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BUSINESS | Page 1

Qatar Chamber Food Security Committee holds meeting on inflow of consumer goods

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Trump suspends Iran attack after Pakistan intervenes

GT Report

United States President Donald Trump announced yesterday that he would suspend military operations against Iran for two weeks following a direct intervention by Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Field Marshal Asim Munir, citing progress toward a long-term peace agreement and Iran's expected opening of the Strait of Hormuz.



PUSH BACK: Donald Trump.

ready met and exceeded its military objectives and was "very far along with a definitive agreement concerning long-term peace with Iran."

Trump said Washington had received a 10-point proposal

from Tehran and considered it "a workable basis on which to negotiate," adding that "almost all of the various points of past contention" had been agreed to between the two sides.

The announcement came after Sharif made a high-profile public appeal on X, urging Trump to extend his deadline by a fortnight and calling on Iran to open the Strait of Hormuz for a corresponding period as a goodwill gesture. Sharif had tagged Trump, Vice-President JD Vance, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff, as well as Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf and Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi – publicly positioning Islamabad as a credible mediator between Washington and Tehran. **To Page 11**



Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser with the Akhlaquna winners. PICTURE: AR Al-Baker

Falling debris injures 4 after missile attack

GT Report

Four people, including a Qatari child, were injured after debris from intercepted Iranian missiles fell on a residential property in the Muraikh area, the Ministry of Interior said yesterday. In a statement, the ministry said the incident occurred as Qatari air defence systems intercepted incoming missiles, with falling debris striking a citizen's residence. The injuries were described as moderate. Emergency teams responded immediately, providing on-site assistance before transferring the injured to hospital for treatment. Authorities also reported limited material damage at the location. The ministry said relevant agencies were operating under approved response plans to ensure rapid intervention, contain the impact of such incidents and safeguard public safety. It urged residents to follow official instructions, avoid gathering near incident sites or attempting to film, and allow emergency and security personnel to carry out their duties without obstruction.

Sheikha Moza honours 2026 Akhlaquna winners

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

Promoting the inculcation of human values, morals and social responsibility, Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, Chairperson of Qatar Foundation (QF), yesterday honoured 14 winners in different categories with the 2026 Akhlaquna Awards. Held at Multaqa at Education City, the event was also graced by HE Sheikha Hind bint Hamad al-Thani, Vice-Chairperson, QF, several ministers and a number of dignitaries. Launched in 2017, QF's Akhlaquna initiative emphasises the interconnection between knowledge, education, and strong moral values. Over the years, 79 ambassadors have been appointed from among the initiative's winners. This year's winners were chosen by a 17-member jury who evaluated their impactful and inspiring community initiatives as well as the exemplary ethical values in their initiatives and behaviours. Speaking at the ceremony, Sheikha Noof Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani, vice-president, Strategic Educational Initiatives, Pre-University Education at QF, said that ethics and values are

no longer merely an intellectual condition but an existential necessity. "When the balance is disturbed, societies are not sustained by abundant resources or strengthened by powerful tools; rather, their equilibrium is restored by the moral values rooted within them and by the sense of responsibility individuals uphold toward themselves and their communities," noted Sheikha Noof. "Today, we affirm that true investment is not only in knowledge, but in the ethical values that guide it," explained Sheikha Noof. "Since 2017, we have not been building just a programme, rather we have been building impact. We have moved from foundation to empowerment, and from idea to tangible results." She also announced the launch of this year's ethical campaign under the slogan: "Responsibility is a Trust," adding, "It is not just a phrase, but a call for every individual to recognise that what they hold is trust, and that their impact on society is a responsibility." Eight students were awarded in the Akhlaquna Junior category, which recognises children who embody positive ethical values. **To Page 12**

Qatar says Strait of Hormuz belongs to no single party

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

Qatar has warned that any closure of the Strait of Hormuz constitutes a flagrant violation of international law that endangers global energy and food supply chains, calling for an immediate halt to Iranian attacks on Gulf states and urged all parties to return to the negotiating table. Speaking at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' weekly media briefing yesterday, Adviser to the Prime Minister and Official Spokesperson Dr Majed bin Mohamed al-Ansari described the strait's

closure as "a very dangerous precedent that will harm all and undermine the world security of energy and food supplies," stressing that the waterway – unlike the Suez or Panama canals – belongs to no single nation and must remain open to international navigation as it has been for centuries. Al-Ansari confirmed that two Qatari tankers remain stranded and unable to transit the strait, and said Qatar's immediate priority is the safety and security of their crew members. On Qatar's diplomatic posture, he drew a clear distinction between support for mediation and direct engagement with Iran. "We are not a party to this war, but we

are in daily contact with key actors to reduce escalation," he said. "We are not engaged in mediation and are focused on defending our sovereignty, but we support Pakistan's efforts." Regarding a recent call between Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani, al-Ansari said the prime minister strongly condemned and rejected continued Iranian attacks on Qatar and neighbouring countries, stressing the need to stop them immediately as they were "completely unjustifiable and unacceptable." **To Page 11**

Qatar grabs Nasa spotlight with prized nebula image



By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

Following seven nights of painstaking imaging under Qatar's desert skies, astrophotographer Rabeea Alkuwari has earned global acclaim after his image of the Blue Horsehead Nebula was selected as Astronomy Picture of the Day by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (Nasa). The recognition marks the third time Alkuwari's work has been featured on Nasa's widely followed Astronomy Picture of the Day (APOD) platform, which showcases a different image of the universe each day, accompanied by expert scientific commentary. "This one is the third image of mine to be selected. It's always a special feeling to be selected by Nasa; it is a recognition of excellence in our field and always means a lot for astrophotographers around the world," Alkuwari told *Gulf Times*. **To Page 11**



Rabeea Alkuwari

A striking deep-space image captured from Qatar by Rabeea Alkuwari, which has been selected as "Astronomy Picture of the Day" by Nasa.

Ukrainian specialists in Qatar 'to share air defence expertise'

By Peter Alagos
Business Editor

A team of elite Ukrainian defence specialists are in Qatar to collaborate on a high-level technical exchange aimed at strengthening the protection of regional airspace against modern aerial threats. Ambassador Andrii Kuzmenko confirmed that the team arrived in March and was immediately integrated into a collaborative working environment with the Qatari Ministry of Defence. The arrival of these specialists, who possess "specific grounds and even combat experience," marks a significant shift in the bilateral relationship. While Qatar has historically provided humanitarian support to Ukraine, the

ambassador noted that this mission allows Ukraine to reciprocate through the sharing of "tactical know-how" and expertise. "Our primary task is to assist, to help, and to provide our Qatari friends with Ukrainian expertise to help them defend the airspace," Kuzmenko told *Gulf Times* in an exclusive interview, noting that the experts were met with an atmosphere of "trust, understanding, and technical co-operation." According to Kuzmenko, this technical mission serves as the first practical application of a landmark 10-year intergovernmental agreement on co-operation in the defence sector. Signed during President Volodymyr Zelensky's working visit to Doha on March 28-29, the pact acts as a broad "umbrella" or framework for long-term security collaboration.



Ukrainian ambassador Andrii Kuzmenko. PICTURE: Thajudheen

The ambassador said the agreement establishes a legal basis for co-operation in several critical fields, including the defence industry, technology development, air defence, counter-drone capabilities, military training, cybersecurity, and artificial intelligence (AI). Kuzmenko emphasised that the principal outcome of the high-level talks, which included His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani, was the formalisation of this decade-long partnership. **To Page 2**

Deputy PM receives phone call from Spanish minister



HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Sheikh Saud bin Abdulrahman bin Hassan al-Thani received a phone call yesterday from Spain's Defence Minister Margarita Robles.

They discussed the latest developments and security updates in the region, along with aspects of joint co-operation and co-ordination in light of the current circumstances. - QNA



PM receives written message from Malta's deputy premier

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani received a written message from Malta's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Tourism Ian Borg, relating to bilateral ties, in addition to his country's solidarity with Qatar in light of the regional.

The message was received by HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi during his meeting yesterday with Malta's ambassador to Qatar Simon Polichino. - QNA

Students will be fairly assessed in mid-term exams, says official

The assistant undersecretary for Evaluation Affairs at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE), Khalid Abdullah al-Harqan, has reassured students and parents regarding the specifications of the mid-term exams for the second semester, which will begin on Sunday and continue until April 21, stressing that the learning patterns that students have experienced during the past period, whether in in-person or remote learning, have been taken into account in their preparation.



Khalid Abdullah al-Harqan

Al-Harqan told the Qatar News Agency (QNA) that this measure ensures the fairness of the assessment and its suitability to the actual level of progress in learning outcomes, and to ensure that the tests do not constitute any additional burden on students from grades 1-11 in government and private schools that apply national standards.

This, he said, is in line with the MoEHE's ongoing commitment to the students' best interests and to creating the appropriate conditions and atmosphere that ensure they can perform the exams in the best possible way, free from any pressure.

The official emphasised the readiness of the assessment system for the launch of the mid-term exams for the second semester of the 2025-26 academic year, which will be conducted according to the actual attendance system in schools, with the provision of a

safe and organised educational environment.

Al-Harqan said that preparations for the mid-term exams were carried out in close co-ordination and co-operation with the stakeholders in the education sector and relevant authorities within the MoEHE, within the framework of efforts to integrate the educational and organisational aspects related to the examination process.

The objective, he added, is primarily to provide an ideal and stimulating educational environment that helps students to perform their exams with ease and peace of mind, ensuring the achievement of the best desired educational results and overcoming all obstacles that they may face during this period.

The official said that schools will handle the preparation of the tests internally in accordance with the approved specifications.

Al-Harqan added schools will adhere to the approved timetable for evaluation and grade monitoring processes via electronic systems, which supports the accuracy of results and the speed of their announcement.

He emphasised the MoEHE's commitment to providing a safe and stable educational environment, which includes providing an integrated educational system that is flexible to deal with various circumstances. - QNA



Qatar taking part in Arab experts meeting on model drug legislation

Qatar has participated in the third meeting of an Arab expert committee to update the Arab Model Law on Combating Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances.

The committee comprises experts and representatives from ministries of justice, interior, health, and relevant authorities of Arab countries.

The three-day talks began yesterday at the headquarters of the Arab League Secretariat in Cairo.

Qatar was represented by Staff Colonel Abdulhadi Saad al-Qahtani from the Ministry of Interior and Mohammed Salem Sultan from Qatar's Permanent Mission to the Arab League.

The meeting focuses on finalising discussions to update the law's provisions, including annexes specifying controlled substances, ahead of presenting the results to the Arab Ministers of Justice and Interior Councils. - QNA

Ukrainian specialists in Qatar 'to share defence expertise'

From Page 1

He said that a primary focus for the Ukrainian team is the implementation of more efficient defence tactics.

Drawing on recent experience, the envoy highlighted the importance of using cost-effective methods to intercept aerial targets.

Kuzmenko noted that modern security requires a strategic balance, as it is often unnecessary to utilise multi-million dollar inter-

ceptors to neutralise drones that may only cost a fraction of that amount.

The ambassador further revealed that the new agreement opens the door for joint production of defence technologies, allowing both nations to develop projects for "mutual benefit".

Kuzmenko characterised the negotiations as professional and decisive, conducted in an atmosphere of "mutual trust and mutual respect".

This sentiment was under-

scored by a personal message from His Highness the Amir to Zelensky during the visit, the envoy emphasised.

Despite the challenges currently facing Ukraine, Kuzmenko said that "His Highness the Amir expressed deep gratitude for the deployment of these specialists".

According to the ambassador, this exchange has established the groundwork for a "real partnership" that Ukraine hopes will continue to grow as a win-win strategy for both nations.

Snoonu and Namaa Join Forces to Empower Entrepreneurs and Advance Qatar's Innovation Economy

In a strategic move to strengthen Qatar's entrepreneurial ecosystem and accelerate innovation, Namaa Social Incubator, one of the centers under the Qatar Foundation for Social Work, and Snoonu, Qatar's leading technology platform, have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) aimed at empowering entrepreneurs and supporting the growth of emerging businesses.

The partnership reflects a shared vision to foster a dynamic, inclusive, and knowledge-driven economy, aligned with Qatar National Vision 2030 and the country's ongoing efforts toward economic diversification and sustainable development.

Through this collaboration, entrepreneurs within Namaa's incubation programs will gain access to Snoonu's digital platform and integrated ecosystem, enabling them to scale their businesses, expand their reach, and enhance operational efficiency. The initiative will also offer a range of capacity-building opportunities, including mentorship, technical support, training workshops, and marketing exposure.

By leveraging Snoonu's advanced technology, logistics infrastructure, and customer reach, participating businesses will be better positioned to accelerate their growth journeys and compete in an evolving market landscape.

The partnership places a strong emphasis on inclusion, targeting key segments such as home-based businesses, social security beneficiaries, and people with disabilities, ensuring broader participation in economic development.

Mr. Ghanim Salah Al Ali, Executive Director of Namaa, said:

"We believe in the power of strategic partnerships to amplify social and economic impact. This collaboration represents a significant step toward empowering entrepreneurs and creating an enabling environment that supports sustainable growth, in line with Qatar National Vision 2030."

Mr. Hamad Mubarak Al-Hajri, Founder and CEO of Snoonu, added:

"At Snoonu, we see innovation as a key driver of inclusive growth. Through this partnership, we aim to provide entrepreneurs with the tools, platform, and opportunities they need to scale their ideas and create lasting impact within the community."

Both parties emphasized that this collaboration represents a model of effective public-private partnership, contributing to the advancement of Qatar's digital economy and reinforcing its position as a hub for innovation and entrepreneurship in the region.



Qatar Tourism chairman takes part in GCC ministers' meeting

Qatar Tourism chairman HE Saad bin Ali al-Kharji participated in an extraordinary ministerial meeting of GCC tourism ministers, held via video conference yesterday, to review recent regional developments and assess their potential implications for the tourism sector across member states. The ministers affirmed that the GCC tourism sector continues to operate effectively, supported by advanced infrastructure, high operational efficiency, and an integrated ecosystem that ensures continuity and stability. They also reiterated that GCC destinations remain committed to delivering safe, high-quality tourism experiences, highlighting the sector's readiness to navigate current developments while sustaining growth.



Iran says ready for anything after Trump issues warning

AFP
Tehran

Iran said yesterday it was prepared for any eventuality, after US President Donald Trump warned "a whole civilisation will die" if the Islamic republic did not heed a looming deadline to open the Strait of Hormuz.

Speaking in Budapest, Vice President JD Vance said the United States had tools "that we so far haven't decided to use" against Iran, without explaining further.

The White House later denied Vance was alluding to nuclear weapons, while Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said in a statement to AFP that "only the President knows where things stand and what he will do".

The statements came as Iran reported the United States and Israel had begun striking key infrastructure, with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu confirming attacks on railways and bridges he said were "used by the Revolutionary Guards".

Trump had initially vowed to carry out the "complete demolition" of Iran's critical infrastructure, particularly bridges and power plants, only if a deal was not reached.

But hours before the deadline, the Israeli military said it had already completed a broad wave of strikes targeting "infrastructure sites" across Iran.

Writing on Truth Social, Trump elevated his ultimatum for Iran, stating that "a whole civilisation will die tonight, never to be brought back again. I don't want that to happen, but it probably will".

It was not clear exactly what he meant by his latest threat, or by what means he intended to carry it out. Hours ahead of the deadline, Iranian First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref said his government was prepared "for all scenarios". "No threat is beyond our preparedness and intelligence," he added.

Both Trump and Iran have turned down a proposal touted by international mediators for a 45-day ceasefire. Infrastructure attacks reported by Iranian



Journalists film at a damaged area following strikes on Sharif University of Technology in Tehran, yesterday. (AFP)

authorities yesterday included a US-Israeli strike on a bridge outside the city of Qom and another on a rail bridge in central Iran that killed two people.

Regional authorities also said a US-Israeli strike shut down a key highway in northern Iran connecting the city of Tabriz with Tehran. The Mizan news agency additionally reported a strike on railway tracks in Karaj, outside Tehran.

University student Metanat, whose classmate was killed two weeks ago in an attack, told AFP she felt "terrified and so should everyone else in the country".

The 27-year-old, who declined to give her last name, said as far as Trump's ultimatums were concerned, "some people think they are a joke", but "death is not a joke".

The UN's rights chief decried the "incendiary rhetoric" in the Middle East war yesterday, warning that deliberate attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure was "a war crime".

At the UN Security Council, Russia and China vetoed a resolution on reopening the Strait of Hormuz. Iran has effectively blocked the waterway — through which a fifth of the world's oil normally flows — since the start of the war on February 28, driving up global energy prices.

Iranian pensioner Morteza Hamidi said that among many emotions, he felt "gloomy for the future of the country after the war".

The 62-year-old added that he had seen Trump back down too many times to take his words seriously: "We are now numb to his threats".

Kuwait, meanwhile, urged its citizens to remain indoors from midnight until 7:00 am, while Bahrain's main port said it would be suspending operations starting early today.

OTHER STRIKES

Apart from the infrastructure attacks, strikes were reported on Kharg island, a critical hub for the Iranian oil industry, according to Iran's Mehr news agency, although US media said the attacks were against military targets.

Earlier in the day a series of explosions was heard across Tehran, and Iranian media reported that 18 people, including two children, were killed in strikes in neighbouring Alborz province.

US-Israeli strikes also "completely destroyed" the capital's Rafi-Nia synagogue, local media reported. The Israeli army later expressed regret for the "collateral damage", saying it had been targeting a senior military commander, not the house of worship.

Overnight, attacks on Saudi Arabia hit a petrochemical complex in a sprawling industrial area in the eastern city of Jubail, a witness who requested anonymity told AFP, hours after similar installations in Iran were struck.

Regional states have faced the brunt of Iran's retaliatory attacks without responding, though Bahraini Foreign Minister Abdullatif bin Rashid al-Zayani warned yesterday that "this restraint cannot be expected to continue without limit".

Rawabi Hypermarket marks World Health Day with free medical camp



In celebration of World Health Day, Rawabi Hypermarket, one of Qatar's trusted retail chains, organised a Free Medical Check-Up Camp for customers and staff as part of its ongoing Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives.

The campaign was conducted in collaboration with Aster Healthcare, utilising their fully equipped volunteer mobile medical bus to deliver accessible

healthcare services directly to the community.

The initiative was held across three locations, including Rawabi Hypermarket Izghawa and Grand Hypermarket Karaitiyat, where the Aster mobile medical bus was stationed.

The final session is scheduled on April 8, from 8am to 12pm at Rawabi Food Center Rayyan.

The free medical camp included essential health services such as Blood Pressure (BP) checks, Body Mass Index (BMI) assessments, Random Blood Sugar (GRBS) tests, and general doctor consultations, ensuring preventive healthcare support for both customers and staff.

Through this initiative, Rawabi Hypermarket reinforces its commitment to community well-being by promoting early health awareness and encouraging healthier lifestyle choices. The programme reflects the company's continuous efforts to make healthcare more accessible and convenient for the public. Aligned with Qatar National Vision 2030, Rawabi Hypermarket remains dedicated to supporting the nation's goal of building a healthier and more sustainable society.

As a growing retail leader in Qatar, the company continues to go beyond retail by actively contributing to social responsibility initiatives that enhance the quality of life in the communities it serves.



Recall order issued for Ford, Lincoln and Hyundai models

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry, in co-operation with Almana Motors Company, Qatar's Ford and Lincoln dealership, has announced the recall of Ford Transit - F250 - F150 - Expedition and Lincoln Navigator 2021- 2026 models and also the Hyundai Kona, Sonata, Azera 2025- 2026 models.

The recall is due to the possibility that the Trailer Module (TRM) may lose communication at vehicle start-up. Dealers are to reprogram the TRM to the latest software. The ministry said the recall campaign comes within the framework of its ongoing efforts to protect consumers and ensure that car dealers follow

up on vehicle defects and repairs. The ministry said that it will co-ordinate with the dealer to follow up on the maintenance and repair works and will communicate with customers to ensure that the necessary repairs are carried out.

The ministry has urged all customers to report any violations to its Consumer Protection and Anti-Commercial Fraud Department, which processes complaints, inquiries and suggestions through the following channels: Call Centre: 16001, e-mail: info@moci.gov.qa, ministry's accounts on social media: @mociqatar, ministry's Mobile App: MOCIQATAR (available on iOS and Android devices)

Pope slams threat to Iranian population

AFP
Castel Gandolfo

Pope Leo XIV said yesterday threats to civilian targets in Iran were "unacceptable", speaking after US President Donald Trump said a "whole civilisation will die" if Tehran defies his latest ultimatum.

"Today... there was this threat against all the people of Iran, and this is truly unacceptable," the pope told journalists, without mentioning the US, which is at war with the Islamic republic.

"There are certainly questions of international law, but much more than that, it is a moral question," he said as he left his residence in Castel Gandolfo, outside Rome, for the Vatican.

His comments came just hours

ahead of Trump's deadline. The US president warned yesterday that "a whole civilization will die" if Iran does not open the Strait of Hormuz by then. Iran has effectively closed the Strait — a key transit route for Middle Eastern oil — since the US and Israel started the war in February, igniting a global energy shock.

Leo, the Catholic Church's first US pope, said that attacks on civilian infrastructure are "against international law".

He urged those involved to "come back to the table" for negotiations. "Let's talk. Let's look for solutions in a peaceful way," he said.

The pontiff also urged "the citizens of all the countries involved to contact the authorities, political leaders, congressmen, to ask them, tell them to work for peace and to reject war always".

Since his election in May, the

Chicago-born pontiff has taken a clear stand against some decisions by Trump's administration.

But faced with a highly polarised US political landscape, he has also relied on the American Catholic hierarchy to deliver the strongest criticism in his stead.

Yesterday, the head of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, Archbishop Paul Coakley, issued a direct appeal to Trump "to step back from the precipice of war".

"The threat of destroying a whole civilisation and the intentional targeting of civilian infrastructure cannot be morally justified," he said in an open letter. "There are other ways to resolve conflict between peoples. I call on President Trump to step back from the precipice of war and negotiate a just settlement for the sake of peace and before more lives are lost," Coakley said.

With Legos and trolling, Iran pushes conflict narrative on social media

AFP
Paris

Flooding the Internet with posts from embassies across the world, sharing Lego videos mocking Donald Trump and even maintaining live accounts in the name of its slain supreme leader — Iran has charged headlong into the battlefield of social media.

Five weeks into the war against Israel and the US, Iranian authorities have pulled out all the stops to aggressively promote the Islamic republic's narrative online.

Their efforts on X and other social media outlets are aimed at the outside world, given that X and most of its competitors have been blocked for years inside Iran, only accessible with the use of a VPN to circumvent internal censorship.

Most Iranians have barely had access to the worldwide web at all since the outbreak of the war on February 28, due to what monitor Netblocks terms an "Internet blackout" that has now lasted 39 days.

But this does not prevent select "whitelisted" officials from using social media platforms like X as weapons in the propaganda war, even as they remain blocked to ordinary Iranians, in a double standard that has enraged digital rights activists. Embassies overseas are also getting in on the action, with certain Trump posts sending sometimes-dormant accounts into a frenzy.

When the US leader issued an explosive-laden rant at the Islamic republic threatening consequences if it did not reopen the Strait of Hormuz, Iran's embassy in Zimbabwe quipped: "We've lost the keys".

ANIMATION

Referring to a previous threat by Trump to send Iran back to the "Stone Ages", the embassy in Thailand added: "Judging by how Potus swears like a teenager, it seems the US has reached the Stone Age sooner than expected".

Iran's embassy in the UK, meanwhile, shared a quote attributed to the famed American author Mark Twain: "It is better to keep your mouth closed and let people



An image released recently, and obtained from social media appears to show wreckage of an American aircraft and a helicopter rotor in Isfahan, Iran, which forensic imagery analyst William Goodhind said is consistent with a US MC-130J or HC-130J, amid the US-Israeli conflict with Iran. (Reuters)

think you are a fool than to open it and remove all doubt."

An incident last week that saw a US

warplane shot down and its two crew ejected over Iran before being rescued by American special forces has also highlighted the foes' competing narratives.

Trump has hailed the operation, and Washington has described it as successful, with no casualties.

But pro-government Iranian news media's English-language accounts on X such as the Tasnim news agency described the operation as "Tabas II", after the Iranian desert location where a 1980 American helicopter bid to rescue hostages being held in the US embassy ended in disaster.

A group called Explosive Media, which describes itself as a "Iranian Lego-style animation team" posted its latest video about the incident showing a Lego Trump with a bandaged hand.

One of the most active users among top officials has been parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, seen by some analysts as the de facto Iranian number one after the killing of supreme leader Ali Khamenei on February 28 at the start of the war.

Referring to threats of a ground inva-

sion, the former Revolutionary Guards commander said on April 1: "You come for our home... you're gonna meet the whole family. Locked loaded and standing tall. Bring it on."

The killing of Khamenei did not end his presence on social media, with his accounts on X and Telegram still posting, sometimes several times daily with comments from past speeches.

Meanwhile, according to Netblocks the web "restrictions have left most Iranians isolated from the global network known as the Internet, with only a domestic digital service, or intranet, now available".

This means most Iranians are unable to reach international websites and social media, with only homegrown services such as for banking, shopping and ride hailing still accessible.

Khamenei's son and successor Mojtaba has yet to be seen in public since being named supreme leader, but has his own widely-used X and Telegram channels.

Despite posting statements and condolence messages in his name, they have yet to offer new images or proof of life.



Smoke rises from the area of Houla caused by Israeli military activities as seen from the southern Lebanese city of Nabatieh, yesterday. **Right:** A firefighter uses a hose to extinguish a fire in a damaged building following overnight Israeli bombardment on the village of Maarake in southern Lebanon, yesterday. (AFP)



Palestinian youth dies of injuries

QNA
Gaza

Palestinian medical sources reported that a young Palestinian man was martyred yesterday after succumbing to injuries he sustained from Israeli shelling east of the Maghazi refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip on Monday.

In the same context, Israeli occupation forces continued artillery shelling and gunfire across various areas of the Gaza Strip. Naval boats fired intensively at the sea off Khan Younis in the southern part of the Strip, while artillery targeted the eastern areas of the city.

Military vehicles also opened heavy fire east of Gaza City, alongside artillery shelling in the Zeitoun neighborhood in the east, and helicopter gunfire combined with artillery bombardment east of Al-Bureij refugee camp in the central Strip.

Ten Palestinians were martyred yesterday in the same attacks and dozens were injured after an Israeli airstrike targeted a gathering of residents east of the Maghazi refugee camp.

The Israeli entity continues to violate the ceasefire agreement that came into effect in October 2025 by carrying out airstrikes and artillery shelling on various areas across the Gaza Strip.

Aid convoy to southern Lebanese town forced back by bombardment

Reuters
Beirut

Bombardment in southern Lebanon yesterday forced a convoy of humanitarian aid organised by the Vatican's embassy for a besieged town to turn back, a priest in the town told Reuters.

Thousands of Christians in several southern Lebanese towns have stayed in their homes despite the escalating fighting between

Israel and Lebanese armed group Hezbollah, hoping their towns would be spared if they stayed on the sidelines of the conflict.

But clashes and Israeli air strikes on surrounding villages have made travel in and out of the towns too dangerous, and food, water and medicine are running short.

An aid delivery organised by the Vatican's embassy was meant to deliver aid to the town of Debel yesterday but shelling forced it to

turn back at the last minute, said Fadi Falfil, a priest in Debel.

"We don't have basic medication like insulin - we don't even have drinking water," he told Reuters. Falfil said the convoy was first organised for Easter Sunday but heavy shelling delayed it to yesterday.

"We were waiting all day, and they were in pain all day to try to get this aid to us. It was five minutes away and it had to turn back," Falfil said.

Falfil said he had been briefed

that Israeli shelling on Hezbollah fighters nearby had derailed the delivery, and that there was no date set for another attempt.

The Israeli military, Hezbollah and a spokesperson for the Vatican's embassy in Lebanon did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The United Nations peace-keeping force in Lebanon, known as UNIFIL, was escorting the convoy yesterday.

"The mission had to be cut short due to shelling in the area.

We did have some very minor injuries among peacekeepers due to the impacts nearby," UNIFIL spokesperson Kandice Ardiel said.

Lebanese broadcaster MTV reported that the aid convoy consisted of three trucks full of basic provisions including bread and vegetables.

"No matter what happens, we're going to stay. We stay because of our faith and our history here - it isn't a choice, it's a message," said Falfil.

Iranians form human chains at power plants: state media

AFP
Paris

Iranians formed human chains to protect power plants yesterday after President Donald Trump's threats to strike energy infrastructure, according to images published by state media, as top officials said they were also prepared to sacrifice their lives.

After a campaign online and through SMS texts to sign up for the human chains nationwide, officials claimed that more than 14mn people had joined.

It was not immediately possible to verify that figure or how many people were taking part, although initial images showed dozens involved at each location.

The state-run IRNA news agency showed people forming a human chain "to support power plants" in the southern city of Bushahr, which is home to Iran's nuclear power plant. State television and the Mehr news agency showed dozens of people outside the main power station in the northern city of Tabriz, as well as at a plant in the north-eastern city of Mashhad.

With US-Israeli strikes also targeting

bridges, people gathered on the main span over a river in the western city of Ahvaz, Mehr reported.

While the more than five-week war between the Islamic republic and the US and Israel has seen a whole echelon of the Iranian leadership killed, strikes on energy plants would mark a major escalation.

Iran parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, seen by some as the country's de-facto number one after the killing of supreme leader Ali Khamenei at the start of the war, published a screenshot of what was purportedly the registration system for the human chains.

Saying he had registered his own name, he added: "Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf is ready to sacrifice his life for Iran."

The local word for self-sacrifice - janfada - became a trending hashtag on social media. "More than 14mn proud Iranians have so far registered to sacrifice their lives to defend Iran. I too have been, am, and will remain ready to give my life for Iran," President Masoud Pezeshkian wrote on X.

US President Trump earlier warned "a whole civilisation will die" in Iran if the country did not heed his midnight deadline to open the Strait of Hormuz.

Dubai pet lovers gather amid Mideast war

AFP
Dubai

A Dubai beach was chock full of dogs and their owners milling between the sea, beauty competitions and stalls selling everything a pet owner could want, as revellers at Barkfest paid no heed to the war gripping the Gulf.

The city has been a continual target for Iranian drones and missiles for more than a month, as Tehran lashes out at neighbouring states in the war against the US and Israel, but neither those on two legs or four at Barkfest seemed to mind.

Two huskies wearing pink ski goggles posed for photos in front of a machine blowing bubbles, followed by a chihuahua and its owner in matching sombreros.

In the distance, a jet ski skipped across the sea.

"For now it's fine," said Poppy, a British 27-year-old who works in the import and export of fake eyelashes.

She was visiting the event alongside her partner, an online fitness coach tattooed from neck to wrist, and one of their French bulldogs.

The other was suffering from an ear infection and had to stay at home, said Poppy, dressed in leggings and a sports top.

The Emirati authorities have been working hard to protect Dubai's image as a safe haven in a turbulent region, despite the Iranian barrages.

The country's expensive air defence systems have worked well, intercepting the vast majority of the more than 2,000 drones and 500 missiles launched by Tehran.

Nevertheless, at least 10 people have been killed since the start of the war, while sites across the country have been damaged.

Pictures of the damage are hard to find though, with the authorities having made it illegal to share images of the attacks.

As a result, images of burning hotels, shattered flats and smoke-filled skylines are now rare on social media.

"Think before sharing. Spreading rumours is a crime" punishable with a \$55,000 fine and two years in prison, Dubai police posted on its X account.

Another post encouraged people to be "the eyes" of law enforcement by reporting "negative behaviour or actions that threaten the security of the community".

On social media, the authorities report successful interceptions of incoming Iranian attacks, but only ever talk of "sounds" and not explosions.

Reclining on a lounge with her two young Peruvian hairless dogs, Barbie and Claudia, protected from the sun by anti-UV t-shirts, Maria said she was "really glad that these kinds of events are organised".



A man poses for a picture with his dog during the Barkfest dog festival at Barasti Beach in Dubai. (AFP)

The 35-year-old Latvian, a fertility specialist, said she felt "safer here than going back to London", without elaborating on what dangers she might face in the British capital.

The line is a common re-

frain among Western expats in the glitzy Gulf city, where crime levels are extremely low.

But not all residents are as indifferent to the consequences of the war. Many, especially those with chil-

dren, continue to leave the city, while neighbourhoods are sometimes abandoned when Iran threatens specific US businesses with facilities there.

Barkfest, though, managed to escape warnings of missile or drone threats.

Sarah, a 40-year-old in a long dress, dark glasses and a straw hat, said the deadly conflict that has spread throughout the region had not affected her lifestyle - in fact it may have improved it.

The German, who spends her winters in Dubai and summers back home, said she had noticed the city emptying out.

It has meant no traffic jams or tourists packing the attractions, while shops and restaurants, desperate to attract customers, have been putting on special offers. "I'm making the most of it," Sarah said, smiling with a pair of toy poodles in her arms.

The Transport Company
MOWASALAT (KARWA)

Mowasalat (Karwa) announces the following tender:

Tender Ref. No.	Tender Title	Tender Fee	Electronic Tender Fee Payment Dates	Tender Bond	Bid Closing Date
TC-012-LTS-2026	Lease of Vehicles on Call-off Basis	QAR 2000	08th April to 15th April 2026	QAR 75,000	05th May 2026

CONDITIONS:

- ▶ Interested bidder shall pay the tender fee to Mowasalat Bank Account details as shown:
- ▶ Bidder must submit proof of tender fee payment (Bank Deposit Slip + a Signed & Stamped Expression of Interest (indicating Tender Ref. No. and Title / Company Name and details of nominated contact person i.e., Tel. No., Fax No., and Email address) + Copy of valid Commercial Registration to Mowasalat Secretary - Tender Committee at email: tenders@mowasalat.com
- ▶ Tender documents will be released via email on the next working day after the tender fee payment date to all bidders who have submitted the bank deposit slip and other documents requested (i.e., 16th April 2026).
- ▶ **Bonds: Tender Bond & Performance Bond:** Bids must be accompanied by Bonds issued by a local bank operating in the State of Qatar as per the Qatar Central Bank template. Further details of bonds can be found in the tender documents. *Bids without Tender Bond shall not be considered.*
- ▶ **Tender validity:** Bid validity period shall be 180 days from the bid closing date.
- ▶ **Tender documents submission:** Bids must be submitted in 3 separate sealed (IN RED WAX) envelopes addressed to **Secretary - Tender Committee** clearly highlighting the Tender Ref. No. & Tender Title:
 - **Envelope 1# must** include the Technical Bid submission (1 Original + 1 non-Editable copy in a USB)
 - **Envelope 2# must** include Commercial Bid submission (1 Original + 1 Editable MS Excel spreadsheet copied in a USB)
 - **Envelope 3# must** include the Tender Bond (1 Original) + 3 years Audited Financial Statements.
- ▶ **Bid Closing Date:** Bid submission deadline is **12.00 noon Doha Local Time** as on the Bid closing date shown above. The 3 envelopes must be handed over to the Office of The Secretary - Tender Committee, located at Mowasalat Head Office, Industrial Area. Any tender submitted after the deadline will not be considered.

Supplier Registration

Mowasalat Location

Tel.: 4458 8724
Fax: 4458 8850

كروى KAFWA
دولة ليموسينه dohalimousine
خدمات كروى karwa services
مركز مواصلات الطبي mowasalat medical center
الأكاديمية كروى Karwa Academy
كروى للتكنولوجيا Karwa Technologies

QATAR FUEL ADDITIVES COMPANY LIMITED
QAFAC

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

The Tender Committee of QAFAC invites qualified local suppliers to participate in the following Tenders in accordance with QAFAC tendering procedures:

No.	Tender No.	Description	Collection Fees	Tender Bond	Bid Closing Date
1	QTC/027/26	Four (4) year Call off Contract for Periodic Maintenance Support and Repair Services of MTBE Industrial Elevator at QAFAC Plant, Mesaieed.	Qrs. 300/-	Qrs. 50,000/-	03 rd May 2026
2	QTC/003/26	Modification of C-1101-T at QAFAC Plant, Mesaieed	Qrs. 300/-	Qrs. 40,000/-	03 rd May 2026

Interested companies are invited to collect the above tender documents as follows:

- **Collection Date** : From **Wednesday, 08th April 2026** (QAFAC working days from Sunday to Thursday only)
- **Collection Time** : 08:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m
- **Location** : The Gate, Bay Tower 2, 13th Floor, West Bay, QAFAC
- **Tender Fees** : As shown above, (**non-refundable**) can be paid at QAFAC Doha Office
- **Validity** : Offers must be valid for 120 days from closing date.
- **Bid Bond** : Offers must include a Bid bond issued from a local bank and valid for 120 Days from closing date.
- **Authorization** : Tenders will be issued to authorized company personnel with the following:
 1. Official authorization on Company Letter Head.
 2. Proper Identification.
 3. Copy of valid Company's Commercial Registration.
 4. Focal Point of Contact (Name, Telephone, Mobile & Email)
 5. Valid In Country Value (ICV) Certificate

Note: "Effective from 1st July 2023, bids received from Local Companies (established under the Laws of state of Qatar with local Commercial Registration) who are not in possession of an ICV score in the ICV portal by Bid Closing Date (or commercial bid submission date if separately mentioned/notified) will not be accepted. Local Company that have been established for less than 2 years and insurance companies are exempted from this requirement. For further details please visit ICV digital Portal :- <https://icv.qa/US>

Cambodian deported by US faced 'misery' in Eswatini prison

AFP
Phnom Penh

A Cambodian refugee long-settled in the US, ex-convict Pheap Rom, remains bewildered at how he wound up behind bars in the African nation of Eswatini for months after being swept up in Donald Trump's deportation blitz.

When Rom and nine other men — shackled and escorted onto a plane by US authorities — landed in the kingdom of Eswatini in October, they were greeted on the tarmac by a squad of "military guys with guns and masks", the 43-year-old said.

"I didn't know what was going to happen," he said in an interview in the Cambodian capital Phnom Penh, where he was repatriated in late March.

"I didn't understand why I was being deported to Africa because I'm Cambodian."

Rom is one of around 20 men the US has deported to landlocked Eswatini — bordering South Africa and Mozambique — under a Trump administration scheme challenged in courts and described by rights advocates as akin to "human trafficking".

Eswatini, Africa's last absolute monarchy, is among several "third countries" accepting migrants under shadowy deals enabling the US president's push for mass deportations.

The nation formerly known as Swaziland agreed to accept up to 160 deportees in exchange for around \$5.1mn, with plans to forward them to their home countries after Washington said their direct repatriations were denied. But Rom — living in the US with "permanent resident" status since 1985 after his family fled Cambodia's genocidal Khmer Rouge regime — is just the second to be repatriated from Eswatini, after a Jamaican was returned home last year.

The remainder may still be trapped inside the deportation process, opaque even to those inside it.

Rom served a 15-year prison sentence in the US after pleading guilty to attempted murder for firing a gun during two neighbourhood disputes, leaving several people wounded. "I know what I did was wrong," he said. "I accepted my punishment."

He was detained by immigration authorities upon his release in November 2024, and his green card was revoked after an immigration judge ordered his deportation due to his felony conviction.

He expected to be sent to Cambodia. But landing in Eswatini was like turning back the clock to his prison term, Rom said.

His jailers seemed unaware that the men had served their time and looked at them as if they were "criminals because of what the (US) administration was portraying us to be".

For the first two months at the Matsapha Correctional Centre, Rom said he and fellow deportees "went through misery" — allowed outdoors for only



Cambodian Pheap Rom poses for picture at a restaurant in Phnom Penh. (AFP)

15 minutes a day and given one weekly phone call.

"We had an attorney there that was willing to try to come and talk to us, but they weren't letting that attorney in," he said. Lawyers in Eswatini have corroborated his claim to AFP, saying they have been repeatedly denied access to people expelled by the US who have been detained without charge.

Eswatini's government has said US deportees were "in good hands" and receiving healthcare, including counselling.

Much of Trump's deportation campaign has been executed by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), criticised for using heavy-handed tactics during crackdowns in US cities.

ICE did not reply to a request for comment about Rom's case.

In July, when the first deportees were sent to Eswatini, a US Department of Homeland Security spokeswoman said on social media they were "so uniquely barbaric that their home countries refused to take them back".

But Rom and his lawyer Tin Thanh Nguyen both expressed doubts the agency even tried to deport him directly to Cambodia, the only country where he has citizenship.

Nguyen is struggling to piece together the logic that led to his client being marooned in a country where he had no ties.

The lawyer painted a picture of a chaotic process, saying Rom was not interviewed in the US to verify his nationality and was registered for deportation to Thailand, the country where he was born in a refugee camp. "If ICE was requesting travel documents from Thailand, they went to the wrong country," Nguyen said.

Chann Rotana, a spokesman for Cambodia's foreign ministry, told AFP that the US had previously sent Cambodian deportees to the country directly with no issues.

ing measures, or electricity rationing. "This decision was taken following the observation that the country is facing a deep crisis due to disruptions in energy supply across the island, linked to the conflict in the Middle East," the cabinet said in a statement. "The declaration of a state of energy emergency allows authorities to take exceptional and urgent measures to restore energy supply and ensure the continuity of public services."

Local media in Madagascar reported widespread fuel shortages nationwide yesterday.

Madagascar declares state of emergency over energy situation due to Iran war

Reuters
Antananarivo

Madagascar declared a nationwide state of energy emergency for 15 days yesterday, citing disruptions in energy supply caused by the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, its cabinet said.

Several African governments have responded to surging global oil prices, spurred by the Iran war, by implementing sharp fuel price increases, energy-sav-

Thousands of small fish defy gravity to climb Congo waterfall

Reuters
Kinshasa

A species of small fish has been observed by the thousands climbing a vertical waterfall 15 metres (50 feet) tall in the Democratic Republic of Congo in a behaviour that illustrates the surprising and ingenious ways animals can adapt to extreme environments.

The researchers documented how this species of shellfish,

whose scientific name is *Parakneria thysi*, scales the Luvilombo Falls in the upper Congo Basin, a vast river system spanning Central Africa and home to the world's second-largest rainforest. Researchers observed the fish ascending the vertical rock face during seasonal floods at the end of the rainy season, typically in April and May. While this species can reach about 9.8 centimetres (3.9 inches) long, the researchers observed only small to medium-

sized individuals — about 3.7 to 4.8 cm (1.5 to 1.9 inches) long — journeying up the falls. Observations suggest a fish may take nearly 10 hours to complete the slow and demanding climb to the top, moving in short bursts and resting frequently. Larger individuals of the species appeared to be too heavy for their fins to support the climb. "This discovery highlights the importance of maintaining the continuity of watercourses, particularly in the context of the Congo Basin, where studies on fish behaviour are virtually non-existent," said Pacifique Kiwele, a researcher in ichthyology and a member of the scientific staff at the Université de Lubumbashi in the Democratic Republic of Congo who was the lead author of the study published in the journal *Scientific Reports*.

"It prompts scientists to be even more vigilant in their observations, as anything is possible. Who would have believed it without being close enough to check, and document it with photographic and film material, that indeed some fish are able to climb waterfalls? It illustrates that there are wonders out there that surpass our imagination," Kiwele said.

Some other fish species are capable of scaling waterfalls through various means but the researchers said this species is the first one documented in Africa.

The researchers recorded the behaviour of this shellfish on four occasions in 2018 and 2020, observing them moving up the rock face through what is called the splash zone — areas kept wet by spray rather than direct water flow. So how do they do it? The fish cling to wet rock surfaces using their pectoral fins, supported by pelvic fins and aided by tiny hook-like projections known as unculi, which help them grip sur-

DR Congo makes deal with US to take in deported foreigners

AFP
Kinshasa

The Democratic Republic of Congo has said it will take in foreigners deported from the US under a deal with Washington, which also wants access to Congolese mineral wealth.

Contacted by AFP yesterday, the government did not say how many third-country nationals would be accepted under the agreement nor what the US had offered the Kinshasa government in return for participating in its mass deportation campaign.

Several other African countries have, in recent months, made deals with the US to take in deportees — Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Eswatini, Ghana, Rwanda and South Sudan.

A number of the deals include US financial or logistical assistance.

Many of the people rounded up for deportation have US work permits and no criminal record,

according to US statistics.

Human Rights Watch said in September the "opaque deals" were "part of a US policy approach that violated international human rights law and is designed to instrumentalise human suffering as a deterrent to migration".

The NGO said recent expulsions of people to African countries had "exposed several hundred people to a risk of arbitrary detention, ill-treatment and refoulement".

Refoulement refers to the practice of forcibly sending refugees or asylum seekers to a country where they are liable to suffer persecution.

On Sunday, the DRC government announced it would "temporarily take in third country nationals" from the US, starting this month.

The huge central African country is one of the poorest in the world and nearly three quarters of the population live under the poverty threshold, according to World Bank figures.

The DRC communications ministry said the deportees would be taken to Kinshasa, whose infrastructure is insufficient for the needs of the 17mn people living in the capital.

Most homes lack access to running water or electricity. The government said it had made arrangements for "reception facilities".

The ministry said there would be no cost to the Congolese government because "the logistical and technical aspects of the operation will be handled by the US government".

UN human rights experts complained in July that the Trump administration's "expedited removal procedure could allow people to be taken to a country other than their own in as little as a single day, without an immigration court hearing or other appearance before a judge". Kinshasa and Washington are also negotiating US access to DRC health data and mineral assets.

Ugandan kindergarten stabbings suspect charged with murder

A Ugandan man accused of fatally stabbing kindergarten children in the capital, Kampala, has been charged with quadruple murder, the state prosecutor said yesterday, AFP reported from Kampala. Christopher Okello Onyum is suspected of having gained access to a daycare centre last week by posing as a parent, before attacking children aged around two and three with a knife, killing four of them. The attack sparked outrage in the African Great Lakes nation, with an angry crowd attempting to lynch him

before his arrest. "The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) has sanctioned four murder charges," reads yesterday's statement from the state prosecutor. Onyum appeared before a lower court in Kampala under tight security, with families of the victims present to follow the proceedings. "There was tension around the court premises. There was police, the military and prison guards, all armed and some were deployed inside the courtroom," said Ramathan Musoke, a witness present at the court.

Death toll from torrential rain flooding in Angola rises to 30

AFP
Luanda

Torrential rains that swept across Angola in recent days have killed more than 30 people, according to a new toll reported by Angolan public television yesterday.

The storm has triggered flash floods that inundated streets and damaged infrastructure in the capital Luanda and the central city of Benguela on the Atlantic

coast. President Joao Lourenco has said the country faces a "race against the clock" to find, rescue and provide medical care to those affected.

Emergency services on Sunday had put the death toll at 15 and said thousands had been forced to leave their homes.

Benguela has borne the biggest brunt of the flooding, with 23 people killed, TPA television said.

Six people have died and one is missing in Luanda, the fire

service said in a statement.

In neighbouring Namibia, the Zambezi River has risen sharply, forcing thousands of people living along its banks to flee.

Officials said water levels had reached about 6.8 metres, well above the usual four metres.

Heavy downpours are not unusual in southern Africa during the rainy season but scientists say human-caused climate change is increasing the probability, length and severity of such extreme weather events.



File photo shows members of a species of shellfish, scientific name *Parakneria thysi*, crossing the second level of Luvilombo Falls, a waterfall in the Democratic Republic of Congo. (Reuters)



File photo of Luvilombo Falls, a waterfall in the Democratic Republic of Congo during the period of mass migration of a species of shellfish. (Reuters)

LIQUIDATION / LICENSE CANCELLATION NOTICE

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Accordingly, any interested party who has a claim against the Company is hereby requested to submit its outstanding claims within 14 days of notice by registered post or contact:

Mr. Neil Wilson
PRO Partner Consultancy QFZ LLC
Address: Coworking Space 99, Office 62, Ras Bufontas Admin Building, Building 43, Street 517, Zone 49, Ras Bufontas Free Zone, Doha, Qatar
Tel No. +97474786986
Email: nwilson@SovereignGroup.com

Claims received after expiry of the notice period of 14 days shall not be considered



Google adds Gemini crisis features amid lawsuit over user's suicide

AFP
San Francisco

Google has announced updates to the mental health safeguards on its Gemini artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot, as the company faces a wrongful death lawsuit alleging the chatbot aided a user in his suicide.

The tech giant said Gemini would now show a redesigned "Help is available" feature when conversations signal potential mental health distress, to provide faster connections to crisis care.

When the chatbot detects signs of a po-

tential crisis related to suicide or self-harm, a simplified interface will offer users the ability to call, text, or chat with a crisis hotline in a single click – a feature Google said would remain visible for the remainder of the conversation once activated.

Google's philanthropic arm Google.org also committed \$30mn over three years to help scale the capacity of global crisis hotlines, and \$4mn toward an expanded partnership with AI training platform Re-flexAI.

"We realise that AI tools can pose new challenges," Google said in a blog post announcing the measures. "But as they improve and more people use them as part of

their daily lives, we believe that responsible AI can play a positive role for people's mental well-being"

The announcements come months after a lawsuit filed in a California federal court accused Gemini of contributing to the October 2025 death of Jonathan Gavalas, a 36-year-old Florida man.

His father alleges the chatbot spent weeks manufacturing an elaborate delusional fantasy before framing his son's death as a spiritual journey.

Among the relief sought in the suit is a requirement that Google program its AI to end conversations involving self-harm, a ban on AI systems presenting themselves

as sentient, and mandatory referral to crisis services when users express suicidal ideation.

In the same blog post, Google said it had trained Gemini to avoid acting as a human-like companion and resist simulating emotional intimacy or encouraging bullying.

The case against Google is the latest in a widening wave of litigation targeting AI companies over chatbot-linked deaths.

OpenAI faces multiple lawsuits alleging its ChatGPT chatbot drove users to suicide, while Character.AI recently settled with the family of a 14-year-old boy who died after forming a romantic attachment to one of its chatbots.

Artemis II astronauts snap historic Earthset picture on their way home

Crew members have boldly gone where no human has gone before

AFP/Reuters
Houston

The Artemis II astronauts snapped a stunning shot of Earthset – the moment when the Earth dips below the Moon's horizon – on their long journey back home yesterday after wrapping up a historic lunar flyby.

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (Nasa) released the photo of Earth dropping below the rugged lunar edge in a deliberate nod to the iconic Earthrise image taken by an Apollo 8 astronaut in 1968.

That shot 57 years ago helped capture the public's imagination when it was taken by US astronaut Bill Anders during the first space mission to carry humans around the Moon.

The modern version pairs the delicate, watery planet Earth with the harsh, huge curve of the Moon, separated by black space.

"First photo from the far side of the Moon," the White House said, reposting the image.

The crew of four – US astronauts Reid Wiseman, Christina Koch, and Victor Glover, teamed with Canadian Jeremy Hansen – are on a historic mission to loop around Earth's natural satellite as part of a broader program paving the way for a Moon landing in 2028.

After completing their lunar flyby – breaking the record for distance from Earth – they were bound for home, with splashdown due in the Pacific off the coast of California late on Friday.

The crew reported in vivid detail features of the lunar surface and later witnessed a solar eclipse, when the Moon passed in front of the Sun.

They also described flashes of light – meteor strikes – on the Moon's surface.

"Humans probably have not evolved to see what we're seeing," said Glover. "It is truly hard to describe. It is amazing."

About two dozen scientists packed a conference room adjacent to mission control at Nasa's Johnson Space Centre in Houston to record the lunar phenomena witnessed by the Artemis crew in real time.

Late on Monday, the crew got a congratulatory call from Nasa administrator Jared Isaacman and US President Donald Trump, who at 79 is old enough to remember the Apollo programme.

"You've really inspired the entire world," Trump said, calling them "modern-day pioneers" who have "a lot of courage".

He probed the astronauts about their favourite moments and asked what it was like to lose connection with Earth for some 40 minutes during an expected communications blackout.

Trump experienced a signal glitch of his own while calling into space.

"Might have gotten cut off," Trump said as he waited a full minute for the signal to return. "It is a long distance."

Asked by the president how they felt when all communication with



Earth was cut off as Orion flew behind the moon, Glover answered: "I said a little prayer, but then I had to keep rolling."

The Artemis II team broke the distance record set by the 1970 Apollo 13 mission, which they surpassed by more than 4,000 miles (more than 6,000km) when they reached the journey's furthest distance from Earth 252,756 miles (406,771km).

Hansen said that the moment should "challenge this generation and the next, to make sure this record is not long-lived".

Glover was the first person of colour to fly around the Moon, Koch was the first woman, and Canadian Hansen the first non-American.

The Orion capsule carrying the astronauts will now travel back to Earth in a so-called free-return trajectory before coming down in the ocean.

They'll be leaving something behind: names for two previously unnamed Moon craters.

The first they requested to name in honour of their spacecraft's nickname, "Integrity".

They offered a second name, "Carroll", for another crater, which they asked be named after the late wife of mission commander Wiseman, who died of cancer.

"It's a bright spot on the Moon," said Hansen, his voice breaking with emotion. "And we would like to call it Carroll."

Nasa said that it will formally submit the name proposals to the International Astronomical Union, the body charged with naming celestial bodies and surface features.

While designed as a crewed dress rehearsal for future lunar excursions, Artemis II generated a wealth of new material for lunar scientists to study, including meteor impact flashes recorded during Monday's flyby that were reminiscent of sparks and streaks of light described by some of Apollo's astronauts.



Victor Glover and Christina Koch gather images and observations during the Artemis II crew's flyby of the Moon. - Reuters



The Moon is fully eclipsed by the Sun during the Artemis II crew's flyby of the Moon yesterday. - Reuters



The Earth, seen from the Orion capsule after the spacecraft had reached its farthest distance from the planet when it traveled around the Moon, is pictured in this image taken from video. - Reuters

This handout picture released yesterday by Nasa shows the Earth as it dips beyond the lunar horizon, also known as Earthset, as seen from the Orion spacecraft. - AFP

'Morale boost': Nasa carries out Moon mission during a tough year for science

By Maggy Donaldson
AFP

As the four Artemis astronauts approached a high point of their lunar mission – getting slung around the far side of the Moon – National Aeronautics and Space Administration (Nasa) staffers crowded into Houston's famed mission control room on Monday for a team photo.

They were all smiles as countdown clocks ticked and the Orion spacecraft flew ever closer to Earth's cratered neighbour, a mission years in the making come to fruition at last.

By most metrics it's been a rough year for science in the United States – the Trump administration has slashed funding, halted projects and devastated workforces.

However, the Nasa sent astronauts around the Moon for the first time in half-a-century, deeper into space than ever before.

The moonshot has served as a "massive positive moment", said exploration scientist Jacob Bleacher.

"People have been working on this for months, years – over a decade in some cases," he told AFP.

The majority of Americans, including Nasa scientists, weren't yet born when the Apollo era first sent astronauts to the Moon in the late 1960s.

The myth loomed large, but it was past tense – until now.

"It's just surreal," said Bleacher, speaking from Nasa's Science Mission Operations Room in Houston's famed Johnson Space Centre.

"This is my generation's first chance to step up and really do this," he said. "I like to think about it as walking through a doorway into how humankind explores the solar system going forward."

US President Donald Trump has pressured Nasa to get boots

Netflix debuts new Playground gaming app for children

Netflix doubled down on its gaming efforts on Monday, launching a new app called *Netflix Playground* that would feature games built around popular children's characters such as Peppa Pig and Sesame Street.

Analysts say the streaming giant's gaming efforts have yet to emerge as a major growth driver.

One of the main challenges, analysts believe, is Netflix's relatively limited portfolio of iconic intellectual property compared with rivals such as Warner Bros Discovery, which owns franchises, including DC Comics.

Some of the most popular games from Netflix include Rockstar Games' *GTA: San Andreas*, and those based on its own hit shows such as *Squid Game: Unleashed*.

The streaming giant said the new features aim to be a "curated space where parents know kids are entertained, engaged and enriched".

The move is also aimed at deepening engagement with families, a segment where children's content has traditionally been seen as helping reduce churn because parents are less likely to cancel.

"Emphasising kids programmes will make Netflix stickier for households with children," Emarketer senior analyst Ross Benes said.

The new app will help Netflix "compete in the one area where it has a deficiency compared to Disney+, which is children's programming", he added.

The app is designed for children eight years old and younger and is included in all levels of Netflix membership.

Each game will be playable offline, including *Playtime With Peppa Pig*, *Dr. Seuss's Horton!* and *Sesame Street*.

In addition to parental controls, the platform ensures no ads, in-app purchases or extra fees.

Netflix Playground is available for download in the US, Canada, the UK, Australia, the Philippines and New Zealand.

The company will launch globally towards the end of this month. - Reuters

on the lunar surface before his second term ends in 2029.

However, just last week the White House simultaneously proposed slashing the space agency's overall budget by 23% and significantly curtailing its science programme funding.

And like many US government agencies, Nasa has faced "significant cuts to their workforce", said Clayton Swope, a space policy expert at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies.

With Artemis 2, "I think they have delivered", he told AFP. "It's been under very challenging circumstances."

For Amanda Nahm, a programme scientist for Nasa Headquarters, the successful Artemis II launch and unfolding mission offer "a good morale boost".

"We all work at Nasa because of this – and I think it's helping remind us" that "our base mission is this hard, exciting exploration – seeing new things, trying out new things we've never done before", she told AFP.

"I think it will hopefully reinvigorate us all."

As they carry out their mission, the team of four astronauts have been routinely asked to reflect on the weight of the torch they carry.

They regularly bring the focus back to their role in a project they see as much bigger than themselves.

And frequently, they also cite the work of the team "we're lifted up by", as mission commander Reid Wiseman put it.

"We just feel like we're lifted up by the team that supports us, and you just sort of execute the plan," he said as the crew soared away from their home planet.

"Many people telling us how to work this and manage this vehicle, and a lot of great training, and you just kind of go step by step, which I think is pretty remarkable, what this team can do," he added.

"It really highlights their excellence."

Russia delays lunar missions as US marks historic flight

Reuters
Moscow

Russia has pushed back the launch of three Moon missions, the Interfax news agency said yesterday, a setback to its ambitious lunar exploration programme as longtime space rival, the United States, celebrated a historic flight around the Moon.

The launches of Russian spacecraft Luna-28, Luna-29, and Luna-30 have been postponed to 2032-36, Interfax quoted Russian Academy of Sciences vice-president Sergei Chernyshev as saying.

It did not say when they had originally been slated to lift off, but the unexplained delays follow postponements last year to other Russian lunar and space missions and the crash of its unmanned Luna-25 craft into the surface of the Moon in 2023.

Russia sees lunar exploration as vital to its national interests, the head of Russia's space agency Roskosmos said after the failed 2023 mission, saying that the race was on to develop the Moon's natural resources.

The Soviet Union launched the world's first satellite and sent the first human into space in the 1960s, but Russia's once mighty space programme has declined in the post-Soviet era, falling behind the US and, increasingly, China.

Florida governor signs 'terrorist' designation law, raises free speech and due process concerns

Reuters
Washington

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis has signed into law a measure that gave him and other state officials the power to designate groups as "terrorist organisations" and expel students who support them, with rights groups saying that the law will chill free speech.

The law empowers the state's chief of domestic security, governor and cabinet to designate any organisation that they determine engages in extremist acts as a "terrorist organisation".

After such a designation, the group can be forcibly dissolved and face a freeze on state funding, according to the legislation.

It also says that students shall be expelled from their institution if they "promoted a domestic terrorist organisation or a foreign terrorist organisation".

DeSantis, a Republican, signed the law on Monday.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations

(CAIR), one of the country's most prominent Muslim rights groups, called the law "draconian" and unconstitutional in a statement on Monday.

Late last year, DeSantis signed an executive order designating the CAIR as a "foreign terrorist organisation".

The CAIR sued over the designation and a judge eventually blocked the order.

Free speech group PEN America says the measure signed by DeSantis "could chill free speech by placing unprecedented pressure on individuals to avoid speaking, organising, or engaging with certain viewpoints".

In November, Texas also designated the CAIR as a "terrorist organisation", alleging the rights group had ties to extremists.

The CAIR sued over that designation as well and dismissed the claims.

Darryl Li, a legal scholar at the University of Chicago, and Shirin Sinnar, a professor of law at Stanford Law School, said in a joint piece in February that efforts by Texas and Florida towards such designations "could lay the groundwork for even more sweeping forms of authoritarianism".

Republican President Donald Trump's administration and some Republican-governed states have cracked down against left-leaning organisations and pro-Palestinian groups that they cast as extremist, antisemitic and anti-American.

Those groups dismiss the allegations and say the crackdown violates free speech and due process.

They also say that those states and the Trump administration conflate pro-Palestinian advocacy with support for extremism, and criticism of US ally Israel's assault on Gaza and its occupation of Palestinian territories with antisemitism.

Trump's attempts to deport some protesters and freeze funds for universities where protests were held have faced judicial roadblocks.

PEN America Florida director William Johnson said the Florida legislation "opens the door for Florida students to face punishment for constitutionally protected speech".

DeSantis cast the legislation as a framework to combat extremism and have accountability in the education system.



This picture taken last month shows US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents at Washington Reagan National Airport in Arlington, Virginia. - Reuters

'ICE arrested more than 800 after tips from TSA'

By Ted Hesson and Kristina Cooke
Reuters

US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) arrested more than 800 people following tips shared by federal airport security officials from the start of Donald Trump's presidency through February 2026, internal ICE data reviewed by Reuters show, a figure far above what was previously publicly known.

The leads came from the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), which supplied the ICE with records on more than 31,000 travelers for possible immigration enforcement, the data showed.

Reuters could not determine how many arrests took place inside airports, although the TSA tips would mainly be useful in determining when a person would be traveling.

The ICE and TSA are part of the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

The agencies have historically shared information related to national security threats, but they began focusing on routine immigration arrests last year as part of Trump's mass deportation effort.

The 31,000 traveler records were gathered by the TSA's Secure Flight Programme, which was created in 2007 to allow the agency to review passenger information for people who may be on US government watchlists.

The programme was intended as a counter-terrorism measure, not to track down immigration offenders, according to the regulation outlining its purpose.

The DHS did not respond to questions about the TSA providing passenger information to the ICE, but said that under Trump, the TSA "is pursuing solutions that improve resiliency, security, and efficiency across our entire system".

Figures for arrests and traveler records that the TSA shared with the ICE before Trump's current term were unavailable.

US airports and immigration enforcement have been at the centre of a partisan funding fight since mid-February, when Democrats refused to support additional

money for the Republican president's immigration crackdown without reforms to scale back aggressive tactics.

The standoff blocked the passage of a bill to fund the DHS, which caused TSA security officers to miss at least two full paycheques.

After some unpaid TSA officers began calling in sick, Trump deployed ICE officers to more than a dozen airports in March to aid security efforts.

Democrats have criticised the deployment and called on the Trump administration to remove them.

A group of more than 40 Democrats in the US House of Representatives wrote in a letter to recently installed Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin last week that ICE officers "will cause confusion and fear" if allowed to remain in airports.

Several cases of ICE officers arresting travelers in US airports have sparked backlash.

ICE officers detained a college student traveling from Boston to Texas to celebrate Thanksgiving in November and arrested a sobbing mother at San Francisco International Airport the day before Trump's airport deployment began.

The DHS defended both arrests and said they were subject to final orders of removal.

Reuters spoke with three immigration attorneys who said they were familiar with cases of people without legal immigration status being arrested in airports.

The cases included an Irish couple who had lived in the US for more than two decades and were detained last summer by immigration authorities in front of their children when trying to fly from Florida to New York after a vacation, Christina Canty, one of the lawyers, said.

The parents - who had pending applications for permanent residency - were deported and left their two young children, ages seven and 10, with adult siblings in the US, Canty said.

In another case, a Chinese woman with a final order of removal who was seeking permanent residence was detained by the ICE last year at the Atlanta airport en route to Philadelphia, one of the attorneys said.

Apex court clears path to overturn Bannan's conviction

The US Supreme Court has cleared the way for Steve Bannan, a former adviser to President Donald Trump, to overturn his conviction in a case linked to the January 6 attack on the Capitol.

Bannan, a leading figure on the far-right, served four months in a federal prison in 2024 for defying a subpoena to testify before a congressional panel investigating the 2021 attack.

However, he appealed to the Supreme Court to have the conviction overturned, a legal challenge the Trump administration joined in February.

Acting Attorney-General Todd Blanche has described the move as a course correction from what he claimed was "the prior administration's weaponisation of the justice system".

In a brief, unsigned decision on Monday, the Supreme Court granted this request, vacating the appellate ruling upholding Bannan's conviction, and remanding the case to the trial judge.

Bannan, a mastermind behind Trump's first presidential campaign, was sacked as chief strategist in the White House in August 2017.

He was one of the loudest voices behind false accusations of fraud in the 2020 presidential election won by Democratic candidate Joe Biden.

The Justice Department (DOJ)'s decision to drop Bannan's case was one of multiple actions it has taken that have benefited allies and supporters of the Republican president since Trump returned to office last year. - AFP/Reuters



Steve Bannan

Charlie's Angels stars reunite for show's 50th anniversary

The stars of legendary American crime drama *Charlie's Angels* reunited on Monday at Los Angeles' PaleyFest to celebrate 50 years since the show catapulted the trio to fame.

Aired over five seasons between 1976 and 1981, the show became a cultural phenomenon that left its mark on television and starred Kate Jackson, Jaclyn Smith and Cheryl Ladd - who joined after Farrah Fawcett left the show to pursue a movie career.

The series followed three powerful women who left the daily grind of the Los Angeles police force to become private detectives working for a mysterious boss named Charlie Townsend who spoke to them through an intercom.

It hoped to highlight the strength of women and fight against the archetype that women needed rescuing, Smith - who played Kelly Garrett - told AFP on the red carpet at Hollywood's legendary Dolby Theatre.

"Women came into their own, it was groundbreaking (and a) game changer for women," she said. "Here we were chasing danger (and) we were not being rescued. We were not a wife, a nurse, a secretary, a girlfriend... we were these strong



US actresses Kate Jackson (left), Jaclyn Smith and Cheryl Ladd (right) at the PaleyFest LA 2026. - AFP

women that could take down a 200-pound man."

Jackson, 77, said she had "never doubted" the show's potential or that it would become a hit big enough to captivate audiences half a century later.

"It was unique, it was unusual, and the three of us had chemistry... we're still sisters today," the 77-year-old who played Sabrina Duncan told AFP.

Although the cast of *Charlie's Angels* changed several times, Smith, Jackson and Ladd formed the series' most enduring trio with Fawcett, who died in 2009, returning as a guest star in a few episodes as Ladd's older sister.

PaleyFest, organised by the Paley Centre for Media, celebrates the best of American television. - AFP

Southwest to limit passengers to one portable charger

Southwest Airlines said yesterday that it will limit passengers to one lithium portable charger on flights and ban them from being stowed in overhead bins to reduce risks of inflight battery fires.

The new policy on power banks is effective from April 20 and Southwest also said portable chargers are no longer allowed to be recharged using in-seat power.

Last month, the United Nations aviation agency - the Montreal-based International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) - said that the use of power banks, or portable, rechargeable battery packs, would be limited to two per passenger as part of new rules for using the devices while in the air and it prohibited recharging the power banks during flights.

Airlines such as the Lufthansa Group and countries including South Korea had already been introducing restrictions on the use of power banks on flights, following incidents like a fire on an Air Busan plane in 2025.

The ICAO normally sets global standards for aviation that are mostly approved by its 193-member states.

The new specifications regarding power banks are effective immediately.

In September, the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) issued a safety alert to airlines over risks from lithium batteries in aircraft passenger compartments, citing numerous serious incidents. - Reuters

Gates to testify about Epstein

Billionaire Bill Gates is to testify on June 10 before a congressional committee investigating the late convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein and his accomplice Ghislaine Maxwell, a source close to the matter told AFP yesterday.

The Microsoft co-founder is among the prominent names appearing in documents released by the US Justice Department that revealed close friendships, illicit financial dealings and private photos with Epstein.

The source said Gates would sit for a "transcribed interview", signaling his testimony would take place in the same closed-door setting used for that of former president Bill Clinton and Hillary Clinton, the former secretary of state and senator.

Gates has admitted making a "huge mistake" in associating with Epstein. - AFP

Rio de Janeiro's gangs hijack buses to sow chaos in war with police

By Lucia Lacurcia
AFP

When police killed a drug kingpin in a Rio de Janeiro favela last month, armed men quickly surrounded a bus, forced the passengers to disembark and set it on fire in the middle of an avenue. "They boarded, told me to get the passengers off, and set it ablaze. It happened very fast," 48-year-old driver Marcio Souza told AFP, still shaken by the ordeal. "It was a horrible feeling that I wouldn't wish on anyone."

Scenes like this are common in the city of nearly 7mn people, which is one of the most visited tourist destinations in the world.

Clashes are frequent between police and armed criminal groups that dominate Rio de Janeiro's sprawling favelas.

To retaliate, criminals often seize buses in a show of power and use them as barricades to block police patrols and paralyse traffic for hours.

This disproportionately affects residents of poor neighbourhoods who already face

lengthy commutes to work.

In October, when Brazil's deadliest police operation left more than 120 people dead as officers clashed with heavily armed gang members, more than 100 buses were hijacked around the city.

A 35-year-old bus driver, using the pseudonym Joao, told AFP how criminals on motorcycles recently assaulted him, snatched his keys and doused his vehicle with gasoline.

The police arrived in time to prevent the bus from being torched.

"The terror was immense. In that moment, all I could think about was my family, my children. I thought the worst was going to happen," said the father of two girls.

He said his family is often "terrified about whether or not I'll make it back safe and sound".

Nearly 200 drivers took sick leave last year due to stress and panic attacks, according to Paulo Valente, a spokesperson for Rio Onibus - which represents the employers of Rio's 14,000 bus drivers.

During that same period, 254 buses were used as barricades, more than double the

number from the previous year.

The trend is striking fear into passengers.

"I don't take the bus anymore because it's too dangerous. We pass through several favelas, and lately, there have been a lot of clashes. And the first thing (the criminals) do is stop the buses," said Elisiane, 43, who did not want to give her last name.

Monica Correia, a 56-year-old caregiver, said she leaves home three hours earlier than necessary to account for any unforeseen delays.

Valente told AFP that each hijacking had "a direct impact on the economy", resulting in losses amounting to millions for the bus companies, as well as tarnishing the city's image.

"When a bus is used as a barricade, more than 50 others come to a standstill, and just as many are forced to reroute. And for certain routes, there simply is no possible detour."

Faced with the escalation in hijackings, authorities are working with Rio Onibus to try to minimise the impact, including alerting companies about upcoming police operations.

Rio's police did not respond to AFP's requests for comment.

During the October police operation, some 500,000 people were unable to complete their journeys, said Valente.

Businesses closed and people were sent home early from work.

In 2023, President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva described images of 35 buses set ablaze around the city as "scenes one would expect to see in the Gaza Strip".

A recent study showed that nearly 190,000 students were unable to make it to school between 2023 and mid-2025 due to transport disruptions.

"Ninety-five per cent of schools were affected. Armed violence permeates the lives of the entire population of Rio," said Maria Isabel Couto, a co-author of the study from the Fogo Cruzado Institute, which tracks armed violence in low-income communities.

"Armed territorial control has a very significant impact on this disrupted mobility. But the state cannot hide behind that, because it plays a role in the production of this violence and inequality."

Bridge blast near Panama Canal kills one

One person died and two more were injured on Monday after a truck carrying fuel exploded near a bridge that crosses the Panama Canal, authorities said.

The incident occurred at a complex where tanker trucks are supplied with fuel, located next to the Bridge of the Americas, which traverses the interoceanic canal.

Security camera footage of the explosion showed a fireball and a thick cloud of smoke emanating from the area.

Panamanian firefighter chief Victor Alvarez said a person who was presumed to work at the complex died as a result of the explosion, and two firefighters suffered minor injuries.

The Panama Canal Authority reported the explosion had no impact on the canal.

The Bridge of the Americas was closed after the incident. - AFP



Indonesia charges 19 over baby trafficking ring

AFP
Bandung

Indonesian prosecutors charged 19 people with human trafficking yesterday for their alleged roles in buying babies from new parents and selling them at a profit to clients at home and abroad.

A man and 18 women, including alleged ringleader Lie Siu Luan, 70, were formally charged during an appearance at the Bandung district court in West Java province.

If found guilty, they could face up to 15 years in prison under Indonesian laws governing human trafficking and child protection, officials said.

The defendants were arrested last year after a parent reported an alleged baby kidnapping to police in West Java.

Investigators tracked down a suspect who allegedly confessed to having traded more than two dozen infants, some as young as three months old.

They were bought from people who did not want or could not afford to keep their babies.

The person who reported the kidnapping had actually entered into an agreement with the syndicate but never got paid, police said.

"Most of those babies were trafficked to Singapore," prosecutor Sukanda — who like many Indonesians has only one name — told the court yesterday.

Police rescued several infants held by the syndicate in Indonesia, before they could be sold.

Others, rejected by would-be clients in Singapore, had already been sold domestically, including to adoptive parents in the capital Jakarta.

Police said the syndicate had started operating in 2023 and had sent at least 14 babies to Singapore.

The defendants allegedly played distinct roles: some were assigned to find babies, some to care for them, and others to prepare identity documents and passports.

One of the women told prosecutors she had procured 34 children for the group.

Human trafficking is a recurring problem in Indonesia, a sprawling nation of more than 17,000 islands.

In one of the worst cases in recent years, at least 57 people were found caged on a palm oil plantation in North Sumatra province in 2022.

Abortion is illegal in the Muslim-majority archipelago except in cases of rape or medical necessity.

40m scaffold collapses in Japan

AFP
Tokyo

A scaffold around the height of 12-storey building collapsed in Japan yesterday, leaving three workers in a critical condition and one missing, local media reported.

The spectacular industrial accident at a steelworks near Tokyo saw the 40-metre (130-foot) structure give way during the dismantling of a crane, broadcaster NHK reported.

Aerial footage from NHK showed a large, water-filled hole at the portside complex in Kawasaki, with fire engines and rescue crews at the scene and divers conducting searches.

Five people fell when the scaffold collapsed, according to NHK, citing police and fire officials.



An aerial view of the site where three people were seriously injured and one is missing after falling about 40 metres from collapsed scaffolding at JFE Steel construction site in Kawasaki, south of Tokyo, yesterday. (Reuters)

Of them, three were left unconscious in a critical condition, while one was conscious and another remained missing, the reports said.

Kanagawa Prefecture Police told AFP the accident "happened at a steelworks of JFE Steel in Kawasaki City", about 20

kilometres (12 miles) from Tokyo, without giving further details. The site is located in a corner of the waterfront area of Kawasaki, where work was underway to dismantle the cranes used for unloading cargo from ships, according to NHK.

Taiwan opposition leader makes rare visit to China

AFP
Shanghai

Taiwan's main opposition leader landed in China yesterday for a rare visit aimed at building cross-strait "peace", as the Taipei government warned Beijing would seek to stop US arms sales to the democratic island.

Kuomintang (KMT) chairwoman Cheng Li-wen, who is the party's first leader to visit China in a decade, has insisted on meeting Chinese President Xi Jinping before she visits the US — Taiwan's main security backer.

The KMT supports closer relations with China, which claims Taiwan is part of its territory and has threatened to use force to seize it.

But Cheng, whose unexpected rise to the top of the KMT drew a congratulatory message from Xi in October, has been accused by critics, including inside the party, of being too pro-China.

The KMT leader landed at a Shanghai airport yesterday, where she was presented with a bouquet of flowers before being driven away in a convoy, live video from Taiwanese media showed.

Cheng then travelled to the eastern city of Nanjing, where Chinese state broadcaster CCTV said she thanked Xi and China for the warm reception.

She is expected to visit the memorial of Chinese revolutionary Sun Yat-sen in the city today.

Cheng will be in China for six days, also visiting Beijing where



Kuomintang Chairperson Cheng Li-wen (R) arriving in Shanghai Hongqiao International Airport yesterday. (AFP)

she hopes to meet Xi.

Cheng told journalists before her trip that Taiwan "must do everything in our power to prevent war from breaking out".

"To preserve peace is to preserve Taiwan," Cheng told a news conference at the KMT headquarters in Taipei.

"Goodwill must be built up and mutual trust needs to be expanded, step by step, by both sides."

Ahead of the visit, Taiwan's top China policy body warned Beijing would attempt to "cut off Taiwan's military purchases from the US and co-operation with other countries", which the KMT dismissed.

"This trip is entirely for cross-strait peace and stability, so it has nothing to do with arms procurement or other issues," Cheng said last week.

Taiwanese lawmakers have been at loggerheads over the government's plan to spend NT\$1.25tn (\$39bn) on defence, which has been stalled for months in the opposition-controlled parliament.

While KMT party members regularly fly to China for exchanges with officials, its last leader to visit was Hung Hsiu-chu in 2016.

China severed high-level contact with Taiwan that year after Tsai Ing-wen of the Democratic Progressive Party won the presidency and rejected Beijing's claims to the island.

Cross-strait relations have worsened since then, with China ramping up military pressure with near daily deployments of fighter jets and warships near Taiwan and regular large-scale military drills.

Tsai's successor Lai Ching-te,

who was elected in 2024 and whom Beijing brands a separatist, warned as Cheng arrived in Nanjing that China is the "biggest" threat to Taiwan's democracy.

Cheng's trip comes a month before US President Donald Trump is scheduled to visit Beijing for a summit with Xi.

The US has been piling pressure on Taiwanese opposition lawmakers to back a proposal for defence purchases, including US weapons, to deter a potential Chinese attack.

Cheng has rallied against the government's proposal, insisting "Taiwan isn't an ATM" and instead backed a KMT plan to allocate NT\$380bn for US weapons with the option for more acquisitions.

But she faces deepening divisions inside her party over how to counter China's military threats, with more moderate senior figures in the KMT pushing for a much higher budget.

While the US has long been ambiguous about its willingness to defend Taiwan, Washington remains Taipei's biggest arms supplier, which angers Beijing.

The US approved the sale of \$11bn worth of arms to Taiwan in December. More deals are in the pipeline, but there have been doubts about whether they would proceed after Xi warned Trump against sending weapons to Taiwan.

Cheng has insisted she supports Taiwan having a strong defence, but said the island does not have to choose between Beijing and Washington.

Thailand weighing overnight petrol station closures to save fuel

AFP
Bangkok

Thailand is considering enforcing overnight closures of petrol stations beginning later this month, the prime minister said yesterday, an effort to preserve fuel as the Middle East war has driven fears of shortages.

Anutin Charnvirakul, whose new cabinet was sworn in late Monday, told reporters in Bangkok that his government was weighing shutting down sales at petrol pumps from 10:00pm to 5:00am, as early as April 20.

The prime minister assured Thais they would still be able to travel to their hometowns during the Songkran holiday period, officially observed from Monday to Wednesday next week.

"Petrol station closing hours may start after people return from their Songkran trips and resume normal life," Anutin said.

Many Thais celebrate the annual Songkran new year festivities by road-tripping to their home provinces to visit family.

Anutin asked the public on Monday to conserve energy by working from home and using public transit, as the US-Israel conflict against Iran continues to strain global fuel supplies.

"Although Thailand maintains oil reserves at a relatively high level compared with other countries, we remain vulnerable as a nation that must import large volumes of oil from various oil-exporting countries," he said in a statement.

"We cannot be complacent or continue managing oil matters in the same way as before."

Last week, the conservative leader slammed oil traders for "excessive profiteering", blaming those stockpiling fuel or smuggling it abroad for shortages that have driven prices steadily higher.

The allegations come amid public outcry over successive fuel price hikes in late March and early April.

Thai police seize drugs hidden under cabbages

Thai police have seized 1.6 tonnes of ketamine and crystal methamphetamine buried under cabbages in the bed of a pickup truck, with the driver arrested on drug trafficking charges. The Thai man, aged 39, was arrested over the weekend when he stopped his truck at a petrol station in central Ayutthaya province, police said.

Authorities found 900 kilograms (one US tonne) of ketamine and 700 kilograms of crystal methamphetamine in packages hidden underneath bags of the leafy vegetable, Bangkok police said in a statement on Sunday. The driver, who was arrested on Saturday, confessed that he was hired to transport the

drugs for 100,000 baht (\$3,000), police said. The drug trafficking charges carry a maximum sentence of 15 years to life in prison.

Police said they suspected the drugs were trafficked from a neighbouring country, without specifying which one. (AFP)

S Korea deports alleged Thai drug kingpin

South Korean authorities deported to Thailand yesterday a man accused of running a major drug trafficking operation who had evaded arrest for years, Seoul's spy agency said.

The 43-year-old Thai suspect was arrested on Monday at a hotel in Seoul's affluent Gangnam district at the request of Thailand's Office of the Narcotics Control Board, South Korea's National Intelligence Service (NIS) said.

Thai authorities had issued some 50 arrest warrants over the past decade in a bid to apprehend the suspect, whose name was withheld, the NIS said.

Authorities described the scale of the narcotics operation as "unprecedented" for a single organisation, involving 11.5

tonnes of methamphetamine, five tonnes of ketamine and 271mn pills of "yaba" — a potent mix of methamphetamine and caffeine — over 25 years.

The suspect's organisation is believed to have trafficked narcotics across Thailand and another country, according to the South Korean spy agency.

The NIS said the methamphetamine linked to the alleged kingpin was enough to supply up to 380mn people, putting the total value at 4.6tn won (\$3.1bn).

The volume of ketamine — an anaesthetic that can be used as a party drug — was enough for 100mn people, it added.

The suspect had entered South Korea legally using a third-country passport, the NIS said. (AFP)

Vietnam's To Lam consolidates power with presidential perch

AFP
Hanoi

Vietnam Communist Party boss To Lam was elected president by the National Assembly yesterday, capping his bid to centralise authority in a nation where senior cadres have traditionally governed collectively.

In less than two years as party chief, the 68-year-old has swept aside rivals and transformed the country through an aggressive reform drive — literally redrawing the map as he combined provinces and slashed bureaucracy.

Lam has set an ambitious target of 10% annual growth for the Southeast Asian manufacturing hub, and muscled the party behind his vision for development-oriented reform.

After securing another term as the party's general secretary in January, Lam has now taken over the number two position in Vietnamese politics — unifying leadership of the party and state as President Xi Jinping did in neighbouring China.

The move has "effectively turned him into Vietnam's 'supreme leader'", said Le Hong Hiep, senior fellow at the Vietnam Stud-

ies Programme at Singapore's ISEAS — Yusof Ishak Institute.

It has "transitioned the country's leadership from a consensus-based collective model to a strongman leadership style", he told AFP.

Tran Thanh Man, chairman of the National Assembly, said 100% of deputies who were present approved the resolution electing Lam president for the 2026-2031 term.

In a speech after being sworn in, Lam called his new dual role a "huge honour" and a "sacred and noble duty".

The parliament, which serves mainly to ratify party decisions, also elected Lam ally Le Minh

Hung as prime minister yesterday.

Elevated to party chief after general secretary Nguyen Phu Trong's death in 2024, Lam has shocked the country with the pace of his changes.

He has eliminated whole layers of government, abolishing eight ministries or agencies and cutting nearly 150,000 jobs from the state payroll, while pushing massive infrastructure projects.

Lam is now promoting a "new growth model" that speeds up decision-making and unleashes the private sector to achieve double-digit annual growth for the next five years.



General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam To Lam takes his oath as Vietnam's President during a National Assembly's session in Hanoi yesterday. (AFP)

India court sentences 9 policemen to death for Covid custody killings

AFP
New Delhi

An Indian court has sentenced nine policemen to death for the torture and killing of a father and son in 2020 who were detained for allegedly breaching Covid lockdown rules.

The additional district judge in Madurai, in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, found the officers guilty in the custodial deaths of trader Jeyaraj, 59, and his son Beniniks, 31, according to a statement by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) yesterday.

"The court upheld that the case

is a clear instance of abuse of authority and falls in the rarest of the rare cases," it said following sentencing on Monday in a case that triggered outrage over police brutality.

The two men were picked up by the officers from a police station and allegedly subjected to brutal torture.

Media reports said the victims, who ran a mobile shop, were arrested for allegedly keeping their shop open beyond permitted hours during a lockdown as the Covid-19 pandemic raged across the country.

Widespread outrage over the killings pushed the Tamil Nadu government to transfer the case

to the CBI, which filed charges against nine officers within 90 days.

During the trial, the CBI examined more than 50 witnesses and argued that the killings had "shaken public conscience", warranting the severest punishment.

All nine accused were convicted of murder and destroying evidence.

India carries out executions by hanging, though they remain rare.

The last executions in India were in March 2020, when four men convicted of the 2012 gang rape and murder of a woman on a Delhi bus were hanged, in a case that sparked huge nationwide protests.

Violence flares in India's Manipur state

Reuters
Guwahati

At least four people were killed, two of them by police fire, in India's north-eastern state of Manipur yesterday, officials said, after months of relative calm.

Two children from the mostly Hindu Meitei community were killed after a bomb exploded in a house in the Meitei-dominated Bishnupur district, the officials and the chief minister's office said.

Later yesterday, police opened fire to control a crowd that had stormed a camp belonging to security forces, killing two people, the state's interior minister, Govindas Konthoujam said.

Clashes first broke out in May 2023 between Manipur's dominant, mostly Hindu Meitei com-



Smoke rises from burnt vehicles following an attack in Bishnupur district, Manipur, yesterday. (Reuters)

munity and the mainly Christian Kuki tribes over economic benefits and job quotas. In all some 260 people have been killed and more than 60,000 displaced.

The children killed in the latest unrest belonged to the Meitei community, whose members alleged the attack was carried out

by Kuki militants. Kuki groups denied the accusations.

The state's Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh said the perpetrators were yet to be identified and that the bomb attack was the "handiwork of individuals or groups with an interest in disturbing the prevailing peace".

Doctors in England begin 6-day strike

Reuters
London

Resident doctors in England started a six-day walkout yesterday after rejecting an offer the government said would not get better, with the British Medical Association saying it failed to reverse years of pay erosion and staffing pressures.

The strike action during the Easter holiday period is due to run until the morning of April 13 after a 48-hour ultimatum from Prime Minister Keir Starmer passed without agreement.

The government has now withdrawn a pledge to fund 1,000 additional speciality training posts that it said had been contingent on the deal being accepted.

Health minister Wes Streeting said the government was not prepared to spend money needed for patient services on a settlement it viewed as unaffordable, estimating the strike would cost the health service about 50mn pounds (\$66mn) a day, or 300 million over the six-day walkout.



A pedestrian (right) walks past as staff members hold placards on a picket line during the first day of a six-day resident doctors' strike outside St Thomas' Hospital in central London yesterday. (AFP)

Speaking on Times Radio yesterday, Streeting said resident doctors had secured the largest pay uplift of any public sector group under the Labour government, but had rejected the offer without putting forward a counter proposal.

Streeting had said that the offer "doesn't get better than this" when urging the union to reconsider last month.

The BMA represents about 55,000 of the resident doctors — formerly known as junior doctors — who make up nearly half of the medical workforce.

Since early 2023 the BMA has held more than a dozen rounds of industrial action over pay, strike action that successive governments has blamed for frustrating efforts to reduce waiting lists in the state-run service.

The union says the government's offer on pay and workforce does not go far enough to address long-standing concerns, including historical below-inflation pay increases.

The pay offer includes a 3.5% increase this year, which the government said would represent an above-inflation rise, and take total pay increases over three years to around 35%, plus reimbursements of mandatory exam fees, which can cost doctors thousands of pounds.

Jack Fletcher, chair of the BMA's resident doctors' committee, has said the union was concerned the level of investment in the deal had been reduced, the proposed reforms were spread over several years, and uncertainties remained over the implementation of new training posts.

Fletcher said the government's threat to withdraw parts of the deal had also undermined confidence.

"No one wants to strike. But without a credible offer on the table, doctors are left with no alternative," the BMA said in a post on X yesterday.

Bangladesh police arrest former parliament speaker

AFP
Dhaka

Bangladeshi police arrested the former parliament speaker yesterday on attempted murder charges, marking the first detention of a prominent figure from Sheikh Hasina's toppled government under the newly elected one.

Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, the South Asian nation's first female speaker, who also served as minister in Hasina's administration, was arrested at a relative's residence and held in custody.

She has denied all charges and "it is absurd to suggest that she was involved in an attempted murder", her lawyer Shamim Al Sayeed told AFP, adding that the court had rejected their petition for bail.

Chaudhury had not been seen in public since a deadly mass uprising in 2024 forced Hasina from power.

She joins scores of members of Hasina's now-banned Awami League to be arrested since her

downfall in cases relating to the failed crackdown on the uprising.

Investigators told the court yesterday that Chaudhury was a key figure in decision-making, alleging she was involved in planning and ordering attacks on unarmed civilians.

Police Inspector Mohsin Uddin told the court that on July 18, 2024, police alongside Awami League activists opened fire on unarmed students and other protesters.

Tarique Rahman, leader of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, won a landslide election victory in February, taking over from the interim administration that had led the country of 170mn people since the uprising.

Hasina, a convicted fugitive in hiding in India, was also named in the same case. Her case has strained relations between Dhaka and New Delhi.

Bangladesh's Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman is due to visit India yesterday as part of a "goodwill visit" to build relations.

British govt vows to cut knife crime

AFP
London

The UK government yesterday unveiled a plan to "halve knife crime within a decade" by increasing police deployment and targeting the most affected areas.

Knife crime has risen sharply over the past 15 years, particularly among young people, with Prime Minister Keir Starmer describing the scourge as a "national crisis".

To tackle the issue, the Home Office said in the statement that it would identify the most affected knife crime hotspots with precision down to small geographical areas.

"The vast majority of knife crime happens in the same place and same street, over and over again," the ministry said, announcing some 26mn pounds (\$35mn) in funding to support 27

police forces covering areas that account for 90% of such offences in England and Wales.

Those hotspots will see a "dramatic surge in police activity", including additional patrols, new CCTV coverage, the rollout of live facial recognition, and the installation of knife arches to detect weapons. No timeline has been set for these measures.

The government would "deploy state of the art mapping" to pinpoint high-risk areas and direct resources more effectively, said crime and policing minister Sarah Jones.

The strategy also includes prevention measures, with plans to establish 50 youth clubs by 2029 aimed at steering young people away from crime.

"Knife crime creates a profound and often location-based fear among young people, shaping how they move, socialise and experience their own neighbourhoods," said Patrick Green,

a member of the government's Coalition to Tackle Knife Crime.

Additional funding will be directed towards school-based prevention programmes.

Last week, police launched a National Knife Crime Centre in London to crack down on the sale of banned knives and machetes.

The government has already introduced legislation banning so-called "zombie knives" and machetes, often associated with gang culture, which came into force in September 2024.

In the year ending September 2025 there were about 50,000 knife crimes in England and Wales, according to the Office for National Statistics, with the highest rates in London.

According to the Home Office, knife crime has fallen by 8% since July 2024, with more than 63,000 weapons seized, surrendered, or confiscated, the majority of them zombie-style knives and machetes.

Sri Lanka unveils relief package

AFP
Colombo

Sri Lanka announced yesterday a record \$320mn relief package for farmers, fishermen and low-income households hit hardest by soaring energy costs due to the Middle East war.

President Anura Kumara Disanayake said the package, the biggest state handout ever, would help the most vulnerable in the island nation of 22mn.

Cash grants would be paid directly into the accounts of thousands of fishermen and rice and tea farmers, he said.

Those living below the poverty line — about 25% of the population — would get an additional \$25 this month to celebrate the traditional Sinhala and Tamil New Year festivals, and also have their electricity bills subsidised.

"The total relief package is

valued at 100bn rupees (\$320mn) over three months," Disanayake said. "We are funding this through the existing budget."

He said the government was keen to avoid a repeat of the 2022 meltdown, when the country saw record inflation of 70% after the government printed money to fund subsidies.

Sri Lanka is still on an IMF bailout programme that began in early 2023 when it secured a \$2.9bn loan spread over four years.

Disanayake said he was hopeful of drawing down the next tranche of about \$700mn from the IMF by the end of next month, following the conclusion of a staff-level agreement with the Washington-based lender this week.

Under the latest scheme, fishermen using smaller boats will get up to about \$300 a month fuel subsidy, while operators of bigger boats will get about \$483

a month for three months.

For farmers, the government will absorb about 30% of the cost of urea fertiliser, he said, adding that the state will also bear part of electricity generation costs, up to 15bn rupees (\$48mn).

He said the government was keen to ensure continuity of supplies and was in talks with Russia to resume imports of gas, coal, fuel and fertiliser previously hit by US sanctions.

"We have a window until April 11 to secure supplies from Russia after President Trump temporarily lifted sanctions," Disanayake said.

Sri Lanka has increased fuel prices by a third while raising electricity tariffs by up to 40% since the start of the US-Israeli attacks against Iran on February 28.

A four-day working week introduced last month will be discontinued this week, as officials said the Wednesday day off had not led to expected energy savings.

Australian soldier charged with war crimes in Afghanistan

AFP
Sydney

One of Australia's most-decorated soldiers was charged yesterday with murdering unarmed prisoners captured in Afghanistan, police said following a sweeping war crimes probe.

A landmark military report in 2020 revealed grave allegations against Australian troops sent to fight Taliban forces, accusing elite units of torture, summary executions and "body count" competitions.

Police levelled murder charges against former Special Air Service officer Ben Roberts-Smith, a distinguished soldier awarded Australia's highest military honour for his efforts fighting insurgents.

Commissioner Krissy Barrett said the 47-year-old was allegedly complicit in a string of unlawful killings between 2009 and 2012.

"It will be alleged the victims were not taking part in hostilities at the time of their alleged murder in Afghanistan," she said.

"It will be alleged the victims were detained, unarmed, and were under the control of ADF members when they were killed," she added,



Australian Federal Police arresting a 47-year-old former Australian soldier, who was widely named in local media as Victoria Cross recipient Ben Roberts-Smith, in Sydney yesterday. (AFP)

referring to the Australian Defence Force.

Court documents showed Roberts-Smith was charged with five counts of "war crime — murder".

They included one "actual offence", one "joint commission to an offence", and three counts of aiding or abetting a murder.

Should Roberts-Smith be found guilty, he faces a maximum sentence of life in prison.

The towering soldier became a

household name across Australia when he was awarded the Victoria Cross in 2011, a medal reserved for only the most courageous wartime exploits.

He met Queen Elizabeth II, had his portrait hung at the Australian War Museum, and was even honoured as the nation's "father of the year".

But the war hero's reputation was called into question in 2018, when a series of news reports

linked him to the alleged murder of unarmed Afghan prisoners by Australian troops.

The soldier had allegedly kicked an unarmed Afghan civilian off a cliff and ordered subordinates to shoot him, *The Age* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported.

He was also said to have taken part in the machine-gunning of a man with a prosthetic limb which he later used as a drinking vessel with other soldiers.

Roberts-Smith has staunchly maintained his innocence throughout, launching legal action against the newspapers who aired the allegations.

But his efforts to sue *The Age* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* for slander would backfire, with a judge finding in 2023 many of the journalists' claims were "substantially true".

Such civil trials carry a lower burden of proof than the criminal proceedings Roberts-Smith now faces.

Australia deployed 39,000 troops to Afghanistan over two decades as part of US- and Nato-led operations against the Taliban and other militant groups.

As Australian veterans returned home, their actions have come into sharp legal focus.

AFP
Sydney

Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said yesterday he will fly to Singapore to help secure petroleum imports as oil prices surge during war in the Middle East.

Australia relies on imports for an estimated 90% of its refined petroleum products, and Singapore is its largest single supplier.

Albanese said he would travel to Singapore from April 9-11 to discuss trade in "essential supplies" such as diesel and liquefied natural gas (LNG) with Prime Minister Lawrence Wong.

"Together, we share concern over the situation in the Middle East, including the consequences for both of our nations," the Australian leader told reporters in Canberra.

"Australia is facing a more uncertain world, and therefore the certainty of those clear, close relationships is more important than ever."

Australia and Singapore committed in a joint statement last month to keep fuel flowing between both countries and to

work together to strengthen energy supply chain resilience.

Singapore's Energy, Science and Technology Minister Tan See Leng said the city-state will reassure Australia "that we will abide by (the) rules-based, multilateral trading system".

Speaking in parliament, Tan said Singapore will not impose export restrictions and will continue refining operations as feedstock availability improves.

He added that the Southeast Asian country aimed to continue to enhance its refinery capabilities to ensure supplies of essential fuel products like diesel, petrol and naphtha.

Australia "will continue to get supply", Tan said, adding Singapore hoped that LNG supplies from Australia would continue in return.

Service station outages of diesel and unleaded gasoline in Australia are falling, the government said. A total 241 service stations across Australia — three % of the total — had no diesel yesterday, while 141 had no gasoline. The country has 29 days' worth of diesel, 39 days of petrol, and 30 days of jet fuel., said energy minister Chris Bowen.

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GULF TIMES

Consumers want weight-loss pills for cost and convenience

Americans starting weight-loss medicines for the first time want lower cost and greater convenience as they consider pills from Novo Nordisk or Eli Lilly, according to seven doctors who specialize in obesity. Novo's Wegovy pill has been on the market since January, while Lilly's just-approved Foundayo joins the fray this week.

Reuters interviews with the specialists show a promising landscape for oral weight-loss drugs as the companies compete for share in the fast-changing obesity treatment market seen topping \$100bn a year in the next decade. Danish drugmaker Novo Nordisk launched injectable Wegovy in 2021. The pill, like injectable Wegovy and Ozempic for diabetes, has the active ingredient semaglutide.

In the three months since its approval, the oral version has appealed to patients for its lower cost and ease, the doctors said. The pills don't need refrigeration, are more discreet and don't require the use of needles, said Dr Christina Nguyen, an obesity and family medicine physician in Atlanta. "One person said I'd rather stay fat than ever use a needle. That's a true fear," she said.

Lilly's Foundayo pill, with active ingredient orforglipron, will begin shipping this week. All seven doctors said they had begun prescribing oral Wegovy, and three said they have prescribed the pill to about 10% of their patients. Of those patients, most are taking a GLP-1 for the first time, rather than switching from injectables, and have not yet reached the highest dose, the doctors said.

Doctors say pills appeal for convenience, lower cost, and needle-free use



"It is expanding access to people who are not sure that an injectable is something they would feel comfortable doing on themselves, might be leery of needles, and they're excited to have an option that is easier and more familiar to take," said Dr Stefie Deeds, an internal and obesity medicine specialist in Seattle. If patients are tolerating an injectable GLP-1, doctors are reluctant to switch them to pills unless requested.

"The patients we see who are taking medicines, whether it's Wegovy or (Lilly's) Zepbound, we're not telling them to switch to oral Wegovy if they're doing well," said Dr Louis Aronne, director of the Comprehensive Weight Control Center at Weill Cornell Medical College. Aronne has consulted for Lilly and was an investigator on the orforglipron clinical trial, and is an advisory board member of both Lilly and Novo.

Zepbound, with the active ingredient tirzepatide, has been shown in trials to reduce weight by some 20% or more. That makes it the preferred option for treating patients with severe obesity, especially those with more complex cases, doctors said. "For somebody who is in the lower end of the weight spectrum, people who are more likely to be seen by primary care physicians, they would be more likely to use the orals," Aronne said.

In trials, Foundayo led to an 11% reduction in body weight over 72 weeks and oral Wegovy led to about a 14% reduction over 64 weeks. Several of the doctors said they were eager for Lilly's pill, chemically known as orforglipron, to be approved so they would have a more flexible option to present to patients. Oral Wegovy must be taken on an empty stomach with just a sip of water 30 minutes before any other medications or food and drink. Lilly's Foundayo can be taken any time of day without food or water restrictions.

Nguyen said that if the Lilly pill is competitive on price with oral Wegovy, "most likely everyone will go with the orforglipron." Novo spokesperson Liz Skrbova said that based on its survey results, most patients would not find the timing restrictions to be disruptive. Semaglutide has also been found in trials to have other health benefits like reducing cardiovascular risks.

A Lilly spokesperson said the company is still studying Foundayo and that many participants in its clinical trial saw some reduction in markers of cardiovascular risk. Patients consider many factors when picking a GLP-1, but by far the most significant is cost, the doctors said. — Reuters

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Choppy waters



Boats float near the coast of Bab el-Mandeb in Yemen. The Bab-el-Mandeb is a strait and a major global chokepoint between Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula and Djibouti and Eritrea in the Horn of Africa, connecting the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and by extension the Indian Ocean. Iran has threatened that its allies could shut the Bab al-Mandeb shipping route as Tehran has effectively done with the Strait of Hormuz. (Reuters)

Soaring costs, fuel shortage fears drive Pakistan to electric motorbikes



Fuel price hikes after Iran's Hormuz blockade drive EV switch



EV two-wheelers now account for more than 10% of monthly sales



Government EV subsidy scheme draws 7x its applications target

By Ariba Shahid and Sudarshan Varadhan
Reuters

Days after Iran effectively blocked shipping through the Strait of Hormuz following the start of US and Israeli attacks in late February, two Pakistani electric motorbike outlets 1,400km away found themselves overwhelmed with enquiries. Haseeb Bhatti, who retrofits petrol-fuelled bikes with battery-powered motors in the northern city of Rawalpindi, said his March sales surged 70%. For Ali Gohar Khan, who owns a 7-year-old electric motorbike retail franchise with branches across Pakistan, the recent surge in sales is the steepest ever.

"People have this fear that maybe in the near future, they might not get petrol at all," Khan said. The Middle East crisis has sent global fuel prices soaring, compounding pain for Pakistanis already hit by inflation and a post-pandemic economic downturn. As the nation imports nearly all its oil through the Strait of Hormuz, shortage rumours took hold despite the government's supply assurances.

About 40% of Pakistan's petrol is used to fuel the 30mn two-wheelers and three-wheeled autorickshaws. Industry officials and analysts expect the crisis to supercharge an EV rush in Pakistan, which would stand out from a broader regional surge for the availability of cheap and plentiful solar power to charge e-bikes. A switch would also help lower oil imports and bolster foreign exchange reserves, and slash emissions in the world's most



Mehwish Qureshi, 33, an advocate, rides a motorbike in Hyderabad, Pakistan. (Reuters)

polluted country in 2025.

After the government's 18% price hike last week, a Pakistani household earning the median wage now pays 31% of its daily income for a litre of petrol - more than all but 22 of 139 countries tracked by globalpetrolprices.com and Our World in Data. "My monthly salary is 30,000 rupees. I can barely cover expenses for my family of six with this. How am I supposed to fill my bike?" said Zahoor Ahmed, a security guard in the southern city of Karachi.

From working professionals to college students, more riders have been turning to EVs in recent months. Last year, higher petrol prices drove up EV sales nearly three-fold to 90,000 units or 5% of all two-wheelers sold, data from consultancy Renewables First showed.

This year, EVs have accounted for more than 10% of monthly two-wheeler sales for the first time, said Talha Khan, CEO at EV logistics planning company

Orko, a transition he expects to accelerate as filling up with conventional fuel can be as much as 10 times more costly than charging. "Today, the war situation is bad, so petrol prices are going up. I think this (EV) is a very reasonable thing. Everyone should buy one," said Noori Shahbaz, a housewife purchasing an electric bike in Lahore, in a country where female riders remain a small but growing minority.

GENEROUS SUBSIDIES AND INTEREST-FREE LOANS

A typical electric two-wheeler costs around 250,000 rupees and 56% more than the popular petrol-fuelled Honda CD 70, which costs about 160,000 rupees. In February, the government's Pakistan Accelerated Vehicle Electrification (PAVE) plan came into force, providing a subsidy for a fifth of the price and interest-free loans for the rest. The plan targets electric bikes

and autorickshaws.

It has already received about 270,000 applications - nearly seven times PAVE's first phase target ending June - Finance Ministry adviser Adnan Pasha told Reuters, adding that the government aimed to finance 2mn EVs over five years and fund the plan with existing levies on fuel sales. "Electrifying just 2mn vehicles could result in nearly half a billion dollars in annual savings, as we don't have to import that fuel," Pasha said.

Many Pakistanis turned to solar after IMF-driven power tariff hikes in 2023, snapping up cheap China-made panels for their homes. Now the government aims to capitalise on that boom to drive EV growth. "Using solar can reduce electricity costs at charging stations, and make it more affordable to charge at home," Pasha said.

Ammar Habib, an adviser to Pakistan's power minister, said EVs were also "great for the grid as the steady demand from electric vehicle charging will ease some of the daytime volatility linked to solar oversupply."

CHINESE PLAYERS AT HEART OF EV SHIFT

Like its solar revolution, Pakistan's embrace of electric two-wheelers is built on Chinese brands. Scooter makers such as Yadea and Jimpeng, and e-bikes assembled locally with batteries and components from firms including AIMA and Sunra are expected to meet rising demand.

Chinese EV giant BYD, which launched its cars in Pakistan through a local partner also working with HUBCO Green to build charging stations across the country, said it plans to support broader electrification to eventually sell more passenger cars.

Pasha said the government wants local companies to build charging stations and said he expected the 45% cut to charging stations' power tariffs last year to continue boosting adoption. However, financial incentives could come under pressure if the war drags on, while a lack of local expertise and hard-to-scale charging infrastructure are other risks for Pakistan's EV transition, said Ahtasam Ahmad, energy finance lead at Renewables First.

Good servicing networks are critical as EVs are more sensitive to potholes, which are common on South Asian roads. In neighbouring India, riding e-scooters on poorly maintained roads has caused major service backlogs. "When Chinese players flood the market, it may look promising on paper, but with virtually no after-sales service infrastructure, they risk eroding consumer confidence in the technology," Ahmad said.



Workers assemble parts of electric motorcycles on the production line at the ZYP Technology's facility in Lahore. (Reuters)

Trump suspends Iran attack after Pakistan intervenes

From Page 1

The White House had earlier confirmed that Trump had been briefed on the Pakistani proposal, with press secretary Karoline Leavitt saying: "The president has been made aware of the proposal, and a response will come." Iran said it was also reviewing the Pakistani initiative. Pakistan's military establishment moved in lockstep with the civilian government. Field Marshal Asim Munir presided over the 274th Corps Commanders' Conference at General Headquarters in Rawalpindi, where the country's top brass backed the government's diplomatic push and condemned recent Iranian strikes on Saudi energy infrastructure. The conference "echoed the call for restraint, dialogue, and de-escalation, reaffirming Pakistan's commitment to principled diplomacy and constructive engagement," according to a statement by the Inter-Services

Public Relations directorate. Sharif had also spoken by phone with Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Prince Mohammed bin Salman following an Iranian strike on an oil facility in the port city of Jubail, offering what he described as Pakistan's "steadfast solidarity" with Riyadh and condemning the attack – a notable hardening of Islamabad's public stance toward Tehran. The remarks carry added weight in light of a Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement signed between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan last year, under which an attack on either nation is to be treated as an attack on both. Pakistan's Foreign Office had earlier described the strikes on Saudi facilities as "a dangerous escalation" threatening regional peace – completing a picture of rare civil-military alignment in Islamabad's foreign policy messaging as it seeks to position itself as an indispensable broker in the Middle East crisis.

Hormuz belongs to no single party, says Qatar

From Page 1

He warned that targeting civilian infrastructure – particularly energy, water and key installations – served no-one's interests, including Iran's own. "It undermines the livelihoods of the people, harms the environment and would lead to destabilising the region," he said.

On the question of Iran potentially imposing transit fees on vessels crossing the strait, al-Ansari said it was premature to engage with that scenario. The immediate priorities, he stressed, were halting the attacks, guaranteeing free and safe navigation, and protecting global supply chains.

He said GCC states were in continuous coordination at the leadership level and that their defence establishments remained in close contact to maintain collective security. "Since the start of this war, many red lines have been crossed. We call on all parties to halt escalation, which is causing harm to all," he said, adding that any future agreement must rest on a clear international framework with regional states included as integral parties – not afterthoughts. He underlined that any durable solution must address the threat to maritime navigation as a non-negotiable element. No single party, he said, should retain the ability to close the strait or use that threat as leverage in regional dealings without a clear deterrent in place.



Dr Majed bin Mohamed al-Ansari
Advisor to PM and MoFA spokesperson

Al-Ansari described the crisis as no longer merely regional but a global challenge

affecting international economic stability and security, warning that the window for a negotiated settlement was narrowing in light of deadlines set by the United States for an agreement with Iran.

Qatar, he reiterated, had been calling for de-escalation since 2023 and remained committed to a political resolution. "The solution will always be through the negotiation table, not war," he said. "Whoever wants peace in the region must start with the option of peace – not with war, with the expectation that it will lead to peace."

On the Palestinian front, al-Ansari renewed Qatar's condemnation of continued Israeli incursions into the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, intensified military operations in the West Bank and ongoing attacks on Gaza. He warned that Israel – itself a party to the wider conflict – was exploiting international preoccupation with the war to alter the status quo on the ground, calling such attempts "shameful" and a bid to circumvent international law and longstanding agreements.

Any future regional security architecture, he concluded, must be built on co-operation, consensus and international guarantees – and must be driven first by the priorities of the region's own peoples.

Two children among 13 dead in fresh Ukraine, Russia strikes



A damaged municipal bus which was hit by a Russian drone strike in the town of Nikopol, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Dnipropetrovsk region, Ukraine, yesterday. (Reuters)

AFP
Kyiv

Russian artillery and aerial attacks killed nine people in Ukraine – including a child – in strikes across the country yesterday, officials said.

Those strikes came as Moscow, which invaded Ukraine more than four years ago, said a Ukrainian drone had hit a house in Russia, killing a child and his parents.

Russia's invasion has cost hundreds of thousands of lives and forced millions of people from their homes in the bloodiest conflict in Europe since World War II.

The two sides have stepped up deadly long-range drone and

missile attacks in recent months, mainly targeting energy infrastructure, with Moscow aiming to dent Ukrainian resolve and Kyiv targeting Russian energy revenues.

Russian shelling in the southern city of Kherson – captured by Russia and then liberated in 2022 – killed four people and wounded several others, a regional official said.

The official, Oleksandr Prokudin, likened the Russian shelling on Kherson to "hell" and posted footage showing bodies strewn on the street and bloodied victims.

The attack in Kherson came just hours after a Russian drone attack on a passenger bus in the frontline city of Nikopol killed

four people, President Volodymyr Zelensky said.

"The Russians continue their deliberate terror against people in Nikopol and other cities and communities near the front," Zelensky added.

Regional officials posted photos showing a yellow mini-bus ripped open in the attack and remains of those killed lying on the street. Hours later, another attack hit another bus near the city, wounding five, local authorities said.

Nikopol, which had a pre-war population of around 100,000 people, lies on the banks of the Dniro river, which cuts through Ukraine and forms a de facto front line in the south of the country.

Qatar grabs Nasa spotlight with prized nebula image

From Page 1

According to Nasa, the featured image captures IC 4592, also known as the Blue Horsehead Reflection Nebula, a faint molecular cloud that reveals its distinctive shape only through deep imaging. Unlike the more famous Horsehead Nebula in Orion, this formation appears as a horse's head due to the way fine cosmic dust reflects light from nearby stars, particularly a bright star within the Nu Scorpii system.

Nasa noted that the image, taken from Sawda Natheel in southern Qatar, also shows a second reflection nebula, IC 4601, glowing near the centre. Reflection nebulae typically appear blue as dust particles scatter the light of nearby stars, giving the scene its ethereal colour and texture.

For Alkuwari, a mechanical en-

gineer in the oil and gas sector, the achievement underlines the advantages of Qatar's natural environment for astrophotography.

"Being able to share my work from the premium skies of Qatar with the world is always a pleasure. We are lucky in the Middle East with many cloudless nights, which enable us astrophotographers to capture high-quality images.

"In astrophotography, the longer the integration time, the higher the quality of the picture becomes," he pointed out.

The Qatari astrophotographer noted that such conditions allow enthusiasts in the region to pursue deep-sky imaging more consistently than their counterparts in cloudier parts of the world.

He added that despite the favourable skies, capturing the Blue Horsehead Nebula proved tech-

nically demanding. "This one was one of the most challenging objects for me to capture," he explained. "It is a large object for my telescope's field of view, so I had to take two pictures adjacent to each other in the night sky and stitch them together to make a full image of the target. That means double the integration time is required."

In total, Alkuwari said the project required seven full nights of data collection before the final image could be processed to his standards.

Reflecting on his passion, Alkuwari said deep-space objects hold a special appeal. "I love deep-space objects that represent the shapes of things we relate to here on Earth. Of course, it's only from our point of view that the gases resemble a horse's head – that's how it got its name."

Portugal says US uses Azores base on condition no civilian infrastructure targeted

Reuters
Lisbon

Portugal said it had authorised 76 landings by US aircraft at the Lajes air base in the Azores and 25 overflights of its territory since the start of the US-Israeli war on Iran, on condition they were not used to bomb civilian infrastructure. Foreign Minister Paulo Rangel told a parliamentary hearing the US had complied with the condition, in the spirit of "loyal co-operation" between the two Nato allies, but said that on several occasions landings had also been refused.

Spain, France, Italy, Austria and Switzerland have restricted or refused US military aircraft access to their airspace or bases in connection with the war in Iran. US President Donald Trump has given Iran until 8pm on Tuesday in Washington – 3:30am on Wednesday in Tehran – to end its blockade of Gulf oil or see the US destroy every bridge and power plant in Iran.

"We are against any attack on civilian infrastructure, and we made that a condition for the use of the Lajes air base," Rangel said, explaining that Lisbon grants authorisation to use the base for military action

in the event of an attack on the US, provided the response is "necessary and proportional" and does not target civilians.

"The Portuguese government has always made a point of handling this transparently. We say when we authorise it and when there are transits of US aircraft, other (European) governments do as they see fit," Rangel said, reiterating that Portugal supports a diplomatic resolution of the Iran conflict. Lajes Air Base is a strategic hub that hosts the 65th Air Base Wing of the US Air Force, providing base and en route support for US, Nato and allied operations.

Vance hails Orban as 'model' for Europe in Hungary visit

AFP
Budapest

US Vice-President JD Vance yesterday threw his support behind Hungary's nationalist Prime Minister Viktor Orban, ahead of this weekend's fiercely fought parliamentary vote, accusing Brussels of "foreign election interference".

Orban – the EU leader with the closest ties to both US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin – is facing an unprecedented challenge to his 16-year rule in Sunday's vote.

Vance is one of the US administration's fiercest critics of centrist and progressive European governments and one of the most fervent supporters of far-right parties in Europe.

The 41-year-old conservative in his visit to the Hungarian capital Budapest hailed Orban as a "model" for Europe.

"I did want to send a signal to everybody, particularly the bureaucrats in Brussels," he told reporters in a press conference alongside Orban, accusing Brussels of interfering "to hold down the people of Hungary".

Later, at a rally with Orban in an indoor sports arena, Vance told thousands of cheering listeners



US Vice-President JD Vance and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban appear on stage together during Day of Friendship event at MTK Sportpark in Budapest, yesterday. (Reuters)

that he and Trump stood "shoulder to shoulder" with the Hungarian leader.

Before his speech, he had Trump on the phone on loudspeaker, who said "I love that Viktor".

Eszter Molnar, a 39-year-old lawyer who attended the event with her one-year-old daughter, said Vance's visit was "inspiring" as "his values align with those of the Hungarian government".

"I'm glad that Hungarian-American relations have risen to such a good level," she told AFP.

Adorjan Somogyi, an 18-year-old student, said the visit was important "from a foreign policy perspective" but wouldn't sway many voters.

Vance's visit follows that of US Secretary of State Marco Rubio in mid-February, who wished his Hungarian ally "success" in the April 12 election.

Orban said in the press conference earlier that he had discussed the "major issues facing Western civilisation" with Vance, such as "migration, gender ideology, fam-

ily policy, and global security".

He also slammed the "unusually crude and overt interference by foreign intelligence services in Hungary's electoral processes".

Orban, 62, has been in power for 16 years and is close to Moscow.

According to analysts, Orban has benefited from covert Russian assistance to boost his chances of re-election.

However, polls by independent institutes predict a sweeping victory for the Tisza party led by pro-European conservative Peter Magyar.

In two years, Magyar has built an opposition movement capable of challenging Orban.

Pro-government institutions are predicting victory for Orban's Fidesz-KDNP coalition.

Since returning to power, Trump and his government have broken with the traditional restraint past US administrations have shown regarding foreign elections.

Instead, they now strongly show support for leaders they see as compatible with US diplomatic priorities.

European Commission spokesperson Thomas Regnier said in a statement yesterday that elections were the "sole choice of the citizens", adding that "together, the commission and member states are building a stronger, more independent Europe."

Afghanistan, Pakistan hold 'useful' peace talks in China, says Kabul

Reuters
Kabul

Afghanistan and Pakistan made "useful" progress in talks in China to resolve the conflict that broke out between the South Asian neighbours last October, the Taliban administration in Kabul said yesterday. The two Muslim countries have been negotiating to end hostilities in the north-western Chinese city of Urumqi since last week.

China, which shares stretches of its western border with both countries, has been mediating to help end the worst conflict between the allies-turned-foes since the Taliban returned to power in 2021.

Islamabad accuses the Afghan Taliban of harbouring militants who have launched attacks inside Pakistan. Kabul denies the accusation, saying the militancy is Pakistan's domestic problem.

In a statement from his office, Afghanistan's acting foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi said "useful discussions have taken place so far" and expressed hope that minor interpretations would not hinder the progress of the talks.

His comments came after he met with Zhao Xing, the Chinese ambassador to Kabul. The fighting has killed scores of people on both sides, mainly on the Afghan side, since it started in October.

A meeting of Pakistani army commanders headed by their chief Field Marshal Asim Munir resolved yesterday that the operation will continue till "the culmination of terrorists' safe havens and use of Afghan soil against Pakistan is decisively brought to an end." Kabul said more than 400 people were killed in a Pakistani air strike on a drug rehabilitation centre in Kabul last month before the neighbours suspended the fighting. A Reuters reporter counted more than 100 bodies at one hospital after the air strike.

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

China's efforts come as Qatar, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, which had previously tried to broker a peace deal between Pakistan and Afghanistan in October, find themselves embroiled in the US-Iran war.

Sheikha Moza honours winners of Akhlaquna Awards 2026

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These include Essa Rashid al-Muraikhi, Mohammed Ahmad al-Hashemi, Abdulaziz Saoud al-Jassim, Dana Abdulla al-Shebani, Aldana Saad al-Qahtani, Maryam Yousif al-Jedaia, and two students from QF's schools, Aisha Hilal al-Mohannadi from Qatar Academy Al Khor, and Jibr Ali al-Mohannadi from Tariq Bin Ziad School.

Meanwhile, three students were recognised in the Akhlaquna Youth category for their role in promoting ethical values and social responsibility among their peers: Huaim Obaid, Meera Yousef al-Kaabi, and Rashid Mohammed al-Ghafri from QF's Qatar Academy Al Wakra.

Jaffrin Alliyah Choudury received the Akhlaquna Individual Contributions Award – Qatar for her initiative 'Feed a Friend' that delivers food and essential support to those in need, helping thousands of people regain stability while promoting compassion and social responsibility.

Hilal Said al-Dhuhli from Oman received the Akhlaquna Individual Contributions Award – GCC for his initiative 'Esmani' that empowers people who stutter by offering training programmes that help them overcome speech challenges, while also raising societal awareness of their needs and the importance of their inclusion. Meanwhile, the 'Bunyan Club'



PICTURE: Paulo Vecina

initiative, led by Mohammed Nasser al-Jabri, was one of three shortlisted projects and was named a winner in the Akhlaquna Youth (Group) category. The initiative aims to promote a culture of community service and social work within the local community.

"This recognition marks an important milestone in the journey of the initiative, not only on a personal level, but also for the communities that have been part of it," Choudury, winner of Akhlaquna Individual Contributions Award-Qatar, said.

"Every individual can play a role in promoting ethical values by practising them consistently and using their platforms to inspire others, as even a simple act

of kindness can create an impact far beyond what we can imagine," noted al-Dhuhli, winner of the Akhlaquna Individual Contributions Award-GCC.

"This achievement reaffirms the direction of the Bunyan Club initiative and highlights the positive impact that well-organised and purpose-driven social work can have, which motivates us to continue moving forward on this path," al-Jabri from Bunyan Club remarked.

Akhlaquna Day also featured a panel discussion titled 'Youth and Ethics in Times of Crisis,' which highlighted the role of youth as role models, their contribution to raising awareness and building a cohesive society.

How Qatar preserves its heritage while shaping a global identity



Msheireb Downtown reflects a forward-looking vision while staying connected to cultural roots.



Falconry, a key part of Qatari heritage.

Modernity backed by tradition

By Shaima Sheriff
Staff Reporter

Qatar continues to strike a rare balance between preserving its traditions and embracing rapid modern growth, with culture and leadership shaping its evolving global identity.

In a fast-changing world, Qatar stands out for protecting its heritage while growing into a modern global hub. Cultural advocate Farhan al-Sheikh al-Sayed says this balance is not by chance, but the result of strong leadership and steady efforts to keep tradition part of progress.

Looking at Qatar's cultural journey, al-Sayed highlighted the key role of the country's leaders. "Culture and heritage are deeply rooted ... they worked together as a strong team to build Qatar in every way," he said, noting how leadership has shaped the nation's identity.

A clear example is Souq Waqif, a restored heritage market that remains a lively cultural and social hub. "They used to visit almost every week to check how the project was going," Al Sayed said, showing the hands-on effort to keep the site authentic and successful.



Farhan al-Sheikh al-Sayed



Souq Waqif, a restored heritage market that remains a lively cultural and social hub.

At the same time, Qatar has embraced modern development. "Qatar is advanced, but also traditional," he said, pointing to projects like Msheireb Downtown, which reflect a forward-looking vision while staying connected to cultural roots.

Traditional practices are also well supported. Falconry, a key part of Qatari heritage, continues to thrive. "We have one of the most advanced falcon hospitals to make sure young people continue this tradition," he explained, comparing it to protecting a valuable legacy.

Culture is also part of daily life. Serving dates and Qatari coffee remains a common practice. "When someone visits, we offer dates and Qatari kahwa," al-Sayed said, adding that the drink is now served in Qatari embassies around the world.

Beyond preserving its own culture, Qatar is using it to connect globally. Through initiatives such as art, fashion and culture and diplomacy, al-Sayed and his team have organised several international exhibitions. "In just one year, we hosted seven exhibitions,"

he said, highlighting Qatar's growing role in cultural exchange.

These efforts extend abroad, with upcoming participation in events, including exhibitions in Kazakhstan. "When other countries contribute to Qatar, we also contribute to their cultural events," he said, stressing mutual exchange.

For al-Sayed, the future depends on the younger generation. "They should not leave their culture behind when they go abroad... take your traditions with you," he advised.

QC distributes food baskets to vulnerable families in Sudan

Qatar Charity's team in Sudan has completed the distribution of food baskets to 15,708 beneficiaries, with generous support from philanthropists in Qatar. The beneficiaries included the families of sponsored orphans, as well as vulnerable and displaced families in four Sudanese states.

The project targeted sponsored orphan households and vulnerable families in Port Sudan, Red Sea State; the cities of Kassala and Khashm Al Girba in Kassala State; the Al Qolid area in Northern State; as well as Sheikhha Aisha bint Hamad Al Attiyah City in River Nile State.

Fatima Ibrahim, deputy commissioner of the Humanitarian Aid Commission in Kassala State, praised Qatar Charity's implementation of this project during her participation in the launch of the food-basket distribution.

Atiyat Abdullah, secretary of the Orphans Welfare Council in Kassala State, also commended Qatar Charity's special attention to orphans and the association's efforts in distributing the food baskets. Several mothers of orphans in Sheikhha Aisha bint Hamad Al Attiyah City "Rofaqa," a model experience for the care of



orphans and their families in Sudan, expressed their appreciation for the generosity of philanthropists in Qatar in providing food baskets that include the essential items needed by every Sudanese family.

One sponsored orphan's mother said: "I extend my thanks to the kind people in Qatar who provided us with food supplies that reached us at a time when we were in dire need." Sponsored orphan Hajar al-Hilali added that distributing the baskets in eases families' burdens and brings joy to them and to the sponsored orphans in the city. Several mothers of sponsored

orphans in the Northern State, upon receiving the food baskets in the Al Qolid area, noted that the baskets are of great importance considering the difficult economic conditions, which make obtaining food staples difficult and out of reach for many vulnerable families.

Qatar Charity's team also distributed food baskets to one of the largest Qur'an memorisation centres in Northern State, as part of its commitment to reinforcing the values of generosity and social solidarity, alleviating the burdens of those most in need, and bringing relief to them.



QRCS rolls out humanitarian aid project for displaced families in southern Syria

Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) has launched phase 1 of its emergency humanitarian aid project for displaced families in southern Syria. In co-operation with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent Society (SARCS), heating oil is being distributed to internally displaced people (IDPs) from Sweida to Daraa, as well as in the rural areas of Sweida, Latakia, and Tartus.

Aimed at alleviating the suffering of displaced families and improving their living conditions, the project involves food and non-food items (NFIs) for the most vulnerable people. A total of 8,000 food parcels will be distributed to approximately 40,000 beneficiaries as follows: 4,000 in Daraa and rural parts of Sweida, 2,000 in Latakia, and 2,000 in Tartus.

Each parcel contains a variety of local food staples, including rice, bulgur, lentils, chickpeas, beans, pasta, sugar, vegetable oil, canned foods, dates, and other items, meeting the needs of target families for one month. Also, a total of 1,288,000 litres of heating oil are being distributed to the target families, with each family receiving seven containers



Distribution of heating oil in Latakia.

(140 litres) to meet their heating and other household needs.

This project is expected to enhance the food security and living conditions of vulnerable families, especially children and older persons. It is part of QRCS's ongoing efforts to support the people of Syria and mitigate the impact of the humanitarian crisis there, with relief programs designed to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable people amid the currently difficult conditions.

There are plans to provide fur-

ther food and NFI assistance for displaced and impoverished people in Syria, by supplying 1,000 tonnes of flour for the production and distribution of bread to 82,500 beneficiaries over three months, as well as clothing coupons for 3,500 people families.

To support these aid efforts, donations are received via QRCS's website (<https://qrqs.qa>), mobile app (<https://qrqs.qa>), donor service (66666364), home donation collection (33998898), and donation boxes/ desks at malls and shopping centres.