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**BUSINESS | Page 1**

Startup Grind Doha tackles mental health gap for founders

**Family deals**  
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**Al-Kuwari participates in G20 finance ministers and central bank governors meeting**

HE the Minister of Finance Ali bin Ahmed al-Kuwari participated in the Group of Twenty (G20) Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors Meeting, held on the sidelines of the Annual Spring Meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank Group, which took place from April 13-18 in Washington, DC. The meetings included a series of discussion sessions that highlighted the impact of geopolitical conflicts on the global economy, including slower growth, disruptions to trade, rising inflation, and declining investment, particularly in emerging economies, while underscoring the importance of strengthening international co-operation and economic partnerships to ensure market stability, support energy security, and mitigate economic pressures.



HE the Minister of Finance Ali bin Ahmed al-Kuwari.

In his remarks, HE the Minister of Finance affirmed that conflicts undermine economic growth by disrupting trade and increasing the costs of energy and transportation, leading to persistent inflationary pressures and reduced investment, especially in emerging markets. He stressed the importance of shifting towards international co-operation to enhance economic stability and resilience. His Excellency also reiterated Qatar's commitment to supporting global energy security and working with partners to stabilise markets, as well as to fostering economic partnerships that promote integration and address geopolitical challenges, rather than deepening divisions. (QNA)

**Oil plunges below \$90**

Wall Street indexes touched fresh record highs and oil prices cratered yesterday after Iran said that the Strait of Hormuz was open for passage during a ceasefire in Lebanon and US President Donald Trump said he expected to reach a deal to end the war soon. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi said in a post on X that passage for all commercial vessels through the Strait of Hormuz, a key conduit for global energy flows, was declared completely open for the remainder of the 10-day truce brokered by the US that was agreed on Thursday. Benchmark Brent crude futures nosedived and were last trading around \$88.90 per barrel, down 10.55% on the day, having hit a session low of \$86.09. US crude fell 12.26% to \$83.08 a barrel. That is still above pre-war levels that were around \$70, but down significantly from late March's highs, which, for Brent, were close to \$120 a barrel. Stocks marched higher, with the Wall Street benchmark S&P 500 and Nasdaq hitting new record highs and the Dow Jones Industrial Average reaching its highest level in over two months. The S&P 500 gained 1.49%, to 7,145.87. (Reuters)

# Amir, Erdogan back Pakistan PM's peace efforts at Antalya

● Amir, President Erdogan and Pakistani PM Shehbaz Sharif hold joint meeting at the sidelines  
● Window of opportunity opened by ceasefire should be used to establish lasting peace: Erdogan



QNA, AFP  
Antalya

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani attended the opening of the Antalya Diplomacy Forum 2026 yesterday, following an invitation from President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of the Republic of Türkiye. The event, held in the Turkish city of Antalya, brought together heads of state, government leaders, senior officials and representatives of regional and international organisations.

The forum is being held under the theme 'Mapping Tomorrow, Managing Uncertainties', focusing on global challenges and evolving geopolitical risks.

Also attending the opening were Prime Minister and Minis-

ter of Foreign Affairs HE Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani and HE the Chief of the Amiri Diwan Abdullah bin Mohammed al-Khulaifi.

His Highness the Amir, President Erdogan, and Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif held a joint meeting on the sidelines of the Antalya Diplomacy Forum.

Discussion during the meeting focused on the latest regional and international developments, particularly in the Middle East, as well as the international efforts aimed at de-escalation and promoting diplomatic solutions to enhance security and stability.

In this regard, His Highness the Amir and the Turkish president commended the efforts exerted by Pakistan in this regard and expressed their support for the the Pakistani PM's efforts thereon.

The meeting also saw exchange of viewpoints on key issues of common interest. The three parties emphasised the importance of continuing co-ordination regarding various challenges to contribute to consolidating security and stability at the regional and international levels. A lineup of high-ranking officials from the Turkish and Pakistani sides were also present.

Türkiye's diplomatic forum also brought together foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia and Egypt, as Islamabad steps up efforts to help end the Middle East war. "I believe the window of opportunity opened by the ceasefire should be used in the most effective way to establish lasting peace," President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said at the opening of the three-day forum. **To Page 12**



**Antalya Forum would promote shared human understanding: Amir posts on X**

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani expressed hope that the Antalya Diplomacy Forum would play a meaningful role in strengthening dialogue and fostering mutual human understanding.

In a post published on his account on X, His Highness the Amir said that he had participated in the Antalya Diplomacy Forum, where discussions focused on prospects for shaping and anticipating the future in light of global uncertainties driven by rising tensions. He added that he had met with Recep Tayyip Erdogan, as well as a number of heads of state and government from brotherly and friendly nations.

His Highness the Amir further voiced hope that the forum would contribute to advancing dialogue and deepening mutual human understanding. (QNA)

**Iran deal 'very close': Trump**

US President Donald Trump told AFP yesterday that a peace deal with Iran was "very close" and had "no sticking points," as Tehran declared the Strait of Hormuz open to commercial shipping. The upbeat signals from Washington came as a ceasefire took effect in Lebanon, raising hopes that two of the main obstacles to a US-Iran agreement may have been removed.

"We're very close. Looks like it's going to be very good for everybody. And we're very close to having a deal," Trump said in a brief telephone call with AFP from Las Vegas, adding there were "no sticking points at all" left with Tehran.

"The strait's going to be open, they already are open. And things are going very well."

But Tehran quickly pushed back on one key point. Iran's foreign ministry said yesterday that its stockpile of enriched uranium would not be transferred "anywhere," rejecting an earlier claim by Trump that the Islamic republic had agreed to hand it over.

Trump hailed a "GREAT AND BRILLIANT DAY FOR THE WORLD!" in celebratory posts praising mediator Pakistan and Gulf allies, while telling Nato to "STAY AWAY" as he rejected the alliance's offer to help secure the Hormuz strait. (AFP)

**Hormuz reopening seen with caution**

AFP  
London

Shipping industry figures gave a cautious welcome yesterday to Iran's announcement that it was reopening the crucial Strait of Hormuz trade route to commercial freight after nearly seven weeks closed. Iranian forces' closure of the strait has trapped hundreds of ships in the Gulf and driven up the costs of shipping goods, with captains avoiding the region for fear of attacks or mines. A spokesman for German transportation giant Hapag-Lloyd, which has ships stuck in the Gulf, told AFP by phone that the reopening was "in general... good news". But he cautioned that shippers still needed details of what route vessels could take and in what

order, citing fears of sea mines. "One thousand ships cannot just go now to the entrance of the strait, that will be chaos. They (the Iranians) need to give clear orders," said the spokesman, Nils Haupt. "We would be ready to go very soon if some of these open questions can be solved within the weekend." Bloomberg data indicated there were about 770 vessels used for carrying commodities sending transponder signals inside the Gulf on Thursday, of which about 360 were oil and gas carriers. Before the war, average daily crossings of the strait overall numbered about 120, according to industry journal Lloyd's List. After Iran's announcement yesterday, US President Donald Trump said the Islamic republic had declared the waterway "fully open and ready for full passage".

# Qatari laws promote family cohesion, progress, well-being

By Ayman Adly  
Staff Reporter

Qatar's laws and legislation prioritise the vital role of the family in maintaining the stability, cohesion, and progress of society, as emphasised in the Permanent Constitution of Qatar, which recognises the family as the foundation of society.

Article 21 of the Constitution states that the family is the basis of society and underscores the importance of laws designed to protect and support its structure, with special attention to maternity, childhood, and old age.

Article 22 highlights the state's responsibility to protect children from potential harm while promoting their education and upbringing. Furthermore, Article 37 safeguards the privacy of family affairs, acknowledging that human privacy is a protected sanctuary.

Family Law No 22 of 2006 addresses various family-related matters, including dowry, inheritance, child custody, financial maintenance, divorce, and the rights of wives.

This law establishes the foundation for families in Qatar, requiring both men and women to undergo medical examinations before marriage. Both the bride and groom must present a medical certificate confirming their freedom from certain genetic or



contagious diseases, and they must meet the minimum legal age for marriage.

The law also protects the wife's personal property and her right to education while promoting mutual rights and responsibilities for both parties in raising children. Additionally, specialised family courts handle family-related issues, emphasising the resolution of disputes through reconciliation and amicable means. These courts work closely with various entities to provide families with consultation, advice, and assistance, helping to maintain cohesion and stability while preventing potential separations.

Several dedicated committees, including experts, religious scholars, social workers, and psychologists, are engaged

in reconciling family disputes and bridging differences to encourage unity for the well-being of the family and children. Key institutions include the Family Consulting Center (Wifaq), established in 2022. Wifaq offers psychological counselling and therapeutic programmes for all residents in Qatar, regardless of their background, to help build family resilience.

The centre provides specialised guidance, counselling, and mediation services to restore good family dynamics during disputes, alongside various awareness initiatives. The Protection and Social Rehabilitation Centre (Aman), founded in 2013, focuses on the protection and rehabilitation of women and children who are victims of violence and family disintegration. **To Page 2**

## Qatar attends meeting on Hormuz shipping security

The State of Qatar participated yesterday in a meeting on freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz, hosted by President of the French Republic Emmanuel Macron and the United Kingdom's Prime Minister Keir Starmer via video conference. The State of Qatar was represented by HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi. The meeting reaffirmed full diplomatic support for unrestricted navigation through the Strait and the need to uphold international law. (QNA)



## Qatari laws promote family cohesion and well-being

From Page 1

Aman operates a 24-hour hotline in multiple languages for reporting cases and offering assistance. The centre closely coordinates with legal entities, including the Public Prosecution, major hospitals, schools, and others, to address related cases effectively.

Meanwhile, the Doha International Family Institute (Difi), established in 2006, serves as a global policy and research institute aimed at strengthening families through research, outreach, and advocacy. Difi produces high-quality research on topics, such as family cohesion, marriage, divorce, and parenting, with practical approaches to improve family life.

The National Charter for Family Rights and Duties was officially inaugurated on February 5, 2024, by the Ministry of Social Development and Family (MSDF). This inclusive legal and ethical charter regulates family relationships, promotes social cohesion, and emphasises the balance of rights and duties among all family members, serving as a guiding document to reinforce the significance of family rights in the country.

## DICID, QU organise seminar on religions' shared challenges

The Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue (DICID), in collaboration with Qatar University (QU), convened a distinguished scholarly seminar on Thursday. Held under the theme "A Scientific Analysis and a Vision for Dialogue and Solutions", the symposium formed part of the "Dialogue in Universities" initiative and brought together representatives from a range of universities and academic institutions.

In his opening address, the Chairman of DICID, Dr Ibrahim bin Saleh al-Nuaimi, lauded the enduring and productive partnership between the DICID and Qatar University. He underscored the significance of their joint efforts in hosting a series of high-impact intellectual and dialogue-driven events, which have enriched public discourse and served the interests of scholars, practitioners, students, and the wider community.

Dr al-Nuaimi further emphasised the indispensable role of dialogue in addressing both convergent and divergent issues with intellectual honesty and realism. He highlighted the imperative of fostering social cohesion, drawing attention to a recent DICID roundtable titled "Strengthening Social Cohesion and Building Community Resilience in the Face of Crises" which explored the vital role of residents in standing in solidarity with the State of Qatar in times of challenge.

For his part, Dr Ibrahim bin Abdullah al-Ansari, Dean of the College of Shariah and Islamic Studies at Qatar University, reaffirmed the strength of institutional co-operation between the university and the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue. He stressed the intellectual relevance of the symposium's themes and commended the depth and rigour of the contributions presented by participating scholars.

Speaking to Qatar News Agency, Dr al-Ansari elaborated that the seminar sought to critically engage with the evolving landscape of interfaith dialogue and the multifaceted challenges it entails. He drew particular attention to the complexities arising from non-systematic transformations within religious contexts, including their intersections with political and economic shifts. He further noted that the symposium provided a vital academic forum for researchers, students, and stakeholders to articulate, interrogate, and refine constructive responses to these pressing concerns.

The seminar featured a series of presentations addressing a broad spectrum of issues central to interfaith engagement. These included justice, equity, tolerance, coexistence, human rights, and international relations, as well as intellectual, epistemological, methodological, and societal challenges. Speakers also explored the Islamic perspective on these matters. (QNA)

## Shura Speaker discusses parliamentary co-operation with Turkish counterpart

HE Speaker of the Shura Council, Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanem met yesterday with Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye Professor Numan Kurtulmus, on the sidelines of the 152nd Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), currently being held in Istanbul. Discussions during the meeting dealt with bilateral parliamentary co-operation relations between the two sides and ways to strengthen and develop them in a manner that serves common interests.

They also discussed the most prominent topics on the IPU assembly's agenda and exchanged views on them, particularly regarding the emergency item submitted by the State of Qatar, represented by the Shura Council, and a number of other countries, with the support of geopolitical groups within the IPU.

Both sides emphasised the importance of supporting the emergency item submitted by the State of Qatar, given its role in contributing to the consolidation of international peace and security, promoting a ceasefire, and strengthening international efforts aimed at containing conflicts. The Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye also praised the strength of the Qatari-Turkish relations. (QNA)



# Qatar-submitted emergency item adopted by IPU assembly

QNA  
Istanbul

The emergency item submitted by the State of Qatar, represented by the Shura Council, has secured overwhelming approval for inclusion on the agenda of the 152nd General Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), currently underway in Istanbul. The vote marks the first time an emergency item proposed by an Arab country has garnered sufficient support to be formally placed on the assembly's agenda.

The decision was taken during a session dedicated to voting on proposed emergency items. The Qatari delegation is headed by HE Speaker of the Shura Council Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanem, who is participating in the assembly hosted in Istanbul. The adopted emergency item, titled "The urgent need for coordinated parliamentary efforts to uphold ceasefire agreements and support the achievement of peace in the Middle East and other regions", focuses on mobilising international parliamentary action



to reinforce ceasefires, advance peaceful pathways, ensure the protection of civilians, and promote sustainable political solutions to ongoing conflicts. It also underscores the importance of safeguarding freedom of navigation and maintaining the openness of international waterways, particularly amid escalating global crises and their humanitarian repercussions.

On this occasion, HE al-Ghanem described the adoption of the emergency item as a significant success for Qatari parliamentary diplomacy. He said it reflected the effectiveness of Qatar's engagement, in partnership with a number of countries, in advancing more impactful collective approaches to addressing international crises. He added that the timing of the decision highlighted a growing recognition among national parliaments of the need to move beyond declaratory positions toward practical influence, by leveraging parliamentary diplomacy to support ceasefires, enhance their sustainability, and create conducive conditions for the resumption of political processes, thereby contributing to international peace and security.

He further stressed that the achievement demonstrated the importance of joint Arab parliamentary action and its capacity to build broad international consensus across geopolitical groupings, strengthening the voice of parliaments on priority global issues. He also expressed appreciation to the parliaments that voted in favour of the item, noting that such support reflected a genuine international will to pursue peace, reinforce ceasefires, and prioritise diplomatic solutions in order to contain conflicts and alleviate the suffering of affected populations.



The emergency item was submitted by Qatar in co-operation with Australia, Türkiye, France, Brazil, Zambia, Poland, Portugal, Italy, and Ireland, and received wide backing from the Arab Group, the Group of Latin America and the Caribbean, and the African Group. (QNA)

## Illegal logging of wild trees spotted in central region



The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change's Department of Wildlife Protection has apprehended a person for illegally collecting firewood and cutting wild trees in the central region, in particular in the vicinity of Al Khareeb Complex. This act constitutes a violation of the applicable laws and regulations established to protect the vegetation cover in the country. Accordingly, the ministry confirmed that all necessary legal measures have been taken against the offender in accordance with environmental protection laws. This action forms part of its ongoing efforts to preserve terrestrial ecosystems, protect biodiversity, and prevent harmful practices such as unauthorised logging and tree cutting, which are considered serious legal offences. Accordingly, the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change urges the visitors to the wild and natural areas to preserve the country's vegetation cover by adhering to environmental guidelines and adopting sustainable practices. It also encourages the public to cooperate with the relevant authorities by reporting any environmental violations, contributing to the protection of natural resources and ensuring their sustainability for future generations. Further, the ministry highlighted that its field teams will continue to carry out intensive inspection campaigns across various wilderness areas. These efforts aim to detect and address violations promptly, reinforce compliance with environmental laws, and maintain the natural ecological balance.

# Calls to protect shared historical heritage in conflicts and disasters

The world observes World Heritage Day on April 18 each year, an initiative launched by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) in 1982 to raise awareness of shared cultural and historical heritage.

This year's theme, "Emergency Response for Living Heritage in Contexts of Conflicts and Disasters", highlights the need to safeguard heritage during crises.

Unesco defines living heritage as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, and knowledge related to nature and traditional craftsmanship, while ICOMOS includes both tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

Speaking to Qatar News Agency (QNA), Dr Abdulhamid Salah al-Sharif, an expert in crisis and disaster management, stressed the importance of protecting heritage during armed conflicts, calling it a race against time that requires a dual strategy combining technical measures and community participation.

He explained that specialists must anticipate risks through scientific assessment, develop national strategies linked to ear-

ly warning systems, and prepare response plans based on potential scenarios.

He also highlighted rapid response actions such as pre-emptive documentation, evacuation of movable artifacts when needed, and quick rescue programs including temporary structural support and in-situ protection using available tools.

At the community level, he said the local population is the first line of defence, through rejecting illicit trade in looted artifacts, reporting violations, and forming local protection groups.

He emphasised that heritage is not just physical remains but a key part of identity and dignity.

On responsibility, he affirmed a shared responsibility approach, noting that protecting heritage is not solely a government task but a collective social commitment.

He added that governments must establish legal frameworks, enforce laws, allocate resources, and adhere to international agreements such as The Hague Convention of 1954.

He explained that society is the true owner of heritage, stressing that without broad

public awareness, no official efforts can effectively safeguard this legacy.

Dr al-Sharif expressed his belief in the principle of nationalising protection, meaning making citizens feel that heritage sites are their own responsibility to protect.

He said that when heritage is linked to economic value, such as tourism, or spiritual value like identity, the citizen becomes the strongest guardian before the soldier or archaeologist.

He also stressed the importance of media in raising awareness of threats to heritage, calling for more specialised coverage addressing climate change impacts, illicit trafficking, and strengthening the connection between people and their history, including sites, traditions, and cultural practices.

Dr al-Sharif urged transforming heritage from a static historical material into a living developmental element, highlighting success stories in rescue efforts to build awareness, hope, and public engagement.

Regarding ICOMOS, he described it as the leading global

technical reference in heritage protection, contributing to key charters such as the Venice Charter and the Washington Charter (1987).

However, he noted that field experts, especially in conflict zones, seek faster and more flexible intervention and fewer bureaucratic barriers in emergency funding.

He expressed hope that ICOMOS would further support capacity building for local experts in high-risk areas, enabling them to lead rescue operations without waiting for international missions.

He emphasised that living heritage represents a pulse linking the past to the future, and that protecting it during conflicts and disasters is not optional but essential for preserving human memory and cultural independence.

The ICOMOS scientific plan for 2024-2027 focuses on "Disaster and Conflict Resilient Heritage: Preparedness, Response, and Recovery" with 2025 dedicated to preparedness and 2026 focusing on emergency response for affected heritage. (QNA)

**18**  
April 2026

World Heritage Day, under the theme "Emergency Response for Living Heritage in Contexts of Conflicts and Disasters"

Speaking to Qatar News Agency

**Dr. Abdulhamid Salah Al Sharif**  
An expert in crisis and disaster management

Protecting heritage during armed conflicts is a key standard for preserving identity

Strategic foresight requires assessing events through scientific risk evaluation

Building national strategies links early warning systems with preparedness plans based on potential risks

The local community is the first line of defense, rejecting illicit trade, staying vigilant, and reporting violations

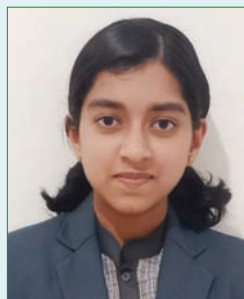
Protecting heritage is a social contract: the state enforces laws, but society is the true owner of this heritage

Living heritage is the pulse connecting past to future, and protecting it preserves human memory

QatarNewsAgency Qnaphoto Qna\_Sports Qna.org.qa

# Indian schools in Qatar excel in CBSE Class 10 exams

## MES Indian School



Aida Bijimon



Afaf Muzzammil Hussain



Muhammed N Anwar



Deepika Palani



Mishara Manmmadhan



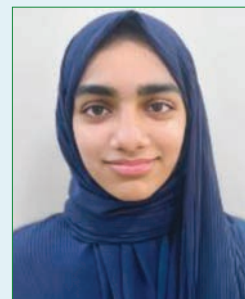
Daniel Chittilappilly

MES Indian School has secured 100% pass in the CBSE Class X Examinations. Aida Bijimon secured 500/500. Afaf Muzzammil Hussain, Muhammed Nazan Anwar, Deepika Palani and Mishara Manmmadhan shared the second position scoring 99%, and Daniel Chittilappilly secured the third position with 98.8% of marks.

## MESIS



Ayesha M N Shaikh



Amina S Aripettamannil



Iman M Sange

MES Indian School, Abu Hamour Branch, (MESIS) has achieved 100% pass in the CBSE Class X Board Examination 2025-26. Out of 142 students who appeared, all successfully passed the examination. The top performers are Ayesha Mohammed Nadeem Shaikh (99.2%), Amina Shirin Aripettamannil (98.6%), and Iman Mustafa Sange (98.2%).

## Podar Pearl School



Aysha Zeya



Daksshesh T Omprakash



Fadhil Anwar



Shikha Dinesh

Podar Pearl School has made commendable accomplishments in the CBSE Grade X Board Examinations for the academic year 2025-2026. Aysha Zeya and Daksshesh Thevendriya Omprakash jointly clinched the top position with 99.6%. Following closely, Fadhil Anwar secured 99.4%, while Shikha Dinesh claimed third position with 99.2%.

## DPS-MIS



Amir N R Syed



Lakshmi B Tota



Boshika S Kannan



Nicole Crasta



Lakshya Gupta



Malavika R Panicker



Manasvi Chaudhari



Mohammed F Abbas



Zaarah Tanwir

DPS-Modern Indian School (DPS-MIS) students performed well in the Class X examination of Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), India with Amir Nawaz Razvi Syed securing a perfect score of 500/500 marks. Second place toppers in the school are: Lakshmi Bhargavi Tota (99.2%); Boshika Srinidhi Kannan 99.2% and the third place went to Nicole Crasta; Lakshya Gupta; Malavika Ratheesh Panicker; Manasvi Chaudhari; Mohammed Fauzan Abbas and Zaarah Tanwir, who all secured 99% each.

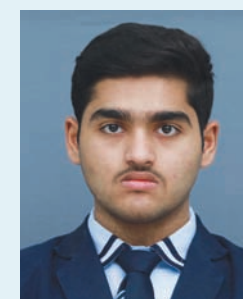
## Ideal Indian School



Mishal Muhammad



Palakshi Sharma



Muhammad S Shoukath

Ideal Indian School has once again demonstrated academic excellence by achieving a 100% pass result in the CBSE Class X Board Examination. Out of 353 students who appeared for the examination, 275 students secured Distinction, while 71 students achieved First Class, reflecting the school's strong academic standards and commitment to quality education. The first position was secured by Mishal Muhammad with an outstanding 99.8%, followed by Palakshi Sharma in the second position with 99%, and Muhammad Shan Shoukath in the third position with 98.4%.

## Olive International School



Adhithi Rukmani S



Ahmad Shayan



Shahd Said Ali



Tanisha F A Khan



Manoj K Deevapandian

Olive International School has achieved cent percent pass result in the AISSE 2025-2026 CBSE board examinations. Adhithi Rukmani S and Ahmad Shayan, topped the school with 98.8%; Shahd Said Ali and Tanisha Fatima Ajmal Khan, each secured 98.6%, while Manoj Kumar Deevapandian earned the third position with 98.4%.



## Doha's Linear Park in Al Hilal offers a green escape



By Peter Alagos  
Business Editor

Stretching 1.5km along Najma Street in the Al Hilal district, the Linear Park has quietly become one of Doha's most cherished neighbourhood retreats since its completion in 2019.

Developed by the Ministry of Municipality, in co-operation with the Public Works Authority (Ashghal), the 75,000sqm green corridor was conceived as a pioneering effort to transform the unused margins of urban roads into liveable, environment-friendly spaces that residents have fully embraced.

With temperatures expected to rise in the coming period, many residents across Doha's diverse communities are presently making the most of the cool breeze. Joggers and walkers trace the winding paved paths beneath canopies of fan palms and date palms, their branches interlocking over-

head to form natural walkways that offer welcome shade. Families spread out across the manicured lawns, children in traditional dress performing impromptu dances while parents capture the unique moments with their cellphones.

Young boys, many barefoot and wearing the jerseys of their favourite football clubs, gather on open patches of grass for spirited matches. Smaller children navigate the paths on bicycles and scooters, weaving around strolling adults, keeping a gentle pace alongside them.

The park's design, wide enough at 50m to accommodate multiple uses simultaneously, yet linear enough to encourage movement, lends itself to a particular kind of spontaneous sociality: neighbours stop to chat; families set up folding chairs; and strangers share the same path without intrusion.

Residents frequenting the area collectively agree that the Linear Park stands apart as a genuinely inclusive public space.



The silhouettes of two broad-canopied trees frame a hazy Doha sunset along Najma Street, casting a dramatic natural backdrop to the Linear Park in Al Hilal — a fitting close to another evening of walks, games, and family time in one of the city's most-loved green corridors.

PICTURES: Shaji Kayamkulam



## Lebanon not 'arena for anyone's wars,' says Lebanese president

Reuters/AFP  
Washington/Beirut

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun on Friday said his country was no longer an "arena" for anyone's wars after a ceasefire in the Israel-Hezbollah war went into force.

"We are confident that we will save Lebanon... we have reclaimed Lebanon and Lebanon's decision-making power for the first time in nearly half a century," Aoun said in his first speech to the nation since the truce, adding that "today, we negotiate for ourselves... we are no longer a pawn in anyone's game, nor an arena for anyone's wars, and we never will be again."

"I hereby affirm... that there will be no agreement that infringes upon our national rights, diminishes the dignity of our steadfast people, or relinquishes an iota of this nation's soil."

His statements came after President Donald Trump said the United States has barred Israel from further bombing in Lebanon, striking an unusually harsh tone with the longtime US ally, while stressing that any US deal with Iran is not linked to the Lebanon conflict.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office did not immediately respond to Trump's remarks, but Netanyahu said in a statement earlier that Israeli forces remained stationed in southern Lebanon to defend against "the near threat." "There are things we plan to do regarding the remaining

rocket threat and the drone threat, which I will not detail here," Netanyahu said.

A US-backed Israeli-Lebanese ceasefire took effect on Thursday, halting fighting that flared on March 2 when Hezbollah fired on northern Israel in support of Iran's fight with the US and Israel, drawing an Israeli offensive that Lebanese authorities say has killed 2,000 people.

In a series of social media posts after Iran announced the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz to commercial vessels, Trump emphasised that any deal the United States reaches with Iran "is in no way subject to Lebanon" and said the US will handle the militant group Hezbollah in an appropriate manner. "Again! This deal is not tied, in any way, to Lebanon, but we will, MAKE LEBANON GREAT AGAIN!" Trump wrote in a later post.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi specified the Strait of Hormuz was open for the remainder of the 10-day truce between Israel and Lebanon. However, Trump later posted: "Iran has agreed to never close the Strait of Hormuz again. It will no longer be used as a weapon against the World!"

After 38 days of fighting, a two-week ceasefire in the Iran war came into effect on April 8. The United States then began enforcing a blockade on vessels entering and departing Iran on Monday.

"The naval blockade will remain in full force and effect as it pertains to Iran, only, until such time as our transaction with Iran is 100% complete," Trump wrote in an all caps.



A woman reacts as emergency personnel search for survivors at the site of an Israeli strike carried out just before a 10-day ceasefire between Lebanon and Israel, in Tyre, Lebanon on Friday. (Reuters)

## Return to ruins: Displaced Lebanese throng to south

Reuters  
Qasmiyeh, Lebanon

Lebanese children leaned out of cars flashing victory signs on Friday as they bumped across a makeshift bridge erected overnight across the Litani River after a truce with Israel.

Nearly a quarter of Lebanese have been forced from their homes, both in the south and other areas, ordered by Israel to leave as it levelled villages and city districts and sent in troops over six weeks of war.

Israel says it has avoided targeting civilians in a military campaign it described as necessary to protect its own people from Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah group.

A 10-day ceasefire announced on Thursday is now bringing respite, allowing many of the displaced to return to what remains of their homes while they pray for a lasting truce.

### PERMANENT END TO WARS

The Halabi family's silver sedan was among the throng of vehicles crowding the coast road to head back over the Litani, where Israel destroyed the last bridge connecting the south with the rest of Lebanon on Thursday.



The throng of vehicles crowding the road in Rmeileh at the northern entrance of the city of Sidon on Friday. (AFP)

Workmen with bulldozers and diggers worked through the night under floodlights to build an earthen dyke in place of the bridge at Qasmiyeh, its twisted metal piled nearby. After 10 hours in the car — on a journey that usually takes one — the family passed huge piles of rubble as they drove slowly into Tyre, a major historic Lebanese city in the south, heading back to their home and relatives.

"These are the first two children to arrive — my son's children," said Sobhi Halabi, 80, hugging his returning grandchildren as they arrived in his apartment, decorated with photographs of the family and

of Hezbollah leaders.

But many were coming back to less joyful scenes. Rubble disfigures many streets where buildings were destroyed. Posters of local men killed fighting Israeli forces are pasted on walls.

For many the starkest signs of war were visible at the beginning of their journey, passing through Beirut's southern suburbs. Burnt-out or smashed cars littered the streets along with debris from targeted buildings. Some had their fronts shorn off by strikes, revealing individual rooms like giant doll houses.

Back in the southern town of Nabatieh, one of the worst-hit ar-

reas of Lebanon, Fadel Badreddine could barely believe the scale of destruction. "We're taking our things and leaving again," he said. "May God grant us relief and end this whole thing permanently — not temporarily — so we can return to our homes."

More than 7,000 housing units have been destroyed or damaged in Nabatieh alone, Lebanese authorities say.

### 'MY HOME, MY BIRTHPLACE'

Not every displaced family has tried to return. Kodor Mouzannar, 62, from the southern village of Souaneh, has been living during the war in a blue tarpaulin tent in Beirut's Camille Chamoun Stadium. "The village is my home, my birthplace, and it means so much to me. It's my childhood, my life, my grandparents, my relatives, and the people. I miss them all. We're all one community," he said.

But though he longs to go home, he has no trust that Israel will stick to the ceasefire. After a truce in 2024, Israeli airstrikes continued in the south as it and Hezbollah accused each other of breaching the truce. "I hope that the (ceasefire) continues and that the situation calms down and people return to their homes," he said.

## Lebanon says Israeli strike in south kills one despite truce

Lebanese state media said an Israeli strike on a motorcycle in the south killed one person on Friday, despite the start of a 10-day ceasefire in the Israel-Hezbollah war.

The truce, announced by US President Donald Trump, went into force at midnight (Thursday 2100 GMT), seeking to end more than six weeks of war that has killed nearly 2,300 people in Lebanon and displaced more than a million.

"A motorcyclist was killed in the town of Kunin, in the Bint Jbeil district, after being targeted by an enemy drone," Lebanon's state-run National News Agency reported. Under the terms of the truce, Israel reserves the right to continue targeting Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah to prevent "planned, imminent or ongoing attacks".

Israel also said it will maintain a 10-kilometre (six-mile) security zone along the border in southern Lebanon.

The ceasefire agreement makes no mention of an Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon.

Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said the area between this security zone and the Litani River, located around 30 kilometres (20 miles) north of Israel, had not yet been "cleared of terrorists and weapons", and that if diplomatic pressure did not achieve that goal, then military action could resume.

However, Trump said on his Truth Social network that "Israel will not be bombing Lebanon any longer. They are PROHIBITED from doing so by the USA. Enough is enough!!!"

AFP

## More than 38,000 women, girls killed in Gaza war by end of 2025: UN

Over 38,000 women and girls were killed in the Gaza war by the end of 2025, the UN estimated Friday, amounting to over half of the 71,000 deaths recorded by the territory's health ministry.

"Between October 2023 and December 2025, more than 38,000 women and girls were killed in Gaza — the result of Israeli air bombardment and land military operations," the UN Women agency's spokeswoman Sofia Calltorp said during a press briefing in Geneva. "This includes over 22,000 women and 16,000 girls, amounting to an average of at least 47 women and girls killed every day."

The agency said the true figures were likely to be higher, with bodies still buried under rubble and reporting systems severely constrained. "Women and girls accounted for a proportion of deaths far higher than those observed in previous conflicts in Gaza," Calltorp added. (AFP)

## Gulf nations laud ceasefire in Lebanon

QNA  
Arab Capitals

The announcement of a ceasefire in Lebanon was widely welcomed across the Arab world, which has been the epicentre of hostilities for the past few months.

In a statement, the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs praised the Lebanese President Joseph Aoun, Prime Minister Nawaf Salam, and Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri. It reiterated Saudi Arabia's support for Lebanon in restoring sovereignty and preserving the country's territorial integrity.

Egypt also welcomed the announcement, describing it as an important step toward de-escalation and halting Israeli attacks on the country — calling for the need for the full and immediate withdrawal of Israeli forces



A Lebanese woman makes the victory sign as residents return to Beirut's southern suburbs. (AFP)

from Lebanese territory.

Jordan praised the positive role played by President Joseph Aoun, the Lebanese government led by Prime Minister Nawaf Salam, and Speaker Nabih Berri. While Oman and the UAE expressed appreciation for the efforts made by the United States and the diplomatic ef-

forts led by President Trump.

For its part, the Arab League described the announcement as a positive development. In a statement, Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit called for using this opportunity as a foundation for negotiations leading to a lasting truce, while lauding efforts made by several Arab countries.

## Gulf states urge UN to condemn Iran attacks on telecoms infrastructure

AFP  
Geneva

Gulf countries and Jordan want the United Nations' telecoms agency to condemn Iran's attacks on their infrastructure, and to monitor and report on the damage. Since the Middle East war began on February 28, Tehran has retaliated attacking infrastructure across the Gulf.

The six countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, plus Jordan, have circulated a letter at the UN's International Telecommunications Union (ITU) agency, demanding action over the impact on telecoms infrastructure: "Since February 28, 2026, the unlawful and unprovoked attacks by the Islamic Republic of Iran involving missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles have deliberately targeted civilians and civilian infrastructure in densely populated areas, including civilian information and communication technology."

The letter was sent to all 48 member countries of the ITU Council, the United Arab Emirates' mission in Geneva told AFP.

It calls for the ITU decision-making body to consider a draft resolution condemning "Iranian attacks against telecommunication services in Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Jordan" during its next annual session, which opens at the end of April. It also highlights "the direct damage to submarine cable landing infrastructure and the suspension of submarine cable projects resulting from such targeting and threats".

An ITU spokesperson confirmed that the draft resolution had been submitted and would be added to the agenda for discussion during the upcoming council meeting, which will run from April 28 to May 8. Countries will then probably engage in drawn-out debate to hammer out an acceptable text, since resolutions brought before the council are typically adopted by consensus.

## Palestinian Authority extradites suspect in 1982 Paris attack



People stand in front of the Jo-Goldenberg restaurant in Paris two days after it was devastated by an attack in the year 1982. (AFP)

AFP  
Paris

A man accused of coordinating a 1982 attack on a Jewish restaurant in Paris that killed six people arrived in France Thursday after being extradited by the Palestinian Authority.

Hicham Harb, one of four suspects sought in connection with the August 9, 1982 attack, was detained on arrival at an air base near the capital and will be formally notified of the warrant against him on Friday.

The attack rocked the French capi-

tal's historically Jewish Marais neighbourhood 44 years ago, when a group of three to five men hurled a grenade inside the Jo Goldenberg restaurant, then opened fire on customers, killing six people and wounding 22 others.

Harb, also known as Mahmoud Khader Abed Adra — now aged 72 — was arrested by Palestinian authorities in September 2025, days before French President Emmanuel Macron officially recognised a Palestinian state. Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas said later that year told newspaper *Le Figaro* while speaking about Harb's extradition that France's decision to grant recognition had created

"an appropriate framework for this French request?"

Following the extradition, Macron's office thanked the Palestinian authorities in a statement for "their cooperation, their commitment to fighting terrorism, as president Abbas promised".

The more than four decades elapsed since the attack "is too long", said a lawyer for victims' families, David Pere, calling for the trial to be held as quickly as possible.

The attack was attributed to the Fatah-Revolutionary Council (Fatah-RC) led by Abu Nidal, a Palestinian splinter group that broke away from

the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

Harb is believed to have been one of the coordinators of the assault.

In February, France's Court of Cassation, the country's highest court, confirmed that a trial would be held over the 1982 attack against two other Palestinians held in France, one of whom has Norwegian citizenship.

Harb is also the subject of a 1988 German arrest warrant in connection with an attack at Frankfurt airport in 1985, and has been suspected by Italian investigators over an attack on a synagogue in Rome in 1982 in which a two-year-old was killed.



# Palestinians to vote for first ballot since war in Gaza

AFP  
Ramallah

With local elections due next week, West Bank Palestinians are struggling to muster enthusiasm for their first ballot since the Gaza war, discouraged by limited political choice and the difficulty of voting under Israeli occupation.

On April 25, voters will choose representatives in cities, towns and villages across the West Bank, with the ballot happening in part of the Gaza Strip in the first such election since the start of the war there in October 2023.

Nearly 1.5 mn people are registered to vote in the occupied West Bank, as well as 70,000 people in Gaza's central Deir el-Balah area, according to the Ramallah-based Central Elections Commission.

But many have been disappointed by a new electoral law passed by decree by Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas requiring all candidates to agree to the Palestine Liberation Organisation's charter and goals in order to register.

"The issue of agreements related to the PLO? I don't agree with this at all," said Khomini Suleiman, a car parts dealer from Beit Ur village near Ramallah, who said he would not vote.

Although some candidates said the new rules had prevented them from running, observers pointed to a general narrowing of the political field.

"The truth is that political parties have effectively disappeared from the Palestinian political scene," a Palestinian elections expert told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue.

Ramallah resident Mohammad al-Taj said he was a "proud" PLO member but did not think recognition of the charter and programme of the organisation — which has recognised Israel since the 1990s — should be a condition for running for office.

But he said he would not vote anyway with the difficulties caused by Israeli settler attacks and the occupation making local elections of "secondary" importance.

Although the Palestinians have regularly voted in local elections, the last time they held parliamentary elections was in 2006, when the Hamas won a sweeping victory over Abbas's Fatah movement.

Abbas, who is now 90 and has remained in



Palestinian demonstrators hold pictures of prisoners held in Israeli jails during a rally in Ramallah in the occupied West Bank on Friday to mark Prisoners' Day. (AFP)

power for more than 20 years without ever being re-elected, frequently promises legislative and presidential elections that have never taken place.

**No Hamas lists**  
Most electoral lists are aligned with Abbas's Fatah or running as independents.

There are no Hamas-affiliated lists. "Hamas and Hamas-affiliated candidates are just staying out of it," the elections expert said.

Aref Jaffal, another Palestinian expert, said there were some "positive sides" to the new law that lowers the candidacy age to 18 and hikes the women's quota to 25%.

But he deplored the fact it transferred some municipal powers to the local government ministry, thereby empowering Abbas's ruling Palestinian Authority.

In most cities, Fatah lists will run against independent lists headed by candidates from factions such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (Marxist-Leninist).

But in many cities, including Ramallah, the seat of the Palestinian Authority, only one list has been submitted, meaning it wins automatically without needing a vote.

Raeda Barghouti, 49, said she was excited because her village, Kobar, would be voting for the first time in a decade, since in previous elections there was only one candidate list.

## Gaza experiment

In Hamas-run Gaza, the PA is holding elections only in Deir el-Balah "as an experiment (to test its own) success or failure, since there are no post-war opinion polls", Jamal al-Fadi, a political scientist at Cairo's Al-Azhar University, told AFP.

Deir el-Balah was chosen as it was one of the only places in Gaza where "the population has remained largely in place and not been displaced" by more than two years of war with Israel, he said.

The election commission says it has recruited polling staff from civil society organisations and hired "a private security company to secure polling centres" for the Gaza vote, spokesman Fareed Taamallah told AFP.

Although a truce deal halted the fighting in October 2025, nearly half of Gaza remains under Israeli control with Palestinians killed by Israeli troops on a near-daily basis.

Asked about coordination with Israel or Hamas, Taamallah said the commission was indirectly coordinating with COGAT, the Israeli defence ministry body in charge of Palestinian civilian affairs, but with "no other party".

The commission said voting would not take place in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem as Israeli authorities forbid Palestinian political activity in the city.

# UN warns against 'full-scale famine' in South Sudan

AFP  
United Nations, United States

UN aid chief Tom Fletcher on Friday warned that South Sudan was at risk of slipping into "full-scale famine and collapse," as fighting intensifies and the UN peacekeeping mission is cut back.

"Visiting South Sudan a few weeks ago, I was told again and again of a feeling of despair and abandonment, and with good reason," Fletcher told the UN Security Council.

"The world's youngest nation stands at a dangerous crossroads. Conflict up. Displacement up. Hunger up. Disease up. Attacks on aid workers up. Funding down," he said.

He called on the council to act quickly to "prevent South Sudan from sliding toward full-scale famine and collapse."

South Sudan gained independence in 2011 but soon descended into civil war and remains mired in extreme poverty and corruption.

A 2018 power-sharing deal between President Salva Kiir and his long-time rival Riek Machar has been unravelling since early 2025, with clashes in multiple areas and

fears of a return to full-blown war.

In recent weeks, the fighting has ramped up even more, and civilians "continue to bear the brunt," said the new head of the UN mission (UNMISS), Anita Kiki Gbeho.

But at the same time, UNMISS has been forced to reduce its "operational capacity" by 25 to 30 percent, due to a wider budget crisis that is hitting the world body, largely because of US delays in paying its mandatory contributions.

With the Security Council expected to weigh in on the renewal of the mission's mandate by the end of the month, "it is important to recognize the dilemma we collectively face," Gbeho said.

"The scale and urgency of needs on the ground are not yet matched by the type of sustained commitment and investment required to meet the ambition of a sustainable path to peace."

Jennifer Locetta, part of the US mission to the UN, warned that the United States wanted to see "narrowed mandate priorities that are realistic and achievable."

She criticized Kiir, saying his actions were "leading South Sudan towards renewed civil war."

# Palestine, Jordan welcome Unesco resolution

The State of Palestine welcomed the unanimous adoption by the Executive Board of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), during its current 224th session held in Paris, of two resolutions in favor of Palestine.

In a statement, the Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates said that the adoption of these two resolutions reaffirmed the rights of the Palestinian people and underscored the responsibility of the international community toward the State of Palestine under occupation, and the need to protect it from systematic campaigns by the occupation targeting its heritage, history, and identity, which are under threat of distortion, falsification, and erasure.

The ministry also stressed its rejection of all measures and actions aimed at altering the status and position of occupied Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine, and at undermining the existing historical and legal status, affirming that Israel has no sovereignty over the land of the State of Palestine, particularly Jerusalem. The Palestinian foreign ministry called for the implementation of international law and relevant international resolutions, including UNESCO decisions that call for the dispatch of a fact-finding mission and the protection of Palestinian cultural, historical, and religious heritage.

The Jordanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs meanwhile welcomed UNESCO's adoption of a resolution on the Old City of Jerusalem.

The ministry said that the resolution considers all legislative, administrative, and other measures taken by Israel, as the occupying power, aimed at changing the character and legal status of Jerusalem to be null and void and must be rescinded.

# Kenya requests emergency World Bank funds to cushion Iran war shocks

Reuters  
Washington

Kenya has requested rapid financial support from the World Bank to help it manage the economic shocks triggered by the Iran war, its central bank governor told Reuters. Like other nations that are heavily reliant on energy imports, the East African country is scrambling to stave off shortages of essential commodities including petrol, while managing cost increases that could drive up inflation.

Kenya is the first larger emerging economy to publicly confirm a formal request to the World Bank, although a number of countries, such as Egypt, have said they have approached multilateral lenders. IMF head Kristalina Georgieva said that at least 12 countries are seeking assistance from the Fund

to cope with the crisis.

The request for funds was "significant", Kenya's central bank governor, Kamau Thugge, told Reuters on Thursday on the sidelines of the IMF and World Bank spring meetings, without providing a figure.

Analysts welcomed the move, saying it will boost confidence and ease market pressure.

"While Kenya's external buffers are large and ample, it is among the most exposed countries in the region to the Iran price shock given its oil import dependence," said Andrew Matheny, senior economist at Goldman Sachs. "Risks to the shilling are tilted toward depreciation, especially in the event of a more protracted shock that implies higher oil prices for longer."

Kenya's dollar bonds rose the most among African issuers on Friday, with the 2034 and 2048



Motorists form queues into a petrol station trying to beat a midnight fuel price-hike in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi on April 15, 2024. (AFP)

bonds gaining by nearly a cent to be bid at 89.21 and 99.25 cents on the dollar respectively, Tradeweb data showed.

The World Bank loan would be in addition to a budgetary support loan, known as development policy operations, that both sides were

discussing before the outbreak of the crisis, Thugge said.

Rapid Response Support is a term used by the World Bank for its fast-disbursing financial windows and policy support that helps countries respond quickly to shocks or crises.



Pope Leo XIV waves to the crowd from the Popemobile as he arrives to lead the Holy Mass at the area in front of Japoma Stadium in Douala on the fifth day of an 11-day apostolic journey to Africa, on Friday. (AFP)

# Pope Leo in Cameroon: Calls for peace and lashes out at exploiters of Africa

AFP  
Douala

Tens of thousands of people streamed towards a stadium in Cameroon's economic capital Douala Friday for a huge, open-air mass by Pope Leo XIV, the biggest event of a visit marked by his calls for peace.

Many of the faithful had travelled far or arrived the previous night to claim their spot for a chance to see the leader of the world's 1.4 billion Catholics deliver mass.

"It's the achievement of a Christian lifetime. When I was little, I thought you couldn't see the pope with your own two eyes," Marguerite Tedga, 72, said after waiting all night with friends from her parish on the esplanade outside the stadium.

The pope's landmark 11-day tour of Africa has seen him abandon his previous restraint to deliver impassioned pleas for world peace — and tussle with fellow American Trump, after the US president lashed out at him for calling for an end to the war in the Middle East.

"The world is being ravaged by a handful of tyrants," Leo said Thursday in a solemn speech at Saint Joseph's Cathedral in the city of Bamenda in northwestern Cameroon, the epicentre of a nearly decade-long separatist insurgency that has killed thousands of people.

Marcianus Nzegge, 36, who drove for four hours to attend the Douala mass from the conflict-hit English-speaking region, said he was touched by the pope's message of peace.

But some Cameroonian Catholics had feared that Leo's visit

could help President Paul Biya, who has ruled the country with an iron fist since 1982, burnish his image.

Douala, one of central Africa's largest ports, was among the cities to see a violent crackdown on demonstrations against the re-election in October of a man who at 93 years of age is already the world's oldest head of state.

Witnesses have reported that the security forces fired live rounds into the crowds. The authorities have acknowledged dozens of deaths, without giving a precise toll.

Without mentioning Trump or Biya by name, Leo has delivered unusually pointed speeches across his African tour.

"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 Bamenda.

In a mass on Thursday, he also criticised "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.

After arriving in the country on Wednesday, the pope urged Cameroon's leaders to root out corruption and abuses carried out in the name of order — within Biya's earshot.

The Catholic Church plays an important social role in Cameroon, where more than a third of the population of 30 million people are Catholic. He leaves Cameroon after a final mass Saturday, headed for Angola before wrapping up his 18,000-km tour.

# Mugabe's son pleads guilty to lesser charges in Johannesburg shooting case

The youngest son of Zimbabwe's former leader Robert Mugabe pleaded guilty on Friday to pointing a gun and illegally being in South Africa but denied shooting and badly wounding his gardener after an altercation. Bellarmine Chatunga Mugabe, 29, had been in police custody with his cousin and co-accused, Tobias Mugabe Matonhodze, on attempted murder charges following the incident in Johannesburg's posh Hyde Park district. Mugabe pleaded guilty to being in South Africa illegally and pointing a gun in a separate incident, while Matonhodze pleaded guilty to attempted murder. Matonhodze, 32, also admitted to contravening immigration and firearm laws. "We had initially engaged with

the state with the intention of finalising a plea and sentencing agreement but those discussions collapsed at the last minute," Mugabe's counsel Sinenhlanhla Mnguni said.

He dismissed suggestions that Matonhodze was taking the fall for Mugabe, calling the claims "very ludicrous."

The firearm used in the shooting has not been recovered since the two were arrested on February 19. The case was adjourned to April 24. Bellarmine is one of two sons that Robert Mugabe had with his second wife Grace. The brothers have at times lived in Johannesburg, where they have gained a reputation for partying and living the high life. Mugabe, who died in 2019, was in power for 37 years before he was ousted in a 2017 coup. (AFP)

In a sign of the risks facing Kenya's public finances, President William Ruto signed a law on Friday cutting value-added tax on petroleum products to 8% from 13% for three months to cushion consumers from a surge in crude prices.

Last week, the central bank lowered its 2026 growth forecast to 5.3% from a previous projection of 5.5%, saying the Iran war posed risks to key sectors of East Africa's biggest economy.

## CLOSE EYE ON CURRENCY

Kenya's shilling weakened slightly at the peak of the fighting between the U.S. and Israel and Iran, but has since clawed back most of the losses, Thugge said.

"If there's pressure .... definitely it will depreciate," he said, adding that the central bank has enough reserves to curb volatility. "What I would say is that de-

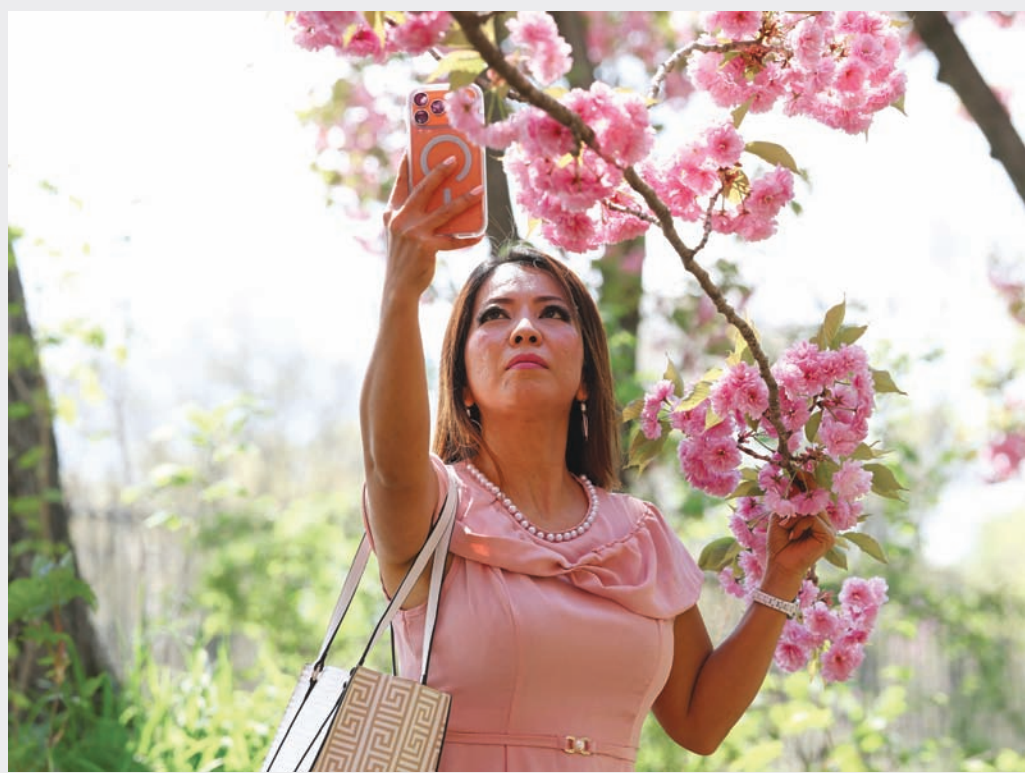
preciation will be orderly. The whole point about why we have been building these international reserves to where they are, to the highest levels, was precisely to be able to avoid excessive volatility."

Hard-currency reserves at the central bank stand at above \$13 billion, equivalent to 5.8 months' worth of import cover.

Kenya's central bank was pressing ahead with its plan to add gold to its reserves, Thugge said, adding that policymakers were studying domestic gold purchase models that have successfully been used by other countries.

Asked about future interest rate moves, Thugge said this would be determined by data in the run-up to June's policy meeting. The central bank paused its easing cycle at last week's meeting, opting to hold rates to assess the impact of the oil price shock.

## Cherry blossoms bloom



A woman takes photos next to some cherry blossoms in Central Park in New York City, yesterday. (AFP)

## US prosecutor 'removed from investigation into ex-CIA chief Brennan'

Reuters  
Washington

A career US prosecutor who had been helping to lead a criminal investigation into former CIA Director John Brennan was removed from the probe, according to two people familiar with the investigation.

Maria Medetis Long, a top prosecutor in the US Attorney's Office in Miami, informed attorneys connected to the investigation late on Thursday that she is no longer working on the case, the sources said. The probe is examining whether Brennan made false statements in 2023 congressional testimony about the US intelligence finding that Russia interfered in the 2016 election to aid Trump.

It was not immediately clear what led to Medetis Long's removal from the probe, which was first reported by CNN. The investigation has been ongoing for months.

A Justice Department spokes-

### Investigation is examining Brennan's testimony about 2016 Russian election interference

person confirmed the move and portrayed it as routine DOJ practice.

"Attorneys are moved around on cases so offices can most effectively allocate resources," the spokesperson said in a statement. "It is completely healthy and normal to change members of legal teams."

Reuters reported on Thursday that the FBI was planning to interview roughly a half-dozen witnesses, including former US intelligence officials, over the next several weeks as part of the investigation into Brennan.

Brennan, a cable news analyst and longtime critic of Trump, has condemned reported investigations into him as politically biased and a misuse of the legal system. His lawyer has said there is no legal basis for an investiga-

tion. A DOJ official told Reuters yesterday that there had been frustration inside the department with the pace of the investigation. Another source familiar with the investigation said some witness interviews were not expected to take place until June.

Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche has faced pressure to deliver prosecutions of Trump's perceived political enemies after his predecessor, Pam Bondi, was ousted over Trump's dissatisfaction with her handling of probes Trump demanded.

Medetis Long is the head of the national security section for the US Attorney's Office in Miami. She was part of the prosecution team that convicted a man at trial last year for attempting to assassinate Trump at his Florida golf club in 2024.

## Lula says 'Hitler' appears if democracy declines

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva warned yesterday that allowing "setbacks" to democracy would bring authoritarian regimes like Hitler's, ahead of a gathering of world left-wing leaders in Spain, AFP reported from Barcelona. Lula and Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez are due to headline today's meeting in Barcelona in a bid to lead an alliance of progressive forces against a rising right and far right. "What we want is to talk and see if we can find a solution to strengthen the democratic process in the world, so that we don't allow any setbacks," Lula told a joint news conference with Sanchez in Barcelona. "Because when there is a setback, a Hitler happens." Conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza and Iran as well as trade turmoil caused by US President Donald Trump's tariffs

have contributed to an erosion of the UN-led system of co-operation between countries that has prevailed since World War II. Sanchez said that multilateral order "must be improved" and "renewed", which would be the focus of today's talks. Although that system had brought human rights and respect for territorial integrity, its values "are being attacked by that reactionary wave, by authoritarians, by disinformation, evils that threaten the strength of our democratic institutions", Sanchez said. South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, Mexico's Claudia Sheinbaum, Gustavo Petro of Colombia, European Council chief Antonio Costa and Irish President Catherine Connolly are among the leaders expected at the "In Defence of Democracy" meeting.

## Acting ICE head Lyons to leave agency at end of May

Reuters  
Washington

The acting head of the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency, which has been at the heart of President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown, will leave the federal government at the end of May, the Trump administration said.

Todd Lyons' last day is May 31 and he will move to the private sector, Department of Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin said in a statement.

Rights groups say Trump's immigration crackdown led by ICE, which is part of DHS, has violated free speech and due process rights. ICE's fatal shooting of two US citizens in Minnesota - Alex Pretti and Renee Good - in January sparked nationwide protests and human rights experts said the agency's actions have created an unsafe environment, particularly for minorities.

Trump says the crackdown is necessary to improve domestic security and curb illegal immigration.

Trump fired former Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem in early March and tapped Mullin as the new DHS chief. The



File photo of Acting Director of US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Todd Lyons. (AFP)

DHS has been shut down for over two months, with lawmakers in Congress unable to agree on legislation to fund the agency in the wake of Trump's immigration crackdown. Earlier on Thursday, prosecutors in Minnesota charged an ICE agent with assault for allegedly pointing his gun at people in a car along a highway in Minneapolis in February.

Prosecutors said those marked the first charges against an ICE officer over actions related to the Trump administration's immigration crackdown in Minnesota earlier this year. The accused agent told state investigators he

had "feared for his safety?" Before being appointed acting chief of ICE in March 2025, Lyons was the executive associate director of the agency's Enforcement and Removal Operations directorate. In that role, he led efforts to arrest and remove migrants who came to the US illegally, according to his official biography.

Lyons held other roles at the Enforcement and Removal Operations directorate, including assistant director of field operations and deputy assistant director of western operations and the southwest border, among other positions.

He started with the directorate as an immigration enforcement agent in Dallas.

Mullin called Lyons "a great leader."

Separately, US media reported late on Thursday that Trump planned to nominate Cameron Hamilton to lead the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which is also part of DHS. Hamilton was ousted from his position as FEMA's acting director last year after he appeared to break with Trump and Noem on the agency's future. FEMA has seen significant staff cuts since Trump took office in January 2025. FEMA could not immediately be reached for comment.

## D4vd arrested over teen's murder

AFP  
Los Angeles

Rising rap star D4vd was arrested in connection to the murder of a teenage girl whose dismembered body was found in the trunk of a car registered in the artist's name, police said.

Los Angeles police arrested the 21-year-old singer, whose real name is David Burke, "for the murder of Celeste Rivas. Burke is being held without bail," according to a statement.

One day before she would have turned 15, Los Angeles police discovered the Rivas's badly decomposed body in the trunk of an impounded Tesla last September.

Police were called to the Hollywood tow yard by workers and neighbours who complained of a foul smell.

No charges have been filed against the rapper yet, but local prosecutors say they will review the case and expect to issue an update Monday.

Rivas was reported missing at age 13 in Riverside County, which neighbours Los Angeles to the



File photo of US rapper D4vd, whose real name is David Burke. (AFP)

southeast. After the autopsy, the medical examiner's office said she "appeared to have been deceased inside the vehicle for an extended period of time before being found."

Los Angeles Police Department investigators said the Tesla was parked in the tony Hollywood Hills area for nearly a month before being towed.

The young star shot to Internet fame in 2022 when his "Romantic Homicide" became a breakout hit on TikTok.

## US-sanctioned Guatemala attorney general tops ranking in re-election bid

AFP  
Guatemala City

Guatemala's attorney general, who has been sanctioned by the United States for corruption, topped a ranking of candidates vying for the role on Thursday, but is considered unlikely to succeed in her bid for a third term.

The 72-year-old prosecutor is close to former president Alejandro Giammattei, who faces graft allegations.

Washington and the European Union accuse Maria Consuelo Porras too of being corrupt and anti-democratic for having tried to prevent President Bernardo Arevalo, a social-democratic anti-graft campaigner, from taking office two years ago.

Porras, whose term runs out in May, is considered unlikely to stay on for another four-year



People protest against the nomination of Maria Consuelo Porras for a third term as attorney general outside the Palace of Justice in Guatemala City, yesterday. (AFP)

stint, given it is Arevalo who chooses the top prosecutor.

But she scored 92.33 out of 100 in a grading scale that has drawn criticism from observers internationally and in Guatemala, which routinely ranks among the most corrupt countries in the world.

Critics argue the ranking fo-

cus solely on professional experience and academic credentials, and fails to take into account ethical values.

Porras is accused of using her office to hound anti-mafia officials, investigative journalists and leaders of social organisations, driving some of them into exile.

## Progressive Democrat wins New Jersey special election to succeed Sherrill

Reuters  
Washington

Voters in northern New Jersey chose Analilia Mejia, a progressive Democrat who worked on Senator Bernie Sanders' 2020 presidential election campaign, as their next representative in a special election, according to US media.

The race was called minutes after polls closed, with Mejia leading by nearly 40 percentage points in early returns.

Mejia's election will narrow Republicans' grip on the US House of Representatives heading into the November midterm elections. She was favoured over Republican Randolph Township Councilman Joe Hathaway to fill the seat vacated by former US Representative

Mikie Sherrill, a moderate Democrat, who was elected governor in November.

The special election came days after two members of Congress - Democratic Representative Eric Swalwell of California and Republican Representative Tony Gonzales of Texas - announced their resignations following separate misconduct allegations and a new member, Republican Representative Clay Fuller of Georgia, was sworn in.

Mejia raised \$1.1mn through March 27, according to recent campaign filings, more than double Hathaway's \$525,000. The filings show Mejia entered the final stretch of the campaign with three times as much money in the bank as Hathaway.

Mejia won a crowded primary that featured millions of dollars in



Analilia Mejia, Democratic candidate for New Jersey's 11th Congressional District, celebrates with her family after winning the election in Montclair, New Jersey, US. (Reuters)

outside spending from the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's super PAC.

The spending targeted former US Representative Tom Ma-

linowski over his stance on Israel. But the ad campaign backfired, as Mejia - a far bigger critic of Israel - beat Malinowski by roughly 1,000 votes. Hathaway ran unopposed

for the Republican nomination.

Former Vice President Kamala Harris won the district by nearly 9 percentage points in 2024, when Sherrill won re-election by nearly 15 percentage points.

Sherrill carried the district by a similar margin in the 2025 gubernatorial election, en route to a 14-point win statewide.

When Mejia is sworn in, House Republicans will hold a 217-214 majority with one independent caucus with Republicans and three vacancies to be filled later this year in Texas and California due to the pair of resignations this week and the death of former Republican Representative Doug LaMalfa.

United Democracy Project, a pro-Israel super PAC, has signalled it will spend to elect another Democrat over Mejia in the state's June 2 primary. The winner of that race

will be favoured to win a full two-year term in November, but none of the top three candidates who ran against Mejia in the February 5 primary has filed to run against her in June.

Democratic candidates have overperformed their party's margins in the 2024 presidential election by an average of 18 points in six special congressional elections this cycle in Florida, Virginia, Arizona, Tennessee and Georgia. A seventh special election in Texas featured two Democrats in a runoff.

While the party hasn't flipped any federal seats this Congress, the consistent overperformance suggests more enthusiasm for Democrats, who have rallied behind an affordability message, charging that President Donald Trump and Republicans in Congress are making life more expensive for Americans.

## Nearly 900 Rohingya dead, missing in shipwrecks in 2025: UN

AFP  
Geneva

Last year was the deadliest on record for Rohingya refugees fleeing by sea, with deaths continuing to soar in 2026, the UN said yesterday, after hundreds were lost in a shipwreck earlier this month.

"In 2025, nearly 900 Rohingya refugees were reported missing or dead in the Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal," the United Nations refugee agency's spokesman Babar Baloch told a press briefing in Geneva.

That marks "the deadliest year on record" for the region, according to data from UNHCR, he said. Baloch highlighted that out of

the more than 6,500 Rohingya who had attempted perilous sea crossings last year, "one in seven (were) reported missing or dead".

That, he said, was "the highest mortality rate worldwide of any major route for refugee and migrant sea journeys".

The Rohingya mainly leave from huge camps in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar, where more than a million refugees forced to flee across the border from war-torn Myanmar's Rakhine state live in squalid conditions.

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

The Rohingya undertake perilous sea journeys every year in search of better living conditions, travelling

aboard rickety boats often operated by trafficking networks.

Baloch roughly estimated that "nearly 200,000 Rohingya refugees ... have taken these dangerous sea journeys since 2012".

And, he estimated, "more than 5,000 Rohingya refugees have lost their lives during these dangerous sea journeys over a decade".

"This makes, sadly, the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal an unmarked graveyard for thousands of desperate Rohingya refugees in recent years," Baloch pointed out that most Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh wanted to return to Myanmar "once conditions allow for a voluntary, dignified and safe return".

But he stressed that "ongoing conflict, persecution and the

absence of citizenship prospects leave them with little hope".

Limited humanitarian aid in Bangladesh, "compounded by insecurity in the camps and limited access to education and livelihoods", pushes refugees towards dangerous journeys, he explained.

In recent years, more than half of those attempting such crossings have been women and children, according to UNHCR data.

This year, Baloch said, "with more than 2,800 Rohingya undertaking dangerous sea journeys between January and April 13".

His comments came days after news emerged that a boat carrying about 280 Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi migrants had capsized in the Andaman Sea.

The boat, which left the south-



Rohingya refugees wait to be rescued from the hull of their capsized boat as a National Search and Rescue Agency vessel approaches in waters some 16 nautical miles off west Aceh. (AFP/File photo)

ern Bangladeshi port of Teknaf on April 4 and was on its way to Malaysia, sank due to heavy winds, rough seas and overcrowding, according to the United Nations.

Bangladeshi authorities said nine people had been rescued, while Baloch said an estimated 250 people are missing.

"UNHCR is providing counsel-

ling and referrals for medical and psychosocial support to Rohingya survivors," he said.

The UN refugee agency said it was calling on states to "address the root causes of displacement, expand safe and legal pathways, and strengthen regional co-operation to save lives and combat smuggling".

## China offers Vietnam railway loans, technology

Reuters  
Beijing

China offered to boost ties with Vietnam on rail infrastructure, from loans and technology to training, as its neighbour's top leader, To Lam, wound up a visit yesterday that featured high-speed train journeys across the country's north and southwest.

China will guide enterprises to join in railway construction projects in Vietnam, according to a joint statement issued by its foreign ministry that hailed the effort as a "new bright spot" in strategic ties.

That echoed a call for more transport and logistics links by President Xi Jinping and Lam when they met on Wednesday.

The neighbours should maintain clarity on strategy and prioritise political security, Xi told Lam, who was making his first trip overseas since he was elected Vietnam's president last week.

"Infrastructure, and rail in particular, is emerging as one of China's clearest priorities in Vietnam," said Nguyen Khac Giang, a visiting fellow at Singapore's ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute.

Chinese state media showed photographs of Lam making a 10-hour journey by high-speed rail from the capital, Beijing, in the north to Nanning in the southwestern region of Guangxi bordering Vietnam, a day before his return to Hanoi.

He also rode high-speed rail on Tuesday to visit Xiongan, a city project in the northern province of Hebei.

Vietnam is a partner in China's flagship Belt and Road Initiative for transport links between Asia and Europe, with many projects funded through loans and investments by Chinese state-owned institutions.

The 32 pacts signed this week included deals for a railway feasibility study and efforts to boost related talent capacity, the official news agency Xinhua said.

The real test of the pacts will be in implementation, where political will has been clearly demonstrated, Giang added.

Ties are warming as Vietnam shifts towards a governance model that increasingly mirrors China's, and Lam's recent consolidation of power also resembles that of its leadership.

Their law enforcement and security agencies will work more closely to counter terrorism and transnational crimes as well as exchange information and details of efforts to fight interference and separatism, they said in the statement.

They will also strengthen ties in fields from aviation and technology including 5G and big data, to new energy and critical minerals.

Vietnam's budget airline Vietjet signed a finance lease pact this week with China's SPDB Financial Leasing for 10 C909 narrow body aircraft from Shanghai-based COMAC.

## Myanmar ex-president freed, Suu Kyi's sentence reduced

Min Aung Hlaing yesterday also commuted all death sentences and ordered the release of more than 4,300 prisoners in an amnesty to mark Myanmar's new year

AFP  
Yangon

Myanmar's former president Win Myint, detained since a 2021 military coup, was freed yesterday under a mass amnesty which, according to a source close to pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, also reduced her sentence.

Win Myint and Suu Kyi, the 80-year-old Nobel Peace Prize laureate, led Myanmar during a decade-long experiment with civilian rule that was abruptly halted by the coup.

The former president, who served from 2018, was pardoned of convictions handed down during the post-putsch period of military rule and released yesterday, a spokesman for his party told AFP.

Suu Kyi meanwhile remains detained, serving a sentence rights groups decry as a politically motivated move to hobble her National League for Democracy (NLD) party.

A source close to her legal case, requesting anonymity for security reasons, told AFP that Suu Kyi's 27-year sentence had been cut as part of the amnesty.

The order announced by Min



Aung San Suu Kyi (left) and Win Myint (right) during their first court appearance in Naypyidaw, since the military detained them in a coup. (AFP/File photo)

Aung Hlaing — the coup leader who ousted Suu Kyi's government and was sworn in last week as civilian president — to reduce the remaining terms of all sentences under 40 years by one-sixth "also applies to her", the source said.

It is unclear how much of her term was considered served before the commutation order.

UN rights chief Volker Turk said that "all those detained unjustly since the coup — including state councillor Aung San Suu Kyi — need to be released immediately and unconditionally".

While Win Myint had occupied the presidency, it functioned as a ceremonial role following the lead of de facto government head Suu Kyi, who was barred from holding the top spot under a military-drafted constitution.

An official statement from Min Aung Hlaing's office said he had pardoned Win Myint — who like Suu Kyi was convicted of a host of crimes critics say were fabricated.



Relatives wait for the release of prisoners from Insein prison to mark the Myanmar New Year in Yangon yesterday. (AFP)

Myo Nyunt, spokesman for the NLD which was dissolved after the coup, told AFP he had visited the ex-president at his daughter's house in the capital Naypyidaw and he was "in good health".

Min Aung Hlaing yesterday also commuted all death sentences and ordered the release of more than 4,300 prisoners in an amnesty to mark Myanmar's new year — one of many public holidays when mass pardons are commonly made.

But Win Myint's pardon is perhaps the most significant climb-down so far.

Outside the barbed-wire boundary of Yangon's Insein prison, AFP journalists saw award-winning filmmaker Shin Daewe released.

She was given a life sentence in 2024 — later commuted to 15 years — for "complicity in terrorism", according to Reporters Without

Borders, which called her initial term the "harshes" post-coup sentencing of a journalist.

"Even though I was fortunate, my unlucky friends were left behind in tears. Even as I return to my family, I am returning with tears in my eyes," said the documentarian.

Other gaggles of families waited in the sweltering heat, hoping their relatives were among those freed.

"My brother has been imprisoned for a political case," said 38-year-old Aung Htet Naing, who was prepared for disappointment.

"We cannot expect much because he wasn't included in previous pardons."

More than 30,000 people have been detained for political reasons since the coup, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners.

## China, Russia ties driving N Korean economic recovery: Seoul

AFP  
Seoul

North Korea's economy is showing signs of recovery as Pyongyang deepens trade and diplomatic ties with Russia and China, South Korea's unification ministry said in a report sent to AFP yesterday.

Rigid socialist planning and high military spending have undermined growth in North Korea for years, as have sweeping international sanctions aimed at scuppering its development of nuclear weapons.

China has long been the diplomatically isolated country's main economic backer, though Pyongyang has also drawn closer

to Russia since Moscow launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Those relationships are now driving an improved economic outlook, with the North appearing to have "moved beyond a period of contraction" and "entered a phase of gradual recovery", according to the South Korean ministry.

The turnaround has come even as Pyongyang continues its nuclear and missile programmes, which it has vowed not to abandon despite years of international pressure.

The report outlined Seoul's basic plan for developing relations with the North through the end of the decade.

It said Pyongyang's expanding cooperation with Moscow and

improving trade conditions with Beijing were key factors supporting the recovery.

Air China resumed direct flights between Beijing and Pyongyang in March after a six-year suspension, and daily passenger rail services between the two capitals have also restarted.

China's foreign minister said in a visit to Pyongyang last week that Beijing hoped to further "promote practical co-operation".

Analysts say the North is also receiving economic and military technology assistance from Russia in return for sending troops and ammunition to help it fight Ukraine.

North Korea does not publish official data on the size of its economy.

Its nominal gross domestic product was equivalent to about \$30bn in 2024, according to Seoul's official estimate — a tiny fraction of the South Korean economy, one of the most developed in the world.

North Korea has long faced shortages. A famine in the mid-1990s killed hundreds of thousands of people, and reports indicate that the Covid-19 pandemic also pushed many into extreme hunger.

In February, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un vowed to lift living standards at a landmark congress, saying the country had overcome its "worst difficulties" in the past five years and was entering a stage of "optimism and confidence in the future".

## Japan devises new term for heatwave days

Blistering temperatures rising to 40C and above will now be branded "cruelly hot" or "kokusho-bi" in Japan, the weather agency said yesterday, as heatwave days become increasingly frequent in the region.

By using this designation, the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA) "will more effectively call for vigilance against extremely high temperatures", it said.

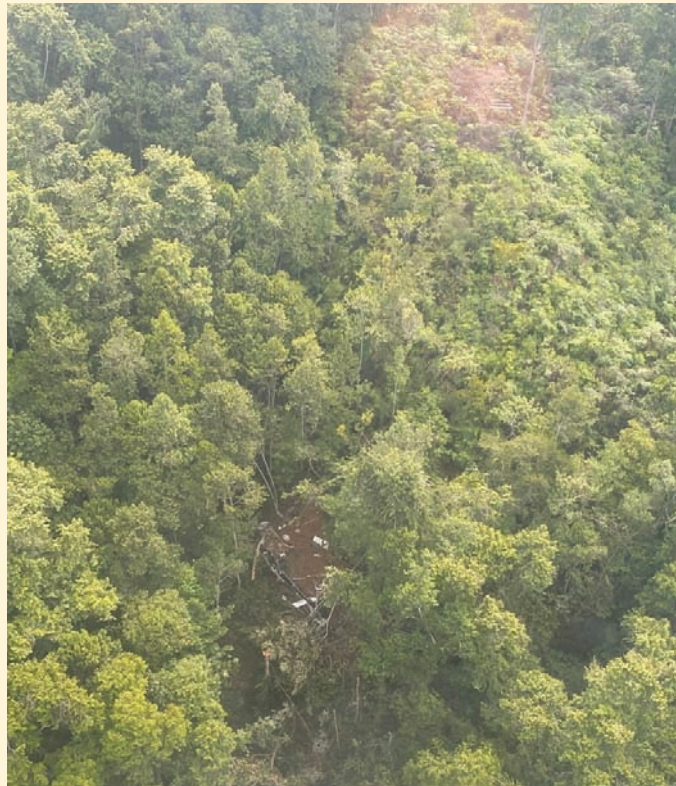
Last year, Japan sweltered through its hottest summer since records began in 1989 — with warmer days on the rise globally due to climate change.

To come up with the new category, JMA conducted a survey with the public and received responses from 478,000 people before adopting "cruelly hot", which was deemed the most popular.

Coming in second was "super-extremely hot day" or "cho-moshobi" while "sauna day", "stay-at-home day" and "boiling day" were also among the choices, JMA said. The new category joins terms already used by JMA for temperatures rising to 25C and higher (summer day), 30C and higher (midsummer day), and 35C and higher (extremely hot day). — AFP

## Indonesia helicopter crash kills 8

Debris at the site of a helicopter crash in Sekadaru regency, West Kalimantan province. Two crew members and six passengers were killed when a private helicopter crashed in dense forest on Indonesia's Borneo island, the transport ministry said yesterday. All eight on board were men and one was a Malaysian national, civil aviation director general Lukman F Laisa said in a statement. The Airbus helicopter, owned by local firm Matthew Air Nusantara, lost contact with air traffic control about five minutes after takeoff in the West Kalimantan province on Thursday morning. Rescuers found the crash victims on Thursday evening in a dense forest area with steep slopes, search and rescue agency head I Made Junetra told AFP yesterday. The bodies were being flown to the provincial capital of Pontianak, Made added. (PICTURE: Reuters)



## Philippines, US to build industrial hub to strengthen supply chain security

Reuters  
Manila

The US and the Philippines will build a 4,000-acre (1,620-hectare) industrial hub after Manila joined a Washington-led initiative to secure AI and semiconductor supply chains, the US State Department said in a statement. The Philippines becomes the 13th country to join Pax Silica, a programme seeking to safeguard the full technology supply chain, including critical minerals, advanced manufacturing, computing and data infrastructure.

The initiative is a key pillar of the Trump administration's economic statecraft strategy aimed at reducing its dependence on rival nations and strengthening co-operation among allied partners. Other signatories include Australia, Finland, India, Qatar, South Korea and Singapore. The

new industrial hub will be built in the Luzon Economic Corridor, a strategic hub for economic activity that includes the capital Manila and neighbouring regions with industrial and manufacturing activities. The Philippines, Japan and the United States have committed to ramp up infrastructure investments in the corridor under a trilateral framework agreement.

"It is intended to serve as a staging point for a purpose-built platform for allied manufacturing," the State Department said in a statement.

"The two Allies are committed to strengthening shared supply chains in critical minerals, semiconductors, electronics, and other goods," it added.

The hub will be set up in New Clark City, the Philippines' flagship planned metropolis north of Manila, which is owned and developed by the government through the Bases Conversion

and Development Authority (BCDA).

BCDA Chairman Hilario Paredes said authorities would be assessing whether sufficient contiguous land was available to host the project.

"We will check if we have space that is contiguous," Paredes said. "We will have to sit down and finalise the details." He added that the envisioned hub would be a commercial facility.

New Clark City sits on state-owned land that was part of a former US military reservation transferred to the Philippine government after US forces withdrew from Philippine bases in 1991. Relations between Manila and Washington have blossomed under Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr, who has pivoted closer to the US. The former US colony is also central to Washington's efforts to counter China's assertiveness in the South China Sea.

# India drops proposal to mandate national ID app on smartphones

Reuters  
New Delhi

India's government has decided not to go ahead with a proposal to require Apple, Samsung and others to pre-install the country's biometric identification app Aadhaar on phones, a state body said yesterday, a move that had been opposed by the smartphone giants.

Reuters reported last month that UIDAI, the state body that operates Aadhaar, had asked the IT ministry in January to engage with Apple, Google and other leading smartphone makers to consider mandatory pre-installation of the Aadhaar app. A unique 12-digit identity number tied to an individual's fingerprints and iris scans, Aadhaar is held by nearly 1.34bn residents and is widely used for verification purposes in banking and telecom services, as well as for faster airport entry.

India's IT ministry reviewed the proposal and "is not in favour of mandating the pre-installation of the Aadhaar App on smartphones," UIDAI said in a statement to Reuters yesterday.

It gave no reason for the decision in the statement. India's IT ministry did not respond to Reuters queries.

The IT ministry held a "con-



A villager goes through the process of a fingerprint scanner for the Unique Identification (UID) database system at an enrolment centre at Merta district in the desert Indian state of Rajasthan. (Reuters/ File Photo)

sultation with stakeholders from the electronics industry" before reaching its decision to drop the Aadhaar preloading proposal, UIDAI said in its statement.

The Aadhaar request was the sixth time in two years the government has sought pre-installation of state apps on phones, according to industry communications reviewed by Reuters earlier this year. All six attempts were opposed by the industry.

Smartphone makers flagged concerns about device security

and compatibility when they received the Aadhaar preload proposal, and also flagged higher production costs as they would have been required to run separate manufacturing lines for India and export markets, according to documents reviewed by Reuters.

Apple and Samsung in particular both had concerns with the proposal due to questions over safety and security, sources told Reuters in March.

The government's decision not to proceed with the proposal

shows the constraints on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's digital push as India courts firms like Apple to expand its role as a global smartphone hub. In December, India faced criticism over an order mandating smartphone firms to pre-install a telecom security app, forcing a rollback within days.

A senior Indian official said yesterday, on condition of anonymity, that the IT ministry is not supportive of any preloading of apps, "unless it is considered very essential."

While the government maintains Aadhaar is safe and secure, the app has faced persistent criticism from privacy advocates, including for data leaks where personal details of millions of holders surfaced on the dark web.

Apar Gupta, founder of the Internet Freedom Foundation, a New Delhi-based digital advocacy group, welcomed the government's decision to drop the Aadhaar pre-installation proposal, and said other such proposals should also be spiked as they lack legislative foundation and have no public policy goal.

"Hopefully it is a welcome exercise of regulatory restraint that recognises that citizens carry their phones as extensions of their autonomy, not as vessels for government order," Gupta said.

# Sri Lanka energy minister quits as president orders coal import investigation

AFP  
Colombo

Sri Lanka's Energy Minister Kumar Jayakody resigned yesterday after the president ordered an investigation into allegations of large-scale corruption in coal imports, the government said.

The resignation follows a government audit last week that found substandard coal prevented a 900-megawatt thermal power plant — the country's biggest — from operating at full capacity.

To cover the shortfall, the state utility relied on more expensive diesel generation during a global energy crunch sparked by the Middle East conflict.

"President Anura Kumara Dissanayake has appointed a Special Presidential Commission of Inquiry to investigate whether any irregularities or unlawful activities took place in relation to the importation of coal," his office said.

It said minister Jayakody resigned to allow the investigation to proceed impartially. The ministry's top bureaucrat also stepped down.

The coal purchase has em-

barrassed Dissanayake, who came to power in September 2024 on a promise to end deep-rooted corruption.

His office said the government will investigate coal purchases dating back to 2009.

The National Audit Office said the Indian supplier should be fined 2.33bn rupees (\$7.65mn) for providing coal well below the specified calorific value, a measure of the energy released when coal is burned.

The direct loss to the state electricity utility from the inferior coal was estimated at 2.24bn rupees (\$7.33mn), slightly less than the amount that could be recovered through a penalty, the Audit Office said.

However, the opposition said the use of diesel to compensate for the reduced coal output cost an estimated 8bn rupees (\$26mn), a figure the government has argued could be much lower.

In the face of the global energy crisis, the government has raised electricity prices by up to 40% and fuel prices by a third since the US and Israel began attacking Iran leading to a global energy supply crisis.

Sri Lanka imports all its oil and coal requirements.

# Australia rules out fuel restrictions after fire at its largest refinery



Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese (centre) speaks to Viva Energy staff in the control room of the Geelong Oil Refinery in Geelong yesterday. (AFP)

Reuters  
Sydney

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said yesterday a fire at the larger of the country's two oil refineries would not trigger any fuel restrictions, as the government ramps up efforts to secure fuel supplies due to the war on Iran.

The blaze at Viva Energy's refinery in Geelong, an hour's drive from Melbourne, comes at a bad time for Australia, which imports 80% of its fuel needs and has been racing to lock in additional supply from regional allies.

The 120,000 barrel-per-day refinery is currently operating at reduced rates, producing about 60% of petrol output and 80% of diesel and aviation fuel after the fire hit two of its petrol processing units, Albanese said after meeting company officials on site.

The refinery supplies more than half the fuel used in Victoria, Australia's second-most populous state, and around a tenth of national demand.

"The event here will not lead to any change," Albanese told reporters, when asked whether the fire would force a shift in the government's four-stage fuel security plan, which includes measures that would limit fuel use if shortages worsen.

"The government has put in place the four stages in order to

plan and prepare for circumstances which are predominantly impacted by global events, not by events here," he said.

Australia is currently at stage two of the plan, which urges motorists to buy only the fuel they need while the government takes precautionary steps to boost fuel supply.

Albanese also said BP had agreed to join a government-backed scheme, through its export credit agency, under which Canberra underwrites spot market fuel purchases to secure extra fuel.

Viva Energy CEO Scott Wyatt said work remained to restore the refinery units safely and return to full production.

Wyatt added the 72-year-old refinery underwent major maintenance last year and said the company had not attempted to raise capacity beyond safe operating limits as an investigation into the cause of the fire continues.

The fire broke out on Wednesday night and was brought under control after about 12 hours.

Albanese returned early from Malaysia overnight after meeting Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and securing a deal with state energy firm Petronas to supply excess fuel to Australia.

Malaysia was Albanese's third Southeast Asia stop in the past week, following visits to Singapore and Brunei, as Canberra looks to strengthen food and energy supplies.

# India fails to pass bill linked to quotas for women

Reuters  
New Delhi

An Indian government bill to expand assemblies that would have brought forward plans to reserve a third of the seats for women did not get enough votes to get through parliament yesterday, in a rare defeat for Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Opposition groups said while they were in favour of quotas for women legislators, the linking of the plan to a mass redrawing of constituency boundaries was a government bid to manipulate the system and get more votes.

"The amendment bill has fallen. They used an unconstitutional trick in the name

of women to break the Constitution," opposition leader Rahul Gandhi said in a post on X, minutes after the bill failed to get through.

The government dismissed that accusation and said it would continue to campaign for women's quotas. "The women of this country will not forgive you," Interior Minister Amit Shah said in parliament, before the bill was put to a vote.

The government had argued the constituency changes were needed to reflect shifts in the population since seats were last fixed after a 1971 census.

The bill would have increased the number of lawmakers in the lower house by around 55% to 850 by the next parliamentary elections, due in 2029 — with a similar expan-

sion of regional assemblies.

Yesterday in parliament's lower house, 298 lawmakers voted in favour and 230 against — far from the two-thirds majority needed for a bill that would have changed the constitution.

A one-third reservation for women had been agreed in legislation passed in 2023, but was then linked to the next census, which is still underway and would have taken the changes beyond the 2029 election.

India's parliament does not currently reserve any seats for women, who 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.

# British PM says 'furious' after fresh revelations over sacked US envoy

AFP  
London

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer said yesterday he was "furious" after it emerged his sacked US ambassador Peter Mandelson was appointed despite failing security vetting, as the scandal again threatens his hold on power.

The beleaguered British leader, who has been dogged for months by the controversy, claimed he and other ministers were not told Mandelson had failed the vetting process, branding that "unforgivable".

Starmer has faced repeated calls to quit since his 2024 decision to appoint Mandelson as Britain's top diplomat in Washington backfired spectacularly over the envoy's longstanding ties to late US offender Jeffrey Epstein.

Starmer sacked Mandelson in September, just seven months after taking up his post.

"That I wasn't told that he had failed (security vetting) when I was telling parliament that due process had been followed is unforgivable," Starmer told broadcasters yesterday

during a visit to Paris.

"Not only was I not told, no minister was told, and I'm absolutely furious about that," he said, adding he would address parliament on Monday "to set out all the relevant facts in true transparency".

Starmer's government has blamed Foreign Office officials for allowing Mandelson's appointment to proceed "against the recommendation of UK Security Vetting", with the ministry's top civil servant, Olly Robbins, ousted late Thursday.

The prime minister had "lost confidence in him" over the botched process, senior minister Darren Jones said.

Parliament's main foreign affairs watchdog committee said yesterday it has requested Robbins give evidence about the issue next Tuesday.

Despite the government's stance, *The Independent* newspaper reported last September of "serious concerns" Mandelson "did not clear security vetting for the role but the prime minister pushed through his appointment anyway".

Five months later, Starmer insisted publicly Mandelson had passed vetting.

# Australian former soldier gets bail on Afghanistan war crime charges

An Australian court ordered bail with travel restrictions yesterday for the country's most decorated soldier, following his arrest on accusations of war crimes while deployed in Afghanistan more than a decade ago.

Police arrested and charged Ben Roberts-Smith (pictured), 47, with five counts of war crimes last week over the murder of five unarmed Afghan civilians between 2009 and 2012. Each charge carries a maximum term of jail for life.

Bail was "not punitive in nature". Judge Greg Grogan told a Sydney courtroom, adding that the veteran of the elite Special Air Service Regiment was entitled to a presumption of innocence though the charges were serious if proved, media said.

As the matter was likely to take "years to get before court", Grogan added, there were exceptional circumstances justifying bail, despite prosecutors' opposition to bail for fear Roberts-Smith might try to contact witnesses.

Roberts-Smith, who appeared via video link at the hearing, must furnish a surety of A\$250,000 (\$180,000) and refrain from contacting any prosecution witnesses, as bail



conditions, in addition to the travel curbs. Roberts-Smith spent more than a week in custody as his legal team awaited an in-person bail review hearing after police initially refused bail following the arrest.

Roberts-Smith has consistently denied the accusations of wrongdoing, many first reported by *Nine Entertainment* newspapers in a series of articles starting in 2018.

The Australian Federal Police said they would allege that his victims were not taking part in hostilities at the time of their deaths and were detained, unarmed and under the control of Australian forces when killed. (Reuters)

# Prince Harry and Meghan meet survivors of Bondi Beach attack

Reuters  
Sydney

Britain's Prince Harry and wife Meghan, Duchess of Sussex, yesterday met survivors of December's Bondi Beach shooting that left 15 dead, on the final day of their visit to Australia.

A father and son who police say were inspired by Islamic State are alleged to have opened fire on a Jewish festival on Sydney's iconic beach last year, in Australia's worst mass shooting in decades.

The Duke and Duchess of Sussex spoke to several survivors includ-

ing 40-year-old Elon Zizer, who survived after being shot numerous times while shielding his children.

"It's an honour to meet the duke and duchess. It's very beautiful that they've come and made an effort to meet us," he said.

"It's very special — it makes us feel heard."

The Sussexes also met emergency workers who responded to the attack, as well as representatives of the Sydney Jewish Museum, which is opening an exhibition on the attacks.

The couple stepped down as working members of the British royal family and moved to the US

in 2020, citing a desire to be financially independent and to escape what they characterised as media intrusion into their private lives.

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

The trip has divided public opinion in Australia, where Britain's King Charles is the head of state, though a sizeable minority supports becoming a republic.

Harry and Meghan have received a warm reception at events across Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne on the four-day visit, but others have questioned the reasons for

the trip, which local media have called a "pseudo-royal tour".

In contrast to their previous visit, the Sussexes are also undertaking what their office called "private meetings and special projects" while in Australia.

While Harry met military veterans on Wednesday, Meghan filmed an episode of cooking show *MasterChef Australia*, where she was a guest judge.

She is also headlining a luxury wellness retreat in Sydney yesterday evening. Tickets for the event, which includes yoga, manifestation and sound healing, start from A\$2,699 (\$1,912) per person.



Britain's Prince Harry and Meghan, the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, meet volunteer first responders from Bondi Surf Bathers' Life Saving Club, during a visit to Bondi Beach, on day four of the royal trip to Australia, yesterday. (Reuters)

## EU denies bowing to tech lobby on data centre green impact

The European Commission has denied that it had copy-pasted from proposals by tech industry lobbyists in adopting rules allowing data centres to keep their environmental impact secret.

An investigation alleged Brussels had added a confidentiality clause to a review of energy efficiency rules after pressure from Microsoft and DigitalEurope, a lobby whose members include Google and Meta.

"We reject the accusation of ad verbatim copy-pasting of industry lobbying," said commission spokeswoman Anna-Kaisa Ikonen.

The commission moved to regulate the fast-growing data centre sector in 2023 requiring operators to submit data on energy consumption, water usage and other metrics – and later said this would be published in aggregated form.

However, in 2024 it took up a submission by tech firms requiring all individual information on data centres be classified, according to an investigation led by Investigate Europe, a journalism co-operative, in partnership with *The Guardian*, *Le Monde* and other media.

As a consequence, information on the precise impact of individual data centres is kept from the public even if demanded through freedom of information requests – in a possible breach of EU transparency rules, the report said.

Only aggregated national data is made public.

The commission admitted it took some of the tech companies' advice, but denied that altered the substance of the law.

"As part of the consultation, the commission decided to change the formulation... by using parts of the proposals submitted by stakeholders," Ikonen said. "We kept the original core intention of the first proposal: to respect business secrets and confidentiality of the reported information and data." – **AFP**

# International law now 'matters more than ever' in chaotic world: UN chief

AFP  
The Hague

International law is more important than ever at a time when even core countries in the global system are calling it into question, the United Nations secretary-general said yesterday.

Marking the 80th anniversary of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the UN's top court, Antonio Guterres said: "Today, violations of international law are unfolding before our eyes."

"It is precisely because the international system is under such strain that adherence to international law matters more than ever – especially in this era of changing power relations," he said. "The force of law must always prevail over the law of force."

Guterres was speaking at a special sitting of the world court at the sumptuous Peace Palace in The Hague also attended by Dutch King Willem-Alexander.

He noted that as the court – which settles disputes between states – turned 80, it was busier than ever.

The ICJ has been in the headlines, notably for a case brought by South Africa against Israel, alleging that its campaign in Gaza is in breach of the UN Genocide Convention.

It also last year issued a landmark environment ruling, obliging states to tackle climate change and paving the way for reparations if they failed to do so.

However, institutions such as the ICJ that uphold international law are increasingly "questioned and challenged", said the UN leader.

"And this erosion is not happening at the margins of the international system," he noted. "It is happening at its core – including by states entrusted with unique responsibilities for the maintenance of international peace and security."

The United States has criticised ICJ decisions and taken aim at the other major international court in The Hague, the International Criminal Court (ICC), which prosecutes individuals for the world's worst crimes.

Furious at arrest warrants issued for Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the US has slapped sanctions on top ICC officials, hampering its work.

Guterres also recalled that the decisions of the ICJ are binding, even though it has no power to enforce them – which critics say is a sign of weakness.

For example, the ICJ ordered Russia to halt its invasion of Ukraine just weeks after tanks rolled over the border – to no avail.

"Respect for those decisions is not optional. It is a (UN) Charter obligation," said Guterres.

With the world in chaos, the UN secretary-general said humanity faced a stark choice: "A future governed by the rule of law, or a future driven by raw power?"

ICJ president Yuji Iwasawa noted "troubling signs" of countries calling into question the value of multilateralism.

"In some cases, the role of law itself has been openly questioned," he said. "These trends place great pressure on the system we serve and remind us that the international rule of law cannot be taken for granted."

## US cloud dominance a risk for Europe: report

AFP  
Paris

More than three-quarters of European countries use American cloud computing services for vital national security functions, a report published yesterday found, warning that the dependency could make governments vulnerable.

The analysis arrives as European governments increasingly fear that vital digital services could be subject to an American "kill switch" if tensions with President Donald Trump's White House escalate.

"Russia and Putin are waging a war against a European country in Ukraine... but we also had a US President threatening Denmark and Greenland," said Tobias Bacherle of the Brussels-based Future of Technology Institute (FOTI). "This geopolitical shift needs to be taken in account."

National security systems in 23 of the 28 countries studied "seem to rely on US tech", researchers found after looking at EU member states and Britain.

The researchers analysed public information from defence ministry websites, national media and EU and UK public procurement records to identify major cloud computing contracts with American providers including Microsoft, Google, Amazon and Oracle.

Of the countries studied, 16 of 28 "are at high risk to a potential US 'kill switch'", the FOTI said, among them Germany, Poland and Britain -- among Europe's key military powers.

Just one – neutral Austria, which is not a North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) member – was classified as lower risk.

Some capitals have already sought domestic or European options for tech procurement, prompting American firms to offer "sovereign" cloud computing services that they say are beyond Washington's reach.

However, "this branding label fails to address the underlying dependencies", the FOTI said, warning that such systems could still fall under the CLOUD act that allows American authorities to demand that companies hand over data stored abroad.

American companies could also be forced

to cut off maintenance and security updates by US sanctions, the researchers added.

Last year, Washington withheld from Ukraine services including satellite images from the American company Maxar after a public Oval Office sparring match between President Trump and his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky.

"If you can do this to Kyiv, you can do it to London, Brussels, Paris and Berlin," said Katja Bego of the British think-tank Chatham House. "It is a profound wake-up call moment. This is an existential national security risk."

The FOTI pointed to early European steps to reduce dependencies, such as the move to open-source software by Italy's defence ministry or the north German state Schleswig-Holstein.

Meanwhile the Netherlands is working with telecoms firm KPN and France's Thales to build its own defence cloud.

"Even small changes or movement are a step in the right direction," FOTI chief Cori Crider said. "You get resilience out of having at least some depth in an alternative."

## EU updates age-check app after weaknesses are found

AFP  
Brussels

The European Union said yesterday that it was updating an age verification app unveiled this week after independent developers pointed to vulnerabilities.

EU chief Ursula von der Leyen said on Wednesday that the app, which aims to better protect children from online harm, was "technically ready".

However, following online claims that the system could be easily hacked, Brussels said "immediate steps" had been taken to address those issues.

"A new version" is being updated, European Commission spokesman Thomas Regnier told reporters in Brussels.

Although the app is not yet available for people to download, its code has been published on the developer platform GitHub.

"Why did we decide to have it open source: to be transparent and to allow, indeed, for the community, for developers to test it, to play with it, to potentially help us to improve it," Regnier said.

Brussels has been under pressure to come up with solutions to safeguard children online as France and other EU nations move ahead with plans to ban social media for children under a certain age.

EU officials said the app aims, for instance, to replace pop-up banners asking users to click to confirm they are over 18 to access adult content sites.

They have also been candid that the app is not bulletproof and could be sidestepped by using a virtual private network (VPN) or low-tech workarounds such as a minor enlisting an older friend or sibling to enable access to restricted sites. – **AFP**

## Rescue bid for stranded whale at 'decisive phase'

AFP  
Berlin

A private rescue attempt for a whale stranded off Germany's Baltic coast has entered a "decisive phase", officials said yesterday, with the sea mammal showing more activity than in recent days.

The 13.5m (44') humpback whale's ordeal first began in late March when it was spotted stuck on a sandbank near the city of Luebeck.

It first freed itself only to become stuck again further east along the German coast.

Earlier this month officials said they expected the animal to die, saying it had been too weakened by the odyssey to survive and make its way back to its natural habitat in the Atlantic.

However on Wednesday a last-

ditch rescue effort proposed by two entrepreneurs was approved, set to involve lifting the whale using inflatable cushions and transporting it with pontoons.

Yesterday Till Backhaus, environment minister for the state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, said that the rescue had entered a "decisive phase" and that the whale would have a "chance" at survival.

Yesterday the rescue team was seen approaching the whale near the island of Poel to take preparatory steps, as the animal showed an increased level of movement, including flapping its tail out of the water.

Backhaus said he was "pleased" that the whale was "in a better condition than some had suspected".

The rescue team say that they are proceeding cautiously so as not to further distress the whale



People in a motorboat inspect a humpback whale, which lies stranded on a sandbank, as rescue efforts continue through a private initiative, in the shallow waters off the Baltic Sea on the Island of Poel, near Wismar, Germany. – **Reuters**

and that they can't say exactly when it might be lifted.

Coverage of the whale's struggle for survival and efforts to rescue it have gripped the German public, with some of the

press calling him "Timmy".

Regular demonstrations have been held in support of the stricken creature, with protesters calling for rescue efforts to resume and some online posts targeting

officials with death threats.

Previous rescue proposals, including the use of a catamaran, were ruled out because it was concluded the whale would probably not survive them.

## Spain's watchdog probes major energy companies over historic blackout

Spain's energy and competition regulator said yesterday that it had opened formal probes into the country's largest energy companies and the power grid operator over last year's unprecedented blackout in Spain and Portugal, after finding evidence that some power sector rules were breached over extended periods.

The watchdog opened probes into grid operator Red Electrica – a unit of Redeia – as well as energy companies Iberdrola, Naturgy, Endesa and Repsol.

It also said it was investigating individual power plants.

Iberdrola and Endesa declined to comment. The other named companies did not immediately reply to requests for comment.

A number of investigations have analysed the causes of the massive outage, which plunged large parts of Spain and Portugal into darkness for up to 16 hours on April 28, 2025.

Most focused on identifying the causes, without assigning blame.

The National Commission on Markets and Competition, or CNMC, said that while the violations did not cause the blackout, they may have affected power

system operations and could amount to administrative infringements, requiring a formal investigation.

The names of the companies being probed were disclosed on the watchdog's website after the market close.

In a report last month, the CNMC recommended measures to mitigate voltage swings in the power grid following the blackout, as well as boosting French power links.

It did not assign blame, saying that it was examining potential breaches separately.

Yesterday, the CNMC said it found a chain of events that progressively destabilised the power system and culminated in the April 28, 2025 outage, whose immediate cause was a surge in voltage.

It added that some suspected breaches had persisted for long periods, but said this did not amount to assigning responsibility for the origin of the blackout to the companies involved.

The proceedings can last between nine and 18 months, depending on the seriousness of any infringement, and affected parties will be able to submit arguments and evidence. – **Reuters**

## Video game voice star: 'Only humans' can make art

By Killian Fichou  
AFP

Millions of gamers around the world may not know Troy Baker's face but would recognise his voice – perhaps as the heartbroken father Joel in *The Last of Us* or an intrepid Indiana Jones in *The Great Circle*.

That human connection is why the 50-year-old actor is "not afraid of anything replacing artists" even as creative industries are beset by fears of artificial intelligence taking over.

Baker spoke to AFP soon after the release of a new title, *Screamer*, the latest in a string of 430 games and animations to which he has lent his vocal cords rather than his bearded face and piercing blue eyes, according to IMDb.

Although artificial intelligence (AI) can easily ape an actor's voice, "we're talking about art", Baker said. "We make art. Art is inherently, intrinsically a human expression, and only humans can make it."

In *Screamer*, a car racing title released last month for PC and consoles, Baker plays the role of Mister A., the organiser of a tournament whose high-octane clashes are interspersed with

animated sequences.

"History has shown us that technology creates more opportunities than it replaces," Baker said.

Nevertheless, "anytime, in any art form, people are fearful of their jobs", he acknowledged. "I understand it."

Baker himself came in for online criticism in early 2022 for associating with a company specialising in NFTs ("non-fungible tokens", or tradeable digital objects) before quickly backing out.

Baker fell almost by accident into voice work in the early 2000s as he was trying to get a rock band off the ground.

However, it was in 2013 that he broke through with the role of Joel in *The Last of Us*, the action-adventure game that tells the story of a man and a young girl traversing a post-apocalyptic America.

Baker's motions were also captured in his performance as the gruff and bereaved father.

Popular the world over, the game's success spawned a 2020 sequel and an HBO series starting in 2023, in which Baker appeared for a cameo role as a different character.

"I love Joel. I miss him every day," Baker said, while adding that he "cannot imagine any



Troy Baker

more of (his) story that's left to tell" despite rumours of a third game regularly circulating online.

Unlike the "multimillion-dollar sets" common in the movie business, in games "there's times when I'm given a microphone, a script and a Zoom call", said Baker, whose other major roles include the brother of the protagonist Nathan Drake in *Uncharted 4* (2016) and the antagonist of two *Death Stranding* games (2019 and 2025).

Baker struck just the right

tone in 2024's *Indiana Jones and the Great Circle*, in which he played Harrison Ford's film hero in his prime.

He recalled how at first, he "prepared in a completely wrong way" by attempting to copy one-for-one the movie star's voice and movements.

"That's the least Indiana Jones thing I could do," he later realised, saying that he "had to let go" of Ford and do things his own way.

The Hollywood star himself congratulated Baker on his performance at the Game Awards in Los Angeles in 2024, one of the high points of the video game calendar.

However, across different projects, "I can't have a single process", Baker said. "Every studio is different. Every game should be different."

His approach these days is to "ask a lot of questions" – as in *Screamer*, where "we spent a lot of time really dialing in each individual character".

This year Baker is appearing in the film *Iron Lung*, a sci-fi thriller directed by the YouTube star Mark Fischbach, who goes by the moniker Marliplier.

Nevertheless, "I've never looked at video games as a stepping stone. This is where I love to be," he said.



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## Foreign investors flee Thailand as war, energy shock dash hopes

Foreign investors are selling Thai assets as an energy shock from the US-Israeli war on Iran threatens to snuff out hopes for an economic revival under Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul and exposes the policy paralysis that is gripping Bangkok.

The conflict has sent global oil prices up to near \$100 a barrel, sharpening the focus on Asia's reliance on energy supplies from the Gulf. Thailand is among the most exposed, with the Middle East supplying nearly half of its oil and gas, according to Krungsri Research.

With public debt on the brink of eclipsing the government's self-imposed 70% ceiling and an economy that was already in deflation before the war, Bangkok's challenge is far more acute than most of its neighbours.

The setback came just as the stars seemed to be aligning for Southeast Asia's second-largest economy, with investors rushing into Thailand again for the first time in years.

Foreigners bought \$1.7bn worth of Thai stocks in February, LSEG data showed. Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul's resounding victory in February ushered in hopes of political stability and long-awaited economic reforms in a country that had lurched through years of turmoil and uncertainty.

But when the Iran war broke out at the end of February, foreign investors pulled back sharply, with an \$823mn net selloff in equities in March, while bond outflows hit \$705mn, the largest combined outflow since October 2024.

A two-week ceasefire this month has spurred hopes of a resolution and led to a sharp rally in Thai stocks and the baht, but investors are cautious about the country's vulnerability if oil prices remain elevated. "The risk remains (that) markets remain complacent about the long-term impact from energy shock and that higher fuel costs hit consumption and disrupt exports and tourism, two key drivers of the Thai economy," said Daniel Tan, a portfolio manager at Grasshopper Asset Management.

### With the fragile ceasefire in mind, analysts and investors warn Thailand faces another difficult year

With the fragile ceasefire in mind, analysts and investors warn Thailand faces another difficult year. Unlike many of its peers in the region, Thailand's exposure runs deeper than just fuel costs as over half of annual power output comes from gas, and liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports are accounting for an increasing share of generation.

Thailand's conundrum is that its economy has struggled to gain traction, growing just 2.4% last year and lagging peers, while inflation dropped for 12 straight months, triggering a rate cut from the central bank in February before the war. "There's a broad consensus among investors that Thailand is in a policy bind," said Gary Tan, a Singapore-based portfolio manager at Allspring Global Investments.

"The central bank has limited room to hike without derailing the recovery, but little urgency or space to ease, which leaves policy restrictive by default," said Tan, who is underweight on Thailand. Every one baht rise in fuel prices cuts economic growth by 2 basis points, according to state planning agency estimates, underlining why Bangkok is reluctant to increase subsidies.

"Higher oil prices could weigh on consumption, the current account and the baht, while also complicating the disinflation path and potentially limiting how much further rates can fall," said Nattanon Arunyananda, investment manager of Thai equities at Aberdeen Investments.

The war has upended Thailand's inflation picture, with average inflation projected to rise as much as 3.5% this year depending on how the conflict unfolds, a stark turnaround from a 0.54% contraction in the first quarter.

Thailand has limited ammunition to address its economic problems, Finance Minister Eknit Nitithanprapas said.

The currency has emerged as the pressure valve, with the Thai baht sliding about 2.8% since the war broke out, though it has clawed back some of the losses since the ceasefire was announced last week. — Reuters

## BYDs ready to sail



An aerial photo shows BYD's Shenzhen car carrier docked to load cars for export in the port of Suzhou, in China's eastern Jiangsu province yesterday. (AFP)

# How the US could clear mines from the Strait of Hormuz

**US may use drones, robots for safer mine clearing**

**Mine-clearing crews remain vulnerable to attacks**

**Sensors, AI, and unmanned systems aim to automate mine clearance**

By Cassell Bryan-Low  
Reuters

**A**s the United States embarks on clearing mines from the Strait of Hormuz, it could draw on an arsenal of drones, explosive-laden robots and helicopters to reduce risks, though de-mining crews could still be vulnerable to Iranian attacks. The US is trying to secure the strait from mines as part of efforts to end Iran's disruption of shipping, which has severely curbed global energy supplies since the US and Israel launched strikes against Iran at the end of February.

But while the US can draw on modernised technology to remotely check for and remove mines, clearing a strategic waterway such as the Strait of Hormuz will still be a slow, multi-step process, former naval officers and industry specialists say. The US military said over the weekend it had started the mine-clearing operation, sending two warships through the strait, but offered few details about the equipment involved.

It said that additional forces, including underwater drones, would join the effort in the coming days. Iran had recently deployed about a dozen mines in the Strait of Hormuz, Reuters reported last month, citing sources familiar with the matter. It is not publicly known where mines may have been laid.

US President Donald Trump said over the weekend that all of Iran's minelaying ships had been sunk. But there is a risk Tehran could deploy additional devices, some specialists said. Mine warfare is effective because the devices are cheap, are costly to clear and "even the threat of a minefield is enough to stop ships, especially commercial ships," said Jon Pentreath, a retired British navy rear admiral who is now a consultant.



BAE Systems' Archerfish mine disposal system, displayed at the Undersea Defence Technology trade exhibition in London.

### MODERNIZING MINESWEEPING

Traditionally, the US Navy relied on manned minesweeping ships that physically entered minefields, using sonars to locate the devices and mechanical gear dragged behind the vessel to clear explosives, sometimes supported by human divers. Much of that aging fleet has been retired.

They are being replaced by lighter vessels known as littoral combat ships, which carry modern mine-hunting equipment such as semi-autonomous surface and underwater drones as well as remote-controlled robots that enable crews to distance themselves from the minefield. The navy has three of these in deployment. Two of those ships were undergoing maintenance in Singapore, a senior US official told Reuters in late March.

At the time, the US minesweeping capacity in the Middle East included unmanned undersea vehicles, four of the traditional Avenger-class vessels, helicopters and divers, according to the official. The US Navy did not respond to a comment request on the mine-clearing capability it currently has in the Middle East. US Central Command declined to

provide further details.

Tehran is believed to possess several types of maritime mines, former naval officials and other specialists say. These include bottom mines that rest on the seabed and detonate when ships pass above, tethered mines that are anchored but float closer to the surface, drifting mines that move freely on the water, and limpet mines that attach directly to a ship's hull.

The US operation will likely involve searching for mines using unmanned surface and underwater vehicles equipped with sensors. Once a mine-like object is detected, the data is typically transferred to crews operating outside the minefield, who identify the device. They then determine how it should be neutralised.

The Navy's search capability now includes sonar-mounted unmanned surface and undersea vehicles, as well as helicopters that are used to spot mines near the surface, former naval officials say.

To destroy mines, the Navy can deploy systems such as the torpedo-shaped Archerfish, a remotely operated device about 2m long that carries an explosive

charge and transmits video back to operators via cable, according to its manufacturer, BAE Systems. Designed to be expendable, it costs tens of thousands of dollars.

The US could also use unmanned boats towing mine-sweeping sleds that trigger detonations or gather mines, said Bryan Clark, a retired US naval officer and senior fellow at the Hudson Institute. Human divers are also sometimes used, including for intelligence gathering, specialists say.

### SLOW PROCESS

Clearing the strait could take two or three weeks, Clark said, and Iranian attacks on mine-clearing crews could slow the process and raise risks. As a result, he said, the US military may deploy defensive measures like ships and airborne drones to defend crews and equipment. "Finding and destroying mines is very time consuming," US Admiral Daryl Caudle, chief of naval operations, said in March. That leaves mine-clearing capability "vulnerable," he added.

New technologies are being developed to speed up mine clearance, particularly through advances in sensors used for detection, specialists say. French technology and defence group Thales says its latest sonar can scan a suspected mine from three different angles in one pass, a process that typically requires multiple sweeps. Advances in artificial intelligence are also enabling more data analysis to be carried out onboard unmanned vessels.

Longer term, the ambition is to deploy groups of unmanned systems that can search for, identify and destroy mines, rather than it being a multi-step process. "That doesn't exist today," said Mark Bock, a retired US Navy captain who is now vice president of business development at Thales' US Navy business. "But it is what all nations are trying to achieve now?"



A formation of Avenger-class mine countermeasure ships and an MH-53E Sea Dragon helicopter assigned to the "Blackhawks" of Helicopter Mine Countermeasures Squadron (HSM) 15 in the Arabian Sea. (Reuters/File Photos)

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# Key Atlantic current could weaken more than expected, study finds

By Antoine Agasse  
AFP

A key Atlantic Ocean current system that helps regulate the planet's climate could weaken more than expected by 2100, with potentially devastating consequences worldwide, a new study has found.

Known as Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC), this conveyor belt of currents plays a crucial role in redistributing heat by transporting warmer waters from the tropics northward.

An AMOC collapse could lead to harsher winters in northern Europe, droughts in South Asia and the Sahel region in Africa, and higher sea levels

in North America, among other consequences.

Previous climate model projections have estimated an average slowdown of around 32% by the end of the century due to climate change.

The latest study, published on Wednesday in the journal *Science Advances*, estimates that the system could slow by 51% by 2100 under a mid-range scenario for greenhouse gas emissions, with a margin of error of plus or minus eight percentage points.

"We obtained an estimate of a future AMOC slowdown that is more severe than we expected," climate scientist Valentin Portmann, the paper's lead author, told AFP. "We are closer to a critical state that is worrying."

Predicting what will happen to AMOC

in the future is a topic of debate in the scientific community.

"There is a kind of consensus on the fact that this circulation will slow down. But there is still quite a bit of debate about the intensity of this slowdown," said Florian Sevellec, research director at the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) in Brest, France.

In its 2021 report, the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) said AMOC will "very likely decline" over this century.

However, the panel of international experts also expressed "medium confidence" that a collapse of AMOC would not take place before 2100.

The latest study, conducted by researchers from the CNRS and the University of Bordeaux in southwest France,

seeks to "refine this estimate of the future slowdown" and "reduce uncertainty", Sevellec said.

While nearly all climate models predict an AMOC slowdown by 2100, the projections range widely: from as little as 3% to as much as 72%, depending on varying emissions scenarios.

Portmann said the new study seeks to narrow that uncertainty using "observational constraints" – a statistical approach that combines real-world observations with results from climate models.

Stefan Rahmstorf, an oceanographer at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK), said the paper showed that pessimistic models "are unfortunately the realistic ones, in that they agree better with observational data".

Rahmstorf, who was not involved in the

study, said that this means AMOC would be so weak by 2100 that it would "very likely" be "on the way to full shutdown".

Fabien Roquet, a physical oceanography professor at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden, said the study was interesting but he cautioned that another team using a similar method reached opposite conclusions last year.

"What is certain, however, is that the climate is warming rapidly," Roquet said. "Whether the AMOC weakens or not, large-scale changes are already underway... and should intensify in the coming decades."

"The debate is not over," said Sevellec, who was also not part of the research team but whose thesis on AMOC was used for the study. "One paper does not settle a scientific debate."

## Irregular border crossings down almost 40% in Q1: Frontex

The number of irregular border crossings into the EU fell by nearly 40% in the first quarter of 2026, compared to the same time period last year, Frontex announced yesterday.

According to the European border agency, "poor weather across the main migratory routes into the European Union was among the key factors behind a continued sharp drop in irregular border crossings".

The number of illegal entries detected had fallen 39% compared with same period last year, "with just over 21,400 crossings recorded", the agency said.

The poor weather conditions contributed to a rising "human cost" of migration, Frontex noted, citing a report by the International Agency for Migration (IOM).

According to the IOM, "nearly 1,000 people have lost their lives in the Mediterranean so far this year".

The Eastern Mediterranean was the busiest route, accounting for about one-third of all irregular entries into the EU, Frontex said, adding that the Western Africa route recorded the steepest decline, with a drop of 83%.

A drop of 58% was seen at the land borders in Eastern Europe.

The Western Mediterranean route is the only one to have recorded an increase – of 66%.

"Attempts detected on exit towards the UK across the Channel, which include both those who reached the UK and those prevented from leaving, fell 41%", Frontex noted.

Despite the recent decreases, the agency warned that "the situation in the Middle East risks fueling displacement in the region in the coming months".

However, they said that "so far, this has not had a noticeable effect on the migratory situation at the EU's external borders".

Frontex clarified that their data refer to the number of detections of irregular crossings of the EU's external borders, and that the same person may cross the border several times at different points. – AFP

# Tens of thousands rally in Lisbon against planned labour reforms

Reuters/AFP  
Lisbon

Tens of thousands of people protested in Lisbon yesterday against the government's planned labour reforms, which unions say would erode workers' rights and deepen job insecurity by making outsourcing easier and curbing payable overtime.

Prime Minister Luis Montenegro's minority conservative government has been trying for months to get employer groups and unions to agree a compromise on the reform, without success.

If the talks yield nothing "in the next few days", the administration will submit its bill to the parliament for a vote, Labour Minister Maria do Rosario Palma Ramalho said on Thursday.

For the legislation to pass, it would need the support of either the left-wing Socialist opposition, or the far-right Chega party, both of which strongly criticised the measures when they were presented last year.

The bill also includes a broadening of the conditions under which strikes must be curbed to allow "minimum service" in various sectors to continue.

The minority centre-right government approved a draft bill in September to amend the labour code, aiming to tackle structurally low productivity.



A man watches a demonstration in Lisbon called by CGTP union against a government plan to reform labour laws. – AFP

However, it triggered the country's first general strike in more than a decade in December, with unions accusing the government of siding with employers to strip rights from low-paid workers struggling with rising living costs.

Portugal's largest union, CGTP, said "many tens of thousands" occupied the capital's main avenue, while police gave no estimate on the number of demonstrators.

Ines Branco, a 33-year-old shop assistant, said the reforms would harm workers

"in every way" – from making it easier to dismiss staff to reducing time for family life.

She added that none of the changes would improve workers' lives.

"With the cost of living rising, workers are working 40 hours a week and still can't pay the bills at the end of the month, while companies are making millions in profits. This is unacceptable," she said.

The bill is undergoing mandatory consultations with unions and business groups

before being submitted to parliament, where far-right Chega, the largest opposition party, has said it may support it.

Although the government has dropped some fiercely opposed measures – including plans to ease just-cause dismissals – unions say major concerns remain.

They include proposals to lift limits on outsourcing and to create "individual time banks", allowing employees to work up to two hours beyond the eight-hour standard workday without immediate overtime pay, offset later within an annual cap of 150 hours.

"We didn't elect the government or MPs for us to be used as a punching bag," said Vanessa Teixeira, 45, a primary school teacher.

Vitor Paulos, a 62-year-old driver taking part in the protest, called the reform a "threat to jobs and to the right to strike".

Fernanda Jorge, a 55-year-old municipal worker, said: "With rising cost of living, the government is withdrawing essential rights from people who already have a hard time living on their salary".

Portugal is among Western Europe's poorest countries, with official data showing that more than half of workers earn less than €1,000 (\$1,180) a month in gross pay.

Eurostat data put Portugal's labour productivity per hour worked at 80.5% of the EU average, the bloc's fifth-lowest.

## Frenchwoman who married Vietnam war veteran is home after ICE ordeal

A Frenchwoman who moved to the United States to marry a Vietnam war veteran she first met six decades ago returned to France yesterday after she was detained by US immigration authorities, the foreign minister said.

The 85-year-old woman, who was not being named at the family's request, "returned to France this morning, and we are pleased about that", Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot told reporters on a visit to the southern city of Montpellier.

She had moved to Anniston, Alabama in 2025 to marry the former Air Force colonel, and was seeking a green card, which allows people to live and work permanently in the United States.

The couple first met some 60 years earlier when she was working as a bilingual secretary and he was a soldier stationed at a Nato base reportedly in Saint-Nazaire, western France, but according to US media both married other people.

Decades later, after they were both widowed, they reconnected.

According to the *New York Times*, the woman gave up her life in the French city of Nantes and moved to Alabama, where the couple married in April 2025.

However, the American died suddenly in January at the age of 85, throwing her immigration status into uncertainty and leading to her detention by the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE).

US media reports said his death also ignited an inheritance dispute between the woman and his son.

The US Department of Homeland Security told AFP on Tuesday that the woman had been detained on April 1.

She had entered the United States in June 2025 on a tourist visa that allowed her to stay for 90 days.

However, she was still in the United States "seven months later", according to US authorities.

Citing accounts from US neighbours, her son told AFP that his mother was arrested, "handcuffed and shackled". – AFP

## Pakistan power shortages ease with hydro generation

Reuters  
Islamabad/Singapore

Pakistan's power shortages eased from six hours of daily outages to less than three hours, after water releases from dams nearly quadrupled and pushed hydropower output to its highest in days, a spokesperson for the country's power division said yesterday.

Hydropower generation rose to 4,100 megawatts (MW) late on Thursday, from 1,800 MW before the dam releases.

The higher output also eased grid constraints and allowed an additional 400MW to be transmitted from the country's south, the spokesperson said.

The overnight improvement comes after Pakistan's electricity shortfall doubled this week to 3,400MW – about a sixth of total

demand – causing 6-7 hours of outages in parts of northern Pakistan and hitting telecommunications.

The shortfalls were mainly due to a 48% annual decline in hydropower output as provinces had not been asking for water releases from dams due to heavy rains reducing the need for irrigation, Power Minister Awais Leghari told Reuters in an interview on Thursday.

It was not immediately clear what had driven the increased water releases.

Hydropower generation will likely remain high in the coming days as the monsoon crop season gets underway, unless more rains reduce the need for irrigation.

Pakistan, which is trying to mediate an end to the Iran war, expected a minimal impact from a halt to liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports due to the conflict compared with the widespread outages that followed

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

That assessment did not account for the drop in hydropower.

Pakistan has no immediate plans to buy LNG on the spot market, and will instead rely on fuel oil and a recovery in hydropower to ease outages, Leghari said.

After Qatar suspended LNG supplies, Pakistan partly offset shortfalls of up to 2,500MW by running furnace oil plants at full capacity.

"The cargoes to be offloading that LNG and then all the other expenses of the terminal... that easily adds another \$4-\$5 to the spot price. So I think furnace oil might be a little bit cheaper," Leghari said in the interview on Thursday.

"We just disciplined ourselves as a nation to be able to bear the discomfort of it and not let the prices actually push up inflation," he said.

# War with Pakistan halts school for Afghan border children

By Isabelle Wesselingh  
AFP

There are no children in the Afghan border village of Barikot, where the school has been smashed by shells and the playground sits deserted after weeks of war with Pakistan.

Almost all of the 8,000 residents fled after the conflict erupted in late February, but AFP journalists travelled to the remote area of the Hindu Kush just after the road to Barikot reopened this week.

Ruhollah Khpalwak, a shopkeeper whose store was destroyed, stood in the school science lab that was littered with broken glass.

"This is the school where I studied. I feel really sad," said the 23-year-old.

The site had welcomed pupils from primary through to high school, but the complex had extensive damage that residents attributed to Pakistani fire.

Dust covered the abandoned books, while outdated schedules hung on the walls.

The Barikot school is one of 22 in need of urgent reconstruction in Afghanistan's northeastern Kunar province, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).



This photograph taken on April 12 shows Afghan people, who have fled their homes due to the conflict between Pakistani forces and Taliban security personnel along the border, living in temporary tents on the outskirts of Kunar province. – AFP

About 12,000 students displaced or affected by the war need safe spaces to learn or catch up on classes in Afghanistan, the OCHA said in a report this month.

Along Barikot's high street, shops were shut, and some had been reduced to rubble.

Hundreds of civilians were killed in Afghanistan along the border and elsewhere in the country, according to the UN, before China brokered talks that largely halted fighting.

Pakistan's military did not respond to AFP's request to comment on its troops hitting Barikot, including the school and a medical centre.

Islamabad accuses Afghanistan of harbouring militants from the Pakistani Taliban, which has carried out deadly attacks in Pakistan.

Afghan officials deny the allegation.

Asked whether such militants were present in Barikot, several residents, including shopkeeper Khpalwak, told AFP that they did not know.

Faridoon Habibi, a pharmacist at the village hospital, said the situation "became very difficult" and staff were moved several kilometres away for their safety.

"This hospital was like my home," the 32-year-old said at the

facility, which remains closed after being damaged.

The pharmacist referred to those across the border in Pakistan as brothers; the Pashtun communities have been divided for decades by a frontier drawn during the British colonial era.

Barikot residents blamed Islamabad – not their neighbours – for the violence.

More than 94,000 Afghans have been displaced by the war, OCHA figures show, more than a quarter of them in Kunar province.

Thousands of them have settled along the banks of the Kunar River, living in makeshift tents made with UN tarpaulins, hessian sacks or pieces of plastic tied to tree branches.

It takes more than an hour to collect water from the nearest well because the river water is not drinkable.

Asmatullah Malangzay, a displaced computer technician, said life was tough in the camp.

"Our women have faced many problems," said the 26-year-old, who lives in a tent with his wife and three children.

"It's very difficult for them, because we don't have a proper toilet system here. We don't have enough water or a place for bathing," he told AFP.

Malangzay and his family had

# Amir attends opening of Antalya Diplomacy Forum 2026

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"No matter how deep the disagreements may be, we must not allow words to be replaced again by weapons," he said, adding that "the shortest cut to peace is constructive dialogue and diplomacy". Erdogan stressed the importance of ensuring freedom of navigation based on established rules and keeping the Strait of Hormuz open to commercial vessels. He emphasised the need to effectively capitalise on the opportunity presented by the ceasefire between the US, Israel, and Iran to establish lasting peace. He welcomed this step, which he believes should be used to establish lasting peace in the region. Iran announced hours earlier the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz to navigation, a move welcomed by Washington and considered a step towards easing the escalating tensions in the region. More than 150 countries are taking part in the gathering, including more than 20 heads of state and government.



## Calling all history buffs!

Growing number of museums and art galleries in Qatar celebrating human creativity

By Ayman Adly  
Staff Reporter

Qatar is home to a growing number of public and private museums and art galleries, showcasing extensive collections that reflect local, regional, and international human creativity across different eras and perspectives, giving enthusiasts a unique opportunity to explore the various trends of art and its history. The first museum to open in Qatar is the Qatar National Museum, inaugurated on June 23, 1975 and it is widely recognised as the first major museum and culture institution in the Gulf Region. However, the Kuwait National Museum (1957) and the Bahrain National Museum (1970), predate it. It was housed in the restored Old Amiri Palace in Doha, which was the former residence of Sheikh Abdullah bin Jassim al-Thani, and was awarded the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 1980. The current National Museum of Qatar is built on the same place and was opened in March 2019 with its unique architectural design that reflects the local heritage, the desert-rose. The public museums include the Museum of Islamic Art, inaugurated in November 2008, Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, founded in 2010, 3-2-1 Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum, opened for the Public in March 2022, and Msheireb Museums, opened for the public in January 2016, among others. Msheireb Museums are a collection of four historic heritage houses in the heart of Msheireb Downtown Doha that explore Qatar's cultural and socio-economic history. These restored houses, Bin Jelmood House, Company House, Mohammed Bin Jassim House, and Radwani House, blend traditional Qatari architecture with modern,



Sections of the reimagined Museum of Islamic Art. PICTURES: Thajudheen

interactive storytelling through the display of various artefacts, documents, images, artworks and audiovisual presentations. These display huge collections of diversified work of art, in addition to hosting some temporary specialised exhibitions. Further, The Lawh Wa Qalam: M. F. Husain Museum is a dedicated institution in Doha that celebrates the life and work of the legendary Indian modernist artist Maqbool Fida Husain. Located within Qatar Foundation's Education City and open for the public, the museum houses a collection of over 150 works. The building's design is itself is considered a piece of art, based on a 2008 sketch by Husain and realised by architect Martand Khosla. Other specialised museums that are set to be completed in the coming years include Dadu, Children's Museum of Qatar with Dadu's Garden open for visit, Art Mill Museum, Lusail Museum and Qatar Auto Museum. Besides, there are a considerable number



of unique private museums across the country that includes Sheikh Faisal Bin Qassim Al Thani Museum, which is considered one of the world's largest private museums. It is located in Al Sheehaniya and hosts an estimate of 40,000 artefacts collected by HE Sheikh Faisal over 50 years, with a huge collection of over 600 vintage and antique cars, trucks, motorcycles and steam engines, in addition to the wide collection of art works and artefacts that focus on local, Islamic and

world heritage. Besides, Sheikh Faisal Oriental Carpet Museum, located in the West Bay Doha, showcases more than 500 unique and exquisite carpets from Iran, Turkiye, India and others with some dating back to the 17th century. Similarly ENK Farm – Museum Classic Cars is a private farm and automotive museum located in Wadi Al Jahiliya, with a collection of rare vintage vehicles, muscle cars, and utility vehicles housed in a unique garage-style setup, in addition to offering visitors a



The Museum of Islamic Art.



A section of the reimagined Museum of Islamic Art. Supplied picture

look into Qatar traditional farm life with related artefacts and tools. Another privately owned museum and open to the public as well is the Museum of Illusions, located in The Gate Mall in West Bay. It is an interactive "edutainment" destination featuring over 80 exhibits based on science, mathematics, and psychology, with a design that challenge perception through gravity-defying rooms, optical illusions, and holograms. Further, OIIOI Doha, is an interactive, experiential children's museum and indoor play located in the Cultural Village Katara, with over 45 hands-on exhibits spread across six themed galleries. In the meantime, there an estimate of over 50 private and public art

active galleries in the country that hosts exhibitions for various schools of art and fosters creativity through hosting the works of local, regional and international artists on regular basis. These include for instance Souq Waqif Art Center, Fire Station: Artists in Residence, M7 for Design, Qatar Museum Gallery Al Riwaq, Al Markhiya Gallery – Katara, Katara Art Center, Katara Art Studios and others. All public museums are open for free for Qatar residents and they open host specialised exhibitions that shed light on different civilisations and cultures, promoting global culture exchange and mutual understanding among different people.

## Sustainability in fashion moves from concept to practice in Qatar's evolving creative scene

By Shaima Sheriff  
Staff Reporter

Sustainability in Qatar's fashion sector is shifting from concept to action, as designers and platforms like Sustainable Futures highlight practical approaches to responsible fashion and changing consumer mindsets.

Sustainability in fashion is increasingly moving beyond theory in Qatar, as designers and industry platforms begin translating ideas into tangible practices that challenge traditional models of production and consumption.

At the Sustainable Futures event held at Doha Festival City, the focus extended beyond showcasing collections to exploring how sustainability is being applied in real terms across the creative sector. Bringing together designers, organisers, and audiences, the initiative highlighted a broader shift in mindset within Qatar's fashion ecosystem.

Rather than presenting a single definition of sustainable fashion,



the event revealed a diverse and evolving landscape, where designers are approaching sustainability through different, often personal, methods. For some, sustainability begins with reducing production and re-thinking material use. Stephanie Bourland, founder of GIGEEZ, centres her work on repurposing existing textiles.

"Sustainability is really at the heart of my brand," she said. "I take deadstock saris and regenerate them into beautiful dresses... it's about not producing, but regenerating the existing."

Her approach reflects a growing movement within the industry that challenges constant production, placing emphasis instead on reuse as a creative and environ-



mental solution.

Others are addressing sustainability through longevity and adaptability. Husnaa Malik, founder of Sewn Threads, focuses on designing garments that can be worn across multiple environments and seasons.

"The biggest thing for me is transitional pieces," she said. "Pieces you can wear in Qatar,

when you travel... year-round."

For Malik, sustainability is closely tied to individual responsibility. "We are in charge of the future... it's our carbon footprint and the decisions that we make that make a difference tomorrow and for our children," she added.

These differing approaches underscore a key reality: sustainable fashion is not a fixed formula. In-

stead, it is shaped by individual priorities, creative direction, and the practical limitations designers face.

"I think we can't do it all... it's up to each one to choose their battle," Bourland noted, reflecting the complexity of balancing creativity, innovation, and environmental responsibility.

Beyond design itself, the event also highlighted the evolving role of retail spaces in shaping conversations around sustainability. Increasingly, such platforms are moving beyond commercial activity to facilitate dialogue, awareness, and engagement with wider audiences.

Organisers emphasised that initiatives like Sustainable Futures aim to bridge the gap between designers and consumers, creating opportunities for both visibility and behavioural change.

"This initiative encourages the community to adopt more mindful lifestyle choices, where style and sustainability go hand in hand," said Mohamed El-Sharkawy, associate director – malls leasing at Doha Festival City.