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BUSINESS | Page 1

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PM opens Kanaf centre to raise parenting skills



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani interacting with a child at the launch.

By A Staff Reporter
Doha

Qatar has opened a dedicated national centre for parenting education, signalling a deliberate shift in how the state approaches child development — treating the raising of children not as an instinctive domestic affair but as a skill requiring professional guidance, continuous training, and sustained institutional support.

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani yesterday inaugurated the Parenting Centre, known as Kanaf — an Arabic word evoking shelter, care, and closeness — at a ceremony attended by ministers, senior government officials, and representatives of civil society organisations.

The centre is a flagship project of the Ministry of Social Development and Family, operating under the Qatar Foundation for Social Work. It forms a core pillar of the Third National Development Strategy and sits within the ministry's broader "Family First" initiative, reflecting a national conviction that strong families are the foundational unit of a resilient and cohesive society.

HE the Minister of Social Development and Family Buthaina bint Ali al-Jabr al-Nuaimi described the inauguration as "an important national milestone," arguing that parental education is not merely a private concern but "a national responsibility that requires qualifi-

Flagship initiative to equip families with science-based tools for raising children in a rapidly changing world

cation, knowledge and continuous awareness." The family, she said, is "the first fortress of society" — language that underscores the strategic weight Qatar's leadership attaches to social cohesion and long-term demographic stability.

What distinguishes Kanaf from conventional family support services is the breadth and rigour of its programming. Rather than responding to crisis after the fact, the centre is built explicitly around prevention and capacity-building, covering every phase of the parenting journey: from pre-conception and the pre-natal period through early childhood and on into the demanding terrain of adolescence. Critically, it also addresses the often-overlooked role of grandparents as transmitters of values and identity across generations — a considered acknowledgement that in Gulf family structures, child-rearing is rarely a two-person undertaking.

The centre runs dedicated programmes for families raising children with disabilities or twins, and extends support to educators navigating complex or specialist cases — pushing its reach beyond the home and into the broader institutional fabric of Qatari society. **To Page 11**

Amir, Oman's Sultan push for diplomacy

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani received a phone call from Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tarik yesterday. They discussed the latest regional and international developments, particularly in light of the current escalation in the region. Developments related to the Strait of Hormuz and their implications for international maritime security and global energy supplies were given special attention. The two sides stressed the importance of exercising restraint and prioritising diplomatic solutions in a way that contributes to enhancing security and stability, and ensuring freedom of navigation and the safety of vital sea lanes. **(QNA)**

PM, Saudi FM call for holding truce

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani received a phone call from Saudi Minister of Foreign Affairs Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah al-Saud. During the call, the latest developments in the region were reviewed, particularly those related to the ceasefire between the United States and Iran, and the need to uphold it in a way that contributes to enhancing security and stability. Both sides affirmed during the call the need to strengthen co-ordination and intensify joint efforts to halt the escalation, paving the way to address the root causes of the crisis through peaceful means and dialogue, ultimately leading to a final agreement that achieves lasting peace. **(QNA)**

GCO meet aligns 60 state entities

The Government Communications Office (GCO) convened a co-ordination meeting of the Joint Newsroom, chaired by Director of the GCO HE Sheikh Jassim bin Mansour bin Jabor al-Thani, with participation from assistant undersecretaries, executive directors, and sector heads across more than 60 state entities. The meeting focused on strengthening media co-ordination and aligning roles in light of current developments, alongside a review of ongoing communications across key sectors, including public services, energy, economy, transport, infrastructure, and digital transformation. **(QNA)**

Amir, Turkish minister review defence co-op



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani met yesterday morning, in his office at the Amiri Diwan, with Turkish Minister of National Defence Yasar Guler. The two sides discussed strategic co-operation between the two countries, particularly in the military and defence fields, and ways to develop them in a way that serves common interests and enhances co-ordination amidst escalating security challenges in the region. They also addressed the developments in the regional and international arenas as well as international efforts to support international security and stability. **(QNA)**

Food stocks untouched as ministry keeps market vigil

Proactive planning helped absorb global shocks, says minister

Qatar's food reserves are in excellent condition and its strategic stocks remain untouched, HE the Minister of Commerce and Industry Sheikh Faisal bin Thani bin Faisal al-Thani has said, crediting proactive planning and an institutional framework built specifically to absorb global shocks and insulate the domestic market from external volatility.

Speaking to Qatar News Agency, His Excellency said the reserves were established under Law No. 24 of 2019 on Regulating and Managing the Strategic Stock of Food and Consumer Goods, issued in line with the directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani. The system was designed from the outset to withstand precisely the kind of geopolitical and logistical pressures now bearing down on global supply chains — from the impact of the Russia-Ukraine war on wheat prices to drought seasons, fires, and crop failures across Asia.

A dedicated situation room is operational around the clock, supported by field and logistics teams monitoring markets in real time. Artificial intelligence sys-



HE the Minister of Commerce and Industry Sheikh Faisal bin Thani bin Faisal al-Thani

tems have been deployed to anticipate supply disruptions and inform decision-making before problems escalate. The ministry has simultaneously activated a network of alternative air, sea, and land cargo routes, each independently capable of meeting Qatar's full import requirements, while co-ordinating in advance with a deliberately diversified base of international suppliers spanning Asia, Europe, and neighbouring Gulf states including Saudi Arabia, Oman, and the UAE.

Qatar Airways has played a pivotal logistical role throughout the crisis. Dedicated cargo flights and the strategic use of commercial routes have delivered around 2,000 tonnes of vegetables and fruit, more than 1,200 tonnes

of red meat, and approximately 283 tonnes of seafood since the crisis began. National logistics firms Qatar Navigation (Milaha) and Gulf Warehousing Company (GWC) have provided critical backbone support across warehousing and distribution.

On the domestic pricing front, the minister acknowledged that some goods have seen modest price increases, driven by higher global shipping costs and elevated production expenses in countries of origin — pressures directly linked to oil price movements and the resulting inflationary environment. He was clear, however, that this is a limited and temporary phenomenon, expected to ease as global conditions stabilise. To cushion the impact, the state has intervened to subsidise shipping costs and contain knock-on effects for consumers at the retail level.

Enforcement has been robust. Inspection teams from the ministries of Commerce and Industry and Municipality are jointly conducting approximately 2,500 inspection orders daily through an integrated electronic monitoring system, covering commercial establishments across the country and focusing on product availability, price compliance, and the prevention of monopolistic or misleading practices. **To Page 11**

Qatar urges comprehensive solution

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

Qatar has called for a comprehensive regional solution to the Iran war crisis, stressing that immediate ceasefire efforts must evolve into a framework of lasting peace that safeguards Gulf stability and international maritime security.

Adviser to the Prime Minister and Official Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Majed bin Mohammed al-Ansari said the current truce is only a temporary measure and cannot substitute for a permanent settlement.

Speaking at the ministry's weekly media briefing, he affirmed that Qatar strongly sup-



Dr Majed bin Mohammed al-Ansari at the briefing yesterday.

ports Pakistan's mediation efforts and views them as the most credible channel for dialogue.

"There is no need for additional mediators," he emphasised, noting that Qatar and other GCC

countries fully endorse Islamabad's initiative and are co-ordinating closely to consolidate its progress.

Al-Ansari said Qatar encourages all positions that facilitate negotiations and ensure that the region's concerns — particularly those of the Gulf states and Iran — are properly addressed. "Our objective is not limited to a ceasefire followed by renewed crises," he said, "but rather a lasting peace that secures the interests and sovereignty of all parties."

He added that Qatar is co-ordinating with partners, including Pakistan and the United States, to support this roadmap and ensure the region's voice remains central in shaping any future agreement.

Reaffirming Qatar's stance, al-Ansari stressed that regional

inclusion is essential in resolving the crisis. "Excluding the region from the negotiating process has led to negative outcomes in the past," he warned, underscoring that Gulf states must not only be part of the solution but a fundamental element within it. High-level co-ordination among GCC countries, he said, continues to address shared challenges and strengthen collective defence.

On Iran, al-Ansari revealed that a recent call between HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani and Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi reaffirmed Qatar's condemnation of Iranian attacks and its support for diplomatic negotiations. **To Page 11**

Trump signals return to talks in Pakistan

US President Donald Trump told the *New York Post* yesterday that a second round of Iran talks could happen in Pakistan "over the next two days," after a first round ended at the weekend without a deal.

"You should stay there, really, because something could be happening over the next two days, and we're more inclined to go there," Trump was quoted as saying in a phone interview with a *Post* reporter in Islamabad.

After saying in an initial call that talks were unlikely to return to Pakistan, the *Post* said Trump called back minutes later to say it was "more likely" they would go back to Islamabad because the country's army chief Asim Munir "is doing a great job."

Israel-Lebanon talks begin

Israel and Lebanon held their first direct high-level talks since 1993 yesterday, mediated by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio in Washington. Rubio called it "a historic opportunity" to build a framework for lasting peace, while Lebanon's President Joseph Aoun expressed hope the talks would end his people's suffering. Hezbollah chief Naim Qassem had urged the talks be scrapped, calling them "futile." The meeting involved the Israeli and Lebanese ambassadors to the United States. — AFP

→ Details on Page 4

PM meets Turkish defence minister



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani met yesterday with Minister of National Defence of Türkiye Yasar Guler. During the meeting, the two sides discussed the latest developments in the region, particularly those related to the ceasefire between the United States of America and Iran, and the necessity of solidifying it to strengthen security and stability. **(QNA)**

Lebanese PM meets Qatar's ambassador

The Prime Minister of the Republic of Lebanon Dr Nawaf Salam met yesterday with the ambassador of the State of Qatar to Lebanon HE Sheikh Saud bin Abdulrahman al-Thani, in the presence of Deputy Prime Minister Dr Tarek Mitri and Minister of Public Works and Transport Fayez Rasamny. Discussions during the meeting covered bilateral co-operation between the two countries, with particular focus on Qatar's support for Lebanon, as well as the latest regional developments. The Lebanese prime minister expressed his sincere appreciation to the State of Qatar for its continued support for Lebanon. For his part, the ambassador reaffirmed Qatar's commitment to supporting Lebanon and its keenness to preserve its stability and security. **(QNA)**



Commerce ministry hosts patent specialists

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) hosted a group of patent examiners specialising in patent applications, in co-operation with the Patent Office at the Secretariat General for Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC). In a statement, the ministry indicated that this visit comes within the framework of strengthening Gulf co-operation and exchanging expertise in the field of intellectual property. It is also part of joint efforts aimed at developing the intellectual property protection system in the State of Qatar and enhancing the efficiency of technical personnel working in the field of patent examination, in line with best international practices and contributing to supporting the environment of innovation and scientific research. The visit programme included a series of specialised

technical workshops attended by staff from the Intellectual Property Rights Protection Department and the GCC Patent Office team. These workshops facilitated the exchange of expertise among specialists, discussions of the latest methods adopted in the technical examination of patent applications, and a review of recent developments in this field. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry affirmed that these initiatives reflect its commitment to strengthening joint Gulf cooperation in the field of intellectual property, which supports the innovation and scientific research system and contributes to consolidating the State of Qatar's position as a leading regional centre for the protection of intellectual property rights. **(QNA)**

Amir sends cables of congratulations to Vietnam president

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani sent cables of congratulations to President To Lam on the occasion of his election as President of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, wishing him success in his duties and further progress and prosperity in relations between the two countries. HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani also sent a similar cable to Le Minh Hung on the occasion of his swearing-in as Prime Minister of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. **(QNA)**

Amir sends cables of congratulations to Djibouti president

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani sent cables of congratulations to President Ismail Omar Guelleh of the Republic of Djibouti following his re-election for a new term. His Highness the Amir wished Guelleh success in performing his duties and expressed hope for further development and growth in relations between Qatar and Djibouti. **(QNA)**

PM receives phone call from Jordan's deputy PM

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani received a phone call from Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the sisterly Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan Dr Ayman al-Safadi. The call discussed the latest developments in the region, particularly those related to the ceasefire between the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the need to uphold it in a manner that contributes to strengthening security and stability. During the call, HE Sheikh Mohammed stressed the importance of all parties responding to ongoing mediation efforts, which would pave the way for addressing the root causes of the crisis through peaceful means and dialogue, leading to a sustainable agreement and preventing renewed escalation. His Excellency also underscored the necessity of keeping maritime corridors open, ensuring freedom of navigation, and refraining from using them as tools of pressure or bargaining. In this context, His Excellency emphasised the negative repercussions such actions could have on countries in the region, as well as on global energy and food supplies, and their broader implications for international peace and security. **(QNA)**

Ministry set to document education history in Qatar

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education has called on all the persons who have copies of the old school textbooks to submit them to the ministry so it would archive them electronically and return the textbooks back to them.

The move is aimed at preserving the history of education in Qatar, where the old school curriculums and textbooks will be saved electronically to docu-

ment the progress of education in Qatar throughout the years. This will be part of maintaining and preserving the national educational heritage and give the future generations the opportunity to explore the development of education throughout the past years in the country.

The ministry called on the public to share the old school textbooks, previous editions of the school curriculums, and any

materials related to these. Besides, the Ministry affirmed that the submitted materials, books and others will be returned intact after copying them, and they will be dealt with according to the highest standard of care. The participants will be honoured and if they wish a reference to them will be made. To take part in this, willing participants can contact Irs@edu.qa, 44044670-44404884.

Municipality ministry opens online application for agricultural sector business licences

The Ministry of Municipality, represented by the Department of Agricultural Affairs, announced the opening of online applications to obtain technical licences to conduct business in the agricultural sector, for owners of companies and institutions working in the fields of importing, exporting, trading, producing, processing and manufacturing pesticides of all kinds, as well as fertilisers, soil conditioners, seeds, seedlings and plants.

The ministry explained yesterday, in a post on the X, that applications must be submitted through its website within a maximum period of (60) days from the date of the announcement. It emphasised the importance of all relevant parties adhering to the specified deadline for completing their procedures.

In the same context, the same department opened the online application process for local agricultural companies wishing to

obtain approval to import restricted fertilisers, specifically nitrate fertilisers and their additives, for the purpose of selling them to farms producing for the 2026/2027 agricultural season.

The ministry explained that applications must be submitted through the official website of the Ministry of Municipality during the period from April 15- 20. It stressed that no applications will be accepted after the specified deadline. **(QNA)**

Snoonu launches “Snoonu Startup Factory” to support the next generation of founders and invests in Sufra

Snoonu has launched Snoonu Startup Factory, a new initiative designed to support and empower the next generation of founders and startups in Qatar and across the region.

As part of this launch, the company announced its first investment; a 100,000\$ pre-seed investment in Sufra AI, a Qatar-based startup reimagining the dining experience through intelligent, personalized digital menus.

Founded by Ekaterina Demenkova and Jemal Velihanova, graduates of Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar, Sufra AI is building what it describes as “the brain behind every table.” Through a simple QR scan, diners can access a smart menu that adapts to their preferences, recommends personalized options, and enables seamless ordering, customization, and payment.

In addition to enhancing the customer experience, Sufra provides restaurants with real-time insights into customer behavior and spending patterns, with the potential to increase average order value by %30-20.

The investment reflects a strong strategic alignment. While Snoonu has built its platform around delivery and digital commerce, Sufra focuses on the in-restaurant experience — together offering a more complete view of the customer journey.



Hamad Al Hajri, Founder & CEO of Snoonu, said:

“We believe the future will be built by founders.

With Snoonu Startup Factory, we are investing in people, ideas, and the ambition to create something meaningful from this region and Sufra represents exactly that.”

Ekaterina Demenkova, The co-founder of Sufra AI added:

“We're in the middle of the greatest technological shift in history, the AI era. F&B hasn't felt it yet. Snoonu backed our ambition to give restaurants a system that actually fuels their growth, we're ready to bring that change to every restaurant in the region”

Snoonu Startup Factory aims to provide early-stage startups with access to funding, mentorship, and market opportunities, contributing to the growth of Qatar's innovation ecosystem. The initiative aligns with Qatar National Vision 2030 and builds on Snoonu's “From Within” approach to empowering local ecosystems.

The program will be anchored within Snoonu's new HQ, the Snoonu Technology Park, reinforcing the company's role as a hub for innovation and entrepreneurship.



QIIB names 'Grand Triple Prize' winner

By A Staff Reporter
Doha

QIIB has named the winner of the 'Grand Triple Prize' as part of its promotional campaign for debit and credit cards, "Win Your Apartment... Your Car... and a Cash Prize All at Once". The bank also named four additional winners, each receiving a cash prize of QR100,000; as part of the campaign's rewards. The draw was conducted under the supervision of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. "This initiative reflects the deep appreciation we hold for our customers and their continued trust in QIIB's services," said its deputy chief executive officer Jamal Abdulla al-Jamal. The 'Grand Triple Prize' – which brings together three rewards in a single offering: a luxury residential apartment in Lusail City by Qatari Diar, a Lexus LX600, and a cash prize of QR100,000 – was awarded

to Sheikh Suhaim bin Hamad al-Thani, while four other customers secured cash prizes of QR100,000 each. The winners are Abdullah Ahmed Allahlook, Muna Hamad al-Mohannadi, Sheikh Mohammed Saud al-Thani, and Mohammed Abdullah al-Nuaimi. This announcement concludes QIIB's campaign, which ran from August 15, 2025 to January 31, 2026 and focused on encouraging greater use of debit and credit cards. Through the campaign, QIIB sought to promote electronic payment practices by offering high-value incentives and unique opportunities to win. Al-Jamal said this campaign forms part of QIIB's broader strategy to introduce innovative initiatives that enhance the customer experience and deliver tangible value. "The strong engagement it has garnered reflects the trust our customers place in the Bank, as well as their continued interest in the high-value propositions we consistently bring to



QIIB deputy chief executive officer Jamal Abdulla al-Jamal.

market," he said. Highlighting that it remains committed to advancing rewards programmes in ways that encourage the adoption of secure and efficient electronic payment solutions; he said this approach aligns with evolving trends in the banking sector, supports ongoing digital transformation, and contributes to the development of a more cashless economy.

Deputy PM meets Turkish defence minister

HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Sheikh Saud bin Abdulrahman bin Hassan al-Thani met yesterday with Minister of National Defence of Türkiye Yasar Guler and his accompanying delegation, during their visit to Qatar. The meeting discussed the latest security developments in the region, as well as aspects of defence co-operation and joint co-ordination in light of current conditions. Senior officers from both sides attended the meeting. (QNA)



Imported medicines must have two-thirds of their shelf life validity

Imported medicines must have at least two-thirds of their shelf life remaining, ensuring patients consistently receive safe and high-quality treatments, the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) has stressed. MoPH has issued a new circular for pharmaceutical suppliers stressing that the imported drugs and medicines must have at least two thirds of their validity remaining

unless there is an official exemption from this condition granted by MoPH Pharmacy and Drug Control Department. The move aims to strengthen drug safety standards, prevent the buildup of near-expiry medicines, and improve the management of the country's strategic pharmaceutical stock. Exceptions will apply only in cases of severe

shortages or emergencies, where life-saving medicines may still be imported with shorter shelf lives. Besides, MoPH will issue a detailed guidebook of such exemptions that will be available on its website. The concerned entities have urged all suppliers and distributors to comply, noting that regular inspections will be carried out to enforce the policy. In the meantime, the measure is designed to protect consumers, reduce waste, and further enhance Qatar's evolving healthcare regulatory system.

CMC stresses importance of protecting natural meadows as key ecological systems

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

The efforts to maintain and enhance the natural meadows around the country should continue to preserve this key component of the local environment, stressed the Central Municipal Council (CMC).

The CMC recently held its 52nd meeting as part of its seventh term, chaired by HE Mohamed bin Ali al-Athba, CMC Chairman. The session addressed a range of municipal services and utilities on its agenda, focused on public services, infrastructure, and key community issues affecting residents across the country.

During the session, the CMC members reviewed recommendations and a report submitted by the Committee on Services and Public Utilities regarding the preservation of the natural meadows (Rawda) and the necessary measures to curb environmental



The recent CMC session.

violations. The discussion underscored the importance of protecting Qatar's natural habitats and enhancing public awareness of environmental sustainability to help in thriving biodiversity.

The Council also examined another report from the same committee concerning the development of Furjan (Neighbourhoods) playground projects across various parts of the country. These neigh-

bourhood playgrounds are part of broader efforts to improve community infrastructure, promote healthy lifestyles, and provide accessible recreational spaces for families and youth. In line with its ongoing focus on infrastructure development and service enhancement, the CMC has continued to monitor initiatives aimed at improving the quality of life for residents. In particular, the neigh-

bourhood playground projects are considered of key importance to the residents of the targeted areas as they provide convenient and easily accessible outlets for practising sports activities.

Accordingly, the Council hosted HE Sheikh Dr Khalid bin Jabr al-Thani, chairman of Qatar Cancer Society (QCS), where he gave a presentation to brief the members on the services and activities of QCS. During his presentation, he highlighted the QCS's activities, programmes, and initiatives implemented across different parts of Qatar. He also outlined its efforts in raising awareness about cancer prevention, as well as providing support services to the patients and their families.

CMC is concerned with improving public services and utilities and gives particular importance to community priorities, strengthening public services, and fostering collaboration with national institutions to support social development across the country.

GTA partakes in GCC meeting

Chaired by HE President of the General Tax Authority (GTA) Khalifa bin Jassim al-Jaham al-Kuwari, the GTA participated virtually in the 16th meeting of the Committee of Heads and Directors of Tax Administrations in the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC). Held yesterday in the presiding country, Bahrain, the meeting discussed key developments and challenges related to tax policies and procedures in the region.

The heads of tax authorities in member states explored ways to enhance cooperation and coordination in the exchange of expertise and best tax practices. They also reviewed updates on the implementation of unified agreements related to indirect taxes, as well as mechanisms to develop technical systems that support electronic connectivity among GCC tax authorities. The meeting further addressed topics related to updating tax legislation and expanding training and capacity-building for national cadres, with the aim of improving performance and increasing the efficiency of implementing tax systems in line with regional and global economic developments. At the conclusion of the meeting, it was emphasised that GCC countries remain committed to continuing joint coordination, strengthening economic integration, and reinforcing the principles of fairness and transparency in tax policies, in support of sustainable development across the Gulf region. (QNA)

City University Qatar, beIN announce partnership



City University Qatar and beIN Media Group have formed a partnership to developing talent, strengthening academic-industry collaboration, and driving innovation across the region.

The agreement was signed yesterday at City University's Lusail Campus by Hamad Ibrahim al-Shaikh, beIN's director of Mena HR and Nasser Hassan al-Naimi, vice-chairman at Artan Holding, in the presence of senior representatives from both organisations.

Commenting on the partnership, al-Naimi, said: "This partnership represents a significant milestone in our mission to provide industry-relevant education. It enables us to enhance experiential learning, expand professional pathways for our students, and contribute to the development of a knowledge-driven economy in Qatar." Al-shaikh added: "As part of

our beIN Academy programme, designed to equip aspiring media professionals with real-world broadcast skills, this partnership underscores our commitment to nurturing future talent and strengthening collaboration with academic institutions. By working closely with City University Qatar, we aim to create meaningful opportunities that empower the next generation while innovation and excellence across the media industry."

This partnership creates a platform that connects education with real-world industry needs, creating meaningful opportunities for students, professionals, and both organisations. Through this collaboration, City University Qatar and beIN will develop a strong talent pipeline by facilitating internships, mentorship, and recruitment opportunities for students, graduates, and alumni.

LGCT expands partnership with Years of Culture

The Longines Global Champions Tour (LGCT) has announced the expansion of its partnership with Qatar's Years of Culture initiative, deepening the connection between world-class sport and international cultural exchange across three landmark destinations in the 2026 season: Mexico City, Cairo, and Rabat.

The expanded collaboration builds on the success of the partnership first launched in Rabat in 2024 as part of the Qatar-Morocco 2024 Year of Culture, and now enters a new phase with a stronger international footprint.

A key highlight of the 2026 partnership will be Mexico City, where the Longines Global Champions Tour returns to Campo Marte from April 16-19. Set against the backdrop of Chapultepec Park, Campo Marte has become one of the most atmospheric stops on the global



equestrian calendar, known for its passionate crowds, lively Mexican spirit, and unique blend of elite sport and cultural celebration.

Representing the Doha Falcons GCL team this week in Mexico City is a dynamic trio combining experience and rising talent, with Jessica Mendoza, Samme Thijssen,

and Nathan Budd set to take on the iconic Campo Marte arena. The Mexico City event will form a key moment within the Qatar Canada and Mexico 2026 Year of Culture, using equestrian sport as a platform for people-to-people exchange and cross-cultural storytelling.

Mohammed al-Kuwari, Years of

Culture adviser on Latin America, said: "The expansion of this partnership reflects the spirit at the heart of Years of Culture, building lasting connections between nations through shared experiences and culture, which is more important now than ever. Mexico City is a particularly important chapter in this journey, bringing together sport, culture, and community in one of the world's most dynamic capitals."

President and founder of the Longines Global Champions Tour Jan Tops added: "Announcing this expanded partnership as we arrive in Mexico City marks an exciting moment in our 2026 season. Following the success of Rabat, we are proud to grow our collaboration with Years of Culture across multiple global destinations, bringing together world-class sport and cultural exchange in a way that truly resonates with our global audience."

Unity and trust key to sustaining Qatar's retail confidence amid regional uncertainty

By Shaima Sheriff
Staff Reporter

Businesses in Qatar are reinforcing resilience through unity, adaptability, and customer trust, as retail leaders highlight the importance of collaboration in maintaining stability during a period of regional uncertainty.

As regional developments continue to influence economic sentiment, Qatar's retail sector is placing renewed emphasis on resilience, collaboration, and consumer trust to sustain stability and confidence across the market.

Industry leaders note that while external conditions may shift, the strength of Qatar's business ecosystem lies in its ability to remain aligned, responsive, and connected, both internally and with its customers.

"Unity is essential," said Mohamed El-Sharkawy, associate director – malls leasing at Doha Festival City. "Maintaining open and continuous dialogue across busi-

nesses, partners and stakeholders is key to navigating challenges effectively."

He emphasised that such coordination allows businesses to respond more efficiently to changing conditions, while reinforcing stability across the wider market.

Equally important, he noted, is maintaining a strong connection with consumers. "Staying closely connected to customers, listening to their needs and adapting accordingly... helps ensure stability, continuity and confidence across the wider ecosystem," he said.

As consumer expectations evolve, businesses are increasingly adopting flexible and customer-centric strategies. According to El-Sharkawy, resilience today is defined not only by operational strength, but by the ability to adapt quickly and deliver consistent value.

"Resilience comes from adaptability, collaboration and a strong customer-centric approach," he explained, adding that clear communication, operational readiness, and tailored engagement ini-



Mohamed El-Sharkawy

tiatives are essential to sustaining trust and long-term loyalty.

Within this framework, malls and commercial hubs in Qatar are also expanding their role. Beyond their traditional function, they

are becoming spaces that support social interaction, routine, and a sense of normality.

"Malls today go beyond retail. They act as community hubs that bring people together," El-Sharkawy said.

At Doha Festival City, the focus remains on creating an environment that supports both commercial activity and community wellbeing. "We focus on creating an environment where visitors can connect, spend time with family and experience a sense of normality," he noted.

He added that providing a "safe, welcoming and comprehensive destination" contributes to a stronger sense of belonging, helping visitors maintain everyday routines despite external uncertainty.

This approach reflects Qatar's broader economic resilience, supported by robust infrastructure, regulatory stability, and a proactive business environment that enables continuity even in challenging conditions.

Businesses across the sector are



also placing greater emphasis on collaboration, recognising that shared efforts are key to maintaining market confidence.

"Resilience is built through collective effort. We have navigated challenges before and emerged stronger by adapting, planning ahead and supporting one another," El-Sharkawy said.

Looking ahead, he stressed that confidence will continue to be driven by trust and alignment

across stakeholders. "Today, confidence comes from trust, collaboration and a shared commitment to moving forward together," he added.

As Qatar continues to navigate a dynamic regional landscape, its retail sector is demonstrating that resilience is not only about sustaining business performance, but also about fostering confidence, connection, and continuity within the community.



Lebanon, Israel start direct talks

AFP
Washington

Washington's top diplomat urged Israel and Lebanon to seize a "historic opportunity" for peace as direct talks between the two opened on Tuesday despite objections from Hezbollah, which announced fresh attacks on Israel just as negotiations got underway.

The United States is pressing for a halt to the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah, fearing it could derail the two-week ceasefire in Washington's war with Iran after talks with Tehran in Pakistan failed to achieve a breakthrough.

Washington said "the ball is in the Iranian court" on ending the region-wide war, after a US naval blockade on Iranian ports began in the Strait of Hormuz, which had already been effectively closed by Tehran.

Lebanon was pulled into the broader conflict when Hezbollah attacked Israel in support of its backer Iran, sparking an Israeli ground invasion and strikes — including an extremely heavy attack on Beirut on April 8 — that have killed more than 2,000 people and displaced over 1 mn.

Tuesday's meeting in Washington — the first high-level, direct talks since 1993 — was mediated by Secretary of State Marco Rubio and involved the Israeli and Lebanese ambassadors to the US.

"This is a historic opportunity," Rubio said as he welcomed the ambassadors, acknowledging the "decades of history" complicating the process. "The hope today is that we can outline a framework upon which a current and lasting peace can be developed."

Lebanon's President Joseph Aoun said he hoped the talks "will mark the beginning of the end of the suffering of the Lebanese people".

But expectations of any major breakthroughs were low, with Hezbollah's leader Naim Qassem calling for the talks to be



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio with other delegates at the US State Department yesterday in Washington, DC. (AFP)

scrapped before they even began, describing them as "futile".

Shortly after the talks began, Hezbollah said it had launched "simultaneous rocket salvos" at 13 northern Israeli towns.

Israel's Foreign Minister Gideon Saar said his country was seeking "peace and normalisation" with Lebanon.

But he insisted that Hezbollah was the "problem", and that it needed to be addressed in order to move to a "different phase".

The Israeli military had previously warned it expected a rise in attacks by Hezbollah as the talks kicked off.

Foreign ministers from 17 countries, including Britain and France, urged both countries to seize the chance to bring lasting security to the region.

US blockades Iran

While attention shifted to the meeting in Washington, Trump sought to squeeze Iran with a naval blockade as diplomatic efforts

accelerated towards a new round of peace talks with Tehran.

US Central Command had said the measures covered "vessels of all nations entering or departing Iranian ports and coastal areas".

But at least two ships using Iranian ports passed through the Strait of Hormuz on Monday, data from maritime tracking firm Kpler indicated Tuesday.

Iran's military command branded the blockade an act of piracy and warned that if the security of its harbours was "threatened, no port in the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea will be safe".

The US military said Tuesday that it successfully stopped six ships from sailing out of Iranian ports during the first 24 hours of the blockade. With his blockade of Iranian ports, Trump was trying to starve Iran of funds but also pressure Beijing, the biggest buyer of Iranian oil, to lean on Tehran to reopen Hormuz, analysts said.

China said the blockade was "dangerous and irresponsible", after Trump threatened

to sink any boats that sought to leave or dock at Iranian ports.

The standoff at the strait, through which one-fifth of global oil transited in peacetime, failed to dampen optimism in global markets, with Asian equities rallying while oil continued a downward slide.

France said it would co-host a video conference with Britain on Friday of countries ready to contribute to a "purely defensive mission" to secure the Strait of Hormuz.

Crucially, despite the blockade, the fragile two-week truce agreed last Wednesday between Washington and Tehran remained in place.

Trump insisted that Iranian representatives had called Washington since a US delegation returned empty-handed from the negotiations in Islamabad, adding they would "like to make a deal. Very badly."

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said on Monday that "full efforts are underway" to reach an agreement to stop the fighting.

On Tuesday, senior Pakistani sources told AFP that Islamabad was working to bring Iran and the US together for a second round of talks.

Foreign ministers from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt will meet Ankara's top diplomat in Turkey this week "to discuss regional affairs", a ministry source told AFP.

Nuclear enrichment pause?

Trump has insisted that an agreement must include stopping Iran from ever acquiring a nuclear weapon, having launched the war after accusing Tehran of seeking to develop an atomic bomb — an allegation it denies.

During weekend talks, the US reportedly sought a 20-year suspension of Iran's uranium enrichment programme, according to media reports on Monday.

Iran in turn proposed to suspend its nuclear activity for five years, which US officials rejected, *The New York Times* reported.

Death toll from Israeli aggression on Lebanon rises to 2,124, with 6,921 wounded

The Lebanese Ministry of Public Health announced Tuesday that the death toll from the ongoing Israeli aggression against the country, which began on March 2, has risen to 2,124, with 6,921 wounded.

The Ministry's Health Emergency Operations Center stated in a press release that additional casualties were recorded in a series of new Israeli airstrikes targeting towns and other facilities in southern Lebanon, bringing the total number of victims to 2,124 dead and 6,921 wounded.

In a related development, Israeli warplanes launched an airstrike targeting the Tayr Falsay Bridge, another on the town of Burj Rahal, and an area near the destroyed Qasmiyeh Bridge, as well as other locations in the south.

It is worth noting that the Israeli entity has expanded its operations in Lebanese territory to include the capital, Beirut, and the eastern and central regions, while delegations representing both sides travelled to Washington DC, to begin direct talks aimed at reaching a ceasefire agreement under the US auspices. (QNA)

Diplomatic efforts also picked up elsewhere, with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Beijing, hours after speaking to his Iranian counterpart.

Moscow has offered to hold Iran's enriched uranium safely as part of any deal.

Chinese President Xi Jinping also vowed Tuesday that Beijing would play a "constructive role" in promoting peace talks in the Middle East.

UN chief says 'no military solution' for Mideast crisis

AFP
United Nations, United States

The UN secretary-general on Tuesday called for the resumption of "serious negotiations" to end the war in the Middle East, saying the crisis has "no military solution." Antonio Guterres also told journalists at United Nations headquarters in New York that international freedom of navigation must be respected "by all parties" in the Strait of Hormuz.

"There is no military solution to this crisis. Peace agreements require persistent engagement and political will. Serious negotiations must resume," he said.

Guterres said the ceasefire between the United States and Iran "must be preserved" — referring to the two-week truce agreed last Wednesday after mediation by Pakistan.

The two sides held talks in Islamabad at the weekend but failed to reach an agreement. US President Donald Trump told the *New York Post* on Tuesday that a second round of Iran talks could happen in Paki-



United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. (Reuters/File Photo)

stan "over the next two days."

The UN chief welcomed the start Tuesday of the first direct talks in decades between Israel and Lebanon. "Nobody expects that these talks today will solve all the problems, but I think it will be very important if these talks create the conditions to a change in the way the actors have been developing their activities," Guterres said.

"Until now, the truth is that Hezbollah and Israel have always helped each other to destabilize the government of Lebanon," he said. The UN chief warned that "lawlessness breeds chaos," suffering and destruction.

Israeli fire kills six in Gaza, including two children

Reuters
CAIRO/GAZA

Israeli fire killed at least six Palestinians, including two children, in separate incidents across the Gaza Strip on Tuesday, local health officials said, in the latest violence to undermine a US-brokered ceasefire agreement.

Four people, including a three-year-old boy, Yahya al-Malahi, were killed in a strike that had targeted a police vehicle in Gaza City, the Hamas-run Interior Ministry said. A police officer was among the dead, while nine bystanders were wounded, some critically, it said.

In the north of the enclave, near Jabalia, Israeli fire killed a 14-year-old child, Adam Ahmed Halaa, health authorities and his family said.

At Gaza's Al Shifa hospital, relatives rushed to



Mukhlis al-Malahi, the father of three-year-old child Yahya al-Malahi, who was killed in an Israeli strike, breaks down in Gaza City, yesterday. (Reuters)

pay farewell to those killed. Carrying his little boy in his arms, Mukhlis al-Malahi said they were leaving a relative's wedding when the Israeli plane attacked the police vehicle.

"We got close to Timraz crossroad with Nafaq

(street); then, we suddenly found something hitting us. They hit a police vehicle as we walked," the father, whose shirt was stained with his son's blood, told Reuters.

"What is his fault? What is his crime? He should be

wearing a wedding suit at his cousin's today, but instead, he wore a shroud stained with blood," cried the young boy's cousin, Hader al-Malahi.

In northern Gaza, Israel's military said it killed a man who had approached the armistice line with Hamas, describing him as an armed fighter. Health authorities confirmed a man had been killed in the area, without providing details.

The ceasefire that began last October halted two years of full-blown war but left Israeli troops in control of a depopulated zone that makes up well over half of Gaza, with Hamas in power in the remaining, narrow coastal strip.

Israel has escalated its attacks on Hamas-led police and security forces since October, killing more than 750 Palestinians. Israeli forces have been accused of expanding the zone they occupy.



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-Accommodation@shell.com

Libya's rival forces take part in joint US-led military exercises

Forces from Libya's east- and west-based administrations participated in US special forces exercises in the central city of Sirte on Tuesday in the first such joint military event including the former civil war rivals.

Libya has been divided since 2014 when war broke out in the wake of the uprising that overthrew longtime leader Muammar Gaddafi three years earlier.

The fighting culminated in 2019-2020 when military commander Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army, or LNA, based in the eastern city of Benghazi, tried to take the capital Tripoli. Tensions have cooled considerably since then, and the two sides last week agreed to the first unified budget in more than a decade to determine how to spend the billions of dollars of oil revenues the country earns each year. The "Flintlock" special operations exercises, run by the United States Africa Command, known as AFRICOM, opened in Sirte on Tuesday including forces from both the LNA and the U.N.-recognised Government of National Unity, which is based in Tripoli. Haftar's son, Saddam, who serves as the LNA's deputy commander, said in a speech that the exercise "reaffirms Libya's position as a reliable partner in supporting regional and international peace and security." AFRICOM said in a statement that forces from more than 30 countries would take part in the exercises, which will also be held in Ivory Coast later in the month. (Reuters)



Tender - Waseef

Waseef Asset Management (Waseef) would like to invite competent Service Providers for the below Open Tender:

Tender Number	Subject	Bid Bond (QAR)	Non-refundable Tender Fee (QAR)	Bid Submission Closing Date
GTC/WSF/CON-MISI/08/2026	TENDER FOR CONSULTANCY SERVICES FOR MULTIPLE INFRASTRUCTURE AND STRUCTURAL ISSUES (CLASSIFICATION MINIMUM GRADE A - CONSULTANCY FROM MME)	20,000	500	May 13, 2026

The Tender Document will be available from April 15, 2026 onwards upon submission of the below documentation to tender@waseef.qa.

To collect please provide the following:

- Authorization Letter on Company letterhead, copy of Commercial Registration and valid Identification of the representative.
- Bank deposit slip carrying tender number and subject details. Tender fee shall be deposited to Account Name - Waseef Asset Management Co., Account Number 0002-105222-200 with Al Rayan Bank.

Minimum requirements to be eligible for obtaining the Tender Documents:

GTC/WSF/CON-MISI/08/2026

- The company shall have a valid Commercial Registration in Qatar.
- MME (UPDA Registration Certificate- Grade A) Consultancy.

Please note the following:

- Bidders should submit a bid bond issued by a bank operating in the State of Qatar, valid for 120 days from the tender closing date, corresponding to an expiry date of 13 September 2026.
- Technical and Commercial offers must be submitted in separate sealed envelopes and delivered to the below-mentioned address: GTC Secretary, 3rd floor, Waseef Head Office, New Waseef Tower (formerly Alaqaria Tower), Museum Park Street, Doha, Qatar





Netanyahu struggles for political gains in Iran war

Reuters
DUBAI

The Iran war was meant to deliver a defining victory over Tehran that would secure Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's place in history. More than six weeks into the conflict, he has been unable to translate military might into political gain.

Despite Israel's overwhelming firepower, its enemies across every front have been weakened but not neutralised. Even after heavy Israeli-U.S. airstrikes and the loss of senior leaders, Iran remains intact and defiant.

Tehran's nuclear stockpiles endure, its missile capability is now proven and it holds sway over the Strait of Hormuz, the artery for a fifth of global oil flows.

Palestinian Islamist militant group Hamas has not been disarmed or dismantled in Gaza, and Iran-backed Hezbollah continues to fire rockets at northern Israel from Lebanon.

"Netanyahu is not winning," said Danny Citrinowicz, a senior researcher on Iran at Israel's Institute for National Security Studies. "This war is a strategic failure. There is a gap between what he

promised at the start of the campaign and where we ended up?" **NETANYAHU'S APPROVAL RATINGS FALL**

Netanyahu, 76, is paying a political price for a military campaign launched with U.S. President Donald Trump that has failed to deliver a decisive outcome, political analysts in the region say.

Netanyahu's approval ratings have slipped and, with legislative elections due by late October, the political risks he faces are rising.

Netanyahu's office did not respond to a Reuters request for comment for this article. The prime minister has criticised those who he said were diminishing Israel's achievements in Iran, saying Israel has emerged stronger and Iran weaker.

"There are massive achievements here. This is a historic change. We crushed the nuclear program. We crushed the missiles. We crushed the regime," he said in a statement on Saturday.

At the start of the war, Netanyahu told Iranians they would be "called upon to take to the streets" and topple their clerical rulers. Security officials have since grown increasingly sceptical such an outcome will materialise any time soon, a senior Israeli military official said.

Two Israeli officials told Reuters the initial expectation had been for a swift operation to "finish the job" in three weeks. The war has instead expanded into a wider confrontation with regional and global implications.

SUPERIOR AIRPOWER
Aviv Bushinsky, a former Netanyahu adviser, said the war on Iran had initially restored Netanyahu's standing, which had been damaged by the Hamas storming of Israel in October that led to the Gaza war.

In the early stages of the Iran war, his hardline posture towards Hamas and Hezbollah resonated with parts of the Israeli public, but polls show his ratings have slipped since then.

An April 11 survey by Hebrew University's Agam Labs found only 10% of Israelis viewed the war as successful, while support for Netanyahu was at 34%, down from 40% at the start of the war. More than half rated his leadership as poor or very poor.

Political analysts in the region say that although the military campaign built almost entirely on airpower has been tactically impressive and produced operational gains, it has not compounded into a coherent and durable strategic endgame.

"There is this idea that F-15s and F-35s (fighter jets) can shape or remake the Middle East - that if you kill enough Iranian leaders, the regime will fall," said Citrinowicz. "It's a flawed assumption, and the cost of it keeps getting higher every time."

Bushinsky also questioned the value of Israel's reliance on targeted assassinations although Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei was among those killed in such strikes.

"There is always someone who replaces them," Bushinsky said. "It wakes the bear, it doesn't kill it."

Israeli officials and a Western source said Netanyahu had been informed of a ceasefire plan that was agreed last week only when it was in its final stages. The Western source said Netanyahu had been angered by being left out of the process.

The prime minister has sought since then to counter any perception that he was sidelined in the Pakistan-brokered talks, and on Tuesday issued a statement saying US Vice President JD Vance had called him from his plane to brief him on the talks.

Netanyahu has also launched a campaign to convince voters the war has been worth the cost. The war effort has run up about



A poster of Iran's late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei hangs along a corridor at the Grand Bazaar in Isfahan, Iran. (Reuters)

\$11.5 bn in budgetary costs, with a large share spent on defence, Israel's finance ministry said on Sunday.

GENIE OUT OF THE BOTTLE

Netanyahu's dilemma, diplomats in the region say, is likely to deepen in the absence of decisive military victories, with security problems remaining for Israel in Gaza and the Israel-occupied West Bank, and the conflict with Lebanon continuing.

Netanyahu could seek to block any immediate diplomatic breakthrough in the war with Iran, calculating that a U.S.-Iran agreement would exacerbate his political troubles, regional diplomats say.

Netanyahu's office did not immediately respond when asked for comment on this assertion.

Israel has said it would accept a deal that curbs Iran's missile and nuclear programmes and removes enriched uranium.

The war has crossed a critical threshold for Washington, experts on Iran say, with Iran realising it can survive a conflict with the U.S. and threaten its enemy by attacking Gulf infrastructure and controlling the Strait of Hormuz.

"You can't put the genie back in the bottle," Citrinowicz said of Iran's control of the strait. "The Iranians feel strengthened now, they feel emboldened and they want much more than they were offered in previous talks."

The biggest losers, said Aaron David Miller, a former US Middle East negotiator, are the Gulf Arab states. The region, he said, faces the prospect of dealing with a more bitter, hardline Iranian leadership. Abdulaziz Sager, chairman of the Saudi-based Gulf Research Center, said Gulf states would accept the risks of heightened confrontation with Iran if necessary to keep the strait open, rather than allow Tehran to threaten shipping or Gulf ports.

Pope walks in Augustine's footsteps on Algeria trip marred by suicide attacks

AFP
Annaba, Algeria

Clement Melki Pope Leo XIV arrived Tuesday in the Algerian city of Annaba, the birthplace of Christian theologian Saint Augustine, on day two of a historic trip marred by two suicide attacks.

While the authorities have yet to comment, an informed source confirmed the bombings, and widely circulated videos of the bodies of two suicide bombers in the city of Blida were verified by AFP. No other deaths were confirmed.

Monday's attacks rocked Blida, some 45 kilometres (28 miles) southwest of the capital Algiers where the pontiff began the first visit by a pope to the North African country.

The trip was already at risk of being overshadowed by a spat with US President Donald Trump, who said he was "not a big fan" of the pope after Leo called for peace in the Middle East.

The US president has also accused the pope of "toying with a country (Iran) that wants a nuclear weapon", and on Monday doubled down on the criticism,



Pope Leo XIV holds a holy Mass at the Basilica of Saint Augustine in Annaba, Algeria on Tuesday. (Reuters)

saying he had "nothing to apologise for".

Overnight, US Vice President JD Vance urged the Vatican to "stick to matters of morality" amid the escalating row, "and let the President of the United States stick to dictating American public policy".

The controversy aside, in northeast Algeria in Annaba - formerly the ancient Roman city of Hippo - Leo visited vestiges of the city's past, and a reception centre run by Catholic nuns for impoverished elderly people, mostly Muslims.

The city was the one-time home of Augustine, whose autobiographical "Confessions" is a

seminal work within the Christian tradition.

Leo also celebrated Mass at the hilltop Basilica of Saint Augustine in the presence of clergy from across Africa. The Arab-Byzantine-style church draws some 18,000 pilgrims each year, including Muslims and Jews.

Delivering his homily in French, the pontiff told Algeria's Christians they were "a humble and faithful sign of Christ's love in this land".

In his first speech in Algiers on Monday, Leo paid tribute to victims of the country's 1954-1962 war of independence from France and called for "forgiveness".

His remarks came amid heightened tensions between Algeria and France, and followed a meeting days ago with French President Emmanuel Macron at the Vatican.

The pope also urged Algeria's leaders "not to fear" greater public participation in political life, calling for a "vibrant, dynamic and free civil society".

"Authorities are called not to dominate, but to serve the people and foster their development," Leo said. The pope is due to leave Algeria on Wednesday for Cameroon.

Strait of Hormuz traffic barely affected on first day of US blockade, data shows

- Strait traffic remains far below pre-war levels, industry sources report
- China calls US blockade 'dangerous and irresponsible', urges de-escalation
- War-risk insurance costs remain high, with cover reviewed every 48 hours, industry sources say

By Florence Tan, Mariko Katsumura and Jonathan Saul
Reuters/SINGAPORE/LONDON

The first full day of a US blockade on vessels calling at Iranian ports made little difference to Strait of Hormuz traffic on Tuesday, with at least eight ships including three Iran-linked tankers, crossing the waterway, shipping data showed.

US President Donald Trump announced the blockade on Sunday after weekend peace talks in Islamabad between the US and Iran failed to reach a deal.

The blockade has created even further uncertainty for shippers, oil companies and war risk insurers. Traffic remains at only a fraction of the 130-plus daily crossings before the US and Israel's war on Iran began on February 28, industry sources said on Tuesday.

"During the first 24 hours, no ships made it past the US blockade," the US Central Command said on X, adding that six vessels complied with direction from U.S. forces to turn around to re-enter an Iranian port.

The three Iran-linked vessels that transited the strait were not heading to Iranian ports and were not affected by the blockade.

Panama-flagged Peace Gulf, a medium-range tanker, is heading to Hamriyah port in the United Arab Emirates, LSEG data showed.

The vessel typically moves Iranian naphtha, a petrochemical feedstock, to other non-Iranian Middle Eastern ports for export to Asia, Kpler data showed.

Prior to this, two U.S.-sanctioned tankers passed through the narrow waterway.

Handy tanker Murlikishan is heading to Iraq to load fuel oil on April 16, Kpler data showed. The vessel, formerly known as MKA, has transported Russian and Iranian oil.



A vessel in the Strait of Hormuz, off the coast of Oman's Musandam province on April 12. (Reuters/File Photo)

Another sanctioned tanker, Rich Starry, would be the first to make it through the strait and to exit the Gulf since the blockade began, data from LSEG and Kpler showed.

The tanker and its owner, Shanghai Xuanrun Shipping Co, were placed under US sanctions for dealing with Iran. The company could not be reached for immediate comment.

Rich Starry is a medium-range tanker carrying about 250,000 barrels of methanol, according to the data. It loaded the cargo at its last port of call, the UAE's Hamriyah, the data showed.

The Chinese-owned tanker has Chinese crew on board, the data showed.

China's foreign ministry said on Tuesday that a US blockade of Iranian ports is "dangerous and irresponsible", warning that it would only aggravate tensions. The ministry did not mention whether Chinese ships were passing the strait.

SAILINGS THROUGH THE STRAIT

Five other vessels had sailed through the strait since the blockade began at 1400 GMT on Monday. These comprised two other chemical and gas tankers, two dry bulk vessels and the Ocean Energy

cargo ship that docked at Iran's Bandar Abbas port.

A US military note sent to mariners and seen by Reuters said that humanitarian shipments would be exempt from the blockade.

"The United States does not need to block every type of ship or enter the Strait of Hormuz; it can carry out an intermittent blockade," said Fabrizio Cotichia, professor of political science at Italy's University of Genoa.

"Ships will not be attacked, but rather diverted," Cotichia said, adding that US warships would be located outside of the strait in the Gulf of Oman.

While the cost of war-risk insurance has not increased since the blockade began, it remains at hundreds of thousands of dollars in additional weekly costs, with cover typically reviewed by underwriters every 48 hours, industry sources said.

"A return to 'normality' in the Middle East arguably now appears more distant than it did one week ago, especially given that the U.S. navy has started a blockade," ship broker BRS said in a report.

"It is anticipated that there will be little or no commercial traffic in the strait for the foreseeable future."

Nigeria in 'dire straits' ahead of elections, opposition says

Nigeria is in "dire straits", one of the country's main opposition parties said Tuesday, as delegates gathered for a national convention ahead of next year's elections. The African Democratic Congress (ADC) has pulled together multiple formerly unaligned opposition politicians as Nigeria prepares for January polls, but is riven by internal rivalries as it faces down the behemoth All Progressives Congress, which controls the presidency, national assembly and almost every governorship.

Rauf Aregbesola, ADC secretary, hit President Bola Tinubu on the country's cost of living crisis, as well as longstanding issues such as insecurity and the country's shambolic power grid.

"This has been the worst time in terms of security of the nation, with banditry and terrorism spreading

across the country. But also worrying is the mad lack of empathy by the rudderless presidency," he told a crowd in Abuja.

"The country is in dire straits and we cannot allow this continued drift into hopelessness." Tinubu has presided over reforms hailed by economists as long overdue, including the liberalisation of the exchange rate and the removal of a costly fuel subsidy.

The country's long-running insurgency, meanwhile, has become worse over the past year, researchers have warned. A series of mass kidnappings, as well as two major suicide bombings in Borno state capital Maiduguri since December, have evoked memories of the 17-year conflict's peak a decade ago.

It remains to be seen whether the ADC can capitalise on people's dissatisfaction



Romuald Wadagni, Benin's finance minister, speaking during a campaign rally ahead of the presidential election in Cotonou. (Reuters)

Benin elects finance minister as new president

AFP
Cotonou, Benin

Benin's finance minister Romuald Wadagni has won a landslide victory in a presidential election, according to provisional results, keeping the coastal west African country on course after a decade of robust economic growth.

Wadagni embodies continuity with the era of outgoing president Patrice Talon, which has seen the country enjoy rapid economic growth, an expansion in tourism

and the completion of numerous infrastructure projects. He nonetheless faces major challenges, including a huge wealth gap and insecurity in the north due to attacks blamed on jihadist groups.

The 49-year-old technocrat was the overwhelming favourite to succeed Talon, who hand-picked him, and was backed by the two parties in the governing coalition.

He faced a single, minor opponent, Paul Houngbe, who ran a low-key campaign and conceded defeat while ballots were still being counted.

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

Benin's independent electoral commission, CENA, released provisional results overnight from Monday to Tuesday showing Wadagni had secured more than 94% of the vote, based on 90% of votes counted. Turnout was nearly 60%.

The constitutional court is expected to announce the final results from Sunday's election later

in the week. An electoral monitoring platform reported complaints of ballot boxes appearing full before the start of voting.

But the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) - which deployed observers in more than 1,000 polling stations - said the election had been peaceful and the aberrations noted were insufficient to undermine its credibility.

"Our observers noted instances of ballot box stuffing, attempted vote-buying and intimidation of electoral officials in certain polling stations," ECOWAS said on

Tuesday. The main opposition Democrats party failed to secure the required parliamentary endorsements to field a candidate. Houngbe needed the endorsement of several majority lawmakers to get on the ballot paper.

"The results are no surprise," said legal practitioner Hilaire Okoude.

"Wadagni had no opposition. He could have got 99%."

Major challenges remain. The poverty rate is estimated at more than 30% and many people have not felt the benefits of economic growth.



Congressional medal tribute



US Speaker of the House Mike Johnson (centre) presents Keri Levine Ferencz, with the Congressional Gold Medal in honour of her father Benjamin Ferencz, who served in the US Army during World War II, investigated and prosecuted Nazi war criminals during the Nuremberg Trials, and devoted his life to justice for victims of the Holocaust, during the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's National Commemoration of the Days of Remembrance ceremony on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, yesterday. (AFP)

Canada's Carney vows to boost economy after winning majority

AFP
Ottawa

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney promised quick action yesterday to transform an economy under threat from US President Donald Trump, hours after his Liberal party clinched a majority in parliament.

The Liberals swept three by-elections held Monday, giving them full control of parliament and Canada's first majority since 2019, during Justin Trudeau's first term as prime minister.

"Now it's time to get serious," Carney said, addressing the election results.

"We're building big, we're moving fast, we're just getting started," he added.

Carney's Liberals won the most seats in a general election a year ago, but fell narrowly short of a majority.

Liberal poll numbers have improved over the past year, with Carney consistently reminding Canadians that they live in a changed world and can no longer count on solid ties with the US.

Carney didn't mention Trump on Tuesday, but again stressed that Canada's economy needed to be "more independent."



Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney speaks at a press conference with Minister of Finance and National Revenue Francois-Philippe Champagne, in Ottawa, Ontario, yesterday. (Reuters)

While more than 85% of US-Canada trade remains tariff free, Trump's levies on key sectors have triggered Canadian job losses and slowed growth.

The North American free trade deal that

Trump signed in his first term is also in jeopardy, with revision talks set for the coming weeks. Trump has said the pact offers the US no benefit.

The Liberal majority was made possible by a series of stunning floor-crossings since last year's election. Four Conservatives and one left-wing New Democratic lawmaker have joined the Liberal caucus.

Carney yesterday dismissed Conservative criticism that he earned his majority through shady political deals.

He said every elected lawmaker had the right to support the government programme.

"We're fortunate to have them," he said of the floor-crossers.

Carney's first policy move since securing his majority was a response to Trump's war in Iran.

The prime minister announced federal tax breaks on petrol and jet fuel that will begin Monday and are set to run through Labor Day, seeking to ease energy costs that have skyrocketed since the US and Israel began striking the Islamic republic.

Carney called the war "an enormous shock in the global economy," and described the energy tax breaks as a "responsible and temporary measure" to make life more affordable.

Court shields Trump officials from probe over deportation flights

Reuters
New York

In a victory for Donald Trump, a US appeals court yesterday blocked a judge from conducting an investigation into whether the Republican president's administration willfully violated a judicial order directing them to stop deportation flights of Venezuelan immigrants to El Salvador.

A three-judge panel of the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit in a 2-1 ruling faulted US District Judge James Boasberg in his standoff with administration officials over the limits of presidential power.

The DC Circuit decided that Boasberg encroached on "the autonomy of the executive branch" by demanding sworn testimony from administration officials to determine whether they purposely defied his March 2025 court order to turn around aircraft that were removing the Venezuelans from the United States.

"The district court proposes to probe high-level Executive Branch deliberations about matters of national security and diplomacy," Circuit Judge Neomi Rao wrote, referring to Boasberg. But Boasberg's inquiry, known as a contempt proceeding, was a "clear abuse of discretion," Rao wrote. Such criminal contempt proceedings can result in fines or other forms of censure.

Rao was joined by Circuit Judge Justin Walker in Tuesday's decision, with Circuit Judge J Michelle Childs in dissent. Rao and Walker are both Trump judicial appointees. Childs was appointed by Democratic former President Joe Biden. The dispute arose as part of a lawsuit brought by the American Civil Liberties Union on behalf of Venezuelan men deported by the Trump administration under the Alien Enemies Act, with the plaintiffs arguing that the administration acted unlawfully with the deportation flights.

This 1798 law, which has been invoked rarely in US history, gives presidents broad powers to detain and deport citizens of nations that are at

war with the United States or have launched an invasion of US territory.

The same judicial panel in December temporarily halted Boasberg's contempt proceeding while considering the matter further.

Boasberg has ruled against Trump's administration in multiple cases. The president has called the judge a "Radical Left Lunatic" as well as a "troublemaker and agitator."

The Venezuelan men at the centre of the litigation were released from a Salvadoran prison last summer and returned to Venezuela as part of a US-brokered prisoner swap. The United States has accused the men of being gang members. Lawyers and family members have disputed that allegation.

Boasberg concluded that the administration appeared to have acted "in bad faith" when it hurriedly assembled three deportation flights at the same time that he was conducting emergency court proceedings to assess the legality of the effort.

The judge sought testimony from a high-ranking Justice Department lawyer, as well as a former department attorney who became a whistleblower.

In her dissent yesterday, Childs said Boasberg was "just trying to understand the events of a single weekend in March (2025), including the actions which may have led to the willful violation" of one of the judge's orders.

Childs said yesterday's ruling stymied Boasberg "in a way that will affect not only these contempt proceedings but will also echo in future proceedings against all litigants."

ACLU attorney Lee Gelernt said in a statement that the US legal system "cannot tolerate the executive branch deliberately violating any court order, much less one that resulted in the horrific abuse and torture of dozens of men at a notorious Salvadoran gulag."

Acting US Attorney General Todd Blanche wrote on X that the ruling "should finally end Judge Boasberg's year-long campaign against the hard-working Department attorneys doing their jobs fighting illegal immigration."

Trump Admin wants new Fed chair in place 'as soon as possible'

AFP
Washington

The Trump administration wants Kevin Warsh in place as the new US central bank chair "as soon as possible," with the existing Fed chief's term coming soon to an end, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said yesterday.

Warsh, a former Federal Reserve official, is President Donald Trump's choice to succeed Jerome Powell.

But his confirmation in the Senate faces challenges as a key lawmaker pushes back against Trump's attempt to control the independent institution.

Powell's term as chairman expires in May, and Senate Banking Committee chairman Tim Scott told Fox Business earlier yesterday that Warsh's hearing is expected next week, with a vote due later on.

"We want Kevin Warsh in as soon as possible," Bessent told reporters on the sidelines of an



File photo of Kevin Warsh. (Reuters)

Institute of International Finance event in Washington.

The Fed and Powell are facing a Justice Department probe over renovation costs at its headquarters in Washington, sparking criticism of political pressure on the bank. Republican Senator Thom Tillis — who sits on the Banking Committee — has vowed to block Warsh's confirmation until the legal issue is resolved.

"I think we're going to let this play out," Bessent said yesterday. "There's agreement for the hearings," Bessent added that he believes Tillis is ultimately "a reasonable man." Asked if he has been

in talks to drop the Justice Department investigation, Bessent said: "I don't control the DOJ probe."

But he maintained: "I am confident that (Warsh) will be the Fed chair." Previously, a federal judge quashed subpoenas issued to the Fed as part of the Justice Department probe, with the court saying there was "a mountain of evidence" to suggest the investigation was a pressure tactic.

Asked about the Fed's path of interest rates as war in the Middle East plays out, Bessent added: "They could observe before they cut rates." "I believe rates should be cut," he maintained.

But he added: "If they want to wait for some clarity, I understand that."

He added that Fed policymakers should also wait for Warsh to be in place "and let him lead the next cycle" of rate adjustments.

Trump has been pushing for the Fed to lower the benchmark lending rate since he returned to the White House in January 2025, and repeatedly lashed out at Powell for not slashing more aggressively.

Warsh's financial disclosures reveal over \$100mn in assets

Kevin Warsh, a former Federal Reserve governor chosen by President Donald Trump to lead the central bank, has submitted financial disclosures indicating he holds assets worth well over \$100mn, putting him on track to be the wealthiest central bank leader ever if confirmed, Reuters reported from Washington.

It is difficult to estimate net worth from US government ethics forms because assets are valued in broad and sometimes open-ended categories. Warsh's filing, made public early yesterday, also includes a notable number of gaps and pledges to divest assets if confirmed. That said, the form gives an extensive accounting of the prospective Fed leader's personal wealth. The 69-page disclosure includes two investments worth more than \$50mn each in the Juggernaut Fund LP and \$10.2mn in consulting fees from the investment office of Wall Street giant Stanley Druckenmiller.

The Juggernaut Fund investments, for example, come with the caveat that the underlying assets "are not disclosed due to pre-existing confidentiality agreements," with a promise from Warsh that "I will divest this asset if confirmed." Warsh's financial disclosures will almost certainly be a focus of his upcoming confirmation hearing next week, ahead of the end of current Fed Chair Jerome Powell's leadership term next month. Federal Reserve ethics rules formalised in 2022 sharply limit what Fed officials and their immediate families can hold and how they can manage their

investments. Those rules prevent ownership of bank stocks and crypto-related investments among other restrictions, and limit how Fed officials can buy and sell holdings, for example. The central bank ethics rules, which are set by the Federal Open Market Committee, are more stringent than those of the rest of the government. Warsh's large-scale investments are among a series of holdings, including around two dozen in THSDFS LLC, some individually worth as much as \$5mn, where details were withheld and which Warsh also pledged to divest if confirmed.

OGE analyst Heather Jones, who signed off on Warsh's document, noted those commitments in her review and said that "once the filer divests these assets, he will be in compliance" with the Ethics in Government Act.

The document lists dozens of other assets without stating the value, mostly focused, judging by the names, in artificial intelligence and crypto, among other sectors. Those holdings include Cafe X, described as a robotic coffee bar platform; a "bionic movement-enhancing wearable clothing" firm called Cionic; Blast, noted as "yield-generating Ethereum layer two"; and Conraline, a "reversible male contraceptive solution." The holdings of Warsh's spouse, Jane Lauder, whose family interests include the Estee Lauder cosmetics company and who Forbes estimates has a net worth of around \$1.9bn, were also included. Some of Lauder's municipal bond holdings were valued simply at "over \$1mn."

Trump turns on Meloni, says 'shocked' by Italian leader

Reuters
Rome

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni lacks courage and has let Washington down, US President Donald Trump told an Italian newspaper yesterday, delivering a blunt public rebuke to one of his closest European allies.

Meloni had been a vociferous supporter of Trump, but she distanced herself from him after he went to war with Iran in February,

and on Monday she openly criticised him for lashing out at Pope Leo, saying his verbal assault was "unacceptable".

Trump responded in an interview with Corriere della Sera, saying Meloni was "very different from what I thought" and denouncing her for refusing to help re-open the Strait of Hormuz, which has been blocked by Iran.

"I'm shocked by her. I thought she had courage. I was wrong," he was quoted as saying in the Italian-language article.



File pictures show Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and US President Donald Trump. (AFP)

The White House declined to comment on the reported quotes. Meloni's office also declined to

comment, but politicians of all stripes rallied to her defence, including Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani, head of the coalition Forza Italia party. "We are, and will remain, sincere supporters of Western unity and steadfast allies of the US, but that unity is built on loyalty, respect and mutual frankness," he said, applauding Meloni for denouncing Trump's attack on the Pope. "On Pope Leo XIV, she said exactly what all of us Italian citizens think," he added in a statement on X. Trump's criticism marked a dramatic change in tone toward Meloni, the only European leader to attend his inauguration in 2025

and whom he had hailed as "a great leader" just one month ago.

Yesterday he accused her of failing to back US efforts to tackle Iran's nuclear programme and guarantee energy flows through the Gulf, saying she wanted America "to do the job for her."

Asked about her condemnation of his comments on Pope Leo, he said: "She is the one who is unacceptable, because she does not care whether Iran has a nuclear weapon and would blow Italy up in two minutes if it had the chance."

Trump's son Eric to join father's state visit to China

Reuters
Washington

US President Donald Trump's son Eric Trump and his wife, Lara, will accompany the president on his trip next month to China, a spokeswoman for the family organisation told Reuters yesterday.

Two sources had told Reuters that members of Trump's family, including Eric, were considering joining Trump on his highly anticipated May 14-15 visit, potentially to contribute to US-China business relations. The spokeswoman said Eric, who manages his father's business empire, would go in a personal capacity.

"Eric and Lara Trump are proud to accompany the president on his state visit," said the Trump Organisation spokeswoman, Kimberly Benza.

"Eric is deeply proud of his father and the accomplishments of this term, and is attending in a personal capacity as a supportive son. He does not have business ventures in China nor plans on doing business in China. He will not be participating in private meetings, but will instead stand alongside the President to mark this historic occasion."

The move could nonetheless raise concerns in Washington, given that the billionaire developer's personal wealth and business dealings are managed by his family. Trump had criticised his Democratic predecessor, President Joe Biden, for his son Hunter accompanying him to China when

Biden was vice president. He accused the younger Biden of using his influence to secure China's financial backing for his investments. In 2019, Trump publicly invited China to open an investigation into his political rivals. The Biden family has denied wrongdoing. The White House and the Chinese embassy in Washington did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The White House has said Trump fully complies with financial ethics and reporting requirements.

Eric Trump is executive vice president of the Trump Organisation, overseeing investments spanning real estate, golf and blockchain. Lara Trump, a former co-chair of the Republican National Committee, hosts Fox News Channel's "My View with Lara Trump."

A spokesman for Donald Trump Jr said the president's eldest son, who is also an executive vice president at the Trump Organisation, would not join the trip.

The highly anticipated trip is the first by a US president in eight years and is aimed at maintaining stable relations between Beijing and Washington. The world's two largest economies agreed to a truce last year after a bruising period marked by Trump's tariffs and China's chokehold on rare-earth exports.

But some US companies had also hoped Trump's visit could go further than giving a green light for deals on Chinese purchases of soybeans and Boeing aircraft, which are already under consideration.

New trial over Maradona's death begins in Argentina

AFP
San Isidro

A new trial over the death of football legend Diego Maradona began yesterday in Argentina, 10 months after a scandal involving a judge caused the first trial to collapse.

Maradona, considered one of the world's greatest players, died in November 2020 at the age of 60 while recovering from surgery for a brain clot.

His seven-strong medical team is accused of gross negligence causing his death during his home convalescence.

Prosecutor Patricio Ferrari yesterday told the court Maradona was treated by a "group of amateurs" who committed "all kinds of omissions," resulting in conditions he described as "cruel."

Maradona's daughters, Dalma, Gianinna, and Jana, as well as his former partner Veronica Ojeda, were present in the packed courtroom in the northern Buenos Aires suburb of San Isidro for the start of the proceedings.

Maradona died of heart failure and acute pulmonary edema — a condition where fluid accumulates in the lungs — two weeks after going under the knife.

The larger-than-life former Boca Juniors and Napoli striker, who captained Argentina to World Cup victory in 1986, was in agony for hours at the end of his life, according to forensic experts.

"Diego Maradona began to die 12 hours before his actual death. Anyone who thought to transfer him to a clinic in a car or ambulance during his last week would have saved his life," prosecutor Patricio Ferrari told the court yesterday.

In his opening statement, the lawyer of Dalma and Gianinna Maradona, Fernando Burlando, displayed a stethoscope.

"This small instrument, so important to medicine, was never placed on Maradona's chest between November 11 and 25 (the two weeks before his death), and his heartbeat was never heard," he said.



Dalma Maradona (centre), daughter of Argentine football legend Diego Maradona and his former partner, Veronica Ojeda (right), are seen at a courthouse during a preliminary hearing in a trial over his death in San Isidro, outskirts of Buenos Aires, yesterday. (AFP)



Argentine football legend Diego Maradona's former medical doctor Leopoldo Luque arrives at a courthouse for a preliminary hearing in the trial in San Isidro. (AFP)

Outside the courthouse, about fifty people carrying Argentine flags and signs demanded justice for "Dios" — a play on Maradona's number 10 jersey and "dios," the Spanish word for the creator.

Two months into the first trial last year, after hours of sometimes tearful testimony from witnesses, including Maradona's

children, the proceedings were ground to a halt by revelations involving one of the three judges.

The judge, Julieta Makintach, was discovered to have taken part in a clandestine documentary about the case, leading to the annulment of the trial.

The new trial, which will run until July at the earliest, will hear

from some 120 witnesses.

The defendants — doctors, psychologists and nurses — are accused of homicide with possible intent by pursuing a course of action despite knowing it could lead to death over the decisions they made regarding Maradona's care. That includes the decision to allow him to convalesce at home instead of in a hospital.

They risk prison terms of between eight and 25 years if convicted. The defence maintains that the flamboyant Maradona, who battled cocaine and alcohol addictions for decades, died of natural causes. "If there's one thing that has been ruled out, it's a malicious criminal plan to kill Maradona," Vadim Mischanchuk, lawyer for psychiatrist Agustina Cosachov, told Radio Con Vos at the weekend.

The passing of the man, who was revered for his preternatural talent and charisma, plunged Argentina into mourning in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Tens of thousands of people queued to bid farewell to him as his body lay in state at the presidential palace.



File photos of Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and Senator Flavio Bolsonaro. (Reuters)

Lula narrowly ahead of Flavio Bolsonaro in potential runoff: poll

Reuters
Sao Paulo

Brazil's leftist President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva is narrowly ahead of right-wing Senator Flavio Bolsonaro in a potential runoff in the October presidential election, a CNT/MDA poll showed yesterday.

The survey showed Lula with 44.9% of the votes in a runoff, compared with 40.2% for Flavio Bolsonaro, the son of far-right former President Jair Bolsonaro.

In a first-round poll in which respondents were asked who they

would vote for if the election were held today, Lula was at 28.7% support versus 16.6% for Flavio Bolsonaro.

The CNT/MDA poll contrasts with several recent surveys that have shown the two candidates statistically tied in a runoff.

Recent polling shows Lula's earlier lead is narrowing, with Flavio Bolsonaro gaining support after receiving public backing from his father, who is under house arrest. Over the weekend, a Datafolha poll showed the younger Bolsonaro with 46% of the vote in a runoff, compared with 45% for Lula.

Swalwell faces another misconduct allegation

Reuters
New York

A fifth woman accused US Representative Eric Swalwell of misconduct yesterday, after the embattled Democratic congressman announced his resignation from the House of Representatives and said he was suspending his campaign for governor of California.

At a press conference at her lawyer's offices in Beverly Hills, California, Lonna Drewes described a 2018 alleged incident with Swalwell, accusing him of drugging her drink and abusing her. Drewes said the lawmaker had previously invited her to two public events. "I thought I died," Drewes said.

She said the incident had a profound effect on her mental health, and that she self-medi-

cated, lost the will to live and cried constantly for years afterward. "My delay in taking action against Eric was driven by fear, not doubt. Fear of his political power," Drewes said.

A representative for Swalwell, who is married and has three children, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Drewes' attorney, Lisa Bloom, said that her firm will be filing a police report with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's office. The firm will be providing evidence including text messages, journal entries and witness information.

Swalwell, who had been a front-runner for the governorship of the US' most populous state, ended his campaign shortly after The San Francisco Chronicle and CNN reported that a woman who previously worked in Swalwell's district office accused him of two misdemeanours. The woman told CNN that Swalwell abused her during the 2024 incident in a New

York City hotel. The Manhattan district attorney's office on Saturday confirmed it is investigating the allegations. CNN also reported that three other women made allegations against Swalwell, who has been in the US House of Representatives since 2013. In a statement posted on X Monday, Swalwell apologised to his family, staff and constituents for "mistakes in judgments I've made in my past" and vowed to fight "the serious, false allegation" against him. It was not immediately clear how soon Swalwell's resignation would take effect, but he said he would work with his staff to ensure his constituents are served in his absence.

Swalwell's absence from the gubernatorial race leaves billionaire Tom Steyer and former Representative Katie Porter as the top remaining Democratic candidates to replace Gavin Newsom, who is completing the maximum of two terms.

Cuba's top destinations deserted, without power or fuel under US sanctions

Reuters
Cienaga De Zapata

The sun is setting in Palpite, a small town on the edge of Cuba's vast Zapata Swamp, when suddenly the road swarms with activity.

But not with the red land crabs that once attracted hundreds of thousands of tourists annually to one of the island's top eco-tourism destinations.

The crowds now are local residents pouring out of their homes in search of a cell phone signal when the lights flicker back on amid a US energy blockade that has condemned a large swath of the island to live without electricity. "What tourist will want to visit us under these conditions?" laments Manuela Arencibia Baez, owner of a rental house — now mostly empty — just down the road in the beachfront Playa Larga, 2 miles away and the region's top overnight destination.

She told Reuters she'd lost count of all the reservations she'd had to cancel, including those from tourists already in the country unable to find a taxi driver with sufficient gas to make the two hour



Maria Rosa Fernandes, 62, owner of a rental house, poses for a photograph outside her property as Cuba's top tourist destinations remain deserted amid power and fuel shortages under US sanctions, in Playa Larga, Cienaga de Zapata, Cuba. Right: Fishing boats are anchored in a bay as Cuba's top tourist destinations remain deserted in Playa Larga, Cienaga de Zapata. (Reuters)

trip south and east from Havana. Official data underscore Arencibia's concerns. International tourist arrivals plunged 56% in February from one year prior. Both of Playa Larga's hotels are closed. Most of its tourist attractions are shuttered as well.

Cuba has for decades been plagued by shortages, hampered by a state-run economy and a Cold War-era US trade embargo that complicates everything from financial transactions to the import of fuel. But this time is different, more than a dozen residents and tourism industry workers of

the Zapata region told Reuters.

"We are much worse off even than during the coronavirus pandemic," said Arencibia, rattling off a list of lost reservations from countries like Switzerland, Canada, France and Germany.

Power cuts now run for 22 hours a day, with just a couple hours of light in which residents scramble to call loved ones in Miami, or Havana, or to prepare food before it rots in refrigerators.

Water is running short across many communities. Medical services — always complicated in far-flung corners of the coun-

try — are now a remote possibility, hampered by power cuts and lack of communications. Fuel for independent travellers who once flocked to the area in rental cars is largely unavailable.

Trump's fuel blockade coincided with what has historically been peak tourism season for Cuba, all but ensuring a disastrous year, a death knell for an industry already knee-capped by shortages but that in 2024 still accounted for as much as 10% of foreign currency earnings.

Many hotels and services, from Havana east to top beach destinations Varadero, Cayo Santa Maria

and Cayo Coco, were forced to close when fuel shortages prompted many airlines to cut flights.

"In these months, I am always booked," said Fidel Silvestre Fuentes, a 67-year-old rental home owner who has long provided accommodations to birdwatchers who come from across the world to see the bee hummingbird, the world's smallest, among other endemic species. "Now, we're empty."

The Zapata Swamp region, much of it contained within a pristine national park — nonetheless has more private rental homes open to tourists than even Cuba's top sun and beach destination, Varadero. Now though, it feels like a ghost town.

The potholes have grown deeper along the region's single access road. The coastal route between the white sands of Playa Larga, at the foot of the bay, and Playa Giron, further out, feels abandoned, inhabited mostly by stray crabs, wayward residents on horseback and men and women on bikes.

Even the region's top attractions are closed. "If you don't have a rental home, you work in a restaurant; or if you don't work in the sector, maybe you are related to someone who does," said Jorge Alberto Brito, a hat and souvenir seller who now

lives off a scarce few pesos a day. "Without a doubt we have hit rock bottom."

LUCKY FEW

Fidel Fuentes Rayo, who rents a home in Playa Larga, is among the lucky few with money enough to purchase solar panels and a lithium battery for storage, giving his home a leg up on the competition.

It hasn't helped, he says.

"Tourists do not come to Cuba for comfortable accommodation, they come to but to tour the National Park and enjoy bird watching, diving services, boat rides, fly fishing... experiences that are just not available now," he said, citing fuel shortages and transportation challenges. Still, a scattered few tourists still roll the dice on travel to the region. Blair Andrews, an American tourist, has returned repeatedly to Cuba, enough so to be on a first name basis with the guides at a scuba diving operation.

The 51-year-old said electricity and cell service were the least of her concerns. "I come back because the Cuban people are good hosts and have a beautiful culture," she said as she strapped a tank to her back before diving into the clear aqua-green water of the bay. "I'm very sad about what's happening to them."



Lee warns Iran war will keep oil price high, orders quick aid rollout

Reuters
Seoul

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung said rising tensions around the Strait of Hormuz made it hard to be optimistic about the fallout from the Iran war, warning that high oil prices and supply-chain strains were likely to persist for some time.

Lee told a cabinet meeting on Tuesday the government should treat prolonged disruption in global energy and raw materials markets as a given and reinforce its emergency response system.

"For the time being, difficulties in global energy and raw materials

supply chains and high oil prices will continue," Lee said.

"I ask that we pursue the development of alternative supply chains, medium- to long-term industrial restructuring, and the transition to a post-plastic economy as top-priority national strategic projects," Lee also urged ministries to move quickly to deploy a supplementary budget passed in response to the war.

At the meeting, ministers outlined steps to contain the economic shock from the conflict, including support for crude imports, controls against hoarding of petrochemical feedstocks and medical supplies, and expanded financial assistance for affected companies.

Industry Minister Kim Jung-kwan said disruptions to shipping through the Strait of Hormuz were still affecting supplies and that even if the passage normalises, it could take around 20 days for Middle Eastern cargoes to reach South Korea.

The government is prioritising support for the passage of seven South Korea-bound oil tankers stuck in the Gulf area, a document shown during the cabinet meeting said. Foreign Minister Cho Hyun told the meeting that the ministry had sent officials to the Congo, Algeria and Libya in a bid to secure energy supplies, in addition to presidential Chief of Staff Kang Hoon-sik travelling to coun-



South Korean President Lee Jae Myung (Reuters/File photo)

tries such as Kazakhstan since last week.

"I also urge the parties to this war to take courageous steps toward the peace the world so des-

perately wants, based on the principles of protecting universal human rights and the lessons of history," Lee said. South Korea's energy ministry said on Tuesday it would begin rolling out a revised seasonal and time-of-use electricity pricing system to shift power demand away from evening peak hours toward midday, when solar generation is higher. The new rates take effect for large industrial users from April 16 while weekend discounts for electric-vehicle charging will begin on April 18. Meanwhile, Middle Eastern oil producers are in contact with South Korea about using the country's petroleum storage facilities as disruptions at the Strait of Hormuz

continue, a South Korean industry ministry official said on Tuesday, signalling growing interest in offshore crude storage hubs.

Yang Ki-wook, a senior official at the industry ministry, told a briefing that Middle Eastern countries were showing increased interest in storing oil outside the strait because a prolonged disruption in logistics would hit their economies and pre-positioning crude could reduce export risk.

Yang said that in addition to Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (Adnoc), which already has a joint stockpiling agreement with South Korea, other Middle Eastern producers were also in contact, though he did not identify them.

Lavrov bashes efforts to 'contain' Russia, China on Beijing visit

AFP
Beijing

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov criticised efforts he said were aimed at "containing" Russia and China yesterday during a visit to Beijing, where he also discussed with his Chinese counterpart plans for a meeting "within the year" between Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping.

Lavrov was given a red-carpet welcome after he arrived in the Chinese capital, photographs released by the Russian foreign ministry showed. He later met his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi, who he was seen shaking hands with in a picture posted on social media by Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova.

Beijing and Moscow are close economic and political partners, and the relationship has deepened further since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Lavrov warned of "some very, very dangerous games going on" in East Asian geopolitical hotspots that included Taiwan, the disputed South China Sea and the nuclear-armed Korean peninsula, according to quotes from the meeting with Wang published by



Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi shake hands during a meeting in Beijing, yesterday. (AFP)

state-run RIA Novosti.

Beijing claims Taiwan as part of its territory and is sharply critical of US military assistance the self-ruled island receives.

In comments apparently referring to the United States and its allies, Lavrov said "they are trying to dismantle (regional cooperation) by creating small-format, bloc-based structures aimed at containing both the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation".

"Our vast continent as a whole demands constant attention," he

said. Wang and Lavrov "conducted in-depth exchanges on the US-Iran conflict, the Asia-Pacific situation, the Ukraine crisis" and other issues during their meeting, the Chinese foreign ministry said in a statement without providing details.

"The two sides coordinate and support one another on the international stage, demonstrating to the whole world that amid adversity, a righteous path remains, and that under changes, there lies greater responsibility," Wang said.

Lavrov and Wang also "communicated and synced up preparations for a meeting between the two heads of state within the year," according to the Chinese readout.

China is hosting this week a string of leaders of countries that have been affected by the US-Israeli war on Iran and its economic fallout, including Vietnam's To Lam and Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Mohamed bin Zayed al-Nahyan.

Wang and Lavrov agreed during a call on April 5 that Beijing and Moscow would work together to de-escalate tensions in the Middle East.

China's Premier Li Qiang told the United Arab Emirates leader that Beijing is "ready to further play a constructive role and contribute to the restoration of peace and tranquility in the Gulf region".

China, Spain pledge closer ties in face of threats to world order

Reuters
Beijing

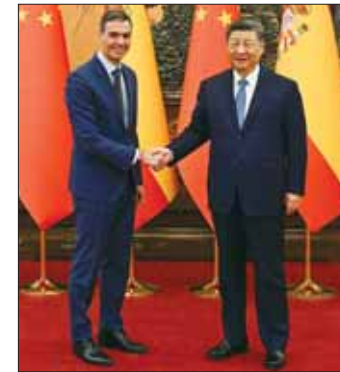
Europe and China must forge closer ties to counter threats to multilateralism, Spanish Premier Pedro Sanchez said yesterday after meeting Chinese President Xi Jinping, who said the international order is "crumbling".

Sanchez's April 11-15 visit to China comes as many Western governments are seeking warmer ties with Beijing despite lingering security and trade tensions, with discomfort growing over the policies of US President Donald Trump.

He is the latest of a string of leaders from Britain, Canada, Finland and Ireland to visit China this year.

During the meeting with Sanchez, Xi said that the international order was "crumbling" and that deeper ties were in the interests of both China and Spain, according to comments provided to media.

Spain has been one of Europe's loudest proponents of expanding trade and treating China as a



China's President Xi Jinping (right) shakes hands with Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez in Beijing, yesterday. (AFP)

strategic ally, rather than the economic and geopolitical rival seen by Trump. Sanchez has urged the world's second-biggest economy to take a larger role on issues from climate change to security, defence and the fight against inequality, saying the US has decided to withdraw from many of these fronts.

In a press conference, the Spanish leader said Beijing had agreed to measures to narrow his coun-

try's trade deficit of nearly \$50bn with Beijing. He added that he would later on Tuesday sign several agreements with Premier Li Qiang, including expanded access for Spanish agricultural products to China and improving Spain's transport and infrastructure. He did not provide further details.

He said that middle powers like Spain must push for the multilateral order to be respected, echoing a concept expressed by Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney earlier this year at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

Sanchez singled out Israel in his press conference for violating international law in the Middle East, saying he had discussed the "grave situation" in Lebanon, Gaza and Ukraine during his meeting with Xi.

"Those of us who raise our voice against governments violating international law are being threatened," Sanchez said, in reference to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's warning that Madrid would "pay an immediate price" for what he described as waging a diplomatic war against his country.

N Korea's Kim oversees cruise missile test

AFP
Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un oversaw new tests of strategic cruise missiles and anti-warship missiles launched from a naval destroyer, state media reported yesterday.



The destroyer Choe Hyon conducting a test-fire of a missile at an undisclosed location in North Korea on Sunday. (AFP)

The weapons tests occurred on Sunday, the state-run Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said, and are the latest in a string of recent missile launches by the nuclear-armed nation.

Two strategic cruise missiles each flew for just over two hours, according to KCNA, while the anti-warship missiles

flew for 33 minutes.

The missiles flew "along the flight orbits set in the sky above the West Sea of Korea and struck the targets with ultra-precision hit accuracy," KCNA said, using its preferred name for the Yellow Sea.

The tests were carried out from the Choe Hyon, one of two 5,000-tonne destroyers in the North's arsenal, both launched last year as Kim seeks to ramp up the country's naval capabilities.

A photo released by KCNA showed a missile in its initial flight stage after being launched from the warship, with an orange flame trailing from its tail.

KCNA said Kim was also briefed on planning for the weapons systems of two more destroyers under construction, referred to simply as "Nos 3 and 4".

Kim reportedly "expressed great satisfaction over the fact that the preparedness of our army's strategic action has been strengthened".

He reiterated that bolstering the North's nuclear deterrent was the "most important priority task".

Indonesia's foreign ministry urges caution over US military overflight proposal

Indonesia's foreign ministry has warned the defence ministry in a letter that an American proposal to give its military "blanket" permission to fly over Indonesian territory risked entangling Jakarta in potential South China Sea conflicts, sources said.

The letter, marked as urgent and confidential, was delivered in early April ahead of a meeting of Defence Minister Sjafriz Sjamsuddin and his US counterpart Pete Hegseth in Washington on Monday, according to two Indonesian sources with knowledge of the matter. The letter has not been previously reported and it urged the defence ministry to delay any final agreement with Washington. It is not clear if the overflight proposal was discussed by Hegseth and Sjafriz.

The two Indonesian sources said the proposal had been slated to be signed at Monday's meeting. A Pentagon statement that followed the meeting said the two countries established a major defence cooperation partnership and listed a number of ways in which the two countries would build defence ties, but did not refer to overflights.

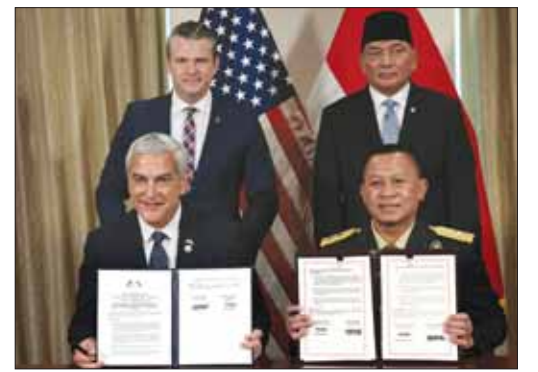
A US official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that just because the overflights were not mentioned in the statement did not mean they were not discussed in private.

The Pentagon did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Indonesia's defence ministry did not respond to a Reuters question on whether the proposal was discussed between the two, but said the US proposal was being carefully reviewed by Jakarta, which had made a number of adjustments keeping in mind the country's sovereignty and national interests.

Indonesia, an archipelago of more than 17,000 islands, is strategically located on the southern entry point of the South China Sea where it controls the Natuna Islands, and balances close ties with both China and the US.

The letter from the foreign ministry said the US proposal should be treated with caution because it would allow Washington to maximise surveillance and



US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth and Indonesia's Defence Minister Sjafriz Sjamsuddin look on after a memorandum of understanding is signed at the Pentagon, in Washington, DC, on Monday. (Reuters)

reconnaissance using Indonesian waters and territory, and could affect relations with other strategic partners in the region, including China.

It said an agreement with the US would give "the impression that Indonesia is involved in an alliance with the implication of increased national security risks because it places Indonesia as a potential target in a regional conflict situation." It noted that a number of US military aircraft had carried out surveillance operations in South China Sea on 18 occasions between January 2024-April 2025, which constituted a violation of Indonesia's territorial waters and airspace. Indonesia's protests regarding this operation have never received a proper response from the US, it added.

Spokespersons for Indonesia's foreign and defence ministries, as well as the Pentagon did not immediately respond to requests for comment on the reservations raised by the Indonesian foreign ministry. Indonesia has a non-aligned foreign policy and President Prabowo Subianto has vowed to befriend all countries. (Reuters)

Japan posts lowest greenhouse gas emissions in decade

Japan's net greenhouse gas emissions fell 1.9% in 2025 to hit their lowest levels in more than a decade, partly due to a slight uptick in nuclear and renewable energy, the government said yesterday. Japan is heavily dependent on imported fossil fuels and is the world's fifth-largest single-country emitter of carbon dioxide, although it is aiming for carbon neutrality by 2050.

In the 2024 fiscal year, which ended in March 2025, net greenhouse gas emissions reached 994mn tonnes, marking the first time the net total has fallen below the one-billion-tonne threshold, the environment ministry

said. It is the lowest level since the 2013 fiscal year, when it recorded 1.39bn tonnes. Japan uses that figure as its base to compare changes in emissions.

But Mie Asaoka, president of the Japan-based NGO Kiko Network, which focuses on climate change, told AFP that the shift to clean energy is not moving fast enough. Environment ministry official Taichi Shirato told AFP yesterday that the emissions fall was chiefly due to a drop in energy consumption linked to output declines in the manufacturing sector, as well as an uptick in renewable and nuclear energy sources in Japan's energy mix. (AFP)

'Philippines, US military drills underscore Washington's defence commitment'

Reuters
Manila

The latest round of military drills involving the Philippines, the United States and several partner nations will underscore Washington's "iron-clad" commitment to its treaty ally and to the region, even as global attention remains fixed on the Middle East, a US military official said yesterday.

Running from April 20-May 8 across multiple locations in the Philippine archipelago, the annual "Balikatan" or "shoulder-

to-shoulder" drills will see more than 17,000 troops participate in one of the largest and most complex training programmes yet, expanding beyond bilateral exercises into a broader multinational effort.

"Balikatan represents an opportunity to showcase our iron-clad alliance with the Philippines and demonstrate our commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific," Colonel Robert Bunn, US spokesperson for the exercises, said at a press conference in Manila.

Japan's participation in the programme is set to expand this

year, with members of its Self-Defense Force taking part in live-fire drills for the first time, using its Type 88 surface-to-ship missile to help sink a decommissioned vessel during a maritime strike exercise.

Tokyo has been strengthening its defence engagement with Manila after they signed a reciprocal access agreement in 2024, allowing them to deploy their militaries in each other's territory.

The exercises are also set to highlight the Philippines' widening network of security partnerships with Canada, France,

New Zealand and Australia, with the countries contributing naval vessels, aircraft and troops.

Bunn said the scale and scope of this year's Balikatan demonstrate the country's sustained commitment to the Indo-Pacific, despite competing global demands. Thousands of US personnel are deploying to the Philippines for the drills, reinforcing alliance readiness, regional stability, and the shared goal of maintaining a free and open region, US and Philippine military officials said.

The expanded drills come amid rising tensions between the Phil-

ippines and China in the South China Sea, where Manila has accused Beijing of increasingly aggressive actions, an accusation China rejects.

Activities will span air, land, sea, and cyber domains, including maritime operations, integrated air and missile defence, counter-landing live-fire exercises, and humanitarian missions. Colonel Dennis Hernandez, Philippine spokesperson for the exercises, said the country has the right to bolster its defence capabilities, adding that the drills were not directed at any country.

Philippines seeks more Russian oil

Manila said yesterday it was seeking US permission to buy more Russian crude. The Philippines' sole oil refinery secured nearly 2.5mn barrels last month after seeing at least 4mn barrels in shipments cancelled since the war. "We have communicated with the Department of Foreign Affairs for another window or extension of the lifting of the embargo," Philippine Energy Secretary Sharon Garin told reporters, adding the request had been officially relayed to Manila's long-time security ally. (AFP)

Indian state raises minimum wages amid protests

Reuters
Noida

India's northern state of Uttar Pradesh has raised workers' minimum wages following days of protests in an industrial hub, government sources said, becoming the second state to do so in less than a week amid rising costs fanned by the Iran war.

Protesters in Noida – a suburb of the national capital that houses industrial units including that of South Korean technology giant Samsung Electronics – had torched vehicles and pelted stones on Monday as they demanded higher pay, with police lobbing tear gas shells to quell the demonstrations.

Similar protests in the state of Haryana, an automaking hub, last week also led to its government ordering a 35% hike in minimum wages.

The protests come at a time when living costs worldwide have



A police officer stands as people queue to get LPG cylinders, after yesterday's violent protests by factory workers demanding wage hikes amid rising living costs linked to the US-Israeli conflict with Iran, in Noida, yesterday. (Reuters)

risen as the US-Israeli war on Iran has curbed fuel supplies.

Around 40,000 workers were part of the Noida protest, according to the Gautam Buddha Nagar police, which has lodged seven criminal cases related to the demonstrations. More than 300 people have been arrested, a police spokesperson told Reuters.

The wage hike ordered this

week will be applicable retrospectively from April 1, and will increase the pay of unskilled workers in Noida to roughly \$147 per month from the current monthly pay of about \$121, government sources said.

Wages for semi-skilled and skilled workers have similarly been increased, the sources said, adding that different increases have also

been made in other parts of the state.

The government of Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, did not respond to a request for comment from Reuters.

Sheetal Dixit, who works at an automobile company in Noida, said workers had heard about the revised minimum wages but termed them "unfair".

"We are not happy with the increased wages," she told Reuters.

Many manufacturing units in Noida remained closed yesterday as protests persisted in some places, with people marching on the roads and chanting slogans under heavy police deployment, and stones also being pelted at a police vehicle in one instance.

Reuters visuals showed police personnel in anti-riot gear attempting to disperse dozens of protesters on a street.

Other images showed charred and overturned vehicles still on the roads, underscoring the violence and arson that occurred a day earlier.

Boiler blast at Indian power plant claims 9

AFP
Raipur

An explosion at a power plant in central India yesterday killed at least nine people and injured 15 others, officials said.

The blast occurred at a plant operated by Vedanta Limited, a subsidiary of London-listed Vedanta Resources, in Chhattisgarh, state industry minister Lakhan Lal Dewangan told reporters.

"Twenty-four workers were seriously affected when a boiler exploded" at the plant in Sakti district, Dewangan said, with nine killed. Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai said an "impartial investigation" would be conducted.

"Strictest possible action will be taken against all those found responsible," he said in a statement.

Vedanta, controlled by India-born billionaire Anil Agarwal, did not comment immediately about the blast.

Industrial accidents are common in India, often due to poor adherence to safety regulations and weak enforcement.

A fire at a fireworks factory in western India last month killed 17 people.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi described the Chhattisgarh blast as "tragic".

"I extend my condolences to those who have lost their loved ones," Modi said in a social media post.

Ex-Nato chief accuses PM Starmer of inadequately funding defence

Reuters
London

Former Nato chief and grandee of Keir Starmer's Labour Party criticised the British prime minister yesterday for failing to adequately fund defence, leaving the country's national security in peril.

George Robertson, who served in the 1990s as UK defence secretary before leading Nato, told the *Financial Times* there was a gap between Starmer's rhetoric and action on defence, and Starmer was "not willing to make the necessary investment".

Asked about Robertson's comments, Starmer's spokesperson told reporters Downing Street "completely" rejected the characterisation.

"It's vital to make the right decisions. The prime minister is determined to ensure the defence investment plan is fit for the threats that we face," the spokesperson said.

Robertson, who helped draft a Strategic Defence Review commissioned by Starmer when La-



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer listens to Member of the House of Lords and former head of Nato George Robertson during a meeting at 10 Downing Street in London. (AFP/File Photo)

bour returned to power in 2024, planned to say later on Tuesday in a lecture that Britain had become vulnerable to external threats, according to excerpts published by the *FT* and BBC.

In his lecture, to be delivered in Salisbury, southern England, Robertson was expected to call out finance minister Rachel Reeves for devoting "only 40 words" to defence in a budget speech last autumn and not mentioning it at

all in an update last month, the *FT* said.

"Britain's national security and safety is in peril," he was due to say, according to the excerpt. "We are under-prepared. We are under-insured. We are under attack. We are not safe."

Robertson's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Starmer has blamed underinvestment in the military on 14

years of rule by the rival Conservative Party, and has promised the largest sustained rise in defence spending since the Cold War, to reach 3% of national output in the next parliament.

The government has yet to publish a 10-year defence investment plan initially due before the end of last year, aimed at meeting the ambitions set out in the 2024 review co-written by Robertson.

The review called for a shift towards drones, digital warfare and data-driven combat systems reflecting lessons drawn from the war in Ukraine.

Starmer said last week that the war in Iran must be a turning point for Britain, pledging to strengthen the economy and military to cope with a more "volatile and dangerous" world.

But according to the excerpts, Robertson planned to accuse Britain's political leadership of a "corrosive complacency" towards defence and describe decisions made by "non-military experts in the Treasury" as "vandalism".

"We cannot defend Britain with an ever-expanding welfare budget," he was expected to say.

Two arms brokers on trial in UK over Libya, South Sudan deals

Reuters
London

Two arms brokers arranged illegal deals to supply ex-Soviet surface-to-air missile systems to South Sudan and fighter jets to Libya during its civil war, British prosecutors told a London court yesterday.

British national David Greenhalgh, 68, and Greek national Christos Farmakis, 48, are charged with 11 and 12 offences respectively of involvement in the unlicensed supply of arms between 2009 and 2016.

They have pleaded not guilty and their trial began this week at Southwark Crown Court. Farmakis has decided not to attend his trial, which is proceeding in his absence, the jury was told.

Prosecutor Edmund Burge said Greenhalgh and Farmakis had "very close connections to senior figures" in South Sudan, with Farmakis appointed as South Sudan's "honorary consul" to Greece and Cyprus.

The two defendants brokered a deal for a "complete air defence missile system" which was

acquired from Ukraine for nearly \$55mn, between 2009 and 2011, the prosecutor said.

South Sudan was still formally part of Sudan until it achieved independence in 2011, Burge added, meaning the semi-autonomous region was subject to a British arms embargo.

Greenhalgh and Farmakis discussed obtaining a Ugandan end-user certificate as "cover" to obscure the intended destination of the missile system, Burge said.

Burge said Farmakis was arrested in 2016 after using his e-mail address for his job at the government-funded Greater London Enterprise to privately arrange arms deals.

Farmakis' e-mail account forwarded an e-mail to his boss, which led to the authorities discovering documents relating to plans to sell fighter jets and other arms to Libya in the wake of the 2011 Arab Spring, Burge added.

The prosecutor said e-mails and other documents suggested Greenhalgh and Farmakis had arranged to supply weapons to Iran, Iraq and Syria in breach of arms embargoes.

Bangladesh launches 'Farmers' Card' scheme

Reuters
Tangail

Bangladesh launched a "Farmers' Card" scheme yesterday aimed at expanding direct support to millions of farmers and streamlining subsidies, as part of efforts to modernise the agriculture sector.

The scheme focuses on small farmers, including sharecroppers who often lack access to banks and other institutional support, agriculture ministry officials said.

Farmers registered under the programme will also gain access to subsidised fertiliser and seeds, agricultural machinery, low-interest loans, crop insurance and advisory services, among other benefits, cutting out intermediaries.

"If farmers of this country are well-off, if the farmers of this country survive, then the whole of Bangladesh will do well and the people of entire Bangladesh will

live well," Prime Minister Tarique Rahman said at the scheme's official launch in Tangail district, central Bangladesh.

The event drew thousands of farmers and supporters of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party, many wearing traditional straw hats to keep out the sun.

"For the first time I am feeling proud to be a farmer. This initiative will help us to grow," said Julekha Akhter, who has a small piece of land in Tangail that she cultivates.

The scheme will be rolled out in phases, beginning with a pilot covering more than 22,000 farmers in selected areas.

The government plans to expand it nationwide over the next five years, ultimately bringing approximately 27.5mn farmers under the system, Rahman said.

The scheme will also connect farmers to digital information on the weather, market prices and crop management, helping improve productivity and planning.

UK approves German takeover of Telegraph newspaper

AFP
London

The UK government yesterday gave the green light for German media group Axel Springer to buy British newspaper *The Telegraph*, ending a drawn-out pursuit of the 170-year-old title.

The Labour government's Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy said in a statement that she is "not minded to intervene in this merger" over competition and foreign-ownership concerns.

Axel, which owns German newspapers *Bild* and *Welt* as well as the Politico news outlet, last month announced it would pay £575mn (\$661mn) in cash for *The Telegraph's* print and online versions.

That came after the UK government in February launched an investigation into an agreed sale of *The Telegraph* to the owner of the



Copies of *The Daily Telegraph* are displayed on a rack in a supermarket in London. (Reuters/File Photo)

Daily Mail, a rival British right-wing publication, citing competition concerns.

That probe has been made redundant by the government's approval of the German takeover.

"After a long period of uncertainty, we can confirm that we will invest significantly in *The Tele-*

graph's editorial excellence and international growth," Axel Springer chief executive Mathias Dopfner said in a statement yesterday.

"*The Telegraph* will join a global network committed to independent reporting while retaining its distinct editorial voice and British identity,"

An international pursuit of *The*

Telegraph stretches back almost three years.

RedBird IMI, a joint venture between US investment firm RedBird Capital and Abu Dhabi's International Media Investments, had struck a deal for the title in late 2023.

However, the previous UK government triggered a swift resale over freedom-of-speech concerns owing to Abu Dhabi's press censorship record.

RedBird then pursued the takeover under a revised structure, but abruptly dropped its bid in late 2025.

The *Daily Mail* then agreed a £500-million deal with US-Emirati consortium RedBird IMI in November for the purchase.

Amid the takeover saga, the previous UK Conservative government also amended merger laws to bar foreign states from controlling British newspapers.

Australia to spend billions on drones

Australia will boost spending on drones by up to Au\$5bn (\$3.6bn) in response to shifts in warfare seen in the Middle East, Defence Minister Richard Marles said yesterday.

Australia's vast coastline and small population have spurred a focus on developing large autonomous submarines and fighter jets, dubbed the Ghost Shark and Ghost Bat.

The use of cheaper drones mass produced by Iran in the Middle East and Ukraine conflicts has prompted the decision to also boost spending on smaller drones and counter-drone systems, Marles said in an ABC radio interview.

"We look at what's happening in the Middle East right now – you need counter-drone technology as well," he said.

Australia will spend Au\$12bn to Au\$15bn over the next decade on autonomous capabilities, Marles said ahead of an update

to the national defence strategy to be released tomorrow.

"Clearly, autonomous systems now are really central to how contest happens, how war happens," he said.

Australia needed the full spectrum of drone capabilities for its defence because of its geography, Marles said.

"What you get at the smaller end is mass – you know, lots of units – and that's what we are seeing play out in Ukraine," he added.

Wary of China's navy build-up, US ally Australia has reshaped its defence force in recent years to focus on its missile strike capability and deterring an adversary from its northern approaches.

Germany said last month it is considering Boeing's Australian-developed Ghost Bat, designed to fly alongside a fighter jet and return to base, as it modernises its air force. (AFP)

Prince Harry, Meghan arrive in Australia

Reuters
Sydney

Britain's Prince Harry and wife Meghan landed in Australia yesterday for a four-day visit with engagements covering sport, mental health and veterans' affairs. The Duke and Duchess of Sussex began their trip at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne, where they took part in an activity in the hospital's therapeutic garden spaces.

"It was a genuinely meaningful visit for our staff and for the young people receiving care," said Dr Peter Steer, the hospital's CEO.

Harry, wearing a navy suit and white shirt, spoke to children and posed for photographs with patients in the foyer of the hospital, calling one of the handmade signs welcoming the couple "beautiful".

Meghan, who wore a matching Au\$1,250 (\$885) navy dress by



Prince Harry and Meghan, the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, visit the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne, yesterday. (Reuters)

Sydney-based designer Karen Gee, later helped serve food at a women's domestic violence shelter in the city.

The Sussexes stepped down as working members of the British royal family and moved to the US in 2020, citing a desire to be finan-

cially independent and to escape what they characterised as media intrusion into their private lives.

They last visited Australia in 2018 while still working royals, announcing Meghan's first pregnancy hours after arriving in Sydney.

Their latest visit has captured public attention in Australia, where Britain's King Charles is the head of state, though a sizeable minority supports becoming a republic. But there was little sign of the ecstatic reception that greeted them on the 2018 trip. Television networks aired footage that they said showed the couple arriving in Melbourne on a commercial flight from Los Angeles, before being taken from the tarmac in a vehicle convoy.

The couple's travel is being privately funded, though local media reported some policing costs associated with the visit would be paid by Australian taxpayers, sparking a protest petition signed by more than 45,000 people.

The couple will travel to the capital, Canberra, today to meet military veterans, attend a mental health summit in Melbourne tomorrow and round off the joint leg of their trip with sailing and rugby events in Sydney on Friday.



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GULF TIMES

Fallout of wars: Large and lasting economic costs

Wars cause large and persistent economic losses in countries where fighting takes place, with output declining by roughly 7% over five years on average, and economic scars lasting for more than a decade, according to the International Monetary Fund.

In 2024, the latest year for which data is available, more than 35 countries experienced conflict in their territory and about 45% of the world's population lived in countries affected by conflict. "Beyond their devastating human toll, wars impose large and lasting economic costs, and pose difficult macroeconomic trade-offs, especially for those countries where the fighting is taking place," the IMF said.

The Middle East and North Africa region is expected to have a sharply slower growth this year as oil-exporting countries grapple with the fallout from the Iran war, the IMF said on Tuesday. The region's real GDP growth forecast was slashed to 1.1% in the IMF's latest World Economic Outlook, 2.8 percentage points lower than its January projection.

Growth is expected to rebound to 4.8% in 2027. The IMF said, however, that its estimates for 2027 assumed energy production and transportation in the region are normalised over the next few months. It noted that this assumption may need to be revised if the conflict drags on.

Tehran's attacks on its Gulf neighbours, in response to US-Israeli strikes that began in late February, have damaged major energy facilities and disrupted shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, which would normally handle about 20% of global oil and liquefied natural gas flows.

The Middle East and North Africa region is expected to post a sharply slower growth this year as oil-exporting countries grapple with the fallout from the Iran war, the IMF has said

The IMF downgraded global growth projection for the year after the war triggered a major oil shock and included the possibility of a downturn if the conflict drags on and energy infrastructure is severely damaged.

Global gross domestic product is now expected to rise 3.1% this year, compared with 3.3% predicted in January, the Washington-based fund said in its latest World Economic Outlook. That's assuming a relatively short-lived conflict and moderate gain in energy prices this year.

Developing economies are expected to take the biggest hit. Growth in emerging markets was cut to 3.9% this year, from a 4.2% forecast

just a few months ago. The impact will be smaller in developed countries including the US, an oil exporter.

The war sparked by the joint US-Israeli attack on Iran and which spread across the Middle East has cost Arab countries \$186bn, a top UN official has said.

"We estimate that the loss to the Arab region's GDP as a result of one month of fighting will be around 6%... 6% of GDP means the region has lost around \$186bn from its economy in a single month," UN assistant secretary-general Abdallah al-Dardari said earlier.

At the same time, World Bank President Ajay Banga is sounding the alarm about a bigger, looming crisis: a huge gap in jobs for the 1.2bn people who will reach working age in developing countries in the next 10 to 15 years. At current trajectories, those economies will generate only about 400mn jobs, leaving a deficit of 800mn jobs.

The spring meetings of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund are being held under the shadow of the US-Israel war on Iran that threatens to slow global growth and jack up inflation. The extent of the hit to the economy will depend on the durability of the two-week ceasefire announced last week.

The ceasefire has halted most attacks. But it has not ended Iran's effective blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, which has caused the biggest-ever disruption to global energy supplies.

"The Middle East conflict halted growth momentum," IMF Chief Economist Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas said in a blog post. "The shock's ultimate magnitude will depend on the conflict's duration and scale - and how quickly energy production and shipment normalize once hostilities end."

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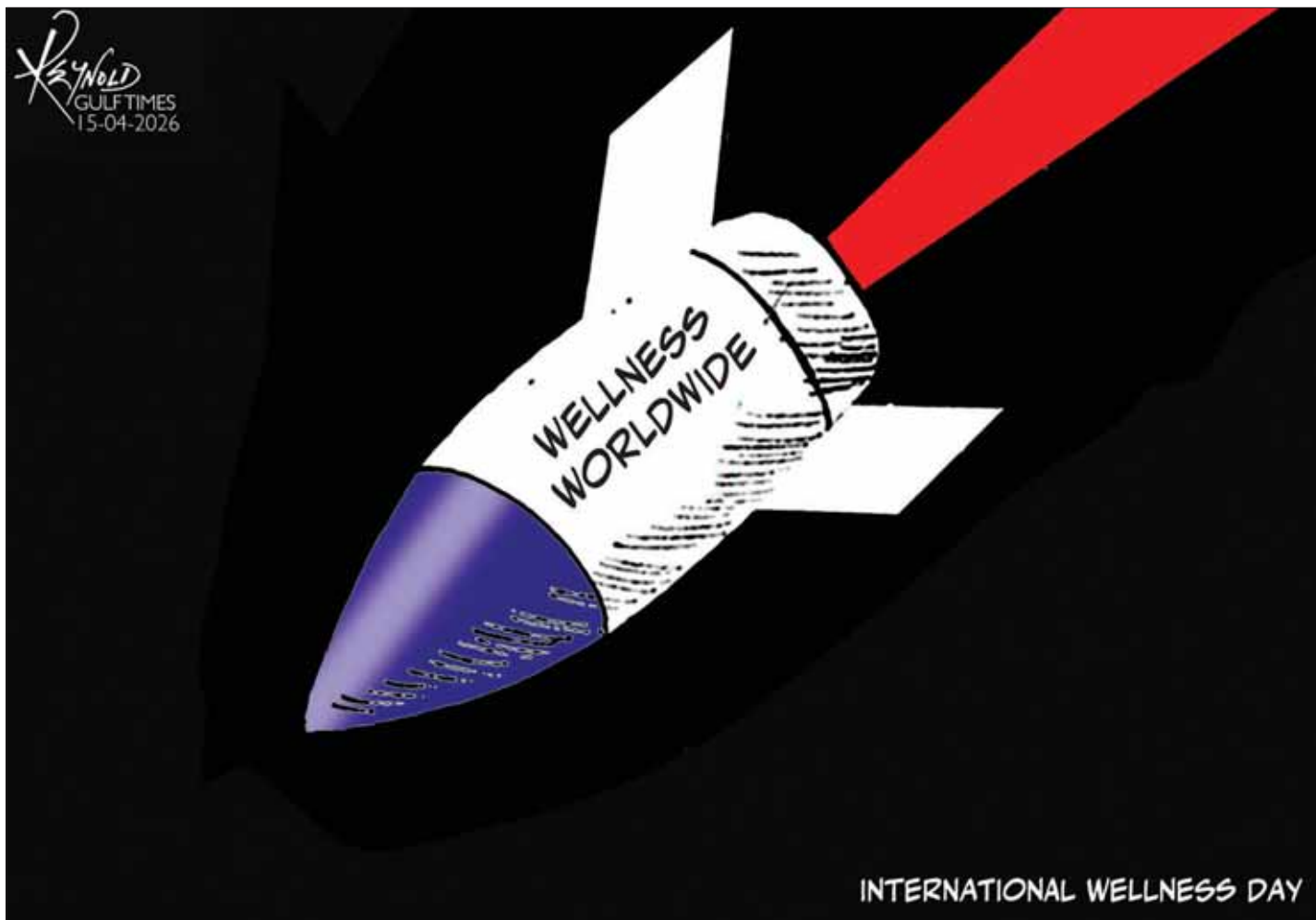
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China model gains appeal in Vietnam

- Vietnam's Lam to meet China's Xi in his first overseas trip as president
- Vietnam considers Chinese-style regulation on data control, stock market, documents show
- Hanoi pursues China-inspired economic policies, is embracing sensitive Chinese tech

By Francesco Guarascio
Hanoi

Vietnam is increasingly edging closer to China's model of governance, tightening state control while embracing Chinese technology and regulation as its most powerful leader in decades heads to Beijing today, according to internal documents, public policy plans and sources.

The two Communist neighbours have swung between conflict and co-operation over centuries. Now, Vietnam is leaning more openly toward Beijing, as China-friendly security figures rise in Hanoi under party chief To Lam, a former public security boss.

Lam will meet China's leader Xi Jinping today on his first overseas trip since becoming state president on April 7, a move that formally unites two of Vietnam's most powerful roles, echoing Xi's own concentration of authority and breaking from Vietnam's traditional emphasis on collective leadership.

"Vietnam-China relations have entered a new stage, marked by higher political trust, more substantive defence and security co-operation, deeper and more practical co-operation across sectors," Lam said in a joint statement with Xi after they last met in April 2025.

This week's visit is expected to yield dozens of co-operation agreements, people briefed on the plans said. While such documents are often non-binding, the relationship is becoming more tangible: China's exports to Vietnam are at record highs, and Chinese investment in manufacturing south of the border is booming. The people spoke on



Chinese President Xi Jinping attends a lay wreath ceremony at the Ho Chi Minh mausoleum during a two day state visit to Hanoi, Vietnam December 13, 2023. (Reuters/File Photo)

condition of anonymity due to the sensitive nature of the topic.

Vietnam is still hedging geopolitically, analysts say, keeping doors open to Washington and others. But at home, it is moving closer to China's governance model - particularly control-driven regulation despite Western misgivings, underscoring how China's influence is deepening as Lam reshapes the state.

Vietnam has "a dual approach of actively learning from the Chinese model while selectively resisting its influence," said Nguyen Khac Giang, a visiting fellow at Singapore's ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute.

Alexander Vuving of the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies in the US, said that closer ties with China without adequate guardrails "will have a negative impact not only on Vietnam's security, prosperity, and autonomy, but also on its relations with the US and the West." Vietnam's foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

TECH AND CONTROL

Technology has emerged as one of the clearest markers of warming ties. Vietnam has dropped earlier concerns about the use of Chinese equipment in its 5G network, while the country's largest internet provider FPT announced investments in an undersea cable to be built by a Chinese vendor that the US considers linked to sanctioned telecom giant Huawei.

A telecom company under Vietnam's public security ministry is in talks with Chinese companies for additional 5G deals. Chinese firms are simultaneously exploring investments in Vietnamese data centres, a strategic asset, according to people familiar with the discussions.

"Chinese interest in Vietnam's data-centre market has increased noticeably over the past 18-24 months," said Mickael Driol, head of investment advisory firm Mekong Partners. He said much of that is driven by manufacturers who moved operations to Vietnam from China.

Hanoi is prioritising state control in data regulation, similar to China. Western tech companies and the US government have repeatedly raised concerns over data protection rules drafted by Vietnam's security ministry that limit cross-border data transfers. Draft documents seen by Reuters show Vietnam plans to establish state-run data-trading exchanges overseen by the public security ministry - mirroring China's centralised data model and expanding the state's ability to deploy information for surveillance and strategic goals. In Western markets, such platforms are typically privately run.

Vietnam is also expanding a national electronic identification system, enabling authorities to identify individuals through AI camera networks that are being rolled out nationwide - another parallel with China's surveillance architecture.

"The police's rising power (in Vietnam) may partly explain a growing interest in Chinese-style social control tactics," said Giang.

MODELLING CHINA'S ECONOMY

Unencumbered by public opinion that has grown less critical of China, the Vietnamese Communist Party is also advancing a more China-style economic model centred on subsidies, public investment and large infrastructure projects, sometimes in direct co-operation with Beijing on sensitive projects including high-speed rail links.

The shift has been reinforced by TikTok's popularity in Vietnam, where positive narratives about China often dominate, and by Hanoi's increasingly muted criticism of Beijing's actions in the disputed South China Sea.

Vietnam remains more open than China to foreign investors and still depends heavily on external capital. But China's share of total investments is rising, and Chinese brands are gaining popularity at home. China's influence is also visible in finance.

Vietnam relies on unconventional monetary policy tools such as lending mandates to banks reminiscent of China's policy, maintains tight foreign ownership caps in key sectors, and is grappling with a property bubble that echoes China's experience.

Now Hanoi is considering deeper intervention in equity markets. Proposed measures include a government-backed stabilisation fund to buy stocks during downturns - an idea explicitly modelled on China. "China created one and succeeded in reassuring investors," said an internal security ministry document reviewed by Reuters. - Reuters



To Lam and his wife Ngo Phuong Ly waving upon their arrival at Beijing International Airport. (AFP)

PM opens Kanaf centre to raise parenting skills

From Page 1

Rashid Mohammed al-Hamda al-Nuaimi, CEO of the Qatar Foundation for Social Work, framed the launch as part of a wider ambition to establish parenting as “a specialised field in its own right,” elevating it from the realm of inherited custom into structured, evidence-based practice aligned with leading global standards.

Executive Director Dr Maryam Ibrahim al-Malki said the centre would serve as “a scientific reference and national platform,” equipping parents with practical tools suited to a world in which children



face accelerating social change and an ever-expanding range of outside influences competing for their attention and values.

The launch comes as Gulf states increasingly look to institutional frameworks to shore up social cohesion amid rapid modernisation.

For Qatar, Kanaf is a clear statement of intent: that investing in how parents parent is, ultimately, investing in the nation itself.

Food stocks untouched as ministry keeps market vigil

From Page 1

While the overwhelming majority of businesses have operated within the law, violations were recorded against 92 commercial establishments. Two were shut down for unjustified price hikes or failure to display prices, with legal measures applied swiftly in all cases.

The minister noted that demand surged sharply in the immediate hours after the crisis broke. Bottled water consumption jumped more than 24-fold and milk sales rose more than fivefold — yet neither development depleted available stocks nor triggered any drawdown of the strategic reserve, a result the minister attributed to the depth of prior preparedness and the efficiency of real-time market management. Local man-

ufacturers, particularly in water bottling and poultry production, have since expanded capacity to further reinforce domestic self-sufficiency.

Qatar currently operates 138 food factories capable of producing over 700 commodities. The minister urged the private sector to seize the current moment as an opportunity to deepen investment in local food manufacturing, prioritising the import of raw materials for domestic processing over reliance on finished product imports.

He closed with a direct appeal to the public: act responsibly, avoid panic buying, and do not be swayed by rumours. The ministry, he stressed, will not hesitate to act against any practice that undermines market stability or infringes on consumer rights.

Finance minister meets officials in New York



HE the Minister of Finance Ali bin Ahmed al-Kuwari held a series of bilateral meetings with a number of officials from global financial institutions and banks, in New York City during his current visit to the United States of America. The separately-held meetings included his discussions with Chairman and Chief Executive Officer and Co-Founder of Blackstone Stephen A Schwarzman, Chief Executive Officer of Brookfield Bruce Flatt, Chief Executive Officer of Apollo Global Management Marc Rowan, and Chief Executive Officer of Janus Henderson Ali Dibadj. During the meetings, they discussed a range of financial and economic topics, alongside developments at both the regional and international levels and the associated challenges, and topics of mutual interest. (QNA)



More than 300 migrants rescued off Crete: Greek officials

Greek authorities have rescued over 300 migrants coming mainly from Bangladesh, Egypt, Yemen and Sudan over the last two days, officials said yesterday. Nearly half of them were rescued on Monday off the island of Crete, the coast guard said, adding that they were travelling on at least three makeshift vessels. Search operations continued yesterday despite strong winds in the area, they said. A coast guard official said the migrants were being held by Cretan police and would be transferred to reception centres on the Greek mainland. Crete has become the main gateway for asylum seekers arriving mainly from Tobruk in eastern Libya, a perilous crossing. At the end of March, 22 people died while adrift in the Mediterranean after leaving from Libya and their bodies were thrown overboard, according to survivors who were rescued off Crete. (AFP)

Qatar urges comprehensive regional solution

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He noted that Iran had crossed red lines prior to the ceasefire, which now presents an opening for “a negotiated and secure path forward.”

The spokesperson highlighted the urgency of reopening the Strait of Hormuz — currently disrupted by the conflict — without preconditions. He described the strait as an international passage that cannot be subjected to the control of any single party.

“Security and freedom of navigation must not be compromised by conflict,” he said, noting that the closure has had global economic repercussions, especially on energy, petrochemicals, fertilisers, and food prices.

While reassuring that no Qatari tankers have been attacked or detained, al-Ansari said maritime traffic remains hindered. “It is still too early to predict

how conditions will evolve,” he cautioned, as the ceasefire holds but remains fragile.

Despite disruptions, al-Ansari affirmed the resilience of Qatar’s economy, citing emergency measures and close monitoring of global supply chains. “We have withstood tougher circumstances,” he said, expressing confidence that Qatar will emerge stronger from this challenge.

He also reiterated Qatar’s condemnation of all forms of aggression across the region, including violations of Lebanon’s sovereignty, and underlined Doha’s continued support for Lebanese unity and dialogue-driven de-escalation.

Concluding, al-Ansari said Qatar will persist in backing peaceful dialogue and mediation as the only lasting instrument for stability. “Conflicts are not resolved by war,” he reiterated, “but through sustained negotiation, mutual respect, and inclusive regional partnership.”

Shura Council attends IPU assembly in Istanbul

Shura Council is participating with a delegation led by HE the Speaker of the Shura Council Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanem in the 152nd General Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the 217th Governing Council meeting in Istanbul, Türkiye, starting today for five days, under the theme ‘Nurturing hope, securing peace and ensuring justice for future generations!’

The session takes place amid complex international circumstances requiring multi-level parliamentary responses. Its agenda covers international peace and security, building a fair and sustainable global economy, the role of parliaments in post-conflict governance, social justice, inclusive development, and the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals, as well as discussions on social inclusion and empowering persons with disabilities.

Within this framework, HE

the Speaker of the Shura Council participated in the Gulf meeting and the Arab parliamentary co-ordination meeting held in Istanbul yesterday. The Gulf meeting discussed strengthening co-ordination and unifying positions among GCC legislative councils regarding items on the IPU agenda, while the Arab co-ordination meeting addressed topics including nominations for the IPU Secretary-General, vacancies in standing and sub-committees, the proposed emergency item, and co-ordination of Arab positions and views on agenda issues. HE Dr Hamda bint Hassan al-Sulaiti, Deputy Speaker of the Shura Council, member of the Executive Committee of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), and Vice-Chair of the IPU Arab Group, presented a briefing during the Arab group meeting reviewing the committee’s work since the 151st General Assembly. (QNA)



Italy shifts away from Israel, US over ME war

AFP
Rome

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni received a sharp rebuke from US President Donald Trump and suspended a defence agreement with Israel yesterday, signalling a shift in her foreign relations.

The far-right prime minister was the only European leader to attend Trump’s inauguration in 2025 and has sought to position herself as a bridge between Europe and his administration.

While ties with Israel were already becoming strained over the Gaza war, the relationship with Washington has been increasingly tense since US-Israeli strikes on Iran set off the Middle East war.

Energy import-dependent Italy has been hit economically and has refused to get involved in the war, siding with European allies.

Trump’s extraordinary criticism on Sunday of Pope Leo XIV’s growing anti-war rhetoric also proved particularly contentious.

After an initial mild statement of support for Pope Leo against Trump’s broadside on Monday, Meloni issued clearer criticism the same day, saying the US leader’s words were “unacceptable”.

Speaking on the sidelines of a fair in northern Italy yesterday, Meloni returned to the subject of

ties with Israel and the US, saying that allies should be frank with each other.

“When we don’t agree, and I often don’t agree, we have to say it” and “act accordingly,” she told reporters.

“In view of the current situation, the government has for example decided to suspend the automatic renewal of the defence agreement with Israel,” Meloni said.

Israel responded saying the suspension of the deal, which involves the exchange of military equipment and technology research, “will not affect Israel’s security”.

“We have no security agreement with Italy. We have a memorandum of understanding from many years ago that has never contained any substantive content,” Israeli foreign ministry spokesman Oren Marmorstein told AFP.

Tensions between the two countries have risen over the past week after the Italian government accused Israeli forces of firing warning shots at a convoy of Italian UN peacekeepers in Lebanon.

Italy summoned Israel’s ambassador in protest over the incident, which damaged at least one vehicle but caused no injuries.

On Monday, Israel summoned Italy’s ambassador following comments by Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani condemning “unacceptable attacks” on Lebanese civilians by Israeli forces.

US, Iran may resume talks despite port blockade

Reuters
Islamabad/Washington/Dubai

Talks to end the Iran war could resume in Pakistan over the next two days, US President Donald Trump said yesterday, after the collapse of weekend negotiations prompted Washington to impose a blockade on Iranian ports. Gulf, Pakistani and Iranian officials also said negotiating teams from the US and Iran could return to Pakistan later this week, though one senior Iranian source said no date had been set. “You should stay there, really, because something could be happening over the next two days, and we’re more inclined to go there,” Trump was quoted as saying in an interview with the New York Post. While the US blockade drew angry rhetoric from Tehran, signs that diplomatic engagement might continue helped calm oil markets, pushing benchmark prices below \$100 yesterday. The highest-level talks between the two adversaries since the 1979 Islamic Revolution ended in Islamabad without a breakthrough, raising doubts over the survival of a two-week ceasefire that still has a week to run.

Since the US and Israel began the war on February 28, Iran effectively shut the Strait of Hormuz to

nearly all vessels except its own, saying passage would be permitted only under Iranian control and subject to a fee. Nearly a fifth of global oil and gas supplies previously flowed through the narrow waterway, making the fallout widespread.

In a countermeasure, the US military said it began blocking shipping traffic in and out of Iran’s ports on Monday. Tehran has threatened to hit naval ships going through the strait and to retaliate against its Gulf neighbours’ ports.

IMF cuts growth outlook

US Central Command said the blockade of Iranian ports involved more than 10,000 US military personnel, more than a dozen warships and dozens of aircraft.

“During the first 24 hours, no ships made it past the US blockade and 6 merchant vessels complied with direction from US forces to turn around to re-enter an Iranian port on the Gulf of Oman,” CENTCOM said in a statement posted on X. Shipping data showed the blockade had made little difference to Strait of Hormuz traffic yesterday, with at least eight ships crossing the waterway.

The latest standoff has further clouded the outlook for global energy security and the supply of



Motorists ride along a road on Islamabad’s Constitution Avenue yesterday. (AFP)

goods that rely on petroleum. Yesterday, the International Monetary Fund cut its growth outlook and said the global economy would teeter on the brink of recession if the conflict worsens and oil stays above \$100 per barrel into 2027. The International Energy Agency slashed its forecasts for global oil supply and demand growth, saying both are now expected to fall from 2025 levels. The US’ Nato allies including Britain and France said they would not be drawn into the conflict by taking part in the blockade, although they have offered to help safeguard the strait by

drawing together a defensive multilateral mission to assist when an agreement is in place. China, the main buyer of Iranian oil, said the US blockade was “dangerous and irresponsible” and would only aggravate tensions.

Proposal for 20-year suspension of nuclear activity

US Vice-President JD Vance, who led Washington’s delegation in Pakistan, has said Trump was adamant that any enriched nuclear material must be removed from Iran and a mechanism be estab-

lished to verify that Iran is not developing nuclear weapons.

A source briefed on the matter confirmed reports that the US had proposed a 20-year suspension of all nuclear activity by Iran “with all sorts of restrictions”.

Two Iranian sources said Iran had rejected the proposal, suggesting a halt of just three to five years.

One source involved in the negotiations in Pakistan said back-channel talks since the weekend had produced good progress in closing the gap on the nuclear issue, bringing the two sides closer to a deal that could be put forward at a new round of talks.

Complicating Pakistan’s mediation efforts, Israel has continued targeting Iran-backed Hezbollah in Lebanon. Israel and the US say that campaign is not covered by the ceasefire, while Iran has insisted it is. Israeli and Lebanese envoys were to meet in Washington yesterday in a rare encounter also expected to be attended by Secretary of State Marco Rubio. Lebanon’s government has sought negotiations with Israel despite objections from Hezbollah.

Israel killed more than 350 people in Lebanon in the war’s worst strikes hours after the Iran ceasefire was announced last week, but later said it was willing to discuss a separate ceasefire with the Leba-

nese government.

Regarding Iran, Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar told reporters in Jerusalem yesterday: “We will never allow Iran to obtain nuclear weapons... The enriched materials must be removed from Iran.”

Ceasefire still holding

With the war unpopular at home and rising energy prices causing political blowback, Trump paused the US-Israeli bombing campaign last week after threatening to destroy Iran’s “whole civilisation” unless it reopened the strait.

A Reuters/Ipsos poll conducted from April 10 to 12 after the ceasefire was announced showed that 35% of Americans approve of US strikes against Iran, down from 37% a week earlier.

The ceasefire has largely held over its first week despite sharp rhetoric from both sides. An Iranian military spokesperson called any US restrictions on international shipping “piracy”, while Trump said that Iran’s navy had been “completely obliterated” and that only a small number of “fast-attack ships” remained.

“Warning: If any of these ships come anywhere close to our BLOCKADE, they will be immediately ELIMINATED,” Trump wrote on social media.



Qatar Reads boosts cross-border reading initiatives

By Joey Aguilar
Doha

Qatar Reads is expanding its cross-border literacy efforts through shared reading programmes, storytelling initiatives and literary exchanges under the Years of Culture platform, its manager Fatema al-Malki said.

She told *Gulf Times* that such an initiative aims to connect young people across countries by fostering engagement through books, ideas and shared cultural experiences.

Al-Malki outlined plans to deepen collaboration between schools, libraries and community spaces internationally, describing these as "natural opportunities" for cultural connection built around shared reading experiences. The initiative also aims to bring together diverse audiences, particularly youth, through programmes that encourage dialogue and exposure to different perspectives.

"There is enormous potential in developing shared reading programmes and children's storytelling initiatives that connect communities across countries," she said, noting that such efforts align with Qatar Reads' core mission of promoting cultural understanding. "Every story is an invitation to see the world through someone else's eyes."

Operating under Qatar National Library, Qatar Reads has emerged as a key player in advancing literacy and cultural exchange within the Years of Culture programme. Through curated literary activities, it has introduced readers to voices and traditions from partner countries while also expanding the global reach of Qatari and Arab literature.

Al-Malki said reading remains one of the most accessible ways to engage with another culture, allowing individuals to encounter different histories, values and lived experiences in a personal and immersive way.



Fatema al-Malki.

"Through stories, poetry and children's literature, readers can connect with cultures beyond their own in a meaningful sense," she said.

Among its notable initiatives is an international reading exchange programme launched last year in Buenos Aires, in collaboration with the city's Ministry of Culture. The project distributed more than 1,000 reading kits to libraries across Argentina, featuring Spanish translations of the classical

Arabic fables *Kalila wa Dimna*.

The centuries-old collection, which originated in ancient India and was later translated into Arabic in the 8th century, was selected for its universal themes and cross-cultural appeal. According to al-Malki, the initiative demonstrates how stories can travel across borders and create connections between communities with different cultural backgrounds.

She added that such programmes illustrate the broader role literacy can play in cultural diplomacy. "Stories help people understand one another beyond the headlines," al-Malki said, highlighting that books can introduce readers to perspectives they may not otherwise encounter.

By framing reading as a form of dialogue, Qatar Reads seeks to create spaces where empathy, curiosity and conversation can flourish.

"When people connect through stories, they begin to see themselves in others," she said, stressing that this can serve as a foundation

for stronger and more enduring relationships between communities and countries.

At the same time, Qatar Reads is adapting to the changing ways audiences consume content, particularly through digital media. Al-Malki said the initiative has expanded its presence on digital platforms to reach wider and more diverse audiences, especially younger readers.

One of its key innovations is the development of accessible audiovisual versions of children's books in partnership with the Audio Education Complex. Produced annually, these adaptations combine narration, visuals and sign language, functioning as inclusive audiobooks that cater to different learning needs and preferences.

"Digital media has transformed how people engage with stories, and we see this as an opportunity to make reading more accessible," al-Malki said. Such formats allow children to experience literature in multiple ways, she added.

Qatar Reads is also preparing to take part in the Qatar Canada and Mexico 2026 Year of Culture, which is expected to further expand literary collaboration and cultural exchange. The programme will highlight interactive and accessible initiatives designed to introduce global audiences to the region's literary heritage.

Al-Malki said audiences can expect renewed engagement with works such as *Kalila wa Dimna*, alongside illustrated interpretations by Qatari artist Wadha al-Athba. These efforts aim to present traditional narratives in ways that resonate with contemporary readers while preserving their cultural significance.

As Qatar Reads continues to evolve, al-Malki underlined the enduring relevance of storytelling in an increasingly interconnected world. She said reading serves as a powerful tool for building bridges, encouraging dialogue, fostering empathy and strengthening cultural ties across borders.

Difi commends establishment of centre to support parents in Qatar

Doha International Family Institute (Difi), a member of Qatar Foundation, has emphasised that the launch of the Parenting Centre "Kanaf", held under the patronage of the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, HE Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani, marks a practical translation of evidence into institutional action.

The centre, opened in the presence of several ministers, representatives of government entities, civil society organisations, and partners, reflects a broader journey that began with identifying research gaps in parental support, generating policy recommendations, and advancing advocacy efforts aimed at establishing a specialised national platform to equip parents with evidence-based skills and knowledge.

This message was highlighted during a panel discussion titled "Enhancing Institutional Integration in Supporting Parenting and Building Conscious Families" on the sidelines of the centre's launch and moderated by Dr Khalid al-Naama, director of Advocacy and Outreach at Difi. The discussion brought together Dr Sharifa Noaman al-Emadi, executive director of Difi; Iman al-Muhammadadi from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education; Maliha al-Shamali from



the Ministry of Public Health and Hamad Medical Corporation; and Sheikh Yahya Butti al-Nuaimi from the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs.

The discussion focused on the strategic importance of institutional co-ordination in strengthening parenting support systems and enabling families to navigate the changing social and digital realities shaping children's development today.

Dr al-Emadi highlighted findings from Difi's 2019 report 'Parenting Programmes in the Arab region', noting that the most impactful programmes were those that provided parents with practical tools for communication, behaviour management, and building relationships with their children.

"At Difi, we view research as the starting point for meaningful change. We identify gaps, undertake policy-oriented research, which allows us to then propose

evidence-based recommendations that can be implemented. In this sense, Kanaf is a natural outcome of years of evidence generation and policy engagement," said Dr al-Emadi.

She also noted that Difi's research on adolescent well-being has shown that structured, practical interventions can make a measurable difference in everyday life. Findings from the study revealed that the percentage of families spending more than 30 hours per week with their families increased from 29% to 45% demonstrating the tangible impact of organised, evidence-based parenting support on family interaction.

Dr al-Emadi added that the strategic value of Kanaf lies not only in the service it offers, but in its role as a national platform that bridges scientific knowledge with institutional practice, helping to shape an integrated Qatari model for parental support across the different stages of family life.

Integration of health facilities licensing with Building Permit System to enhance efficiency

The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) has announced electronic integration of licensing procedures for health facility construction with the Ministry of Municipality's Building Permit System.

Hanan al-Shamlan, acting director, Health Facilities Department, MoPH, affirmed that to enhance efficiency and integration among the relevant authorities, investors can now submit an application for the approval of engineering drawings for healthcare facilities electronically through the Building Permit System. Previously, investors were required to submit such an application in person by visiting the Health Facilities Department.

The acting director explained that obtaining a licence for a healthcare facility involves three stages: facility registration, preliminary evaluation, and final evaluation.

Al-Shamlan noted that once registration is complete and the preliminary approval letter for the activity has been obtained, investors can submit applications for the approval of engineering drawings for healthcare



facilities via the Building Permit System. Authorised engineers review the drawings, provide comments, and approve them via the system, thereby contributing to faster procedures and facilitating co-ordination among all relevant authorities within a single integrated platform.

She added: "Following the completion of the preliminary evaluation stage, the process moves on to the final evaluation stage, leading to the issuance of the healthcare facility licence."

In this context, MoPH in co-operation with the Ministry of Municipality, organised a specialised training workshop on the Electronic Building Permit System for healthcare facilities, targeting staff of the Health Facilities Department. The workshop included practical demonstra-

tions of the system, an overview of how to access it, and guidance on using the various authorisations in line with each employee's responsibilities. It also clarified the specific timeframes for each application type, ensuring that procedures are completed through a fully integrated electronic system without the need for paper transactions.

The Building Permit System includes all transactions and procedures related to the construction sector and serves as the primary gateway for issuing building permits in Qatar. It brings together the relevant authorities whose approvals are required and provides a unified platform for consultants and property owners to complete building permit transactions electronically.

UDST hosts Intellectual Wellness Forum

QNA
Doha

The University of Doha for Science and Technology (UDST) hosted the Intellectual Wellness and Research Excellence Forum (IWRE) as part of its strategic commitment to strengthening an integrated research culture and embedding holistic wellness across its academic environment.

The forum serves as a key platform to showcase ongoing and completed research, enhance interdisciplinary collaboration, and highlight the role of research in advancing the University's institutional priorities.

The forum aligns with UDST's Wellness Strategy, which adopts a comprehensive approach linking academic performance with overall well-being, and emphasises intellectual wellness as a core pillar.

This includes encouraging engagement in creative and mentally stimulating activities, promoting curiosity and lifelong learning, and enabling knowledge exchange across the academic community.



In this context, research at UDST is viewed not only as an academic outcome, but as a powerful mechanism for supporting intellectual wellness, strengthening critical thinking, and enabling interdisciplinary dialogue, contributing to a dynamic and innovation-driven learning environment.

Among the research presented, a study examined the impact of an integrated wellness intervention designed for first-year students, aimed at enhancing health literacy, increasing wellness awareness, and promoting healthier behaviours during the transition into university life.

The intervention combined

structured wellness education within a first-year academic course with individualised coaching based on an eight-dimensional wellness framework, covering physical, emotional, intellectual, social, and financial well-being.

The study demonstrated measurable improvements among participating students, including increased health literacy levels and significant gains across multiple domains of health-promoting behaviours such as nutrition, stress management, and health responsibility.

Students also reported a stronger understanding of wellness concepts, greater awareness of the link between health and

academic performance, and improved ability to adopt more balanced daily habits.

The findings further highlighted the impact of personalised coaching in achieving stronger outcomes, underscoring the importance of tailored support within a comprehensive wellness framework.

Commenting on the initiative, Dr Salem Al-Naemi, President of UDST said: "The IWRE Forum reflects UDST's commitment to integrating research within its institutional wellness framework, enhancing the quality of the academic experience and supporting student success. Through this holistic approach, we continue to advance an academic environment that promotes innovation, encourages knowledge exchange, and delivers meaningful impact within the University and beyond."

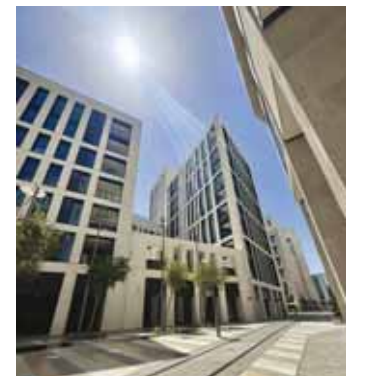
The forum provides an interactive platform for faculty to present their research, exchange ideas, and explore collaborative opportunities across disciplines, reinforcing UDST's position as a leading hub for applied research and innovation.

Doha Design District launches Public Art Open Call for creative placemaking

Doha Design District has launched a Public Art Open Call inviting creatives to propose innovative artworks for public spaces.

The initiative aims to integrate art into the urban environment, strengthen the district's identity, and enhance visitor experience. It focuses on placemaking, cultural expression (including Qatari identity), public engagement, and collaboration, while emphasising sustainable, long-lasting artworks. Director of Doha Design District Dana Kazic said: "Public art plays a transformative role in shaping how people experience and connect with a place. Through this open call, we invite creatives to contribute to Doha Design District's evolving identity, while reinforcing our commitment to supporting artistic innovation and positioning Doha as a vibrant, globally connected cultural hub. We invite artists to be part of this initiative and contribute to our mission to transform our downtown into a dynamic artistic neighbourhood, while showcasing their creativity to the wider community."

Doha Design District is accepting submissions until May 14 for its Public Art Open Call.



The competition is open to a wide range of participants, including designers, artists, architects, collectives, and community groups, with students and emerging professionals eligible if supported by a mentor. Proposals can include sculptures, installations, murals, and community-focused projects, and must be submitted digitally (in English or Arabic) via the official website with a concept description, visuals, and applicant details. Multiple entries are allowed. Submissions will be judged on originality, cultural relevance, public engagement, sustainability, and feasibility. (QNA)

Temperatures set to rise gradually from tomorrow: Met department

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

Qatar Meteorology Department (QMD) has forecast that there will be a gradual rise in temperature in the coming days and the maximum temperature could be in the range of 40°C from tomorrow (Thursday).

"The country witnesses a

gradual rise in temperatures from Thursday until the beginning of the next week where the maximum temperature may reach early forties across various regions," the department said in a social media post.

In its monthly forecast for April 10 to May 7, the department said that the temperatures can rise to normal and above normal levels towards the last week of April.

"The daytime maximum temperatures are expected to be below normal in the first two weeks from April 10-23 and above normal to near normal in the following two weeks from April 24 to May 7. Weekly mean maximum temperatures are likely to range between 32-42°C with generally higher temperatures over the southern parts," said the weather department.

The department also noted that the night time minimum temperatures are expected to be below normal to near normal in the first two weeks and above normal in the following two weeks. The weekly mean minimum temperatures are expected to range between 22-28°C.

During the months of March and April, Qatar had received several spells of rain and the

weather has been predominantly cool. Though there is the forecast of rise in the temperature, the weatherman has also forecast chances of rainfall in the third and fourth weeks of the period of April 10 to May 7. While there are no chances of Shamal winds in the country during the period, relative humidity levels are expected to be above normal. The weekly mean relative humidity is

expected to be in the range of 40-60%.

With the winter behind, the temperatures are set to rise in the coming months with the temperatures hovering above 40°C. The weather department has also noted that for day-to-day weather forecasts, one should refer to the forecast section of the QMD website as the forecasts may vary depending on the fluctuations in the weather conditions.