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BUSINESS | Page 1

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Our Say



Faisal Abdulhameed al-Mudahka, Editor-in-Chief of Gulf Times

Gulf security is a red line, and its stability a collective responsibility

The Arabian Gulf today pursues a balanced diplomatic policy grounded in calls for negotiation and support for political processes aimed at ending the conflict, thereby reinforcing the principle of good neighbourliness and enhancing regional stability, including backing the ongoing mediation between the United States and Iran by Pakistan. At the same time, the Arabian Gulf categorically rejects all forms of wanton aggression, and makes clear that any attempt to seize control of the Strait of Hormuz or use it as a pressure card is entirely unacceptable. The Gulf states cannot and will not be held hostage under any circumstances. Imposing restrictions or levies on freedom of navigation through the strait constitutes a flagrant violation of international law: the Strait of Hormuz is a natural waterway governed by the law of the sea, which guarantees freedom of passage, and it cannot be treated as a channel subject to sovereign control or political extortion. Any attempt to impose a new reality or alter its legal status will be met with firm rejection. It is a vital artery for global energy security and international economic stability. It bears recalling that the other shore of the strait is not the preserve of a single party. The Sultanate of Oman overlooks it through the Musandam Governorate, and UAE islands are also present there. This is a reality that reflects the complex geographical and legal character of the strait, and confirms the impossibility of monopolising or controlling this critical waterway. Iran today, finds itself in a state of growing international isolation as a result of its escalation and its attacks on the Gulf states, which have cost it much of the regional sympathy it once enjoyed. We affirm that no attack can be legally justified under the pretext of "self-defence". Targeting the Gulf states constitutes aggression, plain and simple. In this context, it is worth noting that the continuation of tension serves multiple parties whether directly or indirectly at the expense of regional stability. Iran's policies in the region, including support for armed groups, the undermining of good-neighbourliness, and the stoking of conflicts, run counter to the principle of collective security. Security must be either universal or it will not exist at all. The Gulf states are not a party to the American-Israeli-Iranian war, and they will not fall into that trap. **To Page 11**

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Amir underpins energy stability in Trump call

US president hails Qatar's support

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani received a phone call yesterday from US President Donald Trump. The call discussed the latest regional and international developments amid the accelerating escalation in the region, particularly the implications of recent tensions on international maritime security and the stability of global energy markets and supply chains. During the call, His Highness the Amir reaffirmed Qatar's role as a trusted partner in supporting the stability of global energy markets and its continued commitment to fulfilling its obligations to international partners. His Highness also underlined the importance of intensifying international efforts to prevent further escalation in the region and adopting diplomatic means as the primary path to addressing crises in a way that preserves regional and global security. The US president expressed appreciation for Qatar's role in regional mediation and its ongoing efforts to support stability, stating that the US is keen to coordinate with Qatar on various issues, particularly energy security and global market stability. **(QNA)**

EU stands firmly with GCC, says EC president

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

European Council (EC) President Antonio Costa (pictured) has declared the European Union (EU)'s full solidarity with the Gulf Co-operation Council states in the wake of what he described as Iran's unjustified attacks on the region, calling for a durable ceasefire, the restoration of freedom of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz, and a comprehensive diplomatic settlement addressing Iran's destabilising behaviour. Speaking at a press conference in Doha – his third stop on a Gulf tour that has also taken him to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates – Costa said his visit came at a critical moment, with a fragile ceasefire in place and the region still reeling from Iranian strikes that he said constituted a clear violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Gulf states. "This is unacceptable," he stated. The EC president said the primary purpose of his tour was to listen to Gulf leaders, understand



their reading of the situation, and deliver an unambiguous message: that Europe is a reliable partner the region can count on both now and in the future. He reaffirmed the bloc's commitment to the region's security and stability, and said several EU member states had already deployed military assets to support Gulf defences, alongside firm diplomatic and political backing. Costa identified two overriding priorities for the EU in the current crisis. The first is achieving a stable and lasting ceasefire that creates conditions for sustainable peace. The second is reopening the Strait of Hormuz to international shipping. **To Page 11**

Trump: War 'close to over'

Pakistan army chief in Iran, PM in Saudi to push peace deal

Reuters
Washington

US President Donald Trump said the war he launched with Israel on Iran was close to over, as the army chief of mediator Pakistan arrived in Tehran to try to prevent a renewal of the conflict. The diplomatic push came as US and Iranian officials weighed a return to Pakistan for further talks after negotiations there ended on Sunday without a breakthrough. The White House also paid rich tributes to the mediation by Pakistan, calling the country's efforts in this regard as "incredible". Pakistan's Army Chief Field Marshal Asim Munir also began extensive talks in Tehran yester-

day. A senior Iranian source told Reuters that Munir, who had mediated the last round of talks, was heading to Iran "to narrow gaps" between the two sides. "I think you're going to be watching an amazing two days ahead," Trump told ABC News reporter Jonathan Karl, according to a post by the reporter on X, adding he did not think it would be necessary to extend the ceasefire. "I think it's close to over, yeah. I mean I view it as very close to over," Trump said in an interview on Fox Business Network. "We'll see what happens. I think they want to make a deal very badly." Officials from Pakistan, Iran and Gulf states also said both sides could return to Islamabad in coming days. The talks last weekend broke down without an agreement to end the war. Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also flew down to Jeddah yesterday to meet the Saudi leadership as the peace process surged. **To Page 11**

Amir, Costa review regional security



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani met at his office in the Amiri Diwan yesterday with President of the European Council Antonio Costa and his accompanying delegation. They discussed regional and international updates, particularly the developments in the Middle East, foremost among them the situation in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon, in light of the ongoing escalation and its humanitarian and security repercussions. The two sides also discussed the impact of this escalation on regional security, especially on the security of international maritime navigation and the

stability of global energy markets. They emphasised the importance of maintaining the smooth flow of energy supplies and enhancing security and stability in vital maritime routes. The meeting also considered ways to strengthen the strategic partnership between Qatar and the European Union, affirming Doha's role as a reliable partner in supporting global energy security, including the supply of liquefied natural gas to international markets. Additionally, the two sides explored prospects for expanding bilateral co-operation, particularly in the energy, trade, and investment sectors, in a way that promotes mutual interests. **(QNA)**

Qatar warns of massive global economic impact from war

Al-Kuwari says Doha resilient enough to withstand it

QNA/Reuters
Washington

HE the Minister of Finance Ali bin Ahmed al-Kuwari has warned that the full economic impact of the Iran war is "not far away" and could trigger severe global shortages of energy and food within months, even as he insisted Qatar's own finances remain resilient enough to weather the crisis for at least a year. Speaking at a session titled "Governors Talk: Qatar – Turning Shock into Strategy: Fiscal Policy and Long-Term Growth in Qatar", on the sidelines of the Spring Meetings of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank Group in Washington, al-Kuwari said the recent spike in global prices was merely the "tip of the iceberg".



"A full-fledged impact is coming and it is not far away," he told the IMF discussion. "I think in one month, two months' time you are going to see really a huge economic impact globally." He cautioned that the crisis would soon move beyond price pressures into outright supply constraints. "Very soon you are going to have a problem of energy

availability not just prices. So even if you can afford to pay you are not going to be able to source, which is a major, major problem." Al-Kuwari also flagged the risk of a global food crisis, warning that a sharp reduction in fertiliser production and supply from the region could cause farming seasons to be missed worldwide. Presenting Qatar's assessment of the regional conflict's impact on its own economy, the minister said the country was entering this phase from a position of strength, underpinned by robust macroeconomic management, strong sovereign reserves, and an ongoing reform programme under the Third National Development Strategy. He acknowledged that recent regional developments had affected short-term economic projections, necessitating a comprehensive government response. **To Page 11**

Shehbaz Sharif due in Doha



GT Report

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is due in Doha today as part of a three-nation tour, which also includes Saudi Arabia and Türkiye following Islamabad's concerted efforts to mediate between the US and Iran to bring the war to a close. Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the visits to Saudi Arabia and Qatar would take place in a bilateral context, adding that the prime minister "will meet the leadership of Saudi Arabia and Qatar to discuss ongoing bilateral co-operation as well as regional peace and security". **Page 5**

Cabinet gives green signal for labour, volunteer laws

By A Staff Reporter
Doha

The Cabinet praised the outcomes of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani's talks with British Prime Minister Keir Starmer during his working visit to Qatar, describing the meeting as a reflection of the two countries' deep ties and strategic partnership, with shared commitment to regional and global security, supply chain stability, and the free flow of energy through the Strait of Hormuz. The Cabinet's regular weekly meeting, chaired by HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassem al-Thani at the Amiri Diwan yesterday, also approved key legislation on labour reform and

volunteer work, and reviewed a series of policy reports. HE the Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Ibrahim bin Ali al-Mohammadi briefed the press on the meeting's outcomes. On the legislative front, the Cabinet took note of the Shura Council's approval of a draft law amending several provisions of the Labour Law issued under Law No 14 of 2004. The amendments, prepared by the Ministry of Labour, are aimed at modernising the labour market framework in line with evolving economic and social conditions, with particular emphasis on streamlining the resolution of labour disputes and reinforcing balance and stability in the workplace. The changes align with the goals of the Third National Development Strategy 2024–2030. **To Page 11**

Al-Khulaifi meets German state secretary



HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi met yesterday with State Secretary of the Federal Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany Dr Geza Andreas von Geyr. During the meeting, the two sides discussed the latest developments in the region, particularly those related to the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Iran, and efforts aimed at de-escalating in a way that contributes to enhancing security and stability in the region. State secretary of the German Foreign Office emphasised the important role played by the State of Qatar in supporting regional and international stability through effective diplomatic efforts, commending the strategic partnership between the Federal Republic of Germany and the State of Qatar in various sectors. (QNA)

PM meets president of European Council



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani met yesterday with President of the European Council Antonio Costa, who is visiting the country. During the meeting, they 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 efforts aimed at de-escalation to contribute to enhancing security and stability in the region. The meeting also explored co-operation relations between the State of Qatar and the European Union (EU) as well as ways to support and strengthen them, especially in the fields of energy, trade, and investment. It highlighted Qatar's role in supporting global energy security, including the supply of liquefied natural gas to global markets. During the meeting, the president of the European Council affirmed the EU's solidarity with the State of Qatar in light of the developments taking place in the region, and its commitment to strengthening joint economic interests and supporting the stability of the global economy. (QNA)

Qatar partakes in first GCC-Asia criminal investigation meeting



The State of Qatar participated in the inaugural GCC-Asia meeting of Directors-General of Criminal Investigation and Criminal Search, held via video conference.

The Qatari delegation was headed by Director-General of Criminal Investigation Major General Mohammed Ibrahim al-Jufairi. The meeting addressed the exchange of criminal data, the enhancement of joint policing operations, and initiatives for training and capacity building.

Discussions also focused on coordinating efforts to tackle emerging security challenges and threats. This participation comes within the framework of enhancing police capabilities and expanding areas of GCC-Asian partnership. (QNA)

QCAA shuts down, strikes off several non-compliant travel, air cargo agencies

As part of its ongoing efforts to enhance oversight and regulate the air transport sector, Qatar Civil Aviation Authority (QCAA), represented by Air Transport Department, conducted an inspection campaign targeting travel and air cargo agencies to ensure compliance with applicable laws, approved regulations, and proper operational practices.

The campaign identified several violations, which were addressed in accordance with relevant legislation through appropriate legal and administrative measures. These included corrective actions or penalties, depending on the nature of each violation, as well as the closure and striking off several non-compliant travel agencies from official records for failure to comply with applicable regulations.

QCAA affirmed that all measures were taken in line with approved legal frameworks, ensuring the protection



of the rights of all parties, and enhancing the efficiency and transparency of the sector.

The Authority also calls on all travel and air cargo agencies to fully adhere to the approved regulations and instructions, and to take the initiative to immediately rectify their status. It emphasises that inspection campaigns will continue on regular and unannounced basis, contributing to improving service quality and establishing a well-organised work environment that enhances beneficiaries' trust in the air transport sector. (QNA)

Speaker of Shura Council affirms Qatar's unwavering support for Palestinian cause

QNA
Istanbul

HE the Speaker of the Shura Council Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanem affirmed the State of Qatar's commitment to continue its unwavering support for the Palestinian cause and strengthening its political and humanitarian efforts to support the Palestinian people, in accordance with the directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani. HE al-Ghanem stressed the importance of activating joint parliamentary action and unifying positions in order to contribute to defending legitimate rights, in light of the rapid developments taking place in the Palestinian territories.

This came during al-Ghanem's speech in the Meeting of the Group of Parliaments Supporting Palestine, which was held within the Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, scheduled to kick off on Wednesday evening in Istanbul, Türkiye.

At the beginning of his speech, al-Ghanem noted the importance



HE al-Ghanem highlighted the dangerous developments in the Palestinian territories, pointing out the closure of Al-Aqsa Mosque for a long period of time and the prevention of worshippers from entering it.

of the meeting, considering that it reflects a growing awareness of the role of joint parliamentary action, indicating that the forming of this group represents a significant step that requires a genuine assessment of its course of action since its establishment, and the extent of its ability to unify positions and influence international forums.

HE the Speaker of Shura Council highlighted the dangerous developments in the Palestinian territories, pointing out the closure of

Al-Aqsa Mosque for a long period of time and the prevention of worshippers from entering it, in a clear violation of freedom of worship. He also pointed out the Knesset's approval of the law to execute Palestinian detainees, which constitutes a clear violation of international law and the Geneva Conventions, and the widespread international rejection that this provoked.

He also addressed the issue of a ceasefire agreement in Gaza, stressing that the situation re-

mains questionable given the continued failure to commit to halting military operations or allowing the entry of humanitarian aid, which raises questions about the feasibility of moving to its subsequent stages without fulfilling previous commitments.

HE the Speaker called for moving from the framework of statements to coordinated and effective action, by activating parliamentary tools and promoting presence in international forums, in order to ensure the defence of the rights of the Palestinian people in accordance with the rules of international law, stressing – in this context, that the State of Qatar continues its political and humanitarian efforts in support of the Palestinian cause.

HE al-Ghanem concluded his speech by indicating that the Shura Council continues to contribute to this path through its parliamentary participation and positions, expressing his hope that this meeting will contribute to enhancing the Group's effectiveness by developing a political and media action plan that keeps pace with the scale of the challenges and reflects the shared responsibility.

Qatar urges unity, rejects claims over Iran tensions at IPU meetings

The state of Qatar has reiterated its commitment to diplomacy and regional stability during high-level parliamentary meetings held in Istanbul, as part of the 152nd General Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

A delegation from Qatar's Shura Council, led by HE the Speaker Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanem, took part in coordination meetings of the Islamic and Asian parliamentary groups ahead of the formal opening of the assembly later on Wednesday.

Speaking during the sessions, HE al-Ghanem said that the countries of the Gulf Co-operation Council, particularly the State of Qatar, have consistently pursued a policy of good neighbourliness and played constructive roles in mediation and de-escalation efforts.

He added that these efforts have been particularly evident in facilitating dialogue related to



tensions between Iran and Western nations, noting that "the Iranian leadership is well aware" of such roles.

Al-Ghanem stressed that Gulf states have repeatedly affirmed that their territories would not be used as a launch point for military action against Iran. He called for

evidence to support claims to the contrary, particularly allegations that missiles had been launched from Gulf territories, saying the absence of proof undermines such accusations.

He also highlighted the importance of maintaining unified positions within parliamentary

groupings, warning that amendments to a widely supported emergency proposal submitted by Qatar in coordination with Arab states and other geopolitical blocs could risk undermining consensus.

The proposal, he said, is aimed at addressing current regional challenges. He expressed hope that it would receive broad backing, while cautioning that failure to adopt it could have negative consequences for the region.

The meetings also focused on enhancing coordination among member states and reviewing organisational matters related to the assembly's agenda.

On the sidelines, al-Ghanem held talks with Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Arab Republic of Egypt, Hisham Badawi, during which both sides discussed ways to strengthen parliamentary co-operation and addressed issues of mutual interest. (QNA)

MoT conducts inspection campaigns on passenger transportation companies

The Ministry of Transport (MoT) has concluded its inspection campaigns on limousine companies and companies providing passenger transportation services via electronic applications.

In its press release, the MoT said that the Q1 of 2026 campaigns were carried out in collaboration with relevant Ministry of Interior departments.

The inspection campaigns detected 32 violations of the Law No 8 of 2019 Regulating Road Transport and its Implementing Regulations issued by the Minister of Transport's Decision No 13 of 2024.

The new campaigns covered all areas across Qatar, with

particular focus on business, service, and vital areas; something that reflects an expanding crackdown coverage and greater attention to crowded and high-business locations.

With such campaigns, the MoT continues its law enforcement effort on the violating companies. It also urges all companies to follow the laws in place and obtain the necessary licenses to be able to do the business legally and avoid accountability.

The MoT pays great attention to ensuring that passenger transportation companies follow all applicable laws and meet all safety requirements, while providing the highest quality of service. (QNA)



The new campaigns covered all areas across Qatar, with particular focus on business, service, and vital areas

Health ministry announces action against 3 unlicensed medical practitioners

The Ministry of Public Health has announced the apprehension of three individuals found practising medical activities without a licence, including nursing, allied health professions, and laboratory technology, at a private health centre.

In a statement yesterday, the ministry confirmed that all necessary legal measures are being taken against the violators and the non-compliant facility, in accordance with the laws and regulations governing the practice of healthcare professions in the state.

This action is part of the ministry's ongoing oversight efforts and inspection visits, carried out by the Department of Healthcare Professions, to ensure that

healthcare practitioners comply with the laws and regulations governing the country's health sector.

The Ministry of Public Health urged members of the community to seek healthcare services only from licensed health facilities and practitioners holding valid licences issued by the ministry, in order to safeguard their wellbeing and ensure access to safe and reliable healthcare services.

The ministry further noted that the eligibility of any healthcare practitioner working in the State can be verified through the electronic service "Find a Registered Healthcare Practitioner" available on the ministry's official website. (QNA)

Sidra Medicine performs Qatar's first paediatric sacral neuromodulation

Sidra Medicine, has performed a sacral neuromodulation implantation procedure on an eight-year-old child with spina bifida, a minimally invasive solution for children suffering from severe bladder dysfunction was done in collaboration with Dr Tariq al-Shaiji, a consultant urologist from Kuwait.

Dr Mansour Ali, chair of paediatric surgery at Sidra Medicine said: "This marks the first time the neuromodulation procedure has been carried out in Qatar on a child. I am proud of our joint efforts with Dr al-Shaiji, in bringing this expertise to our patients."

The introduction of sacral neuromodulation is a new treatment option now available in Qatar, for children over the age of seven, who do not respond to first-line therapies. The procedure has shown success in helping children control bladder and bowel activity.

In April 2024, a young patient with a neurogenic bladder and related complications caused by spina bifida, was referred to Sidra Medicine's Multidisciplinary spina bifida clinic.

Prior to arriving at Sidra Medicine, she had undergone several medical procedures at other hospitals to control the condition. She was experiencing recurrent urinary tract infections and persistent incontinence. To prevent infections and maintain bladder function, her symptoms were being managed with a permanent catheter.

However, while the permanent catheter was placed to protect the child's kidneys, she kept experiencing persistent urinary tract infections. It was also limiting her ability to lead a normal life, including playing.

The young patient's initial medical treatment programme at Sidra Medicine included a detethering of



the spina by neurosurgery, followed by an endoscopic Botox treatment for her refractory neurogenic bladder. However, neither of these procedures were able to fully address the child's bladder dysfunction.

Dr Santiago Vallasciani, division chief of Urology at Sidra Medicine said: "After having reviewed all possible options and seeing that

previous procedures did not address her bladder dysfunction properly, we decided upon performing a sacral neuromodulation. The minimally invasive treatment was the most suitable option and a longer-term solution."

The procedure involves implanting a small battery-operated device, called a neurostimulator,

that stimulates the sacral nerves – the nerves responsible for bladder control. Acting similarly to a pacemaker, the neurostimulator regulates nerve signals and can be programmed to optimise bladder function while minimising disruption to the patient's daily life. The device is controlled by an external remote control.

While sacral neuromodulation has previously been performed on a small number of adult patients in Qatar, it had not previously been carried out in younger children in the country.

As there weren't any paediatric experts based in Qatar who specialised in the procedure, the spina bifida clinic at Sidra Medicine collaborated with Dr al-Shaiji. Dr al-Shaiji has extensive experience performing sacral neuromodulations and came to Qatar to support the introduction of the procedure at Sidra Medicine.

Dr al-Shaiji said: "As a second-line therapy, sacral neuromodulation will provide a non-invasive option for children with bladder dysfunction. We are confident that our joint efforts will change the course of paediatric urological services available in the country."

The sacral neuromodulation that was performed on the patient involved two steps. The first temporary step was to place the neurostimulator outside of the patient's body for nearly two months. This was done to test any improvements to her urinary function and her body's acceptance of the implant.

The procedure was successfully performed in February 2026 at Sidra Medicine. Involving a team of anaesthesiologists, general surgeons, urologists and neurosurgeons, the minimally invasive procedure and set-up took less than two hours.

Environment in Qatar safe, normal: minister

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

The environmental situation in Qatar is stable and there are constant efforts to monitor the situation, especially since the start of the Iranian war crisis, noted HE the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Dr Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki al-Subaie. He stressed that as all environmental indicators are assuring that the situation is normal, there are no spotted phenomena that may cause any worries.



HE Dr Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki al-Subaie

Speaking to Qatar TV last night he sent a strong message of assurance to the public that the environmental situation, including the quality of air and water, is perfectly normal according to the latest information and data collected through the sophisticated local environment monitoring systems. He also stressed that the ministry deals with such information with full transparency and make the instant air quality reports available through an updated, interactive Air Quality Platform on its official website with clear and easily accessible coloured-indicators.

He noted that operational environmental monitoring systems record all the related environmental indicators and send instant and immediate data and reports to the ministry operation rooms, where the information is analysed and documented to take the necessary decision in case of any occurrence in co-operation with the relevant entities.

The ministry maintains several monitoring systems, in particular for air quality, radiation levels, and oil slicks or spills, and water qual-

ity. These work around the clock employing the most sophisticated and advanced equipment in the field and send data instantly. There are 48 air quality stations across various areas in the country and the local waters, and 20 air quality stations by the roadsides. These are constantly updated and enhanced and there are more expansion to come. Besides, the ministry has been investing in the human cadre and improve their skills in the radiation field through the scholarships programmes abroad in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and other relevant department to have a qualified generation of Qatari professionals in the field.

Regarding the risks of any radiation, HE Dr al-Subaie stressed that the ministry has an independent system to monitor the levels of radiation and it cover various areas of the country and the system gives very accurate data. Before, the crisis started, the ministry had conducted a comprehensive survey on the levels of

radiations in the air and waters of the state and the levels were normal. Accordingly, all the information that comes now from these monitoring stations is compared to such information, which indicates that the situation is normal.

Further, the ministry has early warning systems that can spot any potential sources of radiation or pollution that could cross the boundaries between countries, in addition to active cooperation with all the related entities in the GCC countries and the Atomic Energy Organisation and other regional organizations. These all send early warnings and instant reports in case of any risk or abnormal radiation levels thanks to the effective information exchange co-operation.

He explained that the ministry has active co-ordination and co-operation with the Civil Defence Council in case any of reports about nuclear reactors' mishap or malfunctioning in the region, where the necessary procedures are explored and taken immediately. Further, there is a simulation scenario for such mishaps or accidents, which anticipates their repercussions within the next 48 hours, where the direction and speed of the wind is calculated and the effective measures are taken to deal with this in cooperation with the various concerned entities.

Eventually, HE Dr al-Subaie urged the public to avoid listening to rumours and unverified information, as these are thriving these days. He added that the ministry is keen to update the public on any related issues with full transparency and its official platforms are always updated and easily accessible for all.



Qatar holds talks on Sudan crisis at international conference in Berlin

HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz al-Khulaifi has held a series of high-level meetings on the sidelines of an international conference on Sudan in Berlin. HE Dr al-Khulaifi met separately with senior officials including Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Waleed bin Abdulkarim al-Khereiji; Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Shakhboot bin Nahyan bin Mubarak al-Nahyan; State Secretary of the Federal Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development

of the Federal Republic of Germany, Niels Annen; and Head of the Peace and Human Rights Division of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of the Swiss Confederation, Tim Enderlin. The meetings took place during the third international conference on Sudan, where officials reviewed the latest developments in the crisis and discussed regional and international efforts to support a comprehensive political solution. HE Dr al-Khulaifi reiterated Qatar's full support for the unity, sovereignty and stability of Sudan, as well as its solidarity with the Sudanese people. (QNA)

QIIB names winners of Ramadan special financing campaign

By A Staff Reporter
Doha

QIIB has named the winners of its special financing campaign launched during Ramadan, which offered customers a unique opportunity to win an amount equivalent to the full value of their financing. Mahmoud Mohammed al-Mulla and Mohammed Suffer al-Shahrani were selected as the winners at the draw, which was conducted at QIIB's headquarters in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, along with a number of the bank's officials. The campaign reflects QIIB's ongoing commitment to introducing innovative propositions that enhance the overall customer experience and

deliver added value. "The campaign witnessed strong engagement, reflecting our success in designing offers that resonate with our customers' needs and expectations. By combining competitive profit rates with compelling incentives – most notably the opportunity to recover the full value of the financing – we have further reinforced our commitment to rewarding our customers through innovative and meaningful propositions," said Talal al-Jaidah, Head of Banking Products at QIIB. QIIB continues to enhance its financing campaigns and offerings in line with the evolving banking landscape, strengthening its position as a leading financial institution that places customers at the heart of its priorities, according to him. He encouraged customers to take advantage of the bank's

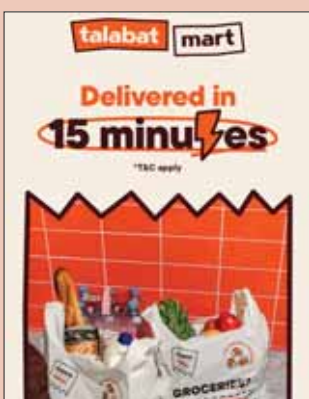


Talal al-Jaidah, Head of Banking Products at QIIB.

comprehensive suite of financing solutions, affirming that QIIB will continue to introduce high-quality initiatives that create greater opportunities for customers to achieve their financial aspirations while benefiting from genuinely competitive advantages.

talabat mart launches 15-minute delivery across key areas in Qatar

talabat, has expanded its quick commerce offering with talabat mart, now providing 15 minutes delivery across selected areas in Qatar. Designed to meet the growing demand for speed and reliability, talabat mart enables customers to order a wide range of items, from everyday grocery essentials and fresh products to last minute top ups, delivered seamlessly in minutes. The service is now available across Doha, Lusail, Al Khor, and Al Rayyan, bringing faster and more convenient delivery to customers. This expansion reflects talabat's commitment to a more holistic, convenience driven experience that fits effortlessly into customer's daily lives. "We are continuously evolving how we serve our customers, ensuring our offering integrates seamlessly into their daily routines" said Ali Amjad, general manager, talabat mart Qatar "With the expansion of talabat mart and our 15-minute delivery promise, we are setting a new benchmark for convenience in Qatar, enabling faster access to a broader range of products. Whether it's a quick snack, a weekly shop, or something you need at the last minute, our focus is on delivering a smooth, reliable experience everytime."



Asean Committee in Doha set to launch more activities

The Asean Committee in Doha (ACD) recently held its 74th meeting, chaired by the ambassador of Vietnam, Nguyen Huy Hiep. Vietnam is the current chair of the Asean's diplomatic engagement in Qatar.

The meeting, held in Doha, brought together Heads of Missions of Asean member states to discuss and adopt the ACD's Calendar of Activities for 2026, outlining key priorities and initiatives to guide the committee's work throughout the year.

In his opening remarks, ambassador Nguyen welcomed participants and expressed appreciation for their continued cooperation and flexibility, noting that the meeting took place amid evolving regional circumstances.

He also commended the Royal Thai embassy in Doha for its suc-



cessful chairmanship in 2025, highlighting its contribution to strengthening the Asean unity and enhancing the bloc's visibility in Qatar through a wide range of meaningful initiatives.

As Vietnam assumes the ACD chairmanship for 2026, ambassador Nguyen reaffirmed the country's commitment to building on these achievements and advancing a more cohesive, proactive,

and forward-looking Asean community in Doha. He emphasised that the 2026 Calendar of Activities will focus on strengthening co-ordination among Asean missions while expanding engagement with the Qatari partners, including comprehensive initiatives that highlight Asean's shared values, cultural diversity, and commitment to sustainable development.

Marli New York opens exclusive pop-up boutique at Place Vendôme

Marli New York has announced the opening of its exclusive pop-up boutique at Place Vendôme Mall, until May 16. Located in one of Doha's leading luxury destinations, the pop-up invites guests to discover Marli's latest creations and signature collections – Cleo, Life, and Empire. Architectural forms, pyramid motifs, rotating rings, and diamond-set details highlight the brand's modern design language, where New York inspiration meets contemporary elegance.

Through this experience, Marli New York brings its vision of modern fine jewellery to Doha, offering visitors a refined setting to experience the brand's craftsmanship and distinctive aesthetic.





Israeli attacks prevents Lebanese from burying dead in ancestral lands

• Lebanese families forced to bury loved ones in Beirut
• Strikes make it too dangerous to return to ancestral lands
• Over 2,160 killed and 1.2mn displaced in Lebanon, Lebanese authorities say
• Israeli military says strikes target Hezbollah

By Nazih Osseiran and Jihed Abidellaoui, Reuters
Beirut

Brothers Ali and Wael Sabbagh stood facing the remains of the building that contained their family home for more than 50 years.

The site was pounded into rubble by Israeli strikes last week in an attack that killed their mother, brother, and the family's helper.

Their grief has been compounded by their inability to properly bury their mother and brother a plight shared by other families from south Lebanon. Unable to head to their ancestral lands to honor their dead, they are forced to bury them temporarily in Beirut until it becomes safe enough to allow their remains to be moved to their final resting place.

"We come from the south of Lebanon, from Nabatieh, and that is being bombarded on a daily basis," Wael said. "We want them to be buried in the family cemetery, but unfortunately we're unable to do that."

Israel has vowed to establish a buffer zone in southern Lebanon and maintain control over territory up to about 30 km (20 miles) north of Israel's border.

Nabatieh, a major city in the south, has been mostly reduced to rubble. The brothers said they cannot risk the journey south, nor



Wael Sabbagh, whose mother Afaf Sidaoui and brother Hassan, were killed in an Israeli strike on an apartment building on April 8, stands at the strike site in Tallet El Khayat in Beirut, Lebanon, on Thursday. (Reuters)

can they send someone in their place for fear of them being killed in the strikes.

"Nobody should have to go through this. And unfortunately, my brother, sister, and I are not the only ones going through this," Wael said. "Hundreds, if not thousands, of families...are mourning in the same way I am, not understanding what happened." The Israeli attacks on Beirut last week were some of the most violent strikes on the Lebanese capital in decades. Across the country, more than 350 people were killed, said Lebanese authorities. More than 2,160 people have been killed in Lebanon by Israeli attacks since the war between Hezbollah and Israel erupted last month. Hez-

bollah had lobbed rockets at Israel, prompting Israel to retaliate and launch an all-out war on Lebanon. More than 1.2mn people have been displaced in Lebanon since, said Lebanese authorities.

The Israeli military has said its operations in Lebanon target Hezbollah. Ali and Wael's mother's body was found in her home. It took two days for the family to track down their brother, whom they were able to identify by his arm tattoo. The family made arrangements to repatriate the body of the house helper to Ethiopia.

The brothers spoke to Reuters a day after Lebanese and Israeli officials met in Washington in a rare encounter between representatives of governments that

have technically been in a state of war since Israel was established in 1948.

"We're always going to be under the foot of the Israelis," Wael said. The brothers said they will try to seek legal action against the people behind the killing of their family members.

Ali lamented the cycle of death, destruction and resurgence that has marked the lives of the Lebanese for most of their country's existence. Already, behind the Sabbaghs' bombed-out home, construction workers were busy working on a new building. "Come back in a few years, there's a new building, new kids, new mothers, new brothers," Ali said. "I will come. I will remember. Nobody else will."

Three paramedics killed in south Lebanon, Israel says 200 Hezbollah targets hit

AFP
Beirut

Lebanese authorities said Israeli strikes on the country's south killed at least three paramedics on Wednesday, as the Israeli army announced it had attacked 200 Hezbollah targets over 24 hours.

Iran-backed armed group Hezbollah claimed attacks on northern Israel and invading Israeli troops, a day after Lebanese and Israeli officials agreed to hold direct negotiations.

Israel has not targeted the Lebanese capital since a series of attacks across the country on April 8 that killed more than 350 people, but has kept up deadly strikes on southern Lebanon as troops push a ground invasion.

"I have ordered that all of the area of south Lebanon up to the Litani (River) line be turned into a Hezbollah terrorist kill zone," Israeli army chief of staff Eyal Zamir said Wednesday during a visit to frontline troops.

Lebanon's health ministry said Israel targeted paramedics working in the southern town of Mayfadun "three consecutive times", killing at least three of them and injuring six others, while one paramedic remains missing.

The ministry said three paramedic teams were attacked, one after another, while trying to rescue people wounded in an initial Israeli strike.

It decried the "flagrant crime, which reflects the Israeli enemy's determination to prevent paramedics from performing their life-saving work by any means".

Since the start of the war between Israel and Hezbollah on March 2, Israel has killed 91 healthcare workers in Lebanon, the ministry said.

The violence has killed more than 2,100 people overall in Lebanon, according to government figures.

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency (NNA) reported separate Israeli strikes Wednesday on two vehicles, both on the

coastal highway around 20 kilometres (12 miles) south of Beirut and outside Hezbollah's traditional strongholds.

An AFP photographer saw a burned-out van with firefighters working to extinguish the blaze.

Rescue workers were recovering human remains from the wreckage of the vehicle and its surroundings, and the army had established a security perimeter, causing a massive traffic jam on this major thoroughfare, the photographer added.

NNA also reported several other strikes across southern Lebanon.

The Lebanese foreign ministry announced Wednesday that it had asked its representative to the UN "to submit an urgent complaint to the Security Council and the Secretary-General" over the April 8 strike wave.

A diplomatic source told AFP last week that there was European and Arab pressure on Israel to refrain from striking Beirut.

The Israeli military, meanwhile, had detected "approximately 30 launches" by Hezbollah towards Israel since the early hours of Wednesday, a spokesman told AFP.

Hezbollah said it launched rockets at northern Israel.

Hezbollah lawmaker Hassan Fadlallah on Wednesday said the group's fighters "are preventing enemy soldiers from seizing control" of the key southern town of Bint Jbeil, five kilometres north of Israel.

The Israeli army had said on Tuesday that 10 soldiers were wounded in the town, which it says it encircled.

Wednesday's attacks come a day after Lebanon and Israel's ambassadors to the United States held their first direct talks in decades in Washington and agreed to hold further direct negotiations. The Lebanese envoy called for a ceasefire, but no truce was announced and an Israeli government spokesperson said Wednesday there was "no ceasefire discussion" with Hezbollah.

Hezbollah has strongly rejected the talks.

Syria begins loading Iraqi oil shipments for re-export

AFP
Baniyas

Syria began loading its first tanker carrying Iraqi oil on Wednesday at the Baniyas port refinery, according to state media and an AFP correspondent, after Iraq was largely unable to export during the Middle East war.

With maritime traffic through the Strait of Hormuz disrupted, Iraq's exports came to a halt and oil storage tanks began filling up

rapidly, forcing Iraqi authorities to largely suspend production.

At the beginning of April, Iraq announced it had started transporting oil by truck through Syria in preparation for re-export by boat.

"The loading of the first oil tanker is underway in Syria today, under the agreement reached with the Iraqi side to transport Iraqi oil to the Baniyas refinery and then to the oil terminal for shipment by sea," Syrian Petroleum Company deputy CEO Ahmed Qubbaji told reporters.

"The quantity that will be load-

ed onto the tanker is estimated at around 500,000 tons" and the loading operation will take at least three days, he said.

According to Qubbaji, the agreement allows Syria to take "the oil we need for power plants in order to generate electricity, while the surplus is exported". An AFP correspondent saw dozens of trucks with Iraqi license plates heading towards the Baniyas refinery and the storage tanks surrounding it. The Iraqi oil ministry said in early April that it had begun exporting oil by truck

through neighbouring Syria.

A founding member of the OPEC oil cartel, Iraq is hugely dependent on its oil exports, accounting for some 90% of its budget revenues. Before the start of the Middle East war on February 28, most of its output — roughly 3.5mn barrels per day in normal times — had been exported via the Gulf.

Last month, Iraq announced it had resumed part of its exports, up to 250,000 barrels per day, through the Kurdistan region's oil pipeline that runs to Turkey's Ceyhan port.



The Greek-flagged crude oil tanker "Asahi Princess" is made ready at the Syrian Baniyas port refinery on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea on Wednesday. (AFP)



Qatar Red Crescent – Medical Affairs Division

Tenders Announcement: -

Sr. #	Tender No.	Description	Temporary Tender Bond	Documents Fees (Non-Refundable)	Closing Date
1	QRC/WHC/07-2026	Complete rectification works for the roof and water gutter system of Building No (2) at Mesiamer Health Center	6,000 Q.R	500 Q.R	07/05/2026

The documents can be collected from Medical Affairs Division, Ain Khalid Area, Sunday to Thursday from 09:00 am to 02:00 pm till the closing date or by sending email along with the requested documents below.

Required Documents:

- Authorization letter to receive tender documents + ID copy of the person will be receiving the documents.
- Company's Commercial registration copy with the business activity clearly specified therein.
- Bank deposit voucher with the value of documents not refunded & account details:
 - Account Name: Qatar Red Crescent.
 - Bank: Al Rayan.
 - Account Number: 0011199970200
 - IBAN Number: QA83MAFR000000000011199970200

For more information: please call: (50044554), or
Email whc.tenders@qrcs.org.qa

Gaza aid flotilla sets sail from Barcelona

A flotilla of some 40 boats set sail for Gaza from Barcelona on Wednesday in a fresh bid to break an Israeli blockade and deliver aid to the devastated territory, organisers said.

The Global Sumud Flotilla had initially been set to depart from the Mediterranean port on Sunday but the mission was postponed due to adverse weather conditions. The ships, mostly sailboats, set sail just after 11:30 am (0930 GMT), organisers said in a statement.

Some 20 boats which will join the maritime convoy left the French port of Marseille on April 4 and more ships are set to depart from Syracuse in Sicily on April 24.

A week-long stopover is planned in southern Italy for "non-violence training". Sumud, which means "resilience" in Arabic, is due to rally hundreds of pro-Palestinian activists from dozens of countries.

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

The crew members were arrested and expelled by Israel.

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



Qatar Shell GTL Limited

INVITATION TO TENDER

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

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

General Instructions:

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

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



African Union Commission Chairperson Mahamoud Ali Youssouf sits next to France's Foreign Affairs Minister Jean-Noel Barrot (C). (AFP)

Pak PM in Saudi amid hopes of next round of US-Iran talks

AFP
Jeddah/Tehran

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif arrived in Saudi Arabia on Wednesday at the start of a four-day tour before a possible second round of US-Iran peace talks, his office said in a statement.

Sharif will also visit Qatar and Turkiye on his trip, which comes after Washington and Tehran held their highest-level talks in decades in Islamabad last weekend.

The Pakistani leader will discuss the "regional situation" with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the Saudi de facto ruler, his office said.

The visits to Saudi Arabia and Qatar will be conducted "in the bilateral context", while Sharif will participate in the Antalya Diplomacy Forum while in Turkiye, Pakistan's foreign ministry said earlier.

Sharif will also hold bilateral meetings with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and other leaders on the sidelines of the Antalya forum, it said.

The Islamabad talks marked a step forward in efforts to end the war that began when the United States and Israel attacked Iran on February 28.

Iran targeted US allies in the Gulf — including Saudi Arabia and Qatar — in retaliation and blocked energy exports from the region, sending oil prices soaring.

The talks concluded without an agreement to end the conflict, but US President Donald Trump said on Tuesday that negotiations could resume this week in the Pakistani capital.

A fragile ceasefire due to expire next week remains in place, despite the United States ordering a naval blockade of Iran.

Sharif will also visit Qatar and Turkiye on his trip, which comes after Washington and Tehran held their highest-level talks in decades in Islamabad last weekend

Sharif is being accompanied by Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar — one of the mediators during the US-Iran talks — and other senior officials on his visits, his office said.

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia share close ties, and Islamabad's finance ministry announced on Wednesday that Riyadh would provide Pakistan with \$3 billion to help bolster its foreign reserves.

That support came days after Pakistan said it was returning billions in loans to Riyadh's ally-turned-rival the United Arab Emirates.

The finance ministry said an existing \$5 billion Saudi deposit would also be extended for an unspecified period.

Separately, a Pakistani delegation led by army chief Asim Munir arrived in Iran, where it was welcomed by Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi.

Iranian state TV said earlier that the delegation would bring a new message from Washington and was due to discuss a second round of talks.

Iran had confirmed on Wednesday that the sides had kept talking via Pakistan after a first round of talks in the Pakistani capital fell flat over the weekend.

"Since Sunday, when the Iranian delegation returned to Tehran, several messages have been exchanged through Pakistan," foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei said in a weekly press briefing.

"Today, we are very likely to receive a Pakistani delegation as a continuation of the discussions in Islamabad," he added.



Deputy Governor of Makkah region, Prince Saud bin Mishaal bin Abdulaziz receives Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif upon his arrival at Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. (Reuters)



Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (R) welcoming Pakistan's Army Chief Asim Munir who is leading a Pakistani delegation upon his arrival at the airport in Tehran. (AFP)

Sudan confronts devastation as donors gather in Berlin

AFP
Khartoum/Berlin

Three years into Sudan's war that has killed tens of thousands, displaced millions and spawned numerous war crimes allegations, Germany said Wednesday it hoped donors would pledge more than \$1 billion towards humanitarian efforts.

Speaking ahead of a meeting of international donors in Berlin, German Foreign Minister Johann Wadepuhl said: "We want to achieve more than at the last conference in London, that was a billion dollars."

"It seems to be working," he told the Deutschlandfunk broadcaster, adding: "There are more pledges coming in now, we are working on this."

At the start of the meeting, African Union Commission chairman Mahamoud Ali Youssouf appealed for more media attention for Sudan's war and "disastrous humanitarian catastrophe".

As well as rallying donors, the conference aims to revive faltering peace talks, although the two sides fighting the war, the Sudanese army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, have been excluded.

The vast majority of Sudanese people have been plunged into poverty by the conflict, with

11 million uprooted from their homes and nearly twice as many facing hunger.

"People are exhausted," said Amgad Ahmed, 42, who has lived in Omdurman, Khartoum's twin city, throughout the conflict.

"Three years of war have worn people down. We have lost work, savings and any sense of stability," he told AFP.

The Berlin meeting brings together governments, aid agencies and civil society groups and follows similar conferences hosted by London and Paris over the past two years.

The war between Sudan's army and the RSF has killed tens of thousands of people.

Nearly 700 civilians have been killed in drone strikes since January alone, according to the United Nations.

A semblance of normality, however, has taken root in the capital since the army retook control of Khartoum last year with reopening of markets, traffic returning to otherwise empty streets and senior secondary exams were held at schools. According to the UN, around 1.7 million people have returned to Khartoum.

In terms of international action on the humanitarian front, Wadepuhl said it was "regrettable" that the United States was "not as active as in previous years" in terms of providing aid.

Iran offers proposal allowing ships to safely exit Oman side of Hormuz

Iran could consider allowing ships to sail freely through the Oman side of the Strait of Hormuz without risk of attack as part of proposals it has offered in negotiations with the US if a deal is clinched to prevent renewed conflict, a source briefed by Tehran said. The war has resulted in the largest-ever disruption of global oil and gas supplies due to Iran's interruption of traffic through the strait, which handles about 20% of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas flows.

The source adamant on maintaining anonymity said Iran could be willing to let ships use the other side of the narrow strait in Omani waters without any hindrance. The source did not say whether Iran would also agree to clear any mines it may have placed in that stretch of water or if all ships — even those linked to Israel — would be allowed to pass freely. It added that the proposal hinged on whether the US was prepared to meet Tehran's demands, a condition that was central to a potential breakthrough with the strait. (Reuters)

Hormuz shipping muted as US blockade takes hold

AFP
Paris

A trickle of ships crossed the Strait of Hormuz Tuesday and Wednesday as a US blockade appeared to further curb traffic in the trade route already paralysed by Iranian forces, marine tracking data showed.

The crucial waterway normally sees about a fifth of global crude oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) pass through it, but traffic has been almost halted since the US and Israeli strikes on Iran sparked the war on February 28.

Here are the latest developments in the strait, using maritime data from ship tracking firm Kpler unless stated otherwise:

US blockade enforced

The US military said the blockade of vessels either departing or destined for Iranian ports had been fully implemented during the first 48 hours.

"No vessels have made it past US forces. Additionally, 9 vessels have complied with direction from US forces to turn around and return toward an Iranian port or coastal area," regional command CENTCOM said on X.

It posted photos and audio of its warships and operations in the area, saying more than 10,000 personnel were deployed for the blockade "against vessels of all



Cargo ships in the Gulf, near the Strait of Hormuz, as seen from northern Ras al-Khaimah in United Arab Emirates. (Reuters/File Photo)

nations entering or departing Iranian ports and coastal areas".

Ships turn around

Sanctioned Chinese tanker Rich Starry, laden with methanol from Iran, crossed the Strait on Tuesday but U-turned and was close to Iran's Qeshm island on Wednesday evening.

The Iranian-flagged container ship Golbon, sanctioned by the US, made it through the strait overnight but ground to a halt as it approached Pakistan and was last detected close to the Iranian port of Chabahar.

The Kashan, another Iranian-flagged container ship, appeared

to have made it out of the Gulf of Oman on its way to India, but made an abrupt U-turn at around 1300 GMT and headed back towards the strait.

Tankers enter Gulf

Petrochemical tankers G Summer, Alicia and Agios Fanourios I, all sanctioned by the US for transporting Iranian products, passed westwards through the strait towards the Gulf using the so-called "toll" route set up by Iran, although all listed their destination as Iraq.

Bulk carrier Christianna and sanctioned tanker Elpis both passed eastwards through the strait away from the Gulf, having

left Iranian ports, but later appeared to be stopped close to the UAE.

The only vessel destined for an Iranian port that has made it westwards through the strait is the Rosalina, which is laden with corn, according to Kpler.

The US has said that humanitarian shipments would be exempt from the blockade, according to news reports.

Another vessel, Seachampion, left the strait in the opposite direction having delivered soy beans to Iran, and was heading to Oman.

Massive slowdown
Just 388 commodity carriers

have passed through the Strait of Hormuz between March 1 and April 15, 255 of them oil and gas tankers, and most were heading east away from the Gulf, Kpler data showed.

Only 16 commodity vessels have made the crossing since the US blockade came into force on Monday.

Vessels stuck

Around 670 commodity vessels sent signals from west of the strait on Tuesday, having apparently been stuck there since the end of February, according to data from maritime companies collated by Bloomberg.

Of those, 332 were oil or gas tankers.

More than 55 very large crude carriers are stuck in the Gulf — including nine owned by Japanese companies and several owned by companies from China, Greece and South Korea, according to Bloomberg data and other maritime companies.

Dozens of vessels targeted

No new attacks on ships have been reported since the start of a ceasefire in the US-Israeli war with Iran last week.

Some 30 commercial ships, including 13 tankers, have been attacked or reported incidents in the region since March 1, according to the IMO, the UK Maritime Trade Operations Centre and Vanguard Tech.

Hundreds rally ahead of sentencing of S. African firebrand Malema

Hundreds of red-clad supporters of radical left-wing opposition leader Julius Malema gathered in a South African city Wednesday ahead of his sentencing for firing an assault rifle at a rally eight years ago. The case against the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) party leader was laid by the small far-right group AfriForum, which has brought its long-standing complaints against Malema to the attention of US President Donald Trump. Police were out in force in the eastern city of KuGumpo, formerly called East London, as EFF supporters marched to a court ahead of closing arguments and sentencing expected Thursday. The state is seeking the maximum 15-year jail term for Malema, who was found guilty in October of violating firearm laws by shooting a gun in the air at an EFF celebration near the city in 2018.

The EFF — a small but vocal party — says the case is an attempt to silence its outspoken leader, who is known for fiery speeches.

Malema has long been criticised by AfriForum, notably for his use at rallies of an anti-apartheid chant, "Kill the Boer" — a word for the country's white Afrikaaner population — which the far-right group says is hate speech and incites anti-white violence. Trump showed clips of Malema chanting the slogan at talks at the White House with President Cyril Ramaphosa in May last year, where the US leader repeated unfounded claims of an orchestrated campaign of violence against white farmers in South Africa. (AFP)

Finding new trade routes



An aerial photograph shows a destroyed statue of the late Syrian president Hafez al-Assad, as a long line of Iraqi diesel-laden tanker trucks line up along the Tartus-Baniyas highway waiting to unload their cargo at the Baniyas port refinery on the Mediterranean Sea, on Wednesday. Iraq has begun exporting crude using tanker trucks through Syria, its oil ministry said, as an official said oil revenue last month dropped more than 70% compared to February. More than a month into the Middle East war that has wrought havoc on energy markets, Iraq has been particularly impacted as oil exports account for some 90% of its budget revenues. Until Iranian attacks and threats all but shut the Strait of Hormuz in revenge for US-Israeli strikes, Iraq exported the majority of its oil through the strategic waterway. (AFP)

Condolences

The Management & Staff of
FAMILY COMPUTERS
express their heartfelt condolences to
Libin Raj
on the sad demise of his beloved Mother



LEELA RAJAN

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



Tax cut briefing



House Majority Leader Steve Scalise (R-LA) speaks alongside House Republican leadership during a news conference on the steps of the US Capitol in Washington, DC, yesterday. US Speaker of the House Mike Johnson (R-LA) held the press conference to discuss Working Families Tax Cuts on Tax Day. (AFP)

Trump threatens to fire Powell if he doesn't quit Fed board

Reuters
Washington

- Powell's term as Fed chief ends on May 15; his seat on board extends to 2028
- Criminal probe into Powell complicates Warsh's confirmation as next Fed chief

President Donald Trump yesterday threatened to fire Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell from his separate seat on the US central bank's Board of Governors if Powell does not vacate that post as well when his term as Fed chief ends on May 15, intensifying a complicated standoff that has upended the Fed's usually smooth transition of power.

Trump administration threats against Powell, including an ongoing criminal investigation, could delay Senate confirmation of Kevin Warsh as Trump's nominee to succeed Powell as Fed chief, but the president in a Fox Business interview doubled down on the probe as a way to prove Powell's "incompetence" and said if he doesn't leave altogether, "then I'll have to fire him."

"You want Jay Powell out of the way?" the president was asked by Fox Business host Maria Bartiromo. "If he's not leaving on time - I've held back firing him, I've wanted to fire him, but I hate to be controversial, you know. I want to be uncontroverial, but he will be fired," Trump responded.

He gave no indication that US Attorney for the District of Columbia Jeanine Pirro would back down from investigating a Fed building project the administration has criticised for cost overruns. Trump's language underscored the stakes, and the potential complications the administration faces if Powell doesn't leave the seven-member Fed board. With greater control of seats on the board, Warsh would have a freer hand in setting monetary policy and making other changes at the central bank that the administration might seek. Trump has appointed only three of the current members, and one of them, Fed Governor Stephen Miran, is in a seat whose term has already expired and, as it stands, would have to be vacated for



This combination of photos shows US Federal Reserve Board Chairman Jerome Powell and US President Donald Trump. (AFP)

Warsh to join.

Three of the Fed's seven governors were appointed by former President Joe Biden; Powell was promoted to the top central bank job by Trump, but has proved himself independent of the president's pressure and threats; and even Trump appointees like Fed Governor Christopher Waller are considered unlikely to support radical change or even abide by Trump's advice on interest rates.

As a consequence, administration efforts to clear room on the board, such as through a move to fire Fed Governor Lisa Cook, a case that is pending in the US Supreme Court, have become all the more urgent in the discussion of the Fed's standing as an independent central bank able to set rates free of political influence.

The status of the Pirro investigation, involving whether Powell made misstatements to Congress about the project at the Fed's headquarters in Washington, DC, is unclear. Pirro was rebuffed by a federal judge who said grand jury

subpoenas were not warranted, but has not yet followed through on a promised appeal. Investigators from her office made an unannounced visit to the building site on Tuesday, where they were told to ask for an appointment.

Both Trump and Pirro have said the building investigation needs to be pursued regardless of how it affects Warsh's confirmation process. Senator Thom Tillis, a Republican member of the Senate Banking Committee, has said he regards the probe as a frivolous assault on the Fed's independence and will block Warsh's confirmation until it is dismissed.

Warsh, who Trump has said he trusts to deliver interest rate cuts that Powell and other Fed officials feel would be unwise, given that inflation is running above the central bank's 2% target, has a hearing before the committee on April 21.

Trump has been angry with Powell since shortly after appointing him to the Fed chief position during his first term in the White House.

Ministers cite economic pain, demand ceasefire

Reuters
Washington

Finance ministers from almost a dozen countries led by Britain called on the United States, Israel and Iran to implement their ceasefire in full yesterday and said the conflict would weigh on the global economy and markets even if it was resolved soon.

A joint statement, signed by ministers from Australia, Japan, Sweden, the Netherlands, Finland, Spain, Norway, Ireland, Poland and New Zealand as well as Britain, was agreed a day after the International Monetary Fund cut its global economic growth forecasts because of the war. The statement called on "all parties" to implement in full the ceasefire agreed earlier this month and said the war had caused unacceptable loss of life.

"Renewed hostilities, a widening of the conflict or continued disruption in the Strait of Hormuz would pose serious additional risks to global energy security, supply chains, and economic and financial stability," it said.

"Even with a durable resolution of the conflict, impacts on growth, inflation and markets will persist," the statement - issued by Britain's government during the IMF and World Bank Spring Meetings in Washington - said.

Mindful of the surge in public debt to help households and businesses during the Covid-19 pandemic and after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the ministers committed to being fiscally responsible with any new support which would be targeted at those who most need support.

"We commit to avoiding, and

call on all countries to avoid, protectionist actions, including unjustified export controls, stockpiling and other trade barriers in hydrocarbon and other supply chains affected by the crisis," they said. British finance minister Rachel Reeves, who this week criticised the US strategy in the Iran war as a folly, kept up her calls for an end to the conflict that London had not backed.

"A sustained ceasefire and avoiding knee-jerk responses is key to limiting costs for households," she said in a statement of her own yesterday. Trump on Tuesday extended his criticisms of Britain's government for failing to join the Iran war, and said the country's trade deal with the US "can always be changed."

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said yesterday he would not yield to pressure from Trump to join the war.

Tax enforcement weakened after US job cuts: IRS data

Reuters
Washington

The Trump administration dramatically reduced efforts to pursue tax cheats in 2025, government data shows, shedding tens of thousands of employees at the Internal Revenue Service, including those charged with enforcement.

The result was a 5% decline in revenue collected through enforcement actions, or almost \$5bn, in the fiscal year, according to data obtained by Reuters through the Freedom of Information Act. The agency opened more than 120,000 fewer tax audits in 2025 than in the year prior, the Taxpayer Advocate Service, the IRS' internal watchdog, reported.

The vast majority of revenue collected through tax enforcement comes from unpaid balances. Audits are often years-long processes that do not immediately yield revenue.

Treasury Department officials told Reuters that the IRS has seen a 12% increase in enforcement revenue in the first five months of the 2026 fiscal year, which began October 1. The Department of



Internal Revenue Service Chief Executive Officer Frank Bisignano testifies during a hearing with the Senate Finance Committee in Washington, DC, yesterday. (AFP)

Government Efficiency, the now-defunct cost-cutting agency created by President Donald Trump and led by billionaire Elon Musk, oversaw mass staffing cuts at the IRS that carved into every aspect of the tax agency.

But the IRS's enforcement arm lost roughly 5,000 of its employees headed into 2026 and is on track to cut another 5,000 in the coming year, according to the agency's budget projection.

Frank Bisignano, the CEO of the IRS and Social Security Administration Commissioner, told the Senate Finance Commit-

tee yesterday that the tax agency was reviewing the "tax gap," or the amount of taxes owed but not paid, to see what quantity is "addressable."

Completely eliminating the tax gap, experts say, would require the IRS to act far more aggressively than Americans are generally used to. Bisignano said he would soon return to the committee with "a plan to drive the number down and you'll have the resources allocated and the technology" to recoup the unpaid sums.

The moves at the IRS essentially wipe out one of the Biden administration's signature achievements, sending tens of billions of dollars to the agency to increase tax scrutiny of major corporations and wealthy individuals. At its height during the Biden administration, the IRS employed 103,000 people, according to the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration. It aims to employ about 69,000 by the 2027 fiscal year, which begins October 1.

Before that infusion of cash, the IRS had struggled for years with its finances as Republicans in Congress blocked funding for the agency intended to help it maintain its outdated technology systems and retain high-skilled staff.

NAACP sues Musk's xAI, alleging illegal operation of gas turbines

Reuters
Washington

The largest US civil rights group has sued xAI and a subsidiary, claiming they illegally operated more than two dozen gas turbines in Mississippi to power its Colossus 2 data centre, posing a health risk to local residents.

The NAACP, represented by Earthjustice and the Southern Environmental Law Center, sued xAI and subsidiary MZX Tech, charging they violated the federal Clean Air Act by running 27 gas-fired turbines before getting necessary air permits for its massive data centre that powers xAI's Grok chatbot.

Elon Musk's artificial intelligence startup xAI has invested more than \$20bn to build the data centre in Southaven with the full backing of Mississippi Governor Tate Reeves, but the facility, as well as Colos-

sus 1 just over the border in Memphis, Tennessee, has met heavy opposition from local communities due to their effect on local air and environmental quality.

"By looking to evade clean air laws to operate dirty turbines that emit pollution and known carcinogens, these companies are following a shameful, familiar pattern: asking Black and frontline communities to bear the toxic brunt of 'innovation,'" said Abre' Conner, director of the Center for Environmental and Climate Justice at the NAACP.

The NAACP announced its intention to sue xAI and MZX in February because the Clean Air Act requires 60 days of notice ahead of filing a lawsuit.

Mississippi regulators held one public hearing that month about permits for those turbines after just a few days of public notice for the hearing, and subsequently approved the permits. xAI was not immediately available for comment.

US doesn't 'have time for Ukraine' because of Iran war: Zelensky

AFP
Berlin

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has told a German broadcaster that US peace negotiators "have no time for Ukraine" because of the war in Iran, and bemoaned disruptions of deliveries of US arms.

Zelensky told public broadcaster ZDF that Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, who have helped broker talks with Moscow on ending Russia's war on Ukraine, were "constantly in talks with Iran" at the moment.

Describing the pair as "pragmatic", Zelensky said they were trying to "get more attention from Putin in order to end the war".

But "if the United States does not put pressure on Putin (...) and only engages in a gentle dialogue with the Russians, then they will no longer be afraid", he said. US-led talks to end Europe's deadliest conflict since World War II have stalled since the Iran war

erupted on February 28, and Russian and Ukrainian negotiators have not met since February in Geneva.

Zelensky said that the issue of deliveries of US arms to Ukraine has become "a big problem".

"If the war goes on, there will be less arms for Ukraine. It's critical, especially in materials for air defences," he said. Zelensky later told a press conference during a visit to Norway that this was especially a problem for PAC-3 interceptor missiles, as well as the PAC-2 missile. He said these were primarily bought through the PURL programme, which was launched last year and allows Ukraine to receive US equipment financed by European countries.

"At the very beginning of... (the) war in the Middle East we understood that we can have challenges," Zelensky said. Zelensky said deliveries came "slowly", noting it was a "very difficult position for us."

Zelensky made the comment alongside Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store, with the two leaders announcing they had signed "a joint declaration on enhanced defence and security cooperation."

Ice Cream Man promo



Eli Roth poses in front of an ice cream truck as he promotes his upcoming film *Ice Cream Man* at CinemaCon, the official convention of Cinema United, in Las Vegas, Nevada, US. (Reuters)

Argentina reaches IMF staff deal, opening door to \$1bn in fresh funds

Reuters
New York

Argentina reached a staff-level agreement with the International Monetary Fund on the second review of its \$20bn programme, the IMF said yesterday, unlocking a \$1bn disbursement, subject to approval by its Executive Board.

"Reform momentum has significantly strengthened in recent months," the IMF said in a statement, citing greater political support in South America's second-largest economy for key reforms, as well as improvements to monetary and FX policy that have helped kickstart the accumulation of critical foreign reserves. Argentina sealed the \$20bn, 48-month deal a year ago — its 23rd deal with the Washington-based lender — in order to help roll over an earlier \$44bn deal and give the government of libertarian Javier Milei financial firepower to undo capital controls and regain access to international capital markets. Markets have since closely tracked the government's ability to restore its depleted foreign reserves, a key requirement under the deal. When approving its first review last July, the IMF lowered the bar for the reserve accumulation targets through 2026 after Argentina missed its initial goal. In recent months, however,

the IMF has praised the central bank's daily foreign currency purchases aimed at meeting debt obligations and rebuilding reserve buffers. So far in 2026, Argentina's central bank has purchased more than \$5.5bn, although overall reserves remain constrained by ongoing debt payments.

Following a decisive victory for Milei's agenda in October's legislative elections, the IMF yesterday welcomed political support for Milei's 2026 budget, as well as legislation aimed at "formalizing holdings of financial assets by residents, enhancing labour market flexibility, ratifying critical trade agreements, and unlocking investments in mining."

Argentine dollar-denominated international bonds were trading mixed yesterday, with the 2038 issue up more than two cents to 79.25 cents on the dollar, still yielding over 10%, according to LSEG data. The 2041 fell 0.4 cent to 70.75.

Milei, an economist who has allied himself closely with US President Donald Trump, has tempered Argentina's long-running sky-high inflation with tough austerity and guided the country out of a recession. While his shock austerity had initially plunged millions into hardship, the country's poverty rate has since fallen sharply, reaching 28.2% in the second half of 2025,

the lowest level since the first half of 2018, according to government data.

Argentine Economy Minister Luis Caputo, who travelled to Washington this week for the IMF and World Bank spring meetings, welcomed the deal in a post on social media, thanking IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva.

"This agreement is a very important step in consolidating the macroeconomic stability we have been working on these two years, and it will contribute to strengthening the economic growth of our country," Caputo said. The news comes amid an increasingly challenging global environment, impacted by conflict in the Middle East. The IMF on Tuesday downgraded its forecast for Argentina's economic growth by half a percentage point, now expecting GDP to grow 3.5% this year, while inflation is seen reaching 30.4%, nearly double its earlier estimate.

Argentina has so far weathered the spillovers from the Middle East war relatively well, the IMF said yesterday, citing stronger fundamentals and its status as a net energy exporter. Still, the global fuel price shock has put pressure on Milei's free-market experiment, which has sharply reduced fuel subsidies, leaving Argentines more exposed as demand for natural gas imports rises with winter's onset in June.

Leftist Sanchez in line for Peru runoff as vote count goes down to the wire



Peru's presidential candidate for the Juntos por el Peru party, Roberto Sanchez, speaks outside his campaign office at the historical centre in Lima, yesterday. **Right:** Peru's presidential candidate for the Fuerza Popular party, Keiko Fujimori, waves as she leaves her house in Lima. (AFP)

Reuters
Lima

Leftist Peruvian congressman Roberto Sanchez shifted into second place in a presidential vote tally heading down to the wire yesterday, rattling financial markets at the prospect of him facing Keiko Fujimori in the runoff.

With just over 91% of the ballots counted, Sanchez held a razor-thin lead over right-wing former Lima mayor Rafael Lopez Aliaga, at 12.1% and 11.9% respectively. Centre-left candidate Jorge Nieto was in fourth place at 11.1%, data from electoral authority ONPE showed. Fujimori, a conservative former congresswoman and the daughter of late former President Alberto Fujimori, remained comfortably in the lead, with 17% of the vote from Sunday's election.

She is set to advance to a runoff due on June 7, in her fourth bid for the presidency of the South American country.

Markets reacted yesterday, with Peru's sol currency weakening

1.4% against the US dollar and the MSCI Peru stock index sinking 6.6%. Market analysts said the market slump reflects fears that Sanchez could clinch the second place.

Sanchez, 57, a congressman running for the left-leaning Together for Peru party, has called for a new constitution to establish a "plurinational" state that would give a greater voice to Indigenous communities that have felt excluded from national decision-making. He is an ally of former president Pedro Castillo, who was jailed on rebellion and conspiracy charges after a short-lived presidency that ended in a failed attempt to dissolve Congress in 2022. From prison, Castillo has endorsed Sanchez, who in turn has called for Castillo's release, saying on X on Wednesday: "Let no constitutional president ever again be removed from office or arrested."

"Sanchez represents more risk for the market," said Alberto Arispe, who leads Kallpa SAB, a Peruvian brokerage.

There seemed to be no end yes-

terday to the political uncertainty that has stalked Peru, which has had eight presidents in the last decade.

As counting continues, allegations of fraud have spread. Lopez Aliaga and Sanchez both expressed concerns about the integrity of the process, and Lopez Aliaga shared a post that called for Fujimori to request that the proceedings be annulled.

European Union election observers said at a press conference on Tuesday that they had found no concrete evidence to support the allegations of fraud that have been circulating since Sunday.

Fujimori, 50, also reached the runoff in all three of her previous campaigns. She leads the Popular Force party, which anchors a right-wing bloc in Congress.

She has positioned herself as pro-US, pitching foreign investment, and her campaign has emphasised a law-and-order message, echoing the militarised security policies associated with the presidency of her father, who ruled from 1990 to 2000 before being jailed for human rights abuses.

Brazil court orders probe into Flavio Bolsonaro for 'slander' of Lula

AFP
Brasilia

Brazil's Supreme Court has ordered an investigation of Flavio Bolsonaro, the main rival of President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva in upcoming elections, over allegations he slandered the nation's leader.

According to the Supreme Court order -- obtained by AFP yesterday -- the probe centres on a January 3 social media post by Bolsonaro, a right-wing senator and son of former Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro.

In the post, the younger Bolsonaro sought to link Lula to drug trafficking, money laundering and electoral fraud, pairing images of the left-wing Brazilian president with Venezuelan former leader Nicolas Maduro, captioned: "Lula will be exposed."

Maduro was toppled from power in a US military operation on January 3 and moved to the United States to face trial on drugs trafficking and weapons charges.

According to the Supreme Court order, Justice Alexandre de Moraes ordered "the initiation of an inquiry against Flavio Nantes Bolsonaro to investigate the alleged commission of the crime of slander."

The order said the investigation was requested by the justice ministry and endorsed by the prosecutor general's office, which deemed that the post "falsely, publicly, and disparagingly attributed criminal acts to the President of the Republic."

Federal police will have 60 days to carry out the initial investigative steps.

Bolsonaro, 44, has emerged as the leading figure



File photo of Flavio Bolsonaro. (AFP)

on the Brazilian right after his father designated him as his political heir.

Jair Bolsonaro is serving a 27-year sentence after he was found guilty of having led a failed scheme to prevent Lula from taking office and retain power after losing 2022 presidential elections.

In elections in October, Flavio Bolsonaro is expected to be the main rival of Lula, 80, who is seeking a fourth term.

According to polling data released yesterday by the firm Genial/Quaest, Bolsonaro would currently edge Lula in a head-to-head election.

Guitar farm from above



File photo shows aerial view of Estancia La Guitarra (The Guitar Farm), surrounded by cornfields near General Levalle in the south of Cordoba province, Argentina. A labour of love created by the late Pedro Martin Ureta in memory of his wife, Graciela Yraizoz, the giant figure was planted beginning in 1979 with more than 7,000 cypress and eucalyptus trees, forming a guitar 1,100 metres long and 400 metres wide - visible only from the air. (AFP)

US names new top diplomat for Venezuela

The US announced a new top diplomat yesterday for its embassy in Caracas, which was reopened in March after a US military operation ousted longtime Venezuelan strongman Nicolas Maduro, AFP reported from Caracas. Temporary mission head Laura Dogu said on X that she was being replaced by John Barrett, a career diplomat who has been heading the embassy in Guatemala since January. "I am pleased to announce that John Barrett will soon arrive in Venezuela to assume the functions of charge d'affaires," Dogu wrote in a Spanish-language statement posted on the Caracas embassy's X account. With no formal ambassador named to Venezuela, Barrett, like Dogu, will run the mission under the title of charge d'affaires. Diplomatic relations between Venezuela and the US were broken in 2019 and restored on March 5 in the aftermath of the US military assault to arrest Maduro. Maduro was toppled from power on January 3 and moved to the US to face trial on drugs trafficking and weapons charges. Venezuela is currently led by interim president Delcy Rodriguez, who is co-operating under heavy US pressure to meet President Donald Trump's demands for access to the country's oil.

AI ruling raises growing concerns over chat privacy

Reuters
New York

As people increasingly turn to artificial intelligence for advice, some US lawyers are telling their clients not to treat AI chatbots like trusted confidants when their freedom or legal liability is on the line.

These warnings became more urgent after a federal judge in New York ruled this year that the former CEO of a bankrupt financial services company could not shield his AI chats from prosecutors pursuing securities fraud charges against him.

In the wake of the ruling, attorneys have been advising that conversations with chatbots like Anthropic's Claude and OpenAI's ChatGPT could be demanded by prosecutors in criminal cases or by litigation adversaries in civil cases.

"We are telling our clients: You should proceed with caution here," said Alexandria Gutierrez Swette, a lawyer at New York-based law firm Kobre & Kim.

People's discussions with their lawyers are almost always deemed confidential under US law. But AI chatbots are not lawyers, and attorneys are instructing clients to take steps that could keep their communications with AI tools more private.

In emails to clients and advi-

sories posted on their websites, more than a dozen major US law firms have outlined advice for people and companies to decrease the chances of AI chats winding up in court.

Similar warnings are also appearing in hiring agreements by some firms with their clients. For instance, New York-based firm Sher Tremonte stated in a recent client contract that sharing a lawyer's advice or communications with a chatbot could erase the legal protection known as attorney-client privilege that usually shields communications between lawyers and their clients.

A JUDICIAL RULING

The case that helped set off the alarm bells involved Bradley Heppner, the former chair of bankrupt financial services company GWG Holdings and founder of alternative asset firm Beneficent. Heppner was charged by federal prosecutors last November with securities and wire fraud, and pleaded not guilty.

Heppner had used Anthropic's chatbot Claude to prepare reports about his case to share with his attorneys, who later argued that his AI exchanges should be withheld because they contained details from the lawyers related to his defence.

Prosecutors argued that they had a right to demand material that Heppner created with Claude because his defence lawyers were



File photo shows Artificial Intelligence (AI) letters placed on a computer motherboard in this illustration. (Reuters)

not directly involved, and because attorney-client privilege does not apply to chatbots.

Voluntarily revealing information from a lawyer to any third party can jeopardise the customary legal protections for those attorney communications. Manhattan-based US District Judge Jed Rakoff ruled in February that Heppner must hand over 31 documents generated by Anthropic's chatbot Claude related to the case.

No attorney-client relationship exists "or could exist, between an AI user and a platform such as Claude," Rakoff wrote.

Lawyers for Heppner did not immediately respond to requests for comment. A spokesperson for the US attorney's office in Manhattan declined to comment. Courts already are grappling with the growing use of artificial intelligence by lawyers and people

representing themselves in legal cases, which among other things has led to legal filings containing made-up cases invented by AI.

Rakoff's decision was an important early test in the AI chatbot era for bedrock legal protections governing attorney-client communications and materials prepared for litigation.

On the same day as Rakoff's ruling, US Magistrate Judge Anthony Patti in Michigan said a woman representing herself in a lawsuit she brought against her former company did not have to hand over her chats with OpenAI's ChatGPT about the employment claims made in the case.

Patti treated the woman's AI chats as part of her own personal "work-product" for the case, rather than as conversations with a person who her employer could seek to use for its defence. ChatGPT and other generative AI programmes "are tools, not persons," Patti wrote in his order.

The privacy and usage terms for both OpenAI and Anthropic state that the companies can share data involving their users with third parties. Both also state that they require users to consult a qualified professional before relying on their chatbots for legal advice.

Rakoff at a February hearing in Heppner's case noted that Claude "expressly provided that users

have no expectation of privacy in their inputs."

Representatives for OpenAI and Anthropic did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

LAWYERS RACE TO SET GUARDRAILS

The advice from lawyers has ranged from telling clients to select their AI platforms carefully to suggesting specific language to use in chatbot prompts.

Los Angeles-based O'Melveny & Myers and other firms said in client advisories that "closed" AI systems designed for corporate use could provide stronger protections for legal communications, though they said even that remains largely untested.

Some firms said AI legal research is more likely to be protected by attorney-client privilege when it is conducted at the direction of a lawyer. If a lawyer does advise the use of AI, a person should say so in the chatbot prompt, New York-headquartered law firm Debevoise & Plimpton said in a notice on its website. "I am doing this research at the direction of counsel for litigation," the firm suggested people write.

Information about AI use is also becoming common in contracts used by law firms with clients, according to a Reuters review of contracts posted to a US government website.



North Korea boosting ability to make nuclear arms: UN watchdog

AFP
Seoul

North Korea is showing a "very serious increase" in its ability to produce atomic weapons, the head of the UN nuclear watchdog said during a visit to Seoul yesterday.

Diplomatically isolated North Korea is believed to operate multiple facilities for enriching uranium, a key step in making nuclear warheads, South Korea's spy agency has said.

That includes one at the Yongbyon nuclear site, which Pyongyang purportedly decom-

missioned after talks but later re-activated in 2021.

"In our periodic assessments, we have been able to confirm that there's a rapid increase in the operations" of the Yongbyon reactor, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief Rafael Grossi said in Seoul, where he met South Korea's foreign minister.

The agency also observed a rise in operations at Yongbyon's reprocessing unit and light-water reactor, as well as the activation of other facilities, Grossi told reporters.

"All that points to a very serious increase in the capabilities of (the) DPRK in the area of nuclear weapons production, which is es-

timated at a few dozen warheads," he said, referring to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the North's official name.

North Korea, which conducted its first nuclear test in 2006, is under rafts of UN sanctions for its banned weapons programmes.

It has declared that it will never surrender its nuclear weapons, and cut off access to IAEA inspectors in 2009.

The agency has noted the construction of a "new facility similar to the enrichment facility in Yongbyon", Grossi said. It was "not easy to calculate" any production increases without visiting the site.

However, "we consider, looking

at external features of the facility, that there will be significant increase in the enrichment capacity of the DPRK", he said.

The Center for Strategic and International Studies said this week that North Korea appeared to have completed a building at Yongbyon that could be a new uranium enrichment plant.

Citing satellite imagery from April, the US-based think tank said the building had generators, fuel storage tanks and cooling units.

Asked whether Russia was assisting North Korea's nuclear development, Grossi said the IAEA had not seen "anything in particular in that regard".

While the agency hoped any such cooperation would be civilian in nature, "if anything, this is too early days to judge", he said.

North Korea has sent ground troops and artillery shells to support Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and observers say Pyongyang is receiving military technology assistance from Moscow in return.

Grossi told South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Hyun that Pyongyang's nuclear programme "remained one of the IAEA's key issues", a statement from the ministry said later on Wednesday.

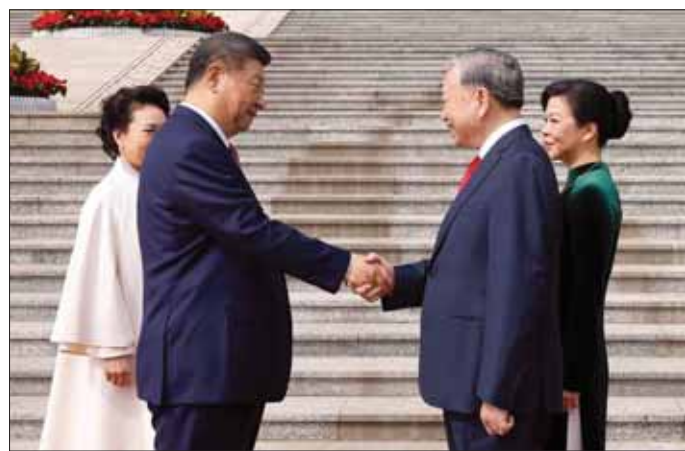
Cho said Seoul was working to "end hostility and confrontation" with the North and to pursue



Director General of IAEA, Rafael Grossi at a press conference in Seoul yesterday. (AFP)

peaceful coexistence and shared growth on the peninsula.

Separately, top naval commanders from South Korea, the United States and Japan met in Seoul on Wednesday to hold maritime security talks aimed at deterring North Korea's growing nuclear and missile threats, Seoul's navy said.



Chinese President Xi Jinping (2nd left) and his wife Peng Liyuan (left) welcoming Vietnam's President To Lam and his wife Ngo Phuung Ly at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, yesterday. (AFP)

China, Vietnam leaders sign co-operation deals

AFP
Beijing

Vietnam's President To Lam met with China's leader Xi Jinping in Beijing yesterday, Chinese state media said, hoping to deepen ties he says are a top priority.

The visit is Lam's first trip abroad since the Communist Party leader was elected last week as president — the number two position in Vietnamese politics.

He has called ties with Beijing a "top priority" but faces a precarious balancing act between the US — Vietnam's main export market — and the country's largest supplier China.

Xi and Lam met yesterday morning in Beijing's opulent Great Hall of the People, and signed several cooperation agreements, state broadcaster CCTV said, without providing immediate details.

Lam wrote in an article published in China's state-run People's Daily on Tuesday that ties with China were a "strategic priority" for Vietnam.

"Cooperation between the two countries needs to move strongly from 'increasing scale' to 'improving quality'; from expanding trade to deeper connections between development strategies, economic corridors, production chains, supply chains, and stra-

tegic infrastructure," he wrote.

He reiterated that China was a "strategic choice and top priority" during a speech at Beijing's Tsinghua University on Tuesday, Vietnamese state media reported.

Despite rival territorial claims in the South China Sea, the two countries have sought to deepen already close economic ties to guard against global trade upheaval caused by US President Donald Trump's tariffs.

Chinese exports to Vietnam surged 22.4% last year, with Vietnam spending \$198bn on Chinese goods — more than any other country in Southeast Asia.

But Chinese imports from Vietnam fell 0.7%, leaving Hanoi with a huge deficit close to \$100bn with Beijing.

Both Vietnam and China get much of their oil imports via the Strait of Hormuz, where shipping has largely been halted due to the US-Israeli war with Iran.

However, Hanoi sees rivalry between top trading partners the US and China as a major impediment to its ambitious goal of achieving double-digit growth over the next five years.

Last week, Xi expressed his willingness "to work with To Lam... to continuously strengthen our respective socialist causes"; as he congratulated the Vietnamese leader on his election, Chinese state media reported at the time.

still under internal consideration and that intra-ministerial coordination "is a common and necessary part of the policy making process." "Any form of co-operation, including with the US, remains firmly under Indonesia's sovereignty and is subject to applicable national mechanisms and procedures," she said. Yvonne said the government will ensure any policies adopted do not create adverse implications for regional stability, adding that overflight arrangements do not constitute a "central part" of Indonesia-US defence co-operation. (Reuters)

Xi meets Russian FM as leaders flock to China over Mideast war

AFP
Beijing

China's President Xi Jinping met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov yesterday, Chinese state media said, as a string of leaders of countries impacted by the Middle East war flock to Beijing.

Lavrov joins Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed al-Nahyan and Vietnamese leader To Lam in meeting with Xi this week.

The Russian diplomat told a news conference after meeting Xi that Moscow could "compensate" for China's energy shortages as shipping through the Strait of Hormuz remains choked by the Iran war.

Xi, meanwhile, has sought to position China as a mediator and stable partner in the face of the US- and Israeli-led conflict.

Xi told Abu Dhabi's crown prince on Tuesday that China would play a "constructive role" in promoting peace talks in the Middle East.

In talks with Spain's Sanchez, Xi warned that the world was facing "chaos and turmoil" and "a contest between justice and force", urging closer co-operation.

The Spanish prime minister, meanwhile, welcomed China's role in seeking to resolve the conflict in the Middle East.

Though the level of diplomatic activity is normal for Beijing, the Middle East war and particularly the issue of energy security have taken on new urgency in diplomatic discussions, according to



Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov (left) shaking hands with China's President Xi Jinping in Beijing, yesterday. (AFP)

Lavrov joins Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed al-Nahyan and Vietnam's To Lam in meeting with Xi this week

Dylan Loh, associate professor at Singapore's Nanyang Technological University.

"China has got leverage and influence over Iran, and there are some hopes and expectations that China can use this influence in a more direct way," Loh said.

Countries, particularly in the Gulf, could be hoping China can pressure Iran to stop its attacks on Gulf countries and to persist with diplomatic negotiations, he said.

The string of visitors "demonstrates that various actors are adjusting to the realities of an uncertain world. Engaging with the PRC, including over areas of difference, is part of this adjustment", according to Ja Ian Chong,

a political scientist at the National University of Singapore.

While many visits were likely planned before the Middle East crisis, those from Gulf countries' representatives and Lavrov "seem more of a direct result of the conflict and the desire to de-escalate", Chong said.

Lavrov, who is on a two-day visit to China to boost bilateral ties, said Russia could help China with energy resources following the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz.

China is a net importer of oil and has seen prices for petrol, plastics, and fertilisers spike due to the war.

"Russia can, without doubt, compensate for the shortfall in resources that has arisen both for the

Indonesia, France agree to boost defence industry ties

AFP
Jakarta

Indonesia, fresh off concluding a defence pact with Washington and an oil deal with Russia, has also agreed to boost defence industry cooperation with France, Jakarta said yesterday after the countries' presidents met in Paris.

President Prabowo Subianto was hosted by counterpart Emmanuel Macron at the Elysee Palace on Tuesday, where they "discussed strengthening strategic cooperation," a statement from the government said.

"This includes the procurement of defence equipment and the strengthening of the defence industry," it said, citing France as a strategic partner for Indonesia in Europe.

The leaders also agreed on co-operation in "energy transition and the development of new and renewable energy", it said.

Prabowo met Putin at the Kremlin on Monday, flying directly from the Russian capital to Paris.

With Putin, he had discussed

"strengthening their strategic partnership, particularly in the sectors of energy, mineral resources, and national industrial development", according to Cabinet Secretary Teddy Indra Wijaya.

Prabowo, who recently travelled to South Korea and Japan, has justified his slew of foreign visits.

"Brothers and sisters, it's to secure oil, I have to go everywhere," he said in an address to his cabinet this month.

Like many nations, Indonesia has come under pressure from soaring global oil prices over the war in the Middle East.

Jakarta, while defending a non-aligned diplomatic posture, last year joined the Brics bloc of emerging economies that includes Russia and US-rival China.

Prabowo has also signed a trade deal with US President Donald Trump and joined his so-called "Board of Peace", although has insisted his country would not pay the \$1bn joining fee for permanent membership.

Indonesia is a major arms buyer from France, with then-Defence Minister Prabowo inking a \$8.1bn



France's President Emmanuel Macron (left) welcomes Indonesia's President Prabowo Subianto prior to their meeting at the Elysee Presidential Palace in Paris on Tuesday. (AFP)

deal in 2022 to purchase 42 French-made Rafale jets.

Prabowo, a former military general who was elected president in 2024, has sought to modernise Indonesia's ageing military assets.

On Monday, US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth hosted Indonesian counterpart Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin and announced a "Major Defence Co-operation Partnership".

A joint statement underlined the countries' "shared commit-

ment to maintaining peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific."

Indonesia is strategically located on the Malacca Strait — the world's busiest chokepoint for oil and petroleum liquids, according to the US Energy Information Administration (EIA).

Jakarta on Tuesday said it was still considering a US request for "overflight clearance" which, if approved, analysts say could be seen as an alignment with Washington over Beijing.



Visitors stroll through the grounds of Nezu Shrine during the annual Azalea Festival in Tokyo on Tuesday. (AFP)

Japan tourism hits record despite China spat, Iran war

AFP
Tokyo

Foreign tourists coming to Japan hit a new record in March despite another huge drop in Chinese visitors as well as a fall in those from the Middle East, official data showed yesterday.

The number of international visitors was 3.6mn, up 3.5% year-on-year, a new record for the month, according to the Japan National Tourism Organization.

Chinese visitors dropped 56%

to 291,600 — Beijing warned people from visiting last year — while those from the Middle East fell 30% to 16,700 because of the Iran war.

The JNTO said the total number of tourists was boosted by "the start of the cherry blossom season around late March, and school holidays coinciding with Easter in April".

Japanese locals and tourists enjoy the famed cherry blossom season which is often in full swing in late March and early April.

The tiny white and pink pet-

als of cherry flowers, known as sakura, herald the start of spring in Japan, and full bloom ushers in a brief period of boisterous outdoor parties held by residents.

Previously, Chinese travellers were the biggest source of tourists to Japan, but the figure sharply dropped after Beijing warned Chinese citizens against visiting Japan.

Japan-China ties have deteriorated since Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi suggested in November that Japan might intervene militarily in any Chinese attempt to take Taiwan.

China, which regards the democratic island as part of its territory and has not ruled out force to annex it, was furious over the comments.

The number of Chinese visitors to Japan already tumbled 45% in December, nose-dived 61% in January and dropped 45% in March.

South Korea has become the largest contingent since January. The latest data shows the number of visitors from Mexico soared 70% while those from Malaysia and Vietnam jumped nearly 45%, respectively.

Starmer says 'won't yield' to Trump's Mideast war threats

AFP
London

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer yesterday said he would not "yield" to pressure to join the Iran war after US President Donald Trump threatened to scrap a UK trade deal.

"We're not going to get dragged into this war. It is not our war," Starmer told parliament.

"I'm not going to change my mind. I'm not going to yield. It is not in our national interest to join this war," the Labour leader added.

In a phone interview with Sky News, Trump threatened to alter an agreement struck with Britain that limits the impact of his US tariffs blitz.

Trump, who has repeatedly slammed Starmer's policies, said strains in the relationship with the Nato ally would "not at all" negatively affect King Charles III's state visit to the US this month.

In reference to the royal trip, Starmer told parliament that the two nations' "long standing bonds... are far greater than anyone who occupies any particular



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer speaking during the weekly session of Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs) in the House of Commons in London yesterday. (AFP)

office at any particular time".

London and Washington concluded a trade agreement last year capping US tariffs at 10% on most British manufactured goods.

In return, the UK agreed to open its markets further to American ethanol and beef, sparking concerns in the country.

At the time, it was an advantageous agreement for London, which benefited from the lowest tariffs granted by the US.

This advantage has, however, been weakened since the US Supreme Court struck down some

tariffs and Washington retaliated by imposing a temporary 10-per cent tariff on almost all of its imports pending a new tariff regime by July.

While Trump praised his good relationship with Starmer at the time of the agreement, ties have since deteriorated, particularly over the war in the Middle East.

Starmer angered Trump by refusing to allow British bases to be used for the US's initial strikes on Iran last month.

He later agreed to a US request to use two British military bases

for a "specific and limited defensive purpose".

"It's a relationship where when we asked them for help, they were not there," Trump told Sky News.

"When we needed them, they were not there. When we didn't need them, they were not there. They still aren't there," he insisted.

Starmer's Labour government, which has sought to build bridges with Trump since his return to the White House in January 2025, has recently hardened its rhetoric toward its historic ally.

Finance Minister Rachel Reeves on Tuesday hit out at the "folly" of Trump launching a war with Iran "without a clear exit plan".

Starmer told parliament on Monday that Trump was wrong to threaten to destroy Iranian "civilisation", while on Sunday Health Minister Wes Streeting criticised Trump's language as "incendiary, provocative, outrageous".

Against this backdrop, Reeves was to see US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent in Washington yesterday as part of an International Monetary Fund meeting to detail the economic impact of the conflict.

Afghan teen denies UK charge of endangering lives

AFP
London

An Afghan teenager appeared in a UK court yesterday and denied endangering dozens of lives by piloting a small boat of migrants across the Channel from France earlier this week.

The 16-year-old pleaded "not guilty" at a magistrates' court in southeastern Margate, and said he was "forced" to pilot the vessel across the busy waterway between Britain and France.

The court appearance came two days after he allegedly landed on UK shores following the first successful migrant small boat Channel crossing of 2026.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) — which decides whether to prosecute cases in England and Wales — said the teenager was charged under the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Act, which only came into force two days earlier.

Prosecutors told the court that 46 people were on the boat.

The teenager, who cannot be identified as a minor, is the first person to be charged using the new legislation with the crime of endangering life during a small boat crossing arriving in the UK without valid entry clearance, it

noted. Anyone convicted of this offence faces up to six years behind bars.

A small number of migrants have previously been prosecuted for piloting small boats using other UK laws.

Wearing a black coat in court, the teenager followed proceedings through a Dari interpreter and spoke only to confirm his name during a short hearing.

He was remanded into custody to appear at Canterbury Crown Court on February 9.

The UK's centre-left Labour government is under intense pressure to stem the arrivals each year of tens of thousands of migrants aboard small boats from France.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer won power in July 2024 vowing to curb the crossings by "smashing the gangs" facilitating the perilous journeys. But last year saw 41,472 migrant arrivals — the second-highest tally on record.

According to tallies from French and British official sources, some 29 people died trying to make the perilous crossing in 2025.

Migration minister Mike Tapp insisted yesterday the government is "restoring order and control to our borders by cracking down on the people smugglers behind these unacceptable small boat crossings".

UK to rejoin EU's student exchange scheme

AFP
London

The UK and European Union said yesterday they had signed the legal texts allowing Britain to rejoin the bloc's Erasmus student exchange scheme, five years after Brexit forced its departure.

London and Brussels announced in December they had agreed the terms for the UK to rejoin the popular programme next year, amid Labour Prime Minister Keir Starmer's much-touted EU "reset".

More than 100,000 people are expected to benefit in the scheme's first year alone, according to the British government, which negotiated to contribute £570m (\$774m) towards the scheme's costs in 2027.

It has claimed that reflects a 30% discount on the "default contribution rate" and delivers "a fair deal for taxpayers while guaranteeing full participation in the programme".

Students, apprentices and young people will be eligible to participate, including on placements in leading European companies, cultural exchanges and other cross-border initiatives, London noted.

"From learning a language to building confidence and work experience, Erasmus+ offers transformative opportunities to enhance young people's life chances," UK skills minister Jacqui Smith said in a statement.

London said the British Council was set to return as the UK's "national agency" — helping organisations and individual participants

to navigate the programme — as the organisation did between 2014 and 2020.

The European Commission will formally confirm the British Council's return to the role later this year, the British government noted.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said Europe and the UK "have enjoyed mutually beneficial educational ties for centuries".

"Strengthening those ties further makes perfect sense on both sides — for our students, teachers, educational systems, economies and societies as a whole," she added in a statement.

"I look forward to seeing the immense potential of this development being realised as soon as possible."

Sri Lanka repatriates stranded Iranian sailors

AFP
Colombo

Sri Lanka has repatriated 238 Iranian sailors stranded in the South Asian country after one of their warships was torpedoed by a US submarine, a minister told AFP yesterday.

Deputy Defence Minister Aruna Jayasekara said 32 sailors rescued from the IRIS Dena — a frigate attacked on March 4 just off Sri Lanka — and another 206 from the IRIS Bushehr left on Tuesday.

"A few sailors from the IRIS Bushehr are staying back to operate the vessel, but 206 joined those rescued from the IRIS Dena and returned home last night in a chartered aircraft," Ja-

yasekara said.

Official sources said 15 Iranian sailors will remain in Sri Lanka to operate the IRIS Bushehr, which is anchored off Trincomalee in the northeast of the island.

The attack on the IRIS Dena brought the Middle East conflict into the Indian Ocean, killing 104 sailors in the early days of the US and Israeli war against Iran, according to Iranian authorities.

The bodies of 84 victims were recovered and have been repatriated.

Last month, Iran's ambassador to Sri Lanka Alireza Delkosh said Tehran was in talks with Colombo to repatriate sailors from the IRIS Bushehr which was given safe harbour in Sri Lanka after the IRIS Dena was sunk.

Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake said the island provided protection to the Bushehr crew on humanitarian grounds in line with the 1907 Hague Convention.

It was not immediately clear on what basis the sailors from the second Iranian vessel were allowed to leave Sri Lankan custody.

Sri Lanka has refused permission for US warplanes to use ground facilities in the country in order to maintain Colombo's neutrality.

A third Iranian ship — the IRIS Lavan, with 183 crew members — sought shelter in India's Kochi port in early March.

More than 100 non-essential crew of the IRIS Lavan have since left India.

Hundreds missing after boat sinks in Andaman Sea

AFP
Dhaka

Families were frantically searching for news of their relatives yesterday after a boat carrying about 280 Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi migrants capsized in the Andaman Sea earlier this month.

The boat, which left the southern Bangladeshi port of Teknaf on April 4 and was on its way to Malaysia, sank due to heavy winds, rough seas and overcrowding, according to the UN.

Bangladeshi authorities said nine people had been rescued. One survivor told AFP the boat sank nearly 10 days ago, casting gloom over the fate of the missing.

"I now have 70-80 photos on my mobile phone from people asking for updates on the victims," 40-year-old Rafiqul Islam, one of the survivors, told AFP yesterday.

Islam, who sustained burn injuries as oil spilled from the trawler, said he was lured by traffickers who promised him a job in Malaysia.

The Rohingya on board the boat



Rachel Begum (left), who was rescued from a capsized boat sits inside her shelter at a refugee camp in Ukhiya, in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar yesterday. (AFP)

were likely leaving huge camps in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar, where more than a million refugees forced to flee war-torn Myanmar's Rakhine state live in squalid conditions.

Rakhine state has been the scene of fierce fighting between the military and the Arakan Army, an ethnic minority rebel group.

The Rohingya undertake perilous sea journeys every year in search of better living conditions, travelling aboard rickety boats often operated by trafficking net-

works. Bangladesh police said yesterday they had arrested six people on suspicion of human trafficking over the incident.

"We are investigating each individual's liability in the tragic incident," Saiful Islam, officer-in-charge of Teknaf police station, told AFP.

At the Kutupalong Rohingya camp, Jasim Uddin, 34, said he had travelled to Rafiqul Islam's home after losing contact with his brother.

"My brother paid 350,000 taka (\$2,850) for the trip to Malaysia to a contractor who is now avoiding us," he told AFP.

"I showed my brother's photo to Islam, and he confirmed that he had seen him on the boat."

Rohingya representatives warned that worsening poverty and food aid cuts were likely to drive more refugees to undertake dangerous sea travel.

Since April 1, the UN World Food Programme has reduced monthly assistance for large sections of the over one million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

"Human trafficking has never stopped, and in the near future it will escalate without a doubt as the food aid cuts remain in place," Sayed Ullah, president of the United Council of Rohingya, told AFP.

"Desperate people will risk their lives to support their families."

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said Tuesday the latest incident reflected the "dire consequences of protracted displacement and the absence of durable solutions for the Rohingya".

Maldives president slashes cabinet after poll debacle

AFP
Malé

Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu has cut down his cabinet and brought in new ministers, the government said yesterday, following his party's humiliating defeat at local polls.

Muizzu introduced four new faces into a cabinet trimmed to 15 members from the previous 20. Foreign Minister Abdulla Khaleel was replaced by the Maldives High Commissioner in London, Iruthisham Adam.

"President Muizzu has restructured the cabinet, reducing the number of ministers to 15 members," his office said in a statement.

Defence Minister Mohamed Ghassan Maumoon resigned on Tuesday along with nine other ministers, clearing the way for Muizzu to carry out the overhaul. Maumoon's replacement

has yet to be named.

The cabinet shake-up comes 10 days after Maldivians voted to reject a government plan to hold presidential and parliamentary elections on the same day in a bid to save about \$8m in costs.

A local council election held alongside the referendum also saw a humiliating defeat for Muizzu's People's National Congress.

The main opposition Maldivian Democratic Party swept key councils in the capital, Male, and in the archipelago's second-largest constituency, Addu.

The Maldives, a tiny nation of 1,192 coral islands scattered across the equator, has emerged as a geopolitical hotspot as it straddles a key east-west maritime shipping route.

Regional powerhouse India and economic giant China have been competing for influence in the archipelago, home to around 382,000 people.

India power plant blast death toll climbs to 19

AFP
Raipur

The death toll from a boiler blast at a power plant in central India has risen to 19, a police officer said yesterday, noting 17 others were injured.

The explosion occurred Tuesday at a facility operated by Vedanta Limited, a subsidiary of London-listed Vedanta Resources, in Chhattisgarh state's Sakti district.

"The death toll in the power plant blast has reached 19 whereas 17 are undergoing treatment in various hospitals," district police chief Praful Thakur told AFP.

The explosion likely happened after a pipeline burst, spewing "superheated steam" on people who were having their

lunch at the time, the *Indian Express* newspaper said.

Indian-born billionaire Anil Agarwal, chairman of Vedanta Resources, said he was "distressed by the extremely tragic accident".

"A high-level investigation into this incident has been initiated... We will leave no stone unturned in getting to the bottom of this matter," he said in a statement.

Chhattisgarh state authorities have also launched a probe, with chief minister Vishnu Deo Sai vowing the "strictest possible action" against those found guilty.

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.

India gems exports fall to five-year low on US tariffs

Reuters
Mumbai

India's gems and jewellery exports in the 2025/26 fiscal year dipped 3.3% from a year earlier to their lowest level in five years, as shipments to top buyer the US nearly halved, a leading trade body said yesterday, reflecting the impact of tariffs and duties.

Gem and jewellery exports in the year to the end of March fell to \$27.72bn, the lowest since 2020/21, when pandemic-led lockdowns disrupted trade, and down from \$28.7bn in the previous year, the Gem and Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC) said in a statement.

Shipments to the US fell 45% from a year earlier to \$5.09bn, as exports were disrupted for several months after Washington imposed reciprocal tariffs and later added a further 25% duty on Indian goods, GJEPC data showed.

Cut and polished diamond exports, which usually account for nearly half of overall gem



Gold ornaments are placed for polishing inside a Senco Gold & Diamonds jewellery workshop in Kolkata. (Reuters/File Photo)

and jewellery shipments, fell 8.5% year-on-year to \$12.16bn, the lowest in more than two decades, the GJEPC said.

India is the world's largest cutting and polishing hub, handling nine out of every 10 diamonds processed globally.

Even though exports to the US fell due to tariff

concerns, markets such as the United Arab Emirates, Hong Kong, Australia, and Canada showed strong growth, said Kirit Bhansali, chairman of GJEPC. "The anticipated implementation of free trade agreements with the UK and EU this year is expected to further support the growth of India's gem and jewellery exports," he said.



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GULF TIMES

Why is Sudan at war and what is the impact?

The war in Sudan entered its fourth year on April 15 overshadowed by other regional and global turmoil, despite having created what the United Nations calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

The war pits the Sudanese army, led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, against the Rapid Support Forces, a paramilitary group led by General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo. The two men had joined forces in 2019 to overthrow veteran autocrat Omar al-Bashir, after which Burhan became head of state. But having staged a coup that derailed a faltering transition towards civilian rule, they fell out over plans to launch a new transition and integrate their forces.

After war erupted on April 15, 2023, it quickly drew in myriad local militias fighting on either side, as well as foreign powers. Most prominently, UN researchers, US lawmakers, and the Sudanese army say the United Arab Emirates has provided critical support to the RSF via several of Sudan's neighbors, a charge the Gulf power denies. The Sudanese army counts other regional powers including Egypt, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar as supporters to varying extents.

The RSF last year cemented control of the vast Darfur region, its traditional power base and the westernmost area of the country, and quickly began setting up a parallel government. The army maintains control over the eastern half of the country. The fight is currently centered around the Kordofan region that lies in between, as well as a new front opened up by the RSF along the Sudanese border with Ethiopia in the southeast.

The war has had a devastating impact on the Sudanese people, with the UN estimating that almost three-quarters are in need of humanitarian aid

The war has had a devastating impact on the Sudanese people, with the UN estimating that almost three-quarters are in need of humanitarian aid. Famine or risk of famine has been declared in conflict hotspots across the country, often exacerbated by blockades and bureaucratic impediments placed by the warring parties.

Diseases including dengue fever have run rampant as the country's healthcare system collapsed in many areas. Throughout the war, the RSF has carried out waves of ethnically targeted killings later cited as bearing the hallmarks of genocide by UN researchers, most recently in North Darfur's al-Fashir.

Violence and reduced funding have prevented the calculation of a comprehensive death toll. Sudan's health ministry tells Reuters it has documented 11,209 deaths across most of Sudan's states, but experts say excess deaths since the war began are in the hundreds of thousands.

Despite overwhelming need, the UN's 2026 appeal for aid to Sudan is only 17% funded, coming at a time when the US has retreated from foreign aid, European donors make cuts, and Gulf powers focus on bilateral donations.

Aid agencies report scaling back their services, while Sudanese mutual aid groups, including the Nobel Peace Prize-nominated Emergency Response Rooms, have tried to fill the gap. A study by aid agency Islamic Relief this week, however, showed that more than 40% of the local community kitchens run by these groups have had to shut down due to lack of support.

While the war has caught the attention of world leaders, including US President Donald Trump, few attempts to end it have shown promise and competing regional interests have hindered efforts.

The US has led a so-called Quad that includes Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, which presented a preliminary proposal for a ceasefire to both sides last year. As realities on the ground have changed, both the army and RSF have by turns welcomed and rejected mediation, with no let-up in fighting on the horizon. — Reuters

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NOT EVEN CLOSE.



How data-centre boom derailed clean-air efforts in US cities

By Valerie Volcovici and Tim McLaughlin
Reuters

Barbara Johnson has been fighting coal pollution for decades in her mostly Black neighbourhood of North St Louis as an organizer with Metropolitan Congregations United — one of many activist groups campaigning for cleaner air in a city that has some of the country's dirtiest.

Until recently, Johnson had reason to believe things would improve: tougher federal soot standards adopted in 2024 under the Biden administration were scheduled to go into effect in 2027, requiring plants to slash emissions or shut down. That would have forced one of the area's biggest polluters — Ameren's Labadie Energy Center power plant — to cut its soot emissions in half to stay in business.

Johnson's hopes vanished in February, however, when President Donald Trump's administration scrapped the standards before they took effect as part of broader efforts to ensure the nation's grid can meet surging demand from data centers. Now she wonders if she'll ever get to see the changes she's been fighting for since her youth.

"You take two steps forward and four steps back," said Johnson, 75. "I am used to that backwards trend but how many generations will it take to make those positive changes stick?" Trump's rollbacks in support of AI mark a reversal in US environmental policy and a painful truth for America's clean air activists: After years pushing coal toward the exits, the rise of power-hungry data centers has nudged the country's most polluting power source back to the stage.

Trump last year issued an executive order entitled 'Reinvigorating America's Beautiful Clean Coal Industry' that said coal-fired power was crucial to meeting the rise in US electricity demand driven by the construction of artificial intelligence data processing centres. He has since provided funding to keep old plants running, issued orders to delay plant retirements, and rolled back environmental regulations on mercury and other toxins to free plants from costly upgrades.

"Ensuring affordable baseload power, including coal, is essential for keeping the lights on and heating American homes," the US Environmental Protection Agency said in an emailed statement about the regulatory rollbacks. "EPA is committed to ensuring clean air for all Americans regardless of race, gender, creed, or background."

DATA-CENTRE GROWTH

The US Department of Energy estimates artificial intelligence and data-centre growth will create 50 gigawatts of new electricity demand by 2030 — a nearly 4% increase over the 1,300 gigawatts produced by all US power plants in 2025.

Reuters interviewed 20 air quality activists and health



The Labadie power plant, outside of St Louis, Missouri, US. (Reuters)

- Trump administration rolled back clean-air rules to support AI-driven electricity demand
- St Louis faces poor air quality and high health costs

advocates for this story and found all had identified the AI boom — and the policies supporting it — as the biggest potential threat to US air quality due to its need for power, including from dirty sources like coal.

Over the past decade, the number of US coal plants providing energy to the grid and other industrial operations dropped to about 200 from nearly 400 in 2015, according to EPA data examined by Reuters. But that pace has slowed fast. In 2025 only four plants producing 2.6 gigawatts were retired, compared with 94 producing 15 gigawatts in 2015, as the DoE issued emergency orders keeping them online, according to the US Energy Information Administration.

A coalition of farmers, environmentalists and homeowners have united to resist data-centre expansion out of concern for its impacts, ranging from higher power bills to reduced water supplies — a potential liability for Republicans in the November midterm elections. Trump has since secured voluntary agreements from big tech companies to pay up for their power needs and shield American consumers from higher bills, but his administration has not announced steps to address the health effects of higher pollution from expanded power generation.

St Louis will be among the US cities most impacted by the regulatory rollbacks, mainly because of its already poor air quality and the close proximity of the huge Labadie plant, according to the interviews, and government data reviewed by Reuters.

Last year, metro St Louis residents had "good" air to breathe during only one-third of the days of the year, according to the standards used by the EPA's Air Quality Index. That ranked St Louis 475th in air quality out of 501 small and large US metro areas. The Labadie Energy Center is a significant contributor, according to EPA data and recent scientific studies.

The plant, a sprawling facility that sits around 40 miles to the city's west, produces the highest combined total of sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides among US coal plants, and also emits soot at a rate that is two to three times that of nearly every other US coal plant,

according to EPA data.

That pollution drives an estimated economic burden of up to \$5.5bn each year, with about \$820mn of those costs borne by St Louis area residents, according to a Reuters analysis of the EPA's Co-Benefits Risk Assessment (COBRA) tool.

HEALTH COSTS

COBRA estimates health costs such as emergency room visits and measures how much people, collectively, are willing to pay for cleaner air because it lowers the risk of premature death. Reuters showed the analysis to two outside experts — Bryan Hubbell, a senior fellow at non-profit research group Resources for the Future and John Graham, a senior scientist at the environmental research group Clean Air Task Force — who both agreed with the figures.

Labadie's owner, St Louis-based utility Ameren Corp, did not contest the Reuters analysis of the EPA data. Ameren said the plant operates within the existing federal pollution limits.

Labadie will keep running for at least another decade to ensure reliable power supplies for all customers, Ameren said.

"Our employees live here, raise families here and rely on the same energy as our neighbours," Craig Giesman, Ameren's director of environmental services, said in a statement.

"That is just one of many reasons we remain focused on operating responsibly, protecting public health and providing reliable energy, especially when it's needed most."

The EPA declined to comment on Reuters' analysis of the COBRA data, but pointed out the agency is seeking to update its cost-benefit modeling tools.

A scientific study led by researchers at the University of Washington and published in the Journal of the International Society for Environmental Epidemiology last year said St Louis would be the city most impacted by delaying tougher soot standards on US coal plants. Biden's regulation would have forced Labadie to slash its soot emissions by more than half to continue to operate. Those soot limits would have yielded net public health benefits of up to \$3bn nationwide by 2037, according

to the EPA's 2023 cost-benefit analysis.

The EPA under Trump has since reversed course. The agency told Reuters the Biden administration's estimates were overblown and that existing standards provide "an ample margin of safety to protect public health." St Louis clean air activists see it differently.

"Our region continues to be a sacrifice zone," said Darnell Tingle, director of United Congregations of Metro-East, another activist network. "We are trying to prepare for these data centers, and negate their harm to our communities."

CHEAP POWER

The predominantly Black neighbourhoods of North St Louis already have some of the city's worst air quality. Tiny particles of soot pollution small enough to penetrate the brain and lungs exceed federal safety limits there regularly, according to a Reuters analysis of data tracked by the EPA, thanks to industrial sources along with pollution from nearby highways and rail operations.

Some 78% of African Americans live within 30 miles of a coal-fired power plant, according to the NAACP, compared to 56% of non-Hispanic whites. Soot pollution from power plants, meanwhile, kills African Americans at a rate that is 25% higher than the national average, according to a 2019 study in the Environmental Science & Technology journal.

"The logic is that we need cheap electricity in the US. But if you look at the rise in healthcare costs for residents in the St Louis area, this isn't cheap," said Patricia Schuba, who runs a local environmental group that monitors Labadie and three other coal plants.

Tougher pollution limits had forced Ameren to upgrade Labadie. About a decade ago, Ameren installed state-of-the-art soot pollution controls for two of Labadie's four coal-fired boilers in order to comply with Obama-era soot limits.

At a minimum, older controls on the remaining boilers would have needed retrofitting to meet Biden-era limits, Ameren told the EPA in a March 2025 letter seeking an exemption. Ameren declined to answer questions about how much upgrading the plant would have cost.

Commitment to provide excellent municipal services to enhance family life

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

The Ministry of Municipality has renewed its commitment to enhance and improve the quality of life in the country through its comprehensive municipal services, making them more accessible, convenient and cater for the needs of all members of the society.

On the occasion of Qatar Family Day, marked annually on April 15, the Ministry stressed the importance of the active engagement of all family members in the society embracing the broad and vibrant culture diversity in the country, which hosts families from around the world with different cultures, backgrounds and traditions living together in harmony and mutual respect. The ministry further stressed that diversity and culture difference are a source of pride and

should be celebrated while maintaining the cohesion of the society as a whole, as a driving force to enhance the fabric of the nation and build its prosperous future.

In the meantime, the ministry has continued to provide excellent services in expanding family parks and gardens across the different neighbourhoods of the country while constantly maintaining them and improving the services provided to give families excellent and free of charge recreation facilities with dedicated kids play areas, walkways, seats, and the other services.

There are around 156 public parks across Qatar, and the number is set to increase over the coming period, with some of these dedicated to families, in particular the parks located within the family residential areas. While many public parks are open for all, they give special focus to family-oriented services and activities include

well-equipped kids play areas that enjoyed enhanced safety features.

In addition to the parks, the ministry has maintained a good number of well-equipped and prepared beaches across the country dedicated for families that include Al Wakrah Family Beach, Simaisma Family Beach, Al Farkiah Family Beach and others. In addition, there are women dedicated beaches, where women and children under 10 years old can enjoy exclusive privacy. The largest public number of beaches is free of charge, and offers the visitors all the necessary services such as shower rooms, toilets, seats with shades, walkways and others.

Besides, the Ministry provides several free of charge services to improve the life of the people that include pest control services, tree pruning, where requests can be made to prune large trees outside family homes, sewage and rainwater removal, especially during the

rainy season with immediate service response, and there are various plant nurseries that pertain to the municipality that provide plants for home gardening at minimal rates. Most of these services are easily accessible through the Ministry's website, call centre and Oun App. Further, the ministry keeps providing plenty of public services on daily basis to help people enjoy their lives in clean, safe, healthy and well-organised surroundings that makes daily life more hassle-free for all.

Accordingly, the Ministry on its official X account stressed that "In Qatar, families from diverse cultures and backgrounds come together to form a cohesive society, reflecting the strong bonds that unite citizens and residents alike. Together, we continue to build a society rooted in unity, where diversity becomes a driving force that strengthens the fabric of our nation"



MSDF highlights modern parenting challenges

QNA
Doha

Qatar's Ministry of Social Development and Family (MSDF) has hosted a panel discussion on contemporary parenting challenges, as part of events marking Qatar Family Day 2026.

The event was organised in cooperation with the Doha International Family Institute, bringing together experts, specialists and families to explore the evolving demands on parents.

Participants discussed the growing pressures faced by parents amid rapid social and technological change, focusing on how to equip them with practical skills to translate parenting knowledge into sustainable daily practices.

The session highlighted the importance of preparing individuals



for parenthood and fostering a deeper understanding of child-rearing approaches that support children's psychological and social development at different stages of life. Particular attention was given to digital challenges, changing family dynamics and the fast pace of modern life.

Executive Director of the Doha International Family Institute, Dr Sharifa Noaman al-Emadi, said investing in parenting skills is a key preventive approach to strength-

ening family cohesion.

"Empowering parents begins with providing them with practical knowledge and applicable skills," she said, adding that this enables families to build more balanced relationships and respond more effectively to social and psychological challenges.

The discussion also examined the role of specialised programmes, schools and community institutions in supporting families, including efforts to prepare indi-

viduals for parenthood and promote flexible parenting approaches that enhance emotional security and communication.

Executive Director of Kanaf Parenting Center, Dr Maryam al-Malki, also took part, outlining the importance of equipping parents with practical tools and support pathways across different stages of parenting.

She presented the vision and programmes of the Parenting Center, which was launched on April 14, describing it as a national platform dedicated to strengthening parenting capabilities and helping families address modern challenges.

Organisers said the event reflects ongoing efforts by the ministry and its partners to support families through community dialogue and targeted initiatives aimed at promoting stability and cohesion in Qatari society.

Qatar marks Family Day with focus on environmental values

QNA
Doha

Qatar's Ministry of Environment and Climate Change has highlighted the vital role of families in promoting environmental values, as the country marked Qatar Family Day 2026.

In a statement issued on the occasion, the ministry said the family plays a central role in shaping environmentally responsible behaviour, describing it as the first "school" where children learn the principles of sustainability and the importance of preserving natural resources.

It stressed that building an environmentally conscious society begins at home, where individuals develop their awareness and attitudes, making family empowerment a key pillar in achieving sustainable development goals.

To mark the occasion, the min-

istry illuminated its main headquarters in green, symbolising sustainability, growth and environmental responsibility.

Officials said the colour green reflects values the ministry seeks to promote through its programmes and initiatives, as part of broader efforts to strengthen community awareness and foster a more cohesive and sustainable society.

The ministry also reaffirmed its commitment to launching awareness campaigns and initiatives targeting all segments of society, with a particular emphasis on engaging families in environmental protection efforts.

It added that celebrating Qatar Family Day forms part of wider national efforts to promote social cohesion and raise a generation that is conscious, responsible and capable of safeguarding the country's natural resources and achievements.

Gulf security is a red line, and its stability a collective responsibility

From Page 1

It is therefore essential to pursue strategic courses of action, foremost among them the establishment of a joint defence architecture along the lines of a "Gulf Nato," with the possibility of regional powers such as Türkiye or Pakistan joining to strengthen collective deterrence. Equally urgent is the acceleration of a regional network for the transmission of gas, oil, electricity, and water, linking the Gulf states and extending through Saudi Arabia to the Red Sea, through Oman to the Arabian Sea, and potentially to the Mediterranean via Syria — diversifying energy routes and strengthening energy security. In the same vein, there is a pressing need to develop a transcontinental rail network connecting East Asia, including China, to Europe via the Arab region, facilitating trade flows, deepening economic integration, and reviving the region's historic role as a global trade hub along the lines of the ancient Silk Roads. Such projects would reinforce stability and development, rather than leaving the door open to expansionist agendas or unilateral visions. Sustainable stability is also bound up with achieving a just and comprehensive resolution to the Palestinian question on the basis of a two-state solution and United Nations resolutions. In this framework, it is important to adopt a unified Gulf foreign policy on regional and international issues, and to accelerate the implementation of regional transport projects such as the Gulf Railway and the Asia-Europe economic corridors. This would deepen economic integration among the Gulf states and strengthening their international standing. On the peace front, the Arab Peace Initiative must be upheld as a comprehensive framework for a full and just settlement. Genuine integration cannot be built without a unified policy, a shared defence architecture, and a clear collective deterrent. The message, in closing, remains constant: Arabian Gulf security is a red line, and its stability is a collective responsibility that admits no compromise. The Gulf states will remain steadfast in their right to protect their sovereignty and safeguard their interests by every legitimate means available.

Cabinet gives green signal for labour, volunteer laws

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The Cabinet also approved a draft law establishing a unified system for volunteer work across GCC member states and referred it to the Shura Council for consideration. Proposed by the Ministry of Social Development and Family, the legislation seeks to embed a culture of volunteerism on a sound institutional footing — safeguarding the rights and defining the responsibilities of both volunteers and host organisations, while ensuring participation remains genuinely free and voluntary. The law is consistent with the social pillar of Qatar National Vision 2030 and the Third National Development Strategy's objectives around social cohesion.

In the area of urban planning, the Cabinet approved a draft ministerial decision to amend certain provisions of Decision No. 7 of 1989 on architectural conditions and technical specifications for buildings. Prepared by the Ministry of Municipality, the changes reflect a broader national

effort to align housing policy with the practical needs of Qatari families and contemporary living standards. The revised rules seek to ease architectural requirements and introduce more flexible planning controls, while maintaining safety standards and environmental sustainability commitments in line with the state's comprehensive urban plan and QNV 2030.

The Cabinet concluded its session by reviewing three reports. These covered the 2025 annual report of the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking; the outcomes of Qatar's hosting of the Sixth Arab Ministerial Forum on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development and the 42nd session of the Council of Arab Ministers of Housing and Reconstruction, held in Doha in December 2025; and a report on Qatar's participation, led by HE the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, in the second Ministerial Council meeting of the Middle East Green Initiative in Jeddah.

Trump: War 'close to over'

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Meanwhile, during the first 48 hours of the US blockade on ships entering and exiting Iranian ports, no vessels have made it past US forces, the US military said. Additionally, nine vessels have complied with direction from US forces to turn around and return toward an Iranian port or coastal area.

However, Iran's Fars News agency said an Iranian supertanker subject to US sanctions crossed the strait towards Iran's Imam Khomeini port despite the blockade. Fars did not identify the tanker or give further details of its voyage.

Iran's joint military command warned it would halt trade flows in the Gulf, the Sea of Oman and the Red Sea — which connects to the Suez Canal — if the US blockade continued.

Trump has also threatened to escalate if the war resumes. He told Fox Business Network: "We could take out every one of their bridges in one hour. We could take out every one of their power plants, electric power plants, in one hour. We don't want to do that...so we'll see what happens."

Trump told the *New York Post* on

Tuesday that his negotiators were likely to return to Pakistan.

Iran's nuclear ambitions were a key sticking point at last weekend's talks. The US proposed a 20-year suspension of all nuclear activity by Iran — an apparent concession from longstanding demands for a permanent ban — while Tehran suggested a halt of three to five years, according to people familiar with the proposals.

One source involved in the talks said back-channel discussions had made progress in narrowing gaps, bringing the two sides closer to a deal that could be presented at a new round of talks.

Speaking at a White House press briefing, Leavitt said any fresh talks would likely be in Pakistan again as it has emerged as the "only mediator" in the effort to end the US-Israeli war on Iran.

"These conversations are productive and ongoing, and that's where we are right now. I've also seen some reporting about the potential for in-person discussions. Again, those discussions are being had, but nothing is official until you hear it from us here at the White House, but we feel good about the prospects of a deal," Leavitt said.

Qatar warns of massive global economic impact from war

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Economists at JPMorgan have warned that Qatar's economy is likely to contract by around 9% this year after Iranian missile strikes on the Ras Laffan Liquefied Natural Gas plant wiped out 17% of its production capacity. Al-Kuwari said the war's overall impact on the country's fiscal position nonetheless remained manageable.

"Managing the fiscal situation is fine," he said, pointing to the country's conservative pre-war budget and its shock stability fund. He added that Qatar could go six months without drawing on the Qatar Investment Authority, its sovereign wealth fund, and had additional options available including tightening the budget, borrowing if necessary, and deferring some investment projects. "We are not seeing a major issue and we can go for a full year without this," he said.

Al-Kuwari stressed that Qatar was calling for de-escalation and prioritising peaceful

solutions and dialogue. He also emphasised the importance of maintaining the smooth flow of global trade routes and energy security, and reaffirmed Qatar's commitment to market stability, fulfilment of international obligations, and its role as a reliable global economic partner.

"Qatar is addressing current challenges through an integrated package of policies and measures, including strengthening fiscal stability, reinforcing the resilience of the financial system, ensuring continuity of production, and consolidating national capacity to withstand shocks, reflecting a proactive approach grounded in strong economic fundamentals," he said.

He concluded by underscoring that Qatar's fiscal policy struck a balance between short-term stability and long-term sustainability, guided by the principles of good governance and transparency, and through the re-prioritisation of expenditure to support sustainable growth.

EU stands firmly with GCC, says EC president

From Page 1

He described the strait — along with the Red Sea — as a vital artery for global supply chains and trade, warning that the conflict had already inflicted severe damage on the world economy and would worsen considerably if no resolution was found.

He said the EU had consistently called for de-escalation and respect for international law since the outset of the conflict, and expressed support for the US-Iran talks mediated by Pakistan as a foundation on which to build a lasting agreement. That agreement, he said, must address not only the nuclear question, but also Iran's ballistic missile programme, its support for regional proxies, and its closure of international shipping lanes. France and the United Kingdom, he noted, are working with global partners to establish a broad coalition to guarantee safe passage through the strait, and the EU intends to contribute actively to that effort.

Responding to a question from the Qatar News Agency, Costa described Qatar as an "honest mediator" for peace and regional stability — a role it had demonstrated during the Gaza conflict — and said Doha was continuing its efforts to consolidate the ceasefire and lay

the groundwork for negotiations on the broader range of outstanding issues. He added that Qatar was actively supporting freedom-of-navigation discussions, and praised the country's constructive engagement throughout the crisis.

On Lebanon, Costa said Hezbollah posed an existential threat to the country and was a serious source of regional instability. He welcomed Lebanese President Joseph Aoun's move to restrict Hezbollah's military activities, and said empowering Beirut to disarm the group was the only sustainable path to stability. He also welcomed talks held in Washington between Lebanon and Israel as an important step that needed to yield concrete results.

On EU-GCC relations more broadly, Costa said the current moment had only reinforced the importance of deeper co-operation, with free trade negotiations under way with some member states and strategic partnerships being developed with others. He expressed hope for a second EU-GCC summit before the year's end, to be held in the Gulf region.

He closed with a sobering note, warning that the world was at a juncture where adherence to the rules-based international order was not optional — and that the alternative was chaos. (QNA)

Sport keeps dialogue open, says Years of Culture ambassador

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

Sport continues to link Qatar to the world, a cross-cultural connection that's more important now than ever, a Years of Culture sports programmes ambassador told *Gulf Times*.

Ali bin Towar al-Kuwari, adventurer, entrepreneur and TV host who also serves as a Years of Culture sports ambassador, cited the growing importance of sports diplomacy as a tool for maintaining dialogue and mutual understanding between nations, particularly during periods of uncertainty.

He said sport possesses a rare ability to unite people across cultures through shared experiences, emotions and goals.

"Sport has a unique ability to bring people together in ways few other platforms can," al-Kuwari said, noting that shared challenges, whether in training or competition, often create lasting bonds. "Even in times of tension, it opens space for connection that is universally understood."

Within the Years of Culture framework, he said sports pro-

gramming has become an integral part of fostering engagement between communities. By creating opportunities for participation and interaction, these initiatives encourage individuals from different countries and backgrounds to connect through something positive and familiar.

Al-Kuwari said such shared experiences help build trust, mutual respect and understanding, forming a foundation for stronger and more enduring international relationships. "These moments of connection are important because they keep engagement open and constructive".

He stressed that in the current regional climate, strengthening people-to-people ties has taken on greater urgency. Programmes under Years of Culture are designed to create meaningful spaces for co-operation, even when broader geopolitical conditions may be uncertain, he pointed out.

According to al-Kuwari, hands-on initiatives such as CultuRide and CultuHike were cited as examples of how sport can bring individuals together in practical and engaging ways. These activities allow participants to connect through teamwork, shared chal-



Ali bin Towar al-Kuwari.

lenges and common goals, fostering genuine relationships that extend beyond borders.

"Sport speaks to a wide audience and creates direct, human connection. It reminds us that meaningful relationships between countries often begin with simple moments of connection between people," he said.

Addressing the idea of sport as neutral ground, al-Kuwari said it remains one of the most effective platforms for bridging differences. He explained that sport provides a shared language that transcends cultural, linguistic and social barriers.

"You don't need to speak the same language to understand the emotion of a match or the discipline it takes to complete a chal-

lenge," he said. "That sense of connection happens very quickly."

Al-Kuwari noted that the goal of sports initiatives within Years of Culture is not to overlook differences, but to create environments where those differences do not hinder positive engagement. By focusing on shared experiences, he said such programmes enable participants to interact in ways that encourage openness and mutual respect.

He highlighted the importance of digital transformation in reshaping how people connect through sport globally. He said advancements in streaming, social media and e-sports have significantly expanded access and participation, particularly among younger audiences.

"Streaming has made sports content far more accessible, allowing people to follow events from anywhere in the world in real time," al-Kuwari said. Social media, meanwhile, has brought fans closer to athletes and teams, enabling direct interaction and fostering cross-border communities, he added.

He said that e-sports also emerged as a powerful new avenue for engagement, attracting diverse

audiences and redefining how competition and teamwork are experienced. This shift, he added, was highlighted in the recent "Esports | A Game Changer" exhibition at 3-2-1 Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum, which explored the growing role of gaming in contemporary sports culture.

"People are no longer just watching sport from a distance. They are reacting, sharing and building communities around it in real time," al-Kuwari said.

He pointed out that Qatar is also well-positioned to strengthen its role as a hub for international sports collaboration. He pointed to the country's track record in hosting major events and developing sports infrastructure, as well as its broader commitment to integrating sport with national development goals.

Future opportunities lie in linking sport more closely with education, culture, innovation and community development, he said. One such initiative involves collaboration with the Qatar Winter Sports Committee to launch a year-round winter sports development programme as part of the Qatar - Canada and Mexico 2026 Year of Culture partnership.

"These initiatives are valuable because they connect sport with broader national priorities," al-Kuwari said, noting that they also support technical exchange and grassroots participation while fostering long-term partnerships.

He stressed that the aim is not only for Qatar to remain a global host of sporting events, but also to become a long-term partner in shaping how sport contributes to international co-operation.

Al-Kuwari also highlighted the important role of the private sector in advancing sports diplomacy. He said sustainable development in sport requires collaboration across a wide range of stakeholders, including companies, sponsors and industry partners.

"The private sector helps scale programmes, support innovation and create platforms that reach wider audiences," he said, adding that such partnerships bring valuable expertise in areas such as technology, event management and youth engagement.

By working together, public and private entities can ensure that sports initiatives have a more lasting and practical impact, al-Kuwari added.

QF strengthens autism support in Qatar with digital hub launch

Qatar Foundation (QF) is advancing its decade-long vision for inclusive autism support across education, research, and community development with its new Autism Community Hub - a digital platform that unites services, resources, and expertise, making co-ordinated care and guidance more accessible for families and professionals across Qatar.

The platform has been developed as a flagship initiative under the QF Autism Strategy 2025-2035 - a 10-year framework launched in April 2025 to build a fully inclusive ecosystem for people with autism - and represents its first phase. It responds to a critical gap faced by families, particularly in identifying and navigating autism support following an initial assessment request.

The Autism Community Hub, which can be accessed by visiting <https://www.qf.org.qa/commu->



nity/autism, aims to help individuals navigate services and pathways, while co-ordinating guidance, through centralising information on programmes, research opportunities, and community resources available within QF.

It is designed for parents, caregivers, educators, and professionals - as well as a platform for healthcare professionals, therapy providers, researchers, policymakers, and government entities - and aims to help users make informed decisions

throughout every stage of their autism journey.

Dr Dena A al-Thani, associate professor, Head of Computer and Electrical Engineering Division, College of Science and Engineering, Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU) is the chair of the QF Autism Task Force.

"The Autism Community Hub underscores Qatar Foundation's ongoing commitment to bridging gaps in autism support, ensuring individuals and their families stay in-

formed, connected, and supported at every stage," she said.

"By creating a trusted space for guidance, clarity, and connection, the platform aims to enhance the quality of life for families and foster a strong sense of belonging and inclusion throughout their journey."

At HBKU, autism research supports this mission through a multidisciplinary approach that explores genetic and biological factors, investigates brain function and development, and advances the use of inno-



novative technologies for more precise assessment and intervention. It also contributes to the development of targeted therapies and informs policies that improve access to diagnosis, care, and support services.

Among the Autism Community Hub's key features is a clearly defined autism pathway, guiding users from initial diagnosis through education and long-term support. The platform also includes a comprehensive, searchable directory of services and programmes, making it

easy for families to identify and access the support they need.

The platform also offers centralised updates on the progress of the implementation of the QF Autism Strategy, alongside news, insights, and community stories that nurture shared learning experiences, peer-to-peer support, and connections.

Future phases of the platform will focus on gradually enhancing personalisation, community engagement pathways, and the integration of research and innovation elements, data, and insights, further strengthening its role as a connected and evolving platform for autism support in Qatar.

Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, Chairperson of Qatar Foundation, is a global advocate for autism awareness, whose 2007 proposal led to the United Nations' adoption of World Autism Awareness Day, marked annually on April 2.



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