



## Deputy PM meets Italian defence minister



HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Sheikh Saoud bin Abdulrahman bin Hassan bin Ali al-Thani met yesterday with Italy's Minister of Defence Guido Crosetto and his delegation, during their visit to Qatar. The meeting, attended by senior officers from both sides, discussed the latest developments and security updates in the region, as well as aspects of defence co-operation and joint co-ordination in light of the current circumstances. - **QNA**

## Minister meets Mauritanian ambassador



HE the Minister of State for Interior Affairs Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Faisal bin Mohammed al-Thani met yesterday with Mauritania's ambassador to Qatar Mohamed Mohamed Abdullah Bebane. During the meeting, co-operation and relations between the countries in the security fields were reviewed, and ways to strengthen and develop them were discussed, in addition to addressing topics of mutual interest. - **QNA**

## Environment minister meets ambassador of Georgia

HE the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Dr Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki al-Subaie met yesterday with Georgia's ambassador to Qatar Varlam Avaliani. During the meeting, they discussed opportunities for co-operation between the two countries in the fields of environment, in addition to topics of mutual interest. - **QNA**



## Weekly insulin dose for type 2 diabetes to be available soon in Qatar

Medical experts have underscored the significance of a newly approved treatment for type 2 diabetes, a long-acting insulin administered once weekly instead of through daily injections, describing it as a major step forward in disease management. This innovation follows extensive clinical trials and rigorous scientific reviews that demonstrated its effectiveness in improving blood glucose control.

According to the physicians, the drug, which has received approval from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), could mark a turning point in how millions of patients worldwide manage diabetes.

They noted that modern the approaches to chronic disease treatment are no longer limited to reducing biological markers alone, but increasingly focus on simplifying treatment routines and easing the daily burden on patients.

They pointed out that this shift plays a key role in improving adherence and enhancing the overall quality of life.

The doctors also revealed that the medication is expected to be introduced in the Qatar market in the coming months.

They stressed that incorporating such therapies expands available treatment options, supports better diabetes management, and contributes to improving the overall quality of healthcare services.

Qatar Diabetes Association (QDA) executive director Dr Abdullah al-Hamaq described the weekly insulin as "a true breakthrough in the treatment of type 2 diabetes".

He said that reducing injections from seven times a week to just once could significantly improve patient adherence to treatment while alleviating both psychological and physical burdens, particularly for elderly patients and those who struggle with conventional routines.

In the meantime time, Dr al-Hamaq stressed the importance of using the treatment under a specialised medical supervision due to variations in individual cases.

Dr Ghassan Homs, consultant in Endocrinology and Diabetes, said that this type of insulin provides stable blood glucose coverage throughout an entire week, thanks to its slow and steady release mechanism in the body.

"This reduces sharp fluctuations in blood sugar levels and offers patients greater stability," he said, adding that clinical studies have shown it can achieve results comparable to, or even better than, daily treatments.

However, Dr Homs cautioned about certain challenges, including the difficulty of rapidly adjusting doses and the potential risk of hypoglycaemia in some patients.

Dr Abdulhaq al-Nuaimi, consultant in Internal Medicine, stressed that the importance of this innovation extends beyond its clinical benefits to reshaping the relationship between patients and their treatment.

He pointed out that reducing the number of doses helps mitigate what is known as "treatment fatigue", which in turn positively affects patient adherence and response, particularly given the complexity of treatment protocols for individuals with chronic conditions.

# CCQ, QSC sign MoU to boost innovation, co-operation

The Community College of Qatar (CCQ) and the Qatar Scientific Club (QSC) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) yesterday aimed at strengthening joint co-operation in the fields of technical training, vocational qualification, and the exchange of scientific and technical expertise.

The agreement supports innovation, advances the knowledge-based economy, and aligns with the objectives of Qatar National Vision 2030, particularly in developing human capital and empowering youth.

The MoU was signed by CCQ vice-president for Academic Affairs Dr Abdullah Khalid al-Ali and QSC deputy director Eng. Abdulrahman Saleh Khamis, in the presence of officials from both sides.

The agreement stipulates co-operation in providing technical consultations, exchanging scientific expertise, involving students

in research programmes and scientific projects, supporting joint initiatives and events, and facilitating students' access to the club's facilities while enhancing their participation in scientific and volunteer activities.

Dr al-Ali affirmed in a speech that this partnership represents a qualitative addition to the college's efforts in empowering students and providing an educational environment that combines theoretical knowledge with practical application.

Khamis described the MoU as a strategic step to enhance integration between educational and scientific institutions.

He said the QSC is committed to supporting initiatives that contribute to developing youth skills and advancing their scientific and technical capabilities through high-quality programmes that keep pace with global developments. - **QNA**



## Joint exhibition showcases Qatari, Egyptian artistic dialogue

Al Markhiya Gallery has opened a joint exhibition featuring works by prominent Qatari artist Yousef Ahmed and late Egyptian artist Hazem

El Mestikawy at the Fire Station: Artists' Residence.

The exhibition presents 15 works by Ahmed and 12 by El Mestikawy, with both artists

drawing inspiration from the natural world as a central element of their practice.

Ahmed told the Qatar News Agency (QNA) that his work focuses on reinterpreting Qatari palm fronds as a versatile artistic medium, using handmade paper, pulp, and collage techniques.

He described the material as dynamic and evolving, enabling continuous experimentation and transformation.

His works on display span from 2013-2025, reflecting earthy tones inspired by the Qatari environment, alongside later pieces incorporating Arabic calligraphy and textured paper surfaces.

Curator Anas Quteit stated that the exhibition highlights a visual harmony between the two artists through their shared use of natural materials.



He said El Mestikawy's works explore spatial relationships influenced by architecture, geometry, and design, blending elements of sculpture and optical illusion.

Quteit added that El Mestikawy's practice draws on ancient

Egyptian heritage and contemporary abstraction, reinterpreting traditional elements such as mashrabiyas and geometric patterns into contemplative visual structures, often using cardboard to create balanced and rhythmic compositions.

## Improved customs clearance for personal imports ready

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The MoU commits Qatar Aviation Services to conducting clearance operations in line with approved regulations, upholding fair competition and non-monopolisation principles, maintaining transparency in service pricing, and sharing relevant data through electronic systems in full compliance with customs laws.

Both sides will jointly monitor the implementation of clearance procedures, conduct periodic performance assessments, and produce reports to support decision-making and drive continued service improvements.

## Illegal disposal of waste detected

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC) has spotted an environmental violation involving the illegal disposal of waste in a non-designated area of the desert, coinciding with the official conclusion of the winter camping season.

The Land Protection Department confirmed that field monitoring and inspection teams have successfully identified the violation and took all necessary legal measures, referring the case to the competent authorities. The ministry stressed that such behaviour constitutes a clear breach of environmental protection laws and undermines ongoing efforts to preserve the cleanliness of meadows and open desert areas.



## Ministry opens application for financial support for wooden ships

The Ministry of Municipality, represented by the Fisheries Department, has announced the opening of applications for financial support for eligible wooden marine vessel owners for the year 2026.

The ministry said that applications will be accepted until May 13 this year, in accordance with the specified requirements, stressing that no submissions will be received after the stated deadline.

The initiative is aimed at supporting traditional maritime activities and assist boat owners in sustaining their operations within the sector.

To benefit from this initiative, the eligible applicant will receive support for one ship for each owner, and in case of the new ships, the owner has to submit a proof of having a dedicated parking lot for the ship.

As for the fishing vessels, these have to maintain at least 24 trips a year to be eligible for receiving support.

## Israeli fire kills at least five in Gaza, West Bank

Israeli airstrikes killed at least four Palestinians in Gaza on yesterday, and Israeli soldiers shot and killed a 15-year-old during an army raid in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, Palestinian health officials said.

One person was killed in a strike in southern Gaza's Khan Younis in which several others were wounded, local medics said.

Israel's military said it had targeted militants transporting munitions, who it said had posed a threat to Israeli soldiers.

Three others, including a rescue worker, were killed in a separate strike in Maghazi, a Palestinian refugee camp in the Deir al Balah area in central Gaza, health officials said.

Israel has carried out repeated strikes on Gaza since a US-brokered ceasefire came into effect in October.

Four Israeli soldiers and more than 780 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza since the ceasefire started.

At Gaza City's Al Shifa Hospital, the territory's largest medical facility, relatives stood among mourners gathered to bury five people, including three children, who were killed on Wednesday in an Israeli airstrike on a northern Gaza town.

"There is no ceasefire, no truce, nothing at all," said Mohammed Baalousha, a relative of one of the victims.

In the West Bank city of Nablus, health officials said Israeli forces shot and killed a teenager during an ongoing raid in the city.

The Palestinian health ministry said in a statement that "15-year-old Youssef Sameh Shtayyeh was killed by the (Israeli) occupation's gunfire in Nablus", in the north of the West Bank. - Reuters/AFP

## Khamenei 'gravely wounded' but 'mentally sharp': Times

Iran's new supreme leader Mojtaba Khamenei was seriously wounded in the US-Israeli airstrike that killed his father and predecessor Ali Khamenei but is mentally sharp, the *New York Times* reported yesterday.

Citing several Iranian officials which it did not name, the *Times* said Mojtaba Khamenei had "at least for now" delegated decision-making to generals in the Revolutionary Guards ideological army.

Mojtaba Khamenei has not appeared in public since succeeding his father and only issued written statements, creating speculation over his condition and if he is still alive.

Although Mojtaba Khamenei was "gravely wounded (in the February 28 airstrike), he is mentally sharp and engaged", said the *Times*.

"One leg was operated on three times, and he is awaiting a prosthetic. He had surgery on one hand and is slowly regaining function. His face and lips have been burned severely, making it difficult for him to speak," it cited the officials as saying, adding that "eventually, he will need plastic surgery".

Access for security reasons is extremely limited to Khamenei, who remains in hiding, with only handwritten messages passed on, it said.

Guards commanders do not visit him but President Masoud Pezeshkian, who is also a heart surgeon, has been involved in his care, it said. - AFP

## Qatar's humanitarian response, emergency interventions undiminished despite prevailing regional challenges

Qatar has continued to deliver urgent humanitarian assistance to affected countries despite significant regional disruptions, including transport constraints, air traffic disruptions, and wider logistical challenges linked to ongoing crises, according to humanitarian officials.

Qatar Charity (QC) and the Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) maintained the implementation of planned Ramadan relief programs through co-ordinated regional offices and pre-established contingency planning, ensuring aid reached vulnerable populations without major interruption.

QRCS Secretary-General Eng. Ibrahim bin Hashim al-Sada stated that the organisation's long-standing field experience and extensive partnerships enabled it to operate effectively in complex crisis environments.

He told the Qatar News Agency (QNA) that proactive planning ahead of Ramadan allowed most relief projects to proceed as scheduled across multiple countries.

Al-Sada added that despite logistical difficulties, including disruptions to supply chains and shipping constraints, the QRCS continued key interventions such as Ramadan Iftar programmes in Lebanon and timely delivery of Eid clothing assistance to Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Jordan.

However, he acknowledged that some operations were delayed, particularly



Ibrahim bin Hashim al-Sada



Yousef bin Ahmed al-Kuwari

medical aid convoys bound for Sudan, where three shipments eventually arrived late, while a fourth was delayed due to current conditions.

The official also pointed to ongoing access challenges in Gaza, stating that border closures and restrictions have significantly slowed the delivery of humanitarian supplies, with some planned aid still arriving in insufficient quantities to meet needs.

Al-Sada emphasised that QRCS field teams, operating across 12 countries, continue to adapt programmes in co-ordination with humanitarian partners to overcome logistical barriers.

He highlighted ongoing projects in countries including Yemen, Palestine, Syria, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and Niger, stressing that operations remain largely stable despite constraints.

Al-Sada noted that worsening humani-

tarian conditions in Lebanon have required continuous adjustments to aid programmes based on field assessments, with priorities regularly reassessed to ensure effective and responsive assistance.

The official stated that the organisation plays a central humanitarian role as a supporting arm of the State of Qatar, operating under a clear strategic vision, structured operational plans, and experienced field teams backed by extensive local and international partnerships.

The QRCS, al-Sada said, remains committed to humanitarian principles and hopes for an early resolution to ongoing crises to ensure safe and effective aid delivery.

Meanwhile, QC chief executive Yousef bin Ahmed al-Kuwari stated that the organisation implemented its Ramadan campaign "Good Starts With You" across 43 countries, reaching approximately

3.85mn beneficiaries, despite regional instability.

He told the QNA that the campaign included seasonal aid programmes such as Iftar meals, Zakat al-Fitr, and Eid clothing, alongside development projects in housing, mosque construction, Qur'an centres, water projects, and economic empowerment initiatives.

He also highlighted emergency interventions for refugees and displaced communities, including Rohingya, Somali, Chadian, Afghan, and Yemeni populations.

Al-Kuwari added that the organisation launched medical initiatives, including cardiac surgeries for children and blindness treatment campaigns in several countries during Ramadan.

He attributed the success of these programmes to early preparation before Ramadan, advance contracting, and co-ordinated implementation through 34 field offices and local partners, including procurement from local markets to support host economies.

The official also noted adjustments to domestic programmes in Qatar in line with safety guidelines, including delivering Iftar meals to workers instead of hosting communal tents.

Additionally, he highlighted the introduction of a smart electronic voucher system to efficiently deliver assistance to low-income families while preserving privacy. - QNA

# Lebanon leaders accuses Israel of war crime after journalist's death

AFP/Reuters  
Beirut

Lebanon's leaders have accused Israel of committing a war crime, after an airstrike killed a Lebanese journalist in the country's south, with the Israeli army saying it was reviewing the incident.

Rescuers and the reporter's employer on Wednesday confirmed the death of Amal Khalil, a 42-year-old journalist who worked for the Lebanese daily *\*Al-Akhbar*.

The civil defence agency said she was killed in a strike on a house in the village of Al-Tiri.

"Israel deliberately targets journalists in order to conceal the truth about its crimes against Lebanon," said President Joseph Aoun, in a statement denouncing "war crimes".

Prime Minister Nawaf Salam wrote on X that "targeting journalists and obstructing access for rescue teams constitutes a war crime", adding that his government would take the case to international bodies.

When contacted by AFP yesterday, an Israeli army spokesperson said "the incident is still under review".

A 10-day ceasefire has been in effect in Lebanon since last Friday, pausing the war between Israel and Iran-backed Hezbollah that has left more than 2,400 dead in Lebanon.

Khalil and another journalist had taken refuge in a house in Al-Tiri after an Israeli airstrike targeted a car in front of them, according to Lebanon's National News Agency (NNA).

It said the two occupants of the vehicle, the mayor of the nearby Israeli-occupied town of Bint Jbeil and a man with him, were killed.

An Israeli strike then targeted the house where the two journalists had taken refuge.

The health ministry said the attack wounded journalist Zeinab Faraj - who was taken to hospital - and left Khalil trapped.

A Lebanese Red Cross official told AFP that they had "managed to rescue Zeinab Faraj" but



were unable to reach Khalil and withdrew "because of a warning strike".

Lebanese authorities had to contact UN peacekeepers deployed in southern Lebanon, and it took several hours before rescue workers could regain access to the area to recover the journalist's body from the rubble.

The health ministry accused Israel yesterday of "obstructing rescue operations" and "targeting an ambulance clearly bearing the Red Cross symbol".

The Israeli military said in a statement on Wednesday that it had "identified two vehicles in southern Lebanon that had departed from a military structure used by Hezbollah".

The air force then struck a vehicle carrying "terrorists", it said, who had crossed what Israel calls the "forward defence line" in southern Lebanon and approached its troops.

Israel says it has established a "yellow line" deep into southern Lebanon where its troops have been posted, stopping residents from returning.

Its army denied preventing rescue teams from "accessing the area".

Rights groups have condemned Israel's repeated killing of press workers, while journalists held a protest in downtown Beirut to commemorate Khalil ahead of her funeral in her hometown of Baysariyeh in southern Lebanon.

Mourners hold portraits of Lebanese journalist Amal Khalil during her funeral procession in Bissariye town, south of Sidon. - AFP

Right: Late journalist Amal Khalil, who was killed in an Israeli strike, is pictured in this still image obtained from a handout video. - Reuters



countable, Israel would not have continued killing journalists one after another.

The US was meanwhile due to host a second meeting between Lebanese and Israeli envoys, with Beirut seeking the extension of a ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah.

The US-mediated ceasefire, which is set to expire on Sunday, has yielded a significant reduction in violence, but attacks have continued in southern Lebanon, where Israeli troops have seized a self-declared buffer zone.

Iran-backed Hezbollah says it has "the right to resist" occupying forces.

Hezbollah lawmaker Hassan Fadlallah said the group wanted the ceasefire to continue but "on the basis of full compliance by the Israeli enemy".

At a televised press conference, he reiterated Hezbollah's objections to the face-to-face talks and urged the government to cancel all forms of direct contact with Israel.

Hostilities between Hezbollah and Israel reignited on March 2,

when the group opened fire in support of Iran in the regional war.

The ceasefire in Lebanon emerged separately from Washington's efforts to resolve its conflict with Tehran, though Iran had called for Lebanon to be included in any broader truce.

Nearly 2,500 people have been killed in Lebanon since Israel went on the offensive following Hezbollah's March 2 attack, according to Lebanese authorities.

Lebanese President Aoun has said that Beirut's envoy to the talks in Washington, Lebanese ambassador to the US Nada Moawad, would seek a ceasefire extension and a halt to demolitions by Israel in villages in the south.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio is set to attend the meeting. Israel will be represented by its ambassador to Washington, Yechiel Leiter.

Rubio hosted the first meeting between Leiter and Moawad on April 14 - the highest-level contact between Lebanon and Israel in decades.

## Clearing Hormuz Strait mines could take six months: report

A Pentagon assessment said it could take six months to completely clear the Strait of Hormuz of Iranian-laid mines, which could keep oil prices high, the *Washington Post* reported on Wednesday.

Iran has all but blocked the vital waterway since the start of a war with the United States and Israel, sharply driving up oil and gas prices and disrupting the global economy.

The strait - through which one-fifth of the world's oil and gas passes in peacetime - has remained largely closed during a shaky ceasefire, with the US imposing its own blockade.

Even if hostilities end and the blockade lifts, it could take months to clear the waterway of mines, according to a Pentagon assessment, the *Washington Post* reported citing officials close to the discussion.

The assessment added that it was unlikely such an operation would begin before the end of the war.

The six-month estimate was shared with

members of the House Armed Services Committee during a classified briefing, the *Post* reported.

Lawmakers were told that Iran may have placed 20 or more mines in and around the strait, some floated remotely using GPS technology which makes them harder to detect, according to the report.

"A six-month closure of the Strait of Hormuz is an impossibility and completely unacceptable to the Secretary," Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell said in a statement shared with AFP denying the report.

Parnell said the *Post* report was based on a "classified, closed briefing" but much of the information was "false".

Iran's Revolutionary Guards have warned of a "danger zone" covering 1,400sq km - 14 times the size of Paris - where mines may be present.

Iran's parliament speaker said the Islamic republic would not reopen the strait as long as the US naval blockade remained.

A spokesman for German transportation giant Hapag-Lloyd cautioned last week that shippers needed details on viable routes as they remain fearful of mines.

When the Hormuz strait briefly reopened at the start of the ceasefire this month, only a few ships trickled through amid concerns about attacks or mines.

Earlier in April, the US Navy said its ships transited the waterway to begin removing the mines, but that claim was denied by Iran's Revolutionary Guard, which threatened any military vessels attempting to cross the channel.

London hosted talks with military planners from over 30 countries starting Wednesday on a UK and France-led multinational mission to protect navigation in the Strait of Hormuz once hostilities end.

The "defensive" coalition is set to discuss plans to reopen the strait and conduct mine clearance operations.



This screen grab taken from a screen recording of the Marine Traffic website on April 21 shows data visualisation of maritime traffic in the Gulf, Strait of Hormuz and Gulf of Oman from April 18-20, amid a fragile US-Iran truce. - AFP



The Iran war has exposed Africa's vulnerability to fuel chokepoints and is heading for an 86mn tonne fuel shortfall by 2040, the Africa Finance Corporation (AFC) said yesterday.

Africa imports more than 70% of its refined fuel and some \$230bn worth of essential goods, including food, plastics, steel, and fertiliser each year, the AFC said in a report released at a Nairobi summit.

One possible part of the solution was announced at the summit where Africa's richest man, Aliko Dangote, told Kenya's William Ruto and Uganda's Yoweri Museveni that he would build a refinery in east Africa similar to his huge complex in Nigeria.

"I can give commitment to the two

## 'Africa faces 86mn tonne fuel shortfall by 2040'

presidents that are here: If they will support the refinery, we'll build the identical one that we have in Nigeria - 650,000 barrels," Dangote told the audience.

Africa's dependence on fuel imports will continue to rise from 74mn tonnes in 2023 to 86mn tonnes in 2040, the AFC, a Pan-African organisation that helps fund and develop infrastructure, said in its report.

That is equivalent to almost three of Dangote's Nigeria refinery - by far the biggest in Africa.

East Africa's vulnerability to supply shocks has been particularly exposed by

the conflict in the Middle East and the resulting block on oil traffic through the Strait of Hormuz.

Ruto told the summit that the war showed the need for Africa to stop relying on outsiders.

"Our ambitions will remain unrealised if we continue to depend on external capital whose primary interest is securing raw materials for their own industries," said the Kenyan president. "We cannot continue to export raw materials and import finished products made from them."

Kenya last year announced an infrastructure splurge, including 50 new hy-

droelectric dams and 10,000MW of additional power generation within seven years, as well as plans to revamp roads, rail and airports.

"While historical injustices from colonialism to inequities in the global economic order are real, we must also acknowledge that other regions have faced similar challenges, but they have risen above them," Ruto said. "We are constrained only by the extent that we accept the status quo through acquiescence, complacency, and limited ambition."

Fixing Africa's energy shortfall requires new hubs and better performance from

existing assets, the AFC report said.

AFC's chief economist Rita Babihuga-Nsanze highlighted the example of Zambian dams that were not designed to cope with new drought conditions, and 2GW of Angolan hydropower that was not connected to the regional grid and therefore went to waste.

She also spoke of the fertiliser shortages caused by the war, since a high proportion comes from the Gulf.

Such vulnerabilities are "strange", said Babihuga-Nsanze: Africa has 80% of the world's phosphate reserves - a key fertiliser source - yet only produces 20% of the global stock.

"There's a real opportunity for Africa to step in the gap here," she said. - AFP

## South Africa suspends police chief over corruption case

Reuters/AFP  
Johannesburg

South Africa's president suspended the country's police chief on yesterday over allegations that he broke public finance rules in the irregular awarding of a 228mn-rand (\$13.8mn) tender.

Fannie Masemola, the National Commissioner of the South African Police Service, has denied the charges, which prosecutors laid after revelations at a national corruption inquiry.

Other people charged over the contract include businessman Vusumuzi Matlala, whose company Medicare24 won it.

Matlala and 15 others stand accused of corruption, fraud and money laundering. They have not yet entered pleas in court.

President Cyril Ramaphosa has appointed Puleg Dimphe as acting police chief while Masemola is on a precautionary suspension.

Dimphe has been serving as the police service's divisional commissioner for financial management services.

"These measures have been necessary to ensure accountability and to devise remedial action to



Fannie Masemola

prevent the abuse of office and the theft of public resources," Ramaphosa told a press conference.

Prosecutors allege Medicare24 colluded with police officials to secure the tender to provide health services to the police.

Matlala received payments of just over 50mn rand before the contract was cancelled.

Masemola, who is accused of violating the Public Finance Management Act, has been in charge of the day-to-day running of the police since 2022.

Prosecutors allege he failed to comply with required financial oversight and procurement controls.



Cyril Ramaphosa

The Medicare24 contract has been one of the focal points of the Madlanga Commission, which is investigating allegations that criminal syndicates infiltrated parts of South Africa's law-enforcement and criminal justice system.

The Madlanga Commission was set up in July after a senior police official alleged corruption and political interference had compromised criminal investigations.

Ramaphosa put police minister Senzo Mchunu on a leave of absence when he established the inquiry last year.

Mchunu has denied guilt, calling

corruption allegations against him baseless.

The case adds to a slew of corruption scandals that have eroded public trust in South Africa's ruling coalition, ahead of local government elections in which its handling of graft could sway voter sentiment.

Matlala shot to national prominence after a regional police chief accused the force and South Africa's police minister of dabbling in criminality.

The allegations triggered the minister's removal from office and a formal commission of inquiry was set up by the president, turning the saga into a national spectacle.

Broadcast daily on television and radio, the hearings of the Madlanga commission have been closely followed by South Africans.

Matlala was arrested in May last year in connection with the 2023 attempt on his ex-partner Tebogo Thobejane's life.

His name had already surfaced in a hospital scandal, in which more than 2.2bn rand (\$129mn) was allegedly siphoned off.

The Tembisa hospital case cost whistleblower Babita Deokaran her life in 2021, when she was shot nine times outside her home.

## Tanzania inquiry says at least 518 killed in last year's election violence

Reuters/AFP  
Nairobi

At least 518 people were killed in violence that broke out during Tanzania's elections last October, a government-appointed commission of inquiry said yesterday, in the first official acknowledgment of the scale of the deadly unrest.

The commission, however, placed the blame for the violence with the protesters, infuriating the government's opponents, who accused it of bias.

The UN human rights office estimated last year that hundreds were killed in violence driven by the exclusion of leading opposition candidates from presidential and parliamentary elections.

The main opposition party has said thousands died.

Tanzanian authorities have previously declined to comment on casualty figures, saying that they were awaiting the report of the commission, which President Samia Suluhu Hassan appointed in November.

They have denied allegations by human rights groups that the security services used excessive force.

Speaking at a ceremony to hand over the report to Hassan, commission chair Mohamed Chande Othman said the death toll could be an undercount because of difficulties identifying victims.

He did not pass judgement on the actions of law enforcement, instead recommending that a commission of criminal investigation be formed to probe specific incidents.

Chande said the commission had "indisputable evidence" the violence was planned and funded by "trained people" but did not name them.

"Organisers used various techniques, including using people without deep understanding and desperate youth, while encouraging simultaneous acts of violence across different locations," he said.

Hassan, who was declared the winner of the presidential election with nearly 98% of the vote, has said the protests were an attempt to overthrow her government and received foreign funding, without providing evidence.

The commission's report was not immediately made public and it was not clear whether it would be.



President Hassan receiving the report from Mohamed Chande Othman. - Reuters

In comments at the ceremony, Hassan said the report was "the property of the president".

The main opposition party, Chadema, rejected the commission's work, saying in a statement yesterday that a government accused of carrying out violent abuses cannot investigate itself.

The government report is "an attempt to whitewash the regime's crimes", the main opposition party told AFP yesterday.

"It's all a cover-up actually. Like many other statements that the president has made, the report is all designed to whitewash the regime's crimes," John Kitoka, head of foreign affairs for Chadema, told AFP by phone. "There's nothing new and we expected to be like that."

Chande acknowledged receiving allegations that people were shot in homes and shops, including near a cafe in the northern city of Mwanza.

Reuters reporting found that police officers massacred more than a dozen unarmed young men at the cafe far from any known protest.

Witnesses to other incidents in Mwanza and two other cities also told Reuters they saw officers shoot at people who were not protesting.

The government said at the time that it took concerns about the use of force seriously but that many allegations were based on unverified and out-of-context information.

"Tanzanians are very disappointed. They don't have any trust in these enquiries because the president herself is accused in the process. Why would anyone trust her?" said Chadema's Kitoka.

Commission chair Chande "has completely destroyed whatever reputation he had, he went about lying to Tanzanians saying (protesters) were paid by foreign forces, which is a big lie", he added.

## Sudan refugee crisis 'driving Chad measles, meningitis outbreaks'

AFP/Reuters  
Geneva

Eastern Chad is witnessing a dual outbreak of meningitis and measles, the medical charity Doctors Without Borders (Medecins Sans Frontieres, MSF) said yesterday, with large numbers of refugees crossing in from Sudan.

The civil war in Sudan between the army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has killed tens of thousands of people since April 2023 and displaced more than 12mn people, nearly 1mn of whom have fled to Chad, according to the United Nations.

Chad closed its border with Sudan in February following RSF incursions.

"The continued arrival of refugee families from Sudan, where

measles and meningitis outbreaks are ongoing", is fuelling the surge in meningitis and measles cases in border areas of eastern Chad, said MSF.

"In the camps, overcrowding, limited access to water and health-care, and malnutrition facilitate rapid transmission and increase the risk of severe complications, particularly among children under five."

The organisation said that in Adre, near the border, measles cases had gone up from 16 in January to 371 in March, with 161 cases recorded in the first two weeks of April.

Meningitis cases have gone from 18 in January to 109 in March and 101 by mid-April.

Out of 212 children admitted to MSF facilities with meningitis from March to April, 25 had died, "a shocking case fatality rate", MSF added.



A boy sits atop a hill overlooking a refugee camp near the Chad-Sudan border. - Reuters

"Every day, we see children arriving with severe measles, often complicated by pneumonia, requiring urgent hospitalisation," said Isabelle Kavira, MSF's medical activity manager in Adre. "At the same time, bed occupancy for meningitis is close to 100%, saturating our capacity and compromising care for other conditions."

The medical charity said that over three weeks, Chad's health ministry, with MSF support, had carried out the emergency vacci-

nation of more than 95,500 children against measles and 337,800 people against meningitis.

However, disruptions in the refrigeration needed to preserve vaccine doses and gaps in routine immunisation "leave entire populations exposed", MSF warned.

Without strengthening routine vaccination, "reactive campaigns alone will not be sufficient", it said.

Nearly 1,400km (870 miles) long and located in a desert region, the border between Chad and Sudan is porous and difficult to control.

## Pope ends Africa visit with open-air mass in Equatorial Guinea

AFP/Reuters  
Malabo

Pope Leo XIV held an open-air mass in Equatorial Guinea yesterday in front of tens of thousands of followers, wrapping up his first major international tour that began with harsh criticism of his stance on Iran from US President Donald Trump.

The leader of the world's 1.4bn Catholics has been in the closed-off central African nation since Tuesday, where he took aim at the suppression of civic freedoms and called for prisoners to be better treated in a country infamous for its brutal jails.

On his final day in the oil-rich former Spanish colony of 2mn people, where most of the population lives in poverty, he officiated at a mass before 30,000 people at a stadium in Malabo, the former capital.

He was due to arrive back in Rome about 8pm (1800 GMT).

On the way, he spoke to reporters travelling with him, with his remarks eagerly awaited after Trump's attacks (see accompanying report).

Trump called the US-born Pontiff "very weak on crime and other things" and said he was "wrong" to call for an end to violence in the Iran war, in comments that cast a pall over the early stages of his four-

### Pope defends meeting 'authoritarian' leaders, decries world's treatment of migrants

Pope Leo XIV defended meeting "authoritarian" leaders as he returned yesterday from a trip to Africa, arguing that maintaining diplomatic relations allowed the Vatican to work behind the scenes.

"Sometimes we have diplomatic relationships with countries that have authoritarian leaders," Leo told journalists on the papal plane.

"We have the opportunity to speak with them on a diplomatic level, on a formal level," he added.

"We don't always make great proclamations, criticising, judging or condemning, but there's an awful lot of work that goes on behind the scenes to promote justice, to promote humanitarian causes," the leader of the world's 1.4bn Catholics said.

The Holy See has diplomatic relations with 184 states. By remaining neutral and attempting to foster positive diplomatic relationships, "with at times great sacrifice", the Vatican could try to change "situations so that the lives of people can be improved", Leo said, giving the freeing of political prisoners as an example.

The US-born Pope's comments came as he wrapped up an 11-day trip which took him from Algeria to Cameroon, then on to Angola and Equatorial Guinea.

Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, the world's longest-serving

non-royal head of state, has held onto power in Equatorial Guinea for more than four decades.

Cameroon's President Paul Biya, who has been in power for nearly 43 years, has repressed most political opposition. Already the world's oldest head of state at 93 years of age, he was re-elected for an eighth term in October last year.

The Pope also decried the world's treatment of immigrants, saying that often migrants and refugees seeking to escape violence or poverty are considered "worse than house pets or animals", in unusually strong remarks on the issue.

Leo, who has been a critic of US President Trump's headline immigration policies, called for humane treatment of immigrants. "They are human beings and we have to treat human beings in a humanitarian way and not treat them worse... than house pets or animals," the Pope said.

Leo did not mention any specific country in his remarks on Thursday.

He said that countries have a right to control their borders. He urged richer nations to help develop the countries that migrants are leaving, so they do not feel the need to leave.

"What are richer countries doing to change the situation for poorer countries?" he asked. "And why can't we seek... to change the situations in (those) countries?" - AFP/Reuters

country, 11-day Africa tour.

Leo has warned that the whims of the world's richest threaten peace, decried violations of international law by "neocolonial" global powers, and said the world was "being ravaged by a handful of tyrants".

Leo told Reuters on April 13 that he would keep raising his voice, despite Trump's criticism.

He later clarified to reporters that the speeches for the tour were written weeks ago, and not aimed directly at Trump, and

expressed regret that his speeches were being interpreted as a response to the US leader's criticism.

Yet throughout the trip, from Algeria to Cameroon, then on to Angola and Equatorial Guinea, he piled high his calls for social

justice, peace and respect for human dignity, while denouncing inequality, corruption and the unfair exploitation of natural resources by "tyrants".

His newly forceful style, blasting those who "in the name of profit, continue to lay their hands on the African continent to exploit and plunder it", was a marked departure from the restraint he has shown since he was elected in May last year.

Leaders of the four countries he visited have all been criticised - in varying degrees - for authoritarian tendencies.

Equatorial Guinea, ruled with an iron fist by President Teodoro Obiang Nguema since 1979, has long faced claims of human rights abuses as well as the trampling of civil freedoms.

However, he urged the country to place itself "in the service of law and justice" and condemned "troubling hygienic and sanitary conditions" for prisoners.

On Wednesday, the Pope went to Equatorial Guinea's notorious Bata prison, where he was greeted by hundreds of shaven-headed inmates in the driving rain.

Pope Leo - born Robert Francis Prevost - is at 70 relatively young for a pope and has shown energy that contrasts sharply with the declining health of his Argentinian predecessor, Francis, who died a year ago at 88.

His next trip abroad will be to Spain from June 6-12.

## 113th annual First Lady's Luncheon in Washington



US First Lady Melania Trump (centre) speaks at the 113th annual First Lady's Luncheon at the Washington Hilton yesterday in Washington, DC. The first lady spoke about a variety of topics including her "Foster the Future" initiative and foster care reform. (AFP)

## White House accuses China of industrial-scale theft of AI

By Alexandra Alper and Ruchika Khanna  
Reuters

The White House yesterday accused China of stealing US artificial intelligence (AI) labs' intellectual property on an industrial scale in a memo that threatens to strain relations ahead of a summit between US and Chinese leaders next month.

"The US government has information indicating that foreign entities, principally based in China, are engaged in deliberate, industrial-scale campaigns to distill US frontier AI systems," Michael Kratsios, director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, wrote in a memo shared on social media on Thursday and first reported by the Financial Times.

"Leveraging tens of thousands of proxy accounts to evade detection and using jailbreaking techniques to expose proprietary information, these co-ordinated campaigns systematically extract capabilities from American AI models, exploiting American expertise and innovation," he added. The Chinese embassy in Washington said it opposes

"the baseless allegations" adding that Beijing "attaches great importance to the protection of intellectual property rights." The memo, released just weeks before US President Donald Trump is set to visit Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing, promises to raise tensions in a long-running tech war between the rival superpowers, which had been lowered by a detente brokered last October. It also raises questions about whether Washington will allow Nvidia's powerful AI chips to be shipped to China. The Trump administration gave a green light to the sales in January, with conditions. On Wednesday, however, Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick indicated that no shipments had yet been made.

Distillation is the process of training smaller AI models using the output of larger ones as part of an effort to lower the costs of training a powerful new AI tool.

The memo, addressed to government agencies, says the administration will share information with American AI companies about the distillation efforts, and "explore a range of measures to hold foreign actors accountable" for the campaigns.

## 'Canada not as reliant on US economy as some think'

AFP  
Montreal

There is a "misimpression" about the extent of Canada's economic reliance on the US, Prime Minister Mark Carney said Thursday, again pushing back on suggestions Ottawa must capitulate to Washington's trade demands.

Canada and the US are heading towards fractious negotiations on the future of a North American free trade agreement that President Donald Trump signed and praised in his first term, but now says is "irrelevant."

The Trump administration's key trade figures — Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick and US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer — have been highly critical of Can-



Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney. (Reuters/File Photo)

ada's posture ahead of talks set to accelerate over the coming weeks.

Appearing in Congress on Wednesday, Lutnick defended Washington's tough rhetoric and said "Canada's economy leans on the incredible 30tn dollar economy of America."

Carney told reporters yesterday that "there is a misimpression, by some, of the degree to which we are reliant on the US."

"Yes, it is our biggest trading partner by far. We are also their second-biggest trading partner. There is a symbiosis between the two," the prime minister said.

Canada's "destiny is first and foremost going to be determined by what we do here."

Trump has repeatedly said the US economy does not need anything Canada produces and told the World Economic Forum in January that "Canada lives because of the US."

Greer's comments about Canada have been more muted.

He said this month that "pillars" of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) are functioning reasonably well and would likely be preserved, while stressing substantial parts of the deal need to be changed.

Both Greer and Lutnick on

Wednesday voiced anger over an Ontario provincial government decision to ban the sale of US alcohol in retaliation for Trump's steel and auto tariffs, which are hurting the economy of Canada's largest province.

Lutnick told Congress the ban was "insulting and disrespectful to America."

Greer told US lawmakers "there may have to be an enforcement action to deal with this issue," an apparent reference to dispute mechanisms within the USMCA.

Asked about Ontario's US alcohol ban yesterday, Carney said it was a provincial decision but noted US breaches of the USMCA are undeniable.

"The tariffs on steel, the tariffs on aluminium, the tariffs on automobiles... those are violations of our trade deal," Carney said.

## Top US Navy official to leave office 'immediately': Pentagon

US Secretary of the Navy John Phelan will leave office "immediately," the Pentagon announced on Wednesday, without providing an explanation for the sudden exit.

Phelan's departure follows the removal of top US Army officer general Randy George and two other senior officers earlier this

month, at a time when the US is locked in a war with Iran that still remains unresolved.

Phelan "is departing the administration, effective immediately," Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell said in a statement on X, adding that he would be replaced in an acting capacity by Undersecretary Hung Cao. (AFP)

## Democratic-backed Virginia referendum was 'rigged': Trump

AFP  
Washington

US President Donald Trump on Wednesday alleged a vote in which Virginia backed a new electoral map that could favor Democrats was "rigged" — echoing his false claims over the 2020 election.

"A RIGGED ELECTION TOOK PLACE LAST NIGHT," Trump said on social media. "All day long Republicans were winning, the Spirit was unbelievable, until the very end when, of course, there was a massive 'Mail In Ballot Drop!'"

The state voted in a referendum Tuesday to allow the redrawing of the congressional map, giving Democrats a strong advantage in 10 of the state's 11 House districts, up from their previous 6-5 edge.

The temporary map is the latest instance of "gerrymandering," the long-established but widely criticised US practice of drawing electoral boundaries to benefit one party.

Gerrymandering has become a defining element in November's midterm elections, in which all US House Representatives and one-third of Senators are on the ballot.

Redistricting usually follows the US national census every 10 years, but Trump last year urged Republican-led states to redraw maps mid-decade to protect the party's fragile House of Representatives majority.

Texas moved first, adopting a map that could add up to five Republican seats. California answered with a ballot measure

designed to give Democrats five more of their own.

Democrats argued that the Virginia map was a necessary counterweight to Trump's pressure campaign, while Republicans denounced it as a power grab in a state where Trump took 46% of the vote in 2024.

"Six to five goes to ten to one, and yet the Presidential Election in November was very close to a 50-50 split," Trump said on Wednesday.

The 79-year-old Republican also criticised the Virginia election as confusing, writing: "In addition to everything else, the language on the Referendum was purposefully unintelligible and deceptive."

In his Truth Social post, Trump expressed hope that the courts would weigh in and block the Virginia redistricting. "Let's see if the Courts will fix this travesty of 'justice,'" he said.

Republicans have mounted multiple legal challenges to the redistricting, some of which are still being litigated and may eventually be decided by the Virginia Supreme Court, which ruled previously that the referendum could go ahead.

Trump heavily pushed the Texas redistricting effort, which was jammed through by the state legislature without a referendum.

A vocal critic of mail-in voting as a supposed cause of election fraud — despite using it himself — Trump for years has propagated the falsehood to justify his attempt to overturn his 2020 election loss to Democrat Joe Biden.

## US Senate votes to advance \$70bn funding plan for ICE, Border Patrol

Reuters  
Washington

US Senate Republicans voted yesterday to advance a \$70bn plan to fund the Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Border Patrol agencies for the next three years, ignoring demands from Democrats for guardrails on immigration enforcement agents (ICE) and their operations.

Lawmakers voted 50-48 in the predawn hours to adopt then-binding budget resolution and send it to the US House of Representatives, taking a crucial step forward in their effort to end a partial shutdown that has gripped the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) since mid-February.

Two Republicans — Senators Rand Paul and Lisa Murkowski — opposed the measure.

If adopted by the House, the resolution will allow congressional committees to begin filling in the details on how the \$70bn would be spent in separate legislation that President Donald Trump would have to sign into law. The new funding would be expected to run through Trump's presidency, which ends in January 2029.

With Democrats adamantly opposed to the funding initiative, Republicans plan to employ a rarely used procedure known as budget reconciliation in the separate legis-

lation, which allows some budget-related bills to bypass Democratic opposition in the Senate.

Such measures require only a simple majority for passage in the 100-member chamber, instead of the usual supermajority of 60 votes or more. Republicans hold a 53-47 seat majority.

Funding for most of DHS ran out more than nine weeks ago, as Democrats pressed Republicans and the White House to accept new constraints on ICE and Border Patrol, which operate under the direction of DHS.

After two US citizens were fatally shot by immigration enforcement agents in Minneapolis, Democrats insisted that ICE and Border Patrol be subject to the same operational rules as police forces across the US, including a requirement that judicial warrants be obtained before agents can enter private homes.

But weeks of negotiations ended in a stalemate.

The Senate has since passed legislation to fund DHS operations other than ICE and Border Patrol. But the measure has stalled in the House, where hardline Republicans have demanded funding for those two entities as well.

Last year, Republicans passed legislation providing around \$130bn in funding for these two agencies, separate from their annual appropriations and the \$70bn now being advanced in Congress.



US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent testifies before a Senate Appropriations Financial Services and General Government Subcommittee hearing on Trump's fiscal year 2027 budget request for the Department of the Treasury, on Capitol Hill in Washington on Wednesday. (Reuters)

The Senate action followed a nearly six-hour "vote-a-rama" session that began late on Wednesday, with votes on a series of proposed amendments.

Eight months before the November midterm elections, which will determine which party controls Congress in the final years of Donald Trump's presidency, Democrats sought to use the session to portray Republicans as out of step with American families and the challenges they face from soaring gasoline prices and healthcare costs.

Republicans accused Democrats of wanting to "defund" crucial immigration and border security operations.

Democrats offered a dozen amendments intended to lower out-of-pocket healthcare costs, restore food assistance for lower-income Americans, prevent the cancellation of health insurance coverage, increase funding for school meals and childcare, protect consumers from rising prices driven by tariffs and the war in Iran, and lower electricity costs for working people.

All failed but drew support from some Republicans, including Senators Susan Collins of Maine and Dan Sullivan of Alaska, who face challenging re-election bids in November.

A recent Reuters/Ipsos poll shows that more than half of Americans are less likely to support candidates who back Trump's approach to deporting immigrants, while a similar majority say their household finances have taken a hit from soaring gasoline prices.

Healthcare tops the list of household costs that voters think Congress should focus on most, polling data shows.

The Senate voted 98-0 to adopt a Republican amendment from Senate Budget Committee Chairman Lindsey Graham that would establish a deficit-neutral fund supporting ICE operations to apprehend, detain and expedite the deportation of adults convicted of rape, murder or sexual abuse of a minor after entering the US illegally.

## UN leadership hopefuls stress need for peace and restoring confidence

AFP  
UN

Contenders for next UN secretary-general made their case this week for a UN more invested in peace, but avoided taking positions that could antagonise the member states who will choose the world body's next chief.

Chile's Michelle Bachelet, Argentina's Rafael Grossi, Costa Rica's Rebeca Grynspan and Senegal's Macky Sall are all hoping to succeed Antonio Guterres on January 1, 2027, when his second five-year term ends.

Each candidate spent three hours this week answering wide-ranging questions from the 193 member states and representatives of civil society.

However, "a lot of diplomats are a bit cynical about the hearings," Richard Gowan of the Interna-

tional Crisis Group told AFP.

"There is a widespread suspicion that the US and other vetoes in the Security Council will select a winner in private and minimise the Assembly's role in the process."

The question-and-answer sessions, dubbed "interactive dialogues," were introduced in 2016.

The General Assembly, where every member state has a seat, can only elect the secretary-general upon the recommendation of the Security Council, where the five permanent members — the US, China, Russia, Britain and France — hold veto power.

Much of what the contenders said was "formulaic" but they did send some "important messages," according to Gowan.

He said Grossi emphasised "how fragile the UN is today" and appeared more "radical" than Guterres on reform.

All the candidates stressed the



From left: Rafael Mariano Grossi, Michelle Bachelet, Rebeca Grynspan and Macky Sall. (AFP)

urgent need to restore confidence in a UN teetering on the brink of financial collapse. Its relevance has also been called into question in a world facing a level of armed conflict not seen since World War II.

Chile's Bachelet, a former UN human rights chief, said the secretary-general should be "physically present in the field" wherever problems need solving — a posi-

tion also taken by Grossi.

Sall, a former president of Senegal, suggested a "reinvented role" so that the UN might "regain its place at the global table."

Some have criticised Guterres for failing to exert influence over conflicts in Ukraine or the Middle East.

Grynspan said the next UN chief "needs to take a risk" and lamented: "We have become a risk-

conservative organisation."

"The UN only fails when we don't try, we have to try," added Grynspan, who as head of UN Trade and Development negotiated a deal that facilitated the export of Ukrainian grain following the 2022 Russian invasion.

The candidates acknowledged the link between the UN's three pillars of peace, human rights and development, while emphasising the organisation's primary role in upholding the first tenet.

US President Donald Trump has called for the UN to return to its "original mission" of peace.

Very few of the questions focused on specific conflicts, and the candidates largely refrained from answering in concrete terms, preferring instead to invoke a commitment to the UN Charter.

When asked about Gaza, however, Grynspan urged "unrestricted" entry of humanitarian aid and voiced support for a long-term

solution for two states to live side-by-side in "peace and security"

Sall highlighted the "human tragedy" of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Candidates' past stances and actions will undoubtedly influence the final selection.

Republican lawmakers have already called on Washington to block Bachelet due to her defence of abortion rights.

Grossi, the current head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, is involved in sensitive matters such as the response to Iran's nuclear programme.

The five Security Council permanent members remain tight-lipped about their intentions, and other contenders for UN chief might still emerge.

"I think that there are still quite a few candidates circling and waiting to see how things play out" before declaring their candidacy, Gowan said.



# Top Peru ministers quit in protest over stalled US fighter jet deal

AFP  
Lima

Peru's foreign and defence ministers resigned on Wednesday in protest over the interim president's decision to stall a \$3.5bn deal for the purchase of 24 US F-16 fighter jets.

The ministers said the deal had already been signed and that to cast doubt on it now jeopardised Peru's reputation as a trading partner.

Their surprise resignations deepen instability gripping the South American country, after a recent election to choose the country's ninth president in a decade descended into chaos.

No candidate emerged with an outright majority, meaning a run-

off election will be held June 7. Interim president Jose Maria Balcasar said on Tuesday he would leave it up to the victor to finalise the jets deal.

The US ambassador to Peru, businessman Bernardo Navarro, on Friday issued a warning widely believed to relate to the agreement.

"If you deal with the US in bad faith and undermine US interests, rest assured, I, on behalf of @POTUS Trump and his administration, will use every available tool to protect and promote the prosperity and security of the US and our region," Navarro wrote on X.

On Wednesday, Balcasar went on state TV to assure Peruvians that he was "not seeking confrontation with the US."

He said he halted the defence

deal to ensure that public funds were "used appropriately, reasonably, in accordance with the significant social gaps we have to address in the country."

Foreign Minister Hugo de Zela said the decision "endangers our country and undermines its credibility."

He claimed the contracts for the F-16s were signed on Monday, after being approved by the National Defense Council, and that an initial payment was due on Wednesday.

Defence Minister Carlos Diaz said the purchase of jets was not political but "for the security and defence of the nation."

Balcasar, who replaced a previous interim leader who was impeached, denied on Tuesday that the sale of the jets had already gone



Peru's interim President Jose Maria Balcasar speaking during a message to the nation in Lima on Wednesday. (AFP)

through.

His term ends on July 28.

Congress President Fernando Rospigliosi urged Balcasar to honour the deal with the US to avoid a "political, legal and geopolitical

problem." Ultraconservative congressman Jorge Montoya suggested making Balcasar the fifth president in 10 years to be impeached.

In October 2024, Peru announced that it would renew its ageing air defence fleet with the purchase of state-of-the-art fighter jets. A state evaluation committee last year chose the F-16s over rival bids from France's Rafale and Sweden's Gripen, citing technical and geopolitical criteria.

Peru currently has 12 Mirage 2000 aircraft, according to defence publications.

Its combat fleet also includes Russian MiG-29s and Belarusian Sukhoi Su-27s, most of which are inoperative or in reserve.

The deal with the US has become swept up in a presidential election

marred by logistical problems, unsubstantiated fraud allegations and delays to the ballot count.

Ten days after Peruvians voted in the first round, it is still not known who will face off against conservative frontrunner Keiko Fujimori in June's second round.

Ultraconservative former Lima mayor Rafael Lopez Aliaga is locked a tight race with leftist ex-minister Roberto Sanchez for the second runoff spot.

Lopez Aliaga has alleged election fraud and called for the vote to be annulled.

The final results have been delayed by legal challenges.

The election was dominated by calls for a security crackdown to end an extortion epidemic and related wave of contract killings.

## Brazil revokes US official's credentials in latest diplomatic spat

AFP  
Brasilia

Brazil revoked the credentials of an American police attaché on Wednesday after a Brazilian official was forced to leave the US — the latest twist in troubled bilateral ties.

The Trump administration on Monday asked Marcelo Ivo, a liaison officer in Miami for Brazil's federal police, to leave the country.

According to US and Brazilian media reports, Ivo was involved in the US arrest of Brazil's fugitive ex-spy chief Alexandre Ramagem, a close ally of far-right former president Jair Bolsonaro.

Ramagem fled Brazil late last year after being sentenced to 16 years in prison on charges of helping Bolsonaro attempt a coup to keep the leftist Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva from taking power following the 2022 election.

Ramagem was detained by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) on April 13 but released two days later.

The US State Department said on Monday it had asked an unnamed Brazilian official to leave the country for attempting to "game" the American immigration system, in an attempt to extend an unspecified "political witch hunt" to American soil.

US President Donald Trump used the same term last year to describe the Brazilian Supreme Court trial of Bolsonaro, his close ally.

The right-wing ex-president, Ramagem and other former officials were found guilty of attempting to carry out a coup following Bolsonaro's 2022 election loss.

Brazil's federal police chief Andre Rodrigues told Globo News television on Wednesday that Ramagem's arrest had stemmed from bilateral cooperation on immigration.

"Regretfully today I withdrew the credentials of the US official working with the federal police... until we can clear up definitively what happened," he said.

Ivo's expulsion "fails to observe the good diplomatic practice of dialogue between friendly nations," Brazil's foreign ministry said in a statement confirming the tit-for-tat response to the US.

Rodrigues said Ivo had done nothing wrong and it was "insane" to think he tried to fool the US.

Rodrigues asserted that Ramagem had been arrested in Florida over a traffic infraction.

Supporters of Ramagem said it was Trump who had him released from detention.

Trump slapped tariffs on Brazil in retribution for the trial of Bolsonaro, who is now serving a 27 year prison term over the coup plot.

The levies were eventually partially eased as ties between Trump and the leftist Lula warmed.

Lula is seeking re-election in October and is running against Flavio Bolsonaro, a son of the ex-president.

## Mexico 'shouldn't be nostalgic' about zero-tariff era: minister

Reuters  
Mexico City

Mexico's Economy Minister Marcelo Ebrard acknowledged on Wednesday that tariffs on the country's automotive, steel and aluminium sectors are likely to remain in place, regardless of whether a trade deal with the US and Canada is renewed. "We shouldn't be nostalgic about a time when there were no tariffs," Ebrard told reporters on the sidelines of an event on Wednesday. "When it comes to the automotive industry, steel and aluminium—which have been our priority—we know it is very difficult to think that tariffs will disappear. What we are looking for is how to reduce them." His comments come one day after Reuters reported that US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer told Mexico's auto and steel industries earlier this week they should not expect the renegotiation of the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement to remove President Donald Trump's tariffs on their sectors.

Ebrard, who is leading Mexico's



US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer (right) talks with Mexico's Economy Minister Marcelo Ebrard as they leave National Palace amid talks to review the US-Mexico-Canada trade pact, in Mexico City, Mexico, on Monday. (Reuters)

negotiations with the US to revamp USMCA starting the week of May 25, said Greer shared the same message with Mexican business leaders and largely repeated it to US lawmakers on Wednesday.

"The world—the global trading system we had, based on free trade—is very unlikely to return," Ebrard said.

Greer told the US House of Representatives Ways and Means

Committee that Trump intended to keep tariffs in place on US imports, that his trade policies have not changed.

"He's not going to go back to the old situation where we had no tariffs and we just let foreign goods made by foreign workers come in without any fee to the detriment of domestic workers," Greer said. "The president will have tariffs using appropriate legal tools."

Mexico and Canada have been looking to the USMCA negotiations as a way to provide relief from the steep duties Trump imposed last year that have caused difficulties for automakers and other industries in a highly integrated North American economy.

Trump last year imposed a 25% national security tariff on automotive exports from Mexico and Canada, compared to zero under USMCA, which Trump launched in 2020 as the "greatest trade deal ever."

Although the value of US content can be deducted from the import value of vehicles and parts, automakers say that Trump's 25% duties put Mexico and Canada at a disadvantage to other major auto-producing countries and regions. Vehicles from Japan, South Korea and the European Union are charged a 15% tariff, while cars from Britain are charged 10%.

Mexico's steel industry faces a 50% US duty on commodity steel and aluminium products and a 25% duty for derivative goods containing at least 15% of the metals by weight.

## Sheinbaum taps economist Lazzeri for Mexico's ambassador to the US

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum said yesterday she will propose economist Roberto Lazzeri as the country's next ambassador to the United States, opting to change the head of Mexico's most important diplomatic post amid a high-stakes review of North America's trade pact. Lazzeri, whose appointment needs Senate approval, would replace current ambassador Esteban Moctezuma, who was chosen by former President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador and held the post since 2021.

"He worked for a long time in the finance ministry," Sheinbaum said of Lazzeri during her regular morning press conference. "He has a very good relationship with the whole Mexican government and also with US counterparts." The move to appoint Lazzeri, the head of two of Mexico's top development banks, Nafin and Bancomext, and who has also overseen public debt for the federal government, comes as talks ramp up to review the US-Mexico-Canada trade pact. (Reuters)

## Argentina blocks journalists from govt house citing espionage with smart glasses

Reuters  
Buenos Aires

The government of Argentina's President Javier Milei blocked the entry of accredited journalists to government house Casa Rosada yesterday, citing an incident of "illegal espionage" after a local television network aired footage recorded with smart glasses.

The move was announced by communications director Javier Lanari on X, who said fingerprint access for journalists was removed as a "preventative measure" following a security complaint. A Reuters journalist

who regularly works from Casa Rosada, where government press conferences are held, was unable to enter on Thursday morning.

"The sole purpose is to ensure national security," Lanari said. On Wednesday, Milei posted a photo of two journalists from television network TN, calling them "DISGUSTING TRASH" after the channel aired a report featuring footage from Casa Rosada, which it said was recorded with smart glasses, computer-powered eyewear. "I would love to see those filthy scum who carry journalist credentials, (95%) come out to defend what these two criminals did," Milei said, appearing to reference

the network's report, which included an image of cabinet chief Manuel Adorni walking through Casa Rosada.

Journalists accredited to work from Casa Rosada published a statement saying the "unjustified" decision to deny reporters access "suggests an explicit attack on press freedom, the practice of journalism, and the public's right to access information."

Milei has repeatedly clashed with journalists, publicly sparring on social media and in interviews, prompting press-freedom groups to warn of a sharp deterioration in relations between his government and the media since he took office in December 2023.

## Panama Canal says \$1mn-plus auction slots reflect temporary surge in demand

Reuters  
Panama City

The Panama Canal Authority said yesterday that some ships had recently paid more than \$1mn for crossing slots at auction, but said the unusually high prices reflected a temporary rise in demand rather than persistent congestion at the waterway.

The authority said average auction prices had risen to about \$385,000 after the start of the Middle East conflict, from around \$135,000-140,000 before, as higher traffic boosted demand for reservations.

Last week, the authority had downplayed reports that an LPG vessel had paid as much as \$4mn in an auction to secure faster passage. Victor Vial, the canal's vice

president of finance, said in a statement that some vessels had indeed paid more than \$1mn in recent auctions, but described those results as exceptional and tied to a short-term rise in demand.

He added that most ships book their transits in advance, helping avoid queues.

The canal offers several booking mechanisms, including long-term slot allocations and a dedicated system for liquefied natural gas vessels. For ships that do not reserve ahead of time, it also offers last-minute reservations and auctions, with between three and five slots currently offered each day through the auction system.

Canal administrator Ricaurte Vazquez said container and liquefied petroleum gas shipments had been among the strongest-

performing segments, with energy products taking on a bigger role in volumes handled by the waterway.

The authority also said it has been taking steps to preserve water levels at its retention lakes as it monitors the risk of a potentially strong El Nino later this year.

Deputy administrator Ilya Espino de Marotta said unusual rainfall during the dry season had kept Gatun and Alhajuela lakes at maximum levels, allowing the canal to build reserves.

"We do not foresee anything significant between now and December, but we are continuing to monitor the situation," she explained, adding that the goal was to keep lake levels as high as possible ahead of the next dry season.

In the past, drought has caused the canal to slash its daily crossings.

## Mexico reopens Teotihuacan pyramids under heavy police presence after deadly shooting

Reuters  
Teotihuacan, Mexico

Mexico's ancient Teotihuacan archaeological site reopened on Wednesday under heavy security and with fewer tourists than usual, two days after a gunman killed a Canadian woman and wounded 13 others at the Pyramid of the Moon in a rare attack at a major tourist destination.

Monday's shooting has raised scrutiny of security measures at Mexico's cultural sites just as the country prepares to co-host the World Cup.

The sprawling complex of pyramids and temples at Teotihuacan is one of the country's most popular tourist draws, bringing in 1.8mn visitors last year.

On Wednesday, 40 National Guard members were deployed to reinforce security, joining municipal and Mexico City police. National Guard members in helmets, camouflage clothing and bulletproof vests patrolled the grounds in armed pickup trucks, their faces partially covered.

Basic bag and backpack inspections were implemented at the site's five entry points.

The beefed-up measures slowed down access to the site, which sits about 50 kilometers (31 miles) from Mexico City.

Some tourists waited more than 3-1/2 hours in the sun, and were offered free admission as compensation for the delay, the



Members of the National Guard stand near the Sun Pyramid, as the Teotihuacan pyramids reopen, on the outskirts of Mexico City, Mexico, on Wednesday. (Reuters)

National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) said.

"As instructed by the president, we will also be able to count on metal detectors," INAH Director Omar Vazquez said, adding there would be more police at each entrance.

The shooter, a 27-year-old Mexican man, opened fire from the mezzanine of the Pyramid of the Moon on Monday morning, witnesses said, firing mostly into the air while carrying a digital tablet and shouting, before killing himself.

Access to the pyramid was blocked even as Teotihuacan reopened.

On Wednesday, some visitors said they felt reassured by the vis-

ible security presence. "The incident has already happened, and we feel there will be enough security here," said Imran Khan, an American tourist.

French visitor Lou Kermaerrec said she had not been sure the site would open. "I'm not feeling insecure because I was pretty sure there would be a lot of police around," she said. "But I think it's really terrible what happened because it's such a popular site."

Local vendor Silvia Castaneda, surrounded by handicraft souvenirs, cups and caps bearing motifs from the site, welcomed tourists back.

"Teotihuacan awaits them with open arms," she said.

## China FM calls for eradication of scam centres in Cambodia

AFP  
Beijing

China's top diplomat Wang Yi called for the complete eradication of scam centres in Cambodia during a meeting with Prime Minister Hun Manet in Phnom Penh, according to Beijing's foreign ministry.

Cambodia hosts dozens of scam centres with tens of thousands of people perpetrating online scams – some willingly and others trafficked – in a multibillion-dollar illicit industry, rights monitors say.

But under pressure from several countries, including China, Cambodian authorities say they are cracking down on the industry.

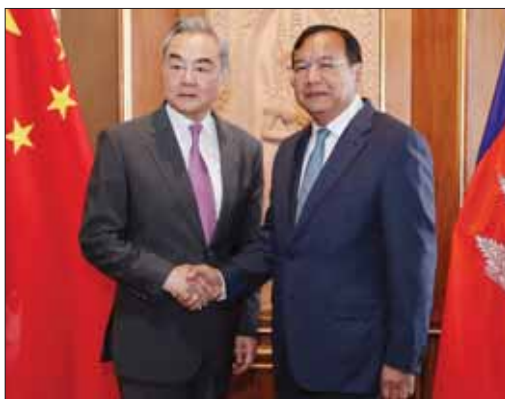
"Cross-border gambling and fraud endanger the lives and property of the people and must be resolutely cracked down on and completely eradicated," Wang told Hun Manet, China's foreign ministry said in a statement late Wednesday.

China and Cambodia maintain close trade, diplomatic and military ties. Wang, who was accompanied by Chinese Defence Minister Dong Jun, also underlined the two countries' "unbreakable bond" during the meeting.

Hun Manet told AFP in February that scam centres were destroying his country's economy and giving the nation a bad name, vowing to "clean this out".

He wrote on social media late Wednesday that he, Wang and Dong had discussed promoting cooperation in politics, trade and investment, national defence and security, clean energy, transportation infrastructure construction and agriculture.

Wang and Dong also met Cambodia's Foreign



Prak Sokhonn (right), Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation, shaking hands with China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi during a meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Phnom Penh, yesterday. (AFP)

Minister Prak Sokhonn and Defence Minister Tea Seiha on Wednesday. The Chinese foreign minister said he supported initiatives aimed at normalising relations between Cambodia and Thailand following deadly clashes last year along their shared border.

"China is willing to continue to build more platforms for the resumption of exchanges and direct dialogue between Cambodia and Thailand," Wang said.

While a ceasefire was agreed to in December, the regional situation remains fragile, with Cambodia and Thailand accusing each other of failing to respect the truce.

## N Korea, Russia aim to open new road bridge soon: KCNA

Reuters  
Seoul

North Korea and Russia aim to open a road bridge connecting the countries across the Tumen River as soon as possible, North Korean state media KCNA said yesterday, as the neighbouring countries forge closer ties.

The project, which began about a year ago, is "an important business" to boost bilateral cooperation including tourism, trade and the movement of people, KCNA said.

Construction of the 850m (2,789ft) bridge, which will connect to Russia's highway system, was agreed during a 2024 visit to North Korea by President Vladimir Putin.

Russia and North Korea held a ceremony on Tuesday to mark the joining of the bridge, the Moscow Times reported.

It is being built near the existing "Friendship Bridge", a rail bridge which was commissioned in 1959 after the Korean War.

KCNA said an opening ceremony would be held soon, without specifying a date. The Russian embassy in Pyongyang wrote on

Telegram that the bridge would be completed on June 19.

Oleg Kozhemyako, governor of the Primorsky region in Russia's Far East, wrote on Telegram that the bridge would increase trade and expand cultural and tourism ties. He said it would cut the distance between Vladivostok and the border city of Rason to 320 kilometres and the crossing would have the capacity to accommodate up to 300 cars per day.

The update came as several Russian delegations visited North Korea this week. Russian Interior Minister Vladimir Kolokolt-

sev met Jo Yong Won, chairman of the Standing Committee of North Korea's Supreme People's Assembly, on Wednesday in what KCNA described as a "favourable atmosphere."

On Wednesday, Russian Health Minister Mikhail Murashko visited the North Korean city of Wonsan to attend a ceremony celebrating the construction of a hospital symbolising the "friendship" between the countries, KCNA said.

Russia and North Korea in 2024 signed a "comprehensive strategic partnership treaty" during Putin's visit to Pyongyang.



A ceremony marking the connection of the two sides of the new Russia-N Korea road bridge over the Tumen River, set to open this summer. (AFP)

## Japan intelligence bill clears lower house

AFP  
Tokyo

Japan's lower house approved a bill yesterday to upgrade Tokyo's intelligence capacity, the latest step in Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's campaign to boost the nation's defence and security apparatus.

Japanese officials have long argued that the nation needs to improve its intelligence capacity to deter foreign spies, prevent terrorism, safeguard sensitive technologies and improve national security.

Critics say Tokyo's existing policies and law enforcement against espionage are too relaxed – even labelling the nation a "spies' paradise".

The issue has gained a renewed sense of urgency since a diplomatic row erupted with Beijing, after Takaichi suggested in November that Tokyo might intervene militarily in any Chinese attempt to take Taiwan.

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

Tokyo's intelligence activities are currently scattered among

various existing ministries, including the foreign ministry, the defence ministry and the police.

But under the bill – which will now go to the upper house for review – the government would upgrade an existing intelligence body to serve as the central command for collecting and analysing information related to security and public safety.

It cleared the lower house by a majority vote, with support also coming from key opposition parties.

Under the legislation, the National Intelligence Bureau would integrate information gathered by various ministries and report to the newly created National Intelligence Council, headed by the prime minister.

The change is necessary, Takaichi has said, "to ensure the efficient collection and effective utilisation of high-quality intelligence" for the government's decision making.

Takaichi and her ruling bloc are also trying to push through separate anti-spying legislation.

Her critics have voiced concerns that the upgraded intelligence capacity might lead to the government's overreach and infringe upon individual freedom and privacy.

## Philippine ex-president Duterte must stand trial for murder: ICC

Reuters  
The Hague

Judges at the International Criminal Court (ICC) confirmed murder charges against former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte as crimes against humanity yesterday, paving the way for a trial.

The judges said there were "substantial grounds" to believe Duterte, 81, played a key role in the murders of 76 people and the attempted murder of two others as part of his so-called "war on drugs", which prosecutors say killed thousands of civilians in the Philippines.

"The available evidentiary material shows the existence of a common plan between Mr Duterte and his co-perpetrators to kill alleged criminals in the Philippines, including those perceived or alleged to be associated with drug use, sale or production, through violent crimes including murder," the court said.

In pre-trial hearings, his lawyers argued that Duterte's public state-



Relatives of drug war victims holding placards that say "the fight continues" and "make Duterte accountable" in Filipino, react after watching a livestream of the International Criminal Court's rejection of former Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte's challenge to the court's jurisdiction, in Quezon City, Philippines, on Wednesday. (Reuters)

ments that he would stop drugs and criminality in the Philippines and would tell security forces to go out and kill criminals were just rhetoric, meant to instil fear.

In the Philippines, the office of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. issued a statement to say that it respected the ruling and jus-

tice must be served.

"Both sides stand to benefit from this. Justice for the accused if he is innocent, or justice for the victims if their rights were indeed abused," the statement said.

The case will now be assigned to a trial chamber which will start planning for a trial. In previous

cases, it has taken the ICC up to a year between the confirmation of charges and the opening of a trial.

Prosecutors have said Duterte created, funded and armed death squads to target and kill suspected narcotics peddlers and users when he was in power between 2016 and 2022. He was arrested and taken to The Hague last March.

Duterte has long insisted he instructed police to kill only in self-defence and has always defended the crackdown.

Appeals judges at the court on Wednesday had dismissed a bid to throw out Duterte's trial and said the court had jurisdiction over the case.

Lawyers for the octogenarian former president have also tried to argue that Duterte was unfit to stand trial because of alleged cognitive decline.

But judges in the pre-trial procedure ruled the case could move forward. It is rare for international courts to find suspects, even elderly ones, wholly unfit for trial. The ICC has never found a suspect unfit for trial despite several other defendants' petitions.

## South Korea e-commerce probe opens rift in US ties

AFP  
Seoul

South Korea pushed back yesterday against criticism of its business environment by US lawmakers, as a rare spat deepens over Seoul's investigation into online retail company Coupang.

US-listed Coupang's South Korean arm operates the country's most popular shopping platform.

But it has faced a backlash since a massive data leak last year exposed the details of over 30m customers.

South Korean authorities are investigating Coupang for potential negligence and regulatory breaches, and statements from Seoul and

Washington this week revealed cracks in the relationship between the longtime allies.

Yesterday, South Korea's foreign ministry said the Coupang probe was "being conducted in strict accordance with our domestic laws and due process", adding that it was not discriminatory against American firms.

The statement followed a letter by Republican lawmakers to the South Korean ambassador in Washington, in which they called for an end to "discriminatory regulatory actions" against US businesses. The letter claimed that South Korea "leveraged a low-sensitivity data leak... as a pretext to launch a whole-of-

government assault on Coupang". It accused Seoul of "indiscriminate raids... punishing fines, unprecedented tax audits, and pressure on public pension funds to divest their Coupang holdings".

The evident strain is remarkable given that South Korea and the US are major economic and defence partners, with Washington stationing 28,500 troops there to help guard against North Korea.

On Wednesday, Seoul said talks with Washington over a security agreement should proceed separately from issues related to Coupang.

The unusual statement came after multiple South Korean media outlets reported that the US had

threatened to halt high-level security talks unless Seoul guaranteed the legal safety of Coupang Chairman Kim Bom, an American citizen also known as Kim Bom-suk.

The reports said that US negotiators had asked South Korea to lift a travel ban on Kim and ensure that he would not face arrest or detention when visiting the country.

The talks carry high stakes for South Korea, as they would touch on its plan to build nuclear-powered submarines as a deterrent against the North. Coupang declined to confirm Kim's current whereabouts. South Korea has not confirmed that Washington made any such demands regarding Kim or linked them to the security talks.



Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi (right) and her cabinet ministers react after the government's bill to establish a National Intelligence Council was passed by a majority vote of both ruling and opposition parties during a plenary session of the House of Representatives in Tokyo yesterday. (AFP)

## Malaysia's king says he will choose next head of anti-graft agency

Malaysia's King Sultan Ibrahim said yesterday that he will select the next head of the country's anti-graft body, with the agency's current chief under growing pressure to resign over misconduct allegations.

Azam Baki, chief commissioner of the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC), has faced sustained calls to step down following media reports in February accusing him and other senior officials at the agency of misconduct and breaches of public service rules. Azam and the MACC have described the allegations as "baseless". The scandal has deepened rifts within Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's administration, with some key allies questioning the premier's commitment to tackling graft.

The government has investigated some of the allegations against Azam but has so far declined to make the findings public, pending related probes by police and other authorities. Azam's contract with the MACC is due to end in May, according to media reports.

Sultan Ibrahim said there was no need for the appointment to be politicised, adding that the chief's role was important to ensure the agency's effectiveness in combating corruption, misappropriations and abuse of power, according to a statement from the royal press office. "I will determine who will be the best candidate to lead the MACC from now on," he said.

Anwar's office and the MACC did not immediately respond to requests for comment on the king's decree. According to the constitution, the king can appoint heads of key government agencies on the advice of the prime minister.

Malaysia practices a unique rotational form of monarchy, in which the heads of the country's nine royal families take turns to be king for a five-year reign.

The monarchy plays a largely ceremonial role and is traditionally seen as above politics. But it has become more influential in recent years due to prolonged political instability during which the king has wielded rarely used discretionary powers. (Reuters)

## Myanmar 'considering good things' for Suu Kyi: Thai FM

AFP  
Bangkok

Myanmar's leader is "considering good things" for detained Aung San Suu Kyi, Thailand's top diplomat said, after meeting the country's coup leader for the first time since he took over as civilian president.

Tropical Myanmar has been led by Min Aung Hlaing since 2021, who as armed forces chief deposed Suu Kyi's elected government, detained the Nobel Peace Prize laureate and sparked civil war.

This month he took over the role of civilian president after an election democracy watchdogs dismissed as a choreographed affair designed to rebrand military rule.

Thai Foreign Minister Sihanak

Phuangketkeow said he raised the issue of Suu Kyi when he met Myanmar's leader in the capital Naypyidaw on Wednesday.

"The president said that she is being well taken care of and the Myanmar government is considering good things, without giving any further details," Sihanak said in a video message before returning to Thailand on Wednesday night.

"This should be a good sign," he added.

Min Aung Hlaing last week pardoned Suu Kyi's top aide Win Myint, who served as the ceremonial president of her administration and was also swept into custody in the coup.

Some analysts have dismissed the clemency measure as part of a rebranding effort for Min Aung Hlaing's new administration as

it grasps for legitimacy.

The announcement of Win Myint's pardon has nonetheless renewed diplomatic calls for Suu Kyi's release.

The 80-year-old has now been detained for a half-decade – with even her close family saying they have been permitted scant communication with her.

Diplomats and media have persistently queried her status, but Myanmar authorities have insisted her detention on a host of criminal convictions is a matter for the courts.

Win Myint's pardon last Friday, however, came directly from the office of Min Aung Hlaing. That blanket order also shaved some time off Suu Kyi's 27-year sentence, a source close to her legal case told AFP.

Rights groups say charges against Suu Kyi were concocted in order to sideline her and allow the military to return to power, ending the country's tentative decade-long experiment with democracy.



## King Charles on US mission to bolster UK's special relationship with royalist Trump

Reuters  
London

Britain's King Charles heads to the US next week for the most high-profile trip of his reign so far, on a mission to shore up the future of the two allies' "special relationship" which the Iran war has plunged to its lowest point in 70 years.

The state visit marks the 250th anniversary of the US declaration of independence from British rule, when the then 13 American colonies decided to split from King George III, Charles's five-times-great-grandfather.

For Charles, it will be a moment to reflect on how Britain and the US have come together since then to forge some of the world's closest security, military and economic ties, while for US President Donald Trump it will be another chance to

indulge his love of the British royals.

It also comes against the backdrop of the worst relations between the two countries since the Suez Crisis in 1956, with repeated criticism by Trump of Prime Minister Keir Starmer over his refusal to join the attack on Iran and dismissive remarks about Britain's military capabilities.

Trump, asked by the BBC whether the king's visit could help repair the relationship, said: "Absolutely, the answer is yes."

"I know him well, I've known him for years," he told the BBC in a phone interview. "He's a brave man, and he's a great man."

Nigel Sheinwald, Britain's ambassador to Washington from 2007 to 2012, said the visit could not, and was not designed to heal any current acrimony between governments, but it would demonstrate ties that went far deeper than any individuals.



King Charles III with US President Donald Trump at Windsor Castle, Berkshire. (Reuters/File Photo)

"Pretty much more than any other visit, this is about the long term. This is about the fundamentals of the relationship between our peoples, our coun-

tries," Sheinwald told Reuters. "It's not about what's going on today."

Charles, accompanied by his wife Queen Camilla, will kick off

the four-day trip on Monday with a private tea with Trump before addressing Congress, a state dinner and visits to New York and Virginia.

Back in Britain, some politicians and commentators have said the trip should have been cancelled given some of the recent remarks from Trump. There are also fears the unpredictable US president might use the occasion to deliver further criticisms and so potentially embarrass the king.

Sheinwald and the current US ambassador to London, Warren Stephens, have said that would be damaging. Royal aides privately say Trump, who calls the king a "great man", behaved impeccably during his unprecedented two state visits to Britain in 2019 and last year.

"He is a huge royalist," royal biographer Robert Hardman told Reuters.

"He has... one mindset when it comes to the British government, but British monarchy is a completely separate element, and he's a huge fan of it. And he adored the late queen, a big fan of the king. For him, this is a big moment."

In some ways, Charles' trip has echoes of the one made by his mother, Queen Elizabeth II, in 1957, a year after the Suez Crisis caused upheaval in the Middle East, with British, French and Israeli troops forced to end an invasion of Egypt after pressure from the US.

Her visit then succeeded in winning over US President Dwight Eisenhower and smoothing relations between the allies.

"The respect we have for Britain is epitomised in the affection we have for the royal family, who have honoured us so much by making this visit to our shores," Eisenhower said.

## UK, France sign 3-year deal to stop migrant crossings

AFP  
Loon-Plage

Britain and France yesterday signed a new three-year deal to stop undocumented migrants making the risky journey across the Channel in small boats.

Under the deal, France pledged to increase law enforcement personnel on the coast by more than half – reaching 1,400 officers by 2029.

Britain will in return provide up to 766m euros (\$897m) in funding, though nearly a quarter of that – 186m euros – are conditional on the measures being effective.

The cross-Channel neighbours have wrangled for months over renewing the Sandhurst treaty, which sets out the United Kingdom's financial contribution to French efforts to stop migrants attempting the perilous sea crossing to Britain.

The United Kingdom has accused France of doing too little to prevent would-be asylum seekers from setting off from French shores, with smugglers and migrants taking ever-greater risks to



British Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood and French Interior Minister Laurent Nunez, look at a boat used by people smugglers at Zuydcoote beach, France yesterday. (Reuters)

avoid detection.

As a result, London insisted it would only renew the Sandhurst treaty – first signed in 2018, extended in 2023 and set to expire this year – if it could impose conditions on how some of its money is used by the French government.

"We will now have flexibility to fund things that we know are working," UK Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood said yesterday, during a visit to northern France,

where she inked the deal with her French counterpart.

According to a French interior ministry document on the accord, if the new measures do not deliver "sufficient results, based on a joint annual assessment, the funding will be redirected to new actions".

French Interior Minister Laurent Nunez said the agreement was key for "combating" and "eradicating" illegal immigration networks. Even if the conditional portion

is not paid, the United Kingdom's core contribution of 580m euros still represents a 40-million-euro hike on what it paid under the last treaty.

Doctors Without Borders criticised the "results-based" funding scheme, arguing it would not deter people from seeking refuge in the United Kingdom.

The organisation warned the policy would instead "push men, women and children into the hands of smugglers and traffickers and force them to undertake the increasingly dangerous, sometimes deadly, crossings" to avoid being caught.

At least 29 migrants died at sea in the Channel last year, according to an AFP tally based on official French and British sources.

According to official British figures, 41,472 people reached the United Kingdom illegally in small boats in 2025, the second-highest figure since large-scale crossings were first detected in 2018.

The deal's renewal comes at a crunch time for British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who faces political pressure to curb immigration.

## China-linked hackers using common devices to conceal attacks

Reuters  
London

International cyber agencies yesterday urged organisations to better defend against covert networks used by China-linked hackers to conceal malicious cyber activity, according to Britain's National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC).

The NCSC published the new guidance alongside industry and 15 international partners from across eight other countries: the US, Australia, Canada, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand and Spain.

Covert networks, usually made up of what the NCSC described as vulnerable everyday Internet-connected devices such as home routers and smart devices, are used to target critical sectors globally, steal sensitive data, and maintain persistent access.

"In recent years, we have seen a deliberate shift in cyber groups based in China utilising these networks to hide their malicious activity in an attempt to avoid

accountability," NCSC director of operations Paul Chichester said in a statement.

The Chinese foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment.

The new guidance – jointly issued with agencies including the US's Federal Bureau of Investigation – warns that attacks can be hard to detect because evidence can disappear quickly, complicating efforts to disrupt such activity.

The advisory comes a day after Richard Horne, the head of the NCSC, warned Britain to brace for a rise in cyberattacks directly or indirectly from nation states, including China, Iran and Russia.

He said his agency had continued to handle about four nationally significant cyber incidents a week on average and that the highest-impact attacks were increasingly tied to governments rather than criminal gangs alone.

Britain has also called on leading AI companies to work with the government to build AI-powered cyber-defence capabilities to protect critical national infrastructure.

## Hackers steal \$2.5mn from Sri Lanka

AFP  
Colombo

Cyber criminals hacked into the Sri Lankan finance ministry's computer system and siphoned off \$2.5m, the government said yesterday, the most amount of cash ever stolen by hackers from a state institution in the debt-saddled country.

The cyber attack is a major blow to Sri Lanka, which is recovering from a crippling economic crisis in 2022 after Colombo defaulted on its \$46bn external debt.

The money was destined as debt repayment to Australia, finance ministry secretary Harshana Suriyapperuma told reporters in the capital.

Four senior officers at the Public Debt Management Office (PDMO) were suspended after the breach, he said.

Authorities were alerted to an



Sri Lanka's Secretary to the Ministry of Finance Harshana Suriyapperuma speaks during a press conference in Colombo yesterday. (AFP)

attempt to break into the ministry's e-mail server, and investigations showed that a \$2.5m payment owed to Australia had disappeared.

"Criminal investigators are looking into this and we are not in a position to give further details,"

Suriyapperuma said, adding that Sri Lankan authorities were seeking help from foreign law enforcement agencies.

Sri Lanka established the PDMO earlier this year in line with an IMF-backed \$2.9bn bailout loan from early 2023, following the island's economic meltdown.

Australia's High Commissioner in Sri Lanka, Matthew Duckworth, said Canberra was aware of "irregularities" in payments owed to it.

"Sri Lankan authorities are investigating the matter and are co-ordinating with Australian officials, who are assisting the investigation," Duckworth said on X.

"Australia remains committed to supporting Sri Lanka's return to debt sustainability."

The attack came as Sri Lanka's central bank and finance ministry launched an advertising blitz in local newspapers earlier this year, warning Sri Lankans not to fall prey to cyber scams.

## Mauritius sets July deadline for Chagos deal

Reuters  
Port Louis

Mauritius said it would wait up to the end of July for Britain to finalise a deal to hand over the Chagos Islands after London put the agreement on hold following objections from US President Donald Trump.

A British delegation met Mauritian Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam on Wednesday in their first talks since the UK paused the deal, which would cede sovereignty of the Indian Ocean archipelago to Mauritius while retaining use of the US-British military base on Diego Garcia island.

In comments to the national broadcaster after the talks, Attorney General Gavin Glover said Mauritius had no visibility on whether the US government would ultimately give the re-

**"We will wait until then, and at that point, the Mauritian government will have to decide on the way forward depending on what happens in the United Kingdom"**

quired approval for the deal to move ahead. "We will give them until the end of July," Glover said on Wednesday.

"We will wait until then, and at that point, the Mauritian government will have to decide on the way forward depending on what happens in the United Kingdom."

It was unclear what steps Mauritius might consider and what leverage it would have on an issue that has caught Trump's eye and become part of a wider geopolitical power-play. Trump said in February that the deal was a "big mistake" after having previously said it was the best that UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer would get.

US-led operations launched from Diego Garcia include bombing strikes against Houthi targets in Yemen in 2024 and 2025, humanitarian aid deployments to Gaza and attacks against Taliban and Al Qaeda targets in Afghanistan in 2001.

Iran fired two missiles at Diego Garcia last month, media reported, but did not hit the base.

The Chagos' six main atolls, among more than 600 islands, lie about 500km (300 miles) south of the Maldives and halfway between Africa and Indonesia, with about 4,000 people stationed there.

Britain forcibly displaced up to 2,000 indigenous Chagossians in the late 1960s and 1970s to establish the base on the Diego Garcia atoll, but had last year agreed to give sovereignty to former colony Mauritius while paying 101m pounds (\$136m) per year to secure the installation.

## N Zealand's Labour Party to support India free trade deal

Reuters  
Wellington

New Zealand's opposition Labour Party said yesterday it would support a free trade deal with India, paving the way for the agreement to clear parliament after one of the coalition partners in the government opposed it.

"This is not the deal Labour would have negotiated, but we value our relationship with India and the positive contributions of our Indian communities," opposition leader Chris Hipkins said.

New Zealand and India concluded a free trade deal in December that will eliminate or reduce tariffs on 95% of New Zealand's exports to India, with more than half of the products

to be duty free on day one of the pact, while all Indian goods would have duty-free access to New Zealand.

New Zealand also agreed to invest \$20bn in the Asian country in the next 15 years.

The agreement is due to be signed on Monday in Delhi. National, the largest party in government, along with coalition partner ACT both support the agreement but the third coalition partner, New Zealand First, does not.

This means Labour's support is necessary for the deal to be ratified in parliament. Trade agreements in New Zealand have historically been bipartisan.

New Zealand exporters and businesses last week called for cross-party support for the agreement.

## Voting underway in two key Indian states

AFP  
Kolkata

Voting began yesterday in two of India's politically key opposition-held states, with tens of millions casting ballots in West Bengal and the southern Tamil Nadu.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the ruling party in the national parliament, is hoping to make inroads in the opposition strongholds.

In West Bengal, which has a population of over 100m, polling opened in the first phase to elect members from 152 constituencies of the 294-seat legislative assembly. The second phase, covering the remaining 142 seats, will be held on April 29.

"Nearly 36m people are eligi-



Security personnel and polling officials leave the home of an elderly voter after collecting their ballot through the home-voting process during the West Bengal Legislative Assembly elections in Kolkata yesterday. (AFP)

ble to vote," said Manoj Agarwal, the state's chief electoral officer, adding that around 8,000 polling stations had been designated "supersensitive".

Modi's BJP has waged an ag-

gressive bid to dislodge West Bengal's Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, the firebrand leader of the All India Trinamool Congress (TMC) which has been in power in the state since 2011. Banerjee's

party won 213 of the 294 seats in the previous election held in 2021. Paramilitary forces were deployed, with security heightened along the Bangladesh border.

The campaign was marked by protests over the removal of millions of names from voter rolls during a Special Intensive Revision – meant to remove ineligible voters but which critics say is skewed against marginalised and minority communities.

Women's safety and corruption also featured prominently during the campaign.

In Tamil Nadu, which has a population of over 80m, polling for the 234-member assembly was being conducted yesterday in a single phase, with the ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) facing off against its long-time rival, the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK).



# The call of Ibrahim

When Ibrahim ('alaihi salaam) completed the structure of the Ka'aba, Allah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala) commanded him to call the people to Haj. Ibrahim ('alaihi salaam) pleaded, "O Allah! How shall my voice reach all of those people?" Allah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala) told him that his duty was only to give the call and it was up to Allah to make it reach the people. Ibrahim ('alaihi salaam) then climbed Mount Arafat and called out in his loudest voice, "O People! Verily Allah has prescribed upon you Haj, so perform Haj." Allah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala) revealed in the Qur'an: "And proclaim the Haj among mankind. They will come to thee on foot and (mounted) on every camel, lean on account of journeys through deep and distant mountain highways." (Surah Al-Hajj, Ayat 28). To this very day millions upon millions of Muslims continue to answer the call of Prophet Ibrahim ('alaihi salaam).

'Amr ibn Al-'Aas narrates, "When Islam entered my heart, I went to the Messenger of Allah, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, and said, 'Give me your hand so that I may pledge allegiance to you.' The Prophet spread his hand, but I withdrew mine. He said, 'What is wrong 'Amr?' I said, 'I want to make a condition.' 'And what is that?' he said. I said, 'That Allah will forgive me.' Then the Messenger of Allah said, 'Did you not know that Islam wipes out what came before it, and that Hijrah wipes out what came before it and that Haj wipes out what came before it!' (Sahih Muslim).

Haj is the fifth pillar of Islam. Allah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala) made it compulsory upon every able Muslim male and female to perform it, at least once in a lifetime. Allah revealed: "Haj thereto is a duty mankind owes to Allah, those who can afford the journey, but if any deny faith, Allah stands not in need of any of His creatures" (Surah Ali-Imran, Ayat 97). Performance of the Haj washes away all sins. Abu Hurairah narrates: I heard the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, say, "Whoever performs Haj and does not commit any Rafath (obscenity) or Fusooq (transgression), he returns (free from sin) as the day his mother bore him" (Sahih Bukhari).

Haj is one of the greatest deeds one can accomplish in his or her lifetime.

Abu Hurairah narrates: The Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, was asked, "What deed is the best?" He said, "Iman in Allah and His Messenger." "Then what?" "Jihad in the sake of Allah." "Then what?" "Haj Mabroor, a Haj accepted by Allah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala)." Abu Sha'thaa' said, "I contemplated the good deeds that a person does. I found that salaah as well as fasting are a jihad of the body. And that sadaqa is a jihad of someone's wealth. But Haj is a jihad of both body and wealth."

Haj is the greatest jihad. Aishah (radhiallahu 'anha) asked the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, "We find that jihad is the best deed, shouldn't we (women) do jihad?" The Prophet replied, "Rather the best jihad is a Haj Mabroor!" Aishah later said, "I'll never cease performing Haj after I heard that from Rasul Allah" (Agreed Upon).

## The dua of the one in Haj shall be accepted.

The Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "The soldier in the path of Allah and the one who performs Haj and the one who performs 'Umrah, all are the delegation of Allah! He called them and they answered. And they asked Him, and He shall grant them (what they ask for!)" (Authentic, narrated by Ibn Majah and Ibn Hibban).

In the Islamic history books it was narrated that on the day of Arafat, a man from Turkmenistan stood on the plains of Arafat in Haj. To his left all he could see was Muslims crying and praying to Allah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala). Because of his native tongue, he could not imitate the lengthy prayers of the others. At this realisation everything blurred in front of him. His face reddened, his eyes poured tears as he raised his hands, "O Allah! Grant me everything that they are asking for! Grant me everything that they are asking for!" And Allah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala) accepted his dua.

There is not a single day that the sun has come up on more beloved to Allah

(Subhanahu wa ta'ala) than the Day of Arafat.

The Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said, "There is no day on which Allah frees more of His slaves from Fire than the Day of Arafat, and He verily draws near, then boasts of them before the angles, saying: 'What do they seek?'" (Sahih Muslim). And in another hadith: "Verily Allah boasts of the people of Arafat before the people of Heaven (angels) saying: 'Look to my servants who have come to Me dishevelled and dusty.'" Abdullah ibn al-Mubaarak narrates: I went to Sufyaan ibn al-Uyaynah as the day of Arafat was setting. He sat on his knees, his hands raised to the Heavens, and tears moistened his cheeks and beard. He turned and looked at me, so I asked him, "Amongst the people who have gathered here for Haj, who is in the worst state?" Sufyaan ibn al-Uyaynah said, "He who thinks that Allah will not forgive him."

Aishah (radhiallahu 'anha) would see the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, standing in prayer at night so much so that his feet would crack. She would ask him, "Why do you do this when Allah has forgiven all your sins, the past and anything you may do in the future?" And he would reply, "Shouldn't I be a thankful slave?" With this example of the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, what should our attitude be when we hear of Paradise and forgiveness of sin for those who perform Haj? Does it mean that after Haj we fall back into all the disobedience that we went to Haj with? Does it mean that we are promised Jannah no matter what sin we do after Haj? Many people think this to be the case and it is a very dangerous presumption. You will find in many of the Hadith regarding the virtue of Haj the term Haj Mabroor. Do you know what Mabroor means? It means an accepted Haj. A Mabroor Haj is one in which Allah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala) is not disobeyed during or after. Others have said that a Haj Mabroor is one that is accepted, and the sign of it's acceptance is that a person will go back in a better state than when he came, and that he will discontinue the sins that were between him and Allah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala).

When Ibn Umar was on his deathbed and his son reminded him of all the



good deeds that he did with the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, and the companions, he told him, "Quiet! Don't you know whom Allah accepts from? Verily Allah only accepts from the God-Fearing (Al-Muttaqoon)." When Ali ibn Al-Husayn (radhiallahu 'anhuma) wore his Ihram towels and sat upright on his camel in preparation for the journey to Makkah, his face changed colour, his skin shivered and he cried, unable to say the Talbiyyah, Labbayk Allahumma Labbayk. Someone asked him, "What's

wrong?" And he replied, "I'm afraid that when I say it, it shall be replied, 'Laa Labbayka wa Laa Sa'dayk' (May you never have come and may you not have happiness)."

With that spirit, let us march forward in the search of the Mercy of Allah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala) and His forgiveness, to the first house of Allah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala) on earth, to Haj.

The Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said, "And there is no reward for an accepted Haj...except Jannah!"

# How do you face good and bad times?

The more one ponders over the apparent and hidden favours from Allah The Almighty upon him, the more he will realise that his Lord has granted him abundant blessings and protected him from a number of evils; this will certainly remove grief and anxiety and bring happiness and contentment. Thus, take heed of the advice of the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, when he said: "Look to those who are lower than you (i.e., those who possess less than you) and do not look to those higher than you; this will make you appreciate the bounties of Allah upon you." [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

Such people get the support and assistance of Allah The Almighty which makes fear vanish, as Allah The Almighty Says (what means): {"Be patient. Surely, Allah is with those who are the patient."} [Qur'an 8: 46]

The virtuous and the sinful, and the believer and the disbeliever are the same when it comes to conditioning oneself to becoming brave, which is the natural ability to calm oneself during moments of terror. Due to the believer's strong faith, perseverance and reliance on Allah The Almighty, he emerges stronger than others in difficult situations and this reduces his fear and anxiety and ultimately makes matters easy for him. As Allah The Almighty Says (what means): {"And don't be weak in the pursuit of the enemy; if you are suffering (hardships) then surely, they (too) are suffering (hardships) as you are suffering, but you have a hope from Allah (for the reward, i.e. Paradise) that for which they hope not."} [Qur'an, 4: 104]

However, the one who is devoid of strong faith will be the opposite; he becomes anxious, nervous, confused and full of fear; indeed his anxiety and paranoia team up against him. If this type of person does not possess the worldly means to tackle his fear and affliction, then he will collapse because he does not possess the faith which would enable him to persevere during tough times.

Another example of this is when certain frightening or disturbing events occur, such as emergencies or accidents. One finds that a person with sound faith is calm, steadfast, and able to cope with the situation and handle the hardship he is go-



ing through; such a person has conditioned himself to receiving such afflictions and this makes his heart stronger and more steadfast, which gives him tranquillity.

These examples show the great difference between a person who has strong belief and acts accordingly, and another who is not at this level of faith. Due to the strong belief of the true believer and his contentment with whatever Allah The Almighty has decreed, if he is afflicted with sickness, poverty or any other affliction, he is tranquil and content and has no desire for anything which has not been decreed for him. Instead, he looks at those less fortunate than him rather than those who are more fortunate and by doing so he becomes happier, even more than one who is discontent despite possessing all the riches of this world.

Many people receive affliction with fear, discontent, sorrow and despair; their life becomes miserable, they panic and become short tempered. Such a person fails to think about the reward that he should be hoping for, nor does he exercise patience that would bring about contentment and thus make life easier for him.

There can be several reasons for this state of mind: the fear of losing the things one desires and cherishes or the greed to acquire more of the same, because man

will never reach a point where he is fully satisfied in life.

Different people can have completely different reactions when something good or bad befalls them, and their reactions depend on the strength of their belief and the extent of their righteous actions. One person may receive goodness with gratitude and evil with perseverance, which brings him peace of mind and happiness, causing his grief, anxiety and misery to disappear. Thus, this becomes a cause of positivity in his life. The second person receives goodness with arrogance and transgression; his manners degenerate and become evil; he receives this goodness and utilises it in an unthinking manner; it does not give him any peace of mind and his mind is always restless and agitated.

The Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "How wonderful is the affair of the believer! All of his affairs are good and this is the case for nobody except a believer. If he is blessed with prosperity he thanks (Allah) and that is good for him; and if he is afflicted with adversity he perseveres and that is also good for him." [Muslim]

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



# The sin of associating partners with Allah

One of the most important things Muslims must know and pay attention to is the issue of Shirk (associating partners with Allah in worship), its seriousness and its different types, so that our Tawheed (belief in the Oneness of Allah) and our Islam may be complete, and our faith may be sound.

The word Shirk in Arabic means taking a partner, i.e., regarding someone as the partner of another. It is used in Arabic when one wishes to express that he regards two people as equal in status; or that two people are involved in it.

In terms of Shariah or Islamic terminology, Shirk means ascribing a partner or rival to Allah in Lordship (Ruboobiyyah), worship (Uloohiyyah) or in His Names and Attributes.

A rival is a peer or counterpart. Hence Allah forbids setting up rivals with Him and He condemns those who take them (rivals) as gods instead of or besides Allah in many verses of the Qur'an. Allah Says (what means): "Then do not set up rivals to Allah (in worship) while you know (that He Alone has the right to be worshipped)." [Qur'an 2:222]

And (what means): "And they set up rivals to Allah, to mislead (people) from His path! Say (O Muhammad, to the polytheists): 'Enjoy (your brief life)! But certainly, your destination is the Fire!'" [Qur'an 14:30]

Prophet Muhammad, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Whoever dies claiming that Allah has a rival, will enter Hell!" [Al-Bukhari]

## The types of Shirk:

The texts of the Qur'an and Sunnah (narrations of the Prophets, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, indicate that Shirk sometimes puts a person beyond the pale of Islam and sometimes does not. Hence, the scholars divided Shirk into two types: major Shirk and minor Shirk. Following is a brief description of each type:

### 1 - Major Shirk

This means ascribing to someone other than Allah something that belongs only to Allah, such as Lordship (Ruboobiyyah), Worship (Uloohiyyah) and the Divine Names or Attributes (Al-Asmaa' Was-Sifaat).

This kind of Shirk may sometimes be outwardly, such as the Shirk of those who worship idols and graves, or the dead or even living people. Other times, it may be hidden, such as those who put their trust in other than Allah, or the Shirk of the hypocrites. For even though their (hypocrites') Shirk puts them beyond the pale of Islam and means that they will abide forever in Hell, it is a hidden Shirk, because they make an outward display of Islam and conceal their disbelief and Shirk, so they are inwardly Polytheists but not outwardly.

### Shirk in the form of beliefs, such as:

- The belief that there is someone else who creates, gives life and death, reigns or controls the affairs of the universe along with Allah.
- The belief that there is someone else who must be obeyed absolutely besides Allah.
- Associating others with Allah in love and veneration, by loving a created being as loving



Allah. This is the kind of Shirk that Allah does not forgive, and it is the Shirk about which Allah Says (what means):

"And of mankind are some who take (for worship) others besides Allah as rivals. They love them as they love Allah!" [Qur'an 2:165]

- The belief that there are those who know the Unseen that only Allah Knows. This is very common among some of the deviant sects.

- The belief that there is someone who bestows mercy in a manner that is befitting only for Allah, so he shows mercy as Allah does and forgives sins and overlooks the bad deeds of his 'worshippers'!

### Shirk in the form of words:

Such as those who supplicate to someone other than Allah, or seek his help or seek refuge with him with regard to matters over which no one has control except Allah, whether the person called upon is a Prophet, a Wali (righteous person), an angel or a jinn, or some other created being. This is a kind of major Shirk which puts one beyond the pale of Islam.

Also, those who make fun of religion or who liken Allah to His creation, or say that there is another creator, provider or controller besides Allah are included in this type of Shirk. All of these fall under major Shirk and are grave sins that are not forgiven.

### Shirk in the form of actions:

Such as one who sacrifices, prays or prostrates to something other than Allah, or who promulgates laws to replace the rulings of Allah and makes such laws the reference which people are obliged to refer to for judgement; or one who supports the disbelievers and helps them against the believers, and other acts that go against the basic meaning of faith and put the one who does them beyond the pale of Islam.

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



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**GULF TIMES**

## Hormuz crisis throws spotlight on world's largest 'chokepoint' — the Malacca Strait

The closure of the Strait of Hormuz has forced policymakers in Asia to face questions over the security of other maritime chokepoints, including the Strait of Malacca, which is the world's busiest waterway for international trade.

The 900-km (550-mile) long Malacca Strait, bounded by Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore, provides the shortest sea route from East Asia to the Middle East and Europe.

It carries nearly 22% of the world's maritime trade, according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies. This includes oil and gas shipments from the Middle East to the energy-hungry economies of China, Japan and South Korea.

Malacca is the largest "oil transit chokepoint" in the world and the only one that outpaces Hormuz, according to the US Energy Information Administration.

In the first half of 2025, some 23.2mn barrels of oil per day were transported through the Malacca Strait, accounting for 29% of total maritime oil flows. The next largest chokepoint, Hormuz, saw about 20.9mn bpd pass through.

More than 102,500 ships, mostly commercial vessels, transited through the Malacca Strait in 2025, up from around 94,300 in 2024, data from Malaysia's Marine Department showed. These include most tankers, but some very large vessels avoid the strait because of draught restrictions and go south around Indonesia instead.

**The Malacca Strait is only 2.7km wide, creating a natural bottleneck, as well as potential for collisions, grounding, or oil spills**

This route allows the Strait of Malacca to be bypassed if it were closed, but it adds to journey time that would delay shipments and drive up prices. At its narrowest point in the Phillips Channel of the Singapore Strait, the Malacca Strait is only 1.7 miles (2.7km) wide, creating a natural bottleneck, as well as potential for collisions, grounding, or oil spills.

Some parts of the strait are relatively shallow, with a depth of 25-27m (82-90 ft), restricting the largest vessels, but even very large crude carriers (VLCCs) measuring more than 350m long, 60m wide, and with a draft of more than 20m, make the transit.

For years, the strait has been a hotbed of piracy and attacks on merchant vessels.

Last year saw criminal attacks spike to at least 104, but these have fallen off in the first quarter of this year, according to the ReCAAP Information Sharing Centre, an organisation established by regional governments to combat piracy.

The narrow and congested waterway has been strategically important to Beijing, with around 75% of China's seaborne crude oil imports passing through it from the Middle East and Africa, data from tanker tracker Vortexa shows.

The Iran crisis has crystallised long-standing worries about how chokepoints such as Malacca could be affected if a conflict breaks out in the South China Sea or the Taiwan Strait, where another 21% of global maritime trade transits, according to CSIS.

Malaysian authorities say the Malacca Strait is also a growing spot for illegal ship-to-ship transfers, where oil is shifted between tankers at sea to obscure its origin. Indonesian Finance Minister Purbaya Yudhi Sadewa made waves on Wednesday by openly musing about ways countries could impose tolls on ships as a way to monetize the strait, before noting that such an arrangement is not possible.

When asked about the risks of tolls or other restrictions on movement in the strait, Singapore Foreign Affairs Minister Vivian Balakrishnan told CNBC that the nations along the strait share a strategic interest to keep it open, and have agreed not to collect tolls.

He also said Singapore had assured the United States and China that the right of passage was guaranteed for all and it would not participate in any efforts to block the strait or impose tolls. Malaysian Foreign Minister Mohamad Hasan told a forum on Wednesday that no unilateral decisions can be made about the strait and that Malaysia is on the same page with Singapore, Indonesia and Thailand, and they conduct joint patrols to ensure the waterway remains open. — Reuters

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## All lined up



New Porsche cars are ready for shipping next to the Volkswagen plant in Emden, northwestern Germany, during a media day ahead of the National Maritime Conference. The National Maritime Conference (NMC), scheduled for April 29 and 30, 2026, is the German government's central event for supporting the maritime industry. (AFP)

# Qatar adopts unique approach to promoting multilateral diplomacy

**The country's efforts in mediation and good offices have risen gradually since 2004, gaining a distinct credibility, and have proven effective in resolving many intractable conflicts**

**QNA**  
Doha

The International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace is celebrated on April 24 each year and is considered an occasion for one of the most prominent aspects of international institutional work with diverse roles. In recent decades, it has occupied a large space in the area of cross-border co-operation, where negotiated diplomacy aims to make efforts to establish peace and resolve conflicts in different parts of the world succeed and save the lives of millions.

It represents an expression of a shared political and humanitarian commitment, stemming from a system of values and principles agreed upon by those concerned with international affairs. The vocabulary of political consultation committed to international laws, along with openness to different viewpoints and bridging the gaps between them, and guaranteeing the rights of affected, fragile and weak groups, constitutes solid foundations upon which purposeful diplomatic interaction to defuse conflicts is based.

Its path is guided by rules that ensure the continuity of co-operation, provided that the rules are applied equally to all parties, so that everyone achieves their rights and ensures the fulfillment of their duties through a fair distribution of responsibilities.

World leaders adopted what became known as the Pact for the Future at the summit held at the United Nations headquarters in September 2024, reaffirming their commitment to peace, sustainable development and the protection of human rights. As the UN embodies the highest form of multilateralism, its Charter not only defines its structure and functions, but is also a pillar of the international system, which Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has described more than once as the "moral compass to promote peace, advance human dignity, prosperity and uphold human rights and the rule of law."

In December 2018, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on the International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace, calling on member states and stakeholders to celebrate this day and promote awareness of the benefits of multilateralism. The multilateral framework has witnessed remarkable development, with the number of countries under its umbrella increasing from 51 members in 1945 to 193 currently, in addition to the growing participation of non-governmental organizations and the private sector, with more than a thousand organizations having observer status at the UN.

**International praise**

Qatar adopts a unique approach to promoting multilateral diplomacy and plays a pivotal role through fruitful diplomacy that has proven effective in resolving many intractable conflicts. It also hosts numerous rounds of dialogue and negotiations between the parties to the conflict, and has received international praise for its consistent commitment to supporting the UN and its active partnership with humanitarian and development organizations operating under the UN's umbrella, which has strengthened its active and responsible role as an influential member of the international community.

The latest diplomatic efforts of the State of Qatar in the international arena included its request to include an emergency item on the agenda of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), which convened in Istanbul from April 15-19, in partnership with a number of countries and with the support of geopolitical groups. The emergency item was 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."

The emergency item submitted by the State

The 24th of April is celebrated each year and is considered an occasion for one of the most prominent aspects of international institutional work with diverse roles

**2026**

April. Qatar requested to include an emergency item on the agenda of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)

**193**

The current number of countries under the multilateral framework's umbrella compared to 51 members in 1945

Exclusive Statements to Qatar News Agency |



**Faleh bin Hussein Al Hajri**  
Editor-in-Chief of Al-Arab daily newspaper

The "Emergency Item" initiative proposed by Doha offers a vision that integrates parliamentary diplomacy into the efforts aimed at stabilizing the ceasefire

The broad approval and registration of the initiative mark an Arab precedent and reflect the crystallization of international credibility



**Dr. Ali Bakir**  
Research Assistant Professor of International Affairs, Security, and Defense at Qatar University

The initiative of "Emergency Item" embodies a practical example of multilateral diplomacy, as it represents the State of Qatar's ability to mobilize international support for peace and stability issues

"This initiative comes to reinforce the role of Qatar as a responsible international actor seeking to entrench collective security"



of Qatar, represented by the Shura Council, won an overwhelming majority to be included on the agenda of the IPU's 152nd General Assembly, held in Istanbul. This is the first time that an emergency item submitted by an Arab country has received the necessary votes to be included on the agenda of the General Assembly.

In this regard, Research Assistant Professor of International Affairs, Security, and Defence at Qatar University Dr Ali Bakir said in an interview with QNA that the initiative of "Emergency Item" embodies a practical example of multilateral diplomacy, as it represents Qatar's ability to mobilise international support for peace and stability issues.

He noted that it is not possible to isolate this achievement from Qatar's well-established approach, as this initiative depicts the culmination of over two decades of diplomatic efforts in mediation, trust building, and favouring political solutions over conflicts.

Dr Bakir affirmed that Qatar played a pivotal role in bridging the gap between the conflicting parties across various regional and international issues, and contributed in lowering tensions and encouraging opportunities for dialogue.

From this standpoint, this initiative comes to reinforce the role of Qatar as a responsible international actor seeking to entrench collective security and leverage international parliamentary tools in the service of peace. This underscores that Qatari diplomacy is not a situational response, but a steadfast policy

with a long-term strategic vision. For his part, Editor-in-Chief of Al-Arab daily newspaper Faleh bin Hussein al-Hajri said in a statement to QNA that Qatar's experience manifests as a mature expression of a political vision that has woven its presence through a steady and systematic accumulation, where mediation has evolved into a permanent fixture of its foreign policy, and dialogue has become a primary tool for navigating international complexities.

In this context, the "Emergency Item" initiative proposed by Doha came to consolidate this trajectory, as it offers a vision that integrates parliamentary diplomacy into the efforts aimed at stabilising the ceasefire, protecting civilians, and entrenching the rules of international humanitarian law.

Al-Hajri added that the broad approval and registration of the initiative mark an Arab precedent in placing an emergency item on the union's agenda.

This, he said, reflects the crystallisation of international credibility over two decades of active engagement in mediation, ranging from conflict resolution to managing complex humanitarian files.

He pointed out that this credibility is rooted in a Qatari foreign policy that has turned de-escalation into a priority and made the bridging of perspectives an institutional practice, thereby strengthening regional and international stability.

He emphasised that this approach, especially in an international environment characterised by accelerating and intertwined crises, stands out as a practical contribution to revitalise the international system through multilateral tools capable of transforming principles into executive mechanisms, thereby entrenching peace and establishing long-term stability.

Qatar's efforts in mediation and good offices have escalated gradually since 2004, gaining a distinct credibility that has propelled it into the arena of mediation with diverse objectives, such as ceasefires, restoring diplomatic relations, releasing hostages, exchanging prisoners, supporting national dialogues, ending border disputes, enhancing humanitarian efforts, and reaching peace agreements at both regional and international levels.

## Climate scrubbed from G7 meeting to appease US

AFP  
Paris

Environment ministers from G7 nations launched a two-day meeting in Paris yesterday with climate change kept off the agenda to avoid a row with the US.

The office of France's ecology minister Monique Barbut had said the Group of Seven would focus on "less contentious issues" to appease its largest and most powerful member, drawing criticism from activists.

Barbut said the G7 "must remain a forum for convergence" and France as host was prioritising unity at a time when environmental protection was slipping down the global agenda.

"I hope we can send a strong message of unity and ambition", Barbut said at the opening of the meeting.

Italy, Canada, Japan, Germany and the United Kingdom sent their environment ministers to Paris but Washington dispatched Usha-Mar-

ia Turner, an assistant administrator at the US Environmental Protection Agency.

Ocean conservation, funding for biodiversity, and the transformation of dry areas into desert are on the agenda, among other broad environmental themes.

Barbut's office said it "chose not to address the climate issue head-on because the United States' positions on this subject are well known".

President Donald Trump's administration has withdrawn the US from global agreements on climate change and weakened environmental protections since he returned to office in 2025.

Gaia Febvre from Climate Action Network, an alliance of activist groups, said "a G7 moving at the pace of the US cannot claim to respond to the crises of the century".

"By yielding to pressure, it weakens collective action and renounces its potential leading role," she told AFP.

It takes place just days before more than 50 countries meet in Colombia for the first-ever

global conference dedicated to phasing out fossil fuels, the main driver of climate change.

France is spearheading an initiative to raise public and private finance for the protection of biodiversity and hopes to win the backing of other G7 nations.

Barbut's ministry hopes to announce \$800mn in funding for national parks in some 20 African countries, according to sources close to the matter.

Jean Burkard, advocacy director at WWF France, welcomed this inclusion on the G7 agenda but said any funding "must be additional and not compensate" for cuts elsewhere to state budgets for nature.

The G7 meeting also hopes to reach a political declaration on desertification and security, while sessions on oceans will look to strengthen an alliance on marine protected areas.

Other sessions are planned, including on water pollution, while a visit to the Fontainebleau forest south of Paris is also scheduled Thursday as part of a session dedicated to woodlands.

## EU leaders, Zelensky celebrate unblocked funds in Cyprus

AFP  
Ayia Napa

The EU gave a long-awaited green light yesterday to release a 90-billion-euro (\$105-billion) loan for Kyiv, with leaders to celebrate the end of the deadlock with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in Cyprus in the evening.

After months of wrangling with Hungary, the final sign-off for the loan and a new package of EU sanctions on Russia boosted Zelensky as he touched down for talks with the bloc's leaders in resort town Ayia Napa.

EU chief Ursula von der Leyen welcomed the "good news" as she headed to Cyprus.

"While Russia doubles down on its aggression, we are doubling down on our support to the brave Ukrainian nation enabling Ukraine to defend itself and putting pressure on Russia's war economy," she said on X.

Zelensky hailed the move and urged the first tranche to be disbursed by May or June. He has previously said Ukraine wants to use the money to strengthen the country's army and support "the domestic production of Ukrainian weapons".

But he immediately put pressure on EU leaders to give Ukraine full, not "symbolic" membership of the European Union.

"We are defending common European values. I believe that we deserve full-fledged EU membership," he told journalists, including from AFP, in a recorded voice message.

The 90-billion euros were blocked after a bitter row broke out between Hungary's nationalist pre-



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky poses for a family photo with European Union leaders at the start of an informal European leaders' summit in Ayia Napa, yesterday. (Reuters)

mier Viktor Orban and Zelensky.

Orban warned he would only lift his veto on the funds after Ukraine fixed a pipeline damaged by a Russian strike. Following its repair this week, oil flowed once more via the pipeline to Hungary and Slovakia.

Moscow ally Orban has frequently been a thorn in the EU's side and officials hope decisions on Ukraine will now be made faster without his opposition, after a crushing election defeat to pro-EU opposition figure Peter Magyar this month.

Orban, who will only step down next month but will not attend meetings in Cyprus on Thursday and Friday – which will be informal – had been blocking Ukraine's next step towards EU accession.

But even with him gone, there is reluctance among EU members to fast track Kyiv's bid to join – prompting some to float the possibility of granting Ukraine a lesser

status without full membership rights.

"There will be no enlargement for Ukraine in the foreseeable future," a European diplomat told AFP.

A senior Ukrainian official said Zelensky would discuss with leaders "joint weapons production and security capabilities, the challenges posed by the war in Iran" and air defence for Ukraine.

The new round of economic punishment for the Kremlin – the 20th by the EU since the war started – targets Russia's energy, banking and trade sectors.

The measures included clamping down further on the so-called "shadow fleet" of ageing tankers that Moscow uses to dodge oil export restrictions, and curbs on Russian cryptocurrency traders.

During the two days of talks in Cyprus, which holds the rotating EU presidency, leaders will also

discuss the Middle East war and its fallout, including skyrocketing energy prices.

Cyprus was sucked into the conflict in March after a drone strike on a British base on the Mediterranean island.

European leaders will be joined today by their regional counterparts for what a senior EU official described as "intensive dialogue".

Expected to join them are Lebanese President Joseph Aoun, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa, and Jordanian Crown Prince Hussein bin Abdullah.

During a working lunch, they will discuss the situation in Lebanon. A key issue for Europe is the Strait of Hormuz whose effective closure has sent oil prices soaring and crimped supply of jet fuel in Europe.

The European Union's 2028-2034 budget will also be discussed for the first time, with hopes of securing a final agreement by the end of 2026.

The EU executive wants a bigger budget worth around two trillion euros (\$2.3tn) though national governments are reluctant to pay more.

That's why despite the energy shocks, the EU has little wiggle room to spend more as it pays off Covid-era loans.

But as with anything related to money in the EU, France and Germany are diametrically opposed, with Paris calling for more European investment and Berlin arguing for fiscal restraint.

European officials fear that without a deal before France's presidential election next year, there is a risk that a far-right leader could cut contributions to the EU by France, the bloc's second-biggest economy.

## 10 killed in Pakistan mining project attack

AFP  
Quetta

A group of militants killed at least 10 people, including a Turkish national, at a copper and gold mining project in Pakistan's southwestern Balochistan province, officials said yesterday, with another Turk taken hostage.

About 40 militants on motorcycles and other vehicles stormed the mining project site of Pakistani company National Resources Private Limited (NRL) in the Darigwan area of Chagai district on Wednesday.

"At least 10 people were killed in the incident, including a Turkish national, six workers, and three guards," a local administration official told AFP on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to speak to the media.

No group claimed responsibility, but local ethnic separatist groups have intensified their attacks in the region in recent years, including on mining projects.

The Turk and three guards were killed when a fuel tanker at the mine exploded during the at-

tack, the official said.

"The militants also abducted one Turkish national during the attack," he said.

A police official, also speaking on condition of anonymity, confirmed the details of the attack to AFP. He said eight people were wounded.

The company acknowledged the attack late on Wednesday, saying security forces responded "promptly and have secured the area". It did not provide details about casualties.

The dead and wounded were taken to a government hospital in nearby Dalbandin, AFP journalists saw.

One man's feet and left arm were bandaged, his clothes ripped and blackened.

Nasir Khan, a hospital official, confirmed the death toll.

"We have 10 dead bodies here," he told AFP. "Some had gunshot wounds. Others were burned."

Two people were seriously wounded, he said. One had been hit by shrapnel and the other had extensive burns.

The local official said a Turkish national and two South Africans were "safely evacuated" from the attack site.

## Russia warns against hosting French nuclear bombers

Reuters  
Moscow

Russia warned yesterday that any European countries that accepted deployments of French nuclear-capable strategic bombers would make themselves targets for attack by Moscow's forces in the event of a conflict.

French President Emmanuel Macron announced plans in March to expand the country's nuclear arsenal and said France may allow European partners to host its nuclear-capable aircraft on temporary deployments.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko said in an interview published yesterday that this was part of an "uncontrolled build-up" of Nato's nuclear potential, which posed a strategic threat to Russia.

He stressed Moscow's concern about the potential French nuclear deployments to other European countries. Macron has said Paris is discussing such arrangements with Britain, Germany, Poland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Greece, Sweden and Denmark.

"Clearly, our military will be forced to pay close atten-

tion to this issue in the context of updating the list of priority targets in the event of a major conflict," Grushko told the state media group Russia Today.

"As a result, instead of the declared French strengthening of the defence of their allies – to whom, incidentally, they offer no ironclad guarantees – the security of these countries is in fact being weakened."

Macron's initiative is part of a drive by Nato's European members to take more responsibility for their own defence, after frequent criticism of the alliance from US President Donald Trump, and in light of his threats to take control of Greenland from Nato member Denmark.

The expiry in February of the last remaining treaty limiting the size of the Russian and US strategic nuclear arsenals has created a vacuum in global arms control, at a time when international tensions are at their highest for decades because of the Ukraine and Iran wars.

Grushko said any future dialogue on nuclear weapons would need to take into account the combined capabilities of Nato, including the French and British arsenals as well as that of the US

## 18 injured in head-on train crash in Denmark

AFP  
Hillerod

Two commuter trains collided head-on near the Danish capital early yesterday leaving five critically hurt and 13 others with lesser injuries, officials said.

Police were unable to provide information about the cause of the accident, which occurred near a level crossing in a rural wooded area about 40 kilometres (25 miles) north of Copenhagen, near the town of Hillerod.

"Eighteen people have been injured in the accident. Of these, five are currently considered to be in critical condition," police said in a statement, citing health authorities.

Police said they were alerted to the crash at 6:29am (0429 GMT).

The yellow and grey locomotives of the two trains could be seen smashed and buckled in, the glass from their windshields and windows shattered. Both trains and their carriages remained upright on the rails.

Thirty-seven people were on the two trains, according to police.

A large number of ambulances and police cars were dispatched and all the passengers were evacuated and the injured transported to hospitals.

The mayor of Gribskov municipality, Trine Egetved, said on Facebook that some of the injured were flown to hospital by helicopter.

The municipality of Hillerod set up a crisis centre for uninjured passengers and their relatives.

"21 people came to the crisis centre, most of them were on the train coming from the north and were on their way to work," Michael Jorgen Pedersen, preparedness co-ordinator for the municipality, told AFP, adding that the people arriving had been "shaken".

Red Cross volunteer Christian Kraul Jensen told AFP they had been given coffee and a "psychological debriefing".

"Meaning they were debriefed by retelling



Emergency workers at the site of a collision between two trains between Hilleroed and Kagerup at Isterodvejen, yesterday. (Reuters)

the situation and only describing how they felt and what happened," Jensen said.

Emergency crews wound up their rescue efforts around three hours after the accident, as investigators continued their work at the scene.

"We can't provide any details for now about the cause," police official Morten Kaare Pedersen told reporters.

"We are in the process of gathering the necessary information about the course of events. So there are, and will continue to be for quite some time, a lot of investigations underway."

Damm-Højmdal said the number of critically injured "could change" over the course of the day.

The number "is obviously dynamic and could change. But that is the status as of now," he told a press conference almost four hours after the accident.

"Initially it is difficult to get an overview of the exact injuries," he said. "You can imagine two trains colliding. That causes a lot of differ-

ent injuries, people get thrown around."

Kristian Madsen, an expert on railways with the Danish union IDA, told AFP he believed the accident was likely due to human error.

"It could be that the locomotive driver hadn't seen that the signal was on red and then continued driving... The other thing it could be is that the station master who is responsible for the signalling on the station had given the train a green signal," Madsen said.

The expert explained that the area still used an "old signal system".

Egetved said she had been "deeply upset and shocked".

"This train is used by many residents of Gribskov, workers and students," she said.

Denmark prides itself on its safety record, but a 2019 train crash left eight dead and 16 injured.

In August last year, an express train hit a farm truck on a crossing, killing one person and injuring 27.

## Putin defends Internet outages as necessary

Reuters  
Moscow

President Vladimir Putin said yesterday that Internet outages in Russia were being imposed for security reasons, defending measures that have caused widespread public frustration.

However Putin also said, in televised comments, that law enforcement officials must show "ingenuity" in finding solutions and guaranteeing the functioning of vital services.

"I can't help but draw attention to what people are experiencing in large cities. It's not common but it does happen, unfortunately. I'm referring to certain Internet problems and outages in large cities," he told a government meeting.

"Of course, if this is related to operational work to prevent terrorist attacks – and we know that, unfortunately, we sometimes miss such attacks – the priority will always be to protect people's safety," he added.

Authorities shut down the mobile Internet in Moscow for nearly three weeks last month and regularly block it elsewhere, citing the risk of Ukrainian drones using it to guide attacks.

The shutdowns have sparked criticism from businesses, officials and ordinary Russians, frustrated by disruption to banking, transport and other daily services.

A source close to the Kremlin told Reuters earlier this month that senior business-oriented officials and bankers had lobbied Putin to ease the clampdown.



Russian President Vladimir Putin chairs a meeting with members of the government via video link at the Kremlin in Moscow, yesterday. (Reuters)

Putin said providing public information in advance about Internet outages could be detrimental because "criminals, after all, hear and see everything"; and could adjust their behaviour and plans accordingly.

But he said security agencies and civilian authorities should co-ordinate to find solutions, and there was a need to "develop a mechanism for the uninterrupted operation of vital services".

Independent political analyst Tatiana Stanovaya said Putin's message was that the outages were justified but people needed to be better informed.

"He often justifies social discontent in this way, claiming officials haven't explained things well," she said.

"His words imply that the security services are doing everything correctly, and this will continue at their discretion for as long as necessary."

# Café culture evolves into a social experience in Qatar

By Shaima Sheriff  
Staff Reporter

Café culture in Qatar is rapidly expanding, transforming coffee from a daily habit into a social and lifestyle experience, as residents embrace cafés as spaces for connection, comfort, and community.

Across Qatar, cafés are no longer just places to grab a quick drink, they are becoming central to how people socialise, unwind, and experience the city's evolving lifestyle.

From popular destinations, such as West Walk, Old Doha port, and Lusail to neighbourhood cafés across Doha, the growing number of venues reflects a wider cultural shift, where coffee is increasingly tied to leisure and connection rather than necessity.

"It's not just something you drink when you need it," one café-goer said while sitting with a friend. "It's something you enjoy. It has become a leisure activity."

For many, cafés now serve as meeting points, spaces to relax, catch up, and spend quality time.



From popular destinations, such as West Walk, Old Doha port, and Lusail to neighbourhood cafés across Doha, the growing number of venues reflects a wider cultural shift, where coffee is increasingly tied to leisure and connection rather than necessity.

"People come out to have fun, and grabbing a coffee or a drink is part of that. Having a good spot to go to is just a plus point," she added.

The experience, however, goes beyond the drink itself. Another visitor noted that the atmosphere

plays a key role in shaping the appeal. "It's not only about the coffee anymore," she said.

She added: "It's about the place, it has to be aesthetically pleasing, calm, and comfortable. It's enjoyable just to sit and see

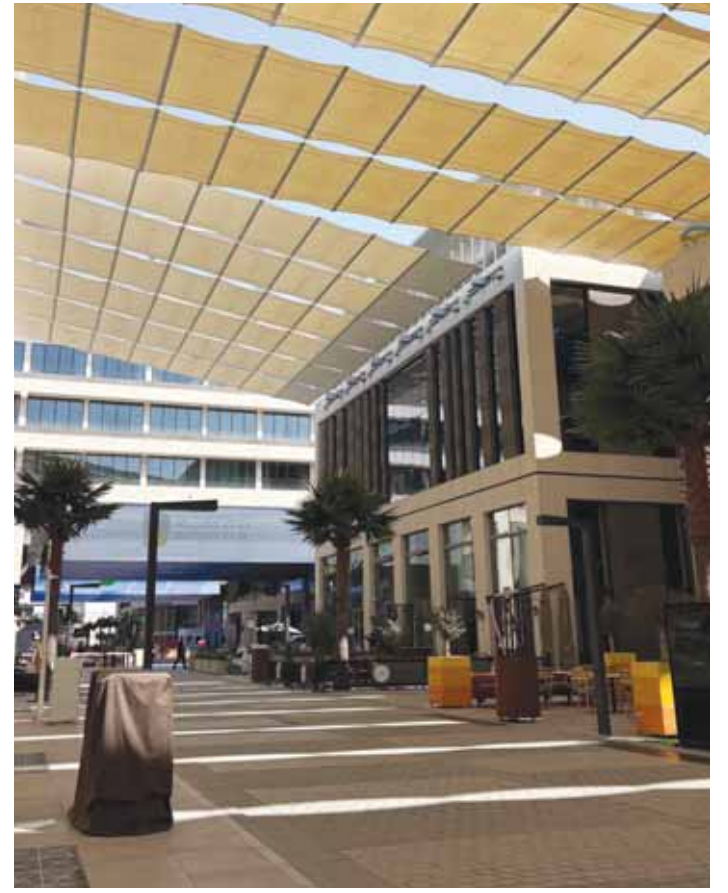
people around you."

This growing trend is particularly evident among younger residents, who are increasingly choosing cafés as an alternative to staying at home. "Sometimes, getting out of the house just means sitting somewhere different with something to drink or snack on. It's something people really appreciate," one person explained.

University student Ayesha echoed this sentiment, describing café culture in Qatar as a popular trend among youth, where socialising is often centred around shared spaces and experiences.

For others, cafés have become part of family life. Reem, a resident, said visiting cafés is now a routine activity. "Families go out, sit down together, talk, and have fun," she said, highlighting how these spaces cater to different age groups and social settings.

The rise of pop-up cafés and new concepts has further fuelled the trend, offering unique experiences that attract a diverse audience. Many visitors noted that these modern spaces still carry echoes of



traditional Qatari hospitality.

"There's something meaningful about it. Serving coffee has always been part of our culture, and now it's being presented in new ways," one café-goer said.

As café culture continues to grow, it is reshaping everyday life

in Qatar, blending modern lifestyle trends with longstanding traditions of hospitality.

What began as a simple cup of coffee has evolved into something more, a shared experience that brings people together, one café at a time.

## Protection of marine environment highlighted at Old Doha Port event

QNA  
Doha

In recognition of Earth Day, Old Doha Port is showcasing its sustainability work across marine protection, waste management, and seabed conservation. The destination's environmental initiatives reflect its responsibility to protect the marine environment that supports its operations, heritage, and offerings.

These efforts include Old Doha Port's pollution response operations, regulated waste management practices, and the annual Seabed Cleaning Initiative, delivered by the divers, technical teams, and partners behind each of these activities. They form part of Old Doha Port's wider environmental sustainability agenda, in line with the Qatar National Vision 2030 and the country's commitment to environmental preservation and sustainable tourism development, according to a press release issued Wednesday by Old Doha Port on the occasion of Earth Day.

One of Old Doha Port's flagship sustainability initiatives is the annual Seabed Cleaning, first launched in 2023 and now in its fourth consecutive year. The initiative brings together professional divers, government entities, and private sector partners to remove



waste from depths of up to six metres, including plastics, abandoned fishing nets, ropes, and large debris that pose risks to marine life and safe navigation, the press release said.

Each operation is guided by pre-assessment surveys to accurately identify pollution areas, with collected waste sorted and recyclable materials processed in collaboration with specialised entities. The annual Seabed Cleaning initiative also plays an important role in raising public awareness around marine conservation and engaging the wider community in protecting Qatar's coastal waters, it added.

Old Doha Port stressed that it also maintains a high standard of readiness to respond to oil spills and marine pollution incidents through dedicated specialised equipment. This includes floating barriers used

to contain spills on the water's surface, alongside recovery and treatment tools. These efforts are supported by trained teams ready to act immediately in any emergency. Response plans are reviewed and updated regularly in coordination with the relevant authorities, with routine drills carried out to ensure operational readiness.

In parallel, Old Doha Port operates a regulated waste management system for boats and marine activity within the marina. Dedicated collection points are in place for solid waste, alongside treatment facilities for sewage water and dedicated tanks for used oils, while the discharge of any waste into the water basin is strictly prohibited. Operators are required to follow established environmental guidelines, with ongoing monitoring carried out to ensure full compliance.

## Winter sports development initiative set to launch soon

The Qatar Winter Sports Committee in collaboration with Years of Culture, is set to launch a year-round programme of winter sports development initiatives as part of the Qatar Canada and Mexico 2026 Year of Culture partnership. This marks a major step in expanding winter sports participation and technical excellence in Qatar.

Running throughout the year, the programme is designed to grow winter sports in Qatar over the long term. It covers several disciplines, including ice hockey, curling, skating, and short track, with a focus on grassroots participation, youth engagement, coach development, and competitive opportunities. The initiative reflects Qatar's long-term commitment to making winter sports a stronger part of its sporting landscape.

Developed within the framework of the 2026 Year of Culture, the programme draws on Canada's globally recognised leadership in winter sports, creating opportunities for collaboration in coaching, athlete development, and programme design. By connecting sport with community engagement, the initiative reinforces the role of sport as a powerful platform for cultural exchange and legacy building.



Mohammed bin Jassim al-Kuwari, Years of Culture adviser on Latin America and Qatar's former ambassador to Mexico, said: "This programme reflects the spirit at the heart of Years of Culture: building lasting connections through shared experiences that bring people and communities together. Through our partnership with the Qatar Winter Sports Committee, we are creating opportunities for knowledge exchange and collaboration while supporting Qatar's long-term vision for sport development and cultural engagement."

Hassan Hissam al-Hebabi, general secretary of Qatar Winter Sports Committee, said: "Our ambition is to build a sustainable winter sports pathway in Qatar that nurtures talent from

the grassroots level through to high-performance competition. The year-round programme created for the Qatar Canada and Mexico 2026 Year of Culture is an important milestone in expanding access to winter sports and inspiring the next generation of athletes and families to engage with these disciplines."

Beginning in April 2026, the Qatar Winter Sports Committee and Years of Culture will host a monthly calendar of recurring events at venues around Doha. The first series of events will take place at the Ali Bin Hamad Al At-Tiyah Arena on April 30, featuring an exhibition curling match followed by an open house for attendees, as well as an exhibition hockey match and accompanying family experience sessions.

## Cleaning campaign of the meadows

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Wildlife Development Department, organised a clean-up campaign at Rawdat Aba Al Najm, North of Umm Al Amad on the occasion of the Earth Day.

Accordingly, Adel al-Yafei, Head of the Plant Wildlife Section, noted that Qatar is home to more than 1,500 meadows (Rawdat), which serve as vital ecosystems supporting diverse plant and animal species. He stressed that the ministry continues to safeguard this natural heritage through integrated environmental initiatives, including vegetation rehabilitation programmes and community awareness campaigns, in alignment with Qatar National Vision 2030.

Al-Yafei also called on the public to actively contribute to preserving these habitats by properly disposing of waste in designated areas. He stressed that such responsible practices play a key role in protecting the environment and ensuring the sustainability of biodiversity for future generations.



## Qatar Tourism unveils Nami Beach as new upscale waterfront destination

QNA  
Doha

Qatar Tourism has announced the opening of Nami Beach, a new leisure destination in central Doha designed to offer a high-end seaside experience within the city.

In a statement released yesterday, the authority said the development was created in partnership with Loft A Trading and Contracting, aiming to blend coastal design with premium hospitality in a comfortable and contemporary setting. The beach features an infinity pool over-

looking the sea, landscaped green spaces, beachfront lounges and private cabanas. Visitors will also have access to on-site facilities including showers and changing rooms.

A range of dining options is available across the site. These include signature dishes at the main Nami restaurant, Mediterranean-inspired cuisine at Nami Greek, and health-focused offerings at Olive Green.

Officials said the opening of Nami Beach strengthens Qatar's position as a leading tourism destination, expanding its portfolio of high-quality leisure attractions for residents and visitors alike.



## QU hosts Google experts for seminar on AI technologies

Qatar University (QU), represented by the University Core Curriculum Program at the Deanship of General Studies, organised a specialised virtual seminar titled "Google AI Technologies: Overview and Practical Applications" via WebEx, featuring participation from experts at Google.

The seminar was delivered by Taymour Narch, cloud solutions engineer, and Richard Hitti, artificial intelligence engineer, who presented a comprehensive overview of the transformative impact of generative artificial intelligence (AI) on today's tech-

nological landscape. The session highlighted the growing role of AI in accelerating digital transformation and fostering innovation across sectors.

During the seminar, Narch emphasised the importance of integrating artificial intelligence with cloud computing services, noting how individuals and institutions can leverage Google Cloud platforms to enhance efficiency and drive digital innovation. He also introduced the concept of "data democratisation," explaining how modern tools enable non-specialists to develop intel-



ligent applications without requiring advanced programming expertise. This, he noted, opens new opportunities for student creativity and interdisciplinary innovation.

Hitti presented practical examples of AI applications in code generation and content creation, underscoring the importance for students and developers to understand and utilise these tools to improve operational efficiency and productivity.

The seminar addressed several key themes, including Google's "AI-first" ap-

proach and the development of advanced language models that contribute to solving complex challenges. Speakers also highlighted the growing importance of AI technologies in cloud computing and big data analytics, positioning them as key drivers of innovation in modern work environments.

The session witnessed strong engagement from participants, with discussions focusing on the ethical implications of artificial intelligence, corporate responsibility in addressing algorithmic bias, and the future of jobs in an AI-driven world.