's YouTube and Snapchat for possible breaches of the law, gathering evidence for possible legal action. The eSafety regulator had previously said it would only take enforcement action in cases



of systemic noncompliance. In its first comprehensive compliance report, the regulator said nearly one-third of parents reported their under-16 child still had at least one social media account. Among those, two-thirds said the platform had not asked the child's age. Angela Flannery, a former general counsel for the government's Communications Department who now advises the private sector, said, "The government is quite heartened generally by the number of other jurisdictions that are looking at imposing restrictions on the under-16s globally."

But given Tuesday's "disheartening" report on compliance, Flannery said, "They probably want to be seen to be

taking action to keep encouraging other jurisdictions to enforce or to enact similar bans." Meta and Snap said they were committed to complying with the ban, TikTok declined to comment and Alphabet did not respond to a request for comment on the government action.

META, GOOGLE LOSE IN US COURTSROOMS

The eSafety report said complaints about cyberbullying and image-based abuse -- problems the government said the ban would fix -- were unchanged, while parents reported being unable to notify platforms that their underage children still had accounts. Minors who failed an age test were being prompted to repeat

the test until they passed, the regulator said.

The ban requires platforms to take "reasonable steps" to keep under-16s from having an account or face fines of up to A\$49.5mn (\$34mn). Communications Minister Wells said the problem was not parents or kids failing to comply but Big Tech undermining the government's policy.

Also likely emboldening Australia to go after platforms, say people familiar with the ban's rollout, were a US trial verdict last week ordering Meta to pay \$375mn in penalties for safety lapses that allowed child exploitation on Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, and another decision finding Meta and Google negligent for designing social media platforms that are harmful to young people.

"The court cases in New Mexico and California have helped the court of public opinion," said Julian Sefton-Green, a professor of new media at Deakin University who is advising the commissioner's two-year study on the ban's impact. "They're jury decisions, that social media is liable for the well-being of young people, so I think the government's going to take heart from that."

Rob Nicholls, a researcher of regulation at the University of Sydney, said the lawsuits may prompt platform redesigns that comply with the Australian ban by focusing on protecting minors. "The effect of that design change will be to reduce access for under-16s," he said. "If you've got to do it to avoid litigation in the States, you may as well do the same thing around the world."



The ban requires platforms to take "reasonable steps" to keep under-16s from having an account or face fines of up to A\$49.5mn (\$34mn). (Reuters/File Photo)

Rain, storms kill 121 in Afghanistan, Pakistan in 2 weeks

AFP
Kabul

Heavy rain and storms have killed at least 121 people over two weeks across Afghanistan and Pakistan, disaster officials in both countries said yesterday.

Stormy weather has brought rain sweeping across Afghanistan since late March, causing floods, landslides, and hitting homes and crops.

"Since March 26 till today, 77 people have been killed and 137 wounded across the country because of the floods and rains," Afghanistan's disaster management authority (ANDMA) spokesman Mohammad Yousuf Hammad told AFP yesterday.

The spokesman added that 26 people were killed and 48 were wounded across the country in the past 48 hours due to rains, floods, landslides and lightning.

Across the border in Pakistan, 44 people were killed following heavy rains in the last weeks, officials said.

At least 32 people died in the northern province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa since March 25 and 12 in southwestern Balochistan since March 20, the provincial disaster management authorities told AFP.

Afghanistan's latest casualties include a child who drowned in a flash flood in southeastern Ghazni yesterday morning while he was busy playing with other children, provincial police said.

Two more children also drowned in different districts of the same province.

That came hours after three people died in Kandahar province, southern Afghanistan, when



A rescue team helps residents evacuating the flooded area following heavy rainfall on the outskirts of Peshawar yesterday. (AFP)

the roof of their house collapsed due to rains, the provincial disaster management authority said.

ANDMA spokesman Hammad said rainfall since the start of spring "can strengthen the underground sources of water and give growth to the agriculture sector".

But he said it can also cause human suffering and financial loss.

In western Herat province, farmer Abdul Rahim Taimori said: "We don't remember such a flood happening before. It has caused us a lot of damage."

"It has destroyed the crops of people, their homes. If it continues like this then we would have

to leave our homes," the 45-year-old told AFP.

But relocating is unaffordable for many.

"Where shall we go? We are forced to stay," said Majal Niazi, a 45-year-old farmer who lives in a one-room house with his family.

The rain has also led to several road closures, with Kabul police reporting the partial closure Friday of the road between the capital and the city of Jalalabad.

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

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

Afghanistan frequently experiences deadly floods, landslides and storms, particularly in remote areas with fragile infrastructure.

Among the poorest countries in the world after decades of war, Afghanistan is particularly exposed to the effects of climate change, which scientists say is spurring extreme weather.

"It was drought before and now we have these rains, both are a danger," said Abdul Sattar, a 40-year-old farmer in Herat.

Iran refutes declining Pakistan invitation

Agencies
Tehran

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi yesterday dismissed what he called "misrepresentation" by US media outlets, asserting that Tehran had never declined an invitation to engage in discussions via Pakistan's mediation.

"We are deeply grateful to Pakistan for its efforts and have never refused to go to Islamabad," Araghchi said in a social media post. "What we care about are the terms of a conclusive and lasting end to the illegal war imposed on us."

His remarks come amid an increasingly intricate diplomatic effort centred on Islamabad. Last week, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar said his country would be "honoured to host and facilitate meaningful talks between the two sides" after the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Egypt gathered for consultations in the Pakistani capital.

Washington, sources said, recently conveyed a 15-point peace plan to Tehran through Pakistan, proposing that Iran dismantle its nuclear sites, halt uranium enrichment, and cease support for regional proxies in exchange for sanctions relief and US cooperation in the civilian nuclear sector. Iran's response was swift: Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei reiterated that contacts remained strictly indirect and conveyed through intermediar-

"We are deeply grateful to Pakistan for its efforts and have never refused to go to Islamabad. What we care about are the terms of a conclusive and lasting end to the illegal war imposed on us," Araghchi said in a social media post

ies, describing the US proposals as unacceptable.

On March 30, Tehran acknowledged holding indirect exchanges through Islamabad but condemned Washington's stance as "excessive and unreasonable."

It subsequently advanced a five-point counterproposal calling for an end to US and Israeli attacks, mechanisms to prevent renewed conflict, compensation for war damage, and recognition of Iranian sovereignty over the Strait of Hormuz.

President Masoud Pezeshkian, in phone talks with Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, warned that Iran had been attacked twice during earlier nuclear dialogues with Washington — deepening its mistrust of American intentions and underlining the need for confidence-building steps before any direct engagement.

Afghanistan quake kills 12

An earthquake that struck Afghanistan overnight killed 12 people, including eight members of the same family, a government official and the Afghan Red Crescent Society said yesterday. The 5.8-magnitude quake struck at 8:42pm (1612 GMT) on Friday at a depth of 186km (115 miles) at the epicentre in northeastern Badakhshan province, according to the US Geological Survey (USGS). "As a result of this earthquake, unfortunately, 12 people were killed and four people were injured," deputy government spokesman Hamdullah Fitrat posted on his official X account. He said five houses were completely destroyed and 33 partially damaged in Kabul, Panjshir, Logar, Nangarhar, Laghman and Nuristan provinces, affecting a total of 40 families. Shaking was felt in many parts of the country, including the capital

Kabul, according to AFP journalists. "In the Gosfand Dara area of Kabul Province, eight members of a family died as a result of the earthquake," Health Ministry spokesman Sharafat Zaman said earlier. A child aged around two was the only survivor from the household and Afghanistan's disaster management agency said the boy had been injured in the tremor. "The other four people have been killed in the west of Kabul," Afghan Red Crescent Society spokesman Abdul Qadeem Abrar told AFP. Afghanistan is frequently jolted by earthquakes, particularly along the Hindu Kush mountain range near where the Eurasian and Indian tectonic plates meet. A shallow magnitude 6 earthquake wiped out mountainside villages and killed more than 2,200 people in eastern Afghanistan in August, making it the deadliest tremor in the country's recent history. (AFP)

France announces crisis loans for firms hit by fuel-price surge

France said on Friday it was launching an emergency loan programme to help small and medium-sized businesses exposed to soaring fuel prices driven by the war in the Middle East. The economy ministry said firms in the transportation, agriculture and fisheries industries would be eligible for the "flash fuel loans" of up to 50,000 euros (\$57,600). The programme fulfils a pledge made last week by Prime Minister Sebastien Lecornu, whose government, like many worldwide, is seeking to contain the economic pain caused by the war's impact on fuel prices. Public investment bank Bpifrance will issue the loans via a streamlined digital process that will make the money available within seven days, the ministry said in a statement. The three-year loans will have an interest rate of 3.8 percent. Separately, French Economy Minister Roland Lescure said he had written to the European Commission to ask it to investigate whether the continent's refineries were taking advantage of the war to commit "abuses" in setting fuel prices. (AFP)

Slovak PM says EU should drop sanctions on Russian oil, gas

Reuters
Warsaw

The European Union (EU) should end sanctions on Russian oil and gas imports, take steps to restore Druzhba oil pipeline flows and end the war in Ukraine to tackle the energy crisis stemming from the war in Iran, Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico said yesterday. Fico said in a statement after a call with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban that the EU should renew dialogue with Russia and ensure conditions so member states can get missing gas and oil supplies from all sources, including Russia. Hungary and Slovakia's leaders are outliers in the EU for maintaining relations with Moscow. Oil prices have surged since U.S. and Israeli strikes on Iran started on February 28, holding up shipments from the Gulf and creating, what the International Energy Agency called the

biggest oil supply disruption in history.

Central European nations have taken measures to cool the impact of high prices at the fuel pump for people and businesses.

The EU was importing just 1% of its oil from Russia by the final quarter of 2025, having slashed imports since Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Hungary and Slovakia were the only two EU countries still importing Russian oil by January 27, when Kyiv said a Russian drone strike hit pipeline equipment in Ukraine, disrupting Russian oil shipments.

Budapest and Bratislava have accused Ukraine of deliberately delaying the repairs to resume oil flows through the Druzhba pipeline, triggering a political dispute that has seen Hungary block an EU loan to Kyiv. Ukraine says it is fixing it as fast as it can.

In the statement on Saturday, Fico said it was not enough to deal with the energy crisis only at the national level.

Erdogan, Zelensky discuss energy security, peace efforts

AFP
Istanbul

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan received Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky in Istanbul yesterday for talks on energy and navigation security, and efforts to end the war with Russia, the Turkish presidency said.

The visit came a day after Erdogan spoke with Russian President Vladimir Putin, who accused Kyiv of attempting to target the gas pipeline between Russia and Turkey supplying several European countries.

Erdogan "stressed the importance that Türkiye attaches to the safety of navigation in the Black Sea and the crucial nature of the security of energy supply," his office said.

The two leaders had discussed relations between the countries,



Turkiye's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (right) and Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky attending a bilateral meeting on security at Dolmabahce Presidential Office, in Istanbul, yesterday. (AFP)

"peace efforts in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and regional and international developments", it added.

Zelensky said they had discussed "steps to implement joint projects in developing gas infrastructure, as well as opportuni-

ties for joint development of gas fields".

There was a heavy police presence around the lavish Dolmabahce Palace on the shores of the Bosphorus, which also hosted several rounds of talks between Moscow and Kyiv in the past.

Kyiv has been pushing for a truce over the Orthodox Easter holidays that would include a halt in attacks on energy infrastructure.

Russia, which is seeking a permanent settlement rather than a brief ceasefire, said it had not seen any "clearly formulated" proposals from Kyiv.

Ukraine has struck Russian energy infrastructure throughout the more than four-year war in a bid to weaken Moscow's ability to finance its offensive.

Russian strikes on Ukrainian energy facilities have cut power and heating to millions of people since the beginning of the war in 2022.

Russian strike on Ukraine market kills five, wounds 25

AFP
Kyiv

A Russian drone hit a covered market in the eastern Ukrainian city of Nikopol yesterday, killing five people and wounding 25, officials said, as Moscow pressed on with intensified daytime attacks.

Russia has been firing aerial broadsides at Ukraine throughout its more than four-year invasion, mostly at night, but in recent weeks it has stepped up daytime attacks.

The market in Nikopol, Dnipropetrovsk region, was hit at 9:50am (0650 GMT), the local prosecutor's office said.

Regional governor, Oleksandr Ganja, said in a Telegram post that three women and two men were killed.

He added that a 14-year-old girl was among the 25 wounded and was in a "critical condition".

Attacks continued during the morning hours on Saturday, wounding six in the northeastern city of Kharkiv, near the front line, regional police said.

The Ukrainian air force said Russia fired 286 drones overnight, of which 260 were intercepted.

In the northern Sumy region, 11 people were wounded in strikes on residential areas and civilian infrastructure overnight, police said.

Images released by Ukrainian emergency services showed a building whose upper floors were engulfed in flames. Another attack killed a woman and wounded another two in the southeastern city of Kherson, which is close to the fighting.



Firefighters put out a fire at the market following a strike in Nikopol, yesterday. (AFP)

In Russia, a missile and drone attack on the southern Rostov region bordering Ukraine left one person dead and four seriously wounded in the city of Taganrog, regional governor Yuri Slyussar said.

On the Sea of Azov, a foreign cargo ship was damaged by falling drone debris and caught fire, he added.

A family of three, including an eight-year-old child, was killed in a house by a nighttime Ukrainian drone strike that also targeted railway infrastructure in Russian-occupied Lugansk, the Moscow-backed administration said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky was on a surprise visit to Istanbul yesterday for security talks with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Zelensky this week signalled he was ready for a truce over the

Orthodox Easter holidays, but the Kremlin said it had not received "clearly formulated" proposals.

Ukraine has accused Russia of prolonging the war to capture more territory, and says Moscow is not interested in peace. Russia says it wants a permanent settlement instead of a brief ceasefire.

Talks between the two warring parties, mediated by the US, have been stalled by the war in the Middle East.

In comments to reporters, including AFP, published on Friday, Zelensky said he had invited an American delegation to Ukraine to relaunch negotiations with Moscow.

"The delegation will do everything possible in the current conditions — during the war with Iran — to come to Kyiv," Zelensky said. "The American group can come

to us and, after us, go to Moscow. If it does not work out with three parties, let's do it this way," he added.

Amid the Middle East war, Ukraine has sought to leverage its expertise in fighting off Russian drones similar to those Iran has been using in retaliatory attacks across Gulf nations.

Last week, Zelensky visited several Middle Eastern countries and signed defence agreements with Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

He also suggested Ukraine could help unblock the Strait of Hormuz, whose effective closure by Iran has rattled the global economy.

He did not specify how Ukraine could contribute, but cited Kyiv's experience in restoring passage through the Black Sea, which Russia had blocked at the beginning of its invasion.

'Italian PM's visit reflects message of support, solidarity with Qatar'

QNA
Doha

Italian ambassador Paolo Toschi has said that the visit of Italian PM Giorgia Meloni to Qatar aimed to show support, solidarity and friendship, especially as it is the first visit by a leader from one of the largest economies in the world, and the first visit by a G20 country to the Gulf region since the beginning of the current conflict.

In a statement to Qatar News Agency (QNA), the envoy said that this visit reflects Italy's keenness to send a strong signal affirming commitment to friendship and support for the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries in general and for Qatar in particular. He explained that Italy continues to provide support for the defence activities of Qatar and other countries in the region in confronting the unacceptable Iranian attacks



Paolo Toschi

on the Gulf countries, noting that Italy has condemned and continues to condemn these attacks very clearly.

He also stressed that all attacks targeting civilian targets are unacceptable and pointed out that the bilateral relations between Qatar and Italy are distinguished and are witnessing continuous growth in sectors of common interest such as political, diplomatic, defence, mil-

itary affairs and energy, in addition to their expansion in future sectors such as education, academic affairs and direct investments.

He said that Italy is keen to continue partnership with Qatar in strengthening and developing its security system across various sectors, whether in the fields of defence, or infrastructure and transport security, or food security, or cyber and digital security, advanced technology and others.

Regarding energy security, the ambassador stressed the importance of protecting energy security, stressing that Italy will continue co-operation with Qatar and its concerned authorities to enhance this aspect. He said that Qatar has for years been a strategic partner for Italy in the field of energy, affirming the continuation of commitment to this partnership and joint work, based on Italy's strong industrial and engineering sector, to protect energy security at the regional and international levels.

QU hosts seminar on volunteering

The Core Curriculum Programme at the deanship of General Studies at Qatar University (QU) has organised a virtual seminar 'How Does Volunteering Enhance Your Character?' attended by more than 150 students from various colleges across the university.

The seminar was delivered by Dr Somaya al-Mutawa, a trainer and researcher specialising in leadership training and volunteerism. The event was organised as part of QU's ongoing efforts to promote a culture of volunteerism and develop students' personal and professional skills.

During the seminar, Dr al-Mutawa discussed the important role volunteer work plays in building self-confidence and enhancing students' engagement in university life and the broader community. She emphasised that volunteering provides a valuable opportunity for self-discovery and for developing essential skills required in today's job market.

In this context, Dr al-Mutawa stated: "Volunteer work is not merely a form of community service; it is a real platform that shapes students' personalities, develops their skills, and effectively prepares them to face the challenges of the labour market."

The seminar witnessed notable engagement from students, who participated in rich discussions and raised several questions about the role of volunteering in shaping the university student's character and the ways they can leverage their volunteer experiences to strengthen their resumes and prepare for their professional careers.

The seminar also highlighted real-life student experiences in which volunteer activities helped participants discover their abilities, strengthen their sense of responsibility, and improve their capacity to deal with various challenges. The seminar concluded with an emphasis on the Core Curriculum Programme's continued commitment to organising activities and events that enrich students' educational experience, open new opportunities for learning and sustainable development, and strengthen their engagement within the university and the wider community.

The Core Curriculum Programme aims to equip students with a range of attributes, knowledge, values, and skills that support their academic and personal excellence and enhance their ability to contribute effectively within and beyond the university.

WCM-Q students match at elite medical institutions

By A Staff Reporter
Doha

Soon-to-graduate students of Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar (WCM-Q) have gained residency places at prestigious healthcare institutions in Qatar and the US, marking another successful Match Day for the college. Match Day is an extremely significant milestone in the career of every medical student as they learn where they will continue their training after they graduated and received their MD degree.

Final-year medical students at WCM-Q matched with elite residency programmes at highly regarded institutions in the US and Qatar, including Hamad Medical Corporation, Sidra Medicine, Valley Health System, Lincoln Medical Centre, Johns Hopkins Hospital, Case Western/University Hospitals Cleveland Medical Centre, New York-Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell Medical Centre, New York-Presbyterian Queens, Lehigh Valley Hospital, Children's National Medical Center, Quinnipiac University/Netter MD School of Medicine, University of Miami/Jackson Health System, Or-



lando Health, One Brooklyn Health Kingsbrook New York, University of Texas Southwestern Medical School, and the University of Maryland Medical Centre, among others. The students are set to graduate in May and will join their residency programmes in the fall.

WCM-Q achieved an 86% match rate for students who applied to US residency programmes, a level which far exceeds the average 56.4% match rate for international medical graduates, underlining the college's position as one of the world's leading destinations for international medical education.

The medical specialties the soon-to-be doctors of the Class of 2026 will be pursuing once they receive their MD degrees are anaesthesiology, dermatology, emergency medicine, family medicine, general surgery, internal medicine, neurology, neurosurgery, obstet-

rics-gynaecology, ophthalmology, orthopedic surgery, pathology, paediatrics, physical medicine and rehabilitation, plastic surgery, preventive and community medicine, psychiatry, radiology, and surgery.

Dean of WCM-Q Dr Javadi Sheikh said: "We are extremely proud of our Class of 2026 students, who have remained resolute in their dedication to their studies through a challenging time. We are certain that this resilience will enable them to accomplish great things in their careers, and we are sure that many will affirm their commitment to serving patients in our region by taking up roles in Qatar's thriving healthcare sector once they have completed their residency training."

Dr Thurayya Arayssi, vice dean for academic and curricular affairs, said: "Congratulations to all of you in the Class of 2026, you have reached this milestone through challenges that few before you have had to navigate, firstly during the Covid pandemic and now in the present difficult circumstances. That you have persevered and achieved this goal speaks volumes about your resilience and commitment."

Amir, Italian PM widen bilateral ties



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni discussed regional and international developments during a meeting yesterday at Lusail Palace. His Highness the Amir welcomed the Italian PM and expressed thanks and appreciation for the Italian Republic's position, praising the strong ties between the two friendly countries. They also discussed bilateral co-operation relations and explored ways to enhance and develop them across various sectors, particularly in the economy and energy front. (QNA)



13-year-old Mary Pauleen Rioveros.



Eight-year-old Qatari student Ghala Jamal.



14-year-old Zaara Shanavas Manayath.

Qatar students turn to music and art to manage stress, build confidence

By Shaima Sherif
Staff Reporter

Students in Qatar are increasingly using music and art as tools to manage stress, express emotions, and build confidence, highlighting the growing role of creative spaces in supporting youth well-being. At centres such as the International Academy for Intercultural Development (IAID), students from diverse backgrounds are discovering how creative disciplines can provide balance alongside academic demands, offering both emotional release and personal growth.

For 14-year-old Zaara Shanavas Manayath, music has become a powerful form of self-expression. Having trained in Western vocals for nearly eight years, she describes singing as a space where emotions can be freely released. "Singing allows me to belt out all of my emotions, my rage, my happiness, my sadness," she said.

She explained how music helps her cope with school pressure by allowing her to mentally step into different roles. "Whenever I sing, I envision myself as the person I'm singing as...I forget who I am and put on a performance," she noted, adding that the experience not only brings her joy but also positively impacts those around her.

Despite feeling "very nervous" before classes, Manayath said the outcome is always the same. "When I leave the class, I'm completely relaxed...I just let go of all my tension."

A similar sense of emotional fulfilment is reflected in younger students. Eight-year-old Qatari student Ghala Jamal, who practices both visual arts and piano,



One of the students during a performance.



Learning activity in progress.

described the satisfaction she feels through creativity in simple terms: "When I finish my work, I feel good and proud."

Jamal's artistic journey also highlights the role of family and community in nurturing creativity. She has exhibited her work internationally in Tbilisi, Georgia, and locally at the Qatar National Convention Centre, often alongside her mother. Her artworks, including a piece portraying "me and my mum hugging as cats," reflect both imagination and personal connection.

For 13-year-old Mary Pauleen Rioveros, who studies musical theatre, creative expression has played a key role in personal development. "It helps me get relaxed in stressful times...I can focus on what I enjoy the most," she said.

She added that her experience has significantly boosted her confidence. "It changed me for my growth...it gives me a lot of exposure in performance," she noted, recalling a milestone moment when she won a gold medal for a solo performance in Korea.

These individual experiences point to a broader trend in Qatar, where creative education is increasingly recognised as an important complement to traditional academics. However, beyond structure and achievement, the real impact lies in how students internalise creativity. For many, music and art are not just skills to be learned, but essential tools for navigating emotions, building identity, and finding confidence in an increasingly demanding world.

Private sector plays key role in knowledge-based economy, innovation

By A Staff Reporter
Doha

Experts and entrepreneurs in Qatar have underscored the private sector's vital role in advancing scientific research and innovation, noting how Qatar National Vision 2030 has repositioned businesses as key partners in building a diversified, knowledge-based economy.

They noted that the country has established an integrated strategic framework that encourages companies to adopt advanced technologies and deepen collaboration with universities and research centres.

Such framework, combined with a supportive investment climate, advanced digital infrastructure, and flexible economic legislation, has strengthened the

ability of both startups and large firms to engage in research and development and transform ideas into value-added products and services.

Hamad al-Hajri, founder and CEO of Snoonu Group, said the national vision has gone beyond supporting traditional business sectors to building "an integrated ecosystem that fosters innovation and enables startups and entrepreneurs to become active contributors to development."

He pointed out that innovation has been central to Snoonu's journey from the outset. "Innovation has been a core pillar since our founding, as we worked to deliver smart logistics and e-commerce solutions powered by modern technology while continuously enhancing user experience to meet market expectations," he said.

Al-Hajri added that this progress

would not have been possible without a supportive environment, including robust digital infrastructure and flexible regulations.

However, he noted the challenges involved, particularly the high cost of research and development and the need to accelerate innovation. "This makes it essential to strengthen financing tools, expand incubation and acceleration programmes, and better connect entrepreneurs with research centers and universities," he noted, while stressing the significant opportunities in e-commerce, digital services, and artificial intelligence (AI).

Hamad Hadid, co-founder and CEO of Cytomate Cybersecurity, described Qatar's vision as "a pivotal turning point" in the country's economic trajectory. "It established a comprehensive strategic framework that has directly encouraged

businesses to adopt a more active role in research, development, and innovation, enhancing the economy's ability to keep pace with global transformations," he said.

Hadid stressed that there is a growing trend among companies investing in advanced technologies such as AI, big data analytics, and advanced computing, not just to improve operational efficiency but rather to develop competitive products and services. He credited Qatar's strong infrastructure, free zones, and investments in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) for creating a fertile business environment, but stressed that "success ultimately depends on initiative."

Engineer Nayef al-Ibrahim, founding partner and CEO of Ibtchar, said the current phase presents an opportunity to redefine the private sector's role beyond

profit-making. "Companies should be seen as active partners in knowledge creation and the development of innovative solutions that drive economic growth," he said, stressing that innovation is now a necessity in a knowledge-based global economy.

He lauded Qatar's success in building a supportive ecosystem through investments in technology infrastructure, free zones, and business incubators, alongside initiatives to strengthen collaboration between the private sector and academic institutions. "These efforts have enabled companies to turn innovations into commercial products based on national intellectual property," he noted, calling for stronger public-private partnerships based on knowledge-sharing and risk-sharing, particularly to support small and medium-sized enterprises.