



GULF TIMES



TUESDAY Vol. XXXXVI No. 13703

April 7, 2026
Shawwal 19, 1447 AH

www.gulf-times.com 2 Riyals

Published in QATAR since 1978



YOUR SAFETY AND COMFORT ARE OUR PRIORITY

Stay Connected with GigaHome. Activate your new home internet online in just a few taps.



أوريكس بوليدكس
ORIX POLYDEX
Durable waterproofing-performance for roof protection
NATIONAL PAINTS FACTORIES CO., Doha - Qatar
44601602/3

Running Hotel Business For Sale
Furnished Hotel With License & Prime Location.
Serious Party Call Us:
33598672 / 30200166 / 52038746

SPORT | Page 1

Police SC beat Al Arabi to clinch Qatar Volleyball Cup

Family
العودة المدرسية
BACK TO SCHOOL
SUBSCRIBE TO OUR OFFER!

Ready to **GUAC** AND **ROLL?**
Only on talabat

PM condemns attacks in Iran FM call, pushes for diplomacy



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani received a phone call from Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs Abbas Araghchi.

They discussed the developments of the current escalation and its repercussions on regional security and stability.

The prime minister voiced Qatar's condemnation of Iran's continued targeting of Qatar and the countries of the region, stressing that this escalation toward countries that have distanced themselves from the war represents tampering with the security of the region and disregard for its stability.

He also stressed that targeting civilian infrastructure and the resources of peoples is unacceptable and condemned behaviour from any party and under any circumstances, urging for respect for international law by all parties and sparing peoples the consequences of conflicts.

HE the PM emphasised that a comprehensive and lasting diplomatic solution remains the only option for resolving the crisis, in a way that achieves security and stability and spares the region further tension and escalation. (QNA)

● **PM receives calls from Norway, Spain and India - Page 2**

PM urges joint co-ordination in Jordan deputy PM talks



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani met yesterday with Jordanian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates Ayman al-Safadi, who is visiting the country. They discussed the developments pertaining to the military escalation in the region and its serious repercussions on regional and international security and stability, along with ways to resolve all disputes by peaceful means. HE the PM reiterated Qatar's condemnation of the Iranian attacks that targeted vital facilities in Jordan and its full solidarity with and support for all measures

Jordan may take to preserve its sovereignty and security. He stressed the need to stop the unjustified Iranian attacks on Qatar and the countries of the region, warning in this context of the consequences of irresponsible targeting of vital infrastructure, especially that related to water, food, and energy facilities. He also stressed the need to strengthen co-ordination, intensify joint efforts, return to the negotiating table, and prioritise reason and wisdom to contain the crisis, in a way that ensures global energy security, freedom of navigation, environmental safety, and preserves the stability of the region. (QNA)

Amir, world leaders drive urgency to de-escalate

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani yesterday received a phone call from French President Emmanuel Macron.

The two leaders discussed regional developments in the light of the ongoing Iranian attacks targeting Qatar, and their repercussions on regional and international security and stability. They also exchanged views on the impact of the escalation on global energy supplies, underscoring the importance of strengthening international efforts to ensure their stability and continued flow.

The French president praised Qatar's prudent management of the crisis and its calls for de-escalation, reaffirming French support for and solidarity with Qatar.

He further stressed the importance of de-escalation, particularly given its implications for global energy security.

The two sides also discussed developments in Lebanon and emphasised the need to intensify efforts to reduce tensions and enhance stability in the region.

His Highness the Amir also received a phone call from Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez.

The call addressed the latest regional developments regarding the ongoing Iranian aggression against Qatar and its repercussions for maritime security in the region.

Sanchez also inquired about the situation in Qatar, reiterating his country's support for and solidarity with the country.

They discussed the escalating tensions in the region and the efforts being made to contain and reduce them, including the situation in Lebanon, where the importance of de-escalation and strengthening stability was emphasised.

The call also explored bilateral relations and ways to support and develop them in various fields.

His Highness the Amir received a phone call from Guyana President Mohamed Irfaan Ali.

They reviewed current regional and international developments, particularly in light of the continued Iranian aggression against Qatar.

The president condemned the continuation of this aggression, affirming his country's readiness to provide support and assistance to Qatar in confronting these circumstances. (QNA)

Amir chairs first SCEAI 2026 meet



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, Chairman of the Supreme Council for Economic Affairs and Investment (SCEAI), chaired the Council's first meeting of 2026, held yesterday at the Amiri Diwan.

The meeting was attended by His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani, Deputy Chairman of the Council, along with HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdul-

rahman bin Jassim al-Thani, and Their Excellencies members of the Council.

The Council reviewed the decisions and recommendations adopted at its third meeting of 2025 as well as a report on the progress of projects. It also reviewed a report on the progress of the state's economic priorities and took the necessary decisions in this regard.

The Council further reviewed presentations by the Ministry

of Commerce and Industry and the Ministry of Transport on the executive plan for the readiness and resilience of critical infrastructure. It also reviewed presentations by Qatar Central Bank and the Ministry of Finance on executive plans aimed at achieving long-term financial and monetary stability in the State. The Council discussed other items on its agenda and took the appropriate decisions thereon. (QNA) **Page 2**

Shura hails Amir's visits, backs sports strategy

By A Staff Reporter
Doha

Shura Council held its weekly sitting under the chairmanship of HE the Speaker Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanem, commending His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani's recent diplomatic visits to Saudi Arabia and the UAE amid heightened regional tensions.

During his Jeddah visit on March 30, His Highness the Amir held bilateral talks with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and participated in tripartite discussions that also included King Abdullah II of Jordan.

The following day, he met UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al-Nahyan in Abu Dhabi. Both sets of talks centred on de-escalation efforts and the implications of ongoing Iranian

attacks on regional stability. Council members strongly condemned an Iranian missile strike on a QatarEnergy-chartered fuel tanker in waters north of the country, calling it a grave threat to maritime security and global energy supplies, and demanded firm international action to protect shipping lanes.

The session also featured a presentation by HE the Minister of Sports and Youth Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Thani on the ministry's 2023-2030 strategy. The plan targets improved sports services, youth empowerment, and healthier lifestyles in line with Qatar National Vision 2030.

Key pillars include expanded youth programmes, talent development, better sports governance, and deeper partnerships across public and private sectors. **Page 3**

Iran drones neutralised

The Ministry of Defence announced that Qatar was targeted yesterday by an attack involving a number of drones launched from Iran. The Qatar Armed Forces successfully intercepted and neutralised all incoming drones, the ministry's statement said. (QNA)

QU graduation slated for May 4

Under the patronage of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, Qatar University (QU) will hold its Graduation Ceremony for the Class of 2026 (male students) on May 4, 2026. In a statement yesterday, QU said the graduation ceremony for distinguished female students will be held on May 5, in the presence of Her Highness the Consort of HH the Amir Sheikh Jowaher bint Hamad bin Suhaim al-Thani. The total number of graduates this year is expected to be around 3,980 graduates. (QNA)

QCB's unlimited repo facility shores up banking sector

By Santhosh V Perumal
Business Reporter

THE Qatar Central Bank's (QCB) pre-emptive measures, which include an "unlimited" repo facility, are a strategic first line of defence that acts as a countercyclical economic buffer and strengthens the banking sector from multiple fronts.

Three Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) central banks have implemented measures to support their respective banking sectors in response to regional instability, whose pecuniary and opportunity costs are still widening.

The Central Bank of the UAE was the first to act, introducing a five-pillar financial institution resilience package; followed by the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) with a comprehensive prudential and liquidity easing package; and the QCB with its measures focusing on domestic currency liquidity provisions and borrower support.

Amid the ongoing, more than

a month-long Iran War, the QCB moved from a confirmed position of strength as it outlined the pre-emptive package to ensure ample liquidity, enhance financial stability, improve cash flow management, and support economic growth; ensuring policies are calibrated to current short- to medium-term risks without exhausting policy tools.

By committing to provide liquidity without limits (against eligible collateral), Qatar reinforces the robustness of its financial system and positions its banking sector to effectively navigate both domestic and global challenges.

The unlimited liquidity through repo facilities and a new term repo window (up to three months) has significantly reduced the risk of bank runs or funding shortages.

A repo facility is a short-term collateralised borrowing arrangement through which commercial banks obtain liquidity from the central bank by selling securities with an agreement to repurchase them

Qatar's Strategic Financial Defence

Unlimited Liquidity via Repo Facilities
Reduces risk of bank runs by providing uncapped short-term funding against eligible collateral.

4.5% to 3.5%
Reserve Requirements Cut to 3.5%
Reduced from 4.5% to inject immediate capital and lending power into the banking system.

Three-Month Loan Repayment Deferrals
Ensures steady credit flow and supports borrower cash management during periods of stress.

Robust Banking Sector Resilience
Qatar's banks remain well-capitalised with liquidity levels significantly exceeding regulatory requirements.

GT GRAPHICS

later at a predetermined price.

The reduction in reserve requirements (from 4.5% to 3.5%) injects extra funds into the banking system, which not only re-

leases capital that banks can use for lending or operational needs but also increases overall system liquidity without compromising stability. **To Page 2**

Trump threatens 'to take out Iran in one night'

US President Donald Trump said yesterday he would lay waste to every bridge and power plant in Iran if it fails to bend to his demands, as he touted the high-risk operation that rescued two downed airmen.

Dismissing accusations that such a move would be a war crime, Trump told a White House press conference that "the entire country can be taken out in one night, and that night

might be tomorrow night." The president gave lengthy opening remarks on the recovery of two F-15 crew members recovered from behind enemy lines in Iran, which he compared to finding a "needle in a haystack." But Trump also doubled down on his threats of destruction before his self-imposed deadline for Tehran's leaders that is due to expire today at 8pm (0000 GMT Wednesday). (AFP)



Amir chairs SCEAI's first meeting for the year



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani chaired the Supreme Council for Economic Affairs and Investment (SCEAI)'s first meeting of 2026 yesterday at the Amiri Diwan. The meeting was attended by the deputy SCEAI chairman, His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani, along with HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani, and other members of the SCEAI. - QNA

Shura Council lauds Amir's visits to Jeddah, Abu Dhabi

The Shura Council addressed regional developments and reviewed plans to strengthen the country's sports and youth sectors at the body's weekly session.

The session chaired by HE the Speaker Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanim opened with praise for His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani's recent visits to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, where talks focused on regional and international developments.

On March 30, His Highness the Amir arrived in Jeddah, where he held bilateral talks with Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud.

His Highness the Amir also joined tripartite talks with the Saudi crown prince and Jordan's King Abdullah II.

A day later, His Highness the Amir visited Abu Dhabi for a meeting with UAE's President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al-Nahyan.

The Shura Council praised His Highness the Amir's efforts to enhance co-ordination and consultation among fraternal and friendly nations, support diplomatic solutions to reduce tensions, safeguard state sovereignty, and ensure the stability of energy supplies and balance in global markets.

The Council members also condemned an Iranian missile attack on a fuel tanker chartered by QatarEnergy in waters north of the country, calling it a serious threat to maritime security and global energy supplies.

They urged a firm international response to safeguard shipping routes and uphold international law.

They also commended the ef-



orts exerted by the Qatari Armed Forces and security agencies to safeguard the sovereignty of the state and protect nationals and residents alike.

In a separate statement, the Council strongly denounced Israeli legislation concerning the death penalty for Palestinian prisoners, describing it as a violation of international humanitarian law and human rights principles.

It called on international parliamentary bodies to take action.

After that, HE the Secretary-General Nayef bin Mohammed al-Mahmoud read out the agenda, and the minutes of the previ-

ous sitting were approved.

The session was attended by HE the Minister of Sports and Youth Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Thani at the invitation of HE al-Ghanim.

HE Sheikh Hamad outlined the Ministry of Sports and Youth's 2023-30 strategy, which aims to improve sports services, empower young people, and promote healthier lifestyles in line with Qatar National Vision 2030.

The strategy includes expanding youth programmes, supporting entrepreneurship initiatives, developing athletic talent, and improving governance across sports institutions.

It also seeks to increase community participation in sports and ensure facilities are accessible to all segments of society.

HE Sheikh Hamad said that the strategy would be guided by performance indicators and continuous evaluation to ensure long-term impact, adding that preparations are under way to host the 4th Gulf Games in Doha next month.

The session concluded with the Council expressing its support for the ministry's plans, highlighting their importance in promoting a healthy, active society in line with Qatar's national development goals. - QNA

PM receives telephone calls from Norway premier, Spain and India foreign ministers

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani has received phone calls from Norway's Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store, Spain's Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Co-operation Jose Manuel Albares, and India's Minister of External Affairs Dr Subrahmanyam Jaisankar.

Discussions during the calls revolved around developments of the military escalation in the region and its serious repercussions on regional and international security and stability, as well as ways

to resolve all disputes in a peaceful manner.

HE Sheikh Mohammed stressed the need to stop the unjustified Iranian attacks on Qatar and other countries in the region, warning against the irresponsible targeting of vital infrastructure, particularly related to water, food, and energy facilities.

Store, Albares and Jaishankar expressed to HE Sheikh Mohammed their country's solidarity with Qatar, stressing the importance of de-escalation, preserving infrastructure and civilian facilities, and ensuring the safety of the energy sector. - QNA

Qatar slams Israeli minister's storming of Al Aqsa Mosque

Qatar has condemned the storming of Al Aqsa Mosque by the Israeli national security minister under the protection of the occupation police, considering it a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and a provocation of the feelings of Muslims worldwide.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) affirmed in a statement yesterday Qatar's categorical rejection of attempts to undermine the religious and historical status of Al Aqsa Mosque.

It also stressed the need for the international community to uphold its moral and legal responsibilities towards Jerusalem and its holy sites and to firmly confront the repeated Israeli violations.

The ministry reiterated Qatar's unwavering position on the just cause of Palestine and the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, including their full right to practice their religious rites without restrictions and to establish their independent state within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. - QNA

QCB's unlimited repo facility shores up banking sector

From Page 1

"Banks remain well-capitalised, liquid, and capable of supporting economic activity even under stress," an industry source said, adding that the measures enhance banks' ability to withstand external shocks, reinforcing Qatar's reputation as a "stable" financial hub.

The QCB's proactive measures come after a review that confirmed the financial system's continued operation from "a position of strength", with robust liquidity, capital significantly exceeding regulatory requirements, and provisioning providing extended coverage against credit risk.

During periods of economic stress, the QCB has always demonstrated its ability to act swiftly through countercyclical measures and data-driven policymaking.

Temporary loan repayment deferrals (up to three months) ensure credit flow, preventing a contraction in lending that could slow economic growth.

Unlimited repo operations help sustain investor confidence in the domestic financial system, thus reducing the tendency to resort to panic-driven behaviour such as asset sell-offs or cash hoarding.

"This is crucial for maintaining orderly functioning in bond and money markets, where repos are central to pricing and liquidity," an analyst with a leading investment agency said.

Another school of thought holds that unlimited liquidity through

repos is a potent stabilising tool, but one that must be implemented with caution, requiring a delicate balance between ensuring financial stability and preserving market discipline.

"Artificially abundant liquidity may keep borrowing costs low and potentially lead to mispricing of risk," a banking source said, cautioning that sustained liquidity injections, if not carefully managed, can contribute to inflation through an enhanced money supply.

"Repo operations are typically short-term, but prolonged reliance on them can work against long-term sustainable solutions," he added.

Given heightened uncertainty, the QCB is likely to intensify monitoring, including reviews of high-risk sectors to detect vulnerabilities as part of preventative intervention.

These monetary measures are set to be complemented by close coordination with fiscal authorities, creating a comprehensive policy response that reinforces economic resilience.

"Qatar's strong fiscal buffers and strategic policy response position it to navigate the crisis more effectively than many peers," the analyst said.

Sovereigns like Qatar, with greater fiscal flexibility, stronger execution capacity, and an established record of infrastructure investment, are better positioned to absorb repair costs, mobilise temporary supply, and accelerate resilience spending, according to Moody's, a global credit rating agency.

MoEHE launches awareness campaign, guidelines manual on student safety

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) has launched a comprehensive awareness campaign and a new guidelines manual under the slogan *Learning in a Safe Environment, a Shared Responsibility*.

The initiative is aimed at raising student awareness of the preventative measures and proper behaviour throughout the school day, from the moment they leave home until they return.

The ministry said that this initiative is part of its plans to build a school culture based on prevention and adherence to guidelines.

The manual stresses the importance of students complying with safety instructions issued by schools and relevant authorities, and of starting the school day calmly while paying attention to all steps involved in travelling

from home to school to ensure their safety.

Regarding school transportation, the manual outlines a set of rules and procedures that include waiting for the bus in safe areas away from the road, boarding and disembarking in an orderly manner without crowding, remaining seated throughout the trip, and following the bus supervisor's instructions to ensure the safety of all students during transit.

The awareness material also addresses how to deal with emergency situations and the national alert system.

It stresses the importance of remaining completely calm upon receiving any alert, staying seated away from windows and glass surfaces, and following the specified procedures in case of danger, whether outside or inside the bus, ensuring proper conduct

in various emergency scenarios.

Within the school environment, the MoEHE highlighted the importance of abiding by organised entry routes and proceeding directly to classrooms.

It also emphasised the implementation of the approved evacuation procedures when any alert is issued inside the school, including the use of emergency exits and designated stairways, moving calmly to assembly points, and remaining within groups until further instructions are given.

The manual, alongside the awareness campaign, is meant to enhance the safety and security of the students within and without the school environment, while applying effective and practical measures to avoid any disruption to the desired order and discipline in case of emergency.

Government schools' mid-semester break shifted

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) has announced an amendment to the dates of the extended holiday following the mid-semester exams for the second semester of the 2025-26 academic year in all the government schools of the country.

The ministry announced in a statement yesterday that it has decided that the holiday would be on Wednesday and Thursday, corresponding to April 22-23, instead of the previous

date which was scheduled for April 8-9.

The ministry indicated that this amendment ensures that students get a break after completing all the scheduled mid-term exams for the second semester.

With regard to private schools, the ministry confirmed that the extended holiday dates will remain unchanged, in accordance with the previously approved annual calendar, which will be tomorrow and Thursday, corresponding to April 8-9. - QNA

Labour minister chairs meeting of National Committee for Combating Human Trafficking



HE the Minister of Labour Dr Ali bin Samikh al-Marri, who is the chairman of the National Committee for Combating Human Trafficking, chaired the committee's periodic meeting yesterday. The meeting reviewed progress on the National Plan to Combat Human Trafficking (2024-26), which aims to unify national efforts among government entities and civil society organisations. - QNA

Environment minister meets France's envoy



HE the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Dr Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki al-Subaie held a meeting with France's ambassador to Qatar Arnaud Pescheux, during which they discussed co-operation relations between the two countries, particularly in the fields of environment and climate change, in addition to topics of mutual interest. - QNA



almeera chief executive Jassim Mohammed al-Ansari.

almeera unveils its new brand identity

Almeera Consumer Goods Company (almeera) has unveiled its new brand identity, marking a step in its continued evolution and reflecting its vision and focus on enhancing how it serves customers, while reinforcing its role as a Qatari brand committed to supporting communities and meeting customers' needs and expectations.

This includes further developing the shopping experience and services across a network of 65 branches, alongside an integrated digital ecosystem that enables a more advanced and customer-centric service model.

With the launch of the new identity, customers will begin to experience the impact of these ongoing developments, aimed at reinforcing almeera's position as a preferred shopping destination.

This phase places a strong emphasis on expanding digital capabilities and services, while maintaining consistent standards of quality and reliability across all touchpoints.

It also reflects a more integrated model between stores and digital platforms, allowing customers to shop from their nearest branch with home delivery, while preserving real-time product availability and the same level of trust they have come to expect in-store.

The evolution of the 'wafa' loyalty programme further strengthens this ecosystem, offering more relevant benefits and rewards tailored to customers' needs.

The programme extends across almeera and its growing network of partners, including collaborations with national entities, such as the General Retirement and Social Insurance Authority (Daman), through its Al Safwa programme for retirees.

In parallel, almeera continues to support the local economy by strengthening partnerships with local suppliers, while expanding collaboration with regional and international partners.

The company is also developing its private label range to provide high-quality products at accessible prices that meet evolving consumer needs.

"almeera has always been close to people's everyday lives," said almeera chief executive Jassim Mohammed al-Ansari. "Today, our focus is on strengthening that role by evolving how we serve our customers, leveraging digital tools to make their experience easier, and ensuring a consistently high standard of service."

"Our commitment is simple and clear: to be present for every home in Qatar, with reliability, efficiency, and the quality our customers expect," he added.



Ooredoo wins 'Rawda' award

Ooredoo has been awarded the "Rawda" Award for Excellence in Social Work, marking a national achievement that reflects its strong commitment to creating positive and sustainable social impact through meaningful initiatives that enhance quality of life and promote inclusion, participation, and social responsibility.

This recognition comes as part of the inaugural edition of the "Rawda" Award for Excellence in Social Work, held under the patronage of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and organised by the Ministry of Social Development and Family to honour the most impactful and distinguished social initiatives in the country.

The "Rawda" Award is considered the first national award in the field of social work in Qatar.

It was established under Amiri Decree No. (16) of 2025 to serve as an institutional framework for recognising the most impactful and sustainable social initiatives, across five main categories: individuals, families, non-profit organisations, the private sector, and media.

The award falls under the umbrella of the Ministry of Social Development and Family, in partnership with the Social and Sport Contribution Fund.

Ooredoo's win recognises the impact of the Doha Marathon by Ooredoo, which has grown into one of Qatar's leading community-driven sporting initiatives.

Over the years, it has evolved into an event that brings together sport, health, inclusion, and community engagement, creating a meaningful and lasting impact.

The marathon's impact extends beyond sport, creating broader social and community value by supporting local charities, promoting a culture of volunteering, and fostering national partnerships.

More than 2,800 individuals from various nationalities contributed to organising the event, including the Ministry of Interior, Hamad Medical Corporation, and the Qatar Athletics Federation, reflecting strong collaboration across institutions in service of the community.

Ooredoo chief executive Sheikh Ali bin Jabor bin Mohammad al-Thani said in a press statement: "We take pride in this national recognition, which reflects Ooredoo's ongoing commitment to launching initiatives that make a real difference in the community."

"This achievement would not have been possible without the continued support of Ooredoo Group's Board of Directors, represented by our chairman Sheikh Faisal bin Thani al-Thani, and the members of the company's Board of Directors," he said.

"The Doha Marathon by Ooredoo has become more than just a sporting event; it is a fully integrated community sports event that promotes health, celebrates inclusion, and strengthens social connection, aligned with our vision of empowering individuals and communities while creating sustainable, positive impact," Sheikh Ali added.

Recognition for Qatar Cancer Society's commitment to service

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani has honoured the Qatar Cancer Society (QCS) with the "Rawda" Award for Excellence in Social Work in the Non-Profit Organisations category, in recognition of its "Wayyakum" platform.

The award was organised by the Ministry of Social Development and Family to promote community initiatives and foster innovation in the social sector.

QCS chairman Dr Sheikh Khalid bin Jabor al-Thani expressed his pride and appreciation for this recognition, noting that it reflects the QCS's integrated institutional efforts and ongoing commitment to serving cancer patients, improving their quality of life and promoting awareness and community support.

He emphasised that this achievement serves as a strong motivation to further advance humanitarian ini-



tiatives and maximise their sustainable impact.

Sheikh Khalid highlighted that the award reinforces a spirit of positive competition among social institutions to deliver high-quality initiatives aligned with the QCS's vi-

AI-driven distortion of war narratives exposed

The Middle East Council on Global Affairs, in collaboration with the Qatar Press Centre (QPC), organised an online panel discussion on "Media Coverage of the Iran War in the Age of Artificial Intelligence" bringing together academics and media professionals to examine rapid transformations in the media landscape amid the intersection of geopolitical conflict and technological advancement.

The session highlighted how wars are increasingly shifting from traditional battlefields to the digital space, where artificial intelligence (AI) has become a central tool in shaping narratives and influencing public opinion.

This includes the use of deepfakes, propaganda bots and large-scale production of misleading content, alongside efforts to strengthen public awareness in confronting these challenges.

The discussion was moderated by Fawzi al-Ghweidi, visiting fellow at the Middle East Council on Global Affairs.

Participants included Doha Institute for Graduate Studies associate professor Dr Walid al-Saqaf, Qatari researcher and academic Dr Khalid Faraj al-Khanji, *Gulf Times* editor-in-chief Faisal al-Mudahka, and Dr Taleb al-Atbah, faculty member in Qatar University's Department of Mass Communication.

They explored the use of AI in media, newsroom challenges and its impact on reshaping narratives during crises.

Media transformations

Dr al-Atbah said that generative AI has become one of the most prominent features of change in the media landscape.

He stressed that it is not an all-dominant force, as often portrayed, but a rapidly evolving tool that has made significant progress in a short time and works in an integrated way to produce wide-reaching content.

Dr al-Atbah pointed to examples of AI-generated content, including videos related to Iran's display of weapons and fabricated clips of political figures, which may pass unnoticed by some audiences.

Such content, he warned, can shape public opinion - especially

during times of war, when anxiety is high and demand for information increases, making audiences more vulnerable to misinformation.

Dr al-Atbah also highlighted the risks of visual content in spreading false information, due to its speed and lasting impact compared to written material.

He noted that younger generations increasingly consume visual media, while algorithms track audience preferences and behaviour, amplifying exposure.

He stressed the need to integrate AI positively into visual media so audiences can better distinguish between real and fake news, adding: "We need educational crisis media that helps people understand what is real and what is not."

He emphasised that AI can also be used as a tool for verification, referring to the concept of "triangulation of evidence", which involves not relying on a single source, analysing content in depth, tracing its origin and publication history, and identifying whether it has been reused or generated by AI through what he described as "visual fingerprints".

Dr al-Saqaf noted that journalists cannot manage this alone and must be trained to use these tools effectively, warning against reliance on a single source.

Technology in media

Al-Mudahka stressed the need for media institutions to invest in technology and employ specialised data analysts, noting that the future of journalism depends on

countries still need greater readiness to engage in AI-driven information wars.

He also praised Qatar's experience in countering intense online campaigns within a short period, reflecting the scale of challenges in protecting national media narratives.

Balancing media responsibility

Dr al-Khanji said traditional media, including radio and television, faces growing challenges in this evolving environment.

He noted that differences across age groups require more diverse content and distribution channels, adding that media today is a comprehensive system that includes both content and its delivery.

Dr al-Khanji stressed the importance of balancing news coverage with national security considerations and strengthening the media's sense of responsibility.

He also highlighted the need to protect society from misinformation through cooperation between media and educational institutions, promoting critical thinking skills and building trust with audiences.

Strengthening digital sovereignty

In conclusion, al-Mudahka emphasised the need to strengthen digital sovereignty in Arab countries by developing nationally supported AI platforms to ensure technological independence.

He called for supportive legislation, greater private sector involvement in developing solutions tailored to the Arab context, and investment in national talent.

He also stressed the importance of integrating digital resilience and media literacy into educational curricula to help future generations navigate digital content responsibly and counter misinformation.

The panel forms part of a cooperation agreement signed earlier this year between the QPC and the Middle East Council on Global Affairs, aimed at strengthening collaboration between media and research institutions in Qatar and the wider Arab region, and promoting knowledge exchange on issues of shared interest.



Moderated by Fawzi al-Ghweidi, the session featured Faisal al-Mudahka, Dr Walid al-Saqaf, Dr Khalid al-Khanji and Dr Taleb al-Atbah.

Verification challenges

Dr al-Saqaf warned of the unprecedented pace of AI development, noting that it requires media organisations to rethink their policies and working methods.

He said many AI tools are still developed within Western contexts and have not fully adapted to Arab cultural environments, highlighting the need for locally grounded technological and media models.

Dr al-Saqaf also pointed to the widening gap between the sophistication of deepfake technologies and verification tools, stressing the need for advanced fact-checking strategies and continuous development of journalists' digital skills to counter misinformation.

integrating editorial and technical work.

He highlighted the multiplicity of narratives in today's media landscape, compared to the limited reach of Gulf narratives, which often lag behind more technologically advanced content.

Al-Mudahka also pointed to the growing role of "electronic armies" in targeting Gulf narratives, while Gulf media still partially relies on traditional methods, limiting its competitiveness.

He said that propaganda has become a defining feature of modern warfare, with each side seeking to impose its own narrative.

Al-Mudahka revealed that *Gulf Times* has launched an AI-powered newsletter as part of its push for innovation, adding that Arab



Safari Shop & Drive: Cars handed over to third raffle draw winners

Leading hypermarket chain Safari Hypermarket has handed over the cars to the winners of the third raffle draw of its mega promotion, "Shop & Drive - Win 30 Bestune Cars".

The cars were presented to the winners at a ceremony held on April 6 at Safari Mall.

The winners had been selected in the raffle draw conducted on March 29 at Safari Hypermarket, Barwa Village.

The winners of the draw are Mohammad Firoz (Coupon No: SDB300920316), Yousef Dehghani (Coupon No: SDB300043390), Nikhil Navas (Cou-

pon No: SDB300382857), and Abdur Razzak (Coupon No: SDB300832566).

Customers who shop for QR50 or more at any Safari outlet receive an e-affle coupon, giving them a chance to win one of 30 Bestune cars.

Four Bestune cars are awarded in each draw, while five cars will be awarded in the final draw.

This Shop & Drive promotion is available across all Safari outlets.

The fourth raffle draw of the promotion will be held on May 10 at Safari Hypermarket, Industrial Area.



Cirque du Liban's 'Fontana Show' rescheduled to start on April 30

Qatar Calendar has announced that Cirque du Liban's Fontana Show in Doha, originally scheduled to take place from March 20 to April 18 at Hyatt Plaza, has been rescheduled to begin on April 30 and will run until May 31 at the Circus Tent, Hyatt Plaza, Qatar.

Ticket holders are advised to retain their tickets and refer to the official ticketing platform for any further updates.

Previously purchased tickets will be automatically transferred to the new date, with their category unchanged.

Tickets will be available through Platinumlist via: <https://doha.platinumlist.net/event-tickets/104916/fontana-circus-qatar>

Recall order for Hyundai models

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI), in cooperation with Skyline Automotive, Qatar's Hyundai dealership, has announced the recall of Hyundai Kona, Sonata, Azera 2025-26 models.

The recall is due to the possibility of some experiencing intermittent instrument-cluster reboots during driving, causing a momentary black screen condition.

sion of "A cancer-aware community and a better life for those affected", which stems from Qatar National Vision 2030, focusing on sustainable development and human capital investment.

The QCS's "Wayyakum" platform is a pioneering digital solution designed to support cancer patients' treatment, enabling patients to apply for financial assistance and complete procedures electronically without the need for in-person visits, thereby streamlining processes and reducing the burden on patients.

The "Wayyakum" platform is integrated with the "Sanad" platform of the Regulatory Authority for Charitable Activities.

Sheikh Khalid added that in 2025, the QCS facilitated treatment for 1,789 patients who were unable to afford care, with total expenditures exceeding QR475mn.

Qatar celebrates World Health Day today

Qatar, along with the rest of the world, will celebrate World Health Day today, commemorating the founding of the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 1948.

Since its establishment, serving as the leading and co-ordinating authority on health within the United Nations system, it has led global health efforts, shaped research agendas, set standards, provided technical support to countries, and monitored and assessed health trends.

This year's World Health Day comes as Qatar has made significant strides in the healthcare sector.

Under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, the sector has received strong support, enabling it to develop robust foundations and world-class infrastructure.

The country now boasts a network of 26 hospitals across public, semi-governmental, and private sectors, in addition to approximately 60,000 healthcare professionals, including nurses and other healthcare practitioners.

Qatar's recent healthcare advancements have also gained international recognition, with five hospitals ranked among the world's top 250 academic medical centers, including two within the top 100.

This reflects the sector's commitment to integrating patient care with medical research and education to deliver optimal outcomes and patient experiences.

The country's sustained commitment to advancing healthcare stems from a national vision that places people at the heart of its development.

Primary healthcare in Qatar has emerged as a leading model regionally and internationally, supported by strategic investment in human health and the development of an integrated system delivering high-quality preventative, curative, and rehabilitative services in a safe and competitive environment.

The National Health Strategy 2024-30 has outlined three key priorities: improving population health and well-being,

achieving excellence in service delivery and patient experience, and ensuring system efficiency and resilience.

Qatar's healthcare sector continues to advance steadily in global rankings.

The country ranked first in the Middle East and North Africa (Mena) region and 18th globally in the 2025 Health Care Index, according to Numbeo.

This ranking underscores the high quality of healthcare services in Qatar, driven by innovation and the adoption of the latest global practices, in alignment with the Third National Development Strategy, alongside accessibility, affordability, and public trust in the healthcare system.

Furthermore, Qatar has received the WHO's Healthy Cities accreditation for all eight of its municipalities, the first country to receive it nationwide.

Since 2014, Qatar has witnessed a steady increase in life expectancy, making it the highest-ranked in the region

Similar accreditations have also been granted to Qatar University and Education City, highlighting Qatar's health-in-all-policy approach.

The Healthy Cities programme aims to improve population health by promoting well-being, enhancing equity, empowering communities, and addressing the root causes of ill health through cross-sector collaboration and integrated policymaking.

Since 2014, Qatar has witnessed a steady decline in infant mortality rates and a rise in life expectancy, making it the highest-ranked country in the region.

This coincides with Qatar's high ranking in the Universal Health Coverage Index, a global indicator that assesses how well countries provide access to quality healthcare, promote the well-being of families and communities, and protect against public health crises.

Qatar has also supported many countries in the region and the world through

its philanthropic work to promote health for all globally.

World Health Day is a global awareness campaign calling on all nations, leaders, and officials to focus on a single global health challenge.

World Health Day in 2026 is held under the theme *Together for Health. Stand with Science*, celebrating the power of scientific collaboration to protect the health of people, animals, plants, and the planet.

To mark the occasion, the year-long campaign will highlight the scientific achievements and multilateral cooperation needed to translate evidence into action – with a strong focus on the One Health approach.

The 2026 campaign is based on two major global events: the One Health Summit taking place today, hosted by the WHO and France, and the First Global Forum of WHO Collaborating Centres on April 7-9, which will see the participation of some 800 scientific institutions from more than 80 countries.

These two events form the largest scientific network ever assembled around a UN agency, underscoring that science-led partnerships can build a healthier and safer future for all.

The campaign calls on individuals everywhere to participate by celebrating scientific achievements, paying attention to evidence, and sharing personal stories about how science can improve quality of life.

It also calls on governments, scientists, health workers, partners and the public to support science by paying attention to evidence, facts and scientific guidance to protect health, rebuild trust in science and public health, support science-based solutions for a healthier future and chart a new course to protect the health of the planet.

Over the past century, human health has improved thanks to scientific innovations, and the future will certainly be built on how to develop and apply comprehensive scientific approaches to the health of



all – not just humans, but also animals, plants, ecosystems, and the entire planet – through the One Health approach.

The WHO and its partners work around the clock to generate scientific knowledge on key health priorities, from healthy diets

to water, sanitation, vaccines, medicines, infectious diseases, chronic diseases, and mental health, sharing evidence, and strengthening countries' research capacities and systems to achieve more equitable access to healthcare. – QNA

Sidra Medicine highlights advances to family-centred care

To mark World Health Day observed today, Sidra Medicine is reinforcing its role as a research-driven, patient-centred healthcare organisation by announcing its latest service launches and expansion plans for 2026.

"This World Health Day, themed *Together for Health. Stand with Science*, we are pleased to announce the upcoming launch of new services and expansion plans that will positively impact our patient care programmes," said Sidra Medicine chief medical officer Prof Ibrahim Janahi. "Through science, collaboration, and compassion, we are working together to build a healthier future, one where care is not only advanced, but also accessible, continuous, and centred around the needs of our community."

This year also marks key milestones in Sidra Medicine's journey, with a decade of outpatient services and eight years of inpatient care.

As part of its continued evolution, Sidra Medicine is expanding its care model beyond hospital walls by launching new home-based services.

It has announced the upcoming rollout of a Home Visit Programme, set to begin within the next few months.

The programme will initially focus on mother and newborn well-



Prof Khalid Fakhro, Prof Ibrahim Janahi and Dr Patricia Abboud.

ness checks, vaccinations, and well-baby check-ups.

"As one of the region's leading academic healthcare institutions, Sidra Medicine continues to place families at the centre of care, ensuring that services are accessible, continuous, and designed around the patient journey," said Dr Patricia Abboud, executive director of Medical Services at Sidra Medicine. "Its model reflects a simple but powerful belief: better health outcomes begin when care is within reach both physically and emotionally."

The Vaccination and Well Baby service, an extension of the Paediatric Wellness Clinic into the home, will include physician and nurse-led services such as growth monitoring, feeding and nutrition advice, developmental screening and vaccinations.

The Mother and Newborn well-ness check services will initially be offered to women who deliver at Sidra Medicine.

The service includes postnatal check-ups within 48 hours of the mother being discharged from Sidra Medicine.

Nurses will visit the patients at their home to check how they are adjusting with the baby including lactation support, feeding and weight check-ups.

The service will be expanded later in the year with additional care offerings, such as postpartum home visits for mothers who have delivered at other facilities.

Sidra Medicine is also extending its neonatal expertise by establishing a Special Care Baby Unit (SCBU) to expand its advanced Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) capabilities.

The unit is a Level 1 NICU and will provide short-term specialised care for newborns up to 28 days old.

The SCBU will accept newborns with conditions such as jaundice, potential infections, experiencing weight loss exceeding 10% of their birth weight, or anomalies requiring assessment and follow-up care.

"At the core of our healthcare approach is a strong commitment to science and innovation," said chief research officer Prof Khalid Fakhro. "As a research-driven institution, Sidra Medicine continues to advance precision medicine, leveraging scientific discovery and global collaborations to deliver more personalised and effective treatments."

"This approach is not only transforming individual patient outcomes but also raising the standard of healthcare for the future."

As part of its ongoing focus on accessibility and seamless care, Sidra Medicine is also enhancing the patient experience through its dedicated Sidra Medicine App.

The platform allows patients and families to easily manage appointments, access medical records, and stay connected with their care teams, ensuring continuity beyond the hospital setting.

WCM-Q Grand Rounds discusses link between oral, systemic health

The strong connection between oral and systemic health was discussed in the latest edition of Weill Cornell Medicine – Qatar (WCM-Q)'s Grand Rounds Live webinar series.

Dr Zainab Malaki, a consultant in periodontology at Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust (GSFT) and an honorary senior clinical lecturer at King's College London, delivered a presentation titled "Navigating the Link between the Mouth and Body".

The relationship between oral and systemic health, she said, is rooted in the understanding that the mouth is not separate from general health.

As a result, Dr Malaki said, conditions in the mouth, particularly gum disease, can both influence and be influenced by overall health.

Her presentation explored this connection, highlighting how periodontitis, a severe gum inflammation that can lead to tooth loss and other serious health complications, impacts systemic health.

Dr Malaki also examined whether this relationship reflects association or causation and discussed key modifiable risk factors, emphasising the importance of adopting a multidisciplinary, patient-centred approach to care.

"Periodontitis is a multifactorial condition that shares many risk factors with other inflammatory conditions within the body," she said.

"There is plenty of evidence to support that treating periodontitis may not only protect teeth but also safeguard overall health," Dr Malaki continued. "This includes conditions such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease (CVD)."

"Assessing for gum disease should be part of the wider multidisciplinary care for patients presenting with diabetes



Dr Zainab Malaki

or CVD," she stated. "Studies also support the importance of diet and nutrition. We have moved away from one-size-fits-all treatment to a more precise, personalised, and holistic approach to managing patients with periodontitis."

"Dental and medical teams should be encouraged and empowered to identify patients at risk," Dr Malaki said.

"In turn, patients and the public should be empowered to understand that bleeding gums may signal a deeper systemic risk," she continued. "They should also be made aware of the risks associated with periodontitis and other systemic conditions."

"The earlier these conditions are identified, the better they can be managed, helping to improve the quality of life for the patient and reducing the financial burden," the expert said.

The WCM-Q Grand Rounds are delivered by WCM-Q's Division of Continuing Professional Development and are aimed at physicians, nurses, dentists, pharmacists, allied health practitioners, students, researchers and educators.

The lecture series offers high-quality continuing medical education and professional development opportunities across a range of multidisciplinary topics.

It is followed by two weeks of tests and final evaluation. – QNA

QRCS to distribute 8,875 food parcels in Sudan

The Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) is proceeding with the humanitarian aid programme for the people of Sudan, with a new batch of food aid launched in co-operation with the Sudanese Red Crescent Society (SRCS), for the benefit of poor and affected families in three states.

Dr Salah al-Din Daak, head of the QRCS representative office in Sudan, said that the plan involves a total of 8,875 food parcels to be distributed over the coming few days, as follows: 5,000 in North Kordofan, 1,000 in River Nile, and 2,875 in White Nile.

The QRCS is raising funds from charity payers to distribute 8,442 diverse food parcels containing local staples to 50,652 poor and displaced beneficiaries in Sudan, at a cost of QR385 per parcel.

Donations can be made via the QRCS's website (<https://qrqs.qa>), mobile app (<https://qrqs.qa>), donor service number (66666364), home donation collection number (33998898), or donation boxes/ desks at malls and shopping centres.

'Legal Path to Labour Market 2026' initiative launched

The Justice and Labour Ministries and the Civil Service and Government Development Bureau (CGB) have launched the "Legal Path to the Labour Market 2026" initiative during a meeting organised with the participation of a number of job seekers who recently graduated in the legal field, as part of joint efforts aimed at qualifying national legal competencies and enhancing their professional readiness in line with Qatar National Vision 2030.

The director of the CGB's Nomination and Replacement Department, Dhabia Ahmed al-Buainain, said that this initiative provides an applied training path concerned with developing the legal capabilities of recent graduates, and pre-

paring them to engage in the work environment efficiently.

The acting director of the Rehabilitation and Skills Development Department at the Ministry of Labour, Mohammed al-Khulaifi, emphasised the importance of launching the initiative in light of the growing trend toward encouraging national cadres to pursue professional experiences in the private sector.


The director of the Centre for Legal and Judicial Studies at the Ministry of Justice, Dr Abdullah Hamad al-Khalidi, stressed the importance of qualifying cadres to enter the labour market with merit and efficiency, and to ensure that legal professionals possess the capabilities and skills necessary to conduct legal

work with the required quality and skills.

The initiative provides theoretical and practical training over three months, based on two main tracks, which include legal qualification for work in government agencies, and legal qualification for work in the private sector, with the number of trainees reaching 33 graduates of law colleges.

The initiative's training curriculum combines specialised knowledge with practical application, and covers topics including the drafting of legislation and contracts, the writing of legal memoranda, litigation procedures, and the analysis of legal texts.

It is followed by two weeks of tests and final evaluation. – QNA



قطر للطاقة
QatarEnergy

The General, Limited Tenders Committees and Supply Chain Department announces the following Tenders:

Important Notice:
Suppliers and Contractors who are already registered with QatarEnergy via Mushtaryat Portal can "Buy Tender Online and download Tender Document" from QatarEnergy website (Mushtaryat Portal). Effective from 1st July 2023, bids submitted by a Local company (companies incorporated in Qatar) acting as Tenderer in accordance with this Invitation to Tender, will not be accepted by QatarEnergy without any further notification, if such companies are not in possession of an ICV score in the ICV Portal (<https://icv.qa/en-US>) by the specified Original Tender Closing Date or Original due date for submission of COMMERCIAL Package in case of two stage Tendering as per ITT. However, any Local company that has been established within last two (2) years is exempt from this mandatory ICV certification requirement.

Sl. No	Tender Number	Tender Sale Period		Tender Closing Date	Tender Bond	Bond Curr.	Tender Fee	Fee Curr.
		Start Date	End Date					
1	LT26100900	06.04.2026	12.04.2026	04.05.2026	140,000.00	QAR	200.00	QAR
Title of Tender: UPGRADE OF PLC SYSTEMS AT HFO PLANT IN RLIC								
Mid-Tender Meeting Location: To be advised if required								
Mid-Tender Meeting Date & Time: To be advised if required								
2	GT26101800	06.04.2026	13.04.2026	24.05.2026	1,200,000.00	QAR	500.00	QAR
Title of Tender: COLLECTION AND DISPOSAL OF WASTES AND RELATED SERVICES AT DCA, RLIC, MIC, TD AND OCM								
Mid-Tender Meeting Location: To be advised if required								
Mid-Tender Meeting Date & Time: To be advised if required								

* Tender documents can be purchased and downloaded from QatarEnergy Website-> Supply Management -> Tenders page during the Tender Sale Period mentioned above against each Tender. Request for issuance of Tender after the specified Tender Sale Period will not be entertained.

* Always refer to QatarEnergy Website (www.qatarenergy.qa) -> Supply Management -> Tenders page for up to date information on QatarEnergy Tenders. Subscribe to Tender Alert to receive notification in your email on new Tenders

* Changes to Tender Sale Period and Bid Closing Date will be updated in QatarEnergy website/Mushtaryat Portal only.

* Brief Scopes of Work for the above tenders are posted on the QatarEnergy website/Mushtaryat Portal.

* Suppliers and Contractors who are in possession of a valid SAP ID issued by QatarEnergy are instructed to maintain their Company Registration and Communication details upto date and valid via QatarEnergy Mushtaryat Portal on urgent basis.

* No queries will be entertained, or bids received, from entities who have not purchased tender documents in compliance with the above provisions.

* QatarEnergy invites all prospective Suppliers and Contractors interested to participate in QatarEnergy Tenders to register online and obtain a QatarEnergy SAP Vendor Code, a mandatory requirement for the issue of Tender Documents by QatarEnergy.

* Prospective Qatar based Suppliers and Contractors interested to participate in future QatarEnergy Tenders shall obtain an ICV score. Relevant information pertaining to ICV, ICV Scorecard, ICV Certification, and ICV Guidelines are available on the ICV Digital Portal - <https://icv.qa/en-US>

Turkiye's Erdogan accuses Israel of undermining peace initiatives

AFP
Istanbul

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday accused Israel of undermining all efforts to halt the war in the Middle East, but said Ankara would continue to pursue any opportunity to advance a ceasefire.

"The Israeli government has continued to undermine all initiatives aimed at ending the war," Erdogan said following a weekly cabinet meeting in the Turkish capital.

"If there is even the slightest chance to silence the weapons and open space for negotiations, we are making sincere efforts to seize it," he added.

"Our hope is that this unlawful, senseless, illegitimate, and extremely costly war for all humanity will come to an end as soon as possible."

Erdogan also said Türkiye has stepped up diplomatic contacts to achieve a ceasefire.

"As the war drags on, we have warned that the fire could spread to other countries. As we leave behind the 38th day of the conflict, we unfortunately continue to carry the same concerns for our region," he said.

"In the face of increasing risks, I, as president, on one hand, and our ministers on the other, are accelerating our diplomatic contacts," he added.

Turkiye has attempted to mediate an end to the hostilities, notably through negotiations conducted with Pakistan and Egypt.

Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan yesterday met with the US ambassador to Türkiye, Tom Barrack, who called the meeting "productive".

"Türkiye's partnership continues to be vital as we work toward @POTUS's (Trump's) vision for a more secure region," the ambassador said on X, using Türkiye's official name.

Fidan also spoke on the phone with his Iranian counterpart to discuss "the course of war and other developments", a Turkish diplomatic source said.

Iran rejects ceasefire as Trump says entire country can be 'taken out'

- Tehran's response includes lifting sanctions, safe passage in Strait of Hormuz, reconstruction
- Trump threatens severe action if Iran does not agree to deal by deadline

Reuters
Dubai/Washington

Iran said yesterday it wanted a lasting end to the war with the US and Israel, and pushed back against pressure to reopen the Strait of Hormuz while US President Donald Trump warned the country could be "taken out" if it did not meet his deadline tonight to reach a deal.

Responding to a US proposal through mediator Pakistan, Tehran rejected a ceasefire and said a permanent end to the war was necessary, the official IRNA news agency reported.

The Iranian response consisted of 10 clauses, including an end to conflicts in the region, a protocol for safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz, lifting of sanctions and reconstruction, the agency added.

Trump, who has threatened to rain "hell" on Tehran if it did not make a deal by 8 pm EDT today (midnight GMT) to open the Strait of Hormuz, a vital route for global energy supplies, rejected the Iranian response and said his deadline was final.

At a news conference, Trump said Iran could be "taken out" in one night "and that night might be tomorrow night," referring to today. He vowed to destroy Iranian power plants and bridges, brushing off concerns that such actions would be a war crime or alienate Iran's 93mn people.

Without an agreement with Tehran, Trump said, "Every bridge in Iran will be decimated" by midnight EDT (0400 GMT) tomorrow and "every power plant in Iran will be out of business, burning, exploding, and never to be used again."

After the US and Israel attacked on February 28, Iran effectively closed Hormuz, a conduit for about a fifth of the world's oil and natural gas supply.

The waterway's stranglehold on the global economy has proved a powerful bargaining chip, and Tehran is reluctant to relinquish it too easily.



Emergency personnel work at the site of a projectile impact, as the US-Israel conflict with Iran continues, in Haifa, Israel, yesterday. (Reuters)



Heavy machinery operates next to damaged cars covered in debris at an impact site, following a barrage of missiles launched from Iran, in central Israel, yesterday. (Reuters)

The Pakistani-brokered framework for ending the war proposed an immediate ceasefire, followed by talks on a broader peace settlement to be concluded within 15 to 20 days, a source aware of the proposals said.

Iranian foreign ministry spokesperson Esmaeil Baghaei said Tehran's demands "should not be interpreted as a sign of compromise, but rather as a reflection of its confidence in defending its positions."

He added that earlier US demands, such as a 15-point plan, were rejected as "excessive".

At the news conference, Trump and Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth praised the successful weekend retrieval from Iran of a US airman whose jet was shot down on Friday.

Hegseth, who has faced scrutiny for outspokenly blending his evangelical religious faith with military operations, described the rescue in explicitly religious terms.

The rescue mission came amid rising concern about the nearly six-week-long war's effect on the global economy, including a sharp rise in fuel prices. The conflict has also hit Trump's approval ratings and intensified anxiety among Republicans



Iranian healthcare workers gather for a rally condemning attacks on health facilities by the US and Israel outside at Imam Khomeini Hospital in Tehran, yesterday. (AFP)

about November's midterm elections.

VOWS TO DESTROY INFRASTRUCTURE

Fresh aerial strikes were reported across the region yesterday. Hegseth said today would see even more.

Iranian state media said the Revolutionary Guards' intelligence chief, Majid Khademi, had died. Israel claimed responsibility for his death.

Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz threatened to destroy Iran's infrastructure and hunt down its leaders "one by one."

The Israeli military also said it had targeted Iran's air force through a series of strikes on the Bahram, Mehrabad, and Azmayesh airports. Iran said two of its petrochemical complexes were attacked. Emergency and firefighting teams brought a blaze under control at the South Pars complex in Asaluyeh, Iran's National Petrochemical Company said.

No casualties were reported.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the strike on the petrochemical facility in southern Iran was part of dismantling Iran's Revolutionary Guards "money machine". Experts have said strikes on civilian infrastructure such as power plants

and bridges would constitute war crimes. Trump said Iranians are "willing to suffer that in order to have freedom," saying that the US has intercepted messages asking for bombings. "They're saying, 'Please come back,'" he said.

FIGHTING BACK

Iranian weekend strikes on petrochemical facilities and an Israeli-linked vessel in Kuwait, Bahrain and the UAE underscored the country's ability to fight back despite Trump's repeated claims to have knocked out its missile and drone capabilities.

Israel saw a heavy day of rocket volleys yesterday, with the sounds of sirens and missile interception booms ringing out across the country throughout the day.

Israel's military told Reuters there had been 20 missile launches from Lebanon and five from Iran during the day. Several attacks resulted in impacts.

A missile hit Haifa overnight, killing four. This raised the war's death toll in Israel to 23, according to Israel's ambulance service.

Yemen's Houthis said yesterday that they also carried out missile and drone attacks against Israel.

Thousands of people have been killed across the Middle East in the Iran war, including 3,546 in Iran.

Israeli airstrike kills at least 10 near Gaza school as ceasefire strains

Reuters
Cairo/Gaza

An Israeli airstrike killed at least 10 people and wounded several others outside a school housing displaced Palestinians yesterday, health officials said, in the latest violence overshadowing the fragile US-backed Gaza ceasefire deal.

Before the strikes, some Palestinians had clashed with members of an Israeli-backed militia, who they said attacked the school in an attempt to abduct some people, medics and residents said.

In the midst of the clashes, east of the Maghazi refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip, Israeli drones fired two missiles into the area, killing at least 10 people and wounding several others, they added.

It was not immediately clear how many civilians had been killed in the strikes, which hit in a closely packed neighborhood of mostly displaced Palestinians.

Ahmed al-Maghazi, an eyewitness, said their area was attacked by members of the Israeli-backed militia who operate in the territory adjacent to where the Israeli forces are in control, before the militia opened fire.

"The residents tried to defend their homes, but the occupation forces targeted them directly," he told Reuters.

Later yesterday, a leader of one of the Israeli-backed militias said in a video, which Reuters couldn't immediately authenticate, that they killed some five Hamas members.

There was no immediate comment from Hamas, which brands those groups that operate in areas under Israeli control as "Israeli collaborators".

Earlier yesterday, an Israeli airstrike killed one Palestinian and wounded a child as they travelled on a motorbike in Gaza City, medics said.

Medics said that Israeli forces



Family members arrive outside the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir al-Balah, where victims have been brought following an Israeli strike on the Al-Maghazi refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip, yesterday. (AFP)



Palestinians inspect the damage after a person was hit by an Israeli strike while riding a bicycle, according to medics, in Gaza City, yesterday. (Reuters)

killed another Palestinian when they opened fire on a vehicle in central Gaza, taking yesterday's death toll to at least 12.

The Israeli military had no immediate comment on any of the three incidents yesterday.

The Palestinian group Hamas, which has run Gaza since 2007, and Israel have traded blame over violations of the ceasefire that kicked off in October.

The Gaza health ministry says Israeli fire has killed at least 700 people since the ceasefire began. Israel says four soldiers have been

killed by fighters in Gaza over the same period.

The violence comes as Hamas has continued to resist relinquishing its weapons, a major obstacle in talks to implement the next steps in US President Donald Trump's proposed peace plan for Gaza.

On Sunday, Hamas' armed wing said that discussing the group's disarmament before Israel fully implements the first phase of Trump's Gaza plan was an attempt to continue what it called a genocide against the Palestinian people.

Lebanon says Israeli strikes hit Beirut suburbs, country's south

AFP
Beirut

An Israeli airstrike yesterday hit the southern suburbs of Beirut, where Israel's army said it was targeting the Hezbollah group, as Lebanon reported more attacks in the country's south.

AFP TV footage showed smoke billowing across the skyline after the strike on the southern suburbs, a Hezbollah stronghold which has largely emptied of residents following repeated Israeli attacks and evacuation warnings.

Israel's army said it was "striking Hezbollah targets in Beirut" after previously warning it would hit the area.

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

Shortly before the warning, an AFP journalist in the southern suburbs had seen just a few shops open, as well as a gas station belonging to the Al-Amara fuel company that was destroyed in a previous raid. The Israeli army had announced targeting Al-Amara stations recently that were "controlled by Hezbollah".

Fresh portraits mourning Iran's former supreme leader Ali Khamenei, who was killed in the US-Israeli attacks on February 28 that triggered the war, were also visible along some roads.

The latest attacks came a day after the first reported strike on the town of Ain Saadeh, east of Beirut, which killed three people including two women, according to Lebanese authorities.

Among the dead were Pierre Mouawad, a local official in the Lebanese Forces, a party strongly opposed to Hezbollah, and his wife.

Samir Geagea, head of the Lebanese Forces, said yesterday that "the Israelis were targeting a member of the Quds Force", the Iranian Revolutionary Guards' foreign operations arm, but he did not seem to have been killed.



People walk past a damaged building following overnight Israeli strikes that targeted a neighbourhood in the southern Lebanese village of Burj Rahal yesterday. (AFP)

Israel's military said it had struck a "fighter target" east of Beirut and was reviewing the incident after "reports of casualties among Lebanese civilians not involved in the fighting".

In a statement, the Lebanese army said its investigation showed there were "no new tenants" in the targeted building.

"While it was discovered that a person was seen leaving the building on a motorcycle immediately after the attack, the investigation is ongoing to determine his identity and uncover further details."

In south Lebanon, the health ministry said four people were killed in an attack on a car in Kfar Rumman, near the city of Nabatiyeh.

The state-run National News Agency (NNA) also reported deadly strikes elsewhere in the country's south and east, including in the Tyre district village of Burj Rahal, where an AFP correspondent saw mangled metal and household items among the rubble of destroyed buildings.

"The preliminary toll is 15 homes damaged, which are no longer livable," said Burj Rahal mayor Daoud Ezzedine.

"The residents want to return home, but unfortunately they will not be able to."

Later, the Israeli military issued an evacuation warning for more

than 40 southern Lebanese towns. The NNA reported several strikes on the south.

Hezbollah announced attacks on Israeli targets in south Lebanon and across the border, including launching an advanced missile and attack drones at a base near the central city of Hadera.

Lebanon's health ministry said an Israeli attack killed a paramedic from the Hezbollah-allied Risala Scouts association yesterday.

It also said two paramedics from the Islamic Health Committee were killed in an Israeli strike a day earlier.

Lebanon says 1,497 people have been killed since the war erupted, including 57 health workers.

World Health Organisation chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on X that the WHO "has verified 92 attacks on health facilities, medical vehicles, personnel, and warehouses".

"These acts cannot become the new norm," he added.

On Sunday, a strike in the capital's Jnah neighbourhood hit near the country's largest public medical facility, killing five, the ministry said.

Israel's military chief Lieutenant General Eyal Zamir visited troops in southern Lebanon on Sunday and pledged to intensify strikes against Hezbollah.



Artemis astronauts break space distance record

AFP
Houston

The four astronauts embarking on NASA's lunar flyby became yesterday the humans to travel furthest from our planet, as they get set to view areas of the Moon never before seen by the naked eye.

The Artemis II team broke the previous record set by 1970's Apollo 13 mission, which they are expected to surpass by approximately 4,105 miles (6,606 kilometres) when they reach this journey's furthest distance from Earth — 252,760 miles (406,778 kilometres) — later today.

The astronauts are journeying around the Moon for a monumental flyby, in which they'll spend more than six hours analysing and documenting lunar surface features.

The NASA mission had swept earlier into the Moon's gravitational sphere of influence, meaning their spacecraft is in the natural satellite's neighbourhood, with lunar gravity outmuscling Earth's pull.

The Orion capsule is zipping around the Moon before U-turning and heading back to Earth in a so-called "free-return trajectory," a return-trip that will take about four days.

The astronauts began their landmark day with a message from the late Jim Lovell, who took part in the Apollo 8 and 13 missions and



This handout image released by NASA shows a fully illuminated view of the Moon, including the Orientale basin and parts of the far side not visible from Earth, yesterday. (AFP)

recorded the message shortly before his death.

"It's a historic day, and I know how busy you'll be, but don't forget to enjoy the view," the Artemis astronauts heard from Lovell.

"Welcome to my old neighbourhood," he said. "I'm proud to pass that torch on to you as you swing around the Moon."

Swooping around the far side of the Moon, the crew of four will witness previously hidden lunar territory — the sphere looming large through their capsule windows.

The Moon will appear to the astronauts "about the size of a basketball held at arm's length," Noah Petro, head of the US space

agency's planetary geology lab, told AFP.

Adding to the historic nature of the mission led by Reid Wiseman, the Artemis II crew includes several firsts.

Victor Glover will be the first person of colour to fly around the Moon, Christina Koch will be the first woman, and Canadian Jeremy Hansen the first non-American.

There will be a period of around 40 minutes during the flyby where all communication with Artemis II will be cut off as the astronauts pass behind the Moon.

"It'll be exciting, you know, in a slightly scary way, when they go behind the moon," Derek Buzasi, a professor of astronomy and astro-

physics at the University of Chicago, told AFP.

The astronauts have already started seeing features never previously glimpsed directly.

An image sent back by the crew showed the Moon's Orientale basin visible, a massive crater that before had only been viewed by orbiting, uncrewed cameras.

Near the end of their flyby, the astronauts will witness a solar eclipse, when the Sun will be behind the Moon.

Despite the technological advancements since the Apollo era, NASA still relies on the eyesight of its astronauts to learn more about the Moon.

"The human eye is basically the best camera that could ever or will ever exist," Kelsey Young, the lead scientist for the Artemis II mission, told AFP. "The number of receptors in the human eye far outweighs what a camera is able to do."

And while the Orion crew will still be at a substantial distance from the Moon, their flyby is key to preparing for a later crewed mission to the planet's surface itself.

"We're going to learn an awful lot about the spacecraft," NASA administrator Jared Isaacman told CNN on Sunday.

The information will be "pretty paramount to set up for subsequent missions like Artemis III in 2027 and, of course, the lunar landing itself on Artemis IV in 2028," he added.

Trump proposes to cut 9,400 TSA workers, \$1.5bn from budget

Reuters
Washington

The White House is proposing to cut more than 9,400 workers and just over \$1.5bn from the 60,000-employee Transportation Security Administration that handles airport security operations, according to budget documents.

The details were part of a budget document for the Department of Homeland Security, which oversees TSA, that is part of the White House budget proposal for the next fiscal year.

Congress will hold hearings on the White House budget request later this month as lawmakers aim to reach a new budget deal before the fiscal year ends on September 30. Some Republican lawmakers have pushed to privatise TSA completely.

The budget details were unrelated to the funding impasse in Congress over DHS for the current year, which has caused airport delays as TSA workers went without paychecks.

President Donald Trump on Friday proposed requiring smaller airports to use private security in place of TSA as a first step toward privatising the agency created after the

September 11, 2001, attacks. The White House said this change would cut the TSA payroll by more than 4,500 jobs. The TSA proposes to cut another 4,800 jobs by improving efficiency, ending staffing at exit lanes and eliminating redundancies.

The employee cuts would save more than \$500mn in agency costs.

The proposal would cut the agency's \$7.8bn budget by about 20% and comes after TSA has lost more than 1,600 workers during government funding disruptions last fall and this spring.

About 50,000 security screeners at US airports are TSA employees.

Trump has been critical of the TSA. He fired its head, David Pekoske, on his first day in office in 2025 and has never nominated a replacement.

Last year, the White House said it wanted funding cut for the TSA by \$247mn, saying the "TSA has consistently failed audits while implementing intrusive screening measures that violate Americans' privacy and dignity".

The Biden administration had increased the size of the TSA. The TSA screened 904mn passengers in 2024, which was a record high and a 5% increase over 2023.

US Democratic lawmakers visit Cuba

Reuters
Havana

Two Democrats from the US House of Representatives visited Cuba last week, the first such delegation to go to the island this year since US president Donald Trump imposed a de facto oil blockade in a bid to bring Cuba's communist-run government to its knees.

Congressional representatives Pramila Jayapal, a leading member of the progressive wing of the Democratic Party, and Jonathan Jackson, a Democrat with a long interest in Cuba, said they had come to "see the suffering that is happening on the ground" as a result of Trump's fuel embargo, which they called "an illegal blockade of energy supplies."

The lawmakers' visit comes at a time of unprecedented tension in the decades-long frosty relationship between the US and Cuba. The Trump administration has closed the tap on remittances to Cuba, threatened to slap tariffs on countries that provide oil to the island and placed it on a list of nations that sponsor terrorism.

"This is the most sanctioned part of Planet Earth right now, just 90 miles off our shores," Jackson told a small group of reporters at a privately-owned hostel near Havana's waterfront. "Let's bring the rhetoric down. People are suffering. And they are suffering for no good reason."

The lawmakers said their five day trip, which ended on Sunday, included meetings with President Miguel Diaz-Canel, Cuban lawmakers and top officials at Cuba's foreign ministry.

Both nations have acknowledged they have begun talking, though few details of those discussions have been made public.



Jonathan Jackson (D-IL) and Pramila Jayapal (D-WA), opposition lawmakers from the US House of Representatives, pose for a photograph on the seafront boulevard Malecon, in Havana. (Reuters)

"There has been dialogue — the beginnings of dialogue," Jayapal said following meetings with top Cuban officials. "I don't think it's reached the state of negotiation that we were told. But I think there is a desire to ensure that there is a real negotiation...about what needs to happen in order for the situation to change."

The lawmakers said they were saddened after visiting an oncology unit and a maternity ward in Havana hospitals that have been deteriorating for decades but have been particularly hard hit by Trump's fuel blockade. Trump recently said he expected to have the "honour" of "taking Cuba in some form" and that "I can do anything I want" with the neighbouring country.

Despite such threats, Trump did not take action to stop a Russian tanker that last week delivered 700,000 barrels of desperately needed crude oil to Cuba.

"President Trump saw in his heart to let the Russian ship come in, whatever changed his heart we are grateful for," Jackson said.

The Democratic lawmakers also

praised Cuba for recent gestures of apparent goodwill.

Cuba last month invited exiles to invest in businesses on the island, invited the FBI to investigate an illegal incursion by sea that left five dead off Cuba's north coast and most recently, said it would pardon upwards of 2,000 prisoners.

"There are a number of things that indicate that the moment is here for us to have a real negotiation between our two countries and to reverse failed US policy of decades, a Cold War era remnant, that no longer serves the American people or the Cuban people," Jayapal said.

She said Democrats would continue to push for bills that ensure the US does not go to war with Cuba, and would push to lift sanctions she said were ineffective.

Jackson said the duo believed anything short of compromise would lead only to bigger problems. "We can either help (the Cuban) people stay at home and live a healthy normal life, or there's going to be a huge migration coming towards the US," Jackson said. "People will not simply stay here, suffer and die."

Venezuela's government, opposition may co-operate to safeguard US assets

Reuters
New York

Venezuela's government and its political opposition are seeking to co-ordinate their legal defence of the oil-rich country's US assets, after Washington's official recognition of interim President Delcy Rodriguez raised questions about who could represent the country in US courts.

Lawyers for Rodriguez's government and the opposition asked Manhattan-based US Magistrate Judge Sarah Netburn yesterday to pause for 45 days a case in which creditors are seeking to seize funds linked to state oil company Petroleos de Venezuela while they determined who would represent Venezuela's interests.

The letter signalled potential co-operation between the opposition and Rodriguez's government in the safeguarding of US assets including Houston-based oil refiner Citgo Petroleum from creditors, including holders of debt issued by PDVSA and Venezuela's government, companies whose Venezuelan assets were expropriated, and victims of acts of alleged terrorism.

Venezuela's information ministry, which handles media requests on the government's behalf, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Relations between the opposition and Venezuela's socialist government have long been acrimonious. The opposition has controlled US assets including Citgo since 2019, when Washington first imposed sanctions

on PDVSA in a bid to pressure now-jailed President Nicolas Maduro to leave office.

Washington in March recognised Rodriguez as Venezuela's leader, following the capture of Maduro by US forces. She is now preparing to take over the boards of PDVSA's US subsidiaries including Citgo, Reuters reported on April 1, citing four people close to the preparations.

The US recognition of Rodriguez's government prompted Netburn to ask the parties to the lawsuit to clarify who had authority to represent Venezuela in court.

Netburn yesterday granted the request to pause the case. Lawyers for the government and opposition are expected to update her on the selection of a lawyer to permanently represent Venezuela's interests by May 21.

In El Salvador's mass trials, 'the innocent pay for the guilty'

AFP
Soyapango

Wearing white uniforms, their heads shaved, rows of bewildered-looking men are beamed by video link from prisons across El Salvador into a courtroom conducting a mass trial of alleged gang members.

Four years after President Nayib Bukele declared war against gangs in the Central American nation, the fates of thousands of prisoners are being decided en masse with the single swing of a judge's gavel.

Williams Diaz, a 35-year-old air conditioning technician, is one of more than 91,000 people rounded up under a state of emergency — in place since 2022 — who will be judged with scores of others in a faceless court by an anonymous judge.

He was arrested by soldiers over three years ago while on his way to work and taken to Bukele's showpiece Terrorism Confinement Center (CECOT), a brutal prison where over 10,000 suspected gang members are crammed into overcrowded cells.

His mother Gladis Villatoro fears that her Williams, the father of a six-year-old boy, will be tainted when he goes on trial for alleged membership of one of the gangs that terrorised El Salvador before Bukele's crackdown.

"If they convict one, they convict the whole lot...the innocent will pay for the guilty," Villatoro, who sells tortillas for a living,



A woman holds a sign demanding the release of her relatives detained under the state of exception during a gathering for International Women's Day in San Salvador. (AFP)

said at her modest home 20 kilometres (12 miles) east of the capital San Salvador.

A short drive away, Reynaldo Santos, a soft-spoken 58-year-old baker, fears his son Jonathan could also be sent to prison for years without getting a chance to defend himself.

Jonathan, a 24-year-old factory worker, was arrested at home while playing the wildly popular video game Fortnite, which police said denoted a penchant for gang activities.

He was released pending trial, but he could be rearrested at any time.

"It's like Russian roulette, it's a nightmare," his father said.

Bukele's mass incarceration policy has seen around 1.4% of El Salvador's population locked up without due process, creating a logistical headache for the country's courts.

In an attempt to clear the

backlog, the Attorney General's Office vowed to accelerate the mass trials begun in 2024, cloaked in secrecy, by finalising 3,000 indictments in the first three months of 2026.

Human rights groups have expressed outrage over the trials, arguing that collective justice violates the defendants' rights to a fair trial.

Vice-President Felix Ulloa has touted the approach as "innovative."

But the stakes for the accused, mostly from low-income families, couldn't be higher.

Last week, El Salvador's Legislative Assembly increased the maximum sentence for "terrorists" — which the government labels gang members — from 60 years to life imprisonment, including for minors.

Ulloa said sentences would vary, according to the defendant's rank within an alleged gang cell.

ANNOUNCEMENT

I, MOHAMMAD MOFIS MOFIS

holder of

Bangladesh Passport No. EJ0766533
QID No. 28705006266

hereby change my name

from

MOHAMMAD MOFIS MOFIS

to

MD MOFIS EBIDUR RAHAMAN

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

ANNOUNCEMENT

I, SABIHA FURQAN SANGE

holder of

INDIA Passport No. V9546158
QID No. 27935600357

hereby change my name

from

SABIHA FURQAN SANGE

to

SABIHA SANALLAH GHARATKAR

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

Chile's Kast touts 'historic' alliance with Argentina's Milei

AFP
Santiago

Chile's hardline President Jose Antonio Kast yesterday touted his "historic" alliance with Argentina's firebrand leader Javier Milei after talks in Buenos Aires between the two leaders of Latin America's resurgent right.

Kast took office last month as Chile's most right-wing leader in three decades, swept to power by voter anger over a surge in organised crime and illegal migration.

His first foreign visit as president took him across the Andes to Argentina to meet with Milei, a close ally of US President Donald Trump.

Kast later described their talks, which focused on co-operation on tourism, trade, investment and mining, as "a historic moment of integration."

Milei shared an X post from his libertarian party, La Libertad Avanza, which said the visit was proof that "the right is advancing in Latin America!!!"

Kast and Milei have emerged as a counterweight to Brazil's left-wing president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, one of the few remaining left-wing leaders on the continent.



Chile's President Jose Antonio Kast (left) speaks with Argentina's President Javier Milei on the balcony of the Casa Rosada government palace after a meeting, in Buenos Aires yesterday. (AFP)

They had previously met after Kast's election victory in December, posing together with a chainsaw — a symbol of the budget cuts implemented by Milei which Kast wants to emulate in Chile.

Kast, who succeeded the left-wing Gabriel Boric, was elected on a promise to crack down on migration, which Chileans blame for a surge in violent crime in recent years. Yesterday, he said his administration would begin expelling irregular migrants "in the coming weeks and months."

His visit to Buenos Aires comes days after a failed attempt to arrest elderly Chilean left-wing guerrilla Galvarino Apablaza in Argentina.

Apablaza, who had political refugee status in Argentina from 2010 until it was revoked by the courts in February, is accused of participating in the 1991 assassination of Chilean right-wing senator Jaime Guzman. In the past week, Argentine police have sought to arrest him but failed to locate him. "This is someone who is seeking to evade justice," Kast declared.

Bolivia shifts to market reforms

Reuters
La Paz

Bolivia's government rolled out a series of reforms yesterday as part of a broad effort the president said would "put the house in order" by lifting financial controls and cracking down on what it called corrupt state contracting. President Rodrigo Paz ended nearly two decades of leftist rule when he took office last November on promises to open parts of the economy to private investment and close loss-making state firms in order to reverse a deepening economic crisis.

Yesterday, Paz and top ministers

said at a press conference the government was annulling 161 decrees they said constituted a system of corrupt direct contracting and allegedly allowed officials to award contracts to friends, relatives, or party members without oversight, worth \$96m and leading to abandoned projects, such as hospitals and schools.

"Direct contracting, in many cases, became equal to direct corruption," Paz said.

Paz's predecessor, former president Luis Arce, is in pre-trial detention as he is investigated for alleged embezzlement while serving as economy minister under ex-president Evo Morales. Arce has said he is innocent of the accusa-

tions, which he says were made for political reasons.

Paz's Economy Minister Jose Gabriel Espinoza said yesterday the government was lifting restrictions on using Bolivian credit and debit cards for purchases abroad and on digital platforms.

Espinoza said lifting the restrictions was a strategic move designed to bring US dollars back into Bolivia's formal banking system by re-integrating Bolivia with the global economy and to make the banking system a more attractive and reliable channel, including for receiving money from abroad.

Bolivia's dwindling foreign currency reserves have triggered acute shortages of fuel and US dollars.



Have an idea or project?

Brand your business with us

Make your business unforgettable and stand out from the competition.

Anyone who wants to take their business to the next level—whether you're just starting, looking to build, or aiming to grow bigger and better in any industry.

Get your business noticed in our Tuesday Spotlight!

Contact us on gtadv@gulf-times.com or 444 666 21



MOGU MOGU

FUN STARTS HERE

NO.1 NATA DE COCO

READY TO DRINK JUICE

WITH MORE THAN 90 COUNTRIES SELLING WORLDWIDE

Authorized Distributor:
Al Maya International W.L.L. Qatar
Tel: +974 44416441/44410990
Fax: +974 44319170
Doha, State of Qatar
almaya.qatar@almaya.com

When Design Meets Neuroscience: Multiversity Research Explores Lighting's Impact on Autism

Findings reveal how different lighting conditions trigger distinct brain responses, offering new insights for inclusive learning and healthcare environments

Virginia Commonwealth School of the Arts Qatar (VCUarts Qatar) is redefining the role of art and design in scientific discovery, leading research with Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar (WCM-Q) that uses neuroimaging and virtual reality to explore the impact of different environments on autistic learners.

"Our work sits at the intersection of design, neuroscience, and behavioral science," explained Dr. Cherif Amor, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at VCUarts Qatar and they study's principal investigator. "For decades, decisions in architecture and interior design have been based on perception and preference - how people say they feel in a space. With this research, we are going deeper to understand what is actually happening in the brain while individuals experience an environment."

The study builds on the foundation of design and behavioral science research that has already shown that neurodiverse learners are particularly sensitive to interior environmental conditions like light, color, sound, and proxemics.

"By measuring cognitive activity in real-time and in response to different lighting spectrums, we can begin to develop evidence-based design strategies that move beyond subjective feedback. What we learned about how design triggers certain brain activity will inform how we create environments, classrooms, in this case, that genuinely support learning and wellbeing," Dr. Amor said.

The research is backed by the VCU Quest Fund, an internal grant program that gives faculty the opportunity to transform creative inquiry into solutions that advance various sectors, including health, education, and society.

It benefited from a cross-disciplinary collaboration between VCUarts Qatar, WCM-Q, and Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia. Staci Carr, PhD, an expert in Developmental and Cognitive Psychology at the VCU Center on Transition Innovations, contributed her knowledge in Functional Behavioral Assessment and Learning Disabilities. Haithem A. El-Hammali, PhD, an Assistant Professor of Interior Design at VCUarts Qatar, brought his expertise in Virtual Reality and Building Information Modeling to the project. Additionally, Dr. Ryad Ghanam and Dr. Ed Boone, both professors of Mathematics respectively at VCUQ and VCU, provided critical support



in statistical and psychometric data analysis, grounding the research in strong quantitative methods.

The study itself investigated how fluorescent lighting's Correlated Color Temperature (CCT) - warm white, cool white, daylight and achromatic (no hue) - affects cognitive and behavioral responses in autistic individuals.

Autistic participants carried out tasks in immersive VR classrooms set under different lighting conditions, while their brain activity was monitored using an EEG headset. The tasks ranged from math-based problems to test logical and analytical processing; reading passages and answering questions to measure focus, retention, and understanding; and problem-solving tasks that required decision-making and sustained attention.

Results showed that cool white lighting enhanced prefrontal cortex activity, linked to attention and executive functioning. Daylight and warm white color temperatures showed less activity in the prefrontal cortex and actually induced stress, which could in turn inhibit cognitive processing in autistic individuals. Influenced synchronized visual-cognitive processing across brain regions.

Dr. Ghizlane Bendriss, Assistant Professor of Biology at Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar and co-principal investigator of the study explained that because autism is a spectrum disorder, a wide range of responses to light intensity and color temperature is expected. However, she emphasized that: "The use of EEG was particularly valuable, as it provided a direct, objective measure of how sensory stimulation affected neural processing."

"EEG in sensory studies generates a vast amount of complex data influenced by multiple confounding variables, and the use of advanced AI and statistical approaches represents a major advantage that can help move this field forward."

Ultimately these results highlighted what researchers at VCUarts Qatar have long believed: that design choices are not just superficial, they have the power to influence how people feel, think, and function. It provides the foundational data that can guide architects, designers, and healthcare professionals in creating supportive built environments.

"Our next step is to expand this paradigm by comparing the results of neurodiverse and neurotypical participants and testing additional environmental variables, not just lighting," said Dr.

Amor. "With advances in neurotechnology, we can build a stronger scientific foundation for design decisions to develop evidence-based guidelines that inform architecture, interior design, and lighting sources and fixtures manufacturers."

The study was recently presented at the Academy of Neuroscience for Architecture's 20th Anniversary Conference (ANFA 2025), and the World Congress on Health and Design (WCDH 2025), leading global venues where architecture and neuroscience intersect. It builds on earlier work that Dr. Amor and his collaborators shared at the Medical Humanities in the Middle East Conference in Doha in 2018, which was later published in Innovations in Global Health Professions Education (2019). Related strands of this research have also been featured in the Health Environments Research & Design Journal.

"Arts and design-centered research has always had the power to drive meaningful change across sectors," said Dr. Diane Derr, Associate Dean for Research and Development. "This project, showcased internationally and most recently during VCUarts Qatar Week 2025 alongside other groundbreaking initiatives from our Qatar faculty, highlights our commitment to research that delivers real-world impact."



Rights group files 'genocide' complaint against Myanmar leader: Indonesian AG

AFP
Jakarta

Rohingya representatives and a rights group filed a complaint yesterday with Indonesia's attorney-general (AG) against Myanmar's president-elect Min Aung Hlaing for alleged rights abuses against the minority group, the prosecutor's office in Jakarta told AFP.

Myanmar's military, which grabbed power in a 2021 coup, has for decades been accused of rights abuses, mostly targeting the country's ethnic minorities including the Rohingya.

The complaint was filed in Indonesia by a Rohingya woman who had fled from Myanmar, and other figures including Indonesia's former attorney general Marzuki Darusman and repre-

sentatives of local rights group KontraS, the office's spokesman Anang Supriatna told AFP.

"They came to deliver a complaint of crimes against humanity and genocide committed against the Rohingya people in Myanmar by the military junta government" including Min Aung Hlaing, Anang said.

The office will forward the complaint to a division of the attorney-general's office that specialises in serious crimes, he added.

Indonesian law gives the country's courts "universal jurisdiction" over cases that involve serious crimes committed elsewhere in the world.

The world's largest Muslim-majority country has for years been receiving Rohingya refugees as thousands risk their lives on long and dangerous sea journeys to reach Indonesia or Malaysia.

Vietnam parliament convenes to confirm new leaders

AFP
Hanoi

Lawmakers in Vietnam re-elected Tran Thanh Man as chairman of the National Assembly yesterday, giving him a second term as head of the country's top legislative body.

The appointment came as deputies opened a new session in which they will confirm other top state leaders including the president and prime minister — posts already selected by the ruling Communist Party but not yet announced.

Top leader To Lam, who was reaffirmed as the party's general secretary in January, is also widely expected to become president.

His presidency would unify leadership of the party and the state as President Xi Jinping did in neighbouring China. Vietnam's 500-seat National Assembly serves mainly to ratify decisions made by



Vietnam's newly elected National Assembly Chairman Tran Thanh Man takes his oath during the opening session of the National Assembly in Hanoi yesterday. (AFP)

the party, although it occasionally amends proposed legislation.

Its members were elected last month in a vote that saw the Communist Party win nearly 97% of seats. The newly elected delegates

other main "pillars" of Vietnam's collective leadership structure.

Lam has implemented dramatic changes in nearly two years at the helm, slashing bureaucratic red tape and pushing major infrastructure investments as he aims to boost economic growth.

He called on lawmakers to adopt a "development-oriented approach" in a speech to the National Assembly on Monday, urging them to speed up decision-making and eliminate "bottlenecks".

"The nation that proactively implements strategic reforms, promptly reforms its institutions, unleashes creativity, mobilises the resources of its entire population, and seizes new opportunities will rise and develop," he said.

Lam would be the first leader to have secured the top two jobs at a party congress, rather than stepping in following an officeholder's death. The prime minister will also be confirmed by lawmakers' votes.

S Korea president says regrets 'reckless' drones sent to North

AFP
Seoul

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung expressed regret to Pyongyang yesterday over drones sent into North Korea earlier this year, actions he called "irresponsible".

Seoul initially denied any official role in the January drone incursion — with authorities suggesting it was the work of civilians — but Lee said a probe had revealed government officials had been involved.

The North warned in February of a "terrible response" if it detects more drones crossing the border from the South, prompting Seoul to investigate the claims.

Pyongyang said it downed a drone carrying "surveillance equipment" in early January.

Photos released by state media showed the wreckage of a winged craft scattered across the ground alongside grey and blue components that allegedly included cameras. "It has been confirmed that a National Intelligence Service official and an active-duty soldier were involved," Lee told a cabinet meeting.



Combo image shows wreckage of a drone that North Korea claims originated from South Korea, and brought down by specialised electronic warfare assets after violating North Korean airspace. (AFP/File Photo)

"We express regret to the North over the unnecessary military tensions caused by the irresponsible and reckless actions of some individuals," he added that South Korea's constitution bans private individuals from conducting acts that could "provoke the North".

"Such actions, even when deemed necessary for national

strategy, must be approached with extreme caution," he said.

Lee has sought to repair ties with North Korea since taking office last year, criticising his predecessor for allegedly sending drones to scatter propaganda over Pyongyang. His repeated overtures, however, have gone unanswered by the North.

Former South Korean president

Yoon Suk-yeol, is standing trial over charges that his administration sent drones into the North to provoke a backlash and create a pretext for declaring martial law.

Yoon was impeached and ousted from office in April last year and has been sentenced to life in prison over his declaration of martial law.

Lee's expression of regret follows North Korean leader Kim Jong-un labelling Seoul as the "most hostile state" in a policy address in March in which he vowed to "thoroughly reject and disregard it".

Kim also reaffirmed his commitment to maintaining the country's nuclear arsenal, describing it as an "irreversible course".

During Yoon's presidency, relations between Seoul and Pyongyang hit rock bottom, with the North sending balloons filled with garbage, including animal manure, in response to propaganda leaflets sent northward by South Korea-based activists, many of them North Korean defectors.

The two Koreas technically remain at war, as the 1950-53 conflict ended in an armistice rather than a peace treaty, and both enforce mandatory military service for men.

Indonesia raises jet fuel surcharge, flight ticket prices

AFP
Jakarta

Indonesia announced yesterday a 28-percentage point rise in the surcharge on jet fuel, and said it will allow airlines to raise the domestic ticket price, which the government caps, by up to 13%.

As global oil prices soar on the back of the Middle East war, Economy Minister Airlangga Hartarto told reporters the jet fuel surcharge would rise from 10-38%, and the base ticket price between nine and 13%.

Southeast Asia's largest low-cost carrier AirAsia X said yesterday it, too, was raising ticket prices and cutting routes to cushion the impact of the war on Iran.

In Jakarta, Airlangga said the government would bear the 11% value added tax on domestic flight tickets to offset the impact of the price rise on travellers.

"The amount of subsidy given by the government is around 1.3tn rupiah (about \$76mn) per month," the minister said.

The measures would be re-evaluated after two months, he added, depending on whether "the war in the Middle East continues".

Global crude prices have soared to more than \$100 per barrel since the US and Israel unleashed a series of strikes on Iran on February 28, sparking a region-wide conflict and the effective closure of the crucial Strait of Hormuz.

At Jakarta's Soekarno-Hatta International Airport, the price

of jet fuel for domestic flights has increased more than 70% since March, according to the website of state oil company Pertamina.

For international flights, the price has nearly doubled.

The government insisted Monday it would not cut its subsidy on domestically-consumed gasoline and natural gas, however.

The subsidy covers about 30-40% of the cost for consumers and consumes a large chunk of the annual budget in Southeast Asia's most populous nation.

Jakarta's 2026 fuel subsidy calculation was premised on a global oil price of \$70 per barrel, and the government is legally required to keep the fiscal deficit at no more than 3.0% of GDP.

"With savings here and there, we can ensure that the deficit will still be around 2.9%," Finance Minister Purbaya Yudhi Sadewa said at the same news conference Monday.

"I want to emphasise that the subsidised fuel price will not be raised until the end of the year. And my budget is adequate."

Airlangga also announced the government would eliminate the import duty on aircraft spare parts in a bid to lower airline operational costs.

Jakarta last month announced fuel rationing and mandated work from home for civil servants as it seeks to conserve energy stocks.

Several Asian airlines have raised their fuel surcharges, and many worldwide have upped fares to reflect the increase in jet fuel prices.

N Korea leader's sister says Seoul's regret on drones 'wise behaviour'

The powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un said yesterday regret expressed by Seoul over a January drone incursion into the North is "wise behaviour".

"The ROK president personally expressed regret and talked about a measure for preventing recurrence. Our government appreciated it as very fortunate and wise behaviour for its own sake."

Kim Yo-jong said in a statement carried by the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), using the official name of South Korea.

Seoul initially denied any official role in the Janu-

ary drone incursion — with authorities suggesting it was the work of civilians — but Lee said a probe had revealed government officials had been involved.

The North warned in February of a "terrible response" if it detects more drones crossing the border from the South, prompting Seoul to investigate the claims.

Pyongyang said it downed a drone carrying "surveillance equipment" in early January.

Photos released by state media showed the wreckage of a winged craft scattered across the

ground alongside grey and blue components that allegedly included cameras.

Kim Yo-jong said her brother had taken Lee's remark "as a manifestation of a frank and broad-minded man's attitude", but warned Seoul to "stop any reckless provocation against the DPRK and refrain from any attempt at contact", using the initials of the North's official name.

"The ROK side should be mindful that it will be forced to pay a price... if such a provocation as violating the inalienable sovereignty of our state occurs again," she warned. (AFP)

South Korea to send ships to Saudi Red Sea port to avoid Hormuz

South Korea will send five Korean-flagged ships to the Saudi Arabian Red Sea port of Yanbu to help establish alternative oil supply routes to avoid the disruption in the Strait of Hormuz, a ruling MP said yesterday. The situation has prompted Seoul to prepare emergency measures, including a fuel price

cap — the first such step since 1997. "Korean-flagged vessels need to be dispatched to alternative routes" to secure crude supplies using export routes that bypass the Strait of Hormuz, lawmaker Ahn Do-geol told reporters after a meeting with relevant agencies, including the energy ministry. (AFP)

Japan bereaved family sues over 'hostage justice'

AFP
Tokyo

The family of a wrongfully arrested Japanese man who died while in prolonged pre-trial detention sued the state yesterday, seeking to hold judges accountable for repeatedly denying him bail.

This is the latest in a series of lawsuits challenging Japan's criminal justice system that critics say doesn't always presume innocence and relies heavily on coerced confessions.

In March 2020, Japanese authorities arrested three executives of machinery maker Ohkawara Kakohki for allegedly exporting to China industrial spray dryers deemed convertible to military equipment.

During months-long investigations and detention of the trio, one of them, Shizuo Aishima, was denied bail repeatedly despite being diagnosed with stomach cancer.

Eleven months into his detention, the engineer died at age 72.

A few months after his death, prosecutors dropped the case, including against the other two defendants.

The saga has gained notoriety, with law enforcement apologising

and a court ruling that the police investigations were illegal and ordering damages be paid to the firm.

"My husband mumbled to me from his cell, 'is this really the way a human being should be treated?'" his widow, who is withholding her name for privacy concerns, told a news conference after filing the suit.

"I want to know the reason why they kept rejecting bail to someone who was terminally ill," she said.

With her and her two sons as its plaintiffs, the case argues more than 30 judges who kept warranting his detention were complicit in Japan's so-called "hostage justice".

Campaigners say lengthy pre-trial confinement is meted out too easily in Japan and that unless suspects confess, judges are unlikely to approve bail.

This is because judges "see confessions as the behaviour of someone who has accepted what they did and therefore has no motive to destroy evidence or flee", Takashi Takano, lead lawyer for the lawsuit, told reporters.

In Aishima's case, 37 judges were involved in denying him bail, pointing to "structural and organisational problems inherent in the criminal justice system", a complaint for the case read.

The justice ministry, meanwhile, argues on its website the "Japanese criminal justice system does not force confessions by unduly holding suspects and defendants in custody".

Japan has "strict requirements and procedures" in place for holding suspects and defendants in custody, "with due consideration given to the guarantee of human rights", it says.

Aishima's family is seeking 170mn yen (\$1.1mn) in damages.

"Hostage justice" is a term popularised by ex-Nissan chief Carlos Ghosn's months-long, 2018-2019 detention and has been repeatedly decried by international rights bodies.

Another case in point is Iwao Hakamada, once the world's longest-serving death-row inmate. His convictions — quashed in 2024 — relied partly on confessions made during what the Supreme Court ruled were "inhuman" interrogations.

Recent years have seen others initiate lawsuits to raise awareness of the issue, including ex-chairman of major Japanese publishing house Kadokawa who was arrested and indicted in 2022 over bribery charges related to the Olympics hosted a year earlier.

Thailand's new cabinet members



Thailand's Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul (front) and members of the new cabinet arrive for a group photo session before being sworn in to office at Government House in Bangkok yesterday. (AFP)

Seoul says 'credible intelligence' indicates N Korean leader's daughter is successor

Reuters
Seoul

South Korea's spy agency now believes North Korean leader Kim Jong-un's teenage daughter has been positioned as his successor, lawmakers said yesterday, citing a recent public display of her driving a tank that was likely intended to dispel any doubts.

The National Intelligence Service (NIS) told lawmakers its assessment was not based on circumstantial inference but on what it described as "credible intelligence" collected by the agency, according to briefings by ruling and opposition party members after a closed-door parliamentary meeting.

The NIS said the imagery of the daughter driving a tank was intended to highlight her supposed military aptitude and dispel doubts over a female heir, lawmakers said.

North Korea's state-run media KCNA last month published photos of Kim and his daughter driving a new tank, following earlier images showing her firing a rifle at a shooting range and using a handgun.

Such scenes are intended to pay "homage" to Kim's own public military appearances during the early 2010s when he was being prepared to succeed his own father, ruling Democratic Party lawmaker Park Sun-won said.

The latest assessment of Kim's daughter, who is believed to be around 13 and to be named Ju-ae, is a progression from earlier analysis by the spy agency which



North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and his daughter Kim Ju-ae ride a tank during what North Korean state news agency KCNA reports is an offensive tactical drill involving a new type of tank, at a training base in Pyongyang, North Korea. (Reuters/File Photo)

said she was likely being groomed to succeed her father.

Ju-ae's repeated presence at defence-related events is aimed at easing doubts over a female successor and accelerating the construction of a succession narrative, the lawmakers said, citing the NIS.

Lawmakers have previously said the agency believes her increasingly prominent role suggests she is already being treated as the de facto second-highest figure in the North's leadership.

People Power Party lawmaker Lee Seong-kweun said the NIS noted that suggestions Kim's younger sister Kim Yo-jong

might be unhappy about the focus on Ju-ae were misplaced, as Kim Yo-jong does not hold independent power.

Some North Korea experts, however, urged caution in interpreting the images as definitive succession signals.

Hong Min, an analyst at the Korea Institute for National Unification, said Ju-ae's tank appearance alone was insufficient to conclude she had been confirmed as Kim's heir, noting she appeared alongside her father rather than independently, unlike Kim Jong-un's own solo military appearances during his grooming phase.

Indian court turns down request to pause Adani's real estate deal

Reuters
New Delhi

India's top court yesterday rejected billionaire Anil Agarwal-led Vedanta's plea to pause the acquisition by Adani group of a bankrupt real estate giant, which includes a \$4bn pool of prized assets including India's only Formula One track. Agarwal's Vedanta is fighting in courts against the decision of a lenders' panel to give the assets of bankrupt Jaiprakash Associates to fellow tycoon Gautam Adani's group, setting up a battle between billionaires for assets including homes, power, cement plants and the Buddh International Circuit track near New Delhi.

Vedanta's challenge in the Supreme Court was declined as the judges said a lower tribunal was fit to hear the concerns of the group, and the top court does not need to interfere in the proceedings.

Vedanta argues that its \$1.8bn bid was better, but the lenders' panel decided in Adani's favour as its \$1.5bn bid had higher upfront payments.

The acquisition could boost Adani group's real estate plans, which include its other key projects in Mumbai, including the redevelopment of one of Asia's largest slums, Dharavi.

Adani's son, Karan Adani, said at a public event last month that he is "very personally engaged" with bringing F1 back to India after a 13-year absence.

Spring blooms at the Memorial Gardens



Visitors walk amongst the colourful tulips at the Memorial Gardens across from Buckingham Palace as people enjoy the sunny weather on the Easter Monday bank holiday in central London yesterday. (AFP)

Sri Lanka raises cooking gas prices

Sri Lanka yesterday raised prices of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) by nearly a quarter, blaming higher global prices triggered by the Iran war. As well as gas, Sri Lanka also imports all of its oil and buys coal for electricity generation. Colombo has warned that a prolonged war in the Middle East could seriously undermine efforts to emerge from its economic meltdown of 2022. The increase in cooking gas prices on Monday is on top of an eight % hike last month. A private company, which accounts for about a quarter of the domestic LPG market, raised its retail price by 23% to 5,700 rupees (\$18.08), up from 4,630 rupees (\$14.69). The state-owned Litro Gas, the main supplier of

LPG used in cooking stoves, increased the price of a 12.5-kilogramme refill to 4,765 rupees (\$15.62), up from 3,990 rupees — an increase of 19.42%. "We have supplies for the entire month of April," a Litro spokesman said, adding that higher global LPG prices and shipping costs had forced the latest revision.

Last month, Sri Lanka raised both fuel and electricity prices by more than a third as US-Israeli strikes against Iran and retaliatory attacks drove up global energy prices.

The Strait of Hormuz, a key waterway through which about 20% of global crude oil and gas exports pass in peacetime, has been effectively closed since the start of the conflict. (AFP)

Australia has secured fuel shipments 'well into' May, energy minister says

Australia has secured shipments of fuel "well into" May and supply shortages have eased across the country's service stations, Energy Minister Chris Bowen said yesterday. "We have secured contracted, legally binding supply well into May," Bowen told reporters during a press conference. The government had previously indicated Australia

had secured fuel imports until mid-April. Bowen said the percentage of service stations in Australia without diesel was down to 3.4%, lower than it was on Saturday. The government would continue to work with industry and trading partners to ensure fuel supply, Bowen said.

"We've been very pleased with the response we've had

India seeks urea amid Middle East supply disruptions

Reuters
Mumbai

India, the world's largest urea importer, is looking to purchase 2.5 million metric tonnes of the key crop nutrient to shore up domestic supplies, which have tightened due to the US-Israeli war with Iran.

State-run Indian Potash Ltd (IPL) issued a tender on Saturday to import 1.5 million tonnes via the country's west coast. The remaining 1 million tonnes will arrive through the east coast, according to the document posted on the company's website.

Shipments are expected to leave the load port by June 14, it said. Bids for the tender must be submitted by April 15.

India routinely relies on global tenders to secure urea for domestic consumption. The imports are critical as planting for rice, corn, and soybeans is scheduled to begin in June with the arrival of the monsoon.

India, where farming is a mainstay, imports fertilisers such as urea, diammonium phosphate (DAP) and muriate of potash, as well as liquefied natural gas, a key feedstock for urea production.

The Gulf region accounts for 20% to 30% of India's urea imports and about 50% of its LNG imports, which is used to produce urea domestically, Aparna Sharma, additional secretary in the Department of Fertilisers, told reporters last week.

India's urea production fell last month due to limited gas availability following the start of

the Middle East conflict, though supplies to urea plants have improved in recent weeks, she said.

A Mumbai-based industry official said local urea production dipped by about 600,000 to 700,000 tonnes per month, with imports expected to help offset some of the decline.

"But global surplus is limited due to supply disruptions in the Middle East. It will be interesting to see who participates in the tender, as that will determine pricing," the official said.

In the November tender, IPL secured urea at \$418.40 per tonne on a cost-and-freight (CFR) basis, but prices have since risen due to the conflict, and the Indian tender is likely to set a benchmark for other buyers, said a New-Delhi-based official with a leading fertiliser company.

Taiwan opposition leader to visit China

Reuters
Taipei

Taiwan opposition leader Cheng Li-wun leaves today for China and a potential meeting with President Xi Jinping on what she says is a peace mission as Beijing makes a renewed push to convince Taiwanese to support "reunification". Cheng, chairwoman of the Kuomintang (KMT), Taiwan's largest opposition party, is travelling at a time of increased Chinese military pressure on Taiwan, which Beijing views as its own territory, and as the opposition-dominated parliament stalls a government plan for \$40 bn in extra defence spending.

The KMT and the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) have released duelling social media messages ahead of the trip, using the imagery of war and peace.

"Peace is the only foundation for prosperity, and the hope for Taiwan's future," the KMT said on Sunday, putting out a video featuring young people relaxing on the ground, in a pool and smiling while looking up at the stars. The DPP shot back in a Facebook post that the KMT was trying to "co-operate with the Chinese communists' scheme to weaken Taiwan's defence capabilities", pointing to the delay in passing defence spending, plans the US government has backed.

Cheng told foreign reporters last month that "peace cannot possibly be achieved through defence capabilities alone" and political efforts were equally in-



Kuomintang (KMT) Chairperson Cheng Li-wun speaks to the media ahead of her trip to China, in Taipei, Taiwan. (Reuters/File Photo)

dispensable. She is going to China a month before US President Donald Trump's summit with Xi in Beijing. While the two sides could strike goodwill agreements in Beijing on trade in agriculture and aircraft parts, they are also expected to discuss areas of deep tension such as Taiwan, where little progress is expected. In a February call, Xi told Trump that the US "must carefully handle arms sales to Taiwan".

This is the first trip by a KMT leader to China in a decade, though China has yet to confirm whether Xi will definitely meet Cheng, who will be in Beijing on Thursday.

Last week, Taiwan's China-policy-making Mainland Affairs Council said Cheng should tell Beijing to stop its military threats and respect the Taiwanese peo-

ple's right to choose their own future.

China refuses to speak to Taiwan President Lai Ching-te, saying he is a "separatist".

China has never renounced the use of force to bring Taiwan under its control, but says its preferred option is "peaceful reunification". It has stepped up efforts in recent weeks to try and persuade Taiwanese of the benefits, including energy security, which Taiwanese officials have rejected.

On Friday, the Eastern Theatre Command, which would lead any attack on Taiwan, published a cartoon picture of what "Taiwan province" would look like during the traditional Tomb Sweeping Festival, marked on Sunday, if it were united with China.

People lay flowers at a "Monument for the complete reunification of the motherland", in front of another sign showing the location — Taipei's Machangding Memorial Park, where accused communist spy Wu Shi was executed by the KMT government in 1950. KMT forces fled to Taiwan in 1949 after losing a civil war with Mao Zedong's communists.

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

Asked at the news conference with foreign reporters about her views on "reunification", Cheng said the time was still far from ripe for such a discussion.

"What we need to deal with now is how to create peaceful and stable cross-strait relations," she said.

Pressure mounts on UK government to ban Kanye West after festival backlash

Reuters
London

The British government was under growing pressure yesterday to bar US rapper Kanye West from entering the country after he was named as the headline act for the Wireless Festival of rap and hip-hop music set for July.

West, now known as Ye, has been criticised in the past for antisemitic remarks and celebration of Nazism, which have led on several occasions to his social media accounts, including X, being barred.

The decision to book Ye prompted several companies to pull their sponsorship of the festival, while the main opposition Conservative Party wrote to Home Secretary (interior minister) Shabana Mahmood urging her to ban him from coming to Britain.

Asked by Reuters for comment, a Home Office source said

ministers were currently reviewing his permission to enter the country.

The Home Office does not usually comment on individual cases, but Mahmood has powers to personally request Ye to be excluded from the UK. In January, the department revoked the Electronic Travel Authorisation of Eva Vlaardingerbroek, a Dutch far-right activist for spreading false information.

Festival organisers and Ye's representative did not respond immediately to a request for comment.

The Jewish Leadership Council last week condemned the organisers for booking Ye after a rise in attacks on Jewish people and Jewish targets.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer also described as "deeply concerning" the decision to book Ye for the London festival.

"Antisemitism in any form is abhorrent and must be confronted firmly wherever it appears," Starmer said in com-

ments first reported by the Sun on Sunday.

"Everyone has a responsibility to ensure Britain is a place where Jewish people feel safe and secure."

A spokesperson for London mayor Sadiq Khan said the rapper's comments did not reflect the city's values and that the decision had been made by festival organisers.

Ye took a full-page advertisement in the *Wall Street Journal* in January to apologise for his antisemitic remarks, attributing his behaviour to an undiagnosed brain injury and an untreated bipolar disorder.

The 48-year-old has not performed in Britain since he headlined Glastonbury in 2015.

Drinks companies Diageo and Pepsi, a long-running sponsor, said they had withdrawn their support for the Wireless event over the decision to invite Ye. Pepsi-owner PepsiCo also confirmed its Rockstar Energy brand had pulled its sponsorship.

from our Southeast Asian partners in particular, who recognise their role as reliable energy suppliers for Australia when it comes to our liquid fuels," he said. Bowen called for the Strait of Hormuz to be opened "as quickly as possible so the economic impact on Australia and the rest of the world can be minimised."

Australia imports about 90% of its refined fuel,

predominantly from Asian countries. Since the outbreak of the Iran war, six fuel shipments to Australia have been cancelled, but they have been replaced with alternative supplies. Australia has 39 days of petrol, 29 days of diesel and 29 days of jet fuel in reserve, Bowen separately told ABC Radio National Breakfast, a similar level to the start of the conflict. (Reuters)



CHAIRMAN

Abdullah bin Khalifa al-Attiyah

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Faisal Abdulhameed al-Mudahka

Deputy Managing Editor

Kamran Rehmat

- ✉ P.O.Box 2888, Doha, Qatar
- ✉ editor@gulf-times.com
- ☎ 44350478 (News),
- ☎ 44466404 (Sport),
- ☎ 44466636 (Home delivery)
- ☎ 44350474
- 📘 facebook.com/gulftimes
- 🐦 twitter.com/gulftimes_Qatar
- 📷 instagram.com/gulftimes
- 📺 youtube.com/GulftimesVideos



Russian firms, war claims and accountability

Leading Russian state oil and gas companies Rosneft and Gazprom supported wartime camps where more than 2,000 Ukrainian children were taken, facilitating transportation and providing funds, Yale University research has alleged, prompting calls from some US lawmakers to reinstate sanctions on the two firms.

The findings, released by Yale last week, provide the first “definitive public proof of these companies’ critical involvement in Russia’s systematic campaign of child deportation and indoctrination,” the Yale School of Public Health’s Humanitarian Research Lab (Yale HRL) publication said.

With the support of the two energy giants, approximately 2,158 children were taken to the camps in Russian-occupied Ukraine and Russia between 2022-2025, it said, including for pro-Russian education. Yale’s conclusions were based on analysis of public statements by individuals, verified social media posts, corporate websites and records, it said. Reuters could not independently confirm the report’s findings.

Russia’s foreign ministry and Ukrainian authorities did not respond to requests for comment. In response to a Reuters request for comment on details of the report, Gazprom said: “Gazprom owns several health resorts in Russia and Russian children spend summer vacations there.”

Yale report alleges Rosneft, Gazprom funded camps for deported Ukrainian children through their unions

Russia has consistently denied it forcibly took Ukrainian children, saying it removed them from danger on humanitarian grounds. It has dismissed earlier Yale reports as anti-Russian propaganda.

Lawyers representing Rosneft said in a letter to Reuters that Yale’s report failed to find any evidence of participation in illegal activity by the company.

At least 1,072 children from Russia-occupied Ukraine received vouchers from Gazprom subsidiaries and trade union organisations to attend pro-Russian camps in 2022 and 2023, Yale’s report said.

Rosneft’s Interregional Trade Union sponsored 100 children from Ukraine to attend three camps in 2022, it said. Rosneft’s trade union did not respond to a request for comment.

Rosneft’s lawyers said that the union was a separate legal entity, independently registered under Russian law.

They also said Yale did not provide any evidence that Rosneft “directed, controlled, authorised or even knew” of the union’s alleged conduct.

Michael McFaul, a professor of international affairs at Stanford who served as US ambassador to Russia from 2012-2014, dismissed the idea that Rosneft’s union was independent.

“Rosneft is an arm of the Russian government... Tragically, Putin’s dictatorship no longer allows independent trade unions,” said McFaul, who served as Senior Director for Russian and Eurasian Affairs on the National Security Council from 2009 to 2012.

Earlier in March, the US announced a temporary lifting of sanctions on the sale of Russian-origin crude oil and petroleum products to counter surging prices that followed the war in Iran. The White House did not respond to a request for comment.

A bipartisan group of 12 members of US Congress cited Yale’s findings in an appeal to reimpose sanctions on Gazprom and Rosneft, which were also lifted under the waiver. A letter drafted by Ohio Representative Greg Landsman and shared with Reuters said that “the recent revelation of their direct involvement in Russia’s abduction of over 35,000 children from Ukraine is cause for significant alarm.”

The letter, which was to be sent to Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, called for 35 additional entities identified by Yale to be sanctioned, adding that the 30-day sanctions waiver for Russian oil sales will result in approximately \$12bn of revenue for the two Russian companies.

Under international law, the forced deportation and transfer of children from occupied territory to the territory of an occupying power or to that of any other country is a war crime, regardless of the motive, and Ukraine has classified it as a crime against humanity.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and his commissioner for children’s rights, Maria Lvova-Belova, have been accused of the war crime of deportation for the illegal transfer of Ukrainian children. The International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for Putin and Lvova-Belova for their alleged roles in atrocities during the war that began with Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

The Office of the Prosecutor at the ICC did not respond directly to the assertions raised in the Yale report. Russia has rejected the court’s allegations. —Reuters

To Advertise

✉ gtadv@gulf-times.com

Display

☎ 44466621
☎ 44418811

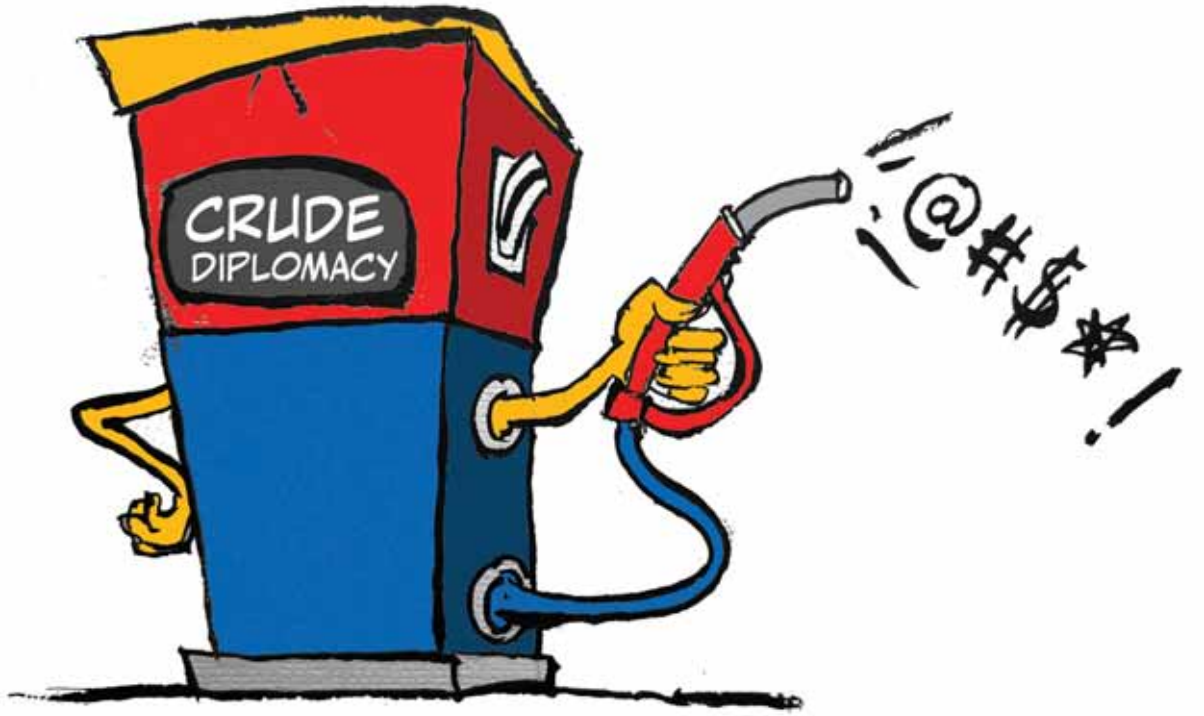
Classified

☎ 44466609 ☎ 44418811
✉ gtcad@gulf-times.com

Subscription

✉ circulation@gulf-times.com

© 2026 Gulf Times. All rights reserved



A winter without snow depletes Europe’s clean energy reservoir

By Lars Paulsson, Kari Lundgren and Joe Wertz
Bloomberg

High in the mountains of southern Norway, where winter is usually measured in metres of snow, engineers are confronting an unfamiliar sight.

Standing atop the Vatndals dam on a recent day, the hydrologist Sverre Eikeland looked out over craggy slopes that should still be blanketed in white powder. The reservoir, large enough to fill nearly half a million Olympic swimming pools, depends on spring melt to replenish and generate electricity. But after Norway’s driest winter in decades, the water level is far below where it should be, prompting companies to limit outflows.

“Less snow means less energy stored in that snow,” said Eikeland, who advises power utility A Energi. “There should be more.”

Norway, with its thousands of dams, is often called Europe’s biggest battery. Under normal conditions, the country’s hydropower system produces enough electricity to meet domestic demand and export large volumes. Last year, net sales abroad amounted to about 15% of its production.

But months of dry weather have upended that pattern. This winter was Norway’s coldest since 2010, the result of persistent high pressure near Greenland that blocked flows of moist Atlantic air into the Nordic region. With little precipitation, snow reserves have fallen to their lowest levels in two decades, creating a deficit of about 25 terawatt-hours of energy, according to Tuomo Saloranta, a hydrologist at the Norwegian Water Resources and Energy Directorate. That’s nearly a fifth of Norway’s total hydropower output last year.

The shortfall is already rippling through electricity markets, slashing exports to the UK and Germany and pushing Nordic prices sharply higher. More than half of the region’s supply comes from hydropower, and in Norway it accounts for nearly all generation. While hydro is generally more predictable than wind and solar, it still depends on sufficient precipitation and snow accumulation.

“We’re a weather-based system,” said Kari Ekelund Thorud, executive vice president for energy at Norsk Hydro ASA, one of Norway’s biggest power users. “We are much more vulnerable if the weather goes the wrong way.”

Waterways like the one Eikeland oversees are ubiquitous in Norway. Stretching more than 200 kilometres, the Otra river, fed by the Vatndals reservoir and surrounding lakes, runs through long, sparsely populated valleys dotted with small farms and holiday cabins. Forests on either side are home to moose, deer and beavers.

Yet for all its seemingly untouched beauty, the river is highly managed through a network of hydropower stations, pumped-storage plants and dams. Strict rules govern how much the water can rise or fall. Nearly every drop is accounted for: Close to 80% of annual rainfall is captured,

- Norway faces record-low snow, threatening hydropower supply
- Lack of snow cuts electricity exports, driving up Nordic prices
- Engineers warn weather shifts could reshape Europe’s energy balance



Sverre Eikeland at the Vatndals dam in March. (Bloomberg)



The reservoir’s water level is visibly low following a season of high power production, with less snow on the surrounding peaks to replenish stores. (Bloomberg)

and only one waterfall remains undveloped.

Annual snowmelt is key to keeping the system balanced. This year, when A Energi measured the snowpack — using rods to extract cores and measure density — staff realised they had a problem.

“There was no snow in February, and now none in March,” said Lars Erik Omland, who leads the company’s market analysis team. “We gradually realised that this would be a winter with little snow.”

Consumers are already feeling the pinch. Electricity sales to the UK and Germany — major export markets — have plunged by about 50% and 40% this year, respectively, while winter energy prices in northern Sweden have surged to more than four times their 2025 levels. The Nordic region’s ski resorts have also come under pressure, facing the double burden of producing more artificial snow while struggling with steep electricity costs.

In Sweden, Ulf Svensson, who heats his home with electric radiators, got a shock when he received his latest bill.

“I never thought it would be this

high,” he said, citing a monthly charge of more than 10,000 kronor (\$1,000). “We’ve always had really low rates here up north.”

Fading Price Advantage

The surge in electricity prices comes at a difficult moment for Europe, as the region contends with higher gas prices tied to the war in the Middle East. In the UK, windier-than-average weather has helped keep the country supplied despite a drop in imports from Norway. Even so, the most expensive hours are still often covered by fossil fuels — a challenging dynamic as exports through the Persian Gulf have effectively come to a standstill.

For traders, the scale of Norway’s shortfall is distilled into a single number. The so-called hydrological balance measures the amount of energy stored in snowpack, reservoirs and groundwater relative to seasonal norms, and is monitored several times a day alongside indicators like French nuclear output and European gas storage.

The deficit widened in late February to its lowest level since 2011 and remained close to that

mark through most of March before improving slightly this week. In southern Norway, which is linked to the continent and the UK by subsea power cables, snow levels are the weakest for this time of year since 1996.

Nordic day-ahead power prices have this year traded just shy of Germany’s — a market that’s been 60% more expensive over the past decade. The convergence underscores how quickly the region’s traditional price advantage can disappear if water reserves shrink.

“When the Nordic region has a hydrological deficit, the export of relatively cheap power to markets like the UK and Germany drops significantly,” said Staffan Bergh, head of analysis at industry consultant Bodecker Partners AB. “They then often have to rely on more expensive production, which typically drives up spot prices and volatility.”

This year’s frigid winter has also boosted electricity demand. Oslo recorded more than 30 consecutive days with temperatures below 0C (32F), the longest such stretch in about 16 years, according to the Norwegian Meteorological Institute. Prolonged freezing conditions have raised heating demand and stored precipitation as snow and ice, delaying inflows to reservoirs.

At the same time, wind generation has dropped sharply. Wind speeds across Scandinavia in January and February 2026 were well below long-term climate norms, sinking to the lowest levels recorded since 2013, according to the University of Maine’s Climate Change Institute. By contrast, the UK and Germany saw stronger output during the same period, which has helped stabilize the European market.

For now, the depleted hydro balance is supporting forward power contracts through the end of the year, boosting returns for generators across the region.

With winter ending, the window to rebuild reserves is closing fast. Rain storms alone likely won’t be enough.

“It’s clear that more than a single event is needed to refill the reservoirs,” said Tarjei Breiteig, head of hydrology and meteorology at A Energi. “Even if it’s extreme, it has to be part of a longer trend over time to correct the situation. That said, it can swing really fast.”

Germany works to clarify new rules on fighting-age men leaving country

Reuters
Frankfurt

Germany's armed forces are working on clarifying a provision in a recently updated military service law that requires fighting-age men to gain permission to leave the country for more than three months, the defence ministry said.

The law went into effect in January, but the requirement - which theoretically affects millions of men between the ages of 17 and 45 in the European Union's most populous country - had gone mostly unnoticed until a local newspaper report highlighted it on Friday.

A defence ministry spokesperson stressed that military service in Germany is voluntary, adding that the ministry was "currently

New law requires men 17-45 to seek approval for stays abroad over three months; Defence ministry stresses military service remains voluntary

drafting specific regulations for granting exemptions from the requirement for approval, also to avoid unnecessary bureaucracy."

The controversial new military service law was passed last year to boost Bundeswehr numbers and meet Nato targets amid the growing view within Germany that it has relied too long on the United States and as tensions with Russia spur calls for stronger defence capabilities across Europe.

The legislation seeks to en-

sure a robust and reliable military registration system, the defence ministry spokesperson said in an emailed response.

"In the case of an emergency, we must know who may be residing abroad for an extended period," he said.

He declined to comment further on how the process may eventually look.

Germany wants to increase the ranks of active soldiers to 260,000 by 2035 from 183,000 at the end of last year, with German Chancellor Friedrich Merz telling military leaders last year that the country needed to become capable of defending itself as quickly as possible, and needed soldiers.

Opposition politicians over the weekend criticised the government for creating confusion with the law.

Spanish PM's party gains on anti-war stance, support for far-right stalls in polls

Reuters
Madrid

Spain's ruling Socialist Party has gained voter support amid Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's staunch opposition to the US-Israeli war on Iran, while far-right Vox, which supports the offensive, has seen a decline, two surveys published yesterday showed.

Sanchez has emerged as one of the most vocal Western leaders criticising what he calls an illegal and reckless war, closing Spanish airspace to US planes involved in the strikes and banning them from using jointly operated military bases in southern Spain.

Vox - closely allied with US President Donald Trump's MAGA movement - has harshly criticised Sanchez's stance.

A survey by state pollster CIS showed last month that 85% of respondents rejected the war.



Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez. (Reuters/File Photo)

Monday's new poll by Sigma Dos for newspaper El Mundo showed support for Sanchez's Socialists rising to 27.7% from 26.4% last month, reducing the lead of the conservative People's Party (PP). Another survey, by 40dB for El Pais, put them at 28.6%, up from 27.7%.

Meanwhile, Vox dropped to 17.1% in April from 18.3% according to Sigma Dos, and slipped by 0.1 percentage point

to 18.7% in the 40dB survey. The PP topped both polls, securing 32.5% and 31.1% of voting intentions, respectively, up by less than one percentage point in both polls. The party accuses Sanchez of damaging transatlantic relations and has refrained from publicly denouncing Trump and Israel, though its leader has also echoed the "no to war" slogan.

A common trend is the transfer of voting intention from the extremes of the spectrum to the two mainstream outfits. The PP appears to be stemming the flow of votes to Vox and the Socialists are picking up former voters of its hard-left junior coalition partner Sumar, the polls showed.

A fragmented electorate still means coalitions are required to secure a government and both polls point to a right-wing majority if elections were held now.

The next general election is due in August 2027.

Russian strike kills 3, wounds 16 in Odesa

AFP
Odesa

Russian strikes on the southern Ukrainian port city of Odesa killed three people, including a two-year-old child, and cut power to thousands of residents in the early hours of Monday, officials said.

Moscow has been launching drones and missiles at Ukraine almost nightly throughout its four-year invasion - the bloodiest conflict in Europe since World War II.

The attack left a gaping hole in a residential building that was set ablaze in the attack, according to AFP reporters on the scene and emergency workers.

"Tragically, three people have been reported killed in this attack, including a child - just two years old. My sincere condolences to the families and loved ones," President Volodymyr Zelensky

wrote on social media, adding 16 people had been wounded.

DTEK, the country's largest private energy provider meanwhile said more than 16,000 people had been left without electricity following the attack.

Zelensky said Russia had fired more than 140 drones in the overnight barrage that he said also damaged energy facilities in the Chernihiv, Sumy, Kharkiv, and Dnipro regions.

"Right now, all partners need to strengthen air defense together so that the interception rate of drones and missiles continues to increase," Zelensky added.

A Ukrainian drone attack meanwhile wounded eight, including two children, in Novorossiysk, the regional governor Veniamin Kondratyev said on social media.

Officials posted video of a damaged residential building, with its upper floors blackened and windows and balconies smashed.



Ukrainian rescuers work at a site of a heavily damaged residential building following a massive strike in Odesa yesterday. (AFP)

Ukraine hits major oil terminal in southern Russia: Moscow

Ukrainian drones attacked the Caspian Pipeline Consortium's marine terminal in southern Russia early Monday, damaging part of a mooring point and setting four oil tanks ablaze, Russia's defence ministry said yesterday. The CPC pipeline - which had not commented - handles around 1% of the world's oil supplies, as well as around 80% of Kazakhstan's exports.

During the night, Ukraine "attacked facilities at the marine transshipment complex in Novorossiysk using fixed-wing attack drones", the Russian defence ministry said in a statement on Telegram. "As a result of the Ukrainian drone strikes, the pipeline of a single mooring point, as well as a loading and unloading terminal, were damaged, and four oil product storage tanks caught fire," the ministry added. (AFP)

Afghanistan seeks to boost trade with Central Asia

AFP
Kabul

Afghanistan aims to increase trade with Central Asian countries to \$10bn within the next three or four years, Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi said on Sunday.

Trade with Central Asian countries to Afghanistan's north came to about \$2.7bn in 2025, itself a significant increase over previous years, Muttaqi said.

He stated Afghanistan's new trade goal with its neighbours at a "constructive dialogue" meeting in Kabul with representatives from Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

The meeting focused on political, economic and security issues, regional cooperation, trade and the expansion of transit routes.

Muttaqi said Afghanistan is seeking to use "its geo-economic position" to link Central Asia with South and West Asia.



Afghanistan's Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi (centre, back), along with representatives from Central Asian states, takes part in the Afghanistan-Central Asia Consultative Dialogue at the Foreign Affairs Ministry in Kabul on Sunday. (AFP)

Among the main projects is the TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) gas pipeline, a major project between Herat in Afghanistan's west and Turkmenistan, of which about 25 kilometres (15 miles) have been completed so far on the Afghan side.

The Taliban government is trying to trade with the world, despite international sanctions on its banking sector that make investors wary.

Russia remains the only state to have officially recognised the Taliban authorities, who returned to

power in 2021, although countries including Türkiye, China, India and the United Arab Emirates have embassies in Afghanistan.

Landlocked Central Asia is trying to regain its historic role as an important trading route. Access to the sea, heading south through Afghanistan, is vital because the route north through Russia is hampered by sanctions.

Afghanistan has been in conflict with its eastern neighbour Pakistan for months, and faces a severe humanitarian crisis, but is seeking alternative partnerships.

It shares a 2,329km border with Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Dushanbe has been critical of the Taliban government in the past because of sometimes deadly cross-border incidents.

Muttaqi acknowledged that "certain issues such as the threat posed by the Islamic State group, drug trafficking, and illegal migration are among our shared concerns" but said "there are no longer any security problems along our common borders".

Hungary prepares to vote as Orbán's future hangs in balance

AFP
Budapest

EU member Hungary will hold a closely watched general election on Sunday, the first since nationalist Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's return to power in 2010 where he is not considered the clear favourite.

Surveys from independent pollsters suggest that opposition leader Peter Magyar's conservative TISZA party could be heading for a landslide victory. Pro-government institutions however forecast a win for Orbán's Fidesz-KDNP coalition.

Analysts expect a record turnout of around 75-80%. In the lead up to the April 12 vote, there has been a flurry of accusations and counter-accusations.

Domestic intelligence was accused of trying to sabotage TISZA, leaked phone conversations caused alarm about the foreign minister's close relations with Moscow, and Orbán ramped up his rhetoric against Ukraine. Allegations of Russian interference and mass vote buying efforts have also surfaced.

On Sunday, after Orbán called an emergency meeting following Serbia's announcement they had found explosives near a gas pipeline to Hungary, Magyar suggested it might be a "false flag" operation.

The election is drawing international attention because Orbán has a "disproportionate importance" globally, said Jacques Rupnik, a specialist in central and eastern European politics at the Sciences Po university in Paris.

The nationalist - who is close to Russia, China and the US under President Donald Trump - has regularly paralysed EU foreign policymaking by wielding Hungary's veto power.

His re-election bid has been endorsed by fellow right-wing leaders from around the globe, including Trump.

US Vice-President J D Vance is set to visit Budapest on Tuesday and hold a rally with Orbán.

For foreign observers, said Rupnik, the main issue is whether Hungary continues to be "lenient"



Fidesz party voters take part in Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's election campaign rally in Szombathely, Hungary, last week. (Reuters)

towards Russia under Orbán or with the election of Magyar moves "to re-establish relations with the European Union".

While Orbán's popularity has waned during his latest four-year term amid economic stagnation and high-profile scandals, he is presenting himself as the "safe choice" in a turbulent world.

His messaging has focused on neighbouring Ukraine, accusing Magyar of being puppet of Kyiv and the European Union, which he argues threatens to involve Hungary in the war.

Analysts argue however that, unlike previous elections, the governing coalition has not been able to dictate the campaign's priorities.

Instead, they "face a highly effective opposition that forced the complacent ruling party and its leader not only to compete but also to defend themselves", political analyst Peter Farkas Zsuzs told AFP.

Magyar has pledged a "system change" - cracking down on corruption, fixing public services, and rebuilding democratic institutions.

He chose "Now or never" as his campaign slogan - a historic

rallying cry of Hungarian revolutionaries.

The 45-year-old former government insider has been criss-crossing Hungary continuously since mid-February, holding four to six rallies a day.

The 62-year-old premier, meanwhile, did just one or two public gatherings per day from mid-March, and was recently met with audible boos from protesters.

On Sunday, Hungarians will vote for local candidates and parties.

Only five parties will be listed - the fewest since Hungary's democratisation in 1990 - after several stood down to bolster the opposition. In addition to the two big blocs, the far-right Our Homeland party is also anticipated to win seats in the 199-member National Assembly. Many voters in Budapest told AFP they had already made up their minds. Mate Dobai, a 35-year-old IT engineer, said he was satisfied with Orbán's policies.

"I commend his pro-peace position in Ukraine, because I find the war pointless," he said. "People are dying and the front line is stagnant." Andrea Simon, a 57-year-old

florist said she planned to vote for TISZA, displeased with Orbán's tenure. "I'm a business owner. Taxes and contributions are increasing month-by-month, and I have hardly any customers, because people are getting poorer even in this affluent town," she said.

Orbán's critics have accused him of tweaking electoral law and leveraging state resources to help his party's campaign.

A documentary published last month alleged the ruling coalition planned to pressure about 500,000 of Hungary's most impoverished people to vote for them.

NGOs also raised the alarm about the possible manipulation of mail-in ballots by Hungarians living abroad, which are collected by Fidesz-allied parties in Romania and Serbia. The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has, for the second time in a row, deployed a full observers' mission for Hungary's general election.

But the OSCE has faced criticism for giving Russian President Vladimir Putin's former interpreter a coordinating role in the mission.

Greek PM calls on prosecutor to act on EU agriculture fraud

AFP
Athens

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis yesterday asked the European public prosecutor's office to launch "without delay" proceedings against lawmakers suspected to be involved in alleged fraud related to EU agricultural subsidies.

European Union (EU) prosecutors last week said they were probing numerous members of the ruling New Democracy party as part of an investigation looking into whether beneficiaries of agriculture subsidies had made false claims.

Greek authorities estimate that the network had defrauded at least 23mn euros (\$27mn) since it started around 2018.

Mitsotakis said that he had requested the lifting of immunity of the 11 MPs who are under investigation and who, according to Greek media, are all members of his party.

"I am asking the European Public Prosecutor's Office, once the immunity of our MPs has been lifted, to immediately take all investigative measures," he said in a statement broadcast on public television, adding that it would have to "rule on whether, against how many, and against which individuals it intends to bring charges."

Last week three cabinet members resigned over the scandal, which has piled pressure on Greece's government.

EU prosecutors first detailed the scam last May, accusing some beneficiaries of agriculture subsidies of making claims for land they did not own and exaggerating the number of animals on farms.

Cases under investigation included banana plantations on Mount Olympus and pastures declared on archaeological sites.

The allegations led to a string of raids and arrests last October, as well as long-running protests from legitimate farmers who had their lawful subsidies held up.



Dreama launches 2026-2030 strategy focused on care and empowerment

Qatar's Orphan Care Center "Dreama" has launched its 2026-2030 strategy, aimed at strengthening care and empowerment programmes for orphans.

The launch event was held under the patronage of HE the Minister of Social Development and Family Buthaina bint al-Jabr al-Nuaimi, and attended by senior officials, partners and supporters.

Speaking at the event, the centre's Executive Director Sheikhha

Najla bint Ahmed al-Thani said the new strategy marks a more mature phase in the institution's development.

She said Dreama has, since its establishment, worked towards a vision of protecting and empowering orphans to become active members of society. The new strategy builds on that vision through an integrated framework focused on innovative care and long-term empowerment.

The plan includes four main outcomes, 12 strategic goals and 12

performance indicators, alongside 15 initiatives and projects, as well as nine supporting programmes aimed at ensuring institutional sustainability.

Sheikha Najla said the approach reflects a commitment to modern social program management based on governance, partnerships, innovation and sustainability. She added that empowering orphans is seen not just as a social responsibility, but as a long-term investment in people and society.

The event also highlighted key

initiatives under the strategy, which aim to align with international best practices and support national efforts to build a cohesive and inclusive society.

Among its priorities is a care model centred on the child, which seeks to expand qualified foster care and reduce reliance on institutional housing, while promoting integration and well-being.

The strategy also focuses on supporting a gradual transition for orphans towards independent living, ensuring continued psy-



chological, social, educational and professional stability.

It further outlines a results-based funding model designed to diversify income sources and translate partner contributions into measurable outcomes.

This will be supported by strengthened institutional capacity, including reliable data systems, automated digital platforms, skilled human resources and robust compliance policies. (QNA)

Qatar Customs ensures smooth flow of imports

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

All necessary regulatory measures have been put in place to ensure the smooth entry of goods and commodities into the country, maintaining an uninterrupted supply chain and guaranteeing the timely and continuous flow of imports, the General Authority of Customs (GAC) has confirmed.

GAC said it is working closely with relevant authorities to support supply chain stability and facilitate customs procedures. Its presence has been strengthened across all transport routes – land, sea and air – to ensure the seamless processing of incoming goods, with particular focus on essential items such as food and medicines. At the same time, the use of land routes has expanded rapidly to reduce reliance on shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, amid associated risks and ongoing regional tensions.

The authority has maintained fast-track customs clearance procedures while diversifying import sources to ensure the uninterrupted supply of perishables despite maritime

disruptions. It has also activated the International Road Transport (TIR) system at the Abu Samra land crossing to accelerate cross-border procedures. GAC has called on cargo companies to register with the TIR system, which can reduce waiting times at border crossings by up to 90%, expediting the entry of goods and maintaining a steady flow of incoming cargo. All customs clearance processes, it added, are being carried out in line with the highest international standards.

Accordingly, the GAC has introduced priority lanes for food and essential commodities, 24/7 customs operations, and simplified inspection and documentation procedures without undermining the high quality of the process.

Officials reiterated that there are no concerns over potential shortages of essential commodities, particularly food, medicines and inputs for local manufacturing. They noted that the country continues to maintain effective and diversified supply chains, supported by multiple routes and suppliers, ensuring the availability of alternatives even in the event of further regional escalation.

GAC also highlighted its well-established

crisis response strategy, supported by advanced tools and digital platforms that have been in use for years. Chief among these is the Al Nadeeb electronic customs platform, which integrates government entities and private stakeholders into a single-window system. The platform enables online submission of documents, fee payments and approvals, while reducing the need for physical inspections and shortening processing times.

In March, GAC processed 255,080 customs declarations. The Al Nadeeb platform recorded 1,179 users, while the authority's customer service centre handled 790 transactions. During the same period, GAC reported 44 seizure cases.

On the ground, the local retail market has shown no signs of shortages. Essential goods, both food and non-food items, remain widely available from multiple suppliers across outlets nationwide, with prices largely unchanged from pre-crisis levels. Authorities said that swift and co-ordinated measures taken by government entities, in collaboration with the private sector, alongside strict market monitoring, have helped keep prices stable and protect consumers from potential manipulation.

MoT reaffirms steady supply channels for goods

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

The Ministry of Transport (MoT) has reaffirmed its commitment to the smooth and seamless supply of various items in the country through marine and land transport.

In a social media post yesterday, the ministry highlighted that transportation is an enabler of economic diversification and a major pillar of a better quality of life and eco-sustainability, and that marine transport continues to enhance operational efficiency. "It is ensuring supply chains continuity through developing operational procedures and higher preparedness at ports, to support sustainability and enhance the industry's role in the logistics ecosystem," the Ministry said in an X post.

MoT has also released some operational safety data and key figures in the post. As per the figures, the Ministry said that IMDG transshipment is temporarily suspended. Moreover, it has limited import of IMDG containers to 'Direct Delivery' only and isolates them outside of the terminal premises. In-ward IMDG units have been reduced to one for



transshipment, three for import and one for export.

In addition, steps are taken for strategic preparedness for stability and the return of regional navigation. MoT is organising regular emergency drills and has enhanced cybersecurity.

Meanwhile, MoT also noted that land transport contributes to improving the quality of life through developing the infrastructure and enhancing road network efficiency to support safe mobility and fulfil sustainable development requirements.

The Ministry said that land transportation ensures safe, seamless mobility for people. It ensures a well-coordinated movement of passengers and travellers' evacuation, as well as seamless passenger movement and adaptability to potential surges. It has also high-

lighted that the pan GCC emergency plans are in place.

Furthermore, regarding supply chains and logistics services, the ministry has emphasised plans to prioritise the movement of basic materials such as food, medicine, and other medical supplies. Moreover, it ensures the movement of goods, supply chains and logistic services.

Additionally, the ministry is contributing to the support of the customs clearance exceptional mechanism during the current crisis. It has simplified truckers' transit and visa protocols.

MoT has implemented comprehensive contingency plans to maintain the seamless flow of goods and people during the current period of regional tensions. Several key measures have been taken by the Ministry and its partners to ensure mobility and continuity of supply chains. Throughout this period, MoT, in co-ordination with the Gulf Co-operation Council, activated alternative maritime routes, enhanced land transport efficiency, and monitored air traffic, making sure that essential goods, including food and medical supplies, continued to flow into the country.

QPO brings 'Peter and the Wolf' to life in bilingual family concerts

The Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra (QPO) has announced its enchanting bilingual family concerts, featuring Sergei Prokofiev's timeless classic, "Peter and the Wolf".

These performances are designed to cater to both Arabic- and English-speaking audiences, offering a rich cultural experience that engages families from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

By merging live musical storytelling with educational objectives, audience interaction is significantly enhanced, as each instrument in the orchestra represents a character from this cherished tale. This method aligns with the Drop Orchestra's mission to foster intercultural understanding through music.

Attendees will enjoy a distinctive blend of high-calibre musical performances. When it comes to the piece "Peter and the Wolf," Op. 67, composed by Sergei Prokofiev in 1936, it serves as a prime example of music crafted to introduce children to orchestral instruments through a captivating narrative.

Commissioned by the Central Children's Theatre of Moscow, this symphonic story intertwines storytelling with musical creativity, assigning

specific personal themes to individual instruments: the flute represents the bird, the oboe symbolises the duck, and Peter is portrayed by string instruments.

Prokofiev's adept use of musical arrangement not only illustrates each character through sound but also showcases his talent in thematic development and diversity. The success of this work lies in its educational purpose combined with artistic brilliance, making it a vital component in educational settings and concert repertoires worldwide.

This continues to be a testament to Prokofiev's ability to merge imaginative storytelling with serious compositional techniques, offering audiences of all ages a smooth introduction to the foundations of classical music.

The concerts are set to take place at the Cultural District Opera House - Katara, under the baton of concertmaster Lionel Schmidt

Two concerts on April 10 at 4pm and 6pm, featuring narration in English by narrator Christoph Schmitz; and two concerts on April 11 at 3pm and 5pm, featuring narration in Arabic, presented by narrator Islam El-Hefnawy.



Souq Waqif holds steady as conflict reshapes travel patterns

By Joey Aguilar
Doha

Despite ongoing regional tensions that have disrupted travel flows across parts of the Middle East, Souq Waqif continues to draw residents and visitors, offering a sense of familiarity, culture and calm in the heart of the capital.

The historic marketplace remains busy, even as the type of visitors changes. Fewer international tourists are arriving, but more residents and regional visitors are filling the walkways, helping the souq maintain its steady pace.

On a typical evening, warm lanterns cast a soft glow across the narrow alleys, where families and tourists stroll past rows of restaurants and traditional shops. Against the illuminated backdrop of the Fanar Islamic Cultural Centre, cafés extend into the pathways, and the scent of spices lingers in the air. Vendors quietly arrange displays of dates, textiles and handicrafts, maintaining a routine that has defined the souq for generations.

At a fruit stall where trays of jujubes and citrus fruits are stacked in neat, colourful mounds, a vendor pauses briefly between customers. He notes that tourist numbers have declined in recent weeks, but adds that overall foot-



fall remains steady. According to him, the souq continues to operate by adjusting to changing circumstances, with local residents and nearby visitors helping sustain business.

Restored and revitalised over the past two decades, the marketplace has evolved into both a cultural landmark and a commercial hub, blending traditional architecture with modern leisure. Even as regional uncertainty affects travel routes and visitor numbers, it continues to serve as a social anchor for Doha.

"It feels safe, and it feels alive. We were planning to travel in March, but since the conflict started, we decided to stay and explore places here instead. Everything is open, and you can feel normal life continuing," said Maria M, a Filipino expatriate visiting the souq with her family.

Other residents like Mohamed, a Doha-based engineer, sitting with friends at an outdoor café, echo similar sentiments: "We come here more often now. Instead of travelling, we spend our weekends in the city. The souq gives you everything: food, atmosphere, a bit of tradition. It's relaxing."

Indian expatriate Rushab, meanwhile, said the change in crowd dynamics has made the experience more enjoyable. "It's less crowded than peak tourist season, which is nice. You can actually walk around comfortably, talk to shopkeepers, and take your time," he said.

Shop owners report a similar pattern. A souvenir seller arranging items outside his store said business has slowed compared to previous months but remains consistent. Weekends, he added, continue to attract more buyers,



driven largely by residents.

"There are fewer tourists, yes, but weekends are still busy. Residents are coming more often now. Families, groups of friends, they are spending more time here," he pointed out.

The shift is visible across the souq. Dining areas remain active, though less packed than during peak travel periods. Conversations feel more relaxed, and visitors stay longer, exploring side alleys and smaller shops that are often overlooked when crowds are heavier.

Historically, the souq served as a trading hub for Bedouins and merchants exchanging goods ranging from spices to livestock. Its architecture reflects that legacy. Thick mud-plastered walls, exposed wooden beams and shad-



The historic marketplace remains busy, even as the type of visitors changes. PICTURES: Joey Aguilar

ed walkways were designed for endurance, providing shelter and comfort in a challenging climate.

That sense of continuity is still evident today. The souq's design echoes a time when traders gathered here despite uncertainty, relying on the marketplace as a place of connection and commerce. Many visitors can be seen taking photographs, waiters call out to

passing diners, and shopkeepers adjust their displays in anticipation of the next customer.

For many in Doha, the souq has become more than a destination, it is a routine.

"It's part of our weekly life. No matter what's happening outside, you come here and things feel normal," said Ahmed, a long-time resident.