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BUSINESS | Page 1

Commercial Bank net profit before Pillar Two tax tops QR538mn in Q1

Imperative to keep maritime routes open, PM tells Iran FM





HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani held talks yesterday with Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, using a call from Tehran to reinforce Doha's consistent diplomatic message: the ceasefire must hold, dialogue must prevail, and global shipping lanes must remain open.

The call is the latest in a series of high-level contacts Qatar has maintained with all parties to the conflict as part of its active mediation posture. Qatar has backed Pakistan's efforts to broker the first direct, high-level talks between the United States and Iran in nearly five decades held in Islamabad on Friday and Saturday

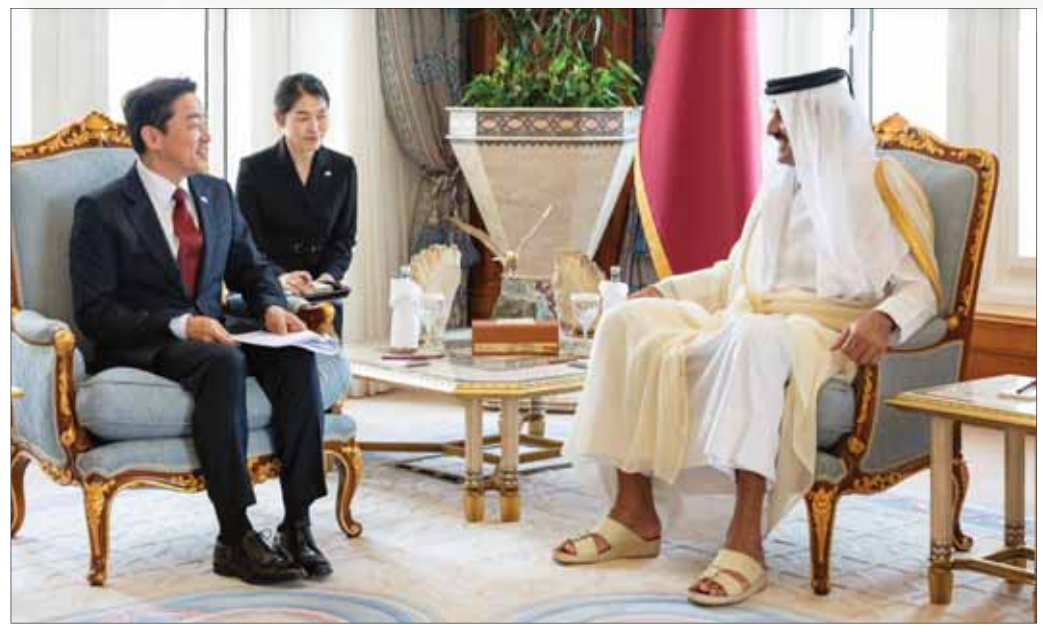
Qatar's support for those Islamabad talks underscored its role as a trusted facilitator, maintaining open channels with Washington, Tehran and regional capitals simultaneously throughout the crisis.

In the conversation with Araghchi, the prime minister stressed the importance of all parties responding constructively to ongoing mediation efforts, and called for dialogue and peaceful means to address the underlying causes of the conflict — with the goal of reaching a durable agreement that forecloses the risk of renewed escalation.

He also delivered a firm message on maritime security, warning against any use of shipping routes as leverage. The prime minister cautioned that disruption to these lanes would carry serious consequences not only for Gulf states but for global energy and food supplies, with far-reaching implications for international peace and security — a concern Qatar has raised consistently given its position as one of the world's leading LNG exporters.

The call reflects Doha's broader diplomatic doctrine: sustained, principled engagement with all sides. (**QNA**)

Amir receives South Korean message



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani has received a written message from South Korean President Lee Jae-myung, expressing solidarity with Doha following recent regional developments.

Lee conveyed his country's support for Qatar in the aftermath of Iranian attacks on Qatar and the wider region. He also expressed hope for a negotiated settlement to bring the current crisis to an end. The letter was delivered yesterday by South Korean Presidential Chief of Staff Kang Hoon-sik, during a meeting with His Highness the Amir at the Amiri Diwan in Doha.

Both sides discussed bilateral relations between Qatar and South Korea, with particular focus on co-operation in energy and economic sectors. They also addressed the latest regional and international developments.

The meeting was attended by HE the Chief of the Amiri Diwan Abdullah bin Mohammed al-Khulaifi. (**QNA**)

Shura Council backs ceasefire, pushes key legislation

By A Staff Reporter
Doha

Shura Council convened its weekly session yesterday at Tamim bin Hamad Hall, chaired by Speaker HE Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanem, voicing support for the US-Iran ceasefire and attending to a range of legislative business. Members welcomed the truce, expressing hope it would lay the groundwork for lasting peace and broader regional stability, underpinned by dialogue and respect for international law.

The Council also commended the mediation efforts that made the agreement possible.

On the legislative front, a draft traffic bill was referred to the Internal and External Affairs Committee for further examination, while an amended drone law was approved and returned to the government following committee-informed debate. The Health, General Services and Environment Committee was granted an extension to complete its review of proposed legislation on animal health and welfare, along with a request for a general debate on childhood obesity.

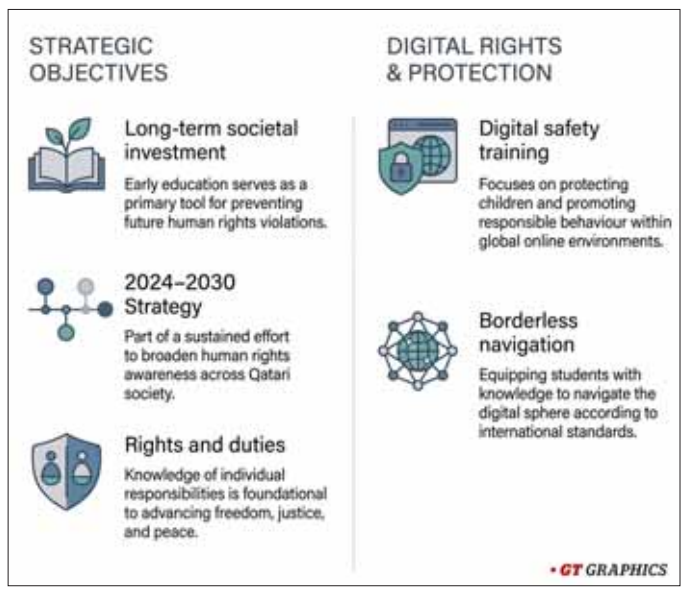
Qatar takes human rights awareness to schools

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

Qatar's National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) has launched its annual schools awareness campaign, targeting students at primary, preparatory and secondary levels across the country as part of a sustained effort to embed human rights values from an early age.

The campaign introduces students to the committee's mission and core human rights principles through a structured training package, and includes specialised lectures on keeping children safe in digital environments. Activities got under way at the Fourth Assalam School.

NHRC Director of Programs and Education Hamad al-Hajri said the initiative sits within the committee's 2024–2030 strategy, specifically its objective of broadening human rights awareness across Qatari society.



He said beginning with schools reflects a conviction that early education is among the most effective tools for preventing future violations, calling it a long-term investment in building a society grounded in justice and respect for rights.

"Knowledge of rights and duties is essential for both individual and societal development," he said, describing awareness as foundational to the advancement of freedom, justice and peace. **To Page 2**

US begins blockade of ports, Iran 'to retaliate'

Reuters
Washington

The US military began a blockade of ships leaving Iran's ports yesterday, President Donald Trump said, and Tehran threatened to retaliate against its Gulf neighbours' ports after weekend talks in Islamabad on ending the war broke down.

A US official said there was continued engagement with Iran, and forward motion on trying to get to an agreement. Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also said efforts were still under way to resolve the conflict.

But oil prices climbed back over $100 per barrel, with no sign of a swift reopening of the Strait of Hormuz to ease the biggest ever disruption in supplies and broader concerns over the durability of a two-week ceasefire agreement reached last week.

Trump said Iran had been in touch yesterday and wanted to make a deal but that he would not sanction any agreement allowing Tehran to have a nuclear weapon.

EXCLUSIVE

US-Iran talks still alive: sources — Page 11



"Iran will not have a nuclear weapon," Trump told reporters at the White House. "We can't let a country blackmail or extort the world."

Trump has said Washington would block Iranian vessels and any ships that paid such tolls and that any Iranian "fast-attack" ships that went near the blockade would be eliminated.

Brigadier General Reza Talaei-Nik, a spokesperson for Iran's Ministry of Defence, warned that foreign military efforts to police the strait would escalate the crisis and instability in global energy security. **To Page 2**

Build helium reserves now or pay the price later: QFC

Semiconductors, MRI machines facing a crunch

By Santhosh V Perumal
Business Reporter

When Qatar halted LNG production in early March following drone attacks on its energy infrastructure, it sent an invisible but consequential shockwave through the global economy: helium output stopped too. That pause, easily overlooked amid the wider drama of the conflict, exposed just how fragile the world's supply of one of its most critical industrial gases truly is.

The warning comes from a Qatar Financial Centre (QFC) report, which calls for the building of large, co-ordinated helium reserves at national or industry level to provide a more reliable buffer against supply shocks and keep international markets stable.

"Unlike oil, helium has no coordinated global stockpiles. Private reserves exist, but they are relatively small and offer only short-term relief for certain commercial needs. Building a large and co-ordinated reserves at the national or industry level would provide a more reliable buffer against supply shocks and help keep markets stable," said Leago Ntutu Joseph Kgasago, Economics and Special Projects, QFC, who authored the report.

The US and Qatar are the world's largest and second-largest helium producers and exporters, respectively, with estimated outputs of around 81mn and 64mn cubic metres in 2025. Other notable producers include Russia and Algeria. As a major supplier, Qatar's exports account for roughly a fifth to a quarter of the world's helium supply.

When Qatar halted LNG (liquefied natural gas) production in early March in response to drone attacks, associated helium output also paused, quickly tightening market conditions, the report said, adding an interruption of this scale would likely ripple through global value chains, tightening the availability of critical inputs and complicating production planning across key markets.

"If disruptions to helium production and shipments were to persist through the end of the summer, global semiconductor manufacturing could face meaningful constraints that extend beyond chipmakers". **To Page 2**



Singapore says no to toll negotiation

GT Report

Singapore has flatly rejected any suggestion it would pay transit fees to Iran for passage through the Strait of Hormuz, with Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan telling parliament the right of free navigation is enshrined in international law — not a toll concession for Tehran to extract.

Responding to a parliamentary question, Balakrishnan said Singapore would continue engaging Iran diplomatically but ruled out any negotiation over safe passage fees.

"It is not a privilege to be granted by the bordering state, it's not a licence to be supplicated for, it is not a toll to be paid," he said. The remarks come as Iran has imposed what shipping sources describe as a de facto toll system — administered by the IRGC — in the wake of US and Israeli strikes on Iranian infrastructure.

QATAR

Minister meets Swiss, Lebanese envoys



HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation Dr Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad met separately yesterday with ambassadors Florence Tinguely (Switzerland) and Bilal Kabalan (Lebanon). The meetings discussed co-operation, relations between the two countries, ways to support and develop them, and other matters of mutual interest, along with the latest developments in the region. – *QNA*

Adviser to PM meets senior French official



Adviser to the Prime Minister and Official Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dr Majid bin Mohammed al-Ansari, met in Doha yesterday with the director-general for political and security affairs at France's Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Frederic Mondoloni.
The meeting discussed areas of bilateral co-operation and ways to enhance and develop them, as well as the latest regional developments. – *QNA*

Real estate developer ordered to reimburse over QR1.2mn to client

The Investment and Commerce Court has ordered a real estate development company to refund more than QR1.2mn to a client, a Qatari woman, and terminate a residential property contract after failing to meet its contractual obligations.

The court mandated the company to return QR1,009,261.98 paid by the plaintiff for a housing unit, in addition to QR200,000 in compensation for damages incurred, bringing the total awarded amount to around QR1.209mn.

The ruling included the cancellation of the sales agreement due to the developer's failure to deliver the property within the agreed timeframe.

According to court documents, the plaintiff, represented by her legal counsel, filed a lawsuit seeking termination of the purchase contract, a full refund of payments made, and financial compensation.

The dispute arose after the developer offered a number of residential units for sale, one of which the plaintiff agreed to purchase.

The unit, measuring 110.10sq m, was scheduled for completion and delivery by December 2021.

Under the terms of the contract, the company was granted a 12-month extension period if needed.

Accordingly, the plaintiff fulfilled her financial obligations, making installment payments totaling over QR1mn.

However, the company failed to deliver the unit within the agreed deadline or during the extension period, prompting the plaintiff to stop making further payments, invoking the legal principle of reciprocal obligations outlined in civil law.

Eventually, the court found that the developer's continued delay and failure to deliver the property caused direct financial harm to the plaintiff, including the loss of potential use or investment of the unit.

This justified both the contract termination and the compensation awarded.

Following the ruling of the court of first instance, the company filed an appeal.

However, the Court of Appeal upheld the original judgment in full, reaffirming the developer's obligation to refund the amounts paid and compensate the plaintiff.

DICID roundtable highlights social cohesion as key to crisis resilience

The Doha International Centre for Interfaith Dialogue (DICID) organised a roundtable on strengthening social cohesion and building community resilience in times of crisis, in partnership with Katara Cultural Village and in co-operation with the "Qatar Minna wa Nahnu Minha" initiative (Arabic for "Qatar is part of us and we are part of it"), launched by a group of academics and intellectuals residing in Qatar.

DICID chairman Dr Ibrahim bin Saleh al-Nuaimi said the discussions focused on the importance of reinforcing social cohesion to address potential challenges and threats.

He commended the contributions of speakers from various disciplines, noting a shared emphasis on the strong bonds between citizens and residents in Qatar, built on harmony, co-ordination and ongoing co-operation.

Dr al-Nuaimi also praised the quality of the presentations and participants' engagement, as well as their recognition of Qatar's role and successful experience in promoting dialogue initiatives.

In his opening remarks, the DICID chairman said the event comes amid rapidly evolving challenges facing contemporary societies, highlighting its aim to exchange expertise and promote values of belonging, co-operation and responsibility to support a cohesive and resilient society.

He underlined that principles rooted in Islamic teachings, including the Holy Qur'an and the Prophetic Sunnah, emphasise co-operation and mutual support, reinforcing social trust as a foundation for strong and stable communities.





Snapshots from the DICID roundtable.



Dr al-Nuaimi added that these values align with modern scientific research, which underscores that social cohesion is not only a moral principle but also a key requirement for stability and sustainability.

He noted that since its establishment in 2007, the DICID has worked to translate dialogue into practical programmes and effective partnerships that promote coexistence, co-operation and mutual understanding, expressing hope that the roundtable would further reinforce societal stability.

The session, moderated by senior DICID researcher Dr Sekou Marafa Toure, brought together a select group of experts who discussed approaches to enhancing social cohesion, resilience and stability, as well as the role of awareness, shared values and women's contributions in fostering peaceful coexistence. – *QNA*

US begins blockade of ports, Iran 'to retaliate'

From Page 1

Nato allies including Britain and France said they would not be drawn into the conflict by taking part in the blockade, stressing instead the need to reopen the waterway, through which about one-fifth of the world's oil normally passes.

The US military's Central Command said the blockade would be "enforced impartially against vessels of all nations" entering or leaving Iranian ports in the Gulf and Gulf of Oman.

"The blockade will not impede neutral transit passage through the Strait of Hormuz to or from non-Iranian destinations," Central Command said in a note to seafarers seen by Reuters yesterday.

Two Iranian-linked tankers, the Aurora and New Future, left the strait laden with oil products yesterday before the deadline, according to LSEG data.

An Iranian military spokesperson called any US restrictions on international shipping "piracy," warning that if Iranian ports were threatened, no port in the Gulf or Gulf of Oman would be secure. Any military vessels approaching the strait would violate the ceasefire, Iran's Revolutionary Guards said.

Trump has declared victory, despite failing to achieve the objectives he set out at the start of the war: to eliminate Iran's ability to strike its neighbours, end its nuclear programme and make it easier for Iranians to topple their government.

QFC: Build helium reserves now or pay the price later

From Page 1

Under this scenario, leading semiconductor producers – Taiwan, South Korea, and China – would be more exposed than most.

China and South Korea import more than half of their helium requirements from Qatar, respectively, while Taiwan sources about one-third of its LNG from the Gulf state," it said.

Stressing that improving supply chain transparency and co-ordination is crucial; it said ensuring greater visibility across the helium supply chain, similar to systems used in energy, semiconductors, and healthcare, would allow a more proactive rather than reactive response to emerging disruptions.

Large industrial users, particularly in semiconductors and healthcare, can ease demand pressure through closed-loop helium recycling.

These systems are currently under-utilised largely due to up-front costs.

However, for large facilities, they can prove practical, cost-effective over time, and worth the initial investment for long-term supply security.

Helium is critical to various industries, with the largest demand coming from the electronics (25%), medical (23%), and industrial (18%) sectors.

Its chemical stability, low density, and extremely low boiling point, makes it uniquely suited for sensitive applications, such as semiconductor and fibre optic manufacturing, cryogenic fuel storage for satellites and space probes, cooling superconducting magnets in MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) machines, and precision leak detection in submarines, missile systems, and high-pressure fuel lines.

Stressing that with deliberate action to diversify supply, invest in resilience, and modernise how critical materials are managed, exposure to disruptions can be reduced; it said "over time, these steps can strengthen the stability of the systems and industries that underpin the modern economy – while supporting more predictable outcomes for manufacturers, hospitals, and end users alike".

CCQ signs pact with Turkiye's Yunus Emre Institute

The Community College of Qatar (CCQ) has signed a joint co-operation agreement with the Yunus Emre Institute to introduce Turkish language education within its academic offerings and strengthen cultural and scholarly exchange between the two institutions.

CCQ president Dr Khalid al-Horr and the director of the Yunus Emre Institute in Doha, Anwar Cidek, signed the agreement in the presence of Turkiye's ambassador to Qatar Dr Mehmet Mustafa Goksu, alongside several academic and diplomatic leaders.

Under the agreement, the CCQ's Foundation Programme and Foreign Languages Division will offer Turkish language courses at the A1 and A2 levels as part of its academic plan, with implementation set to begin in the 2026-27 academic year.

The partnership includes annual joint workshops, training courses, and lectures designed to promote academic knowledge exchange and support the development of Turkish language teaching methodologies in line with leading international standards.

The three-year agreement lays the foundation for sustainable collaboration focused on strengthening students' language skills and enriching Qatar's academic cultural landscape.

It also creates new opportunities for students who wish to deepen their proficiency in Turkish through academic support and direct consultation services from the institute.

"The agreement expands academic choices for our students and equips them with language and cultural competencies that open new pathways in the labour market and scientific research," Dr al-Horr said. "It also supports the college's efforts to broaden its international partnership network and provide a rich educational environment shaped by cultural diversity, in alignment with Qatar National Vision 2030."

Cidek expressed his pride in the collaboration, saying: "The Institute will dedicate its full academic and cultural capabilities to ensure the success of this cooperation in a way that reflects the depth of cultural ties between Qatar and Turkiye."



"We will work closely with the CCQ's Foundation Programme and Foreign Languages Division to prepare academic content and contribute to activities and events that showcase the richness of Turkish culture in all its dimensions, from art and literature to cuisine and traditions," he said. "We will also provide technical consultation to support the development of digital educational materials and open the institute's doors to students who wish to continue their Turkish language studies at an advanced level."

The dean of the CCQ Foundation Programme and Foreign Languages Division, Dr Nisreen Anati, said that the agreement will strengthen Turkish language education and expand academic and cultural exchange among students.

She emphasised that the academic community in Qatar is driven by a shared commitment to deepening co-operation between both sides.

Dr Anati indicated that the agreement would introduce Turkish Language I in Fall 2026-27, followed by Turkish Language II in Spring 2026-27.

Qatar takes human rights awareness to schools

From Page 1

The campaign has drawn a warm response from school administrators.

Fourth Assalam School head Safaa Abu Nada praised both the substance and delivery of the programme, noting it had meaningfully improved students' understanding of digital rights and responsible behaviour online.

A dedicated session on child protection in the digital sphere was delivered by the head of studies and research at the NHRC, Abdulrahman al-Hammadi, who outlined the legal and ethical challenges arising from rapidly expanding online interaction.

He stressed that the digital environment knows no geographical or cultural borders, making it all the more vital to equip children with the knowledge to navigate it safely and in accordance with international human rights standards.



Dukhan Bank picks winner in QR1mn Thara'a campaign

By A Staff Reporter
Doha

Dukhan Bank has named Ahmed AlFateh Mohamed as the winner of QR1mn in the first million-riyal draw of the 2026 Thara'a campaign.

The winner was selected through an electronic draw, conducted under the supervision and in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry's Qualitative License and Market Control Department.

This year's campaign features a significant increase in the volume of cash rewards, headlined by four grand prizes of QR1mn each. In addition, it offers a robust monthly prize pool, including two prizes of QR20,000 each and 60 prizes of QR5,000. All draws will be conducted according to a designated schedule throughout the year.

To enter the draws, customers must open a Thara'a Savings Account via the Dukhan Bank website, mobile app, or any branch.



Ooredoo launches new family mobile plans

Ooredoo, has unveiled its new family mobile plans to bring the entire family's connectivity under a single, seamlessly managed account.

Designed to simplify how families in Qatar stay connected, at home, across the region, and around the world, the offering combines multiple mobile lines, shared benefits, and lifestyle services into one family plan.

For the very first time, Ooredoo will offer unlimited local calls between family members, keeping families connected. Additionally, customers can select a specific region or country to call back home and enjoy more minutes that matter.

Those international minutes can also be shared between family lines, allowing customers to use them more conveniently and efficiently.

The Family Plans, Baytna and Shahry+ Family, are designed to serve the diverse needs of households across Qatar. Baytna is tailored for families seeking premium local and regional connectivity shared between the family, with enhanced roaming and entertainment benefits, while Shahry+ Family is designed for families looking for simple, value-rich plans with strong international calling to their selected region or country, also shared amongst family members, to stay connected with loved ones abroad.

Each plan combines multiple mobile lines for parents, children, dependents, household helpers, or connected data devices, offering unlimited calls within the family, dedicated international calling allowances for a specific region or country, flexible roaming options, streaming entertainment benefits, and lifestyle perks.

UN chief says 'all parties' must respect freedom of navigation

AFP
United Nations

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres yesterday called on "all parties" to respect freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz, after Iran and subsequently the United States blocked flows through the critical waterway.

The strait, through which a fifth of global oil and gas flows, has become a key flashpoint as the US and Iran attempt to gain leverage over each other during ceasefire negotiations.

Disruptions in the strait "have already had direct effect well beyond the immediate region, with increased global economic fragility and insecurity in many sectors," the UN chief's spokesman Stephane Dujarric said in a statement.

The remarks came after US President Donald Trump ordered a blockade of ships entering or leaving Iranian ports and coastal areas yesterday, following the failure of peace talks over the weekend. Iran had already effectively halted traffic through the strait following the US-Israeli attacks beginning February 28. "We need to remember that some 20,000 seafarers have been caught up in this conflict and are currently stranded on ships, facing increasing hardships daily," Guterres' spokesman also said.

Guterres also called for peace talks to continue. "At the same time, the ceasefire must absolutely be preserved. All violations must cease," the spokesman said.

Qatar pavilion set to present works at Venice Biennale next month

The National Pavilion of Qatar at the Giardini della Biennale in Venice, Italy, announced yesterday details of its participation in the 61st International Art Exhibition — La Biennale di Venezia, to be held next month.

The pavilion will present the art exhibition 'untitled 2026 (a gathering of remarkable people)' featuring the works of Rirkrit Tiravanija, Sophia al-Maria, Tarek Atoui, Alia Farid, and Fadi Kattan. This exhibition builds on artist Rirkrit Tiravanija's decades-long practice of inviting collaborators to activate his architectural and spatial scenarios.

HE Chairperson of Qatar Museums Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad al-Thani said, "On the global stage of the Venice Biennale, this exhibition demonstrates Qatar's unwavering belief in the power of culture to bring people together and to create space for reflection, connection, and affirmation of our shared humanity. Qatar is proud to provide a platform for the creative talent of our nation and the Arab world. Together, these artists and their work highlight the importance of resilience in a complicated time, empowering communities, inspiring generations, and strengthening our combined heritage."

For the 61st International Art Exhibition, Rirkrit Tiravanija has designed a tent-like structure to serve as a place for cultural exchange, with a film by Qatari-American artist Sophia al-Maria, live performances organised by Lebanese artist Tarek Atoui, a large-scale sculpture by Kuwaiti-Puerto Rican artist Alia Farid, and a culinary programme of Middle Eastern cuisine designed by Palestinian chef Fadi Kattan.

Produced by Qatar Museums and presented by Rubaiya Qatar (Qatar's contemporary art quadrennial), a gathering of remarkable people is co-curated by Executive Director, Center for Curatorial Studies and the Hessel Museum of Art, Bard College Tom Eccles and Chief Curator and Director of Curatorial Affairs, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA PS1) Ruba Katrib.

The exhibition will be held at the Giardini della Biennale on the site of the future permanent Qatar Pavilion designed by Lina Ghotmeh — Architecture.

Co-curators Tom Eccles and Ruba Katrib said, "We are proud that a gathering of remarkable people builds upon the presentation of Rirkrit Tiravanija's work in Doha, as part of Rubaiya Qatar. The engaging, participatory nature of this new, expansive work, including its desire to nourish both the spirit and the body, will be carried forward by the outstanding artistic collaborators who will bring the exhibition to life in Venice. By including artists, musicians, poets, and chefs, the exhibition proves that culture is the indelible link between us all. Bringing people together at this moment is more important than ever. In fact, it is essential." For his part, Rirkrit Tiravanija said, "I feel honoured to work with Qatar Museums, the Rubaiya Qatar team, and all the artists who will be contributing to this experience in Venice. Sophia al-Maria, Tarek Atoui, Alia Farid and Fadi Kattan represent different aspects of Arab culture, which will be united at the Qatar Pavilion to show how we all can come together."

Among the most prominent artworks and interactive experiences to be presented is an experimental narrative film by Qatari-American artist Sophia al-Maria, in which her protagonist goes on a dream-like journey that delves into the transformative possibilities of music and sound. Also featured is "Jerrican", a large-scale sculpture by Alia Farid from her series of larger-than-life vessels used to store and carry water in the Gulf. **(QNA)**

US details bounds of Hormuz blockade as at least two ships turn around



File photo shows a vessel at the Strait of Hormuz, off the coast of Oman's Musandam province. **(Reuters)**

Reuters
London/Houston

The US military yesterday detailed the boundaries of its Strait of Hormuz blockade, saying it would extend east to the Gulf of Oman and Arabian Sea, while ship-tracking data showed two ships turned around in the strait as the blockade went into effect.

In a note to seafarers about the blockade that seeks to take control of the strait away from Iran, the US Central Command said: "Any vessel entering or departing the blockaded area without authorisation is subject to interception, diversion, and capture."

"The blockade will not impede neutral transit passage through the Strait of Hormuz to or from non-Iranian destinations."

The blockade began at 10 a.m. EDT (1400 GMT) yesterday.

Data from the MarineTraffic tracking service showed the tanker Rich Starry, which departed Sharjah anchorage off the coast of Dubai yesterday heading for China, turned back minutes after approaching the strait as did a second vessel, the Ostria. Those tankers can carry oil and chemicals.

However, two oil tankers linked to Iran exited the Gulf yesterday via the strait ahead of the planned US blockade, shipping data from Kpler and LSEG showed.

The tanker Aurora is laden with Iranian oil products, while the New Future tanker is carrying diesel loaded from the Hamriyah port in the United Arab Emirates, Kpler data showed.

They were among at least eight ships that transited the strait on Monday before the blockade.

According to Kpler, an oil products tanker that loaded in a United Arab Emirates port and three dry bulk ships that left from Iranian ports exited the strait while two other oil products tankers and two dry bulk ships entered the strait. US President Donald Trump announced the blockade following the breakdown of weekend talks to end the six-week-long war between the US and Iran, sending oil prices back above $100 a barrel.

The blockade adds to uncertainty around how ships will transit the crucial waterway, used to move one-fifth of the world's oil and gas supplies.

The US military note said the blockade would include all of Iran's coastline but humanitarian shipments including food, medical supplies, and other essential goods would be permitted, subject to inspection.

"The immediate effect will be a sharp drop in fresh fixture activity for any voyage with Iran exposure, and a broader hesitation even for non-Iran cargoes moving near the Strait," said Shohruh Zukhritdinov, a Dubai-based oil trader.

International Maritime Organisation Secretary-General Arsenio Dominguez told reporters the US blockade would extend a halt to ship traffic in the strait since the conflict began. Dominguez said 20,000 seafarers and around 1,600 vessels were stuck in the Gulf.

Family medicine role highlighted

QNA
Doha

The Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC) has reaffirmed its commitment to boosting family medicine as a cornerstone of community health, ahead of Qatar Family Day 2026. The annual occasion observed on April 15 reflects the country's growing focus on the family as the foundation of a stable and cohesive society, with health authorities emphasising its central role in promoting wellbeing.

Dr Fathiya Mohammed al-Meer, Senior Consultant in Family Medicine and Director of PHCC's Central Region, described the event as an opportunity to engage directly with the public and promote preventive healthcare. She said strong and cohesive families are essential to a healthy society, adding that care extends beyond treatment to include prevention, awareness, and psychological and social support.

Family doctors, she noted, play a pivotal role in the healthcare system, equipped to manage a wide range of physical, mental and behavioural conditions. They are also key to early disease detection, chronic illness management, and coordinating care with specialists.

Dr al-Meer highlighted the unique, trust-based relationship between family physicians and patients, which allows for continuity of care and a comprehensive understanding of patients' medical and family histories-factors that contribute to improved health outcomes. PHCC provides family medicine services across all its health centers throughout the week, offering consultations, routine follow-ups, and preventive programs. Patients can also access support through the Hayyak customer service platform or by calling the national hotline.

Services include treatment for common conditions such as respiratory, digestive, urinary and skin diseases, as well as minor surgical procedures. The program also supports the management of chronic illnesses including diabetes and hypertension, alongside maternal care and family planning guidance.

Child health services, including growth monitoring and vaccinations, are also provided, in addition to smoking cessation programs aimed at improving public health.

To mark Qatar Family Day, health centers across the country are organising awareness and community events to highlight the importance of family well-being and the role of family physicians as the first line of defense in addressing health challenges, particularly during times of crisis.



ARAB WORLD/AFRICA

Israel strikes Lebanon border town ahead of US-hosted talks

Reuters
Beirut/Jerusalem



Destroyed buildings in Bint Jbeil, southern Lebanon, near the border, as seen from the Israeli side of the border in northern Israel, yesterday. **(Reuters)**

Israeli troops launched an attack yesterday to seize a key town in south Lebanon from Hezbollah fighters holed up there, pressing the war on the group on the eve of rare talks between Israeli and Lebanese government envoys.

With the Lebanese and Israeli ambassadors to the US set to meet today in Washington, Lebanon's foreign minister said Beirut would use face-to-face negotiations to press for a ceasefire in the war, which has complicated wider diplomacy to halt the conflict in the Middle East.

But the outlook for the meeting — an unusual, face-to-face encounter between countries formally in a state of war — is uncertain. Israel has said it will not discuss a ceasefire, while Hezbollah has objected to negotiations with Israel, reflecting sharply worsening political tensions in Lebanon.

In a televised speech yesterday, Hezbollah chief Naim Qassem said the Lebanese government should cancel today'smeeting, describing it as "pointless" and saying his group would continue confronting Israeli attacks on Lebanon.

On the ground in south Lebanon, the Israeli military completed its encirclement of the town of Bint Jbeil just over the border and had begun a ground assault there, an Israeli military spokesperson and Lebanese security sources said.

The Lebanese sources said Hezbollah fighters holed up inside were ready to fight to the death, citing the strategic and symbolic significance of Bint Jbeil, a Hezbollah stronghold, provincial capital, and gateway to surrounding villages. An Israeli military official said full operational control of Bint Jbeil would be achieved within days, and that only a small number of fighters remained in the area.

Yesterday, the International Committee of the Red Cross said there had been a strike on a Red Cross centre in southern Lebanon's Tyre. Lebanon's state news agency said one person was killed in the strike. It did not identify the person.

Israel's military said it carried out a strike on a "Hezbollah fighter" in Tyre and was investigating reports the strike had caused damage to a Red Cross centre. The military did not further identify the individual it said that it had killed.

Israel's military separately said a Hezbollah rocket struck the northern Israeli city of Nahariyya. The country's fire service said it hit a three-storey residential building, while the ambulance service said a woman was lightly injured by glass shattered in the blast.

The Israeli military also said that it had intercepted more than 10 drones and rockets launched at Israel from Lebanon since the morning.

A foreign security official based in Lebanon said seizing Bint Jbeil would give Israel better control over the entirety of Lebanon's southeastern border strip, leaving just the western area of the border zone, which is largely forest and harder to clear.

Hezbollah opened fire on Israel in support of Tehran on March 2, igniting an Israeli offensive that Lebanese authorities say has killed more than 2,000 people and displaced more than 1 mn.

Israel says it aims to occupy south Lebanon up to the Litani River, which meets the Mediterranean about 30 km from Israel's border. Israel and the US have said the campaign against Hezbollah was not part of a fragile Iran-US ceasefire, though Pakistan's prime minister had said the truce would include Lebanon.

While fighting in Lebanon has not stopped, Israel has launched no airstrikes on Beirut since Wednesday, when it pounded the capital during an onslaught that killed hundreds.

The US ambassador to Lebanon, Michel Issa, will host today's Washington meeting between Israeli ambassador Yechiel Leiter and his Lebanese counterpart Nada Hamadeh Moawad.

Lebanese Culture Minister Ghassan Salameh, speaking on Sunday, said seeking a ceasefire was the only substantive issue that Moawad had been authorised to discuss.

Israel's embassy in Washington last week said the talks would constitute the start of "formal peace negotiations" and that Israel had refused to discuss a ceasefire with Hezbollah.

Lebanese Foreign Minister Youssef Raggi, a member of the staunchly anti-Hezbollah Lebanese Forces party, said Lebanon was trying to reach a ceasefire through direct negotiations that "effectively established the separation between the Lebanese file and the Iranian track".

A senior Lebanese political source said the talks were taking place without any national consensus because both Hezbollah and its ally, Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, opposed negotiations before a ceasefire.

Another source familiar with their position said Lebanon should not sit at the table with Israel while "our people are being killed".



First responders gather at the site of an Israeli airstrike that targeted a neighbourhood in the southern Lebanese village of Kfar Roummane, yesterday. **(AFP)**



Mohamed El Junayd, 43, who said he survived the Israeli strike, sits beside piled damaged cars at the site of an Israeli strike carried out on April 8, at Corniche al-Mazraa in Beirut, Lebanon, yesterday. **(Reuters)**

Al-Maliki's chances dim, Iraqi leaders revisit PM bid

AFP
Baghdad



Iraq's newly elected president Nizar Amedi, speaks in the parliament in Baghdad. Amedi now has 15 days to appoint a prime minister. (**AFP**)

Nouri al-Maliki's prospects of becoming Iraq's next prime minister are fading as the country's leaders aim to settle the question as a ceasefire takes effect in the region, political sources said.

Since the US-led invasion that overthrew former ruler Saddam Hussein in 2003, Iraqi leaders have struggled to find a balance between two powers competing for influence in the country: Iran and the United States.

In January, US President Donald Trump threatened to stop supporting Iraq if Maliki returned to the post.

A source close to Maliki — a two-time former premier with close ties to Iran — told AFP "I think it is difficult" for Maliki to become Iraq's next premier.

Other political sources confirmed Maliki's chances have waned. Trump's ultimatum left Iraqi leaders at a loss, particularly within the Co-ordination Framework, a ruling alliance of groups with varying degrees of ties to Iran, that had initially nominated Maliki.

The question of the premiership resurfaced after Iraq's parliament elected Nizar Amedi as the country's new president on Saturday, just days after the ceasefire between the US and Iran took effect.

Leaders of the Co-ordination Framework are holding talks about the premiership, sources close to the framework told AFP.

Some leaders had preferred to delay the process until they could assess the impact of the ceasefire and US-Iran talks on the region, two sources said.

But, with the country under a caretaker government in recent months, including during the Middle East war that also engulfed Iraq, political pressure has grown to move the process forward.

One source close to the framework said the priority is "national interest, avoiding sanctions on Iraq and problems with the US".

Pope honours 'martyrs' in Algeria's civil war

Pope Leo XIV paid tribute to the priests, monks and nuns killed in Algeria's 1992-2002 civil war during a landmark visit to the country yesterday, the first for any pontiff.
During the civil war, a total of 19 priests and members of religious orders were murdered, including seven monks kidnapped and killed in 1996 in an incident still shrouded in mystery.
"I am particularly reminded of the 19 men and women religious who were martyred in Algeria, choosing to stand alongside this people in its joys and sorrows," Leo told congregants at the Catholic Basilica of Our Lady of Africa in Algiers.
Leo visited the Great Mosque of Algiers -- home to the world's highest minaret -- before heading to Our Lady of Africa, overlooking the Bay of Algiers.
The two-day visit to the North African country is infused with personal significance for the Pope, as Algeria was the home of Saint Augustine (354-430), whose spiritual legacy permeates Leo's pontificate.
Today, Leo is set to visit the northeastern city of Annaba -- formerly the ancient Roman city of Hippo -- the one-time home of the saint whose autobiographical "Confessions" is a seminal work within the Christian tradition. (**AFP**)

Qatar Shell GTL Limited

INVITATION TO TENDER

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

SR No.	Tender Ref.	Title	Tender Fee	Tender Issue Date	Tender Closing Date
1	WS2704357779, CW998540	Al Khor lease	N/A	12th Apr	17th Apr

General Instructions:

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

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

Millions of people in Sudan surviving on one meal a day as food crisis deepens, NGOs say

Reuters
Geneva

Millions of people in Sudan are surviving on just one meal a day, as the country's food crisis deepens and threatens to spread, according to a report published on Monday by a group of non-governmental organisations.

Sudan's war between the Sudanese army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, which enters its third year on Wednesday, has caused widespread hunger and displaced millions of people amid one of the world's largest humanitarian crises.

"In the two areas worst hit by the conflict — North Darfur and South Kordofan — millions of families can only access one meal a day," the report by Action Against Hunger, CARE International, International Rescue Committee, Mercy Corps, and the Norwegian Refugee Council found.

"Often, they miss meals for entire days," the report stated, adding that many people have resorted to eating leaves and animal feed to survive.

The army-aligned Sudanese government denies the existence of famine, while the RSF denies responsibility for such conditions in areas under its control.

Some 61.7% of Sudan's population — 28.9mn people — is acutely food-insecure, according to the 2026 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan.

The UN has reported widespread atrocities and waves of ethnically charged violence. In November, the global hunger monitor confirmed, for the first time, famine conditions in Al-Fashir, as well as Kadugli. In February, the UN-backed Integrated Food Security Phase Classification found that famine thresholds for acute malnutrition have been surpassed in Um Baru, where the rate of acutely malnourished children under 5 was nearly double the famine threshold, and Kernoi.

The report, based on interviews with farmers, traders, and humanitarian actors in Sudan, details how the war in Sudan is driving communities towards famine conditions — due to disruptions to farming as well as the use of starvation as a weapon of war — including deliberate destruction of farms and markets. Communal kitchens are increasingly unable to meet rising needs, while major donor funding cuts are impeding aid agencies' abilities to respond, the report said.



File photo shows Saddam Najwa, a malnourished, 17-month-old internally displaced child at the paediatric ward of the Mother of Mercy Hospital in Gidel, near Kauda, in the Nuba Mountains, South Kordofan, Sudan. **(Reuters)**

Burundi partially acquits journalist after almost two years in jail

A Burundian appeals court partially acquitted a journalist sentenced to four years in prison for sharing information in a private WhatsApp group, according to court documents seen by AFP yesterday.
Sandra Muhoza, a reporter with the online outlet La Nova Burundi, was released on bail last month after being held for nearly two years over allegations she shared information in a private WhatsApp group about alleged arms distribution by the government.
She had appeared very frail during a court appearance in December. A court acquitted her of undermining national unity but found her guilty of racial hatred, according to the ruling, signed by a court clerk on Monday and confirmed by one of her lawyers.
Racial hatred is punishable by six months to two years imprisonment and/or a fine.
The penal code defines it as "expressing racial or ethnic hatred or hatred" or inciting, encouraging, or committing an "act likely to provoke such hatred or hatred".
Eric Ntibandetse, one of her lawyers, welcomed the ruling but said the years in prison were "for nothing" since the original allegation was "without any basis". He also labelled the racial charge "unfounded" as it similarly involved comments in a private WhatsApp group. (**AFP**)

Tear gas fired at Palestinian schoolchildren in West Bank

AFP
Umm al-Khair

Israeli forces fired tear gas at Palestinian schoolchildren staging a sit-in yesterday in the occupied West Bank, AFP footage showed, after settlers blocked access to their school.

The Israeli military confirmed to AFP it had dispersed an "unusual gathering", but did not specify whether its troops had fired tear gas at the children on the first day of class since the start of the Iran war.

The incident took place at Umm al-Khair, a small village in the southern West Bank region of Masafer Yatta.

Schoolchildren there had been due back in class on Monday for the first time in more than 40 days, after lessons were suspended following the outbreak of the Middle East war on February 28.

A group of schoolchildren and Palestinian residents had gathered near a barbed wire fence erected by Israeli settlers, which blocked access to the school, an AFP journalist reported.

Schoolchildren and some local adults were holding an open-air class as a sit-in to demand access when troops fired the tear gas, witnesses said.

"We were sitting and they threw a grenade (tear gas canister) at us. I got scared and started screaming and ran away," 12-year-old Sarah al-Hathaleen told AFP.

"I started crying. A woman hugged me and stayed with me. We were very scared."

Bassam Jabr, director of education for the Masafer Yatta area, confirmed the children were staging a sit-in at the time of the incident.

"Settlers are trying to tighten the noose on us in every way. One of these methods is cutting off the road for school students and expanding the settlement," Jabr said of settlers from the nearby Carmel settlement whose residents erected the fence.

"Sadly, there are no solutions. We will continue this sit-in today and tomorrow until we find a solution so the students can return to their schools," he said.

Israel's military said troops had been dispatched to the area.

"IDF soldiers were dispatched ot the area of Umm al-Khair due to reports of an unusual gathering of Palestinians in the area," the military told AFP.

"The gathering was dispersed and no injuries were reported," it said, without specifying whether tear gas had been fired.

AFP footage showed canisters being fired, with children screaming and fleeing.

"Last night we were excited for school today. The Israelis came and closed the road with barbed wire... we want to be back in school," said 11-year-old Rashid al-Hathaleen.



Relatives and friends comfort each other during the funeral of 23-year-old Ali Majed Hamadneh in the village of Deir Jarir, northeast of the city of Ramallah in the occupied Palestinian West Bank, yesterday. **(AFP)**



Displaced Palestinian street vendors sell produce in front of a destroyed van and building at the Jabalia refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip, yesterday. **(AFP)**

Israeli fire kills three in Gaza following new ceasefire talks

Reuters
Cairo/Gaza

An Israeli airstrike killed at least three Palestinians in the Gaza Strip yesterday, health officials said, as mediators met leaders from Hamas in an effort to shore up a US-brokered ceasefire deal.

Medics said the strike had hit a group of men outside a school in Deir al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip. There was no immediate comment by the Israeli military.

At Al-Aqsa Hospital in Deir al-Balah, the bodies of those killed lay on the ground in white shrouds outside the morgue as relatives and friends arrived to bid them farewell. Some kissed the victims' foreheads before holding special prayers.

"This isn't a truce; it's a trap for our young men. Every day there are martyrs, every single day. How long can this continue?" said Umm Hussam Abu el-Rous, a female relative of one of the victims.

"Isn't it unjust that a three-year-old child is afraid of seeing his (dead) father? He says, 'My father went to bring me something from the shop,'" she added. The ceasefire that began last October halted two years of full-blown war but left Israeli troops in control of a depopulated zone demarcated by yellow-painted blocks that comprises well over half of Gaza, with Hamas in power in a narrow coastal strip and Israeli airstrikes continuing.

More than 750 Palestinians have been killed since the deal took effect, while the fighters have killed four Israeli soldiers. Israel and Hamas have traded blame for ceasefire violations.

Palestinians say Israeli forces have been moving some of the yellow concrete markers westward. Israel denies this.

The violence comes as leaders from Hamas and other Palestinian factions have been meeting since Saturday in Cairo with mediators from Egypt, Turkiye, and a Gulf state to discuss implementing the second phase of the Gaza deal. Under a plan put forward by US President Donald Trump's Board of Peace, Hamas would be required to lay down its arms in stages over eight months after a US-backed committee of Palestinian technocrats takes control in Gaza. However, Hamas' disarmament has been a major obstacle to progress on Trump's ceasefire deal and plan for Gaza, which have also been put under strain by the war in Iran.

Two officials close to the latest talks said Hamas told mediators that discussions on disarmament could only move forward after Israel fully implements the first phase of Trump's October deal, which includes a complete ceasefire in Gaza.

Militants raid Nigerian army base, kill commander and six soldiers

Reuters
Maiduguri

Militants riding motorbikes stormed an army base near Nigeria's northeastern border with Chad, killing the commander and six other soldiers late on Sunday, two military sources said.

The assault was by members of Boko Haram and its splinter group Islamic State West Africa Province, the sources told Reuters, and came days after a string of co-ordinated attacks on military positions in other parts of Borno State.

Insurgents have ramped up attacks on overstretched bases and looted weapons across the region, piling pressure on the government and President Bola Tinubu who has vowed to end years of violence.

Those killed late on Sunday included the base commander who was weeks from retirement and six other soldiers whose vehicle struck an improvised mine while heading to reinforce troops during the attack, the sources said.

At least 12 militants were killed in a gunfight during the attack on the 242 Battalion barracks in Monguno, the sources added, requesting anonymity because they were not authorised to speak to the media.

Militants have waged a 17-year insurgency seeking to carve out a religious state in northeast Nigeria, killing thousands and displacing at least 2mn people, aid groups say, despite major military campaigns.

Opposition candidate concedes defeat in Benin presidential poll

AFP
Cotonou

Benin presidential election favourite Romuald Wadagni headed for victory yesterday as his opponent conceded defeat even as votes were still being counted.

Opposition candidate Paul Hounkpe offered "republican congratulations" to finance minister Wadagni, 49, who had been widely tipped to win after being endorsed by outgoing leader Patrice Talon.

Official results are not expected before today. But Wadagni's ability to conjure economic growth in the face of militant attacks gave him a clear lead, even if the eight million-strong electorate showed scant enthusiasm for either candidate, notably in the West African nation's cities.



File photo of Paul Hounkpe. **(Reuters)**

"To... Romuald Wadagni, I offer my republican congratulations. Democracy requires mutual respect and the ability to rise above partisan divides," Hounkpe said in his concession statement.

Talon stood down after two five-year terms since 2016. But in the capital Porto-Novo, turnout for Sunday's vote ranged from 20 to 40% at some polling stations, while life in economic capital Cotonou was largely back to its usual bustle by Monday. Hounkpe ran a low-key campaign and needed the help of majority lawmakers to secure the required parliamentary endorsements even to get on the ballot paper. The main opposition Democrats party did not field a candidate as its leader, Renaud Agbodjo, failed to secure sufficient endorsements.

For the media, in the words of Le Telegramme daily, the election was "generally calm and well-organised," while Le Matin Libre saw "Wadagni on his way to the Marina," the presidential palace.

Le Patriote, however, saw "signs of an electoral heist."

"We are waiting for the CENA (electoral commission) to confirm in the coming hours what we already knew: the undisputed victory of our candidate," said Rominus Gnonlonfoun, a leading Wadagni supporter.

Amani TVR Group Opens New Showroom in Muaither



Amani TVR Group inaugurated its new showroom in Muaither in the presence of Group Chairman T.V. Rajan, Qatar Managing Director Rajesh Rajan, Ajitha Rajan, and Amani Rajesh. The new outlet marks the group's 6th showroom in Qatar and 41st across the GCC, further strengthening its 48-year legacy in the auto spare parts industry and its commitment to quality products, competitive pricing, and efficient customer service.

قطر للطاقة QatarEnergy LNG

Public Announcement

FUGRO

To all Ships, Fisherman, and Mariners
Subsea Survey Works Offshore in "North Field"
By the Vessels "Fugro Proteus" and "Stanford Hobby"

Subsea Survey Works Offshore Qatar from 15th Apr 2026 to 31st July 2026

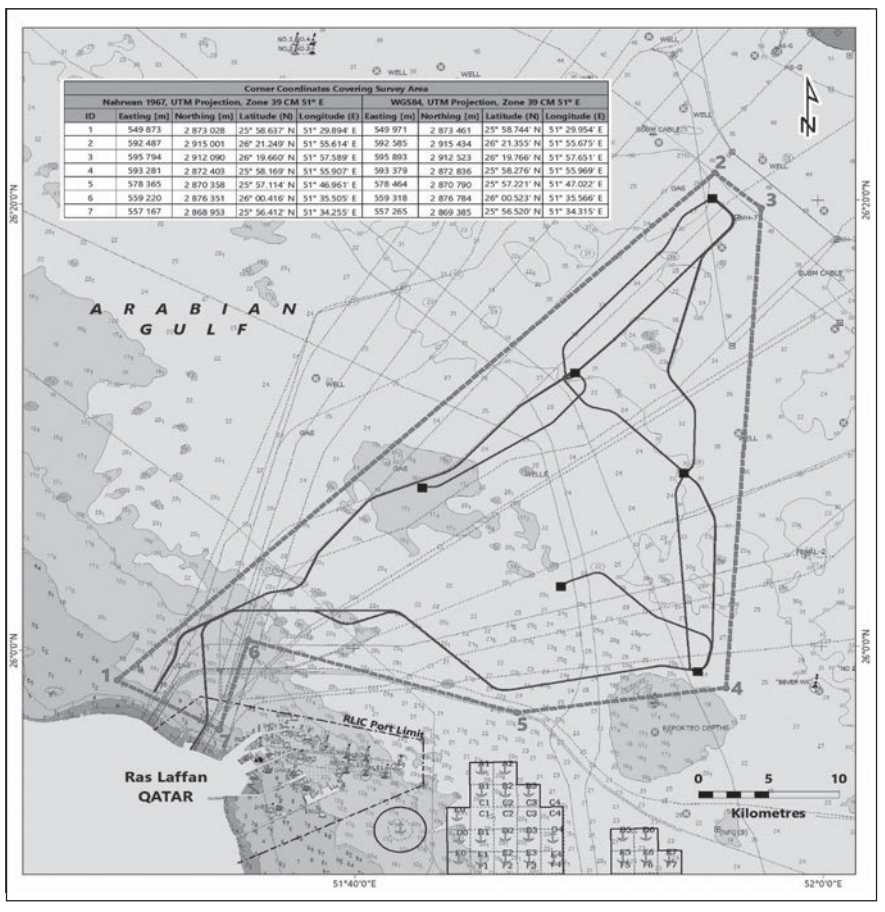
In pursuant and under directives from the Seafarers Affairs and Registration Department, Ministry of Transport, State of Qatar, this announcement is to inform all Vessels, Mariners, and Fisherman that "QatarEnergy LNG" formerly known as Qatar Gas Operating Company Limited intends to undertake geophysical and geotechnical surveys by the vessels "Fugro Proteus" and "Stanford Hobby" in North Field locations, bound by the coordinates and location map shown below.

All Vessels, Mariners, and Fishermen are expected to keep clear of the survey locations during the operations.

QatarEnergy LNG takes no responsibility for any loss or damage caused to outside parties in association with this operation following the publication of this notice.

Corner Coordinates Covering Survey Area

ID	Nahrwan 1967, UTM Projection, Zone 39 CM 51° E Easting [m]	Northing [m]	Latitude (N)	Longitude (E)	WGS84, UTM Projection, Zone 39 CM 51° E Easting [m]	Northing [m]	Latitude (N)	Longitude (E)
1	549 873	2 873 028	25° 58.637' N	51° 29.894' E	549 971	2 873 461	25° 58.744' N	51° 29.954' E
2	592 487	2 915 001	26° 21.249' N	51° 55.614' E	592 585	2 915 434	26° 21.355' N	51° 55.675' E
3	595 794	2 912 090	26° 19.660' N	51° 57.589' E	595 893	2 912 523	26° 19.766' N	51° 57.651' E
4	593 281	2 872 403	25° 58.169' N	51° 55.907' E	593 379	2 872 836	25° 58.276' N	51° 55.969' E
5	578 365	2 870 358	25° 57.114' N	51° 46.961' E	578 464	2 870 790	25° 57.221' N	51° 47.022' E
6	559 220	2 876 351	26° 00.416' N	51° 35.505' E	559 318	2 876 784	26° 00.523' N	51° 35.566' E
7	557 167	2 868 953	25° 56.412' N	51° 34.255' E	557 265	2 869 385	25° 56.520' N	51° 34.315' E



For more details contact 30672614

WORLD

Judge tosses Trump defamation suit against *Wall Street Journal*

A US federal judge has tossed out a $10bn defamation lawsuit filed by President Donald Trump against the *Wall Street Journal*.

Trump sued media magnate Rupert Murdoch and the *Journal* in July after it published a report about a birthday letter he allegedly sent to one-time close friend Jeffrey Epstein.

The case was one of several that Trump, a Republican, has filed during his presidency against major media outlets over reporting he has characterised as unfair or false.

That has led to concern among Democrats and press freedom advocates that he is seeking to use defamation cases to quell critical coverage.

District Judge Darrin Gayles, in a 17-page ruling, said Trump had failed to prove the Murdoch-owned newspaper had knowingly published false statements, the legal standard to prove defamation.

"Because President Trump has not plausibly alleged that defendants published the article with actual malice, both counts must be dismissed," Gayles wrote.

The judge, who was appointed by former president Barack Obama, gave Trump the opportunity to amend his complaint and refile the suit by April 27.

A spokesman for Trump's legal team said the suit would be resubmitted.

"President Trump will follow Judge Gayles's ruling and guidance to refile this powerhouse lawsuit against the *Wall Street Journal* and all of the other Defendants," the spokesman said in a statement. "The President will continue to hold accountable those who traffic in Fake News to mislead the American People."

Trump has intensified his long-established hostility toward the media since his return to the White House, and the suit against the Journal is one of numerous attacks against news organisations that he accuses of bias against him.

Trump's attacks on media outlets have seen him restrict access, badmouth journalists critical of his administration, and bring lawsuits demanding huge amounts of compensation.

According to the *Journal*, Trump wrote a "bawdy" birthday letter to Epstein in 2003 to mark his 50th birthday, part of an album of messages from rich and well-known figures.

Trump and his lawyers said the card is fake, even after it was released by lawmakers investigating Epstein's case.

Trump has said he broke off his friendship with Epstein prior to the wealthy financier's 2008 guilty plea in Florida to solicitation of prostitution with a minor.

Epstein was found dead in a New York prison cell in 2019 as he awaited trial on sex trafficking charges.

His death was ruled a suicide but like much else around Epstein is the subject of lurid conspiracy theories.

The Epstein case has repeatedly overshadowed Trump's second presidency and led to the downfall of a number of powerful figures around the world who were associated with Epstein.

The US Justice Department has over the past year released huge tranches of files related to Epstein.

Trump, 79, figures prominently in the files but has not been formally accused of wrongdoing.

Trump has also sued the BBC, citing misleading editing of a speech, the *New York Times* over articles and a book about him, and a newspaper in Iowa over a poll that showed him trailing Kamala Harris in the 2024 presidential campaign.

All three outlets denied wrongdoing.

ABC settled with Trump after he sued over an anchor's inaccurate comments about a civil case accusing him of abuse.

CBS struck a similar deal after Trump sued over its edits to an interview with Harris. – ***AFP/Reuters***

Trump raps Pope over criticism

Reuters/AFP
Washington/Rome/Algiers


Pope Leo addresses journalists during the flight to Algiers.


Trump: Pope Leo is weak on crime, and terrible at foreign policy.

US President Donald Trump has criticised Pope Leo XIV as "terrible" in an unusual, direct attack on the Pontiff, who responded by vowing to continue denouncing war and suffering.

The president's comments came after the Pope had spoken out, with growing force, against the US-Israeli war on Iran and the Trump administration's hardline immigration policies.

"Pope Leo is WEAK on Crime, and terrible for Foreign Policy," Trump wrote in a post on Truth Social late on Sunday.

Pope Leo, the first Pontiff from the US, responded yesterday by saying that he would continue to denounce war, adding that the Christian message, rooted in the primacy of peace, was being "abused".

"I will continue to speak out loudly against war, looking to promote peace, promoting dialogue and multilateral relationships among the states to look for just solutions to problems," he told Reuters aboard a papal flight to Algiers, where he is embarking on a 10-day tour to four African countries.

"Too many people are suffering in the world today," Leo said. "Too many innocent people are being killed. And I think someone has to stand up and say there's a better way."

Catholics on social media lambasted Trump for attacking the leader of the 1.4bn-member Catholic Church.

"There is no ambiguity about the situation now," Massimo Faggioli, an expert on the papacy, told Reuters.

He compared the comments to efforts by the leaders of Germany and Italy during World War II to draw the late Pope Pius XII to support their causes.

"Not even Hitler or Mussolini attacked the pope so directly and publicly," said Faggioli.

Archbishop Paul S Coakley, president of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, said that he was disheartened by Trump's comments.

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni condemned Trump's criticism of Leo's comments as "unacceptable", saying that "it is right and normal for (Leo) to call for peace and to condemn all forms of war".

Leo, originally from Chicago, is known for choosing his words carefully.

He has emerged as an outspoken critic of the conflict with Iran in recent weeks and decried the "madness of war" in a peace appeal on Saturday.

Last year, he questioned whether the Trump administration's hardline immigration policies were in line with the church's pro-life teachings, and called for a "deep reflection" about the way migrants are being treated in the United States.

Trump wrote in his post on Sunday that "Leo should get his act together as Pope", later telling reporters he was "not a big fan" of the Pontiff.

Trump's broadside against Leo also accused him of being "weak on nuclear weapons", several days after the Pope said the US president's threat to destroy Iranian civilisation was "truly unacceptable".

In a speech on Palm Sunday last month in St. Peter's Square in the Vatican, the Pope said God rejected the prayers of leaders who start wars and have their "hands full of blood", calling the conflict in Iran "atrocious".

Leo has also called on Trump to find an "off-ramp" to end the conflict and "decrease the amount of violence".

In his post, Trump suggested that Leo was only elected to lead the Catholic Church last year "because he was an American, and they thought that would be the best way to deal with President Donald J Trump".

Leo said yesterday that he was not a politician and did not want to be drawn into a debate with Trump.

Trump also had a rocky relationship with Leo's predecessor, Pope Francis, who criticised Trump's immigration policy proposals when he first ran for president and suggested Trump was "not a Christian".

Trump had called Francis "disgraceful" in early 2016.

US president's comments are 'unacceptable': Meloni

Reuters/AFP
Rome

US President Donald Trump's attack on Pope Leo was "unacceptable", Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni said yesterday, joining forces with politicians of all colours in springing to the Pontiff's defence.

The statement represented an extremely rare public rebuke of Trump from Meloni, who has cultivated particularly close ties with the US president, underscoring widespread anger in Italy over his broadside on Pope Leo.

Trump set off the furore by calling Leo "terrible" in a long tirade on Sunday.

He subsequently posted an artificial intelligence (AI) image depicting himself as a Messiah-like figure, sparking further outrage among Christians who saw the image.

Meloni issued an initial statement backing Leo as he flew off on an ambitious four-nation visit to Africa, but made no specific mention of Trump's broadside.

Opposition politicians accused her of lacking the courage to directly challenge Trump, prompting her to issue a second statement later in the day to clarify her position.

"I thought the meaning of my statement this morning was clear, but I will restate it more explicitly. I find President Trump's words about the Holy Father unacceptable," Meloni said. "The Pope is the head of the Catholic Church, and it is right and normal for him to call for peace and to condemn every form of war."

Meloni was the only European leader to attend Trump's inauguration in 2025 and she had hoped their friendship would boost her standing at home and abroad.

However, Trump risks becoming a liability, with 66% of Italians having a negative view of the US leader.

Pollsters say that Meloni's ties to the White House might have been a factor in her defeat last month in a referendum on judicial reform.

Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini, who has also in the past associated himself closely with Trump, also distanced himself from the US leader yesterday, highlighting how Europe's far-right is trying to draw back from the MAGA (Make America Great Again) orbit.


Meloni: It is right and normal for (the Pope) to call for peace and to condemn every form of war.

"Pope Leo is a spiritual leader for billions of Catholics, but beyond that, if there is one person striving for peace, it is Pope Leo, and so attacking him does not seem either wise or helpful," he said in a statement.

The Pope is the bishop of Rome and spiritual leader to millions of Italian Catholics, making politicians of all stripes wary about taking him on.

"It has been centuries since such a blatant act of aggression against the Roman pontiff was seen," said former centre-left prime minister Matteo Renzi, adding that it was vital for Catholics and non-believers alike to defend Leo.

"He is, after all, a 'builder of bridges,' unlike Trump, a destroyer of relationships and of civilisation. The only advantage is this: Trumps come and go, popes remain," he said.

The comment echoed an Italian saying, "chi mangia papa crepa" which roughly means, "whoever tries to devour the pope dies" – a proverb born of centuries of tension between successive papacies and temporal rulers.

"Trump has made the mistake of the century, because 'chi mangia papa crepa' has been borne out repeatedly," said church historian Alberto Melloni, pointing to Italy's royal family, the House of Savoy, which clashed repeatedly with the Vatican during the 19th century only to be swept away while the papacy lived on.

Antonio Spadaro, a Roman Catholic priest and undersecretary of the Vatican's Dicastery for Culture and Education, said Trump's attack revealed his own weakness.

"If Leo were irrelevant, he would not merit any comment. Instead, he is invoked, named, opposed – a sign that his words matter," Spadaro wrote on X. "This is where the church's moral force emerges. Not as a counter-power, but as a space in which power is judged by a standard it does not control."

Britney Spears checks into rehab

Former US pop superstar Britney Spears has checked herself into rehab following her arrest last month on suspicion of driving while intoxicated near Los Angeles, US media reported on Sunday.

The 44-year-old singer was arrested in early March and booked into custody by the Ventura County Sheriff's Department on suspicion of DUI (driving under the influence).

She was released soon after, and a representative for Spears at the time described the incident as "completely inexcusable" and said Spears would "take the right steps and comply with the law", according to the entertainment outlet Deadline.

On Sunday, multiple US news outlets reported that Spears had voluntarily checked herself into a treatment facility.

It was not immediately clear when Spears entered the facility.

She is scheduled to appear in court for her DUI arrest on May 4, according to the *Los Angeles Times*.

Spears had phenomenal early music success in the late 1990s with hits like *Baby One More Time* but has largely stepped back from music in recent years.

Following a public breakdown in 2007, Spears was placed under the conservatorship of her father Jamie Spears, who controlled her money and her personal life, even as she continued to perform high-profile concerts.

The conservatorship was dissolved by a Los Angeles court in 2021, after a groundswell of public support to "Free Britney". – ***AFP***

Dominican rains force evacuation

Some 30,000 people have evacuated their homes in the Dominican Republic over recent days due to torrential rains from weather systems that have hovered over the Caribbean nation hurling rain onto much of its northern region for a month.

Local media reported three people had died, including a seven-year-old girl who tried to cross a river, a 19-year-old man who tried to cross on horseback, and an infant girl in the capital, where the wall of her house collapsed.

"The government's priority at this time is to save lives, protect property and preserve infrastructure," President Luis Abinader's office said in a statement yesterday, urging people to stay away from vulnerable areas.

Abinader declared a national emergency in five provinces as well as in the capital.

In nearby Puerto Rico, authorities warned that heavy rain could trigger flooding. – ***Reuters***

ANNOUNCEMENT

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QID No. 29060804518

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Handout picture released by Rio de Janeiro's Civil Police shows a police officer checking a stun-grenade found at Copacabana beach in Rio de Janeiro. – ***AFP***

Brazil police remove 'explosive device' on Copacabana boardwalk

AFP
Rio de Janeiro

Brazilian police said yesterday that they had removed an "explosive device" from the boardwalk of Copacabana beach, a tourist-heavy area where Colombian singer Shakira will perform a massive free concert on May 2.

Local media reported the object was a stun-grenade – a non-lethal device often used as crowd control, which emits a blinding flash and extremely loud bang to temporarily disorient people.

Police in Rio de Janeiro said the bomb squad had been dispatched and "safely removed the device" for further analysis.

Heavily armed officers, one of them wearing a bomb disposal suit, briefly interrupted movement on the bustling boardwalk – with its iconic black-and-white wave mosaic stones, beach kiosks and palm trees – that is beloved by tourists.

Nearby, a monumental stage is rapidly taking shape for Shakira's concert which will take place in front of the iconic Copacabana Palace hotel.

A free concert by Lady Gaga last year drew more than 2mn people, while one by Madonna in 2024 attracted 1.6mn, according to the Riotur tourism agency.

Peru extends voting in presidential race

Reuters/AFP
Lima



An electoral worker helps a person cast a ballot at a polling station in Lima. ***– Reuters***

Nearly half of Peru's official vote count remained outstanding yesterday as frustration grew over widespread disruptions to Sunday's general election, with conservative Keiko Fujimori in the lead and a June runoff increasingly likely.

In Lima, long lines formed outside polling stations as commuters returned to vote for president and a new bicameral Congress after their ballots never arrived the day before.

The official count from electoral authority ONPE showed that former congresswoman Fujimori – daughter of former president Alberto Fujimori, who was imprisoned for human rights abuses – was leading with about 17% of the vote, followed by right-wing former Lima Mayor Rafael Lopez Aliaga on roughly 15%, and centre-left candidate Jorge Nieto in third place with around 14%.

Just over 54% of the votes had been counted.

With no clear frontrunner and none of the leading candidates near the 50% required to win outright, a June 7 runoff looks highly likely, prolonging political uncertainty in the world's third-largest copper producer amid rising crime levels and intensifying geopolitical competition between the United States and China.

Voting hours were extended by one more day until 6pm local time for more than 50,000 people who were unable to cast ballots on Sunday.

The opening of some polling stations was delayed in some areas of the capital Lima due to logistical problems that officials blamed on the distribution of voting materials.

ONPE managing director Jose Samame accepted responsibility for the delays, tendered his resignation and was later detained by police amid an investigation into the failures.

At a polling station in the Lima district of San Juan de Miraflores, Angela Rios returned to another day of long lines.

"This is an injustice," she said while waiting to cast her ballot. "Yesterday we waited in line, and today we all have to work. No one is going to compensate us for our day."

"The authorities are so incompetent," said 56-year-old domestic worker Nancy Gomez, who was among voters queued around the block in Lima for a second day.

The electoral authority had expected to have 60% of results by midnight on Sunday, a level that has yet to be reached, leaving open the possibility of a sharp swing as votes from the interior of the country are counted.

Ballots from Lima, which typically arrive first, account for about a third of the electorate, where both Fujimori and Lopez Aliaga command strong bases of support.

With margins so tight and any of four candidates with a chance of reaching a runoff, the logistical failures risk fueling fraud allegations, said Nicholas Watson at consultancy Teneo.

"Any candidate who narrowly misses out on second place will be able to argue that they missed out on a berth in the runoff because of the ONPE's incompetence," Watson said.

Fujimori said there was still "a lot of ground to cover" and a great deal of disillusionment as the country approaches a second round, addressing journalists from her car yesterday en route to meet her daughters.

Lopez Aliaga, the face of the Popular Renewal party, said he would not allow a "brutal fraud", arguing that most of the polling stations that failed to operate were in Lima, where his support has traditionally been strongest.

Nieto, who was placing third in partial counts, is a former centre-left minister whose support had been rising in pre-election polls.

Exit polls on Sunday had placed Fujimori in the lead, although Lopez Aliaga briefly moved ahead earlier in the official count, underscoring how tight and fluid the race remains.

Years of political turmoil in the Andean nation have eroded confidence in institutions and left many voters deeply disillusioned.

Since 2018, Peru has had eight presidents, fueling skepticism that any incoming administration will last a full five-year term amid repeated impeachments, corruption scandals and fragile governing coalitions.

Carney's Liberals poised to secure Canada majority

AFP/Reuters
Toronto/Ottawa



Placards direct voters outside of a polling station, in Terrebonne, Quebec, Canada. Canada is holding by-elections in three federal electoral districts to fill vacancies in parliament. ***– AFP***

Pivotal by-elections in Canada yesterday look set to give Prime Minister Mark Carney a majority in parliament, boosting his party as it moves to overhaul an economy threatened by the United States.

Carney's Liberals won the most seats in elections a year ago, but fell just short of a majority.

Canadians were voting in three districts yesterday – two Toronto areas seen as Liberal strongholds to fill vacated seats, and a Quebec district expected to be nail-biter between the Liberal and the separatist candidate from the Bloc Quebecois.

If the Liberals hold the two Toronto seats, as expected, they'll take full control of parliament.

Carney has said that would help him deal more effectively with the trade war with the US started by President Donald Trump.

Carney's Liberals currently have 171 seats in the 343-seat House of Commons.

With a parliamentary majority, Carney will have a freer hand to govern – and solidify his grip on leading Canada until at least 2029, when national elections are due to be held next.

"He will be able to pass legislation without having to go to the opposition to secure enough votes," said Andrew McDougall, assistant professor in Canadian politics at the University of Toronto.

The Liberals have relied on selective support from the Conservatives to pass economic and trade-related legislation in the past year.

McDougall said a majority government would also allow Carney to decide the timing of the next election.

Minority governments are at risk of a snap election if they lose a confidence motion and typically last less than two years.

After five opposition legislators in five months defected to Carney's Liberals, he should also have a slightly more comfortable margin than a single seat.

Only the governments led by John A Macdonald, Canada's first prime minister, and Jean Chretien have seen more politicians defect to the ruling party.

Last Wednesday longtime Conservative politician Marilyn Gladu switched parties to join Carney's government, saying that Canada needs "a serious leader who can address the uncertainty that has arrived due to the unjustified American tariffs".

Gladu, a former chemical engineer who has previously drawn criticism for promoting unproven scientific treatments during the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, opposing a ban on conversion therapy and suggesting the military be used to end Indigenous-led protests against oil pipelines, thanked Carney for inviting her into "the large Liberal tent".

Carney has improved his party's fortunes by sticking firmly to a message focused on Trump, arguing the US leader has upended the world order and Canada needs to take bold action in response.

Carney has announced massive increases in military spending – insisting Canada can no longer rely on Washington for security – and has traveled the globe seeking new trade deals in Asia and Europe.

Canadians have been shaken by Trump's return to power.

The president's tariffs in key sectors have forced job losses in Canada and slowed growth, even if the majority of bilateral trade remains tariff free.

Trump has threatened to annex Canada and mocked Carney and former prime minister Justin Trudeau as the "governor" of a US state.

For University of Ottawa political scientist Genevieve Tellier, Carney has built momentum by "emphasising the historic moment we are living through".

"We've rarely seen popularity ratings this high one year after coming to power," she told AFP, saying Carney was working to build "a broad national coalition" to respond to the unprecedented geopolitical moment.

In the Quebec district of Terrebonne where voting was underway yesterday, Ramon Ponce, a 72-year-old retiree, told AFP that the results could "somewhat strengthen" Carney's government in the ongoing friction with Trump.

While the Liberals remain a political juggernaut, some see hints of vulnerability starting to emerge.

The Angus Reid Institute found last month that "concerns over the high cost of living are higher than they have been in recent memory for lower-income Canadians".

Grocery prices are up more than 20% since 2022 and unemployment is at 6.7%.

Opposition parties are arguing Carney's soaring rhetoric about economic transformation has failed to make lives more affordable for Canadians.

Some voters agree.

"He talks a good game but nothing ever changes," David Gilhooly, a voter in Toronto told AFP last week.

Colombia to control hippo population through euthanasia


This picture taken in 2023 shows hippos – descendants from a small herd introduced by drug kingpin Pablo Escobar – in a lake near the Hacienda Napoles theme park, once the private zoo of Escobar, in Doradal, Antioquia Department, Colombia. ***– AFP***

Colombia will launch a plan in the second half of 2026 to control its invasive hippopotamus population, including euthanising an initial 80 animals, Environment Minister Irene Velez said yesterday.

The South American country is home to some 200 hippos in the central region near the Magdalena River.

If control measures are not adopted, the population could increase to as many as 1,000 by 2035, Velez said.

"We must act to reduce the hippopotamus population. These actions are essential to protect our ecosystems and our native species," Velez told journalists, noting that population growth threatens species like river turtles and manatees and causes water pollution.

"We believe there may be approximately 80 individuals that could be subject to the measure (of euthanasia)," she said.

Colombia's first four hippos were illegally imported in the 1980s by the late drug trafficker Pablo Escobar, who established a zoo on one of his properties.

The population has since grown largely unchecked, despite some efforts by provincial environmental authorities.

The programme announced yesterday has a budget of 7.2bn pesos ($1.98mn) and includes measures like confinement and relocation.

Though Colombia began talks months ago with eight governments including India, Mexico, Philippines, Ecuador, Peru and South Africa to possibly transfer some animals to zoos or sanctuaries in those countries, the necessary authorisations have not yet been obtained, Velez said.

The Colombia hippos have genetic defects due to inbreeding, which has reduced some institutions' interest in them. – ***Reuters***

Former Brazil spy chief arrested by ICE

Former Brazilian intelligence chief Alexandre Ramagem has been detained by the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the agency reported on its website yesterday, after he fled Brazil in September following his conviction for plotting a coup with former president Jair Bolsonaro.

Ramagem, a former federal police inspector, was sentenced to over 16 years in prison for his role in a plot to overturn leftist leader Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's 2022 election victory over Bolsonaro.

Ramagem's lawyers did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

He has long maintained his innocence.

Paulo Figueiredo, a Bolsonaro ally who lives in the US, said on X that Ramagem was arrested for a minor traffic violation.

Reuters could not verify the reason for his arrest, or if it was related to Brazil's request to extradite him.

The case against Bolsonaro, a far-right leader, drew the ire of US President Donald Trump, who used it to justify steep tariffs on Brazilian imports last year.

Trump's reaction did little to derail the case, which ended in September last year with 29 convictions, including Bolsonaro's, who is now serving a 27-year sentence.

Trump later lifted many of the tariffs.

As the head of Brazil's intelligence agency under Bolsonaro administration, starting in 2019, Ramagem was accused of investigating the former president's critics and providing information to help him discredit Brazil's electoral system. – ***Reuters***

Anthropic in talks with White House

Anthropic is discussing its frontier artificial intelligence (AI) model Mythos with the Trump administration, even after the Pentagon cut off business with the US AI company.

"We have a narrow contracting dispute, but I don't want that to get in the way of the fact that we care … about national security," Anthropic co-founder Jack Clark said at the Semafor World Economy event in Washington. "Our position is the government has to know about this stuff … So absolutely, we're talking to them about Mythos, and we'll talk to them about the next models." – ***Reuters***





WORLD

Spanish PM urges China to take bigger role in multipolar order

Reuters
Hong Kong


Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, offers a speech at Tsinghua University, in Beijing, yesterday. (**Reuters**)

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez yesterday said China should take on a more substantial role with issues including climate change, security, defence and the fight against inequality, adding that Europe will also have to redouble its efforts as the US withdraws from leadership roles on many fronts.

Sanchez, who is making his fourth visit to China in four years, spoke at Beijing's Tsinghua University.

His visit comes as many Western governments seek to maintain engagement with Beijing despite lingering security and trade tensions. It follows visits to China earlier this year by the prime ministers of Britain, Ireland, Canada and Finland.

Spain has been one of Europe's loudest proponents of expanding trade and treating China as a strategic ally rather than an economic and geopolitical rival.

Sanchez said China could do more in terms of fighting climate change, promoting global health, controlling the development of responsible artificial intelligence as well as nuclear weapons.

"For example, by demanding as it is doing, that international law be respected and that the conflicts in Lebanon, Iran, Gaza and the West Bank and Ukraine cease," he said.

"Europe will also have to redouble its efforts, especially now that the US has decided to withdraw from many of these fronts."

Sanchez is expected to meet Chinese President Xi Jinping today where they are expected to focus on geopolitics.

China accounted for 74% of Spain's total trade deficit, Sanchez said, adding that co-operation was important to build a "balanced, globalised economy that generates shared prosperity."

Madrid hopes Sanchez's visit will narrow Spain's trade deficit, which more than doubled in four years to nearly $50bn in 2025. It is looking to boost agricultural and manufacturing exports to offset high volumes of China's imports.

China's official news agency Xinhua yesterday said Sanchez's visit was set to further consolidate bilateral ties and pointed to a broader pathway for steady engagement between China and Europe at a time of growing global uncertainty.

China says Hormuz blockade against global interests, urges restraint

Reuters
Beijing

China said a blockade of the Strait of Hormuz would go against the international community's interests and urged calm and restraint by all sides. The US military said it will begin a blockade of all maritime traffic entering and exiting Iranian ports and coastal areas yesterday, after the failure of weekend talks in Islamabad aimed at ending the Iran war. Before the war, most Iranian oil exports were shipped to China, the top global importer of crude.

The blockade of the Strait of Hormuz does not serve the common interests of the international community, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi told Khaldoon Khalifa al-Mubarak, special envoy of the UAE President for China, in Beijing yesterday, according to a ministry statement.

Wang said China understood the legitimate security concerns of the Gulf Arab states, and that the fundamental way to resolve the crisis was a comprehensive and lasting ceasefire achieved through political and diplomatic means.

"China hopes the relevant parties will abide by the temporary ceasefire arrangements, remain committed to resolving disputes through political and diplomatic means, and avoid a resumption of hostilities," foreign ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said at a regular press conference yesterday.

China stood ready to "play a positive and constructive role" in resolving the crisis, Guo added, calling the weekend talks in the Pakistani capital a step in a direction conducive to easing tension. After the marathon talks failed, the US Central Command said its forces would begin a blockade of all maritime traffic with Iranian ports from 10am ET (1400 GMT) yesterday.

Philippines warns of 'sabotage' after cyanide seizure in disputed South China Sea atoll

Reuters
Manila


Philippine Navy spokesman Rear Admiral Roy Vincent Trinidad speaks next to a slide presentation of seized yellow bottles suspected to contain cyanide in waters of Second Thomas Shoal in the disputed South China Sea, during a press conference in Manila yesterday. (**AFP**)

The Philippines discovered cyanide on Chinese boats operating around a disputed atoll in the South China Sea, security officials from the country said yesterday.

Authorities said laboratory tests confirmed the presence of the highly toxic substance in bottles seized by the Philippine navy in operations at Second Thomas Shoal last year.

Officials warned that the cyanide could have had serious consequences for marine life and weakened the reef supporting a warship that Manila grounded on the atoll to reinforce its maritime claim.

"We wish to underscore that the use of cyanide in Ayungin Shoal is a form of sabotage that seeks to kill local fish populations, depriving Navy personnel of a vital food source," Cornelio Valencia, National Security Council spokesperson, told a press conference using the Philippines' name for the atoll.

Valencia added that cyanide could damage the reef and "ultimately compromise" the warship's stability. The Chinese foreign ministry dismissed the Philippines' assertions, calling them a "stunt".

"The Philippine side illegally harassed the Chinese fishing boats conducting normal fishing, grabbed the fishermen's living supplies, and staged this so-called cyanide stunt. There is no credibility whatsoever to their story," foreign ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said yesterday.

The shoal is within the Philippines' 200-nautical mile exclusive economic zone and located 1,300km (808 miles) off mainland China, which refers to it as Renai Reef.

The Philippines has accused China of disrupting resupply missions to troops on the vessel, including a June 17, 2024, incident that turned violent and resulted in a Filipino sailor losing a finger. China has denied allegations of aggressive conduct during such encounters and accused the Philippines of trespassing in its waters.

The June confrontation later led to a provisional understanding for resupply missions to the grounded ship. China and the Philippines held high-level talks last month over the South China Sea, exploring preliminary steps towards oil and gas cooperation, and confidence-building measures at sea, including communication between their coast guards.

The Philippine foreign ministry said in a statement yesterday the scope of the coast guard co-operation would be limited, and "does not contemplate co-operation in sensitive operational areas," adding that there had been no discussions on joint patrols.

China claims nearly all the South China Sea, including areas claimed by Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam.

A 2016 ruling by an international arbitral tribunal found Beijing's sweeping claims had no basis under international law, a decision China rejects. More than $3tn in annual ship-borne commerce travels through the waterway.

China calls reports it supplied weapons to Iran 'baseless smears'

AFP
Beijing

China yesterday called reports it had supplied or intended to supply weapons to Iran "baseless smears", after several outlets quoted US intelligence sources to that effect.

On Sunday US President Donald Trump threatened Beijing with a "staggering" new tariff of 50% if it were to provide military assistance to Tehran.

His comments came the same day US outlet CNN reported that US intelligence indicated China was preparing to deliver new air defence systems to Iran within the next few weeks, citing three people familiar with the assessments.

Over the weekend, The New York Times quoted US officials as saying US intelligence suggested Beijing might have already sent a shipment of shoulder-fired missiles.

China denied the reports, saying yesterday it had "always adopted a cautious and responsible attitude towards the export of military items, implementing strict controls in accordance with its own export control laws and regulations and its international obligations".

"We oppose baseless smears or malicious association," foreign ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun told a regular news briefing.

China is a key economic partner of Iran — it buys most of the Middle Eastern country's oil.

The countries have no formal military pact, though, and many analysts say Beijing largely sees the relationship between the two as transactional.

China also has strong economic ties to the Gulf countries and has criticised Iran's attacks on them over the course of the war.

S Korea, Poland vow deeper defence ties on Tusk visit

AFP
Seoul


Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk and South Korean President Lee Jae-myung pose for photographs before their meeting at the Presidential Blue House in Seoul, yesterday. (**Reuters**)

South Korea and Poland pledged to deepen their defence partnership yesterday, as the European country modernises its military following the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Warsaw has emerged as a key buyer of arms from Seoul, and the countries signed a weapons deal worth over $40 billion in 2022.

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk is in Seoul for the first such visit in 27 years, and held a summit with South Korean President Lee Jae-myung yesterday.

"Mutually beneficial defence co-operation between the two countries will be further expanded," Lee told a joint press conference afterwards.

He stressed the "steady implementation" of the 2022 agreement, calling it "essential for deepening and advancing our defence industry co-operation".

Under the deal, Poland has bought South Korean military hardware including tanks, self-propelled howitzers and rocket launchers.

Some of those weapons are now "operating proudly across Poland's vast plains, helping to safeguard the country's territory and protect its people", Lee said in his opening remarks before the summit.

Seoul and Warsaw would elevate ties to a "comprehensive strategic partnership", he added.

Poland, a member of the European Union and the Nato defence bloc, has stood firmly behind neighbouring Ukraine since Russia launched its full-scale invasion in February 2022.

South Korea has backed Kyiv, especially since North Korea deployed troops to support Russia, but has stopped short of supplying lethal weapons, citing a domestic ban on militarily aiding countries at war.

Tusk described South Korea as "Poland's second-most important ally after the United States", according to a Korean translation of his opening remarks.

Defence co-operation "remains the core driving force of bilateral relations", he said, adding that Warsaw would encourage South Korean partner firms to shift production lines to Poland.

The two leaders also agreed to expand co-operation in non-defence fields, including energy supply chains and infrastructure.

Tusk wraps up his visit on Monday and will then head to Tokyo.

Australia appoints woman to lead its army for the first time

Reuters
Sydney


Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and newly appointed Chief of Army Lieutenant General Susan Coyle pose for photographers after a press conference at Parliament House in Canberra, yesterday. (**Reuters**)

Australia yesterday said a woman would lead its army for the first time in history, as part of a reshuffle of the country's defence force leadership.

Lieutenant General Susan Coyle, the current chief of joint capabilities, will become chief of army in July, the government said in a statement. She will replace Lieutenant General Simon Stuart.

Coyle's appointment comes as Australia's military seeks to boost the number of female officers in its ranks. It faces a wave of allegations of systematic sexual harassment and discrimination.

"From July, we will have the first ever female chief of army in the Australian Army's 125-year history," Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said in a statement.

Defence Minister Richard Marles called Coyle's appointment a "deeply historic moment."

"As Susan said to me, you cannot be what you cannot see," he said.

"Susan's achievement will be deeply significant to women who are serving in the Australian Defence Force today and women who are thinking about serving in the Australian Defence Force in the future."

Coyle, 55, enlisted in the military in 1987 and has held a number of senior command roles. She will be the first woman to lead any service branch of the military, Marles said.

Women currently make up around 21% of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and 18.5% of senior leadership roles. The ADF has set a target of 25% of overall participation for women by 2030.

Last October, a class action lawsuit was filed against the ADF alleging it failed to protect thousands of female officers from systematic sexual assault, harassment and discrimination.

The government yesterday also appointed Vice-Admiral Mark Hammond, the current chief of the navy, as the head of the ADF, succeeding Admiral David Johnston.

The current deputy chief of navy, Rear Admiral Matthew Buckley, will replace Hammond as head of the branch.

Malaysia detains two tankers suspected of illegally transferring diesel

Reuters
Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia's Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) said it has detained two tankers for allegedly conducting an illegal ship-to-ship transfer of about 700,000 litres of diesel off the island of Penang over the weekend.

Malaysia has been cracking down on fuel smuggling amid mounting shortages and supply disruptions throughout the region caused by the war in the Middle East.

Penang MMEA director Muhammad Suffi Mohd Ramli said authorities carried out checks following an intelligence tip about the ships, which were anchored in the waters off Bagan Ajam on Saturday.

"The inspection found that both ships were in a coupled state and were suspected of carrying out ship-to-ship oil transfer activities without permission," Muhammad Suffi said in a statement on Sunday.

The alleged transfer involved about 700,000 litres of Euro 5 diesel, while the total amount seized was estimated at around 800,000 litres, with a value of about 5.43mn ringgit ($1.37mn), he said.

Authorities also arrested 22 crew members, comprising Malaysian, Myanmar, Russian, Philippine and Indonesian nationals.

The MMEA did not specify the origin of the tankers, the diesel, or the fuel's destination.

The waters off Malaysia are known to be a regular site for illegal ship-to-ship transfers, where oil is shifted between tankers at sea to obscure its origin. Malaysian authorities said in July last year that they would enforce related rules with more rigour.

Penang MMEA detained two tankers in February for a similar ship-to-ship transfer of crude oil, though the vessels were later released on a bond pending further investigations.

Police fire tear gas as workers' protest in India turns violent

Reuters
Noida

Police lobbed tear gas shells and used "minimum force" yesterday to quell a factory workers' protest in the Indian national capital's suburb of Noida, which turned violent on its fourth day, with vehicles torched and stones pelted in parts of the satellite city.

Noida is among the largest planned industrial townships of Asia and houses thousands of industrial units.

Living costs across the world have risen as the US-Israeli war in Iran curbed fuel supplies. Similar protests in the auto-making state of Haryana last week led to the government ordering a 35% hike in minimum wages.

Vinay Mahoti, 30, who hails from the eastern state of Bihar and works at a hosiery company in Noida, said he initially protested inside his manufacturing unit but later joined workers from other companies who took to the streets.



A cow walks past a burnt police vehicle during a workers' protest, after factory workers demanded a wage hike, amid soaring living costs due to disruptions caused by the US-Israeli conflict with Iran, in Noida, India's industrial hub town in the state of Uttar Pradesh, yesterday. (**Reuters**)

"Duty hours should be fixed, overtime hours should be paid, and companies...should adhere to the guidelines laid by the federal government," he said, listing his demands.

Visuals from news agency ANI, in which Reuters has a minority stake, showed dozens of protesters marching on the street and chanting slogans, while security personnel in anti-riot gear looked on.

Other visuals showed an overturned vehicle with flames rising out of it, and protesters hurling stones and trying to break through barricades.

Local police said "minimum force" was being used to maintain law and order, while Narendra Kashyap, a lawmaker in Uttar Pradesh state, where Noida is located, called on protesters to discuss their demands with the government.

"Senior police and administrative officials are making persistent efforts to counsel the workers and urge them to maintain peace and restraint," Gautam Budh Nagar police said in a statement.

India gets first Iranian oil in seven years

Reuters
New Delhi

Two very large crude carriers loaded with Iranian oil have reached Indian ports, ship tracking data from LSEG shows, as local refiners utilise a temporary waiver granted by the US last month to resume purchases from Tehran for the first time in seven years.

The current waiver is due to expire on April 19.

The Iran-flagged Felicity has reached Sikka Port in western India, while the Curacao-flagged Jaya is at the eastern port of Odisha, the data shows. A VLCC carries 2mn barrels of oil.

India, the world's third-biggest oil importer and consumer, has not received a cargo from Iran since May 2019 after coming under US pressure not to buy the country's crude.

Indian Oil Corp, the country's top refiner, has bought Iranian oil loaded on the Jaya, a vessel under US sanctions, Reuters reported last week.

India has also allowed Reliance Industries Ltd, the operator of the world's biggest refining complex, to buy Iranian oil loaded on the Comoros-flagged aframax Kaviz, Curacao-flagged VLCC Lenore and Iran-flagged VLCCs Felicity and Hedy, all of which are more than 20 years old and are also under US sanctions.

UK lawmakers will vote on plans to align with EU rules, Starmer says

Reuters
London

Prime Minister Keir Starmer said yesterday that proposed moves to align Britain with the European Union rules would require legislation approved by parliament, rejecting criticism that it would be a "spectator" as he resets ties with the bloc.

Starmer, who has sought to improve ties with the EU nearly a decade after Britain voted to leave the bloc, has repeatedly said he was not seeking to rejoin the single market, which involves the free movement of goods, services and people.

But while opinion polls suggest more British voters regret the 2016 Brexit vote, any suggestion the nation could return to the fold draws anger from those who campaigned to leave and say the government has failed to take advantage of independence.

A government spokesperson said yesterday that Britain planned to introduce legislation allowing the government to ensure some rules covered by agreements with the European Union would align with the bloc by a process that could limit the role of parliament, a move criticised by Brexit supporters.



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer delivering a Ministerial Statement regarding the situation in the Middle East, in the House of Commons at parliament in central London, yesterday. (**AFP**)

The spokesperson said the main legislation would be voted on by lawmakers, but that certain elements of the agreements, including on food standards and emissions, could change over time to ensure Britain's rules match the bloc, confirming that those changes would be made via the so-called secondary legislation process.

"We're in a world where there's massive conflict, great uncertainty, and I strongly believe the UK's best interests are in a stronger, closer relationship with Europe, whether that's defence and security, of course, energy, I think inevitably, and also our economy," Starmer told BBC radio.

"What we're doing with this piece of legislation is trying to make trade easier so there's less burdens for businesses and that, of course, translates into lower prices."

His comments follow reports from the *Guardian* newspaper and the BBC saying the government was planning a bill that could reduce the role of parliament in voting on "dynamic alignment" with EU rules, to which the spokesperson said the main legislation would be voted on.

"The bill will go through parliament in the normal way," the spokesperson said. "Any new treaties or deals with the EU will also face parliamentary scrutiny, and parliament will have a role in approving new EU laws required under those deals via secondary legislation."

Secondary legislation allows ministers to make changes using powers previously granted by parliament, with limited opportunities for lawmakers to amend the measures.

Conservative Andrew Griffith, the party's business policy chief, said the move would reduce parliament "to a spectator while Brussels sets the terms".

"Labour's dire management of the economy has driven Starmer scurrying to Brussels to distract from his own failings," Griffith said in a statement.

A source from the Labour governing party said the government was making a sovereign choice to reduce trade barriers and build closer ties with Europe.

France, UK to host summit on Hormuz this week

AFP
Paris

France and Britain will co-host a summit this week to discuss a "co-ordinated, independent, multinational plan" to safeguard shipping in the Strait of Hormuz, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer said yesterday.

Britain had convened "more than 40 nations who share our aim to restore freedom of navigation" and the summit will discuss ways to protect shipping "when the conflict ends," Starmer said.

Britain and France will work on a "peaceful multinational mission" that would be "separate from the warring parties," French President Emmanuel Macron said earlier yesterday.

US-Israeli strikes on Iran in late February sparked a region-wide war and brought traffic through the Strait of Hormuz to a near standstill, blocking a key route for global oil and gas shipments.

Iran and the US last week agreed to a two-week cessation of hostilities, but ceasefire talks between the warring sides in Pakistan on the weekend ended in failure.

US President Donald Trump responded by ordering his navy to carry out a blockade of the Strait of Hormuz starting yesterday.

Trump also said, on his Truth Social platform, that "Other Countries will be involved with this Blockade" but did not specify which ones.

The UK-French initiative, which Macron and Starmer announced on X, appeared to be separate from Trump's announced blockade.

On April 2, a UK-led diplomatic meeting of some 40 countries demanded "the immediate and unconditional reopening" of the vital shipping route.

Macron said the conference would involve "countries prepared to contribute alongside us to a peaceful multinational mission aimed at restoring freedom of navigation in the strait".

"This strictly defensive mission, separate from the warring parties to the conflict, is intended to be deployed as soon as circumstances permit," he said.

The US military said the blockade of the Strait ordered by Trump would begin at 1400 GMT, and apply to all ships leaving or seeking to dock at Iranian ports on either side of the key waterway.

Starmer said yesterday that Britain will not join the naval blockade announced by Trump.

Girls' murders should have been prevented, UK inquiry says

Reuters
Liverpool

The murders of three young girls at a Taylor Swift-themed dance event in Britain in 2024 should have been prevented, but there was a "fundamental failure" by state bodies and the killer's parents to recognise and act on the risk he posed, an inquiry said yesterday.

Axel Rudakubana, then 17, launched a frenzied knife attack in northern England's Southport on July 29, 2024, killing Bebe King, six, Elsie Dot Stancombe, seven, and Alice Dasilva Aguiar, nine. Rudakubana also wounded 10 others in the attack, which was followed by days of nationwide rioting.

He was jailed for at least 52 years after he admitted the killings shortly before his trial last year.

Inquiry chair Adrian Fulford, who described the killings as "one of the darkest moments in recent national memory", said there were five key failings before the attack.

These included a failure by agencies — including the police, the counter-radicalisation scheme Prevent and social services — to "take ownership of the risk" Rudakubana posed despite many warning signs, Fulford said.



Floral tributes lie near the scene where a teenage suspect was arrested after children were stabbed in Southport. (**Reuters/File Photo**)

Rudakubana's parents "bear significant responsibility" for failing to alert the authorities to the risk their son posed, he added.

Fulford also cited poor information sharing between agencies, Rudakubana's autism being used "as an explanation, or even an excuse, for his conduct" and the lack of any oversight of his online activities.

Rudakubana was referred to Prevent three times, first in December 2019 after taking a knife to school and searching online for school shootings. He also attended his previous school that month with a hockey stick and a knife, which Fulford described as "a watershed event".

"If appropriate arrangements and reasonable resources had been in place to address the risk that (Rudakubana) posed to others from December 2019 onwards, it is highly likely that the tragedy... would not have occurred," Fulford said.

He called for a significant change in how society handles "violence-fixated individuals".

The inquiry's second phase will examine the wider issue of children being drawn into violence, an increasing concern for British authorities.

The second phase would also consider whether there should be additional powers on top of those in Britain's Online Safety Act, to restrict or monitor internet access for young people who show signs of being fascinated with violence, Fulford said.

When he ordered the inquiry, Prime Minister Keir Starmer said its findings could lead to a change in terrorism laws.

Starmer said Monday's report was "profoundly disturbing", adding, "I'm determined to make the fundamental changes needed to keep the public safe."

Cyclone Vaianu leaves North Island cleanup underway in New Zealand

Reuters
Wellington

New Zealanders who evacuated ahead of a cyclone that battered the North Island on Sunday were gradually being allowed to return home as the storm moved away from the country.

Local media reported cleanup crews were clearing roads, removing fallen trees and checking for possible landslides. Power companies continued to report unplanned outages, while some roads remained closed.

Julie Jukes, acting mayor of Whakatane, one of the areas hit by the cyclone, told Radio New Zealand it had brought the worst weather she had ever seen, but "the main thing is that everybody was safe and it's only damage to property and trees, power and things like that."

Prime Minister Christopher Luxon told Radio New Zealand the emergency system had worked well, people had prepared for the storm and the response had been much better than in previous emergencies.

New Zealand forecaster MetService said in a post on X late on Sunday that Cyclone Vaianu had moved offshore and was east of the North Island.

By yesterday morning, the only warnings still in place were for large ocean swells off the coast of lower North Island.

New Zealand has been hit by a series of severe weather events this year, including heavy rain in January that triggered a landslide and killed six people.

Taiwan government should lead engagement with China, official says

Reuters
Taipei

Taiwan's government should lead engagement with China on a series of new steps Beijing has proposed loosening controls on trade and tourism, rather than relying on private party-to-party contacts, a senior Taiwanese security official said yesterday. China on Sunday unveiled 10 new incentive measures for Taiwan, including easing tourist curbs, allowing in "healthy" television dramas and facilitating food sales, following a visit by the island's opposition leader.

But China refuses to speak with Taiwan President Lai Ching-te's administration, saying he is a "separatist", and has rebuffed multiple offers of talks.

Tsai Ming-yen, head of Taiwan's National Security Bureau, said the primary approach should still be Chinese engagement with the island's government.



Taiwan National Security Bureau Director-General Tsai Ming-yen (front desk on the left) attends a parliament session in Taipei. (**Reuters/File Photo**)

"Only then can the government conduct proper assessments and planning and drive relevant exchanges — rather than conducting private dealings through inter-party exchanges," he told reporters at parliament. "Having the government take charge of the relevant planning can therefore also better help avoid unnecessary risks and long-term consequences."

China's Taiwan Affairs Office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Tsai said such "goodwill measures" from China were historically brought up ahead of elections, concentrated on certain specific counties and cities, or specific companies, industries, or individuals.

"However, this has already become a tool the Chinese communists use to interfere in Taiwan's elections," he added. Taiwan will hold key local elections in November. Ahead of the last presidential elections in early 2024, Taiwan complained that China had used a series of trade measures to try and sway electors, including reviewing tariff concessions on products such as agriculture and fishery, machinery, auto parts and textiles.

Taiwan president to visit Eswatini, only African ally

AFP
Taipei

Taiwan's President Lai Ching-te will travel next week to Eswatini, the self-ruled island's only diplomatic ally in Africa, his office said yesterday.

Eswatini, formerly known as Swaziland, is among Taiwan's 12 remaining allies that still recognise Taiwan's claim to statehood, after China convinced others to sever diplomatic relations with Taipei in favour of Beijing.

China sees Taiwan as part of its territory and opposes the democratic self-governed island's participation in international organisations and exchanges with other countries.

Lai will visit Eswatini from April 22 to 26 for the 40th anniversary of King Mswati III's accession and his 58th birthday, the presidential spokeswoman Karen Kuo said in a press briefing.

Lai hopes "to inject new momentum into our co-operation on the solid foundations that already exist," Kuo said.

Lai's last official overseas trip was in November 2024, when he visited Taiwan's Pacific allies and transited through the US territory of Guam.

The Taiwanese leader is expected to meet and exchange views with other heads of state attending the event. Eswatini's King Mswati visited Taiwan to attend Lai's inauguration ceremony in 2024.

The last visit by a Taiwanese president to Eswatini was in 2023, when former president Tsai Ing-wen travelled to the landlocked country of around 1.3mn people.

Taiwan has sent an anti-viral drug that helped the king recover from Covid-19 in 2021 and provided aid to the nation.

Eswatini was left as Taipei's last African ally in 2018 when Burkina Faso switched diplomatic recognition to Beijing.

COMMENT

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GULF TIMES

Hungarian election removes Ukraine's staunchest foe in EU

Ukraine welcomed with relief the defeat of its harshest EU foe, Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban, an outcome which paves the way for a 90bn euro ($105bn) loan that Kyiv urgently needs to fund the war with Russia.

But the winner of Hungary's election, Peter Magyar, is no outspoken ally of Ukraine and some other leaders in the European Union remain sceptical about stronger backing for Kyiv, particularly its efforts to join the EU, analysts said. Magyar's centre-right Tisza party won a landslide victory on Sunday, ending Orban's 16-year rule and winning the two-thirds majority it needs to enact constitutional reforms.

Orban — a nationalist who maintained warm ties with Russian President Vladimir Putin — systematically opposed Brussels' efforts to support Ukraine, most recently obstructing the two-year EU loan over accusations that Kyiv had deliberately halted Russian oil flows across its territory via the Druzhba pipeline. President Volodymyr Zelenskiy says Druzhba was damaged by a Russian strike in January and that repairs should be completed in the spring - though he has urged Europe to stop buying Russian oil.

"One should not call Magyar pro-Ukrainian - he isn't - but he is not anti-Ukrainian, unlike Orban, and that's already great," said Oleksiy Honcharenko, a Ukrainian lawmaker with the European Solidarity Party. "Putin has lost his main ally in Europe." In his first news conference after the election, Magyar said Ukraine was the victim in the war with Russia and he pledged to diversify Hungary's energy sources.

But he also said Budapest would maintain "pragmatic" ties with Moscow and that repairing relations with Kyiv depended on the restoration of the rights of the Hungarian ethnic minority in western Ukraine - a long-running source of tension.

Ukraine is reliant on Western financial support, four years into the war

Officials and analysts expect Magyar to drop Hungary's veto on the loan and on a 20th round of sanctions against Russia after he takes office, probably in mid-May. Magyar is keen to unlock EU funds earmarked for Hungary that were suspended amid accusations of democratic backsliding by Orban's government.

But the timeframe is tight. Ukraine is reliant on Western financial support, four years into the war. It needs $52bn this year and economists say it could start to run out of money next month.

"Hungary's vetoes on EU financial support for Ukraine will likely cease, improving EU decision-making capacity," said Zsuzsanna Vegh, analyst at the German Marshall Fund think tank, adding Hungary itself would still not provide funding. "Tisza is unlikely to embrace expansive military support."

In Kyiv, residents greeted Hungary's election outcome with cautious optimism.

"This is very positive because it gives us a chance to improve relations with Hungary," said Yehor Vasylchencko, a 33-year-old IT specialist. But, noting that Magyar is a former member of Orban's nationalist Fidesz party, he added: "I have some doubts about whether Magyar will be an improvement. Time will tell."

Ukraine's Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha said "meticulous, pragmatic, and calm work" was needed to find common ground with Hungary's new leadership.

Volodymyr Fesenko, director of the Penta think tank, said that, as Ukraine looks to reset relations with Hungary, restarting Druzhba could be an olive branch.

After years of anti-Ukraine rhetoric in Hungarian media, however, much of the Hungarian population is wary of closer ties with Kyiv. In Monday's news conference, Magyar restated his opposition to fast-track EU entry for Ukraine.

Elsewhere in central and eastern Europe, Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico, a critic of EU sanctions on Russia, and Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babis are Ukraine-sceptics. Both publicly backed Orban ahead of Sunday's vote.

In Bulgaria, another proponent of improving relations with Moscow — former President Rumen Radev — leads in polls ahead of a parliamentary election next Sunday.

But Yehor Cherniev, a lawmaker for Ukraine's ruling Servant of the People party and deputy chair of the national security, defence and intelligence committee, said any dramatic shift in European support was unlikely. "A miracle isn't going to happen," Cherniev said.

"Magyar will be obviously less hostile than Orban was," said Orsolya Raczova, analyst at Eurasia Group. "But, with Magyar as prime minister, Hungary will basically join the mainstream opposition to speedy EU accession for Ukraine." — Reuters

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RDI core to national resilience

Why Qatar must treat innovation as a national capability in times of crisis





By Dr Mohammed al-Housani and **Dr Abdellahi Hussein**
Doha

For too long, research, development and innovation have been treated in many places as a long-term ambition that can be delayed when pressure rises. That view is wrong. RDI is not a luxury for favourable times. It is a strategic capability that matters in every phase of national development. In times of peace, it drives economic transformation, diversification and productivity. In times of crisis, it becomes an operational tool for resilience, continuity and the realization of long-term national goals.

This distinction matters now more than ever for the GCC states and for Qatar in particular. As geopolitical instability grows and the regional environment becomes more volatile, the countries that endure are those with the technological capability, institutional depth, and innovation capacity to adapt under pressure. That capacity is built through sustained investment in RDI.

RDI builds the foundation

RDI plays a fundamental role in national development. It strengthens technological capability, raises productivity and supports long-term competitiveness. Countries with advanced RDI ecosystems are better able to diversify their economies, create high-value industries and reduce dependence on narrow sectors. More importantly, they are better equipped to respond when the external environment changes suddenly.

That is the central strategic point. RDI builds the systems, talent base, institutions and knowledge networks that make future resilience possible. It creates the conditions for faster adaptation when shocks arrive. Without that base, countries are left reacting with limited tools and little room to manoeuvre. The real value of RDI is not only in what it produces during stable periods. It is in the capability it creates before crisis hits.

When disruption hits, RDI becomes operational

When crisis arrives, whether through war, pandemics, natural disasters or major supply disruptions, RDI shifts from a long-horizon agenda to a core instrument of response. It enables rapid problem-solving, system adaptation and economic continuity. It helps states and institutions respond faster, reconfigure operations and maintain performance under stress. Crises expose the difference between countries that can innovate under pressure and those that cannot. The gap is rarely determined in the moment. It is usually the result of decisions made years earlier about whether RDI was taken seriously.

This is where the strategic value of RDI becomes clearest. Crisis is precisely the moment when innovation capability matters most. The question is not whether a country can afford RDI during disruption. The question is whether it can afford to operate without it.

History is clear

History offers repeated evidence that major technological breakthroughs are accelerated in periods of crisis but made possible by capabilities developed over time. World War II accelerated advances in computing, radar and aviation. The Cold War drove major leaps on the internet, GPS and satellite systems. During Covid-19, mRNA vaccines and digital platforms moved from scientific promise to global deployment at extraordinary speed. This is precisely when countries should deepen, not defer, their investment in RDI, because crises reward those that have already built the capacity to respond at speed.

Crisis compresses innovation timelines and concentrates attention and funding. But breakthrough performance in crisis does not come from improvisation alone. It depends on pre-existing research depth, talent, infrastructure and institutional co-ordination.

The same principle applies today. Many of the technologies shaping current conflicts in the region, including artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, satellite communications and cyber capabilities, are not short-term inventions. They are the result of decades of sustained RDI investment. That is the lesson policymakers should not miss. Crisis performance is determined by the investments made much earlier.

Leading countries do not retreat from RDI in crisis

In periods of heightened external pressure, research, development and innovation become more closely tied to national strategy, with investment directed toward resilience, strategic sectors and long-term economic security.

For instance, during Covid-19, Singapore accelerated diagnostics innovation and later strengthened vaccine and biologics manufacturing as part of national preparedness.

In response to semiconductor supply-chain vulnerability, South Korea expanded support for semiconductor R&D, testing infrastructure and production capacity. After the Great East Japan Earthquake and Fukushima disaster, Japan embedded science, technology and research into long-term reconstruction efforts. In each case, crisis did not push RDI to the margins. It moved it closer to the centre of national response.

This is what strategic RDI looks like under stress. It does not disappear from the agenda. It moves closer to the centre of national decision-making. Qatar enters this moment with a stronger RDI base than many regional peers due to consistent focus from the country's leadership.

Over the last two decades, it has built significant capacity through deliberate policy and sustained commitment. It was the first in the region to establish a research funding agency. It has a clear national strategy through QRDI 2030. Qatar has world-class research infrastructure, strong universities, global talent attraction and active international partnerships. It also has a growing private sector innovation base, driven by local startups and international players expanding their footprint in the country.

For that reason, strategic RDI should be understood as part of Qatar's national response to a more uncertain environment. This is fully consistent with the Third National Development Strategy (NDS3), which places resilience, diversification, productivity and future capability at the centre of the next phase of development. In that setting, RDI is not a supporting issue. It is a national capability.

The biggest risk is strategic hesitation

The immediate disruption to markets, logistics and supply chains is serious, but the deeper risk is a gradual erosion of innovation capacity and long-term competitiveness. When RDI is deprioritised during crisis, countries lose technological momentum. Innovation ecosystems weaken, global competitiveness declines, talent starts leaving. Capabilities built patiently in times of peace begin to erode. Once that erosion starts, recovery is slow and expensive. This is a risk Qatar will need to guard against. A strong RDI system is most valuable when continuity, adaptation and resilience matter most.

The shift: capacity to capability

Qatar does not need to build an RDI system from scratch. It already has one. The strategic task now is to protect it, prioritise it and leverage it more aggressively. In stable periods, institutions often focus on capacity building. In crisis, the emphasis must shift to capability: the ability to deploy knowledge, technology and partnerships toward urgent national needs.

That means focusing on areas that strengthen both resilience in crisis and competitiveness in peace. Strategic technologies such as AI, advanced computing and semiconductors must move higher up the agenda. So must cybersecurity, digital infrastructure, energy and industrial resilience, supply-chain and logistics innovation, dual-use technologies, and water and food security. These are not disconnected priorities. They are directly aligned with resilience needs today and with Qatar National Vision 2030 and NDS3 goals for long-term national development.

The policy choice is clear

Countries that underinvest in RDI during peace are unprepared in crisis. Countries that deprioritise RDI during crisis fall behind. Countries that protect and refocus RDI emerge stronger, more competitive and more resilient.

That is the real policy choice facing Qatar and others like it. The question is not whether to invest in RDI. The question is whether to sustain it and position it as a core national capability across both stability and disruption. RDI is not a luxury. It is part of how nations protect their future.

• *Dr Mohammed al-Housani is a senior policy leader shaping Qatar's RDI agenda and strengthening its position as a globally competitive innovation hub.*
• *Dr Abdellahi Hussein has nearly two decades of experience in areas such as research management, higher education, STEM education, RDI policy, and social science research methods.*



Qatar has world-class research infrastructure, strong universities, global talent attraction and active international partnerships. It also has a growing private sector innovation base, driven by local startups and international players expanding their footprint in the country. (**AFP/File photo**)

US-Iran talks 'still alive after Islamabad round'

By Ariba Shahid, Parisa Hafezi, Saad Sayeed, Asif Shahzad and **Humeyra Pamuk, Reuters**
Islamabad/Washington

After a sleepless and at times tense night in Islamabad, Iranian and US officials ended their highest-level talks in decades without a breakthrough, but 11 sources familiar with the negotiations said dialogue was still alive.

The weekend meeting to resolve the conflict between the US and Iran, held four days after last Tuesday's ceasefire announcement, was the first direct encounter between US and Iranian officials in more than a decade and the most senior engagement since Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Inside Islamabad's luxury Serena Hotel, the talks unfolded across two separate wings and one common area - one for the US side, one for the Iranians and one for trilateral meetings involving Pakistani mediators, operational staff told Reuters.

Among the slew of issues at stake was the Strait of Hormuz, a major transit point for global energy supplies that Iran has effectively blocked but the US has vowed to reopen, as well as Iran's nuclear programme and international sanctions on Tehran.

Phones were not allowed in the main room, forcing delegates, including US Vice President JD Vance and Iranian Parliamentary Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, to step out during breaks to relay messages back home, two of the sources said.

"There was a strong hope in the middle of the talks that there would be a breakthrough and the two sides would reach an agreement. However, things changed within no time," a Pakistani government source said.

Another source involved in the talks said the parties came "very close" to an agreement and were "80% there", before running into decisions that could not be settled on the spot.

Two senior Iranian sources described the atmosphere as heavy and unfriendly, adding that while Pakistan tried to soften the mood, neither side showed any willingness to ease tensions.

At one point, atmosphere began to lift

Nevertheless the two Iranian sources said that by early Sunday morning the atmosphere had shown some improvement, and the possibility of a one-day extension began to take shape.

However, differences persisted. A US source said the Iranians did not properly understand that the core US aim was to have a deal that ensured Iran would never obtain a nuclear weapon. Among Iran's concerns was a distrust of US intentions.

This account, based on sources who spoke on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter, offers a first account of the internal dynamics of the meeting, how the mood in the room shifted, how talks ended after signs the meeting might be extended, and how further dialogue remains on the cards.

There was no immediate response from the Iranian government to a request for comment on the issues reported in this story.

Yesterday US President Donald Trump said Iran had "called this morning" and that "they'd like to work a deal." Reuters could not immediately verify the assertion.

A US official, referring to Trump's comment, said there was continued engagement between the US and Iran and forward motion on trying to get to an agreement.



Pakistani representatives, including Army Chief Asim Munir and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, moved between the sides through the night to keep things on track. During one tense moment, raised voices could be heard outside the negotiating room before Munir and Dar called a tea break and moved the two sides back into separate rooms

Asked for comment, White House spokeswoman Olivia Wales said the US position had never shifted in the Islamabad meeting.

"Iran can never have a nuclear weapon, and President Trump's negotiating team stuck to this red line and many others. Engagement continues toward an agreement," she said.

'Ups and downs'

A Middle East-based diplomat said conversations between mediators and the Americans have continued since Vance left Islamabad, while the source involved in the talks said Pakistan was still passing messages between Tehran and Washington.

"I want to tell you that a full effort is still on to resolve the issues," Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said yesterday.

Despite numerous obstacles to peace, both sides appear to have strong reasons to consider de-escalation.

The US strikes appear unpopular at home and look unlikely to topple Iran's theocratic ruling system, while Tehran's strangling of energy supplies is hurting the global economy and pushing up inflation months before US midterm elections.

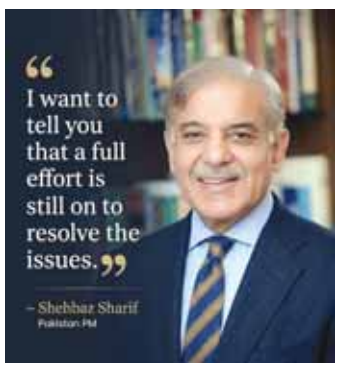
Also, war damage to Iran's ailing economy risks leaving the authorities there weaker internally just weeks after protests they were able to put down only with mass killings.

In Islamabad, the longtime foes had gathered to try to chart a path to a long-term settlement, after a Pakistan-brokered ceasefire paused six weeks of war that has killed thousands of people and disrupted the world's energy supplies.

Central to the dispute is a belief among Western countries and Israel that Iran wants a nuclear bomb. Iran denies seeking nuclear weapons.

A White House official said the US wanted Iran to end all uranium enrichment, dismantle all major nuclear enrichment facilities, turn over its highly enriched uranium, accept a broader peace, agree a security framework that includes regional allies, end funding for regional proxies and fully open Hormuz, charging no tolls.

Iran's demands included a guaranteed permanent ceasefire, assurances of no future strikes on Iran and its allies in the region, lifting of primary and secondary sanctions, unfreezing of all assets, recognition of its right to enrichment and continued control of Hormuz, Iranian sources have said.



Four of the 11 sources said that at times the dialogue appeared close to producing at least a framework understanding, but unraveled over Iran's nuclear programme, the Hormuz Strait and the amount of frozen assets Tehran wants access to.

The Iranian sources said most of the substantive exchanges in Islamabad were between Vance, Qalibaf and Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi.

"There were ups and downs. There were tense moments. People left the room, and then came back," the security source said.

Pakistani representatives, including Army Chief Asim Munir, and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, moved between the sides through the night to keep things on track, five Pakistani sources said.

'How can we trust you?'

The talks stretched for more than 20 hours with on-duty hotel staff eating, sleeping and working on site after undergoing expedited background checks, they said.

When discussions turned to guarantees, both non-aggression assurances and sanctions relief, the tone of the normally mild-mannered Araqchi grew sharper, the two Iranian sources said.

The sources quoted him as saying: "How can we trust you when, in the last Geneva meeting, you said the US would not attack while diplomacy was under way?"

The US-Israeli attack on Iran began two days after the two sides held a previous round of talks in Geneva.

In addition to differences over Hormuz, sanctions and other topics, the two sides also disagreed over the scope of any deal. While Washington focused on the nuclear file and Hormuz, Tehran wanted a broader understanding, according to two of the sources.

During one tense moment, raised voices could be heard outside the negotiating room before Munir and Dar called a tea break and moved the two sides back into separate rooms, the government source said.

'Our final and best offer'

Toward the final stages of the discussions, which spilled into Sunday morning, the US delegates were moving between the negotiating room and their private floor far more often than the Iranians, the senior Pakistani official said.

A US source said the vice president came to the talks with the aim of making a deal and reaching a mutual understanding. The US side has been wary of protracted negotiations with Iran, believing the Iranians are adept at delaying tactics and refusing to make concessions, the source said.

Despite the deadlock, when Vance appeared in front of reporters later to announce the talks had ended, his remarks suggested more exchanges of some kind might be in prospect.

"We leave here with a very simple proposal, a method of understanding that is our final and best offer," he said. "We'll see if the Iranians accept it."

Nato allies refuse to join Trump's Iranian port blockade

Reuters
Paris/London

Nato allies said yesterday they would not get involved in US President Donald Trump's plan to blockade Iranian ports, proposing to intervene only once fighting ends, in a move likely to anger Trump and increase strains in the alliance. Trump said the US military would eliminate any Iranian ships that came near the blockade that began yesterday, after weekend talks failed to reach an agreement to end the six-week conflict with Iran.

Trump initially said the US would work with other countries to block ships passing through the Strait of Hormuz, but the US military later specified that the blockade would only apply to ships going to or from Iranian ports.

Since the war started on February 28, Iran has largely blocked the waterway for all ships but its own. It has been seeking to make its control of the strait permanent and possibly collect levies from ships that use it.

"The Blockade will begin shortly. Other Countries will be involved with this Blockade," Trump said in a post on Truth Social on Sunday.

But Nato allies, including Britain and France, said they would not be drawn into the conflict by taking part in the blockade, saying instead they were working on an initiative to open the strait, through which a fifth of global oil supplies normally passes. Their refusal to participate is another point of friction with Trump, who has threatened to withdraw from the military alliance and is weighing pulling some US troops from Europe after several countries denied US military planes use of their airspace for attacks on Iran.

"We're not supporting the blockade," British Prime Minister Keir Starmer told the BBC.

"My decision has been very clearly that whatever the pressure, and there's been some considerable pressure, we're not getting dragged into the war," he said. Nato Secretary-General Mark Rutte told European governments that Trump wants concrete commitments in the near future to help secure the Strait of Hormuz, diplomats told Reuters last week.

Nato could play a role in the strait if its 32 members could agree on the formation of a mission, Rutte said on Thursday.

Several European countries have said they are willing to help in the strait, but only once there is a durable end to hostilities and an agreement with Iran that their ships will not be attacked.

France will organise a conference with Britain and other countries to create a multinational mission to restore navigation in the strait, French President Emmanuel Macron said on X yesterday.

"This strictly defensive mission, distinct from the belligerents, will be deployed as soon as the situation allows," Macron said.

The initiative aims to establish rules for safe passage and the co-ordination of military vessels to escort tankers, Starmer said in parliament yesterday.

"Let me be very clear, this is about safeguarding shipping and supporting freedom of navigation once the conflict ends. Our shared aim here is a co-ordinated, independent, multi-national plan," he said.

A meeting to draw up plans for the mission involving about 30 countries, including Gulf countries, India, Greece, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands and Sweden, could happen as soon as Thursday in Paris or London, a French diplomatic source said.

The military ships would provide reassurance without being belligerent, the source said, adding that Iran and the US would be informed of the mission but play no direct part.

Another European diplomatic source questioned whether Trump would welcome a mission now that he had ordered the blockade.

"Since Trump is now using the strait as his own leverage, does he even want a mission there?" the source said.

The Strait of Hormuz should be reopened by diplomacy, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said yesterday, adding that creating an international force to oversee it would be complicated. He called for Nato to reset its ties with Trump at a summit in Ankara in July.

Pro-EU Magyar vows 'new era' in Hungary

AFP
Budapest



Peter Magyar, leader of the pro-European conservative TISZA party, delivers a press conference at the HUNGEXPO Congress and Exhibition Center in Budapest, yesterday. (**AFP**)

Hungarian pro-EU prime minister-elect Peter Magyar pledged yesterday to usher in a "new era" after defeating long-time nationalist leader Viktor Orban in elections seen as a blow to hard-right populism.

Orban, a self-described "thorn" in the European Union's side who was backed by US President Donald Trump and maintained close ties to Moscow, was ousted in Sunday's ballot after 16 years in power.

Hungarians fed up with corruption handed conservative former government insider Magyar a decisive victory, with a two-thirds majority in parliament. The vote saw a record turnout.

Magyar, 45, said he would do "everything in our power" to ensure the "beginning of a new era", adding Hungarians "didn't vote for a mere change of government, but for a complete regime change."

In power since 2010, Orban has transformed the central European country of 9.5mn people into a model of "illiberal democracy", making wide-ranging reforms that restricted civil rights and the independence of the judiciary, media and academia.

In that, he frequently clashed with Brussels, which has frozen billions of euros in funds over rule-of-law concerns.

Magyar said he was "willing to take on" reforms, including anti-graft measures, to seek to unlock the funds.

He urged President Tamas Sulyok, an Orban ally, to convene parliament "as soon as possible".

The president has 30 days, or until May 12, to do so.

Sulyok on Facebook said he had invited the leaders of parliamentary parties to a meeting tomorrow.

"Our country has no time to waste. Hungary is in trouble in every respect. It has been plundered, looted, betrayed, indebted and ruined," Magyar told reporters.

Many EU leaders welcomed Magyar's win, while the Kremlin said Moscow hoped for "pragmatic" relations with Hungary's new government and China — which Orban also courted — congratulated Magyar.

Magyar thanked both Moscow and Beijing for "being open to pragmatic co-operation, just as Hungary is."

Orban, 62, conceded defeat on Sunday, saying the message was "painful but unambiguous".

Magyar was a supporter of Orban for years before emerging as his most serious challenger.

He stepped into frontline politics just two years ago, promising to fight corruption and offering better public services.

He garnered support against a backdrop of economic stagnation and despite an electoral system skewed in favour of Orban's Fidesz.

Ahead of the vote, US Vice-President JD Vance, one of the most fervent supporters of far-right parties in Europe, visited Hungary last week to attend a rally with Orban.

His boss, Trump, had promised to back Hungary with the United States' "economic might" if Orban's party won.

The election "could mark a real turning point for Donald Trump's culture war in Europe", said Pawel Zerka, senior policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations.

It gave "confidence (to) pro-European forces across the continent" and meant that association with Trump's culture war was now becoming "more of a liability than an asset", he said.

Orban, who repeatedly blocked EU moves to help Ukraine fight Russia's invasion, made Ukraine a central campaign issue, portraying Kyiv as "hostile" to Hungary.

Like Orban, Magyar opposes sending EU military aid to Ukraine or offering Ukraine a fast-track route to join the 27-nation bloc.

He reiterated that stance yesterday, saying: "We are talking about a country at war. It is completely out of the question for the European Union to admit a country at war."

On election night, jubilant supporters poured into the streets to celebrate in the capital, Budapest.

"At long last it feels so good to be Hungarian. It's like a weight lifted off our shoulders," Csilla Bekesi, 25, told AFP.

Two killed in Ukraine despite Easter ceasefire, governor says

Two people were killed and one injured by Russian troops in Ukraine's frontline eastern Donetsk region before the expiry of a ceasefire to mark Orthodox Easter, a local official said yesterday,
One person was killed in the city of Kramatorsk and one in Druzhkivka on Sunday, regional governor Vadym Filashkin said on the Telegram messaging app, without giving more details. Both Russia and Ukraine have accused each other of breaching the 32-hour ceasefire from Saturday afternoon to midnight on Sunday.
Ukraine's Co-ordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War, citing a spokesperson of the 14th Army Corps, said yesterday that during "the so-called 'Easter ceasefire'"



Firefighters work at the site of a building hit by a Russian drone strike, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Zaporizhzhia, yesterday. (**Reuters**)

Russian servicemen also shot dead four Ukrainian prisoners of war in the Kharkiv region. It did not give more details, adding that Russia was preparing a campaign to deny it.
There was no immediate comment from Russia and Reuters could not verify the information independently.
The General Staff of Ukraine's military said yesterday it had compiled a total of 10,721 Russian violations over the course of the truce.
It said the violations included 1,567 artillery shelling incidents, 119 assault operations and 9,035 strikes by attack drones. It said no air strikes had been recorded.
The Russian defence ministry has said it recorded 1,971 ceasefire violations by Ukraine overnight into Sunday. (**Reuters**)

EU raids chocolate maker in antitrust probe

Brussels investigators were raiding the premises of a chocolate maker in two EU countries yesterday over concerns the firm may have violated the bloc's antitrust rules, the European Commission said.
The surprise inspections targeted a "company active in the chocolate confectionery sector", the commission, the European Union's anti-trust regulator, said, without disclosing the name of the firm or the countries involved.
"The commission has concerns that the inspected company may have violated EU antitrust rules that prohibit cartels and restrictive business practices, as well as abuses of a dominant market position," the commission said in a statement.
In particular, the probe focused on "possible market segmentation in the form of restrictions on the trade of goods" between member states and "obstacles to multi-country purchases", it added.
The raids do not mean the firm is considered guilty of anti-competitive behaviour, the commission noted.
Unannounced investigations are a preliminary investigatory step, it said, adding there was no legal deadline to complete inquiries into anti-competitive conduct. (**AFP**)

QATAR

Sidra Medicine offers unique medical services to treat neurological disorders in children

By A Staff Reporter
Doha


Dr. Husam Kayyali



Sidra Medicine is the only specialised centre in Qatar that receives and treats the full spectrum of neurological disorders in children, including rare and highly complex cases that require precise, multi-disciplinary care, noted, Dr Husam Kayyali, Chief of Pediatric Neurology Division at Sidra Medicine and Director of our Comprehensive Epilepsy Programme at Sidra Medicine.

Dr Kayyali pointed out that Sidra Medicine delivers a fully integrated system of advanced diagnostic and therapeutic services. Backed by cutting-edge global medical technologies and highly experienced specialists, the hospital provides personalised, patient-centred care tailored to each child's condition. This approach ensures comprehensive treatment and significantly enhances the quality of life for young patients and their families.

He noted that epilepsy remains the most prevalent neurological condition among children worldwide and is also the leading diagnosis seen at Sidra Medicine. Dr Kayyali noted that genetic mutations are among the primary causes of neurological disorders in children, particularly in the region, alongside other contributing factors such as brain infections, oxygen deprivation, head injuries, metabolic diseases, and autoimmune disorders.

He explained that the Comprehensive Epilepsy Programme offers comprehensive evaluations for children experiencing seizures, using the latest medical technologies under the supervision of leading pediatric neurologists. Advanced treatment options include epilepsy surgery, neuromodulation therapies such as vagus Nerve Stimulation, and dietary interventions like the ketogenic diet.

Beyond epilepsy, the Pediatric Neurology Department provides expert care for a wide range of conditions, including Duchenne muscular dystrophy, spinal muscular atrophy, movement disorders, neuroimmunological diseases, genetic neurological disorders, cerebral palsy, and white matter diseases. All services are delivered through a coordinated, multi-disciplinary approach designed to achieve optimal clinical outcomes.

Sidra Medicine also operates a comprehensive network of specialised clinics, including advanced epilepsy clinics, neuromuscular clinics, movement disorder clinics, white matter disease clinics, neurocutaneous clinics, chronic headache clinics, brachial plexus clinics, and general pediatric neurology clinics, ensuring full coverage of diverse neurological conditions.

He noted that one-third of epilepsy patients do not respond to medication and are classified as having drug-resistant epilepsy. For these cases, Sidra Medicine offers advanced interventions, including surgical removal of seizure-causing brain tissue, implantation of vagus nerve stimulators, and therapeutic diets such as the ketogenic or modified Atkins diet. These approaches have demonstrated a reduction in seizure frequency by 50% to 80%, offering renewed hope for affected families.

Dr Kayyali indicated that diagnosis at Sidra Medicine is grounded in comprehensive clinical evaluation supported by state-of-the-art tools. These include video electroencephalogram monitoring to accurately identify seizure origins, high-resolution 3 Tesla MRI scans, PET and SPECT imaging, and advanced genetic testing such as epilepsy gene panels and full exome and genome sequencing.

The Comprehensive Epilepsy Programme adopts a patient-first philosophy, guiding children and their families through every stage, from initial consultation and diagnosis to the development of individualized treatment plans. Multidisciplinary teams collaborate closely to ensure seamless, high-quality care aligned with the latest international medical standards.

In addition to medical treatment, Sidra Medicine provides personalised rehabilitation programs based on precision medicine principles, helping children achieve the best possible outcomes. Psychological support is also a cornerstone of care, with specialised teams in child psychology and psychiatry assisting families in coping with the challenges of neurological conditions.

Eventually, Dr Kayyali stressed that Sidra Medicine aims to expand its paediatric neurology services to reach a broader patient population both within Qatar and internationally. Building on recent achievements, the institution is working toward strengthening its position as a regional leader and a globally recognised center of excellence in pediatric healthcare.

QPO launches 2026 national community engagement programme





The Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra (QPO) has announced the launch of its 2026 National Community Engagement Programme—a wide-ranging effort to place world-class orchestral music at the heart of Qatar's diverse communities, schools, and social fabric.

The programme marks a defining chapter in QPO's mission to serve not only concert-hall audiences, but every resident of Qatar from the youngest student taking their first steps in music, to families and communities seeking connection and solace through the universal language of sound.

The programme officially kicked off with QPO's Brass Ensemble, which hosted three dedicated sessions at Hamilton International School, Doha. The timing of this programme is intentional and deeply felt. In a period of heightened uncertainty in the region, QPO recognises its responsibility to contribute to the psychological and emotional well-being of Qatar's communities. Through this programme, QPO extends these benefits directly to the children, families, and institutions who need them most.

The Community Engagement Programme spans the full breadth of Doha's international community. Across Spring 2026, QPO musician ensembles will visit a diverse range of schools and institutions, offering tailored performances and educational workshops that honour both rich traditions of classical music and the multicultural identity of Qatar's residents. The programme encompasses flagship pillars including Healing Notes — therapeutic music experiences for hospitals, special needs centres and vulnerable communities — Community Resonance — school visits and public performances across Doha — and RE:POSE — an immersive orchestral wellness concert concept designed to promote relaxation, mindfulness, and mental restoration through the power of live music.

"At a time when our communities are navigating genuine challenges, music has a unique power to heal, to unite, and to remind us of our shared humanity. Through our presence in schools, the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra aims to grow alongside the community and strengthen Qatar's cultural voice for the next generation. We are committed to ensuring that every child in Qatar, regardless of background or circumstance, has the chance to experience the transformative joy of a live orchestral performance," said, Mohammed Oweda, Orchestra Committee Member, QPO.

With over 20 musician group visits planned across Doha's leading international and Qatari schools, the scale and ambition of this programme represents the most comprehensive community engagement effort in QPO's history.

This month's schedule alone spans a rich cross-section of Qatar's educational community, with confirmed visits to Doha College, Doha English Speaking School, Tarek Bin Ziad School, Turkish School, Arab International School (Lusail and Al Sadd branches), and Hamilton International School — together representing thousands of students from Qatar's diverse expatriate and national communities.

QF award winning Omani initiative aims to empower people with speech disorder

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter


Hilal Said al-Dhuhli **PICTURE**: Shaji Kayamkulam

The founder of Esmaani, Hilal Said al-Dhuhli recently received the Akhlaquna Individual Contributions Award for the GCC category from Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, Chairperson of Qatar Foundation at an event held at the Education City in Doha. The initiative is an Omani volunteer effort and a pioneering programme aimed at empowering individuals who suffer from stuttering—a speech disorder characterised by repetition and interruptions in speech. Along with management of stuttering through specialised training, the programme is also raising awareness about the condition, which affects about 1% of the global population.

Al-Dhuhli who leads the efforts at Esmaani said that it has been a long journey for him empowering the people affected by speech disorder. He advocates for a more inclusive society for those who suffer in their day-to-day life due to this impediment.

At the award ceremony, al-Dhuhli had said: "We aim to empower people who stutter by offering training programmes that help them overcome speech challenges. We also work to raise awareness about their needs and the importance of their inclusion."

According to al-Dhuhli, the initiative was started early in 2020 with only three volunteering members and since then a large number of participants of various age groups have joined. "It is a transformative organisation dedicated to empowering people who stutter by fostering confidence, communication skills, and inclusive opportunities. We believe that every voice matters and through advocacy, education, and community support, we break down barriers to create a world where stuttering is not a limitation but a unique strength," he explained.

The initiative operates under the auspices of the Omani Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth. According to the officials of the organisation, stuttering affects approximately 80mn people globally.

"We aim to empower people and equip them to overcome communication barriers, integrate them into society and ensure that their voices are valued. Tutors involved in the initiative have received specialised training abroad such as Training of Trainers certification on stuttering management to provide high-quality programmes," he noted.

With the motto of 'Empowering Voices, Transforming Lives ' the Esmaani initiative is Oman's first dedicated platform for supporting individuals who stutter. "Our mission is to empower people to achieve their personal and professional goals, fostering confidence and fluency through innovative programmes and community engagement. At Esmani, we strive to create a world where every voice is valued," Al-Dhuhli said.

Through the flagship "Listen to Me" programme, school workshops, and public awareness campaigns, the programme aims to educate society, combat stigma, and provide a supportive network for individuals and their families.

In addition to the Akhlaquna Award, the initiative has received significant recognition in the region, including recognition by the Oman Human Rights Commission in 2022. It also qualified for the Beirut Volunteers Award in 2024 and won the Youth Excellence Award in 2025.

New publications spotlight media responsibility at Siraj cultural event

Shaima Sheriff
Staff Reporter


Mohammed bin Salhan al-Marri **PICTURES**: Shaji Kayamkulam



A cultural event in Doha highlighted the evolving role of media in society, as Mohammed bin Salhan al-Marri launched two books exploring public awareness and media responsibility.

The thought-provoking gathering hosted by Siraj Cultural Club in Doha brought together readers, media professionals and intellectuals, where a book signing event under the theme "When Thought Meets the Reader was organised."

The event featured the launch of two new publications by media professional and author Mohammed bin Salhan al-Marri, titled *Security Media and Before We Listen*, both of which explore the complex relationship between media and its audience.

Speaking at the event, al-Marri, who serves as the editor-in-chief of Darna Press, emphasised the importance of understanding how audiences interact with modern media. "Both books talk about the relationship between the recipient and the media, and how they deal with these means, how they understand them, how they interact with them," he said.

The book *Before We Listen* delves into the behaviour and perception of media consumers—highlighting the growing need for critical engagement in an age of information overload. Meanwhile, Security Media focuses on the relationship between media institutions and military bodies, examining how both sectors intersect in shaping public understanding.

"Security Media talks about the concepts and practices that exist between the military institutions and the media in understanding this comprehensive relationship," al-Marri explained, noting that society remains a shared space influenced by both.

The event formed part of broader efforts by Siraj Cultural Club to enrich Qatar's cultural landscape and encourage dialogue between writers and the public. Attendees were given the opportunity to engage directly with the author, reflecting the event's aim of bridging the gap between thought and readership.

At the core of al-Marri's work lies a strong emphasis on responsibility within the media sector. "I started from the media responsibility that we have towards the society," he said, underlining the ethical role of media in shaping awareness and public discourse.

The discussion also touched on the evolving challenges facing media professionals today, particularly in balancing information delivery with societal impact. Through his publications, al-Marri seeks to prompt reflection on how media messages are produced, interpreted and consumed.

As Qatar continues to position itself as a hub for cultural and intellectual exchange, such initiatives highlight the importance of literature and dialogue in addressing contemporary issues.

By bringing together ideas, voices and audiences, the evening underscored a simple yet powerful message: meaningful engagement with media begins not just with listening, but with understanding.