



Amir, Pakistan prime minister hold talks on regional developments



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif discussed the latest regional and international developments, particularly those in the Middle East, during a meeting held at the Amiri Diwan yesterday. Both sides stressed the necessity of supporting the path of de-escalation and strengthening international co-ordination to ensure the security and stability of the region, especially maintaining the smooth flow of energy supply chains through vital maritime routes. - **QNA**

Qatar slams shooting at school in Turkiye

Qatar has condemned and denounced the shooting incident at a school in Turkiye's Kahramanmaraş province, which resulted in deaths and injuries.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs reiterated in a statement Qatar's firm stance against violence and criminal acts, regardless of motives or reasons.

The ministry affirmed Qatar's full solidarity and support for the government and people of Turkiye, as well as its full support for all measures taken to preserve security and stability.

The ministry expressed Qatar's condolences to the families of the victims, and to the government and people of Turkiye, wishing the injured a swift recovery. - **QNA**

Shura Council Speaker stresses Qatar's continued focus on peace

HE the Speaker of the Shura Council Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanim has affirmed that Qatar, under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, will continue its steadfast approach based on dialogue, mediation, and preventing escalation, which contributes to supporting regional and international security and stability.

He pointed to Qatar's ongoing efforts to bridge differences and reduce tensions, stemming from its firm commitment to the principles of good neighbourliness and peaceful solutions to conflicts.

Addressing the 152nd Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), underway in Istanbul, HE al-Ghanim said that this approach was met with an Iranian attack targeting civilian facilities within Qatar.

This attack, he said, damaged infrastructure, endangered civilian lives, and its effects extended to several other Gulf and Arab states, constituting a grave violation of international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

HE the Shura Council Speaker emphasised that the gravity of this attack lies not only in its direct consequences but also in its targeting of purely civilian objects, thereby undermining the foundations of development, threatening the stability of societies, and revealing a gap between political rhetoric and actual practices.

This, he added, necessitates a clear international stance that ensures accountability and prevents the recurrence of such violations.

Speaking within the framework of this session's theme, *Peace, Justice, and the Activation of Parliamentary Tools to Achieve Security*, HE al-Ghanim noted that the world is witnessing an unprecedented escalation in armed conflicts and an expansion of wars, amidst a clear weakness in the international system and its inability to enforce respect for international law or activate accountability mechanisms.

This has contributed, he said, to undermining confidence in the international system.

Shura Council participates in 217th IPU Governing Council session

THE Shura Council participated yesterday in the 217th session of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)'s Governing Council, as part of the 152nd Assembly of the IPU, currently underway in Istanbul.

The Shura Council was represented at the event by HE the Deputy Speaker Dr Hamda bint Hassan al-Sulaiti and Shura Council members Dr Sultan bin Hassan al-Dhabit al-Dosari and Ahmed bin Ibrahim al-Maliki.

During the session, the attendees approved the summary report of the 216th session of the IPU Governing Council, along with a review by the president of the IPU of the presidency's activities since the previous Governing Council meeting, as well as the activities of the Executive Committee.

The IPU secretary-general also presented the Union's 2025 *State of the Union and Impact Report*.

HE Dr al-Sulaiti, who is also a member



of the IPU Executive Committee and vice-chair of the Committee representing the Arab Group within the IPU, participated in the 299th meeting of the IPU Executive Committee.

The attendees reviewed a number of institutional and strategic topics, most notably the procedures for selecting the new secretary-general, strengthening governance and accountability through performance reports, discussing financial matters

Qatar takes part in 3rd International Sudan Conference

Qatar participated yesterday in the Third International Sudan Conference, held in the German capital Berlin.

Qatar was represented at the conference by HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi.

The minister thanked the German Minister of Foreign Affairs and all partners for hosting and organising the conference focused on the Sudanese issue.

HE Dr al-Khulaifi said that Qatar's position on Sudan has remained consistent and unchanged, reaffirming the country's firm support for the unity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Sudan, and calling on the international community to intensify efforts to reach a de-escalation phase, meet urgent humanitarian needs, and protect innocent civilians.

HE Dr al-Khulaifi stressed that it is now more than ever the responsibility of all to provide assistance and alleviate the severity of the crisis facing the Sudanese people.

He affirmed that providing humanitarian support and ensuring the dignity of men, women, and children, for them to live in safety and security, was a core pillar of Qatari foreign policy, in line with its commitment to international peace and security, noting that Qatar has previously pledged more than \$75mn in aid.

The minister pointed out that despite the critical importance of humanitarian assistance, it alone was insufficient to achieve lasting peace and security for the Sudanese people, emphasising the need for a political settlement to the conflict.

In this context, HE Dr al-Khulaifi renewed Qatar's call to expand international support for efforts to reach a political solution that reflects the will of the Sudanese people. - **QNA**

Wadepful expressed Germany's appreciation for Qatar's efforts to reduce tensions in the region and help restore security and stability. - **QNA**

Al-Khulaifi meets German minister



HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi met yesterday with Germany's Minister of Foreign Affairs Johann Wadepful.

Their meeting discussed the latest developments in the region, particularly those related to the ceasefire between the US and Iran, along with efforts aimed at reducing escalation in a way that contributes to strengthening security and stability in the region.

Wadepful expressed Germany's appreciation for Qatar's efforts to reduce tensions in the region and help restore security and stability. - **QNA**



Top Qatar and Italy transport officials discuss co-operation

HE the Minister of Transport Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah bin Mohammed al-Thani held a meeting yesterday with Italy's Deputy Minister of Infrastructure and Transport of the Italian Republic Edoardo Rixi.

The meeting, held virtually, discussed bilateral co-operation in the fields of transportation and logistics services that support them.

The two sides also discussed the current regional situation and its impact on transportation and supply chains. - **QNA**



Philippines minister meets Qatar's envoy

The Philippines's Secretary of Foreign Affairs Theresa P Lazaro met yesterday with Qatar's ambassador Ahmed bin Saad al-Hamidi. Discussion during the meeting focused on bilateral co-operation. - **QNA**

Shura Council Speaker meets Pakistan, Australian counterparts



HE the Speaker of the Shura Council Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanim held separate meetings in Istanbul with the Speaker of Pakistan's National Assembly, Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, and with the Speaker of Australia's House of Representatives, Milton Dick.

HE al-Ghanim is in Turkiye to take part in the 152nd Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). The meetings dealt with existing parliamentary co-operation and relations between Qatar and both Pakistan and Australia, and ways to enhance them. The meetings also reviewed topics on the agenda of the 152nd IPU Assembly. - **QNA**

and adopting audited financial statements, as well as discussing the membership status of some parliaments and parliamentary diplomacy initiatives to support the peaceful settlement of conflicts.

The meeting also addressed preparations for the General Assembly and the

future directions of the IPU within its 2027-31 strategy, aimed at strengthening multilateral parliamentary action and supporting international peace and security efforts.

The Shura Council, represented by Council Member Ahmed bin Hitmi al-

Hitmi, participated in the meeting of the Standing Committee for International Peace and Security, and by Council Member Yousef bin Ali al-Khater, participated in the meeting of the Standing Committee for Sustainable Development. - **QNA**

Syria completes takeover of military sites used by US

Syria said yesterday that the handover to the government of military sites previously used by US troops had been completed, which it said reflected the successful integration of the Kurdish-led SDF group into national structures.

The Syrian government and Kurdish forces declared in January a ceasefire deal that set out a phased integration into the state of Kurdish fighters that had long been allied to the United States.

Washington had stationed troops in Syria for more than a decade helping to combat the Islamic State (IS).

Syria's foreign ministry said that it "welcomes the completed handover of military sites where United States forces were previously present in Syria to the Syrian government", adding that the move was carried out "in full coordination between the Syrian and American governments".

Damascus said it viewed the US move as reflecting "a shared assessment that the circumstances which originally necessitated the American military presence in Syria... have fundamentally changed".

"The Syrian state is today fully capable of leading counterterrorism efforts from within, in cooperation with the international community," it added.

Syria's Kurds lost swathes of territory to government forces earlier this year following clashes between the sides, who then agreed a deal to gradually integrate the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and Kurdish civilian institutions into the state. - AFP/Reuters

Saudi Arabia providing extra \$3bn to Pakistan

Saudi Arabia has extended a \$5bn deposit with Pakistan's central bank and announced an additional \$3bn deposit, the Saudi state news agency reported.

The move comes on the heels of an official visit by the Pakistani prime minister to Saudi Arabia on Wednesday and underlines a deepening relationship between Riyadh and Islamabad, cemented last year by a mutual defence pact.

The additional support for Pakistan would help the South Asian nation bridge a multi-billion dollar gap in its finances linked to an upcoming debt repayment to the United Arab Emirates.

Pakistan faces a \$3.5bn repayment to the UAE this month that has put a strain on its foreign exchange reserves, which stood at about \$16.4bn as of March 27.

Under Pakistan's \$7bn International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme, the country is targeting foreign exchange reserves of more than \$18bn by June.

Saudi Finance Minister Mohammed al-Jadaan was in Pakistan last Friday in what one source familiar with the matter described as a show of economic support.

Pakistan Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb has told reporters in Washington that "this support comes at a critical time for Pakistan's external financing needs and would help reinforce foreign exchange reserves and strengthen the country's external account", the finance ministry said in a statement.

The minister is in Washington for the IMF's annual Spring Meetings.

The ministry added that Pakistan is committed to maintaining foreign exchange reserves "in line with its obligations to markets and under the IMF-supported programme". - AFP/Reuters

NCSA honours top performers in 2025 National Cyber Drill

The National Cybersecurity Agency (NCSA) has honoured participants in the 2025 National Cyber Drill, titled "Cross-Border Attacks", in recognition of their performance in realistic technical, operational, and administrative scenarios.

NCSA president Eng. Abdulrahman bin Ali al-Farahid al-Malki presented awards to entities that achieved the highest evaluations in the 12th edition of the exercise, held in November last year.

This recognition reflects the agency's efforts to motivate government and critical sectors. Cyber exercises help identify technical and administrative gaps and enhance institutional readiness through targeted strategic initiatives.

The director of the NCSA's Cyber Resilience, Risk, and Insurance Department,



Mohammed Murshid al-Mannai, said that 95 entities successfully passed the exercise. He noted that this edition was exceptional in scale, with more than 1,800 participants from 198 entities, including government bodies, universities, service providers, and several Arab countries.



The exercise also hosted the first Arab Cyber Exercise with participation from 21 countries, alongside 11 local universities competing in a Capture-the-Flag (Ctf) competition. - QNA

Community Policing Department holds workshop on 'Building Positive Behaviour within the Family'

The Community Policing Department (MoI), in co-operation with the Behavioural Healthcare Centre (Daam), organised a training workshop titled "Building Positive Behaviour within the Family".

The workshop addressed several top-

ics in the field of behavioural health, including the role of the family in shaping children's personalities, as well as reviewing best practices in dealing with behavioral challenges.

It also witnessed notable interaction from participants, reflecting growing awareness and contributing to the en-

hancement of community security.

The workshop was attended by the Community Police Department director Brigadier Dr Ibrahim Mohammed al-Sumaih, Traffic director-general Brigadier Jabr Ali al-Kubaisi, and a number of department directors, officers, and MoI personnel. - QNA



QNA concludes course on video filming, montage

The Qatar News Agency (QNA) has concluded a five-day training course on video filming and montage, as part of the QNA Training Centre's 2026 training plan, with the participation of media professionals from the agency and several government bodies.

Represented by QNA photography and montage expert Anwar bin Ammar, the course aimed to develop participants' skills in producing visual content according to professional stand-

ards, by introducing them to modern photography techniques and methods of producing visual materials in line with the requirements of media work, in addition to enhancing their capabilities in field work and refining their visual storytelling skills through specialised practical applications.

The training course covered theoretical and practical components, such as introducing photography equipment like cameras and lenses, as well as the basics of lightning and how to use it,

in addition to reviewing the different types of photography and their uses in media work.

The course included montage (video editing) skills using various applications, with a focus on choosing the right tools for each type of content, along with colour correction and image quality improvement techniques, in addition to the principles of art direction and building an integrated visual story.

At the end of course, certificates were handed out to the participants. - QNA

Pakistan's army chief meets Iran leadership in diplomatic outreach

AFP/Reuters
Tehran/United Nations/Islamabad

The influential chief of Pakistan's armed forces visited Iran to meet the head of Tehran's negotiators yesterday, as Washington considers agreeing to another round of peace talks in Islamabad.

Iranian state television showed Field Marshal Asim Munir meeting Iran's speaker of parliament, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, who led the Iranian delegation at the first US-Iran meeting in Pakistan last week, which ended without a deal.

Earlier, in Washington, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt had told reporters that further talks "would very likely" be in the Pakistani capital.

"Those discussions are being had," Leavitt said, and "we feel good about the prospects of a deal".

Pakistani foreign ministry spokesman Tahir Andrabi said no date had been set for the next round of talks.

"Our role as a mediator and facilitator did not stop when the Islamabad talks, this last round, concluded - it continued," he said.

The optimism came on the back of Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's four-day diplomatic blitz, with the leader meeting on Wednesday with Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.



This handout photo taken and provided by the Office of the Iranian Parliament Speaker shows Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf welcoming Pakistan's army chief Asim Munir before their meeting in Tehran. - AFP

US Vice-President JD Vance, who led the first round of talks, has said that Iran is being offered a "grand bargain" to end the six-week war with Israel and the United States and address the decades-old dispute over Tehran's nuclear programme.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel and the United States have "identical" goals - enriched material removed from Iran, elimination of enrichment capability and reopening the Strait of Hormuz.

The strait, through which one-fifth of the world's crude oil normally flows, has been choked by Iranian forces since the US-Israeli offensive began and is now the focus of the US blockade.

Optimism about an accord in the conflict sent share prices higher on Wall Street, however, with the major stock indices finishing at records on Wednesday while crude prices dropped.

Washington has sought to turn the screws on Tehran with a blockade of its ports, with US Central Command (Centcom) claiming to have "completely halted economic trade going into and out of Iran by sea".

Centcom said it had turned back 10 vessels that tried to sail out of Iranian ports during the first 48 hours of the blockade and "zero ships have broken through".

According to recent maritime tracking data, the picture in the Strait of Hormuz was less clear-

cut, and Iran's Tasnim news agency reported shipping has continued from southern Iran.

The head of Iran's military central command centre warned that a US failure to lift the blockade would constitute "a prelude" to violating the two-week ceasefire struck on April 8.

Yesterday the US widened its blockade on Iranian shipping to include what it called contraband, including weapons, weapons systems, ammunition, nuclear materials, crude and refined oil products as well as iron, steel and aluminium.

Any vessel suspected of trying to reach Iranian territory will be subject to "visit, board, search and seizure", the US Navy said in an advisory.

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Dan Caine said that as of morning yesterday the US military had not boarded any ships and that 13 had turned around.

Keeping up the pressure, the United States slapped fresh sanctions on Iran's oil industry on Wednesday, which Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said targeted "regime elites".

Unless Washington relents, Iran's armed forces "will not allow any exports or imports to continue in the Persian Gulf, the Sea of Oman and the Red Sea", Ali Abdollahi said.

The military adviser to Iran's Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei also warned that Iran would sink American ships in the strait if the United States decides to "po-

lice" the key shipping channel.

"These ships of yours will be sunk by our first missiles," Mohsen Rezaei, a former command centre warned that a US failure to lift the blockade would constitute "a prelude" to violating the two-week ceasefire struck on April 8.

Trump has insisted that any deal with Iran must permanently bar the Islamic Republic from acquiring a nuclear weapon.

He launched the war on February 28, claiming that Tehran was rushing to complete an atomic bomb, an assertion not backed by the UN nuclear watchdog.

Washington has reportedly sought a 20-year suspension of Iran's uranium enrichment programme, while Tehran has proposed suspending nuclear activity for five years - an offer US officials rejected.

Tehran insists its nuclear programme is for civilian purposes and its foreign ministry said on Wednesday that Iran's right to enrich uranium was "indisputable", although the level of enrichment was "negotiable".

US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth meanwhile said that troops were poised to restart combat operations if a deal was not reached.

"We are reloading with more power than ever before, and better intelligence," he told a Pentagon briefing. "We are locked and loaded on your critical dual-use infrastructure, on your remaining power generation, and on your energy industry. We'd rather not have to do it."

Israeli curbs cutting off hope for Gaza's war amputees

By Dawoud Abu Alkas, Nidal al-Mughrabi and Emma Farge
Reuters

Fourteen-year-old Fadel al-Naji used to be a keen footballer but is now largely confined to his home in Gaza City since both legs were severed in an Israeli drone attack in September.

He sits sullenly on a couch with one hollow pant leg dangling and the other tucked into his waist beside his 11-year-old brother, who lost an eye in the same strike.

"He has become withdrawn and isolated," said his mother Najwa al-Naji, showing old videos of him on her phone. "It is as if he is dying slowly, and I wish that they would fit him with prosthetic limbs."

However, those are in scarce supply for Gaza's nearly 5,000 war amputees - a quarter of whom are children - because of Israeli restrictions on materials like plaster of Paris, aid and medical sources said.

Israel, which fought a two-year war with Hamas in the Palestinian enclave, cites security concerns as the reason for restrictions.

Taken together with Gaza's pre-war amputee population provided by Palestinian health officials, its per capita amputee rate now exceeds even Cambodia, which had been the worst due to landmines, aid group Humanity & Inclusion said.

Such is the need that two medical centres said they were trying to reuse old prosthetic limbs recovered from the dead.

Others are creating makeshift artificial limbs with plastic piping or wooden planks, medics said, though this risks damaging the stump or causing infection.

Gaza's amputees are a symbol of unfulfilled pledges from the October ceasefire and US President Donald Trump's 20-point plan envisaging full aid "without interference".

It also foresaw the reopening of the Rafah border crossing - Gaza's sole route out to Egypt - but medical evacuations including for amputees have been irregular.

Israel restricts imports of items that it says have potential military as well as civilian use under a policy pre-dating the two-year war.

While plaster of Paris and other plastic components for prostheses are not

specified on Israeli lists of so-called dual use items, "construction products" are there, an Israeli export control document showed.

Israel's COGAT military agency, which controls access to Gaza, says it facilitates the regular entry of medical equipment but will not permit materials that could be used by Hamas for a "terrorist build-up".

The International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (ICRC), which supports the Artificial Limbs and Polio Centre in Gaza, the main centre for prosthetics, said imports of plaster of Paris have been almost completely restricted for over four months.

"What we are producing now are very small quantities compared to the actual need," said Hosni Mhana, the centre's spokesperson, without giving numbers.

Humanity & Inclusion, which has fit 118 temporary prostheses in Gaza since early 2025, said supplies from its last shipment in December 2024 are dwindling.

The Trump-led Board of Peace, which has sought to boost aid for Gaza, said it took very seriously the hardships of amputees and other patients in Gaza.

"These are urgent civilian needs," it said in a statement to Reuters, noting that the ceasefire obligations included the sustained flow of humanitarian, commercial and medical supplies.

Artificial limbs cannot be imported whole into Gaza since they are built for each patient, with plaster used to take an exact cast of the residual limb to shape a custom-made socket.

Reuters interviewed three other Gaza amputees still struggling to resume their pre-war lives without prostheses.

Some of the amputees are on a waiting list and may have undergone preparatory work, which can include stump revisions, a form of surgery to hone its shape.

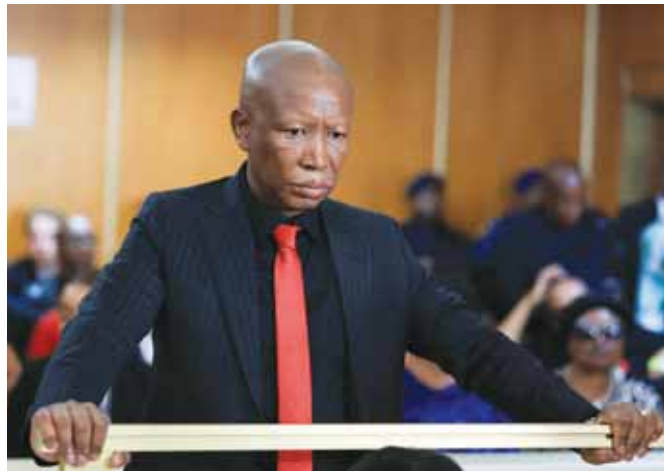
One on the list is Hazem Foura, a 40-year-old unable to work since losing his left leg in December 2024 when he says Israel bombed his house.

"I am not asking for the luxuries of life, I am asking for a limb so I can regain my humanity," he said.

As well as materials, expertise is lacking, with only eight prosthetists still in Gaza according to the World Health Organisation (WHO).



A Palestinian worker assembles a prosthetic limb at the Artificial Limbs and Polio Centre in Gaza City. - Reuters



Malema has said that he will go all the way to the country's top court. - Reuters

South Africa's Malema gets five-year jail sentence after firing gun in public

Reuters/AFP
KuGompo, South Africa

South African opposition leader Julius Malema was sentenced to five years in jail yesterday for firing a rifle in the air at a rally, a judgment that could bar the prominent campaigner from parliament.

Soon after, the 45-year-old was allowed to appeal against his sentence by a magistrate in KuGompo City and released until the case is heard by the high court.

As the hearing was unfolding, hundreds of supporters of his far-left Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) group gathered outside the court, wearing the party's trademark red berets and singing campaign songs.

Legal expert Ulrich Roux said that Malema would not be transferred to jail while the appeal was pending.

Malema has said he will go all the way to the country's top court, the Constitutional Court, a process that Roux said could take years.

Malema was convicted last year on five charges after firing the gun at a stadium in Eastern Cape province in 2018.

"It is clear that if crimes are allowed to go unchecked and unpunished, it poses a serious threat to our democratic state," magistrate Twanet Olivier said before delivering the sentence.

Under the constitution, a prison sentence of 12 months or more, if confirmed after all appeals, would bar Malema from serving as a lawmaker.

That would be a major setback for his party, which has strong support among young South Africans frustrated by the racial inequality that has persisted since the end of white minority rule in 1994.

The EFF advocates nationalising mines and seizing land from white farmers.

Yesterday the court sentenced

Malema to five years in prison for unlawful possession of a firearm and two years for unlawful possession of ammunition.

It gave him fines for the other three offences, including discharging a firearm in a built-up area, with prison time if he does not pay.

The sentences will run at the same time.

Malema, dressed in black suit and shirt with a red tie, was released on a warning, meaning that he did not pay bail, but made commitments to appear in court on a future date.

The state prosecutor had told the court it would set a bad precedent if Malema got off without jail time and urged the magistrate to impose the maximum possible sentence of 15 years.

Malema's lawyers had argued he did not intend to cause harm by firing the gun in a celebratory gesture.

"They are trying by all means to silence this voice," Malema told hundreds of supporters outside the court in the city of KuGompo, formerly East London, after he was released. "They will never win."

Accusing the magistrate of racism, he said: "We are fighting the enemy and the enemy is white supremacy."

Malema's sentencing was welcomed by the centre-right Democratic Alliance (DA), the second largest political party in the country after President Cyril Ramaphosa's African National Congress (ANC).

The DA is in a multiparty unity government with the ANC but which excludes the EFF.

The coalition was formed in 2024, three decades after the end of the apartheid era of white-minority rule.

"Gun violence is out of control in South Africa, so any crime involving illegal gunfire is extremely serious. It's important to punish illegal firearm crimes harshly," DA leader Geordin Hill-Lewis said.

Zimbabwe bus fire kills 18

A minibus burst into flames on a highway in southern Zimbabwe yesterday, killing at least 18 people, police said.

The incident is one of the deadliest in recent months in the country where roads riddled with potholes from years of neglect are a major killer.

It was not immediately clear what had caused the fire. Police spokesperson Paul Nyathi said authorities were still gathering details.

Images shared online showed the minibus reduced to a charred shell along the Bulawayo-Beitbridge road, a key highway linking the country to South Africa.

For everyday transport, many Zimbabweans rely on the privately-run minibus taxis, known locally as kombi, but they are often criticised for overloading and poor driving.

Abuse of regulations has also seen some unroadworthy vehicles carrying passengers.

Earlier this month, a woman and her five children were killed when her vehicle collided with a haulage truck along another highway linking Zimbabwe and South Africa.

In 2018, at least 42 passengers were killed after a suspected gas cylinder exploded on a bus. - AFP

Attacks on Abuja being planned: customs memo

AFP
Lagos

Religious militants are plotting attacks on Abuja airport and a prison on the outskirts of Nigeria's capital, according to an internal memo prepared by the Nigerian Customs Service (NCS) seen by AFP yesterday.

The memo, dated April 13, calls for an "enhanced level of security within the Federal Capital Territory and its environs", after the NCS received a "credible report" that Boko Haram and its rival Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) splinter group were planning a "series of co-ordinated attacks".

Potential targets include the Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport and Kuje prison, both on the outskirts of Abuja, and the Wawa military prison in neighbouring Niger state, according to the memo.

Kuje prison was the site of a massive jailbreak orchestrated by ISWAP in 2022.

Earlier this month, the Kuje area council in Abuja had instituted a dusk-to-dawn curfew in at least four villages "following credible intelligence regarding a potential kinetic assault" on the prison, according to a separate report by the council seen by AFP.

Nigeria has been fighting a religious militant insurgency since 2009, though violence has ticked up in the last year.

Earlier this month, the US embassy in Abuja told "non-emergency" staff they could leave the country "due to the deteriorating security situation".

Nigerian government officials insisted the capital was safe and was not under any imminent attack.

The country's information minister dismissed the US government's advice as a "precautionary measure based on internal protocols".

According to the customs memo, "ISWAP operatives have already infiltrated the (Federal Capital territory) to facilitate the attacks".

The Wawa attack is "reportedly being orchestrated" by Boko Haram's Niger state cell, "in collaboration with elements of" the Nigerian religious militant group Ansaru and the Al Qaeda-affiliated JNIM, which is active in the neighbouring Sahel.

The plot against the airport "reveals a concerning correlation between... recent large-scale attacks on aviation facilities in Niger", including an attack claimed by the Islamic State Sahel Province on the airport in the capital Niamey, the memo said.

Boko Haram and ISWAP have recently intensified attacks on bases in the country's northeast as their 17-year campaign to establish a caliphate grinds on.

The conflict has killed more than 40,000 and displaced around 2mn, according to UN figures.

Benin activist wanted for 'inciting rebellion' arrested in South Africa

Reuters/AFP
Pretoria/Johannesburg

South African police said they have arrested prominent pan-African and pro-Russian activist Kemi Seba who is wanted by authorities in Benin for backing an attempted coup there, and have launched extradition proceedings.

Benin issued an arrest warrant for Seba in December last year for "inciting rebellion" after he publicly supported an attempted coup.

Seba, who accuses Benin's President Patrice Talon of being too close to former colonial master France, posted a video declaring it was "the day of liberation" for his country.

The deadly coup attempt on December 7 was put down within hours by the military with support from Nigeria and France.

The west African country jailed around 30 people after the coup, most of them soldiers, legal sources told AFP, while several mutineers were still on the run.

The 45-year-old Beninese citizen was arrested at a shopping centre in Pretoria along with his 18-year-old son and a South African

national, South African police said in a statement late on Wednesday.

Seba, who has mostly been underground and much less on social media since the failed coup, could not be reached for comment.

"Preliminary investigations have revealed that the father is alleged to be a wanted fugitive in France and Benin for criminal activities relating to crimes against the state," the statement said.

Seba, born Stello Gilles Robert Capo Chichi in France to Beninese parents, is an activist who has had his French nationality revoked.

He is a vocal critic of French political, economic and military influence in West Africa and has adopted a strongly pro-Russian stance, portraying Moscow as a counterweight to Western influence in the West African Sahel region.

South African police alleged that Seba and his son were being assisted by the South African national who they said had been paid approximately 250,000 rand (\$15,300) to help them cross the Limpopo River into Zimbabwe, with the intention of proceeding to Europe.

Police also confiscated cellphones and approximately 318,000 rand.

Seba was appointed adviser to Abdouraha-



Kemi Seba is pictured addressing a press conference in Paris in this picture taken in 2020. - AFP

mane Tchiani, leader of Niger's military government, after the Sahel state expelled French and other Western forces and deepened security ties with Russia.

Seba, his son and the South African citizen were remanded in custody until April 20, the South African police statement said.

Talon - who stepped down on Sunday after two five-year terms - has been accused by critics of taking Benin down an authoritarian path.

A journalist critical of the government was arrested in 2025 at an event in the Ivory Coast, and returned to Benin.

Hugues Comlan Sossoukpe, editor-in-chief of the online newspaper Olofofo, had refugee status in Togo.

Several prominent opposition figures have been sentenced to heavy prison terms by the courts while others are in exile.

Talon's finance minister, Romuald Wadagni, was elected president with more than 94% of the vote.

Pope Leo decries 'handful of tyrants' ravaging the world

AFP/Reuters
Vamenda, Cameroon

Pope Leo XIV criticised the "tyrants" ransacking the world, on a high-security visit yesterday to a "bloodstained" region of Cameroon following a war of words with US President Donald Trump.

Since his landmark four-nation African tour kicked off earlier this week - after Trump lashed out against the Pope's criticism of the Middle East war - the Pope has abandoned his previous restraint in speaking out in favour of world peace.

"Woe to those who manipulate religion and the very name of God for their own military, economic and political gain, dragging that which is sacred into darkness and filth," Leo said in the northwestern city of Bamenda, the epicentre of a nearly decade-long English-speaking separatist insurgency that has killed thousands.

"The world is being ravaged by a handful of tyrants, yet it is held together by a multitude of supportive brothers and sisters," the Pontiff warned, in a solemn speech at Bamenda's Saint Joseph's Cathedral.

Coming after US Vice-President JD Vance - a Catholic - urged the Vatican to "stick to matters of morality", the remarks could deepen the rift between the Trump administration and the Chicago-born Pontiff.

Leo, who kept a relatively low profile for most of his first year as leader of the 1.4bn-member

church, has emerged as an outspoken critic of the war that began with US-Israeli strikes on Iran.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Sarah Mullally, spiritual leader of 85mn Anglicans worldwide, said yesterday that she stood with the pope in his "courageous call for a kingdom of peace".

The Pope made similar remarks last month, saying that God rejected prayers from leaders with "hands full of blood", in comments widely interpreted as aimed at US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth, who has invoked Christian language to justify the Iran war.

Trump began his criticism of Leo on Sunday, when he called the Pope "WEAK on Crime, and terrible for Foreign Policy" in a post on Truth Social.

The US president attacked Leo again on social media late on Tuesday.

On Wednesday Trump posted an image of Jesus embracing Trump, after an earlier image he posted that portrayed him as a Jesus-like figure prompted widespread criticism.

Leo told Reuters on Monday that he would not stop speaking out about the Iran war and has avoided responding to Trump directly since then.

In Bamenda, the mood was joyous as the Pope arrived under a military escort in a popemobile with bulletproof windows, blessing the worshippers who had gathered, many singing and blowing vuvuzela horns, to welcome him.

As he left the cathedral, Leo released white doves, a symbol of peace in a region of the central Af-



Pope Leo XIV waves as he boards a plane bound for Bamenda, at Yaounde Nsimalen International Airport, Cameroon. - Reuters

rican country he called a "bloodstained yet fertile land that has been mistreated".

"Those who rob your land of its resources generally invest much of the profit in weapons, thus perpetuating an endless cycle of destabilisation and death," he said.

"They turn a blind eye to the fact that billions of dollars are spent on killing and devastation, yet the resources needed for healing, education and restoration are nowhere to be found," Leo added.

Later at Bamenda airport - which was renovated for the Pope's visit after being shut since 2019 due to the separatist insurgency - Leo criticised the ongoing exploitation of Africa in a mass to worshippers.

In an address with a strong social message, the Pope bemoaned "those who, in the name of profit, continue to lay their hands on the African continent to exploit and plunder it".

Cameroon is rich in natural resources such as oil, timber, cocoa, coffee and minerals, which have attracted both foreign firms and local elites for decades.

On arrival in the country on Wednesday, the Pope appealed to Cameroon's leaders to examine their "conscience" and tackle corruption and rights abuses, in an uncharacteristically pointed speech at the presidential palace attended by President Paul Biya.

Leo's trip, the fourth to Cameroon by a pope and the first since pope Benedict XVI in 2009, comes six months after the authorities violently put down protests against 93-year-old Biya's disputed reelection for an eighth term.

Security measures had been stepped up on the main routes through Bamenda for the visit.

Cameroon's two anglophone regions have suffered almost a dec-

ade of armed violence following attempts to secede from the rest of the mostly French-speaking central African country.

Cameroon, a former German colony, was partitioned by Britain and France after World War I.

The French part won independence in 1960 and was joined a year later by the smaller English-speaking British area to the west.

Teacher Vivian Ndey, 60, from Bamenda, welcomed the Pope carrying a "plant of peace" as a symbol of hope.

She spoke at the cathedral of the difficulty of teaching during the crisis, saying that teachers were afraid to come to class and students had vanished.

Conflict erupted after Biya, who has ruled since 1982, violently repressed peaceful demonstrations in 2016 by English speakers who felt marginalised.

Civilians have been targeted with killings and kidnappings.

At least 6,000 people have been killed since 2016, according to the United Nations.

Separatist fighters declared a Republic of Ambazonia in the two regions, which account for around a fifth of the population.

On Monday, separatist groups announced a three-day truce to allow for a safe welcome for the Pontiff.

The separatists also have high hopes for the visit.

The Unity Warriors of Ambazonia told AFP that it hoped Leo would press the government to restart talks "where the origins of the conflict could be discussed".

After the Bamenda trip, Leo is to hold a mass at a stadium in the economic capital Douala today, before leaving Cameroon for Angola tomorrow.

He then travels on to Equatorial Guinea.

Nigerian airlines threaten to halt flights over soaring jet fuel prices

Nigerian airlines will suspend all flight operations from April 20, they warned, unless crippling jet fuel prices, which they accused the country's fuel marketers of artificially inflating, are reduced.

The Airline Operators of Nigeria (AON), an industry body composed of around a dozen mainly domestic carriers, wrote to the Major Energies Marketers Association of Nigeria (MEMAN) on April 14, complaining that jet fuel prices had increased by 270% since late February.

In the letter seen by Reuters, AON called the jet fuel increase in Africa's most populous nation "astronomical and artificial", saying that it far outpaced global crude oil prices.

"Currently, airline revenues are insufficient to cover the cost of fuel alone," the letter said.

Soaring jet fuel prices have upended the global aviation industry as a conse-

quence of the Iran war, forcing airlines to raise fares, curb growth plans and rethink forecasts.

However, African airlines are particularly vulnerable, as jet fuel typically accounts for between 30% and 40% of their operating costs, compared with a global average of 20% to 25%, according to the African Airlines Association.

MEMAN disputed the airlines' figures in a response to the AON seen by Reuters, saying that the quoted price was more than 40% above a survey-based market average, adding that jet fuel distribution involves specialised equipment and handling that make it more cost-intensive.

AON said that raising ticket prices to reflect the fuel costs airlines are facing in Nigeria could reduce passenger numbers, while a shutdown of airline operations would have broader repercussions, hurting banks, costing jobs and worsening insecurity. - Reuters

'Fed chair nominee Warsh's disclosures don't comply with Senate ethics rules'

By Richard Cowan
Reuters

US Democratic Senator Elizabeth Warren yesterday said she believes the holes in Federal Reserve chair nominee Kevin Warsh's financial disclosures of his more than \$100mn in assets do not pass muster with Senate ethics rules and add to reasons his confirmation hearing set for Tuesday should be delayed.

"This hearing should not go forward, now, until these financial disclosures are resolved, until he is in compliance with eth-

ics rules," the top Democrat on the Senate Banking Committee told reporters after meeting with Warsh.

Warsh's filing, made public on Tuesday, included gaps in disclosures on assets held "due to pre-existing confidentiality agreements," and pledges to divest them to conform with central bank ethics rules if confirmed.

Without those details, Warren said, "it's just not possible to understand about his entanglements," adding Warsh was explicit that he would not hand over more documents.

"The whole point of the disclosure is not only to know about



US Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) speaks to the media in Washington yesterday. (Reuters)

his entanglements and things, but to be able to check to see that

said. "The Fed has already suffered multiple ethics scandals because Fed governors have had conflicts of interest."

Earlier on Thursday all of the Senate Banking Committee panel's Democrats called on committee Chair Tim Scott to delay the Warsh hearing as long as the Department of Justice had open investigations into Fed Chair Jerome Powell and Fed Governor Lisa Cook, probes that both say are pretexts to pressure the Fed on interest-rate policy.

While the committee's Democrats do not have the numbers to stop the hearing on their own, Republican Thom Tillis has said

he will only vote to confirm Warsh after the DOJ ends its "frivolous" Powell probe, which Tillis also views as an attack on Fed independence. Tillis' stance effectively blocks Warsh from Senate confirmation.

Warren told reporters she is also concerned that Warsh's name appeared in documents related to late convicted sex criminal Jeffrey Epstein released by the government earlier this year.

She said she had a meeting with the White House briefer on the FBI investigation and was told the FBI had not investigated Warsh's undisclosed assets or if he had any relationship with Epstein.

US House rejects bid to curb Trump's Iran war powers

AFP
Washington

The US House of Representatives yesterday rejected an effort to curb President Donald Trump's authority to wage war in Iran, another setback in Democrats' campaign to force Congress back into decisions over military action in the Middle East.

The vote, held after Democrats forced the issue onto the floor, came as unease over the six-week conflict continued to spread on Capitol Hill, with lawmakers wary of rising costs, an unclear endgame and the risk of a wider war.

The measure would have required Trump to end US military operations against Tehran unless Congress explicitly approved them, invoking the 1973 War Powers Resolution that limits presidential freedom to conduct prolonged hostilities without lawmakers' consent.

It was largely party-line vote, although one of Trump's Republicans supported the resolution

and another abstained, while a Democrat voted against it.

Democrats argue that Trump launched the conflict jointly with Israel on February 28 without the congressional authorization required by the constitution, which gives Congress sole power to declare war.

"We are standing at the edge of a cliff, and Congress must act before this president pushes us off. Every day we delay, we inch closer to a conflict with no exit ramp," Gregory Meeks, the top Democrat on the Foreign Affairs Committee, said ahead of the vote.

The defeat came despite Democrats narrowing the margin from a previous failed House vote in March, when a similar resolution lost by seven votes.

But in the end, Republican support remained too thin.

Trump has so far retained broad backing from his party, despite frustration among some lawmakers over the administration's refusal to publicly detail the financial and military burden of the war.

At congressional hearings on

Wednesday and Thursday, White House budget director Russ Vought declined to estimate the taxpayer cost, and would not confirm an estimate by the Senate Budget Committee's top Democrat Jeff Merkley that the figure was around \$50bn so far.

Democrats insist failed war powers votes are still valuable because they force lawmakers to go on the record.

The House vote came a day after the Senate again rejected its own war powers effort, though Democratic leaders in both chambers have vowed to keep bringing the issue back.

"Americans are seeing hundreds of casualties in a war that no one has given them the respect to explain," said Democratic Whip Katherine Clark.

"But one thing is clear: Americans are being asked to foot the bill. With the lives of their sons and daughters. And with the \$2bn a day that we are spending on this conflict that could be going to help Americans afford to go see a doctor."

US health chief begins congressional hearings

AFP
Washington

US health chief Robert F Kennedy Jr began yesterday a marathon series of hearings before federal lawmakers, questioning set to scrutinise the vaccine sceptic's agenda that has outraged the medical community.

The testimony before US congressional committees is related to Republican President Donald Trump's budgetary plan to cut 12% from the health department, which Kennedy had already worked to downsize dramatically since taking it over last year.

But the spate of hearings will also serve to crystallise fierce debates over US health policy – including the secretary's efforts to overhaul the paediatric vaccine schedule to universally recommend fewer shots – in the run-up to November's midterm vote.

In the first of seven such hearings that began Thursday, Kennedy delivered opening remarks that sought to downplay the most controversial of his initiatives, in particular those related to immunisation.

He instead highlighted his push to eliminate some food dyes and the administration's new dietary guidelines, which urge eating less processed food but also more red meat and dairy. He emphasised what he deemed the shortcomings of his predecessors.

"We're ending the era of federal policies that fuelled the chronic disease epidemic and



Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F Kennedy Jr testifies during a hearing of the House Committee on Capitol Hill yesterday. (AFP)

replacing them with policies that put the health of Americans first," Kennedy told the House Ways and Means panel.

Kennedy will appear before more congressional committees later this week and into next.

Questions from Republicans were mostly softballs, but some Democrats took the opportunity to push Kennedy on the surge in diseases, notably measles, which have long been proven preventable by vaccine.

"Kids have died because measles is running rampant under your watch, in large part because President Trump allowed your conspiracy theories to run our public health," said Mike Thompson, a Democrat from California.

Kennedy's tenure overseeing the Department of Health and Human Services has been tumultuous.

He has long been known for espousing vaccine scepticism and fringe views that bleed into conspiracy theories.

Since becoming US health chief,

Kennedy – who allied with Trump after his own 2024 presidential campaign tanked – has pushed reforms that have stoked confusion over longstanding medical advice and diminished the global standing of US institutions.

He has sown doubt about long-proven vaccine safety, notably rolling out sweeping changes to federal recommendations on which vaccines should be recommended to children, a move prominent medical experts have said is endangering public health.

These vaccine policies put forth by the Trump administration are now blocked by a US court, which has paused implementation pending further legal process after finding the reforms were pushed through without following required protocol.

Kennedy's health department has also slashed research funding and weakened disease prevention programs, even as the US experiences its worst measles outbreak in years.

Judge extends White House ballroom ban

AFP
Washington

A US federal judge yesterday extended an order barring construction of President Donald Trump's White House ballroom but gave the green light for work to proceed on a proposed underground bunker.

In an amended order yesterday, Leon extended his ban on any above-ground construction of the proposed ballroom on the former site of the East Wing,

which previously housed the offices of the First Lady.

But he said building of a proposed underground national security facility can go ahead.

"Below-ground construction may proceed, including the construction of any 'top-secret excavations, bunkers, bomb shelters, protective partitioning, military installations, and hospital and medical facilities,'" the judge said.

Work can continue on the underground bunker provided it does "not lock in the above-ground size

and scale of the ballroom," he said.

"National security is not a blank check to proceed with otherwise unlawful activity," he added.

The judge stayed his order for one week to allow the administration to appeal.

In his initial ruling halting the ballroom project, Leon said the president is a "steward" of the White House. "He is not, however, the owner!" he said.

Trump has argued that a large ballroom is needed to host, among other key events, state dinners for visiting dignitaries.

First new planned US nuclear reactors likely to get govt loans, energy chief says

The first five or 10 new planned US nuclear reactors will "almost certainly" receive loans from the US Energy Department's lending office, US Energy Secretary Chris Wright told lawmakers in a hearing yesterday. President Donald Trump signed an executive order last year calling for 10 new large nuclear reactors to be under construction by 2030 and for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to speed reactor approvals. There are currently no approved plans to build new large reactors. But the US government struck a partnership in October with the Canadian owners of Westinghouse Electric, Cameco and Brookfield Asset Management, that aims to build at least \$80bn in reactors. That plan was announced after Trump said during a trip to Asia that Japan will provide up to \$332bn to support infrastructure in the US, including construction of Westinghouse AP1000 reactors and small modular reactors. The last US reactors that came online in 2023 and 2024, built at Georgia's Vogtle site, were delayed by about seven years and cost about \$17bn more than budgeted, despite securing billions in loans from the energy department's loan office during Trump's first administration. The energy department's Office of Energy Dominance Financing has nearly \$290bn to loan and Wright said last year that "by far the biggest use of those dollars will be for nuclear power plants." (Reuters)

US Senate narrowly overturns Minnesota mining ban

By Ernest Scheyder
Reuters

The US Senate yesterday narrowly voted to overturn former president Joe Biden's mining ban in northern Minnesota, agreeing with the House of Representatives and sending the bill to President Donald Trump, who is expected to sign it.

The move reverses Biden's 20-year block on mining across 225,504 minerals-rich acres (91,200 hectares) in the Superior National Forest and gives a major boost to Antofagasta's Twin Metals copper, cobalt and nickel project, as well as other proposed mines in the region bordering Canada.

Environmentalists have long

worried that the mine could damage the water-rich region, which is visited by more than 200,000 hikers and canoeists each year. Miners have said they believe minerals can be extracted safely.

The Senate voted 51-49 to send the measure to Trump, who campaigned in 2024 on overturning the ban. The House approved the bill in January.

Should Trump sign the bill, a future president could not replicate Biden's ban because of a provision in the 1996 Congressional Review Act. The White House was not immediately available to comment.

Reuters first reported in January that Trump officials and legislators had launched a complex plan to reverse the ban using the novel

claim that Biden had not properly informed Congress, a claim that conservationists have rejected.

Trump officials would still need to reissue mining leases to Chile-focused Antofagasta, which has been trying to develop the mine for decades on land controlled by the federal government. The mine would also need to undergo an environmental review and obtain permits.

Yesterday's vote is almost certain to escalate tension over where and how to procure minerals crucial for the electrified economy and national defence.

Copper, nickel and cobalt are used to build electric vehicles, AI data centres, weapons and myriad other devices, yet the US imports far more of these miner-

als than it produces.

Congressman Pete Stauber, a Republican who represents northern Minnesota and sponsored the legislation, called Thursday's vote a "major victory for America" and said it "simply returns the decision (on whether to mine) to established permitting processes, where science, not politics, guides the outcome."

Save the Boundary Waters, a conservation group, called the vote "a dark day for America's most beloved wilderness area" and vowed to fight the project.

"Minnesotans and the American public writ large have been loud and clear: this iconic place needs to be protected," said Ingrid Lyons, the group's executive director.

US law enforcement raids offices of Houston fuel trader

Reuters
Mexico City/Washington

US authorities have raided the offices of Ikon Midstream, a Houston fuel trader whose diesel exports are part of fuel-smuggling investigations in Mexico, two US officials and a Mexican security official told Reuters.

The operation, in which law enforcement executed a federal search warrant, occurred this week at Ikon Midstream's Houston headquarters, two of the U.S. sources said. One of the sources said it targeted computers and documents. Reuters was unable to confirm the exact reason for the search or what materials were seized. The raid had not been previously reported.

The company's attorney, Joseph Slovacek, confirmed that "US Customs and Border Protection served a search warrant on Ikon." He said law enforcement cited earlier Reuters reporting about Ikon Midstream as

the reason for the search.

"The warrant was entirely the result of your October 2025 article, and your persistent attempts to have Ikon investigated," Slovacek said in response to a Reuters request for comment sent on Thursday.

"No arrests were made because Ikon had not engaged in any wrongdoing," he added.

Rhett Kenagy, Ikon Midstream's chairman and chief executive, could not be reached for comment.

The US Department of Homeland Security, US Customs and Border Protection, and Mexico's presidency did not respond to requests for comment sent earlier on Thursday. The FBI declined to comment.

The operations of Ikon Midstream were detailed in a 2025 Reuters investigation into the alleged smuggling of fuel into Mexico. That report chronicled, using tanker-tracking data and trade records, how a shipment of diesel exported by Ikon Midstream in March 2025 aboard the tanker Torm Agnes made

its way to Mexico. That shipment ended up in the hands of Intanza, a Mexican company suspected of being a front for the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG), according to three Mexican security sources and a government security document reviewed by Reuters.

Intanza could not be reached for comment. Letters sent to the company by courier could not be delivered, and Intanza has no website, nor publicly listed phone number nor any social media presence that Reuters could identify.

Smuggled fuel and stolen crude oil have become the second-largest source of revenue for Mexico's cartels behind narcotics, according to the US government, which has ramped up efforts to crack down on the illicit trade alongside its broader attempt to combat the drug gangs. The Trump administration designated CJNG as a foreign terrorist organisation in February 2025.

The October 22 Reuters report revealed how Mexican cartels earn

billions of dollars annually by allegedly smuggling fuel mainly from the US to Mexico, helped by US players, some unwitting, others complicit. Import-export paperwork for these transactions is often incomplete or faked by smugglers.

The scheme boils down to a tax dodge: Diesel, gasoline and naphtha are claimed in trade paperwork to be lubricants to avoid the steep import duties that Mexico charges on those imported fuels, Mexican authorities say. The savings can amount to more than half a cargo's value: \$7mn in the case of the March 2025 Torm Agnes shipment, according to a Reuters' calculation.

Denmark-based Torm, which manages the vessel, in September 2025 told Reuters that it had stopped doing business with Ikon Midstream in April of that year "based on what has come to light." The company said at the time that it was not responsible for, nor involved in, completing customs paperwork for the shipments.



Members of the Mexican navy patrol in a boat next to a refinery of Mexican state oil company Pemex as Mexico expands probe into cartel-linked maritime fuel-smuggling at key ports, in Ciudad Madero, Mexico. (Reuters/File Photo)

Following the publication of Reuters' story last year, Mexico's government said that it had expanded investigations into suspected fuel smuggling by unspecified companies and officials, including at three Mexican ports where Ikon Midstream delivered petroleum products in 2025, according to a government report posted to a Senate website in February.

Ikon Midstream repeatedly has denied wrongdoing. It sued Reuters for defamation on November 14 in

Texas state court, contending the news agency made "categorically false" statements about its business in the October article. In a separate March 27 statement to Reuters, Ikon Midstream said it "conducted its business lawfully" and "we have never falsified any US or Mexican customs document."

Reuters stands by its reporting and strongly denies making any attempts to have Ikon Midstream investigated by law enforcement, a spokeswoman said.



Cubans celebrate 65th anniversary of declaration of the socialist character



A woman holds a poster reading "Long live our socialist revolution" during celebrations marking the victory on the 65th anniversary of the declaration of the socialist character of the Cuban Revolution in Havana yesterday. (AFP)

Chile's Kast unveils 40 reforms including corporate tax rate cut

Reuters
Santiago

Chile's new president, Jose Antonio Kast, unveiled on Wednesday details of a long-awaited reform package that includes cuts to the corporate tax rate, as his government seeks to revive growth and promote job stability.

Some 40 measures were outlined in the package, with Kast saying that it had five main aims: to make Chile more tax competitive, strengthen formal employment, streamline regulations, provide more legal and regulatory certainty and exercise restraint in public spending.

"This bill is not an ideological agenda. It is a concrete response to ... real emergencies," Kast said in his first address to the nation since taking office last month, urging members of Congress to pass the measures quickly.

The right-wing leader has painted Chile, the world's largest copper producer, as a country riddled with organised crime and weak finances.

His government has said it wants to lift Chile's economic annual growth to around 4% from last year's 2.5%, though analysts have expressed scepticism about whether the goal is realistic.

Kast also lacks a congressional majority, which could hamper his ability to deliver his agenda. Allied right-wing blocs hold just 76 of 155 lower-house seats and 25 of 50 Senate seats.

The centrepiece of the bill is proposed gradual cuts in the corporate tax rate to 23% from 27%, which his government has previously said would be over four years. Some opposition members have, however, argued that the real impact of a corporate tax cut remains unclear.

Other tax measures include the creation of a tax credit for wage payments, designed to encourage many smaller companies to pay employees on the books instead of under the table.

"This injects \$1.4bn annually into the productive sector, benefits 235,000 SMEs (representing 86% of the credit's recipients), and protects more than 4mn workers. Formal employment will no longer be a penalty but an advantage," he said.

Other reforms include steps to speed up the issuing of environmental permits for projects such as mines, a temporary VAT exemption on sales of new homes, 400bn pesos (\$450mn) in funds for fire-hit regions and an exemption for homeowners over 65 from property taxes on their primary residence.



A man watches television in a restaurant while Chile's President, Jose Antonio Kast, delivers economic announcements during a national broadcast, in Santiago, Chile, on Wednesday. (Reuters)

Leftist Sanchez vies with former mayor for spot in Peru's runoff vote

Reuters
Lima

Leftist congressman Roberto Sanchez and far-right former Lima Mayor Rafael Lopez Aliaga were neck-to-neck yesterday in the race to face conservative Keiko Fujimori in a June runoff vote for Peru's presidential election.

Sanchez held a less than 10,000-vote lead over Lopez Aliaga with 93% of ballots counted, as results continued to trickle in through Peru's ONPE electoral office five days after Sunday's vote, which was extended into Monday to accommodate several thousand people who were unable to vote.

Sanchez held 11.98% of votes compared to Lopez Aliaga's 11.92%, while Fujimori — the daughter of late former president Alberto Fujimori who is on her fourth run for the job — maintained a comfortable lead with 17.07%.

A second-round vote has been scheduled for June 7.

The extended vote count has

Lula says Trump has 'no right' to threaten other countries

AFP
Madrid

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva criticised US President Donald Trump, saying the US leader has "no right" to threaten other nations, in an interview published in Spain yesterday.

Lula's comments come after Trump this month warned that a "whole civilisation will die" in Iran if the country did not open up the Strait of Hormuz.

"Trump has no right to wake up in the morning and threaten a country," Lula told the Spanish daily El Pais, recalling that the US Constitution divides authority over war and foreign policy between Congress and the president.

"It is essential that powerful leaders take greater responsibility in maintaining peace," the 80-year-old leftist president added.



Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. (AFP)

Lula and Trump, 79, stand on opposite sides on issues including multilateralism, international trade and the fight against climate change.

Brasilia-Washington relations

remain strained, despite a meeting between the leaders last year that helped ease tensions and led to a reduction in trade tariffs.

Lula renewed calls for reform of the UN Security Council, including the removal of the veto held by five permanent members and the inclusion of more countries from Africa and Latin America.

"It is time to redefine the United Nations to give it credibility, otherwise Trump is right," he said, referring to the US president's criticism that the post-World War II international system is no longer effective.

Lula spoke to the newspaper ahead of a visit to Spain, where he is to meet Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez and attend a forum of progressive leaders.

Other attendees at the gathering in Barcelona on Saturday include Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum and South African President Cyril Ramaphosa.

Reuters
Lima



Peru's presidential candidate for the Juntos por el Peru party, Roberto Sanchez, greets supporters in Lima on Wednesday. (AFP)

triggered allegations of fraud, notably from Lopez Aliaga, who has called for counting to be suspended.

Lopez Aliaga's party has offered 20,000 soles (around \$5,830) to electoral workers as a reward for information about "possible irregularities, fraud, or sabotage."

He has not produced evidence to back up his assertions, and European Union observers have

said they found no concrete evidence of fraud.

Fujimori has called for calm. "I have chosen not to comment until there is significant progress in the count," Fujimori said at a press conference on Wednesday night. "The result is going to be very close. Every vote will count, and the result is not yet decided."

Pre-election surveys suggested that a large number of voters were

undecided or unwilling to vote for any candidate in the race, in which a record 34 candidates competed.

Markets have reacted nervously to Sanchez gaining ground.

He has pledged a new constitution and more state control over natural resources and is an ally of former President Pedro Castillo, who was ousted and jailed in 2022 after a short-lived presidency.

Peru, a major exporter of copper and agricultural goods, has faced years of political upheaval with eight presidents in the last decade. Several of its former leaders are behind bars.

Despite this, it has long been one of Latin America's most stable economies.

Alvaro Henzler, who heads Transparencia, an election-monitoring NGO, told local radio RPP that it may take a couple of weeks to get the full results, with most of the uncounted votes coming from broadly left-leaning rural areas and overseas, where emigrants tend to back right-wing parties.

"Transparencia is calling for calm and asking people to wait," he said.

Repsol taking back control of Venezuelan oil assets

AFP
Madrid

Spanish energy group Repsol said yesterday it has reached an agreement with the Venezuelan government to regain control of its oil business in the country and sharply increase production over the coming years.

Repsol's operations in Venezuela have been sharply limited since 2025 after Washington unilaterally revoked its operating license, a move that also affected other foreign companies in the country.

The deal will allow Repsol to resume operational control of its Petroquique joint venture created to develop and operate oil fields in eastern Venezuela, the company said in a statement.

Repsol said it is prepared to increase gross oil production in the country — which currently averages some 45,000 barrels daily — by 50% within 12 months and potentially triple output within three years, provided "necessary conditions" are met. "This agreement underscores Repsol's commitment to Venezuela, where we have operated continuously since 1993," the company's head of exploration and production, Francisco Gea, said in a statement. "We have the assets and the technical, operational, and human capabilities on the ground to increase our production in the country."

The deal was signed between Repsol, Venezuela's hydrocarbon ministry and Venezuela's state oil and gas firm PDVSA, which owns 60% of the Petroquique joint

venture. A new bonanza from Venezuela's vast oil reserves has been touted after the US captured its socialist strongman Nicolas Maduro in January in a lightning military operation on Caracas.

The new authorities, led by interim president Delcy Rodriguez, have cooperated with US President Donald Trump's administration and introduced reforms to liberalise the sector.

The US has eased a seven-year-old oil embargo on Venezuela and issued licenses allowing a handful of multinationals including Repsol to operate in the country under certain conditions.

US oil giant Chevron and the government of Venezuela signed two deals on Monday that will expand oil production in the country. The possibility of increased Ven-

ezuelan oil output comes as global markets face disruptions to Middle East oil supplies from the conflict in Iran which have driven up oil prices.

Venezuela sits on the world's largest proven oil reserves and the once-thriving sector helped make it one of Latin America's wealthiest countries in the 20th century.

But production plummeted during two decades of socialist rule, with observers pointing to underinvestment, mismanagement and corruption, as the country plunged into a protracted political, social and economic crisis.

Speaking to AFP in Paris in February, US Energy Secretary Chris Wright said Venezuelan oil production was "a little bit less than a million barrels a day" in January.

But output could grow by 30-40% by the end of 2026.

Chatbots at the ballot box: AI skirts Brazil election rules

AFP
Rio de Janeiro

"Chat, who is the best candidate?": Six months out from Brazil's presidential election, AI chatbots are still answering such questions in defiance of new electoral rules banning them from giving voting tips.

The head of Brazil's electoral court (TSE), justice Carmen Lucia, warned in January that artificial intelligence (AI) chatbots could lead to the "contamination" of the October vote in Latin America's biggest nation.

In March, the court imposed new regulations which restricted how chatbots are allowed to operate during the 2026 election cycle, as well as increased platform liability for false content.

The TSE has taken a leading role in the fight against disinformation, declaring far-right former

president Jair Bolsonaro ineligible to run for office for spreading false information about the Brazilian electoral system during 2022 polls.

The 2026 election is the first major vote to be held since chatbots became widely available in the country.

The AI tools have been forbidden from providing recommendations, rankings, or opinions regarding candidates and political parties — even when prompted by a user.

However, in tests conducted by AFP weeks after the new rules were set, at least three leading AI chatbots continued to rank political candidates.

When asked who the "best candidates for the 2026 elections" would be, ChatGPT, Grok, and Gemini all weighed in.

"Honest conclusion. The 'technically' best options today: Tarcisio/Zema," ChatGPT responded.

The bot was referring to Sao

Paulo's powerful governor Tarcisio de Freitas, who has ruled out a presidential bid, and former Minas Gerais state governor Romeu Zema, a possible candidate for the right-wing Novo party.

Errors and biases

President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, 80, placed between second and fifth, receiving praise from the chatbots for his "vast experience," but facing criticism for his "advanced age."

The veteran leftist is seeking a fourth term in office.

His main rival in the polls, Flavio Bolsonaro — son of the former president — came last or did not appear on the lists.

Such responses have raised concerns that technology could influence voting in the highly-polarised and hyper-connected country, based on incorrect or biased information.

This is because chatbot replies



The logo of OpenAI's artificial intelligence chatbot ChatGPT. (AFP/File photo)

are generated by probabilities based on training data, which may contain errors or biases, said Theo Araujo, director of the Amsterdam School of Communication Research.

A study he carried out during 2025 elections in the Netherlands showed that one in ten people were likely to use AI chatbots to seek out information about candidates.

Voters assume AI neutrality

In March, AFP's fact-check-

ing team verified as fake an image that allegedly showed Flavio Bolsonaro with Daniel Vorcaro — a businessman under investigation for a major banking fraud scandal that has rattled the country's elite.

However, Grok — X's AI chatbot — said the picture was real and even provided a date for the alleged meeting.

Araujo said that voters were likely to assume that chatbots were "neutral or objective sources, and consequently process their responses less critically."

Some candidates have reinforced this idea.

In a post on X earlier this month, Flavio Bolsonaro urged his followers to "ask Chat what the truth is."

Many have done so. A quick search on the social network revealed various users asking Grok for voting recommendations.

"Based on the six criteria out-

lined in my post, which pre-candidate should I vote for?" asked one internet user, while another asked whether they could trust the results of an opinion survey.

No clear punishment

Despite the concerns, it is unclear how the TSE's new rule will be enforced, as it does not provide for specific sanctions.

The court could order a daily fine, Diogo Rais, a lawyer specialising in electoral law, told AFP.

However, the amounts fined are not set in advance and could be challenged in court.

When contacted, OpenAI stated that ChatGPT is "trained not to favour candidates" and that it continues to refine its models.

Google said that Gemini generates responses based on user prompts, which do not necessarily reflect the company's views.

Attempts to contact X were unsuccessful.

Malaysia, Australia leaders vow closer energy ties

Malaysia's Petronas to supply excess fuel to Australia

Reuters
Sydney/Kuala Lumpur.

Malaysia Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said yesterday that state energy firm Petronas would give priority to providing Australia with its excess fuel supplies, as the two countries sought to bolster energy

security following the disruptions caused by the Middle East conflict.

Anwar said he had obtained an assurance from Petronas on the matter following discussions with his Australian counterpart Anthony Albanese on boosting agricultural and fuel trade.

"The priority is for domestic requirements... but here is where negotiations among friends are critical," Anwar said at a press conference after the meeting at his office in Malaysia's administrative capital Putrajaya.

Malaysia also requires mineral

phosphates from Australia, which it could offer in exchange for urea supplied to Canberra, Anwar said.

Malaysia is Albanese's third stop in Southeast Asia in the past week, following trips to Singapore and Brunei, as Canberra looks to shore up food and energy supplies.

Albanese said his government had secured an additional 100 million litres of diesel from two shipments, one from Brunei and one from South Korea.

"This is the first of many expected shipments secured under the government's new strategic

reserve powers with the support of Export Finance Australia," he said.

Australia also pledged to honour existing contracts with Malaysia, despite disruptions, Albanese said.

Australia is a major supplier of natural gas to Malaysia, which imports about 20% of its domestic supplies, as well as a provider of wheat, lamb and beef products.

Anwar and Albanese also witnessed the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the two countries on halal meat trade, a deal that the Australian leader said would boost the coun-



Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese (left) speaks next to Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim during a press conference in Putrajaya yesterday. (AFP)

try's red meat exports and support Malaysia's food security. Majority-Muslim Malaysia is

widely considered as a global leader in halal processing due to its established certification standards.

S Korean president to visit India, Vietnam

AFP
Seoul

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung will visit India and Vietnam in the coming days, a senior official said yesterday, as Seoul seeks to secure its fuel supplies to cushion the impact of the Middle East war.

Lee will leave on Sunday for a three-day trip to India, where he will meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi, National Security Adviser Wi Sung-lac told reporters.

The two leaders "are expected to reaffirm their mutual commitment to maintaining close coordination regarding energy supply chains amidst the turbulent international landscape," Wi said.

He added that the talks would

seek to enhance cooperation in strategic sectors like shipbuilding, artificial intelligence and defence, and "lay the groundwork" for doubling two-way trade to \$50bn by 2030.

Lee and Modi will also discuss "continuing constructive cooperation for the sake of peace on the Korean Peninsula and within the region".

Lee will arrive in Hanoi later on Tuesday and meet with Vietnamese leader To Lam the following day, Wi said. The pair will discuss "concrete measures to strengthen strategic and reciprocal co-operation amidst global uncertainties".

The talks will focus on energy security, supply chain stability, co-operation on critical minerals and other areas.

Vietnam is South Korea's third-largest trade partner, and

the countries aim to hit \$150bn in annual goods and services volumes this decade.

Like many Asian economies, South Korea has faced mounting risks to its energy supplies since US-Israeli attacks on Iran in late February prompted Tehran to effectively close the crucial Strait of Hormuz.

Seoul said on Wednesday that it would procure more than 270mn barrels of crude oil via routes unaffected by the blockade of the strait, saying the move would help to stabilise domestic supply and demand.

Senior South Korean and Chinese officials will also hold economic talks next week aimed at ensuring a stable trade environment despite the shock from the war, the Yonhap news agency reported yesterday.

Debris found in search for missing helicopter carrying eight in Indonesia

AFP
Pontianak

Rescue crews in Indonesia searching for a missing helicopter carrying eight people yesterday found debris suspected to be from the aircraft, officials said.

The helicopter, owned by local firm Matthew Air Nusantara, took off from the West Kalimantan province on the Borneo island yesterday, heading to another destination in the same province, according to a local search and rescue organisation.

It was carrying two crew members and six passengers.

The National Search and Rescue Agency (Basarnas) said the

helicopter took off at 8:34am (0134 GMT) and lost contact about five minutes later.

An aerial search of the aircraft's last known position uncovered debris suspected to be part of the helicopter in a dense forest with rugged, hilly terrain, according to Basarnas head Mohammad Syaifi.

"Fragments believed to be the tail of the helicopter were spotted approximately three kilometres west of the initial point where it lost contact," he said in a statement.

I Made Junetra, the head of the local search and rescue agency, told AFP earlier that some 20 rescuers had been deployed to search for the helicopter. He added that an Air Force helicopter was also deployed to assist with the search.

Indonesia, a vast Southeast Asian archipelago, relies heavily on air transport to connect its thousands of islands.

The country has a poor aviation safety record, with several fatal accidents in recent years.

A turboprop plane chartered by the fisheries ministry fatally crashed into a mountain on the island of Sulawesi in January, killing all 10 people on board.

In September last year, a helicopter carrying six passengers and two crew members crashed shortly after taking off from South Kalimantan province, killing everybody on board.

Four people were killed less than two weeks later when another helicopter crashed in the remote Papua district of Ilaga.

Indonesia arrests top anti-graft official 6 days into the job

Indonesian authorities have arrested the country's chief ombudsman on bribery charges just five days after he was sworn in as the top official responsible for fighting government graft, the attorney-general's office said.

Hery Susanto, sworn in as chief ombudsman by President Prabowo Subianto last Friday, was arrested late on Wednesday over allegations he accepted bribes from a nickel company, according to Syarif Sulaeman Nahdi, director of investigations for the attorney-

general's office. Hery was accused of receiving 1.5bn rupiah (about \$88,000) while serving in a more junior role in the ombudsman's office.

"We carried out a search, and we took him into custody last night at his home," Syarif told reporters in Jakarta yesterday. Hery was paraded in front of journalists wearing a bright pink vest of the kind often worn by people arrested on corruption charges in Indonesia. He risks prison time if convicted. (AFP)

China tells travellers to use caution after US border checks

China advised its citizens yesterday to use caution when travelling to the United States and avoid entry at Seattle's main airport following "malicious" border checks. Around 20 Chinese scholars planning to attend academic conferences were "recently" denied entry by US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, despite holding valid visas, according to a foreign ministry statement. The Chinese foreign ministry said that, "in light of recurring instances of malicious interrogation and harassment targeting Chinese scholars" at the Seattle airport, authorities "advise individuals planning to travel to the United States in the near future to heighten their safety awareness". Chinese travellers should "avoid entry through this airport", it said. The statement advised travellers to respond in a "calm and rational manner" if they were questioned by US border authorities. (AFP)

Fuel supply fears after blaze tears through crucial Australian refinery

AFP
Geelong

Columns of fire engulfed a crucial Australian oil refinery after a chain of explosions, authorities said yesterday, as they warned of disruptions to domestic fuel supply.

Flames as high as 60m (200 feet) erupted late Wednesday after a gas leak ignited at the Viva fuel plant in Victoria state, firefighters said, one of only two working oil refineries in Australia.

The refinery, about an hour's drive southwest of state capital Melbourne, pumps out about 10 percent of Australia's fuel, according to energy company Viva.

Fire Rescue Victoria said yesterday the blaze had been contained, although it could smoulder throughout the day.

"The whole sky was lit up with the bright flame," Geelong resident Wayne Gardiner told AFP.

The refinery is capable of processing up to 120,000 barrels

of oil each day, company figures stated.

Analysts said that, together with the Ampol refinery in Brisbane, it produces about 10-20 percent of Australia's total fuel supply.

"This is not a positive development," Energy Minister Chris Bowen said as the nation's fuel supplies are under pressure due to war in the Middle East.

Bowen said he had spoken to Viva and the firm was "very confident they can replace the petrol with imports".

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, currently visiting Malaysia, said Australia had secured an additional supply of some 100 million litres of diesel from Brunei and South Korea.

"This is the first of many expected shipments secured, under the government's new strategic reserve powers," he told a news conference.

The fire ripped through a section of the refinery responsible for the production of high-octane petrol, Bowen earlier said.

By triggering isolation valves,



A fire at the Viva Oil Refinery in Geelong, yesterday. (AFP)

other parts of the plant producing jet fuel and diesel had been spared the worst of the blaze.

Geographically isolated and with only two oil refineries, Australia is heavily exposed to disruptions in global fuel supply and imports of the world's oil and gas.

Canberra urged Australians to ignore the impulse to rush out and panic buy more fuel.

Australian court overturns protest limits

AFP
Sydney

Law clamping down on protests following an antisemitic mass shooting at Australia's Bondi Beach was overturned by a court yesterday, a written ruling showed.

Activists had challenged the New South Wales legislation, enacted 10 days after the December 14 attack which killed 15 people and wounded dozens at a beachside Hanukkah festival.

The law gave police the power to restrict public assemblies in declared areas, making it impossible to get a permit for any protests and allowing officers to order people to move away.

The state government pushed for the crackdown to protect cohesion and community safety at a time of high tensions, the Court of Appeal heard.

"The impugned provisions infringe the implied freedom of political communication"

But the legal provisions were "constitutionally impermissible", Chief Justice Andrew Bell found in a written ruling.

They effectively discouraged all forms of protest in the declared area, irrespective of the purpose and possible impact on social cohesion, he said.

"The impugned provisions infringe the implied freedom of political communication," the court ruled, declaring them invalid.

Immediately after the protest law was passed in December, the state's police chief declared the first restrictions across a large swathe of Sydney.

Clampdowns continued in

various forms until February, including during a visit by Israeli President Isaac Herzog when police and demonstrators clashed in central Sydney.

Pro-Palestinian activist Josh Lees, who was one of three plaintiffs in the case, said New South Wales Premier Chris Minns had long sought to ban protests, especially over Gaza. "While Israel and the US wage endless war, destroying the lives of millions of people, supported by Australian governments, they are continuing to try to rip up our democratic rights to protest," the Palestine Action Group spokesman said in a statement.

Minns said the government stood by its decision on the law.

"This was in the aftermath of the worst attack our country has seen, in which 15 innocent lives were lost," he said in a statement to Australian media. "We believe it was necessary and important for Sydney at the time."

Australia secures extra diesel

Australia has secured an additional supply of some 100mn litres of diesel from Brunei and South Korea, as the country looked to boost supplies hit by the Mideast war, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said yesterday.

The Australian leader's comments come as a crucial refinery outside Melbourne was hit by a fire overnight, raising the spectre of further disruptions to the country's fuel supplies.

"I can announce that my government has secured an additional 100mn litres (26mn gallons) of diesel from two shipments. One from Brunei and one from South Korea," the leader told a press conference in Malaysia.

"This is the first of many expected shipments secured, under the government's new strategic reserve powers," said Albanese (AFP).

fire," he told reporters.

Images taken yesterday morning showed thick clouds of smoke billowing over the industrial complex.

Viva Energy boss Scott Wyatt said it was a "very challenging incident". "Production is not our primary priority today," he told reporters. "Today it is getting the site safe."

Australia holds roughly 38 days' worth of petrol in reserve, according to government figures, far below the 90-day minimum dictated by the International Energy Agency.

While the government has so far resisted moves to ration fuel, it has urged drivers to conserve petrol where they can and to favour public transport if possible.

Like most nations in Asia and the South Pacific, Australia is heavily reliant on oil shipped through the Strait of Hormuz, which at one point carried one-fifth of the world's oil and gas.

Shipping traffic through the vital waterway has essentially ceased since the United States and Israel launched strikes against Iran on February 28.



India's Modi pushes for more women in bigger parliament

Reuters
New Delhi

India's government launched a bid to overhaul its democratic system yesterday, with bills to increase the size of parliament and bring forward plans to reserve a third of seats for women — though the opposition dismissed it as an attempt to manipulate elections.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi told the lower house of parliament the proposals — which would also increase the number of legislators and women in regional assemblies and redraw constituencies — would move India in a “new direction”.

“I believe that (women's) voice in this house will bring new strength, fresh thinking, and a greater sense of sensitivity,” he said.

The government said the alterations to boundaries reflected pop-

ulation changes since seats were last fixed after a 1971 census.

Modi's National Democratic Alliance government does not have the two-thirds majority it needs to get the measures through both houses of parliament and is hoping to convince some smaller parties and opposition groups to back the bills.

Larger opposition groups said they supported quotas for women, but accused the government of seeking to manipulate the system to get more votes, and said they would oppose the changes when parliament votes on them this week.

“The government should simplify women's reservation so that it comes into effect immediately upon the passage of the law,” the Congress party, which leads the main opposition alliance, said in a post on X.

The bills would increase the number of lawmakers in the lower

house of parliament by around 55% to 850 — and make similar increases to state legislatures — by the time of the next parliamentary elections due in 2029.

The bills would reserve one-third of seats for women in the expanded assemblies by the same date. The one-third share was agreed in legislation passed in 2023, but that was linked to the next census which would take the changes beyond the next election.

The changes also need to be ratified by at least half the state legislatures before they can become law.

India's parliament currently does not reserve any seats for women, who make up nearly half of its 968mn voters but constitute only 14% of the lawmakers in the lower house and 17% in the upper house.

About 10% of the lawmakers in the country's state legislatures are women.

Scotland's SNP vows price cap on basic foods if re-elected

Reuters
London

Scotland's governing Scottish National Party said yesterday it would introduce a maximum price for “essential” supermarket items such as bread, milk and cheese to help protect voters from rising food inflation.

The SNP, which runs Scotland's semi-autonomous devolved government, said it would cap the prices of between 20 and 50 products — including eggs, rice and chicken — if it is re-elected in next month's election.

Scotland's leader, John Swinney, said the measures were aimed at easing cost-of-living pressures while also improving public health.

“People are, quite simply, struggling to afford food,” Swinney said at the party's manifesto launch. “In a rich country like Scotland, that is a moral outrage.”

Companies have warned that higher energy costs linked to the war in Iran are pushing up prices. Britain's food prices are set to rise by almost 10% this year because of the conflict — about three times faster than previously forecast — the country's food and drink manufacturers' lobby said this month.



Scotland's First Minister and Scottish National Party (SNP) leader John Swinney poses for a photo as he takes part in the launch the SNP's 2026 Scottish Parliament election manifesto in Glasgow yesterday. (AFP)

The SNP, which wants independence from the rest of the United Kingdom, is on course to win a majority in next month's election, according to some polls.

The party said in its manifesto that it would “require large supermarkets” to make one line of listed essential food items available at the capped price.

The manifesto said it would not require supermarkets “to make every variation of that type of food they stock available at that price”.

UK PM tells social media bosses to step up child online safety

AFP
London

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer yesterday hinted at possible measures limiting children's access to social media, as he met senior tech figures and warned: “Things can't go on like this.”

“They must change because right now social media is putting our children at risk,” Starmer told the group which included Wilfredo Fernandez of X, Alistair Law of TikTok, Markus Reinisch of Meta, and Ronan Harris of Snap.

“In a world in which children are protected, even if that means access is restricted, that is preferable to a world where harm is the price of participation,” he added.

Starmer summoned the social media bosses to the Downing Street meeting, also attended by Technology Minister Liz Kendall, amid growing calls for a ban on under-16s using the platforms.

He told the industry leaders he looked forward to working with them on new safeguarding meas-



British Prime Minister Keir Starmer hosts social media industry leaders to discuss child safety online yesterday in London. (Reuters)

ures, but insisted there had to be change.

“I do think this can be done. I think the question is not whether it is done, the question is how it is done,” he said.

The government is considering restrictions on popular social media apps with ministers under pressure to introduce an Australia-style ban.

Australia in December became

the first nation to prohibit people under the age of 16 from using immensely popular and profitable social media platforms.

Greece has since said it will ban social media for under 15s and the European Union has said an expert group will start work this week on recommendations for action across the EU.

Starmer has not ruled out a ban, but previously said he was waiting

for the outcome of a public consultation, due to close on May 26.

He said last month he was “very keen” to tackle addictive features following a landmark US ruling that found Meta and YouTube liable for harming a young woman.

Starmer's official spokesperson said the premier had been “clear” with the bosses that he wanted “to know what they're going to be doing, and it has to be done swiftly”.

“He's asked them to provide assurances on action that they're taking, and it's been clear that companies must be able to show real world changes that make their platforms safer for children.”

The two chambers of Britain's parliament are currently in a stand-off over whether the government should follow Australia.

The unelected upper House of Lords voted in favour of prohibiting social media for under-16s for a second time last month, piling pressure on the government to follow suit.

But the House of Commons, where Starmer's Labour party enjoys a huge majority, has twice rejected the proposal.

3 arrested after attempted arson at Persian-language media office in London

Reuters
London

British police said yesterday they had arrested three people in connection with an attempted arson attack on the offices of a Persian-language media organisation in northwest London, which followed two similar incidents in the British capital.

An ignited container was thrown towards the premises of the unnamed media outlet on Wednesday evening, landing in a car park where the fire extinguished itself. No damage was reported and there were no injuries, the police said.

Two men, aged 19 and 21, and a 16-year-old boy were arrested on suspicion of arson endangering life. The arson attempt was not being treated as terrorism, but counterterrorism officers were involved in the investigation, police said.

Last month, several ambulances belonging to the Jewish volunteer emergency service Hatzola were set alight while parked near a synagogue in the Golders Green area of north London.

Vicki Evans, senior national

co-ordinator for Counter Terrorism Policing, told reporters police were currently treating the three incidents separately, but were “fully aware that they are all similar in nature”.

British authorities have previously warned that there is a threat to journalists working for Persian-language outlets that are critical of Iran's government. In 2024, a journalist working for the television news network Iran International was stabbed in the leg near his home in south London.

Britain's MI5 spy boss said last October that his agency and British police had tracked more than 20 Iranian-backed plots to kidnap or kill British nationals or individuals based in Britain who were regarded by Tehran as a threat.

“We are dealing with an unprecedented level of national security investigations, some with suspected links to foreign states and many of those have dangerous and often reckless intentions,” Evans said yesterday.

She added that the incidents had taken place against a backdrop of “global instability with-in which we're seeing sustained and increasing aggressive and hostile activity”.

Sri Lanka arrests nine Chinese over alleged cyberscam gear

AFP
Colombo

Nine Chinese nationals were arrested at Sri Lanka's main international airport yesterday while attempting to smuggle in communication equipment allegedly intended for cyberscam operations, customs authorities said.

The arrests came two weeks after police detained 152 foreign nationals, mostly Chinese, for allegedly running a cyberscam operation out of a hotel in the island's northwest.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun told AFP in Beijing yesterday that they were willing to “co-operate to jointly combat criminal activities, including online fraud”.

In the latest incident, Sri

Lankan officers recovered 383 used mobile phones, 101 tablet computers, six Wi-Fi routers and GPS trackers from nine arriving Chinese nationals, a customs spokesman said.

“The equipment was taped to the bodies of the suspects,” the spokesman added, noting the haul was valued at 24mn rupees (\$78,000) and was confiscated.

Separately, another six Chinese passengers were arrested yesterday while allegedly trying to smuggle in 75,900 cigarettes packed into their luggage, officials said.

The cigarettes, valued at 11.3mn rupees (\$37,000), were confiscated.

Organised criminal gangs have used casinos, hotels and fortified compounds across Southeast Asia as bases to carry out sophisticated online scams, defrauding

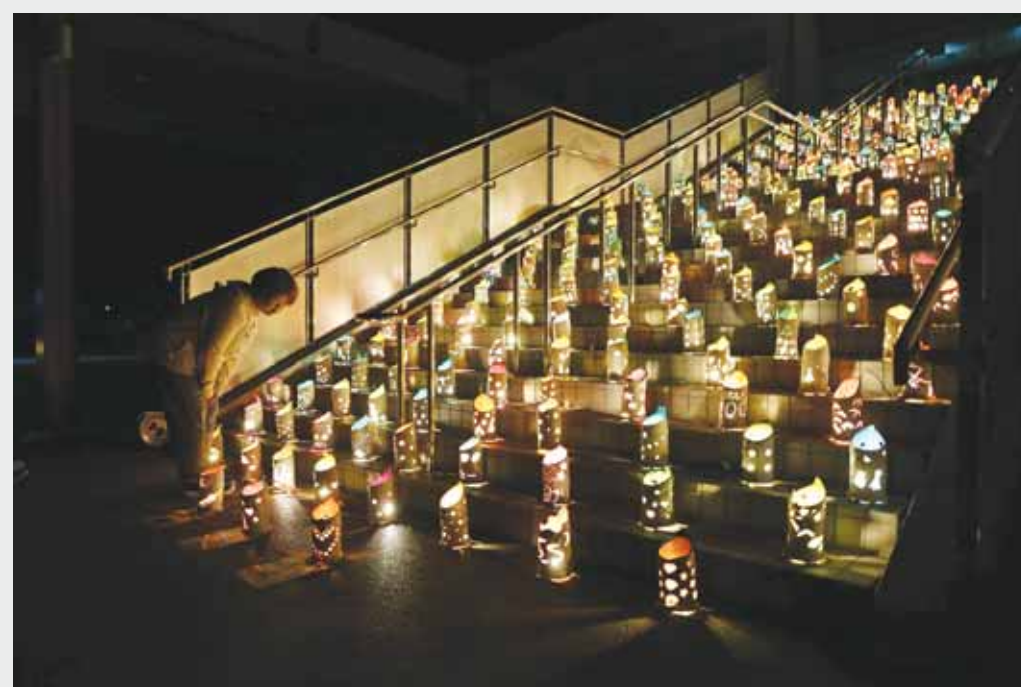
people through cryptocurrency investment schemes and fake romantic relationships, according to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime.

Until a crackdown this year, the region was the epicentre of the multibillion-dollar online scam industry, in which hundreds of thousands of fraudsters — some trafficked, others willing workers — cheat Internet users globally.

“Due to Sri Lanka's well-developed telecommunications infrastructure, favourable geographical location and relatively lenient visa policies, some telecom fraud gangs have moved to Sri Lanka,” the Chinese embassy in Colombo said recently.

“That is why such cases have been increasing in Sri Lanka recently,” it added, noting that the scammers had been targeting Chinese nationals at home.

Kumamoto earthquake anniversary



A woman looks at lights set up to commemorate the victims of the 2016 Kumamoto earthquake, at Nishihara Village Sports Park yesterday in Kumamoto Prefecture. (AFP)

Nepal committee to probe assets of politicians, officials

Nepal's government, elected last month on an anti-corruption platform, has formed a commission to investigate the assets of politicians and officials, an official said yesterday.

Prime Minister Balendra Shah, a 35-year-old rapper-turned-politician, won a landslide election victory on a platform of youth-driven political change in the first elections since deadly 2025 anti-corruption protests ousted the government. Led by a former Supreme Court judge, the five-member commission will examine assets of top figures who have held public office since 2006.

Dipa Dahal, press and investigation

adviser to the prime minister, said the commission was ordered by cabinet on Wednesday.

“The cabinet meeting made this decision,” Dahal told AFP. “We are following up to confirm its timelines and other details.” Plans to form the commission were listed in the government's 100-point reform agenda issued after Shah took office.

Earlier this month Nepal issued an arrest warrant for former prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and his wife in a money laundering investigation, the latest high-profile figure targeted under the new government.

Deuba, who is abroad, has rejected

the allegations. Investigations are also ongoing into former prime minister KP Sharma Oli and ex-home minister Ramesh Lekhak over their alleged roles in the deadly crackdown on the anti-corruption protests in September 2025.

The two men were arrested last month, but they have denied all accusations and were released after a court order.

The youth-led uprising began in Kathmandu and was triggered by a brief social media ban. It spread countrywide the following day, fuelled by longstanding frustration over corruption and economic hardship. (AFP)

Japan to release 50mn medical gloves to ease supply crunch

Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi said yesterday that Japan will give out 50mn medical gloves to facilities facing shortages as the country grapples with the fallout of the war in the Middle East.

The emergency supply will come from Japan's stockpile of some 500mn medical gloves, according to local media.

“Starting in May, the government will release 50mn medical gloves from our pandemic stockpile to medical institutions facing shortages,” Takaichi said in a special meeting on the situation in the Middle East.

The announcement comes as Japan, like the rest of the world, has faced

severe shortages of oil-related products such as naphtha since the US-Israel war began on February 28. Naphtha can be used to make plastics, chemical fibres, rubber and paints.

Iran's effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's crude oil and liquefied natural gas supplies transited before the war, has sent Tokyo officials scrambling to find ways to minimise the damage to the national economy. Resource-poor Japan relies heavily on oil from the Middle East, and Tokyo has tapped into its oil reserves to ease the stress on its economy. In recent weeks, Japanese

physicians have reported a lack of supplies including gloves and have expressed fears that the energy crisis may soon affect the quality of patient care.

Takaichi on Wednesday pledged \$10bn in financial support for Southeast Asian economies as the crisis threatens Tokyo's procurement of vital medical equipment derived from oil.

Under the initiative, Japan will financially help Southeast Asian nations to strengthen their energy supply chain and procure crude and petroleum products. Takaichi noted Japan relies on various supplies from Asia, including medical gloves used during surgeries. (AFP)



Believers support each other

Islam came when people were separated into sects, factions and tribes. Allah The Almighty united people by Islam and brought their hearts together, as He The Almighty Says (what means): {And remember the favour of Allah upon you - when you were enemies and He brought your hearts together and you became, by His favour, brothers.} [Qur'an 3:103] Islam teaches its followers to feel that they are individuals in a group and that they are part of this large group. Feeling that he is a part of the group, a Muslim likes for the other parts what he likes for himself. There are rights and duties that result from a Muslim belonging to the group, the greatest one being the way the believers support one another.

The importance of supporting one another in the Ummah

Supporting one another is of great importance in the life of this Ummah (Muslim nation), and without it the Muslim community is exposed before its enemy and is liable to any defeat. On the other hand, if the society members adhere to supporting Allah The Almighty and one another, then this would definitely lead to the Muslims gaining every good and victory over their enemy. This is a fulfilment of the promise of Allah The Almighty, for He Says (what means): {And Allah will surely support those who support Him.} [Qur'an 22:40]

The Muslims support their Lord The Almighty, and this is attained through obeying Him, not violating His limits and abstaining from disobedient acts. The Muslims support their brothers and sisters and this is achieved through helping them whenever they need it, warding off oppression if they are oppressed and deterring them if they are oppressors. The Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam (may Allah exalt his mention), said: "Support your brother whether he is an oppressor or is oppressed." A man enquired, "O Messenger of Allah, I will support him if he is oppressed, but how can I support him if he is an oppressor?" He, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "You can prevent him from committing oppression, and that is how to support him." [Al-Bukhari]

A novel concept of supporting one another

We notice that the aforementioned Hadith adds a new meaning to supporting one another with regards to supporting a brother who is an oppressor. The Messenger of Allah, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, pointed out that this kind of support is attained by preventing and keeping him from oppression. This is real support, and



not helping him to oppress others, and preventing him from this is supporting him against his self - which is a persistent enjoiner of evil - and its fancies that have deviated from the way of truth. It also supports him against the human and jinni devils and their enticements. Such support saves him from the punishment and torment of Allah The Almighty, rescues him from committing a crime and its lowness, and protects him from the filth of sin and aggression.

"No" to pre-Islamic tribal bigotry

The prevalent concept of supporting one another in the pre-Islamic era was tribal or familial support, whether this support was for a truthful cause or for falsehood. Therefore, whenever disputes arose between two individuals, the tribe of each would support the one who belonged to it, even if he was an aggressor and an oppressor. However, when Islam came, it abolished this bigoted concept which contradicted the primary bases upon which good morals are built. It substituted it with a noble moral concept that is represented in supporting the oppressed

against the oppressor, even if the oppressor is a relative while the oppressed is not. This sublime concept of support in Islam is found in many verses. For example, Allah The Almighty Says (what means): {And when you testify, be just, even if [it concerns] a near relative.} [Qur'an 6:152]

{O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm for Allah, witnesses in justice, and do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just} [Qur'an 5:8]

The Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, ordered his Ummah to support the oppressed, regardless of colour and race, as Al-Baraa' ibn 'Aazib, may Allah be pleased with him, said: "The Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, ordered us to do seven things and forbade us from seven: He ordered us to visit the sick; to follow funeral processions; to respond to a sneezer with 'Yarhamuk Allah [may Allah have mercy on you]' when he says 'Al-hamdu lillah [praise be to Allah]'; to help the oppressed..." [Al-Bukhari and Muslim] The Messenger of Allah, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, clarified that the bond of brotherhood is what attaches Muslims,

and that supporting one another is one of its prerequisites; he, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Every Muslim is inviolable to the Muslim; they are two brothers supporting each other..." [An-Nasaa'I and Ibn Hibbaan, Al-Albaani - Hasan]

The Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, encouraged Muslims to support each other, clarifying that each good deed will have an equal reward; he, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Any person who forsakes a Muslim in a situation in which his inviolability is breached and his honour is defamed, Allah The Almighty will forsake him in a situation where he would like Him to support him. Anyone who supports a Muslim in a situation in which his inviolability is breached and his honor is defamed, Allah The Almighty will support him in a situation where he would want Allah The Almighty to support him." [Ahmad, Al-Albaani - Hasan]

The Messenger of Allah supported the oppressed

According to the terms of the Hudaibiyah peace treaty, everyone had the choice to enter into an alliance and pay allegiance

to either the Messenger of Allah, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, or the Quraysh.

As a consequence, Banu Bakr paid allegiance to Quraysh, and Khuzaa'ah paid allegiance to the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam. There were wars between Banu Bakr and Khuzaa'ah during the pre-Islamic era, and during the treaty between them, Nawfal ibn Mu'aawiyah, from Banu Bakr, led a group of men from his people and headed to the tribe of Khuzaa'ah. They reached Khuzaa'ah at night and killed a man called Munabbih. Thereupon, the people of Khuzaa'ah woke up and started fighting them. Quraysh provided Banu Bakr with weapons and some of them fought with Banu Bakr at night. When the war ended, 'Amr ibn Saalim, may Allah be pleased with him, went to the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, and when he reached him, while he was sitting in the mosque, he said some poetic verses describing the attack and the breaching of the treaty. He sought the support of the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam. Ibn Is'haaq, may Allah have mercy upon him, said: "The Messenger of Allah said to him: 'O 'Amr ibn Saalim, you are supported.' This was the cause of the conquest of Makkah." [Fat'h Al-Baari 592/7]

The righteous advise each other to support the oppressed

When Ibn Muljim, may Allah curse him, stabbed 'Ali, may Allah be pleased with him, he entered his house and called Al-Hasan and Al-Husayn, may Allah be pleased with them, and some of his advice to them was, "Be opponents of the oppressor and support the oppressed."

Abu Bakr At-Tartooshi, may Allah have mercy upon him, visited Al-Afdhal ibn Ameer Al-Juyoosh while he was the ruler of Egypt, and admonished and advised him. Some of what he said was, "Open your door and tell your guards to make it easy for people to enter, support the oppressed and relieve the grieved. May Allah help you to support the oppressed, make you a resort for the grieved, and a means of safety for those who are afraid."

Finally, supporting the oppressed and preventing the oppressor in light of taking into consideration the circumstances, knowing the Islamic jurisprudence of changing and referring to the scholars lead to the safety and success of society.

Article source: <http://www.islamweb.net/emainpage/>



Building a society characterised by solidarity

From a social perspective, the teachings of Islam aim to bring together all Muslims to be a unified entity, in conformity with the words of the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam (may Allah exalt his mention): "The example of the believers as regards their mutual love and compassion is like that of a single body. If any of its parts aches, all the other parts share in the sleeplessness and fever." [Muslim] The strong among them support the weak, and the rich help the poor. Social solidarity manifests in the Muslim community such that its objectives and implications are realised. There are many Shari'ah (Islamic jurisprudence) texts and provisions describing the Muslim community and how it should embody the spirit of solidarity.

There are multiple objectives for such solidarity that incorporate all the needs of the individual and the community, whether material or moral. Social solidarity means that Muslims should work together, each through his position and status, to preserve the public interests of the community as a whole and the private interests of the individuals, so that everyone in the community would feel that his rights are fulfilled and he, accordingly, is eager to fulfill his duties and obligations towards other members of his community. The scope of this solidarity then expands to encompass all people (not limited only among Muslims). Allah, the Exalted, Says (what means): {O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted.} [Qur'an 49:13] Allah, the Exalted, honored Man and commanded us to treat all children of Adam accordingly (with respect). He Says (what means): {And We have certainly honored the children of Adam.} [Qur'an 17:70]

From day one, the teachings of Islam laid emphasis on fostering human ties, strengthening social bonds, and establishing equality among all people so that each and every Muslim would feel the bond of brotherhood with his fellow Muslims. Islam also established a social safety net on the basis of solidarity to enhance the moral and physical building of the individual and community. It laid the foundations of the righteous Muslim individual, the virtuous family, and the integrated society to ensure the establishment of the Muslim community that provides security and safety for all its members.

The circle of this solidarity begins with every Muslim individual as he refines his own 'self', takes care of it and rectifies it, directing it to what is good for himself and for all people, and then he tends to the bonds that connect him with the members of his family. Each family member bears his own responsibilities and shoulders his duties, acting upon the words of the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam: "All of you are guardians and are responsible for your subjects." [Al-Bukhari] A man is a guardian in his family; he has rights and duties, and the same applies to the woman who has her own rights and duties. This critical task begins from the very moment a man chooses his prospective wife; he should choose someone from a righteous family to be a good building block for their family and be able to provide their children with a good upbringing that pleases Allah, the Exalted. This is why the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "A woman is married for four [reasons]: her wealth, her noble descent, her beauty, and her religion. So win the religious woman - otherwise, you will be a loser." [Al-Bukhari] The marital life should be founded on mutual kindness, as Allah, the Exalted, prescribed, acting upon the instructions of the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, when he said: "The best of you are those who are best to their wives, and I am the best of you to my wives." [At-Tirmithi]

As for the process of raising the children and taking care of them, it is a joint duty of both parents. Allah, the Exalted, Says (what means): {O you who have believed, protect yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is people and stones...} [Qur'an 66:6] This includes directing them from an early age towards what benefits them in their worldly lives and the Hereafter, starting with the acts of worship and all good deeds. The Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Command your children to perform prayer when they are seven years old, and beat them (for abandoning it) when they are ten." [Ahmad]

When these teachings are instilled within the individual at a young age, he has successfully taken the first steps in the right direction and recognised his position and status in his community. Islam is keen to foster solidarity among the Muslim individual and his community and harmoniously preserves both the private and public interests to ensure that neither would undermine the other. An individual interacts and co-operates with other members of his community to maintain this harmoni-



ous balance. Allah, the Exalted, Says (what means): {And co-operate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression.} [Qur'an 5:2] On the other side, the community is responsible for preserving the private rights of the individuals, and this contributes to maintaining public order for the sake of the community and all its members.

The scope of such solidarity is not confined to the interests of the individual, the community, or even the country, but rather extends to include other communities and future generations, as confirmed by the words of Allah. He Says, (what means): {And [there is a share for] those who came after them, saying, "Our Lord, forgive us and our brothers who preceded us in faith and put not in our hearts [any] resentment toward those who have believed. Our Lord, indeed You are Kind and Merciful."} [Qur'an 59:10] This is how the humanness of man that Allah, the Exalted, intends for us Muslims is realised, and it is how the enjoined solidarity is realised with its temporal

and spatial dimensions.

One of the most important manifestations of solidarity which Islam is keen to instill in our communities is how to treat the elderly and take care of them, starting with one's parents, acting upon the verse that reads (what means): {And We have enjoined upon man, to his parents, good treatment. His mother carried him with hardship and gave birth to him with hardship, and his gestation and weaning [period] is thirty months.} [Qur'an 46:15] Also, the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "He is not one of us who is not merciful to our youngsters and does not respect and honour our elders." [At-Tirmithi] Then comes the duty of caring for the orphans, the poor, and the needy, and supporting them. Allah, the Exalted, Says (what means): {They ask you [O Muhammad] what they should spend. Say, "Whatever you spend of good is [to be] for parents and relatives and orphans and the needy and the traveler. And whatever you do

of good - indeed, Allah is Knowing of it."} [Qur'an 2:215]

This can be achieved by providing job opportunities for all members of the community rather than concentrating the employment opportunities in specific segments or groups, eliminating the obstacles hindering the poor, and empowering them to break free from the feelings of inferiority to their peers.

Another important manifestation of solidarity in Islam is the enjoined kindness towards neighbours by keenly fulfilling their rights and preserving their interests. The Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "By Allah, he is not a believer! By Allah, he is not a believer! By Allah, he is not a believer!" He, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "The one whose neighbour does not feel safe from his evil." [Al-Bukhari]

Another manifestation is honouring guests and offering them hospitality, and this applies to your private guests or those visiting your country, such as tourists or expatriates (guest workers). You should be hospitable to them all; the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should be hospitable to his guest." [Al-Bukhari]

There are many ways by means of which the members of the community can contribute to the realisation of this solidarity, including: Zakat, charity, expiation, Waqf (Islamic endowment), Wasiyyah (will), 'Aariyah (gratuitous loan of non-fungible objects or property), gifts, grants, and others. There are also other means which the government is responsible for, including: carrying out public projects, building infrastructure for the cities and villages, providing job opportunities for all members of the community, facilitating the fulfilment of people's needs, organizing transportation and communication means, and the means of individual solidarity among the members of the community such as facilitating the establishment of centers for collecting and distributing Zakaah and facilitating their work, acting upon the verse that reads (what means): {Take [O, Muhammad] from their wealth a charity by which you purify them and cause them increase, and invoke [the blessings of Allah] upon them. Indeed, your invocations are reassurance for them. And Allah is Hearing and Knowing.} [Qur'an 9:103]

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GULF TIMES

Relaxation of US day-trading rules opens door to YOLO trading, higher risk

A regulatory move allowing smaller, everyday investors to engage in more day trading could spur impulsive, high-risk "YOLO", or "you-only-live-once," trades and allow eager individual traders to take an even bigger role in driving markets. The US Securities and Exchange Commission late this week approved a proposal to remove restrictions that limited accounts under \$25,000 to three day trades – defined as the buying and selling of the same security within the same trading day – within five business days, known as the "pattern day trader" rule. The decision was a win for brokerage firms like Webull and Robinhood and retail traders who now have a much greater ability to buy and sell frequently – but may also take on higher risk with YOLO trades driven by conviction or impulse rather than by research and careful portfolio planning.

"Removing the restriction makes it easier for undercapitalized traders to take more 'YOLO' shots intraday," said Ophir Gottlieb, chief executive of Los Angeles-based Capital Market Laboratories. "That can mean more freedom to lose money faster," Gottlieb added.

Gottlieb noted that there will still be some guardrails on retail trading under the new rules, where instead of the \$25,000 minimum account size, customers would need to meet certain margin requirements based on their market exposure. "Retail traders have been a large part of this market since Covid and

The decision was a win for brokerage firms like Webull and Robinhood

But the Covid-19 pandemic, together with big leaps in technology and the advent of new trading platforms, helped retail traders to boost that share as high as 25%, and become key players on particularly volatile days. Retail investors have especially been drawn to trading as markets rallied from their recent slump, and there has been heightened buzz around stocks that attracted retail interest such as footwear -to-AI firm Allbirds, which saw a surge of buying.

"The pattern day trader rule really still restricted the ability of our smaller clients to participate in the markets and reduced their opportunities to take advantage of big market moves," said Anthony Denier, group president and US CEO at Webull, whose stock soared 11% on Wednesday.

Denier said the average Webull client has about \$5,000 in their trading account, far below the \$25,000 in assets that, under the pattern day trader rule, would entitle them to engage in more than three day trades within a five-day period. The Financial Industry Regulatory Authority, or FINRA, created the PDT rule following the popping of the dot-com bubble in 2000, as a way to rein in speculation and limit losses for traders with brokerage accounts that allow them to buy stocks on margin.

Denier and others who have pushed for overturning the rule argued that imposing a \$25,000 minimum balance requirement was arbitrary and tilted the playing field in favour of wealthier investors. The new rules will come into effect 45 days after they are posted on FINRA's website. FINRA did not immediately respond to a Reuters query on the precise timing. "This is certainly going to open up opportunities for our smaller customers and democratize access to the markets," Denier said.

Still, some analysts were wary that the move would nudge investors into taking on more risk. "I think it will push some of these traders toward riskier bets," said Garrett DeSimone, head quantitative analyst at OptionMetrics, adding that it would be logical for small investors with limited capital to seek out more bang for their buck. Higher transaction volumes, particularly among retail investors, tend to translate into greater losses, DeSimone said.

"Someone with a few thousand dollars won't just be able to open up a brokerage account and start day-trading options contracts," he said, noting that traders will still have to meet certain thresholds in terms of knowledge or skills. "It just wouldn't be Big Brother saying, 'You're not rich enough,' anymore." – Reuters

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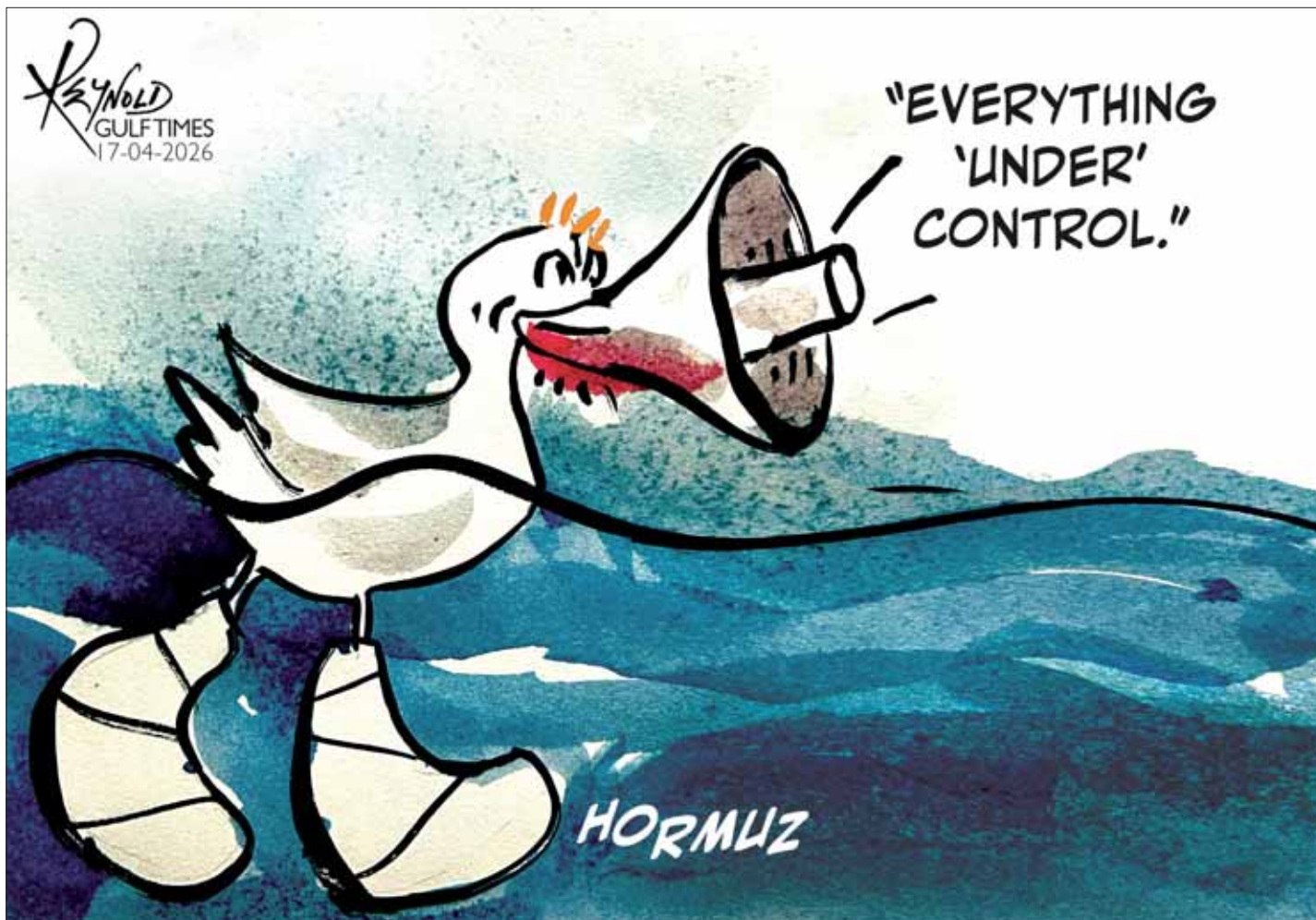
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Qatar a model of stability, adaptation as conflicts reshape insurance industry

Qatar's advanced regulatory environment and the role of the QCB have contributed to strengthening the resilience of the insurance sector, enabling it to deal with regional and international challenges efficiently

QNA
Doha

The insurance sector is facing one of the most complex challenges in its history as geopolitical conflicts escalate and wars are no longer exceptional events but a permanent element in the global risk equation, all of which are forcing companies to reformulate their models and methods of operation.

Amidst escalating tensions, there is a growing demand for specialised insurance solutions to address unconventional risks, including attacks on infrastructure, disruptions to supply chains and transport, and damage to goods. As these risks persist, insurance costs rise significantly. Increases in transport, energy, and basic commodity premiums are reflected in the prices of products and services, making the consumer part of the risk equation. Meanwhile, insurance companies bear the responsibility of managing compensation in an unstable environment.

International reports from Swiss Re and Lloyd's of London revealed a radical shift in the sector, characterized by an almost complete exclusion of damages resulting from armed conflicts from traditional policies, in contrast to the growing reliance on war risk insurance.

Sensitive sector

Experts point out that the insurance sector has become one of the most sensitive sectors to the developments of wars, with a significant increase in the cost of coverage and a widening scope of risks to include supply chains, business disruption, transport and global trade.

In contrast, reinsurance companies play a pivotal role: undertaking the task of distributing risks on a global scale, thereby reducing the likelihood of local insurance companies collapsing in the event of large losses.

In a special statement to Qatar News Agency (QNA), CEO of Damaan Islamic Insurance Company (BEEMA) Nasser Rashid al-Misnad confirmed that the insurance sector is facing increasing challenges that have forced it to reformulate its business models and risk management mechanisms. He pointed out that wars are no longer exceptional events, but have become a permanent element in risk assessment, which has directly affected the cost of insurance and the nature of the coverage provided.

Risk management within insurance companies is no longer limited to monitoring traditional indicators, al-Misnad pointed out, adding that it has become a pivotal function that drives the decision-making process through the continuous evaluation of possible scenarios and preparation for developments that may be unexpected in a highly volatile environment.

The BEEMA CEO explained that the recent period witnessed a significant increase in insurance premiums, especially in the maritime transport, aviation and energy sectors, as a result of the increased likelihood of losses and the complexity of the risk environment. He pointed out that the impact of these increases extended to the cost of goods and services, making the consumer part of this equation.

Al-Misnad referred to the emergence of a need for insurance products that were previously of limited use, most notably insurance against the risks of war, business disruption, and supply chains, in addition to insurance against cyber risks, which have become one of the dimensions of modern wars.

Reinsurance companies form a key pillar in supporting the stability of the sector by distributing risks on a global scale, which limits the impact of large losses on local insurance companies, especially in light of the high volume of potential claims, he added. Al-Misnad noted that insurance companies today increasingly rely on scenario analysis, where different developments of conflicts and their impact on supply chains, energy



and transportation are envisioned, and then the financial and operational impact of each scenario is measured, which helps to make more flexible and proactive decisions.

He explained that stress tests have become an essential tool, where companies simulate harsh conditions such as a sudden surge in claims or widespread market disruptions, with the aim of ensuring their ability to continue and meet their obligations even in the most difficult circumstances.

Some companies resort to what is known as reverse testing, which begins with the assumption of a severe scenario that could lead to the company's failure, and then work backward to understand how this could happen, which helps to discover weaknesses before they occur, he added. Al-Misnad pointed out that insurance companies are moving towards developing more specialized solutions that rely on advanced data analysis and real-time risk management, enabling them to respond quickly to changes, adapt, and improve their ability to accurately price risks.

On the local level, the BEEMA CEO noted that Qatar stands out as a model of economic and financial stability. The advanced regulatory environment and the role of the Qatar Central Bank have contributed to strengthening the resilience of the insurance sector, enabling it to deal with regional and international challenges efficiently. This stability is not limited to economic factors alone, but also reflects the development of risk management practices within institutions, and the keenness of regulatory bodies to promote a culture of proactive preparedness, not just crisis response.

Concluding his statement to QNA, al-Misnad confirmed that the next phase will witness further expansion in specialized insurance products, and perhaps a move towards group or regional solutions to cover high risks, in light of the increasing reluctance of reinsurance companies to cover some types of risks.

Economic expert Ahmed Aql supports this view, stating in an interview with the Qatar News Agency (QNA) that the Qatari model for achieving economic security relies on diversifying production sources and enhancing self-sufficiency, particularly in vital sectors such as food and water. Within the framework of Qatar National Vision 2030, the country has succeeded in increasing self-sufficiency rates in several areas, including dairy, meat, poultry, fish, eggs, and vegetables. This reduces its direct vulnerability to disruptions in global supply chains, alleviates pressure on the insurance sector, and ensures the uninterrupted supply of essential goods to the local market.

Aql added that Qatar's strategic location and its status as a major energy and trade hub have made the development of advanced insurance solutions a pressing necessity, especially in the areas of energy and critical infrastructure insurance, marine insurance related to natural gas exports, and insurance for major projects and infrastructure.

He pointed out that despite this stability, the Qatari market is not without its challenges, as it remains linked to regional and international developments. The rise in global reinsurance costs is reflected in the local market, and reliance on foreign markets to cover some major risks presents an additional challenge.

Marine transport

Aql explained that insurance for transport operations, particularly marine transport, has become more important than ever, given the length of supply chains and the increased likelihood of risks related to cargo damage or loss, or geopolitical risks.

With escalating tensions in the region, risks are no longer limited to cargo alone, but have extended to the ships themselves and their crews. This has prompted insurance companies to significantly raise their premiums, in some cases by three or four times, reflecting a fundamental principle in the insurance sector, which is the cost of coverage increase with the probability of risk.

Aql concluded by saying that insurance companies today operate in a complex environment, where the likelihood of large claims increases, forcing them to tighten their terms and impose additional restrictions on transport operations, especially in areas classified as high-risk. However, these challenges also open up the field for the development of more accurate and advanced insurance options, based on digital data analysis and real-time risk tracking, making the insurance industry better equipped to deal with unforeseen events.

In the same vein, financial and economic analyst Nidal Khouli affirmed that the insurance sector was among the most affected by the military escalation in the Middle East. He pointed out that the Gulf region in general, and Qatar in particular, had enjoyed long periods of regional and local stability, which meant that insurance risks were primarily concentrated in areas related to natural factors and economic activities.

Khouli added that the outbreak of war led to a renewed need for insurance coverage that was previously excluded or considered less important, most notably war risk insurance, maritime disruption insurance, and business interruption insurance. He explained that these products were not among the priorities of customers or even insurance companies before the war, but they have now become central to the concerns of all parties.

He added that the coming period will witness a growing interest in specialized insurance products, such as business interruption insurance during conflicts, supply chain insurance, coverage related to energy supply disruptions, and insurance related to radioactive or environmental pollution, reflecting the expanding scope and increasing complexity of risks.

Khouli also pointed out that if the conflict is prolonged, the need may arise to establish national insurance or funds to provide partial or compensatory coverage for sectors that may be unable to obtain coverage from international reinsurance companies, given the potential reluctance of these companies to assume high risks.

He also suggested that the current phase might necessitate the establishment of regional Gulf insurance pools to bridge the coverage gap and enhance the capacity to address shared risks. On the other hand, he pointed out that cyber risk insurance has become an increasing priority, given the transformation of modern warfare into multidimensional conflicts that include cyberspace. He emphasized that this type of coverage will witness significant growth in the coming period.

Self-care practices play vital role in improving physical, mental health

Regular self-care practices play a vital role in improving physical and mental health, sustaining energy levels, strengthening the immune system, and building resilience during challenging times, two renowned physicians have noted.

"Self-care is a holistic approach that supports both health promotion and disease prevention. It involves taking proactive steps and adopting healthy behaviours to maintain and improve overall well-being," noted, Dr Amit Abraham and Dr Sohaila Cheema from the Institute for Population Health at Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar.

Giving several tips about self-care in their latest article, the physicians said that in recent times people have been faced with events that fall well outside their usual experiences, adding to the everyday pressures of work and life. When combined, these stressors can feel overwhelming and may make it harder to focus on essential aspects of well-being – such as caring for our physical health, staying connected with others, or finding moments of enjoyment and rest.

"Importantly, self care does not mean managing alone; it can include seeking support from family, friends, or healthcare professionals," they said and suggested several tips for self-care.

The physicians have advised everyone to stay physically active and aim for at least 30 minutes of physical activity each day. "Even small amounts add up. Try to avoid long periods of sit-



ting – stretch, take a short walk, or incorporate gentle movement every 30 minutes. Any movement counts," they said.

Another aspect is the need to eat well and stay hydrated. People can choose a balanced diet that includes a variety of fruits and vegetables, lean proteins, and whole grains to support overall health and sustained energy and drink water regularly throughout the day.

They said that sleep should be a priority and one must aim for 7-9 hours of sleep each night. "Establish a consistent sleep routine by going to bed and waking up at the same time. Limit caffeine and screen use in the evening and create a calm sleep environment that is dark and quiet," suggested the

doctors.

Another important aspect is to seek professional support when needed. If people have existing physical or mental health conditions, they should continue to attend regular healthcare appointments and keep up to date with recommended screenings and vaccinations as looking after one's own health enables to better support the family and community.

Meanwhile, the experts also have given a number of self-care tips for mental well-being highlighting that making time for 'me-time' is very important. "Seek out activities that bring you joy, as positive experiences can help ease stress and restore perspective. Continue with hobbies you enjoy,

explore practices such as meditation or yoga, find reasons to laugh, spend time in nature, or seek out uplifting and positive news stories," suggested, the physicians.

Another important point is to stay connected by reaching out to friends and family, and spend time with loved ones – human or otherwise. "Connecting with others, including pets, helps activate coping mechanisms and strengthens emotional resilience," noted the authors.

Other major recommendations are to practise self-compassion to be kind and understanding toward oneself rather than overly critical and cultivating gratitude by acknowledging and appreciating the things.

Amir commends Pakistan's peace efforts in meeting with Shehbaz

From Page 1

The meeting was attended by HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani and HE the Chief of the Amiri Diwan, Abdullah bin Mohammed al-Khulaifi along with a lineup of senior officials.

On the Pakistani side, the meeting was attended by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ishaq Dar; Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar; Minister of State and Special Assistant to the Prime Minister Syed Tariq Fatemi as well as a number of other senior officials.

His Highness the Amir and Sharif also held a bilateral meeting, where they exchanged views on current developments of mutual interest and emphasised the importance of continued co-ordination and consultation between the two countries, particularly amidst current events and their repercussions on the region's security and stability.

Following the talks, His Highness the Amir hosted a luncheon banquet in honour of prime minister and his accompanying delegation.

Sharif departed Doha yesterday after a working visit to the country. He and his accompanying delegation were seen off at Doha International Airport by HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad, and Pakistan's ambassador Muhammad Aamer.

Earlier upon his arrival, the Pakistan PM and his accompanying delegation were welcomed at Doha International Airport by HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi and ambassador Muhammad Aamer. (QNA)

Pak PM hails 'enduring ties'

From Page 1

He added that he had thanked His Highness the Amir "on behalf of the people of Pakistan for the exceptionally warm and generous gesture."

The rare military honour, he said, embodied "the spirit of Qatar's renowned hospitality and the strength of our enduring ties."

Sharif said they discussed "the evolving regional situation, particularly in the Gulf region," stressing the need for de-escalation, dialogue, and co-ordinated international efforts to preserve peace and stability.

The Pakistani premier also reiterated Islamabad's strong condemnation of attacks on Qatar and other regional states, conveying "full solidarity with the brotherly people of Qatar".

The two sides also reviewed bilateral co-operation, reaffirming their commitment to deepening ties in security, defence, and energy – sectors central to Pakistan's strategic and economic interests in the Gulf.

"The extremely warm and productive exchanges were reflective of Pakistan's longstanding ties with Qatar and the Gulf states," Sharif said.

Qatar, Oman urge de-escalation

From Page 1

Following the meeting, His Highness the Amir and Sultan of Oman held a bilateral session in which they exchanged views on strengthening co-operation and discussing other matters of mutual interest.

Later, His Highness the Amir left Muscat yesterday for Doha.

At the forefront of those bidding farewell to His Highness the Amir and the accompanying delegation was Sultan Haitham bin Tariq.

Also present were Shihab bin Tariq al-Said, Theyazin bin Haitham al-Said, Khalid bin Hilal al-Busaidi, and Qatar's ambassador Sheikh Mubarak bin Fahad al-Thani, in addition to a lineup of Their Excellencies senior Omani officials. (QNA)

France reports surge in crypto kidnappings

AFP
Nanterre

France has seen more than forty cases of kidnappings or hostage takings linked to cryptocurrencies since January, a worrying surge since last year as criminals seek to extort digital currency investors for ransom, authorities said yesterday.

Since late 2024 French authorities have been dealing with a string of kidnappings and extortion attempts targeting the families of wealthy individuals dealing in cryptocurrencies.

Some of the cases targeted institutional digital currency players or individuals with crypto holdings, while others involved other crimes not involving kidnappings, Philippe Chadry, deputy national director of the judicial police, told journalists yesterday.

"The modus operandi, the masterminds – often based abroad – and the targeting methods" vary, Chadry said, with the names of targets some-

times revealed to henchmen at the last moment.

The phenomenon of crypto-related abductions, still "marginal" in 2024, gained momentum in 2025 when around thirty cases were reported, said Annabelle Vandendriessche, head of the interior ministry's Service for Information, Intelligence, and Strategic Analysis on Organised Crime (Sirasco).

On Monday a woman and her 11-year-old son were kidnapped in the central Burgundy region ahead of a crypto ransom demand.

After an operation involving around 100 officers, they were freed by Tuesday and seven men were taken into custody.

Also this month, a kidnapping took place in the southern French town of Anglet on April 10, carried out by five individuals searching for a crypto investor. They allegedly stole luxury jewellery, computers and phones.

Police arrested the suspects at Paris's Montparnasse train station after they apparently "mistook their target," Chadry said.

Thai embassy, restaurants set to launch culinary initiative

By Joey Aguilar
Doha

The Thai embassy in Doha has partnered with 12 Thai restaurants across Qatar to launch "Together at the Table: Thailand & Qatar", a culinary initiative that brings Thai hospitality closer to local communities while highlighting ties of friendship and support.

More than a food promotion, the embassy noted that the campaign underlines a broader message of unity and shared resilience, using cuisine as a bridge between cultures and people.

According to the embassy, the initiative underscores the role of shared experiences in strengthening social bonds amid global and regional challenges that continue to test communities. Through a simple yet meaningful act – sharing meals – Thailand conveys a message of care and solidarity with Qatar.

Running from April 22 to May 9, the programme features a cu-

rated selection of Thai restaurants offering special promotions under the banner "From Thailand with Care." These include set menus, exclusive discounts, complimentary dishes, and other offers, allowing each participating venue to showcase signature flavours and culinary traditions.

Organisers said the initiative reflects the richness and authenticity of Thai cuisine, while also highlighting the warmth and attentiveness that define Thai hospitality. From lunch through dinner, diners are encouraged to experience not only the food but also the spirit behind each dish.

The embassy noted that food continues to play a crucial role in fostering connection and stability, particularly during uncertain times. The campaign emphasises how shared meals can promote social cohesion and contribute to broader conversations on community resilience and food security.

Each participating restaurant serves as a platform for cultural

exchange, offering dishes that carry both tradition and a message of goodwill. The initiative also reflects Thailand's continued commitment to strengthening its relationship with Qatar through people-to-people engagement.

Diners are invited to share their experiences online using the hashtag #FromThailandwithCare, helping extend the campaign's message beyond restaurant tables and into the wider community.

The embassy urged Qatari citizens and residents to take part in the initiative, describing it as an opportunity to enjoy authentic cuisine while celebrating shared values of friendship and co-operation.

Through the campaign, the embassy stressed that Thailand aims to send more than culinary offerings, positioning the initiative as a gesture of connection and mutual support. The effort ultimately reflects a simple idea: that through shared moments and experiences, communities can grow stronger together.

Elysee worker sentenced for stealing porcelain

A Paris court yesterday handed a former silverware keeper at France's presidential palace a two-year sentence for stealing hundreds of thousands of euros worth of luxury items between 2023 and 2025.

Thomas M was ordered to wear an electronic tag for a year, with the second year suspended, for stealing exclusive tableware and other items worth nearly 400,000 euros (\$470,000), the court ruled. He was also fined 10,000 euros and barred from working in a similar position and from setting foot in an auction house ever again.

His partner, Damien G, was also sentenced to two years. He was ordered to wear an electronic tag for eight months, with the remaining 16 months suspended.

The couple sold most of the stolen items via a Vinted business account and on Facebook, and said they had pocketed around 15,000 euros in profit. A third man, Ghislain M, who bought nearly 80 of the items, was given a one-year suspended prison sentence.

The case came to light last year when the Sevres national porcelain manufacturer – which makes many of the valuable plates for the presidential palace – saw some of the items listed on auction sites. Investigations quickly focused on Thomas M, a contract worker in the Elysee's silverware department since 2020 and the only staff member with direct access to the warehouse keys. According to the manufacturer, the estimated value of the items was 377,370 euros – a sum the defence described as "absurd". (AFP)

QU honours winners of 19th Education Excellence Award



Qatar University (QU) president, Dr Omar al-Ansari, honoured the winners of the 19th Education Excellence Award for 2026 in the presence of several vice-presidents at a ceremony.

This recognition comes as part of QU's dedication to supporting its students, celebrating their achievements, and promoting a culture of excellence that enhances the quality of educational outcomes. It also contributes to enhancing the quality of educational outcomes and fostering an academic environment that encourages creativity and knowledge.

In his address to the awardees,

Dr al-Ansari, emphasised that this achievement reflects the students' commitment to excellence, noting that their accomplishments demonstrate a high level of discipline, ambition, and dedication. He added that this recognition represents the culmination of their efforts and serves as motivation to continue their journey of success, stressing that excellence is an ongoing journey that requires perseverance and continuous development.

Dr al-Ansari highlighted the university's commitment to supporting its students by providing an advanced educational and research environment that enables them to reach their full potential.

This includes developing their skills and expanding opportunities for innovation and achievement. He stated, "The university's resources are available to you – make the best use of them to achieve your aspirations and contribute effectively to the service and advancement of society."

For their part, the honoured students expressed their pride in receiving this recognition, noting that it reflects the outcome of their hard work and motivates them to continue striving for excellence. They also reaffirmed their commitment to contributing to society and the nation through knowledge and academic achievement.

Greenland celebrates new international airport

AFP
Qaqortoq

A commercial aircraft landed yesterday for the first time in Qaqortoq, Greenland's fourth-largest town, whose new airport means that the whole of the Arctic island – coveted by US President Donald Trump – now has international connections.

The flight between Nuuk, the Greenlandic capital, and Qaqortoq, in the south of the Danish autonomous territory, lasted about 75 minutes and many residents gathered outside the airport to witness the landing, said an AFP reporter on the flight.

Greenland's Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen and Foreign Minister Mute Egede were both on the plane to the town, the main gateway to southern Greenland.



Greenland's prime minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen stands on the tarmac after landing at the airport in Qaqortoq, yesterday. (AFP)

Previously accessible only by helicopter or boat, the town can now have year-round flights from Nuuk and summer connections from Iceland, the VisitGreenland tourism board said in a statement.

The Arctic island of 57,000 people relies on its 14 airports, as well as helipads, as it has no roads connecting its towns.

The airport has a 1,500-metre (4,900-foot)

runway. Its opening comes as the Narsarsuaq airport, located further north, closes.

According to local press, the US is considering refurbishing Narsarsuaq, a former air base that was operated by the US military between 1942 and 1958.

The inauguration of Qaqortoq airport comes just over a year after the launch of the first direct air link between Copenhagen and Nuuk.

Amir, Sultan of Oman discuss regional stability, security; widen ties



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and Sultan Haitham bin Tariq of the Sultanate of Oman, discussed developments in the region amid rising regional tensions. The two sides met at Al Baraka Palace in Muscat, where they exchanged views on current developments, particularly their implications for regional security and stability, as well as their impact on energy supplies and international shipping. Both leaders stressed the importance of intensifying regional and international efforts to de-escalate tensions and the need to prioritise diplomatic solutions and dialogue to resolve disputes, contributing to regional and international security and stability. They also emphasised continued co-ordination and consultation on issues of mutual interest, in addition to the strong fraternal relations between the two countries and ways to further develop them across various fields. (QNA)

Japan stands for diplomatic solutions to resolve regional crisis: ambassador

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

Japan is of the view that diplomatic solutions and self-restraint are the most important steps to avoid any escalations in the ongoing geopolitical conflicts in the region, noted the Japanese ambassador to Qatar. “Japan shares Qatar’s view that diplomatic solutions and self-restraint are key to avoiding escalation in the current crisis. Accordingly, Japan is actively engaged with the diplomatic efforts to de-escalate the situation,” said Naoto Hisajima, ambassador of Japan, yesterday.

Hisajima was addressing a virtual gathering at the “Diplomatic Dialogue Series” organised by Hamad Bin Khalifa University. He said Japan imports about 90% of its oil from this region and therefore, it is one of the countries most affected by this situation. “Japanese foreign minister had made a telephone phone call with HE Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin



Ambassador Naoto Hisajima (right) at the webinar.

Jassim al-Thani and appreciated Qatar’s diplomatic efforts to mediate conflicts in the Middle East, including this current situation.

He also stated that Japan has strongly urged Iran to cease actions, and condemned Iran’s actions on civilian facilities, and also actions that threatened the freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz. He had expressed grave concern of retaliatory attacks and damages caused in the neighbouring countries, including Qatar.

He also noted that the Japanese

foreign minister had expressed his country’s intention to co-ordinate and co-operate with Qatar on various matters, including the early settlement of the situation, and securing the safe navigation in the Strait of Hormuz.

The envoy said that Japan had contacted Iran several times suggesting de-escalation of the situation. “We had explained Japan’s position and urged Iran particularly for the safe passage of vessels in the Strait of Hormuz. Japan and Iran have had a very long relation-

ship, and reflecting on them, our government has had a direct contact with Iran after this situation took place and repeatedly reiterated our positions to Iranian counterparts,” he explained.

Hisajima stated that Japan had also conveyed to the Iranian minister about Japan’s position that Iran’s development of nuclear weapons can not be allowed. He highlighted Japan’s effort to co-ordinate with the international community to make all necessary diplomatic efforts to resolve issues surrounding Iran, including nuclear issues.

“And Japan is continuing to engage in various diplomatic activities in order to de-escalate the situation and ensure the passage of safe navigation in the Strait of Hormuz. Japan’s diplomatic efforts also include the joint statement on the Strait of Hormuz, which was issued on March 19. It was a statement jointly by 38 countries so far, an initiative taken by the United Kingdom and other countries,” he added.

QNL wins Gold Award at Cyber Security Drill



Qatar National Library (QNL) has won the Gold Award at the National Cyber Security Drill 2025, ranking first in the Education Sector.

Organised by the National Cyber Security Agency under the theme “Cross-Border Attacks,” the event aimed to strengthen national defences against sophisticated, external cyber threats.

The award recognises QNL’s strong performance and commitment to advancing cybersecurity preparedness and resilience across its digital infrastructure and services.

Commenting on this

achievement, Dr Nasser al-Ansari, information technology director at QNL, said: “This recognition reflects our continuous commitment to strengthening cybersecurity practices across the library’s systems and services.

As a national knowledge institution, safeguarding our digital environment is essential to ensuring secure and reliable access to information for our community.”

This milestone highlights QNL’s ongoing efforts to align with national priorities and contribute to a secure and resilient digital ecosystem.

Suzana Joumaa and the ‘new wave’ of art emerging from Qatar

By Shaima Sheriff
Staff Reporter

After losing much of her work to war, artist Suzana Joumaa rebuilt her practice in Qatar, redefining art through a system-based approach that dissolves boundaries between disciplines and constantly evolves.

An artist who once lost much of her life’s work to conflict has emerged in Qatar with a radically redefined vision, one that challenges not only how art is created, but what it fundamentally is.

For Suzana Joumaa, the journey from Syria to Doha has been one of profound reinvention. “I lost most of my artworks ... I was depressed. I didn’t want to do art,” she recalled. Her turning point came in Qatar, where the Fire Station Artist in Residence programme became a space of recovery and renewal. “I decided to finish my Master of Fine Arts (MFA) to do a new project and to finish it very well,” she said, a moment that reignited both her practice and purpose.

Today, Joumaa’s work resists traditional categorisation. “I started as an artist and interior architect, then a multidisciplinary artist and now I am a system-based artist,” she explained. Her practice operates “across multiple disciplines within an integrated, system-driven framework where each project defines its own logic and medium.”

Rejecting fixed labels, she moves fluidly between oil painting, printmaking, interior design, digitally fabricated sculpture, mechanical interventions, music, sound and video art. These, she insists, are not separate fields. “I don’t frame myself inside only one art practice ... I can do them all in one frame,” she said.

At the core of her work is what she defines as the “new wave of art,” not a style, but a position. It challenges long-standing assumptions about art, including the separation between disciplines and the idea of the artwork as a finished object.

“In my practice, the artwork is not an end product, but an evolving system that changes through time, interaction, and context,” she noted. The process, she added, is not about combining disciplines for effect, but about “dissolving the hierarchy between them.”



Suzana Joumaa

While Joumaa incorporates advanced tools such as parametric design and 3D printing, she emphasises that technology is only one part of a broader system.

“Parametric design and digital art give me a wider mindset... it’s always pushing the boundaries,” she said, underscoring that evolution, not medium, defines her work.

Qatar has played a central role in enabling this transformation. Beyond personal recovery, Joumaa views the country as a growing cultural hub. “It’s gathering people from all around the world ... giving a platform for all of that to be blended safely,” she said.

Her artistic language reflects this openness, immersive, symbolic and deeply sensory. Through light, shadow, sound and interaction, she invites audiences into emotional and psychological spaces. “I want them to feel ... to stand a moment and ask, ‘What is that?’” she said.

Her work has gained increasing international recognition, with participation in major platforms including Art Cairo at the Egyptian Grand Museum, as well as her role as a World Cup artist in Qatar. She has also collaborated with institutions such as Virginia Commonwealth University and served as a jury member for the Artbeat competition.

Awards, including the Qatar Al-Fann competition and Artist of the Year 2024, have further strengthened her visibility, though she views them as part of a larger journey. “Art is not easy ... you need to keep the passion... to evolve what you do,” she reflected.

Her message to emerging creatives is grounded in persistence. “You will fail many times... it’s all part of the experience... never give up,” she advised.

In an era where disciplines increasingly overlap, Joumaa’s work signals a broader shift in how art is understood. She is not simply creating works, she is constructing a framework. In a world still inclined to categorise, Joumaa is quietly dismantling boundaries, shaping what she calls the “new wave of art,” where everything connects, evolves, and begins again.



Some of Suzana Joumaa’s artworks. She incorporates advanced tools such as parametric design and 3D printing and emphasises that technology is only one part of a broader system.

