



GULF TIMES



FRIDAY Vol. XXXXVI No. 13727

May 1, 2026
Dhul-Qi'dah 14, 1447 AH

www.gulf-times.com 2 Riyals

Published in Qatar since 1978

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BUSINESS | Page 1

QFZ reinforces investor support measures for business continuity

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SCAN TO SHOP

DIBF returns May 14 with 36 nations

Ministry hails event as 'message of resilience' amid regional turmoil

By A Staff Reporter
Doha



The Ministry of Culture has announced that the 35th edition of the Doha International Book Fair (DIBF) will open on May 14 at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Center, running until May 23 with the participation of 36 countries, 515 publishing houses and 910 booths.

This year's fair will showcase a wide range of publications and include participation from ministries, government institutions, and embassies of friendly and allied nations.

HE Undersecretary of the Ministry of Culture Dr Ghanem bin Mubarak al-Ali described the fair as a milestone in the country's cultural development, embodying a national vision focused on human development and intellectual growth. He said it serves as a vital platform bringing together diverse perspectives and creative talents, providing opportunities for cultural exchange and reinforcing the book's role in shaping societal awareness.

He affirmed the ministry's commitment to organising high-quality events that consolidate cultural values and keep pace with global transformations, thereby supporting development and strengthening national identity. The continuation of the event, he added, reflects the state's commitment to initiatives that elevate the cultural landscape and provide a stimulating environment for creativity, "especially since investing in knowledge remains the most important option for a more prosperous future".

Dr al-Ali noted the great attention Qatar pays to the fair despite the current circumstances in the region, citing its significant role in spreading culture and knowledge.

Director of the Libraries Department at the Ministry of Culture and DIBF Director Jassim Ahmed al-Buainain said the 35th edition comes at a pivotal moment in the region's history, under exceptional circumstances that have only strengthened the organisers' resolve to uphold its cultural mission. **To Page 3**

Interior minister attends 2026 Obstacle finale



HE the Minister of Interior and Commander of the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya) Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani attended the closing of the 2026 Military Obstacle Championship held at the obstacle field in the training village. The championship aims to test participants' endurance, assess response speed, and strengthen teamwork while fostering positive competition. At the conclusion of the event, he honoured the Special Unit "Lifdawiya" team, winners of the championship banner. **(QNA)**

Qatar tops Gulf, ranks 2nd in Arab world

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

Qatar has retained its position as the Gulf's top-ranked country and second in the Arab world in Reporters Without Borders' 2026 Press Freedom Index, advancing four places globally to 75th, the Qatar Press Center (QPC) said.

According to index data published by the QPC, Qatar has held its regional lead for the third consecutive year since 2023, scoring 75 (+4). The centre attributed the gain to the package of legal and regulatory reforms launched ahead of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, which positively impacted the media environment and strengthened the country's media standing. Qatar climbed from 79th place in 2025.

The global press freedom map witnessed significant shifts, most notably Syria's record-breaking jump of 36 places to 141st. The improvement followed the fall of the Assad regime and the country's entry into a transitional phase, which allowed for a relative easing of conditions after years of strict restrictions.

In contrast, the report noted a sharp decline in



Israel's ranking, which has dropped 33 places since 2022, due to what the index described as the systematic targeting of journalists, particularly in the Gaza Strip, where more than 220 journalists have been killed since October 7, 2023. Iran continues to rank near the bottom of the global list, among the countries most restrictive of press freedom.

In the Americas, the United States fell to 64th place as a result of policies the index deemed hostile to the media during the Trump administration, including significant cuts to the budgets of international media organisations, which negatively impacted the diversity and independence of the media landscape. **To Page 2**

Amir crowns Camel Race Festival winners



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani attended the final races of the annual Purebred Arabian Camel Racing Festival for HH The Amir's Sword (2025-2026 season) yesterday at Al Shahaniya Camel Racetrack. His Highness presented gold trophies to the winners of the four main races for Al Hail and Al Zamoul competitions (open rounds) for camels owned by Sheikhs. "Dawlah", owned by Al Riyasah, won the Golden Sword in the Open Hail race, while "Al Qaheediya" from Al Shahaniya camels secured the Golden

Shalfa in the Omani Al Hail race. In the Al Zamoul races, "Nehab", owned by Al Riyasah and "Lusail", owned by Umm Al Zubar camels claimed the two Golden Khanjars in the Open and Omani categories. The Amir also awarded the Silver Sword to Nasser Abdullah Ahmed al-Misnad, after his camel "Nathriya" won the Open Hail race for tribal camels on Wednesday. The closing day was attended by a number of senior officials, heads of camel racing federations from several countries, and large crowds of spectators. **(QNA) Page 12**

Qatar's quiet investment boom

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

More than 14,500 non-Qatari companies registered in Qatar in 2025 – a roughly 600% jump on the previous year, and a figure that captures, in a single statistic, why the country has emerged as one of the most attractive business destinations in the Middle East and beyond.

The surge is no accident. A sweep of legal reforms over recent years has dismantled long-standing barriers to foreign investment, opening the door to 100% foreign ownership across most sectors, generous tax holidays, and freehold property rights for overseas investors. Layered on top is what investors have come to take for granted in Qatar: political stability, world-class infrastructure, and a digital government that has cut red tape to a fraction of what it once was.

The numbers bear this out. In 2026, Qatar ranks among the top private-investment destinations in the Middle East and globally, with the country placed third in



the Mena region on the Global Financial Centres Index. Non-oil sector growth has been brisk, the investment market is projected at \$74.37bn this year, and Qatar sits within the top 20 globally for digital competitiveness.

At the heart of the transformation is Law No 1 of 2019, regulating non-Qatari capital investment, which allows foreign investors to own up to 100% of companies in most economic sectors. The reform removed the previous requirement for a 51% Qatari partner – a threshold that had long discouraged investors unwilling to enter into

local partnerships and the legal complications that could come with them.

Foreign businesses can also tap into a generous menu of tax incentives designed to encourage them to expand and stay the course. Chief among these are 20-year corporate tax holidays, renewable, in Qatar's free zones – effectively a 0% corporate tax rate for two decades. The zones, located primarily at Ras Bufontas and Umm Al Houl, focus on logistics, manufacturing and technology, and offer 100% foreign ownership alongside zero customs duties. **To Page 2**

Qatar among top affordable tax-free expat destinations

GT Report
Doha

Qatar has been ranked the sixth most affordable tax-free country to relocate to in 2026, underlining its continued appeal as a destination that combines income advantages with a relatively balanced cost of living.

The ranking, compiled by international health insurance specialist William Russell, analysed zero- and low-tax jurisdictions based on key indicators including estimated monthly living costs, property prices, rent, utilities and average net salaries for a single person.

Qatar recorded estimated monthly living costs of about \$861, placing it ahead of the

United Arab Emirates, which ranked seventh at approximately \$906, and Cyprus at eighth with around \$953. Among the Gulf countries, Bahrain secured third place with roughly \$774, reinforcing the region's overall competitiveness for expatriates seeking tax-efficient lifestyles.

A key factor supporting Qatar's position is its strong earning potential. The study found the country's average monthly net salary stood at about \$3,592, one of the highest among the top-ranked destinations. This income level significantly offsets living expenses and enhances disposable income for residents.

Housing remains a major cost component, with the average rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Qatar estimated at around \$1,322 per month.

Environment minister meets Italy's envoy



HE the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Dr Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki al-Subaie met yesterday with Italy's ambassador to Qatar Paolo Toschi. They discussed bilateral co-operation in environmental and climate fields and ways to enhance it, along with topics of mutual interest. - **QNA**

Police Academy holds seminar

The Police Academy, represented by the Centre for Security Research and Studies, organised a seminar on "Emergency, Crisis and Disaster Management: Towards a Flexible

and Integrated National System", in co-operation with the Civil Defence Council.

The seminar was aimed at reviewing national experiences, exchanging best practices, and

developing early warning mechanisms, information management, and logistical support.

The event was attended by legal adviser to the Minister of Interior and general supervisor of the Police Academy, Major-General Dr Abdullah Yousef al-Mal, and the director-general of Public Security and deputy chairman of the Civil Defence Council, Major-General Mohammed Jassim al-Sulaiti, along with several department directors and officers.

The seminar addressed two main themes, focusing on institutional challenges, risk registers, and capacity building, as well as national response mechanisms, business continuity, and supporting policies. - **QNA**



FemTech Accelerator Programme starts

The Qatar Science & Technology Park (QSTP), a member of Qatar Foundation, in partnership with Merck, has marked the start of the QSTP x Merck FemTech Accelerator.

The programme began following its opening session held on April 20, which brought together applicants and selected founders to kick-start the accelerator journey.

The session marked the start of the Intro Week, held on April 20-23.

It introduced the programme structure, selection process, and key milestones, while also highlighting its vision to drive innovation and deliver impact in women's health.

The programme places a strong emphasis on supporting impact-driven solutions that improve access to care for women across different markets.

This was followed by a panel discussion featuring experts in healthcare, innovation, and

women's health, focusing on key factors for success among founders in the region.

The accelerator has attracted 240 applications from 47 countries, reflecting its global reach.

Female-led startups account for 71% of the total applicants, highlighting strong participation from women founders building solutions in this space.

The programme also saw engagement from within Qatar, with 24 applicants based in the country.

Regionally, 33% of applications came from the West Asia and North Africa region, alongside strong representation from Europe at 24.6%, North America at 15.8% and Africa at 10.4%, reinforcing the programme's positioning as a multi-country accelerator with diverse market perspectives.

From April to June, 40 founders will take part in Phase I of the programme, which includes workshops and expert-led ses-

sions covering areas such as digital health, impact, and commercialisation.

In Phase II, selected startups and scale-ups will work closely with partners in Qatar and across the region to test and refine their solutions in real-world settings, with an emphasis on validation and opportunities for scale.

"The level of interest and the quality of applications reflect both the urgency and the opportunity within women's health," said QSTP president Rama Chakaki. "It is encouraging to see a strong representation of female founders developing solutions across critical areas."

"Our focus now is on working closely with the selected founders to advance pilot opportunities and connect them with leading institutions, ensuring their solutions are tested in real-world settings, where gaps in access and innovation still persist," said programme director Hayfa al-Abdulla.



Qatar joins SCO Green, Sustainable Development Forum

Qatar participated in the 2026 Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO) Green and Sustainable Development Forum, held on April 28-30 in Ningbo, China. Qatar's delegation was led by Qatar's Consul General in Shanghai Rashid bin Mubarak al-Khater. - **QNA**

Qatar takes part in GCC meetings on trade

Qatar participated yesterday in a series of ministerial meetings of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC), focusing on trade, industry and standardisation.

The meetings, held via video conferencing, included the 70th Committee for Trade Co-operation, the 56th Committee for Industrial Co-operation, and the 11th Ministerial Committee for Standardisation Affairs.

HE the Minister of Commerce and Industry Sheikh Faisal bin Thani bin Faisal al-Thani led Qatar's delegation.

HE Sheikh Faisal also participated in a joint meeting between the GCC ministers of commerce and industry and the UK Minister of State for Trade Sir Chris Bryant, which was held via video conferencing.

The meeting discussed trade relations with the United Kingdom, including negotiations towards a free trade agreement.

Within the framework of the work of the Committee for Trade Co-operation, the GCC Ministers of Commerce discussed a number of topics on the agenda, which enhance ways of joint Gulf trade co-operation.

On the other hand, the ministers, members of the GCC Ministerial Committee for Standardisation Affairs, discussed at the 11th meeting of the committee, the latest developments in the work of the Standardisation Organisation, the adoption of draft Gulf technical regulations, and made the appropriate decisions regarding them.

HE Sheikh Faisal also participated in the 14th consultative meeting of the GCC ministers of commerce and industry and the heads of the GCC federations and chambers of commerce.

The meeting discussed topics and recommendations submitted by the heads of the Federation of GCC Chambers (FGCC) and made appropriate decisions regarding them. - **QNA**

Al-Khulaifi, Mali minister discuss ties, Sahel region developments



HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi held a telephone conversation yesterday with Mali's Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation Abdoulaye Diop. They discussed Qatar-Mali co-operation, relations and means to bolster them, in addition to developments in the Sahel region.

HE Dr al-Khulaifi reiterated Qatar's condemnation of the attacks on several military and civil sites in Mali.

He also voiced Qatar's full solidarity with Mali, and its support for all measures taken by Bamako to preserve its security, stability and the safety of its citizens. - **QNA**

Lebanese Speaker meets Qatar's envoy



The Speaker of the Parliament of Lebanon, Nabih Berri, met yesterday with Qatar's ambassador to Lebanon Sheikh Saud bin Abdulrahman al-Thani. Their meeting dealt with bilateral relations and ways to support and strengthen them, in addition to developments in Lebanon and the region. Berry hailed Qatar's ongoing efforts to support Lebanon, praising its unwavering support for the Lebanese people. Sheikh Saud affirmed Qatar's firm commitment to supporting Lebanon under all circumstances, especially in light of the challenges it is facing. - **QNA**

High rate of resolved cases by the SJC during Q1

The Supreme Judiciary Council (SJC) has released its report on the judicial activity for the first quarter (Q1) of 2026, outlining the number of registered cases and finalised rulings between January and March.

In January, the courts recorded

19,008 registered cases and issued 25,060 judgments. February followed closely with 18,539 registered cases and 25,243 judgments. In March, the registered cases amounted to 12,608, with 9,290 finalised judgments.

The report also highlights the

growing role of digital and remote judicial services.

A total of 8,596 electronic services were implemented, while 777 new cases were registered electronically, and 5,052 cases were processed through the remote litigation systems.

AJE wins Peabody Awards

Al Jazeera English (AJE) has won two Peabody Awards for content that examine atrocities committed in Gaza, with honours in the News and Interactive categories announced on April 23.

The 86th Annual Peabody Awards ceremony will be held on May 31 in Los Angeles.

"Fault Lines" films "Kids Under Fire" and "The Disappearance of Dr Abu Safiya" together won a News Peabody, while the Investigative team's "Investigating War Crimes in Gaza" won an award in the Interactive category.

"These awards attest to Al Jazeera English's ongoing commitment as a leading international broadcaster to uncover the truth, regardless of the circumstances," said AJE director of programmes Mohammed al-Hamadi.

"Fault Lines" executive producer Laila al-Arian expressed her appreciation to all those involved, including the Peabody jurors for recognising the films.

"I am so grateful to everyone who spoke with our teams in Gaza and the US for these stories - from the doctors who volunteered there and told the truth about the horrors they witnessed, to the families who lived through them," she said.

"Our congratulations go to the "Fault Lines" and "Investigative" teams for their courage, commitment and talent in consistently producing films that matter," said AJE Investigative Programmes manager Rafi Mustafa. "It demonstrates our commitment to uncovering the truth and sharing these stories from the perspective of those living the events - and not just institutions of power."

QatarEnergy sets May fuel, gasoline prices

QatarEnergy has announced fuel prices for May, with diesel unchanged and gasoline prices increased. Diesel was set at QR2.05 per litre, gasoline 95 (super) at QR2.10, and gasoline 91 (premium) at QR1.90 per litre. - **QNA**

Documentary revisits Qatar's 1981 U-20 milestone

A documentary titled "81: More Than Just a Game" was screened, highlighting Qatar's national U-20 football team journey to the 1981 World Youth Cup final in Australia.

The private screening drew wide attendance, including diplomats, and was praised for its cinematography and rare archival footage, covering four decades of Qatari football history in 52 minutes.

The film revisits Qatar's breakthrough run to the final after defeating Brazil and England, securing the silver medal in extraordinary circumstances.

It frames the achievement as the starting point of long-term investment in talent and sports infrastructure, culminating in Qatar hosting the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

Former national captain Hassan al-Haydos is featured as a bridge between generations.

Director Awad Jumaa said he hopes the film reaches all generations, calling it a reminder that dreams start early.

The film is screened in Arabic with English subtitles, directed and executive produced by Jumaa, an award-winning filmmaker with over two decades of experience. - **QNA**

Qatar's quiet investment boom

From Page 1

Outside the free zones, foreign companies still benefit from a low 10% standard corporate tax rate. Other headline incentives include full capital repatriation and exemption from personal income tax.

Complementing this is Law No 3 of 2023 on combating the concealment of non-Qataris practising commercial, economic and professional activities in violation of the law.

The legislation introduced stricter penalties for illegal practices while reinforcing transparency - a balance made possible because foreign investors now have multiple legitimate routes to run their businesses without needing a local partner.

Real estate has been opened up in parallel. Law No 16 of 2018, regulating non-Qatari ownership and use of property, allows foreign individuals, companies and developers to own freehold property in designated areas, and provides usufruct rights of up to 99 years elsewhere.

Industrial projects, meanwhile, can receive exemptions from customs duties on imported machinery, equipment, spare parts, semi-finished goods, packaging materials and raw materials.

The exemptions are designed to lower the cost of manufacturing, with the condition that the materials cannot be diverted from their originally designated purpose.

The sectors drawing the strongest foreign interest reflect the breadth of Qatar's ambitions: technology, finance, artificial intelligence, gaming, energy, services, retail, logistics, tourism, real estate and construction, and manufacturing.

With the incentives in place, the legal environment now firmly tilted in favour of investors, and the broader economy on solid footing, the expectation in policy circles is that the 2025 surge in foreign company registrations is a beginning rather than a peak.

Qatar tops Gulf, ranks second in Arab world

From Page 1

Several Latin American countries, including Ecuador and Peru, have witnessed a deterioration in the working environment for journalists due to escalating violence and political pressure, while hostile rhetoric towards the media has intensified in Argentina and El Salvador.

Reporters Without Borders (Reporters Sans Frontieres, RSF) warned of an unprecedented deterioration in press freedom worldwide, stressing that more than half of the world's countries are now classified as "difficult" or "very dangerous" - a first

since the index was launched 25 years ago.

The average rating of countries included in the study has fallen to its lowest historical level, reflecting a general trend towards restricting media freedoms and a decline in the right to access information.

The report explained that this decline is not limited to countries with closed systems but also extends to some democracies, where legislative restrictions on journalistic work are increasing, particularly under the pretext of national security and combating disinformation.

The legal index recorded the

largest decline among the five indicators used this year, pointing to a growing tendency to criminalise journalistic work through restrictive laws or the arbitrary application of existing legislation.

The ranking is based on five key indicators: political, legal, economic, social and security.

Norway maintained its top position for the 10th consecutive year, while Eritrea remained at the bottom for the third year running.

More than 52.2% of countries now fall into the most challenging categories, compared with just 13.7% in 2002.

ARTIC rolls out EV charging stations across Qatar portfolio

A Rayyan Tourism and Investment Company (ARTIC), has announced the rollout of electric vehicle (EV) charging stations across its hospitality portfolio in Qatar, reinforcing its commitment to sustainability and responsible tourism development.

The initiative, implemented across a number of ARTIC hotels and residences, supports the growing adoption of environmentally friendly transportation while enhancing convenience for guests and residents.

The charging stations have been installed in collaboration with leading partners "Porche Centre Doha" to ensure efficiency, reliability, and ease of use.

"We are committed to advancing sustainable hospitality by integrating environmentally responsible practices across every aspect of our hotel portfolio, from reducing waste and optimising energy and water consumption to sourcing local products and supporting communities," said ARTIC managing director and chief executive Tarek M El-Sayed.

"The introduction of electric vehicle charging stations across our portfolio marks an important milestone in our sustainability journey," he said. "As the sustainable hospitality sector continues to evolve, we remain committed to adopting innovative solutions that reduce environmental impact while enhancing the guest experience."



Porche car charger at Element Hotel.

All efforts taken to integrate those with hearing disability

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

Qatar has been exerting serious efforts to empower the people with hearing impairment and disability and integrate them within the society.

Speaking to Qatar TV recently through the sign language, Qatari Social Cultural Centre for the Deaf chairperson Abdullah Ibrahim al-Mulla stressed that the centre helps provide deaf persons with job opportunities by raising the awareness of the employers and educating them on the practical potential of deaf people.

He also expressed his desire to send a message to the private and public employers, on the occasion of the Arab Deaf Week, that they should learn the sign language as a means of bridging communication among the deaf and other persons.

Al-Mulla said that the doors of the Qatari Social Cultural Centre for the Deaf are open for them and their representatives to teach them sign language, with specialised training courses throughout the year.

He added that sign language is easy and sim-

ple to learn, and that the deaf people are enthusiastic and anxious to mix and integrate with society.

Al-Mulla explained that the main impediment for deaf people to fully integrate into the society is communication, adding that with the sign language such barriers would eventually disappear.

In the meantime, he continued, the centre has been active in launching community and public awareness campaigns on the rights and capabilities of the deaf persons and how to deal with them.

In addition, it provides various qualification and training activities, as well as culture activities that provide a supportive environment for the persons with hearing disabilities.

The centre acts as a platform for social integration and advocates for the rights and inclusion of the deaf in all social activities.

Various government entities and public educational institutions encourage the learning of sign language and have instituted national programmes that aim for early detection of hearing impairment and provide the adequate treatment when available.

Other forums of support for the deaf include

the digital empowerment through the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT)'s Mada Assistive Technology Centre, which develops tools to enhance digital access, with projects like the Sokoon app, which translates written/spoken Arabic into sign language via 3D characters, and artificial intelligence (AI)-powered solutions to improve communication and access to e-government services.

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) provides specialised education through the Audio Education Complex, which offers speech therapy, auditory assessment, and individual therapeutic plans for students with hearing impairments.

The Ministry of Interior provides a dedicated Deaf Emergency Service (992), which utilises technology for 24/7 video communication and SMS to ensure immediate assistance for hearing-impaired residents.

Qatar legislation guarantees non-discrimination, with a 5% job quota for persons with disabilities in government institutions, and the Ministry of Social Development and Family constantly works to turn these laws into practical opportunities.

QC distributes food baskets to needy families in Chad



Qatar Charity has distributed integrated food baskets to affected families in Chad, responding to the country's worsening food security situation.

The intervention targeted the most vulnerable households in areas surrounding the capital, N'Djamena, reaching nearly 14,000 beneficiaries through the distribution of 2,000 complete food baskets.

The initiative comes amid growing food insecurity in Chad.

According to World Food Programme estimates, millions of people across the country are experiencing varying levels of food insecurity.

The 2025 Global Hunger Index classifies Chad's hunger level as "serious", while data from the Famine Early Warning Systems Network indicates that between 1.5mn and 2mn people will require emergency food assistance during the peak of the lean season (June-September).

This period is characterised by the

depletion of household stocks and a sharp rise in food prices.

The situation is driven by repeated droughts and floods, weak agricultural production, high poverty rates, and the impacts of displacement and refugee inflows.

Health indicators also show that more than 30% of children under the age of five suffer from stunting caused by chronic malnutrition.

The project targeted four key areas on the outskirts of N'Djamena where a total of 500 food baskets were distributed at each site, ensuring balanced geographic coverage for the most vulnerable groups.

Each basket contained essential food items sufficient to meet families' basic needs for several weeks.

The project was implemented in co-ordination with the Chad's Ministry of Social Action, Solidarity and Humanitarian Affairs, represented by the Department of Social Solidarity and its field branches.

Visit Qatar, Paris Saint-Germain unveil special-edition jersey

Visit Qatar, in collaboration with Paris Saint-Germain, has launched an official reveal video featuring PSG players wearing the Club's special-edition jersey featuring the Visit Qatar logo.

The collaboration forms part of a wider, multi-layered campaign centred around Paris Saint-Germain's match against Lorient on May 2.

The campaign combines prominent in-stadium visibility, including Visit Qatar's branding on the team's jersey, with city-wide activations across Paris, designed to engage fans and audiences beyond the pitch.

The video highlights the col-

laboration through a dynamic visual narrative that brings together sport, culture and global storytelling.

By placing the jersey at the centre of the campaign, the activation engages audiences through familiar faces and digital platforms, extending reach across international markets.

The video forms part of Visit Qatar's wider partnership with Paris Saint-Germain, underscoring the role of sport as a powerful platform for cultural exchange and global engagement, while spotlighting Qatar's distinctive hospitality through creative, cross-cultural experiences.

CMU-Q celebrates Class of 2026

Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar (CMU-Q) is preparing to celebrate the graduation of the Class of 2026, a cohort of 106 students distinguished by their academic rigour, global perspective, and significant professional preparation.

Representing 33 nationalities and speaking 32 languages, the Class of 2026 reflects the diverse, multicultural environment that defines the CMU-Q experience within Education City.

CMU-Q dean Michael Trick noted that this is an exceptional cohort of students.

"When I reflect on the accomplishments of the Class of 2026, I am struck by how well-rounded these students are," he said. "They have excelled at academics, embraced leadership opportunities, travelled the world, and worked in research and industry to get valuable, hands-on experience."

The Class of 2026 demonstrated a deep commitment to scholarly inquiry.

60% of the graduates participated in independent research during their time at the CMU-Q, with 10 students completing a prestigious Senior Honours Thesis.

The CMU-Q also announced that 40% of the cohort earned University Honours.

The graduating class comprises 16 Bachelor of Science in Biological Sciences; 34 Bachelor of Science in Business Administration; 24 Bachelor of Science in Computer Science; 29 Bachelor of Science in Information Systems and three Bachelor of Science in General Studies.

Free vaccines at 31 health centres

From Page 1

PHCC health protection manager Dr Khalid Elawad said that appointments can be booked by calling 107 or by visiting any PHCC centre.

"This initiative forms part of a national strategy aimed at increasing vaccination coverage, reducing the spread of infectious diseases, and promoting prevention as the first choice in healthcare," he said.



Dr Khalid Elawad.

Advance booking is encouraged to ease scheduling and allow pre-vaccination medical advice where needed.

He stressed that vaccines undergo rigorous scientific review, are safe and effective, and strengthen rather than weaken immunity.

Annual seasonal influenza vaccination is recommended for everyone aged six months and above, particularly those at higher risk.



Dr Hamad al-Mudahka.

DIBF returns on May 14 with 36 nations

From Page 1

He explained that holding the fair today transcends being merely a periodic cultural event, becoming "a message of resilience" that affirms Qatar, both its leadership and its people, places knowledge above all else.

"The book is a weapon that never fails its owner, and reading is the bridge to a more secure and stable future, ensuring that Doha remains an inextinguishable cultural beacon," al-Buainain said. "Culture is the impregnable shield in times of crisis," he added. "We are aware of the magnitude of the current challenges, and we at the Ministry of Culture believe that the true response to violence lies in spreading enlightenment,

deepening awareness, and elevating human thought." Side-line events will include cultural seminars, lectures and workshops, alongside the DIBF Award for Qatari and international publishers and authors.

Particular attention will be paid to children and young adults, with dedicated spaces for prominent children's publishers and interactive activities to encourage reading.

First launched in 1972 under the auspices of Qatar National Library, the fair was held biennially until 2002 before becoming annual. It will be open daily from 9am to 10pm, except Fridays (3pm to 10pm).

Since 2010, a different country has been selected each year as guest of honour, beginning with the US. - **QNA**

Iran threatens painful response if US resumes attacks

Iran's supreme leader says US suffered 'disgraceful defeat'

Reuters/AFP
Washington/Dubai/Tehran

Iran said yesterday that it would respond with "long and painful strikes" on US positions if Washington renewed attacks, and also reasserted its control over the Strait of Hormuz, complicating US plans for a coalition to reopen the waterway.

Two months into the US-Israeli war with Iran, the vital sea channel remains closed, choking off 20% of the world's oil and gas supplies.

That has sent global energy prices surging and heightened concerns about the risks of an economic downturn.

Efforts to resolve the conflict have hit an impasse, with a ceasefire in place since April 8 but Iran still blocking the strait in response to a US naval blockade of Iran's oil exports, the country's economic lifeline.

US President Donald Trump is slated to receive a briefing on plans for a series of fresh military strikes on Iran to compel it to negotiate an end to the conflict, a US official told Reuters.

Any US attack on Iran, even if limited, will usher in "long and painful strikes" on US regional



A youth dressed in military attire holds a mock rifle during a rally in Tehran to show solidarity and support to the new Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei. - **AFP**

positions, a senior Revolutionary Guards official said.

"We've seen what happened to your regional bases, we will see the same thing happen to your warships," Aerospace Force Commander Majid Mousavi was quoted by Iranian media as saying.

Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei said in a written message to Iranians that Tehran would eliminate "the enemies' abuses of the waterway" under new management of the strait, indicating

that the country intended to maintain its hold over it.

"Today, two months after the largest military deployment and aggression by the world's bullies in the region, and the United States' disgraceful defeat in its plans, a new chapter is unfolding for the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz," said Khamenei in the message read on state television.

The message by Khamenei, who has yet to appear in public since his appointment on March 9 as Iran's

new supreme leader, came on the annual national celebration of "Persian Gulf" day in Iran.

Mojtaba Khamenei became supreme leader after the US and Israel launched a massive campaign of strikes on Iran on February 28, killing his father and predecessor Ali Khamenei.

Last week, the New York Times citing several unnamed Iranian officials said the younger Khamenei was "gravely wounded" in the strikes but has remained "mentally sharp".

In his Thursday message, he said US bases in the region "lack even the capacity to ensure their own security, let alone provide any hope of securing their allies".

He hailed what he called Iran's "new legal framework and management" of the strategic Strait of Hormuz, a key energy chokepoint, as a means to bring "comfort and progress" for countries in the region. "Foreigners who come from thousands of kilometres away... have no place there except at the bottom of its waters," he said.

Iran's parliament speaker and foreign minister also alluded to Iranian control over the strait.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned that if the disruption caused by the closure dragged on through mid-year, global growth would fall, inflation

Kenya allows dirtier fuel to combat shortages

Kenya will waive its fuel quality rules, the government announced yesterday, in an emergency measure to keep supplies running amid shortages caused by the Middle East war.

The east African country is heavily reliant on fuel imports from the Gulf and has been one of the most affected by the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz.

A request from the energy ministry and petrol suppliers "to temporarily waive the sulphur parameter to the maximum limit of 50mg/kg... for a period of six months" was approved by the ministry of investments, trade and industry, it said in a statement.

The measure is "intended to ensure continued fuel availability and sustain economic stability during the current period of global supply disruption", it added. - **AFP**

would rise and tens of millions more people would be pushed into poverty and extreme hunger.

"The longer this vital artery is choked, the harder it will be to reverse the damage," he told reporters in New York.

As well as blocking almost all but its own shipping through the strait, Iran launched drones and missiles at Israel and US bases, infrastructure and US-linked companies in Gulf states.

Amazon said restoring normal operations for its cloud regions in Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates could take months after damage last month from the conflict, which has killed thousands in Iran and across the Middle East.

Mediator Pakistan was trying to avoid escalation while the two sides exchange messages on a potential deal, a Pakistani source said on Wednesday.

Trump has said Iran cannot

have a nuclear weapon, while Tehran says its nuclear ambitions are peaceful.

Iran's latest offer for resolving the war, suspended since April 8 under a ceasefire deal, would set aside discussion of its nuclear programme until the conflict is formally ended and shipping issues resolved.

That did not meet Trump's demand to tackle the nuclear issue at the outset.

The Pakistani source said the United States had shared "observations" on the Iranian proposal and it was now up to Iran to respond.

"(The) Iranians asked for time till the end of the week," the source told Reuters.

Weeks of conflict have strained the Iranian economy but analysts said its ruling clerics and Revolutionary Guards could use their iron grip on the country to hold out.



Years of Culture supports M7 delegation for Fashion Art Toronto debut

Three emerging Qatari and Qatar-based designers are set to debut their work in Toronto this spring.

Backed by and presented by the Qatar - Canada and Mexico 2026 Year of Culture, the delegation from Doha-based innovation and entrepreneurship hub M7 will showcase their collections at Fashion Art Toronto.

The M7 delegation brings together fashion, market discovery and cultural exchange at a moment

when both Canada and Qatar are placing growing emphasis on the creative industries as drivers of international collaboration.

"This visit to Canada reflects our commitment as a regional design hub to creating meaningful opportunities for creative talent to connect across borders," said M7 director Maha Ghanim al-Sulaiti. "Through Years of Culture, we can build platforms where designers can showcase their work globally and exchange ideas, explore new

markets and have a direct impact on cross-cultural understanding."

The delegation from Qatar comprises three designers whose work reflects both Qatar's evolving design identity and broader global influences.

LIN founder Noof al-Mulla will present "HER AURA", a collection shaped by linen, silk and fluid summer silhouettes.

Rooted in quiet strength and refined minimalism, the pieces are designed to move with her, reflect-

ing a sense of ease, light, and understated presence.

"I'm proud to bring LIN to Canada and share a collection that feels deeply connected to who we are," al-Mulla said.

"For me, this goes beyond showcasing designs," she said. "It's about exchanging perspectives and discovering how women, across different cultures, connect through the same sense of simplicity, elegance, and intention."

Designer Samah Sulymann will

present "Jeu Due Denim: In Play", an experimental collection that rethinks denim through sculptural tailoring, draping and sustainable techniques, including the use of recycled materials and 3D printing.

"With Jeu Due Denim, I wanted to take something familiar like denim and look at it in a completely different way," she said. "Bringing it to Canada is a great chance to share that creative process with a new audience."

Rayan Alami, whose label "Au-

thentic Roz" is shaped by a life lived between Qatar, Morocco, and Brazil, will debut "Third Space", a collection exploring identity through the tension between heritage, movement, and transformation.

"Third Space is deeply personal to me" she said. "It comes from growing up between cultures and constantly navigating different ways of seeing the world. The collection reflects that in-between space where identity is never fixed, but always evolving."

Israel seizes Gaza aid ships in international waters

Reuters/AFP
Athens

Israel has intercepted aid ships bound for Gaza in international waters near Greece, flotilla organisers said yesterday, decrying the move as an "escalation of Israel's impunity".

The ships make up part of a second Global Sumud flotilla to try in recent months to break an Israeli blockade by carrying humanitarian aid to Palestinians in Gaza.

They sailed from the Spanish port of Barcelona on April 12.

The vessels were seized by Israel late on Wednesday in international waters off Greece's Peloponnese peninsula, which is hundreds of miles from Gaza, the flotilla's organisers said.

"This is piracy," the group said in a statement. "This is the unlawful seizure of human beings on the open sea near Crete, an assertion that Israel can operate with total impunity, far beyond its own borders, with no consequences."

No state had the right to claim, police, or occupy international waters, but Israel had done that, extending its control outward to occupy the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Europe, it added.

Yesterday Israel's foreign ministry called the flotilla organisers "professional provocateurs" and said that its forces acted lawfully.

"Due to the large numbers of



Protesters gather during a rally in front of Rome's Colosseum in support of the Freedom Flotilla. - AFP

vessels participating in the flotilla and the risk of escalation, and the need to prevent the breach of a lawful blockade, an early action was required in accordance with international law."

Footage released by the organisers showed Israeli soldiers boarding a vessel and crew in life vests with their hands up.

Crew members were then taken to Israeli ships.

Yasmine Scola, an activist on board the flotilla, said her colleagues had been "kidnapped" by Israel.

Rome and Berlin said in a joint statement that they were follow-

ing developments "with deep concern", while Madrid blasted the seizure and said it had summoned Israel's charge d'affaires in Spain.

Paris announced that 15 French nationals had been detained and Rome called for the immediate release of "all the unlawfully detained Italians" - numbering 24 according to the Italian news agency Ansa.

Greek government spokesman Pavlos Marinakis confirmed that 55 vessels were sailing some 50 nautical miles off the Peloponnese towards Crete, shadowed by Israeli warships and Greek coastguard vessels late on Wednesday.

Crew from 17 vessels were safe aboard Israeli warships, he said, adding that Athens had not been notified of the Israeli interception, which took place outside Greek jurisdiction.

A live tracker of the flotilla showed some boats sailing near the southwestern coast of Crete.

Turkiye denounced the interception as a clear violation of international law which jeopardised navigational safety, adding it would take action to support the flotilla.

Last October Israel's military halted a previous flotilla assembled by the same organisation, arresting Swedish activist Greta Thunberg and more than 450 participants.

That followed other seaborne attempts to reach blockaded Gaza. Israel, which controls all access to the Gaza Strip, denies withholding supplies for its 2.2m residents.

Palestinians and international aid bodies say supplies reaching the territory are insufficient, despite a ceasefire reached in October that included guarantees of increased aid.

Israel has been accused by the United Nations and foreign non-governmental organisations (NGOs) of strangling the flow of goods into the territory, causing shortages since the start of the war in October 2023.

The Gaza Strip, governed by Hamas, has been under an Israeli blockade since 2007.

Killer of four children at kindergarten in Uganda receives death sentence

Reuters/AFP
Kampala

Ugandan court has sentenced a man to death for killing four young children this month at a nursery school, in an attack that sparked public outrage and concern for pupils' safety in the East African country.

The judge said an investigation of Christopher Okello Onyum's phone and laptop had found searches including "schools near me" and "ISIS beheading", a reference to the Islamic State group.

However, it was not clear if there was any political or religious motivation for the attack.

In the attack, which took place on April 2 at a nursery school in the capital Kampala, 39-year-old Onyum stabbed his four victims - toddlers aged two and three years old - before a guard subdued him, police said.

Angry parents tried to lynch him before he was detained.

Prosecutors said Onyum, who holds Ugandan and US citizenship, confessed to the crime, believ-

ing the "human sacrifice" would help him become rich, although he eventually pleaded not guilty in court.

The court earlier heard chilling testimony, including from a staff member at the Ggaba Early Childhood Development Centre.

"At first I thought he was beating a child. When I asked him why he was beating our children, before he responded I saw Kaisha (one of the victims) against a wall in the pool of blood," she told the court at the start of the trial.

"He got up and he had a knife in his hand. He was so quick that he immediately grabbed another child.

"I got one of the bicycles the children used. I threw it at him.

"When I threw the bicycle at him he left the child and started running after me. I ran but I later fell down. When I got up I found out he had cut the second child."

The victims' parents also gave evidence, describing their last morning with their children before taking them to kindergarten, the phone call informing them of the attack and the discovery of the bodies at the hospital.



This picture taken last month shows Christopher Okello Onyum escorted by Uganda prison guards during his trial at the Ggaba Community Church Grounds in Kampala. - AFP

One of Onyum's lawyers had argued that he should be acquitted because he had long been mentally unstable and had been committed to a psychiatric hospital.

"I have no doubt in my mind that the search for 'ISIS beheading' prepared the accused person to launch this fatal attack," Judge Alice Komuhangi Khauxha said while delivering the sentence.

She rejected his lawyer's assertion that Onyum was insane, saying that his attack, which took less than seven minutes, had been carefully planned.

Onyum was seen laughing in the dock during his trial, which his lawyer said showed he was mentally ill.

Although Uganda still hands down the death penalty for serious offences such as murder, the last execution was carried out roughly two decades ago.

South Africa court orders Mugabe's son deported over shooting case

A South African court ordered the deportation of the youngest son of Zimbabwe's late former leader Robert Mugabe, implicated in the shooting of a gardener after an altercation.

Bellarmino Chatunga Mugabe has been in custody since mid-February alongside his cousin and co-accused, Tobias Mugabe Matonhodze, on attempted murder charges stemming from an incident at the family's home in Johannesburg's upscale Hyde Park district.

After a failed plea deal, Mugabe, 28, admitted to being in South Africa illegally and to pointing a toy gun in a separate incident, while Matonhodze, 32, pleaded guilty to attempted murder and other charges.

The Alexandra Magistrates' Court fined Mugabe 600,000 rand (\$36,000) on two counts, or 24 months' imprisonment in default.

It also ordered his immediate deportation, with police to escort him to Johannesburg's OR Tambo International Airport.

"Mr Mugabe, you can count yourself very lucky that the complainant in your case was not injured,"

Magistrate Reiner Boshoff ruled, adding it was unclear whether Matonhodze had "taken the rap" for his cousin in the case involving the gardener.

Matonhodze received concurrent prison terms of up to three years, which the court described as "merciful," citing, among other mitigating factors, that the complainant had been remunerated.

He will be deported after serving his sentence. Investigators told the court that the gardener had been paid 250,000 rand (\$15,000) in cash, with a further 150,000 rand (\$9,000) promised.

The firearm used in the shooting has not been recovered since the two were arrested on February 19.

Bellarmino is one of two sons that Robert Mugabe had with his second wife Grace.

The brothers have at times lived in Johannesburg, where they have gained a reputation for partying and living the high life.

Robert Mugabe ruled Zimbabwe for almost four decades until he was deposed in a coup in 2017. He died two years later aged 95. - AFP

South Lebanese mayors and residents protest ongoing Israeli demolitions

AFP
Beirut

Dozens of residents and local officials from southern Lebanon gathered in Beirut yesterday to protest Israel's destruction of their villages, which has been ongoing despite a fragile ceasefire.

Before and after the truce agreed on April 17 in the war between Israel and Hezbollah, Israel has been carrying out demolitions in the south and preventing the return of residents to more than 50 villages.

"We can't go back. It's been bulldozed - basically there's nothing to go back to," Ibrahim Hamza, the mayor of the coastal town of Naqura, told AFP. "The situation is dire and the Israeli enemy is present inside the village."

Standing in Beirut's central square, protesters carried Lebanese flags and photos of their devastated villages, some had signs asking "where is the ceasefire?"

Two days after the ceasefire began, Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said the country's military would "remove the houses in the contact villages near the border that served in every respect as Hezbollah terror outposts".

Israel has declared a "yellow line", some 10km (six miles) deep inside Lebanon, where its troops are operating.

"What is happening in Bint Jbeil... is systematic



Samra, seven, shows her drawing at a makeshift encampment in Beirut amid a temporary ceasefire between Lebanon and Israel. - Reuters

annihilation and destruction of trees and people," said Mohamed Souheili, 56, a local official in the town, now on the Israeli-controlled side of the "yellow line".

The southern town witnessed intense clashes in the days leading up to the ceasefire, evoking for many Lebanese its history of major battles in earlier wars.

"Trees are being uprooted from the ground, and not a single sign of life remains in the town," Souheili said.

The Lebanese government's scientific research council estimated earlier this month that the war had already damaged or destroyed more than 50,000 housing units.

AFP photos from April 15 showed extensive destruction in two such villages, including Mais al-Jabal.

Hosn Qabalan, from Mais al-Jabal, lost her home during an earlier round of fighting between Israel and Hezbollah in 2023 and 2024.

"We went back and our house was gone," the 55-year-old grandmother said, "we sat on the rubble".

Lebanon accused Israel, which refused to withdraw from five positions in southern Lebanon during the 2024 ceasefire, of carrying out a campaign of destruction in

those villages and preventing their reconstruction. Qabalan is nonetheless determined to make it back home once again.

"Even if we have to sit on bare ground, what matters is that we return to our land," she said.

King Charles honours fallen US troops on last day of visit

AFP
Washington

King Charles III paid respects to fallen US troops at a military cemetery yesterday, the final day of a state visit aimed at healing ties between Britain and the US strained by the war in Iran.

By all accounts, the four-day visit has been a success, with President Donald Trump serving as solicitous host-in-chief who kicked off the monarch's stay with a pomp-filled welcome and lavish white-tie banquet at the White House.

"He's a great king — the greatest king, in my book," Trump told reporters as Charles and Queen Camilla arrived at the White House for a brief farewell ceremony under bright spring sunshine yesterday morning.

As the royal couple drove off following handshakes and a bit of chat, Trump added: "Great people. We need more people like that in



Britain's King Charles and Queen Camilla take part in a wreath-laying ceremony at the tomb of the unknown soldier in Arlington National Cemetery, in Arlington, Virginia, yesterday. (Reuters)

our country."

Charles and Camilla then visited Arlington National Cemetery just outside Washington, where they laid a wreath and flowers at the hilltop Tomb of the Unknown Soldier honouring America's uni-

dentified war dead.

The pair stood solemnly as a bugler played "Taps," before visiting the adjacent display room of military exhibits and artefacts.

Next on the agenda was a "block party" to mark 250 years since

American independence from Britain and meetings with Native Americans at a national park, before departing for the British island territory of Bermuda in the Atlantic.

The centrepiece of the whirlwind trip was Charles's speech Tuesday to the US Congress, the first by a British monarch since Queen Elizabeth II in 1991.

The address was warmly received, even as Charles ranged over subjects from climate change and the need for restraints on presidential power to the importance of Nato and defence of Ukraine — sensitive issues for Trump's ruling Republicans.

The 77-year-old monarch skirted around tensions between Trump and Prime Minister Keir Starmer over Britain's refusal to join the war against Iran, insisting the partnership between the two countries was "born out of dispute, but no less strong for it."

The royals visited New York on Wednesday, where they stopped at



Britain's King Charles, Queen Camilla, US President Donald Trump and first lady Melania Trump during a farewell ceremony at the White House on the final day of the King and Queen's state visit, in Washington, DC, yesterday. (Reuters)

the 9/11 memorial and met leftist Mayor Zohran Mamdani.

Charles, who is passionate about gardening and the environment, later visited an urban sustainable farming project in Harlem, while Camilla celebrated the 100th birthday of Winnie the Pooh at the New York Public Library.

Security has been tight for the

royal visit, which came just days after an alleged assassination attempt against Trump at a Washington media gala.

The trip has seen light moments between Charles and Trump, including the US president joking that his Scottish-born mother had a crush on the future king when he was younger.

US Congress clears funding to end partial govt shutdown

AFP
Washington

The US Congress yesterday approved funding for most of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), ending a record-breaking partial government shutdown that has disrupted critical agencies for more than two months.

The House approved the measure, already passed by the Senate, sending it to President Donald Trump for signature. It will fund key DHS agencies through the end of the fiscal year on September 30.

It does not include new money for immigration and border enforcement, leaving unresolved the political dispute that triggered the shutdown.

The House cleared the bill by voice vote just hours before a critical deadline, after Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin warned that emergency funds used to cover salaries would soon run dry.

The department has been partially shuttered since February 14, making it the longest funding lapse of its kind, at 75 days.

The legislation restores normal funding to agencies including the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Coast Guard, and the Transportation Security Administration and the Secret Service.

But Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Border Patrol — at the centre of a bitter partisan fight — are excluded from the deal.

Speaker of the House Mike Johnson "extended the DHS shut-



US Speaker of the House Mike Johnson (R-LA) speaks to reporters after passage of a Department of Homeland Security funding bill, yesterday at the US Capitol in Washington, DC. (AFP)

down for over a month for no reason at all. This is the same bill the Senate unanimously passed five weeks ago," said Patty Murray, the top Democrat on government funding in the upper chamber.

"After Republicans spent months blocking disaster relief and funding for the TSA, Coast Guard, and our cyber defence agency, it is a very good thing that this bill is finally on track to be signed into law to fund these agencies."

The standoff began when Democrats refused to support funding for immigration enforcement without new restrictions on tactics such as raids in sensitive locations and the use of masks by officers.

Republicans rejected those demands, instead pushing for full funding of the agencies without new conditions.

The result is a two-track approach to financing DHS.

Lawmakers have reopened most of the department for now, while Republicans move separately to secure tens of billions of dollars for ICE and Border Patrol through the "budget reconciliation" process, which would allow them to bypass Democrats.

Johnson had resisted bringing the Senate compromise to a vote for weeks, calling it inadequate and insisting that immigration enforcement must be fully funded.

But mounting pressure from the White House, moderate Republicans and officials warning of looming payroll shortfalls forced leadership to act.

The prolonged impasse exposed deep divisions within the Republican Party, with hardliners opposing the partial funding bill and centrists warning of political fallout from continuing the shutdown.

Republican Congressman Nick Langworthy wrote to Johnson on Monday urging him to put the Senate-passed bill on the floor.

"Thank you to (Trump) for agreeing and demanding action," he posted on social media. "Not another day should go by with our safety and security at risk."

The shutdown has taken a toll on federal workers and operations.

Thousands of DHS employees worked without pay for weeks, while more than 1,000 Transportation Security Administration staff reportedly quit. Preparations for major events, including World Cup matches scheduled in US cities this summer, were also under threat.

Despite the resolution, the underlying political conflict remains unresolved. Republicans are pushing to approve up to \$70bn in funding for immigration enforcement agencies for the remainder of Trump's term, while Democrats continue to demand tighter oversight and limits on enforcement practices.

The episode underscores the sharp partisan divide over immigration policy just months ahead of midterm elections that will determine control of Congress, and highlights the challenges facing House Republicans as they navigate internal divisions while advancing the president's agenda.

With lawmakers now leaving Washington for a recess, attention is set to shift to the next phase of the funding fight — and whether Congress can resolve the dispute over immigration enforcement without another shutdown looming later this year.

Trump mulls US troop cuts in Italy, Spain over Iran row

AFP
Washington

President Donald Trump said yesterday he may pull US troops from Italy and Spain due to their opposition to the Iran war, a day after proposing a similar reduction in Germany.

"Yeah, probably, I probably will. Why shouldn't I?" Trump told reporters in the Oval Office when asked if he would consider reducing American troop numbers in Spain and Italy too.

"Italy has not been of any help to us and Spain has been horrible, absolutely horrible."

Trump said on Wednesday that Washington was "studying and reviewing the possible reduction" of US troops in Germany, saying he would decide in

a "short period of time."

As of December 31, 2025, there were 12,662 active-duty US troops in Italy and 3,814 in Spain. In Germany there were 36,436.

The US leader has been bitterly critical of Nato allies for failing to help with the US-Israeli operation against Iran or with keeping the Strait of Hormuz open for oil tanker traffic.

Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni lacks "courage" on Iran, Trump told Italian daily *Corriere della Sera* earlier this month, in a surprising attack on a formerly close right-wing ally.

Last week, a report said that the US was considering trying to suspend Spain from Nato over its refusal to support military operations against Iran.

Trump has also lambasted Madrid for failing to increase defence spending.

Trump congratulates Zaidi on his nomination to be next Iraqi PM

US President Donald Trump congratulated Ali al-Zaidi on his nomination to be next prime minister of Iraq yesterday, saying that he looked forward to a highly productive new relationship. Iraq's alliance of Shia political blocs, the Co-ordination Framework, on Monday named Zaidi as its nominee for the post of prime minister, a coalition statement said.

"We wish him success as he works

to form a new Government free from terrorism that could deliver a brighter future for Iraq," Trump said in a post on Truth Social.

"We look forward to a strong, vibrant, and highly productive new relationship between Iraq and the US."

Trump had threatened in January to withdraw Washington's support for Iraq if former prime minister Nouri al-Maliki was designated to form a cabinet. (Reuters)

Jury convicts Afghan man linked to Kabul airport attack

Reuters
Washington

A federal jury in Virginia on Wednesday convicted an Afghan man of conspiring to provide material support to a terrorist organisation in connection with the 2021 suicide bombing at Kabul airport that killed 13 US service members and about 160 Afghan civilians.

But the jury deadlocked on whether his actions directly caused the deaths, sparing the defendant, Mohammad Sharifullah, from a possible life sentence. He still faces up to 20 years in prison. US District Judge Anthony Trenga did not immediately set a sentencing date. The attack occurred on August 26, 2021, as US forces were evacuating from Afghanistan at the end of America's longest war. A suicide bomber detonated an explosive vest at Abbey

Gate, killing 11 Marines, one Navy corpsman and one Army soldier, along with an estimated 160 Afghan civilians. Prosecutors said Sharifullah helped the Islamic State group's Afghanistan affiliate, ISIS-K, by conducting reconnaissance and facilitating communications ahead of the attack. Defence attorneys argued the government relied too heavily on Sharifullah's own statements during FBI interrogations and failed to independently prove his role in the bombing. The case marked the first US criminal trial stemming from the Abbey Gate attack, a politically charged episode that has continued to shape debate over how former president Joe Biden's administration withdrew from Afghanistan. Early in President Donald Trump's second term, Sharifullah was arrested in Pakistan, near the Afghan border, by Pakistani security forces working with the FBI and CIA.

UN's Guterres says money owed by US is 'non-negotiable'

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said yesterday that the billions of dollars the US owes to the world body is "non-negotiable," after reports that Washington had placed conditions on releasing the funds. The development newswire Devex reported this week that two diplomatic notes circulated by the US called for nine "quick-hit" reforms as a condition for releasing more funds, including further cost-cutting, and moves to counter China's influence at the UN. "The money we are talking about is referred to as assessed contributions," Guterres told reporters when asked about the reports. "Assessed contributions are an obligation of member

states. They are non-negotiable." Guterres, who has been leading reform efforts under pressure from member states, especially the US, said the UN would do its best "to make sure that we make this organisation as effective and as cost-effective and as able to deliver for the people we care for." "But these are two separate things," he added. According to Devex, the US-demanded cost-cutting included overhauling the UN pension system, ending long-distance business-class travel for some senior and all mid-level professionals, additional cuts to senior UN ranks and a 10% reduction in long-running and ineffective peacekeeping missions. (Reuters)

Sheinbaum says proof needed after US charges Sinaloa governor

Reuters
Mexico City

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum said yesterday that unless the US government presents "clear evidence" linking Sinaloa Governor Ruben Rocha to drug cartels, the charges announced against him on Wednesday are politically motivated.

"We are not going to protect anyone who has committed a crime," Sheinbaum said at her regular morning press conference, referring to the US Justice Department's indictment against Rocha and other Mexican current and former officials for conspiring with the Sinaloa Cartel.

"However, if there isn't clear evidence, it is obvious that the objective of these indictments by the Department of Justice is political," Sheinbaum added, saying that Mexico would not permit interference by a foreign government in its sovereign affairs.

The charges against Rocha mark a new front in the US fight against cartels. While the US has repeatedly gone after drug kingpins, US indictments against sitting senior Mexican politicians are rare.

Rocha's indictment poses a problem for Sheinbaum, particularly because they are both from the same ruling Morena Party. Rocha is



Mexico's President Claudia Sheinbaum gestures as she speaks during her daily press conference at the Palacio Nacional in Mexico City yesterday. (AFP)

also an ally of Sheinbaum's predecessor and mentor, former president Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador.

Rocha has denied the charges and said they were an attack against Mexico's governing political movement. "They lack any truth or foundation whatsoever," he said in a post on X, vowing they would be proven false.

According to the US indictment, Rocha was

elected as governor of Sinaloa in 2021 with the help of a faction of the Sinaloa Cartel run by the sons of founder Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman, known as "Los Chapitos."

The Chapitos allegedly kidnapped and intimidated Rocha's political rivals, the Justice Department said, in exchange for Rocha's promise to allow the group to operate with impunity and distribute drugs to the US.

The others charged by the US Justice Department include current and former state-level officials as well as the mayor and an ex-police commander for Culiacan, the Sinaloa state capital.

"These politicians and law enforcement officials have abused their authority in support of the cartel, exposed and subjected victims to threats and violence, and sold out their offices in exchange for massive bribes," according to the indictment.

Sheinbaum stressed that due process would have to be followed in Mexico. "There has to be overwhelming evidence for an arrest warrant to be issued," she said, referring to carrying out the US extradition requests that accompanied the indictment.

The Mexican president said she had spoken to Rocha on Wednesday, telling him: "If there is nothing, there is nothing to fear."

Canada says it will host new multilateral defence bank

Canada is set to host a proposed multilateral defence bank designed to help fund the rearmament of nations facing heightened geopolitical risks, the country's finance ministry said in a statement late on Wednesday. The statement said Canada had been working in Montreal with allies to agree a founding charter for the planned Defence, Security and Resilience Bank (DSRB). The other countries were not identified. The DSRB has been proposed by

former Nato security advisers, senior ex-military personnel and bankers. Its aim is to found a triple-A rated institution capable of raising 100bn pounds (\$135bn) to fund defence projects, particularly in countries that may struggle to access cheaper finance. "Participating countries unanimously supported that, once ratified, Canada, which hosted the negotiations, will serve as host country for the DSRB's future headquarters," the country's

finance ministry said. Canadian newspaper *The Globe and Mail* was first to report Canada was set to host the bank. Canada has been the project's most high profile backer, with Prime Minister Mark Carney also voicing support. However, the initiative has also faced set-backs, with both Britain and Germany distancing themselves. Britain has separately championed its own multilateral finance initiative with the

Netherlands and Finland to help drum up private finance to procure weapons, munitions and military equipment. "These negotiations are a crucial step in taking the DSRB from idea to reality and launching this new defence-focused multilateral bank. The time to act is now, and I look forward to continuing working with our partners to establish and launch the DSRB," said Canada's Finance Minister Francois-Philippe Champagne. (Reuters)



Lula suffers heavy defeat as Senate rejects SC nominee

Reuters
Brasilia

Brazil's Senate yesterday rejected the nomination of Solicitor General Jorge Messias for an open seat on the Supreme Court, making President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva the first leader in more than a century to have a top court nominee rejected by Congress.

The chamber rejected Lula's nomination in a 42-34 vote, as backing from at least 41 of Brazil's 81 senators was required. Lula's government in recent months assembled an unprecedented lobbying effort to try to secure Messias' approval, after lawmakers initially reacted negatively to his November nomination by the leftist leader.

The choice had particularly angered Senate President Davi Alcolumbre, who pushed for a different person to replace Luis Roberto Barroso after the former justice stepped down about eight years ahead of the deadline for his mandatory retirement.

Messias, 46, has worked for nearly two decades in Brazil's office of the solicitor general and has run the institution since the beginning of Lula's current term in 2023.



Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva poses for a picture with Attorney General of the Union Jorge Messias during the induction ceremony of the members of his cabinet, at Planalto Palace in Brasilia. (AFP/File Photo)

"We have to accept it. The Senate is sovereign and has spoken. I appreciate the votes I received," Messias told journalists after the vote. A Senate committee had approved the nominee earlier in the day following a confirmation hearing.

Messias' nomination faced opposition from senators aligned with right-wing former president Jair Bolsonaro and some lawmakers close to Alcolumbre, who had

backed former Senate head Rodrigo Pacheco for the role.

In recent weeks, Lula's team sought support from senators across the political spectrum, arguing that Messias could help ease tensions between Congress and the Supreme Court, according to sources familiar with the matter.

The choice of Messias, a Baptist, was also seen as a gesture to Brazil's growing evangelical Christian community, which accounts for

27% of the country's population.

On Monday, the president hosted a dinner with ministers, senators and state governors at his residence to press his nominee's case.

Senator Randolfe Rodrigues, the government's leader in Congress, argued that Messias' rejection was influenced by the closeness to the country's next general elections, which will be held in October.

"The current mood is one of outrage against the Supreme Court under pressure from the electoral process," he said.

Brazil's Supreme Court has been at odds with some senators due to what lawmakers view as an interference with their duties. Opposition figures, in particular, also criticise the court's handling of Bolsonaro's coup plot case last year.

Opposition senators have said that the nomination for the Supreme Court's open seat should be left to the next administration, as they hope their preferred candidate, right-wing senator Flavio Bolsonaro, beats Lula in October. Justices Cristiano Zanin and Flavio Dino, Lula's two other nominations for Brazil's top court in his third presidential term, were both approved by the Senate in 2023.

Guerrillas claim deadly attack, say it was an 'error'

AFP
Bogota

Dissident guerrillas from Colombia's defunct Farc rebel army took responsibility for a bomb attack that killed 21 people, claiming a "tactical error" during an electoral campaign marked by a surge in violence.

The devastating explosion on a highway in the southwestern Cauca department injured another 56 people and was the biggest single loss of life since Farc blew up a Bogota nightclub in 2003, killing 36 people.

Coming a month before presidential elections on May 31, the attack fuelled fears that violence is on the rise once again, 10 years after Farc agreed to disarm after a half-century of conflict with the state.

The dissident Farc offshoot Central General Command (EMC) took responsibility for the attack, stating late on Tuesday that the incident had occurred during clashes with the army and had resulted from "errors" in the group's military manoeuvres.

The EMC is led by Ivan Mordisco, Colombia's most-wanted criminal suspect.

It broke away from Farc when the latter laid down arms in a historic peace accord in 2016.

"With profound sorrow, we

must assume political responsibility for this tactical error, which has no justification whatsoever," the statement read.

A military source told AFP that the guerrillas had set up a checkpoint on the road to ambush soldiers.

Defence Minister Pedro Sanchez said the reprisal had followed military pressure after peace negotiations between left-wing President Gustavo Petro and Mordisco.

The police on Tuesday captured Jose Vitonco, an alleged leader of a local rebel group with links to Mordisco and who police said was the "main person responsible" for the attack in Cauca.

Petro has called the incident a "terrorist" attack and asserted that it aimed to sabotage the elections. On Wednesday, he accused the right-wing leader of neighbouring Ecuador, with whom he has repeatedly locked horns, of "stirring up violence in Colombia," without providing proof of his claim.

Noboa, for his part, claimed that Ecuador had suffered a cross-border "incursion...by Colombian guerrillas driven by the Petro Government," also without substantiating the allegation.

Petro is constitutionally barred from running for a second consecutive term.

Drone briefly halts flights at Bogota airport

AFP
Bogota

A drone flying over Bogota's El Dorado international airport briefly halted operations yesterday in the second such incident in a week.

It was not immediately known who was behind the intrusion. In Colombia, guerrilla groups often use drones to stage attacks.

Airport authorities said they activated a security protocol after detecting a drone at 5:20am (10:20 GMT).

Two aircraft, one coming from Santiago in Chile and the other from the Colombian city of Cali, were forced to abort their landings as a safety precaution, the government's civil aeronautics agency said.

Normal operations resumed after 24 minutes.

"The improper use of drones near airports poses a serious

risk to aviation," the agency said on X.

It did not specify the origin of yesterday's flyover, the second drone-related incident in a week. On Tuesday night, the airport suspended traffic for 45 minutes.

Guerrillas fighting the state, as well as rival rebel and drug trafficking groups, have taken to fixing explosives to commercial drones and targeting soldiers and civilians alike.

At least 8,000 attacks of this kind killed almost 20 soldiers and civilians and injured almost 300 more last year, according to the Defence Ministry.

Use of the device is prohibited in some rebel-controlled areas.

El Dorado was the busiest airport in Latin America in 2024, handling more than 45.8mn passengers, according to the International Council of Airports for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Argentine Congress grills Milei aide over suspected corruption

AFP
Buenos Aires

Argentine President Javier Milei's chief of staff defended himself against corruption allegations before Congress on Wednesday, the latest in a series of scandals that have sapped support for the government.

Manuel Adorni has received the full-throated support of his boss in recent months, as scandals have popped up around the aide alleging property purchases via unreported transactions, lavish family holidays and cash expenses exceeding his income.

Adorni is a trusted ally and former spokesperson of the president, and his appearance in Congress was unusual.

Milei's decision to stand by his chief of staff despite the allegations has contributed to a dent in his government's approval ratings, with a study by Di Tella University showing a 12-percentage point drop in public support this month alone.

"I did not commit any crime and I am going to prove it in court," Adorni said to applause from Milei and his cabinet colleagues.

"You are the corrupt ones," Argentina's self-declared anarcho-capitalist president told the press as he entered the building, hav-

ing blocked journalists from entering the presidential palace since Thursday.

The Milei government has been dogged by a slew of corruption investigations.

One probe is focusing on the diversion of funds intended for people with disabilities implicating the president's sister and Secretary-General of the Presidency Karina Milei.

She is accused of receiving a three-percent cut on the amount paid by the now-shuttered state disability agency for medicine bought from a pharmaceutical firm after the emergence of leaked recordings.

She denies the allegations and has not been charged.

Another investigation relates to an alleged cryptocurrency scam implicating both siblings.

A congressional committee in December accused the president of "alleged fraud" for promoting the \$LIBRA meme coin scheme and attributed "political responsibility" to the pair.

The Argentine leader has claimed he "did not know the details of the project," which incurred losses of hundreds of millions of dollars for investors.

Karina Milei also attended Wednesday's hearing in a gesture of solidarity with Adorni.

The panoply of corruption allegations prompted lawmakers to have a blizzard of questions ready for the aide, in writing, prior to Wednes-

day's hearing — more than 4,000 of them.

"How do you explain that you get paid in pesos and spend in dollars far more than what you earn?" asked left-wing deputy Myriam Bergman.

Adorni called the allegations against him "tendentious and false."

The tense atmosphere spilled beyond Congress, with a handful of retired people gathering outside for a weekly protest against benefit cuts.

"I am here because people can't take it anymore," retiree Ana Martinez, 76, told AFP. "This is a crisis like none I've ever seen in my life."

"Adorni is a crook and has no shame. He uses the people's money to travel. He's a criminal," she added.

In a separate development Wednesday, an Argentine court threw out corruption charges against former centre-left president Alberto Fernandez, who held office from 2019 to 2023.

The federal chamber of cassation annulled his indictment in a case involving allegations of irregular public sector insurance contracts for lack of evidence.

The court also lifted an asset freeze worth some 14.6bn pesos (around \$10.3mn) and a travel ban against the former leader.

Proceedings against co-defendants in the case remain open.

First US-Venezuela flight in years arrives in Caracas

AFP
Caracas

The first direct flight between the US and Venezuela in seven years landed yesterday in Caracas, a new sign of a thaw after Washington deposed leftist leader Nicolas Maduro.

The American Airlines flight took off at 10:26am (14:26 GMT) from Miami en route to Caracas, where the US has resumed diplomatic relations after years of tension. Envoy Air flight 3599 landed less than three hours later.

The flight's manifest included senior officials from Washington set to fly to Caracas to meet the government, a prospect unthinkable just months ago.

Among other passengers, Claudia Varesano, a 44-year-old with family and businesses in Venezuela, said she had been travelling often between the two countries but had to deal with lengthy layovers.

"A three-hour flight would become an eight-hour flight. I'm celebrating today because I'm a frequent traveller. I can go, have breakfast and come back," she said.

Isabel Parra, a travel agent originally from Venezuela, said she had not returned since 2018 and was "super excited."



An American Eagle aircraft, operating a regional flight for American Airlines, is sprayed with water after landing at Simon Bolivar International Airport in La Guaira, La Guaira state, yesterday. (AFP)

"For years we had to go through Curacao, the Dominican Republic or Bogota, so having this direct flight is a real pleasure," she said.

She said the inaugural flight cost \$3,000 but that she expected costs to go down quickly, particularly once American Airlines starts a second round-trip daily flight on May 21.

The inaugural flights are featuring a special Venezuelan menu including corn pancakes known as cachapas and a Venezuelan-style chicken salad, according to the airline.

Representatives of the city of Miami, a hub for Latin Americans that sees itself as a gateway to the region, greeted passengers at the gate, as did the Venezuelan ambassador

to Washington, Felix Plasencia.

Some 1.2mn Venezuelans live in the US, and the thaw is expected to boost the US business presence in the South American nation, which has the world's largest proven oil reserves.

But President Donald Trump has also been moving aggressively to remove Venezuelans from the US, terminating a programme that shielded migrants from deportation back to the crime-ridden nation.

US forces on January 3 carried out a deadly raid in Caracas, snatching longtime US nemesis Maduro and flying him and his wife to New York to face charges of drug trafficking, which they deny.

Maduro was replaced by his vice-

president, Delcy Rodriguez, who has largely co-operated with the US despite her ideological background.

Trump has voiced satisfaction with her policies toward US companies and has tried to enforce compliance by threatening violence. Venezuela has moved to open its oil and mining sectors to private investment.

Trump in turn has started an easing of sanctions on Venezuela, with measures imposed personally on Rodriguez dropped.

American Airlines, which is based in Texas and has a large network in Latin America, started flights to Venezuela in 1987 and carried the highest number of passengers between the two countries.

It ended flights in 2019 as relations deteriorated, with the US and other Western and Latin American nations declaring Maduro to be illegitimate after an election marred by irregularities.

The State Department continues to call on Americans to reconsider travel to Venezuela due to widespread crime but in March ended its blanket warning against any travel.

The new flight comes despite trouble in the aviation industry, which has been hit hard by a sharp rise in oil prices after the US and Israel attacked Iran.

US visa fallout takes centre stage in Antigua's election

Reuters
Castries, St Lucia

Voters headed to the polls yesterday in Antigua and Barbuda in a snap general election dominated by concerns over US visa restrictions, with Prime Minister Gaston Browne seeking a fourth term.

Debate has been dominated by Washington's decision in January to suspend visa processing for Antigua and Barbuda nationals — a major blow for locals who regularly travel to the US for work.

Washington raised concerns over a program where foreigners can secure citizenship in the Eastern Caribbean twin-island state by making an investment. It argues that criminals could exploit the scheme to then get into the US.

Browne's administration has said it is working with the US and that it has already brought in reforms to make the Citi-

zenship by Investment Program more robust and transparent.

The leader of the opposition United Progressive Party, Jamale Pringle, has also pledged to engage with the US and restore visa access.

Browne's Labour Party, in power since 2014, called the general election last month, two years ahead of schedule, saying it needed a new mandate at a time of international crisis.

During his term in office, the 59-year-old former banker and businessman has called on the US and other wealthy nations to boost assistance to Caribbean countries that are facing the increasingly costly impact of climate change.

His party had a 9-seat majority in the 17-seat parliament before the assembly was suspended in the run-up to the election. The United Progressive Party, which governed for two terms before 2014, is the main challenger.

9 dead after bus accident in Bolivia

At least nine people died and 22 more were injured Wednesday after a bus overturned on a highway near the western Bolivian city of Oruro, according to local law enforcement. The accident happened in the early morning hours in Chalacollo, a small town some 240 kilometres (150 miles) south of the capital, La Paz. "We have nine dead and 22 injured or wounded, who were taken to different hospitals" in the city, Colonel Nandy Torrico, head

of the local traffic police, told state broadcaster Bolivia TV. Torrico said the fatalities included a newborn, who was pronounced dead upon arriving at a medical centre.

The crash remains under investigation, but authorities said excessive speed and the driver's level of alertness are suspected factors.

The driver, a 24-year-old who tested negative for blood alcohol content, was among the injured, police said. (AFP)

El Salvador changes rules for picking top electoral officials

El Salvador amended rules on Wednesday for appointing its electoral authority, less than a year before a presidential race in which President Nayib Bukele is set to run for an unprecedented third term. The amendment was backed by 57 out of 60 lawmakers in Congress, which is controlled by Bukele's ruling party.

Bukele, who has been president since 2019 and was re-elected in 2024 with 85% of the vote, holds near-total control over the country's institutions in what the opposition calls a "dictatorship."

El Salvador has amended its Constitution multiple times since Bukele came to power, including abolishing presidential term limits last year — paving the way for the 44-year-old to run again in polls scheduled for February 2027.

The new rules mean that the five magistrates making up the Supreme Electoral Court will be chosen by the Legislative Assembly. Until now, three of the top officials were nominated by parties with the most votes in the previous elections, and the remaining two by the

Supreme Court of Justice. "No more party quotas. No more personal agendas or interests in the highest electoral authority," Legislative Assembly President Ernesto Castro said on X. But the non-governmental organisation Accion Ciudadana said in a statement that the rule changes were "designed so that the ruling party can fully control the electoral body." The five current magistrates were chosen in 2024 for a five-year term and will preside over next year's general elections. (AFP)

Thai ex-PM Thaksin to be released from prison next month

AFP
Bangkok

Thailand's jailed former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra will be released early from prison next month, the corrections department said on Wednesday. Thaksin, 76, has been serving a one-year prison sentence for corruption since September. The telecoms billionaire will be freed on May 11 and will "need to comply with all conditions" until his probation ends, including wearing an electronic monitor, the

department said in a statement. His age and the fact that he had less than a year left to serve justified his early release, it added. Thaksin's political clan has for two decades been a key foe of Thailand's pro-military, pro-royalty elite who view their populist brand as a threat to the traditional social order. His Pheu Thai party, and its earlier iterations, was Thailand's most successful political party of the 21st century, with the Shinawatra family producing four prime ministers and drawing widespread support from the rural masses.



Thaksin Shinawatra. (AFP/File photo)

But Pheu Thai had its worst election result ever in February,

slipping to third place and raising questions about the future of Thaksin's political machine. Yet Pheu Thai's inclusion in the ruling coalition of conservative Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul has left open the possibility of a political comeback. Thaksin's nephew and Pheu Thai's prime minister candidate, Yodchanan Wongsawat, was given the position of minister of higher education in Anutin's cabinet. Thaksin is serving his sentence in a Bangkok prison after the Supreme Court ruled last year that he improperly served a 2023 sen-

tence in a hospital suite rather than a cell. He was elected prime minister in 2001 and again in 2005, and took himself into exile after his second term was cut short by a military coup. After returning to Thailand in August 2023, he was sentenced to eight years for corruption and abuse of power. But rather than prison, he was whisked to a private room in hospital on health grounds, his sentence was reduced to one year by royal pardon, and he was freed as part of an early release scheme for elderly prisoners.

The timing of his return and his medical transfer, which coincided with his Pheu Thai party forming a new government, had fuelled public suspicion of a backroom deal and allegations of special treatment. The Supreme Court ruled in September that Thaksin had not been suffering from a critical health condition and his time spent in hospital could not count as time served, landing him in a prison cell to serve his one-year term. Thaksin is one of more than 850 prisoners who were approved for early release on Wednesday, the corrections department said.

Myanmar's Suu Kyi moved to house arrest: state media

Myanmar's detained former leader Aung San Suu Kyi has been moved to house arrest, state media reported yesterday, over five years after the country's military ousted a civilian government led by the Nobel laureate and imprisoned her. Suu Kyi, 80, has been detained by the junta since and her whereabouts have been unclear. "...the remaining portion of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's sentence has been commuted to be served at a designated residence," state-run MRTV reported, using an honorific for the veteran politician. State media also broadcast a photograph of Suu Kyi, seated on a wooden sofa and flanked by two uniformed personnel - the first public image of the Nobel laureate in years.

news announcement. After a marathon run of trials, Suu Kyi was sentenced to 33 years after convictions on charges ranging from corruption and inciting election fraud to violating state secrecy rules, which her allies maintain were politically motivated and aimed at sidelining her. That sentence was later commuted to 27 years, and then by a sixth in a Myanmar New Year amnesty on April 17 that freed her ally and co-defendant Win Myint, the former president. Earlier yesterday, her sentence was reduced by a further one-sixth as part of a wider amnesty of all prisoners in Myanmar's jails. Suu Kyi was held under house arrest for a total of 15 years under a previous junta at her family residence on Yangon's Inya Lake, where she famously gave impassioned speeches to crowds of supporters over the metal gates of the property. Myanmar's junta chief-turned-president Min Aung Hlaing, who overthrew Suu Kyi in the coup, has faced persistent international pressure to release political detainees since a recent election, including from the Asean, which he is seeking to re-engage with after being barred from its summits. (Reuters)

Chinese patrols held in SCS amid exercise by US, allies

Reuters
Beijing

China's military said yesterday its naval and air forces held combat readiness patrols near the Scarborough Shoal in the disputed South China Sea (SCS). The patrols come in response to annual regional drills from April 20-May 8, bringing together forces from Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, the US, Japan, Canada and France to showcase advanced weapons capabilities and operational readiness. The annual Balikatan or "shoulder to shoulder" exercises involve the largest number of participating nations to date, US and Philippine officials have said. In drills on Monday, they rehearsed coastal defence manoeuvres and tested the ability to work together to protect territorial waters, with tactics such as repelling a mock assault with live fire against designated targets and intercepting



US soldiers stand beside the Marine Air Defense Integrated System in the Integrated Air and Missile Defense demonstration during Balikatan, the annual joint military exercises between the United States and the Philippines, at Naval Station Leovigildo Gantioqui, San Antonio, Zambales, Philippines on Tuesday. (Reuters)

threats. "Such patrols serve as an effective counter-measure to cope with all sorts of rights-violation and provocative acts," the Southern Theater Command of the Chinese military said in a statement describing yesterday's exercises. "They are meant to resolutely safeguard China's territorial sovereignty and uphold peace and stability in the South China Sea." Later yesterday, the China

Coast Guard also issued a statement saying it carried out "law-enforcement patrols" near the Scarborough Shoal, a major point of contention over sovereignty and fishing rights. The Armed Forces of the Philippines, in response to the Chinese patrols, said its monitoring systems have not validated any unusual or large-scale military activity in the area that matches Beijing's narra-

tion. "This appears to be another instance of information operations designed to project a false sense of control and to justify their illegal, coercive, and aggressive presence within the Philippines' Exclusive Economic Zone," said Roy Vincent Trinidad, Philippine Navy spokesperson for the South China Sea. In 2024, China defined a baseline of "territorial waters" around the Scarborough Shoal, which it claims as its territory and calls Huangyan Island. Manila protested the Chinese claims, saying they "infringe upon Philippine sovereignty and contravene international law." China has previously criticised the joint military exercises by the Philippines and its allies, saying they raise regional tension. The Asia-Pacific region needs peace and stability, rather than outside powers stirring up division, Chinese defence ministry spokesperson Zhang Xiaogang told a press conference on Thursday, in comments on the US-Philippine drills.

Cambodia deports more than 600 Thais linked to cyberscams: minister

AFP
Phnom Penh

Cambodia deported more than 600 Thais allegedly involved in online scams yesterday, the information minister said, part of a crackdown against the multibillion-dollar illicit industry that has ballooned in the country in recent years. Cambodia has emerged as a hub for crime syndicates running fake romantic relationship and cryptocurrency investment schemes in which scammers - some willing, others trafficked - defraud internet users around the world. Operated out of hotels, casinos and fortified compounds around the region, the global cyberscam industry has reached "industrial proportions", with estimates of its annual revenues as high as \$64bn, according to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. Cambodian Information Minister Neth Pheaktra told AFP "635 Thai nationals involved in illegal online business operations and transnational criminal networks were deported to Thailand" through a border checkpoint yesterday. Thirty suspects were "being processed by Cambodian authorities" over alleged criminal offences, he said. Rights monitors and other experts have accused officials in Cambodia of complicity - allega-



Thai official (right) holding a list as Thai citizens, suspected of being involved in online scams, sit at the Poipet international border checkpoint between Cambodia and Thailand, at Poipet town in Banteay Meanchey province, yesterday. (AFP)

tions the government has denied. Authorities say they have detained and deported more than 13,000 foreign nationals involved in online scams since early last year. From January to April, more than 240,000 people, including Chinese, Indonesians, Indians and others, accused of scam involvement "voluntarily departed" Cambodia, the government said last week. Neth Pheaktra said police searched a condominium building in Poipet city, on the border with Thailand, on Saturday. The location was suspected of being the site of illegal online businesses, online gambling and other activities "potentially linked to transnational criminal networks", the minister said.

Nearly 4,700 mobile phones and more than 400 computer monitors were found inside the building, he added. "The inspection of electronic devices also uncovered numerous online gambling websites targeting customers in Thailand," he said. The raid came two days after the US announced sanctions on a Cambodian senator and businessman, Kok An, who Washington accused of controlling scam compounds in Cambodia and protecting a criminal network that has defrauded Americans of millions of dollars. Cambodian authorities raided another suspected scam compound in Poipet on Wednesday, detaining many foreigners, police said.

North Korea faces 'severe' drought: KCNA

AFP
Seoul

North Korea faces an "unusual" and "severe" drought this year and is working to protect crops, state media said yesterday. Natural disasters tend to have an outsized impact on the diplomatically isolated country due to its weak infrastructure and economy. Elizabeth Salmon, the UN special rapporteur on human rights in North Korea, said in February that food shortages are already a key concern. "An unusual drought has recently persisted across much of the country, a phenomenon rarely seen in previous years," Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said. "Workers across various regions are concentrating all efforts on protecting early-season crops

from the drought," it added. In a separate report, KCNA said Premier Pak Thae Song carried out on-site inspections at farms in South Pyongan and North Hwanghae provinces to discuss "countermeasures to minimise drought damage." He called for fully identifying and efficiently using all available water sources, adding that a successful harvest hinged on overcoming this year's "severe drought", KCNA said. South Korea - Asia's fourth-largest economy - also endured a prolonged drought last year that hit the eastern coastal city of Gangneung. That dry spell forced authorities to implement water restrictions, including shutting off 75 % of household meters across the city. KCNA said North Korean cities and counties were carrying out "repairs to the gates of reservoirs and waterways". Workers are also implementing

"technical measures", boosting the drought resistance of wheat and barley and striving to ensure the stable growth of early-season crops, it added. South Korea recorded its hottest summer on record last year, while both the North and the South also saw their warmest June. Climate change is making heat waves more frequent and intense, and experts say the seasonal El Nino weather phenomenon will likely return this year. The weather pattern can bring heat, drought and heavy rain to different parts of Asia. The North has long endured power shortages, and experts say most residents have no access to air conditioning. The country was hit by severe flooding in its northern regions near China in 2024, with South Korean media reporting the number of dead and missing in the North due to the disaster could be as high as 1,500.

South Korea, Australia agree to strengthen energy supply chain resilience, Seoul says

South Korea and Australia have agreed to work together to strengthen energy supply chain resilience and to maintain stable, safe and reliable supply of energy resources, including diesel and LNG, South Korea's Foreign Ministry said yesterday. The following are some points of discussion raised during Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong's visit to Seoul. South Korea and Australia announced a Joint Statement on Energy Resource Security that lays out their commitment to "preemptively" co-operate to ensure energy security resilience, the South Korean ministry said. Wong, who

also travelled to Japan and China on her current trip, said the Asian region has "disproportionately" felt the impact of the crisis in the Middle East and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz. South Korea is a key energy partner of Australia as the largest supplier of diesel and third-largest source of jet fuel, Wong said. Australia is South Korea's largest source of liquefied natural gas (LNG). "We depend on you, and you depend on us," Wong said, in describing the need for close co-ordination and Australia's commitment as a reliable supplier of food, energy and other commodities to S Korea. (Reuters)

Dragon diplomacy: Indonesia lends Komodo lizard pair to Japan zoo

AFP
Surabaya

Indonesia will lend a breeding pair of endangered Komodo dragons to Japan under an agreement signed on Wednesday between zoos from the two countries that emphasised the project's conservation merits. The five-year renewable deal, criticised by animal rights group PETA, will in turn see Indonesia's Surabaya Zoo receive a pair of red pandas, a pair of giraffes, four Aldabra giant tortoises and two female Japanese macaques from iZoo in Kawazu in Japan's Shizuoka prefecture, officials said. "This is not just animal exchange. This is a bridge between our two countries, Japan and Indonesia," iZoo director Tsuyoshi Shirawa said

at the signing ceremony. Indonesia's environment ministry said in a statement this month the programme's main objective was "long-term conservation". PETA Asia has expressed concern that any dragon offspring born in Japan will be "condemned to a lifetime of confinement". "True conservation protects Komodo dragons where they belong - in their natural habitats - not by exporting them for political optics or public relations gains," PETA Asia president Jason Baker said in a statement. The ministry said conservation of the dragons in their natural habitat remained "the main priority". "Through this cooperation, it is hoped there will be more Japanese people and tourists coming to Indonesia, particularly to the Komodo National Park... to witness Komodos



Director of Japan's iZoo Tsuyoshi Shirawa (right), Director of Operations and General Affairs at Surabaya Zoo Nurika Widyasa (centre) and Moch. Nahroni, Director of Finance and Human Resources, display the signed memorandum of understanding regarding co-operation in the protection and conservation of wildlife between Indonesia and Japan at Surabaya Zoo in Surabaya, on Wednesday. (AFP)

in their natural habitat." Indonesian forestry official Ahmad Munawir said at Wednesday's event.

Under the rules of the CITES pact that governs international trade in endangered species, transfers like

this one are allowed for non-commercial breeding programmes. The zoo in Surabaya, Indonesia's second-largest city over 700km (434 miles) from the dragon's natural habitat, has bred dozens of the dragons in recent years in conditions that mimic their natural home. In the wild, the world's largest living lizards are found only in the World Heritage-listed Komodo National Park and on neighbouring Flores island. According to the International Union for Protection of Nature, the global population was about 3,458 adult and juvenile Komodo dragons at the last count in 2019. The fearsome reptiles, which can grow to three metres (10 feet) in length and weigh up to 90kgs (200 pounds), are threatened by human activity and climate change destroying their habitat.



Komodo dragons are seen in an enclosure at Surabaya Zoo on Wednesday. (AFP)

In some places, they are losing natural prey to human hunters, and they sometimes die in conflict with humans over livestock. Some are captured and illicitly traded to zoos or as pets. There have been legal transfers of Komodos to other zoos in the past, including London and Singapore. The Indonesian and Japanese governments signed a Memorandum of Understanding last month to make the exchange with Japan possible.



Statue pops up bearing Banksy's name

AFP
London

A large statue has appeared on a plinth in central London with Banksy's name scrawled on the base, prompting speculation yesterday that it may be the famously enigmatic street artist's latest work.

The statue — of a suited man marching, with one leg off the plinth, while carrying a flag that is covering his face — reportedly first emerged on Wednesday just off the central street of Pall Mall.

Banksy, whose real identity has not been officially confirmed, has not claimed the piece as his own on his Instagram account.

The artist — best known for his satirical murals, often using a distinctive stencilling style — typically uses the platform to confirm his works, posting images and a caption.

The appearance of the statue comes just over a month after a Reuters investigation claimed to have confirmed the artist's true identity.

It backed up a similar claim by the Mail on Sunday tabloid nearly two decades ago that he is a 52-year-old Briton, born as Robin Gunningsham, who later changed



A man takes a photo of a statue which suddenly appeared the day before, bearing the signature of British street artist Banksy etched onto its base, in Waterloo Place in central London early morning yesterday. (AFP)

his name to David Jones.

The report relied in part on a New York arrest record from 2000 as well as witness testimony from a more recent visit to Ukraine by Banksy.

The potential new work sits on Waterloo Place, in the heart of central London, near more than century-old statues of King Edward VII and nurse Florence Nightingale, as well as the Crimean War Memorial.

It has reportedly been drawing crowds of onlookers since being erected.

The artist, who typically creates

a media and public frenzy whenever he reveals a new piece of art, has previously unveiled an unofficial statue in the British capital.

His work known as "The Drinker", which satirised Auguste Rodin's iconic bronze sculpture "The Thinker", was unveiled in 2004 on nearby Shaftesbury Avenue.

It was stolen soon afterwards and then endured years of contested ownership.

Westminster Council, which is responsible for the area where the new statue has appeared, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Under-fire Starmer heckled after stabbings

AFP
London

Prime Minister Keir Starmer was booed and heckled with shouts of "Jew harmer" yesterday as the Jewish community in London accused him of doing too little to protect them, a day after a knife attack.

The crowd in Golders Green in north London where two Jewish men were stabbed in broad daylight shouted "Starmer is a coward" and "show your face".

Starmer was visiting emergency services staff following the attacks, the latest in a spate that have targeted the Jewish community. The area has a large Jewish population.

There have been arson attacks on synagogues and other Jewish sites in the area in recent weeks. Last year, an attack claimed two lives at a synagogue in Manchester.

Hours earlier, the government announced extra money for security patrols outside synagogues and schools.

An extra £25mn (\$33mn) would be allocated to fund the new security for the Jewish community, interior minister Shabana



British Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood, Met Police Commissioner Mark Rowley, and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer attend a meeting of criminal justice agencies following the Golders Green attack, in London, yesterday. (Reuters)

na Mahmood said.

"People have a sense of deep insecurity... and that is why the government is bringing forward investment, an additional £25mn to invest in the security of our Jewish community," Mahmood told Sky News.

"That will pay for more protective security for our Jewish synagogues, schools, places of worship, community centres," she added.

Starmer, convening a top-level meeting at his Downing Street office earlier, said the justice system's response to attacks must be "swift and visible".

A 45-year-old man, a British national who was born in Somalia and came to the UK as a child,

remains in custody following the stabbings.

Monitoring groups have reported a surge in antisemitic and Islamophobic incidents in Britain, particularly since the start of the war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza.

The victims, aged 76 and 34, were in a stable condition in hospital.

The head of London's Metropolitan Police and a Labour Party lawmaker were also heckled at the scene hours after the attacks with shouts of "shame on you".

Rabbi Ben Kurzer, of the Golders Green Synagogue, said the government needed to do more to protect Britain's Jews..

New Zealand mass killer loses bid to overturn convictions

AFP
Wellington

White supremacist killer Brenton Tarrant lost yesterday an appeal seeking to overturn his conviction and sentence for shooting dead 51 people at two New Zealand mosques in 2019, court documents showed.

The 35-year-old admitted to carrying out New Zealand's deadliest modern day mass shooting before being sentenced to life in prison in August 2020.

He appealed to the Court of Appeal in February, saying "torturous and inhumane" detention conditions during his trial made him incapable of making rational decisions when he pleaded guilty.

"I did not have the mind frame or mental health required to be making informed decisions at that time," Tarrant said at the time.

The panel of three judges said the court "does not accept Mr Tarrant's evidence about his mental state."

"There were inconsistencies in Mr Tarrant's own evidence, and his evidence is at odds with the detailed observations of prison authorities and the assessments of



This frame grab shows Brenton Tarrant as he addresses the Court of Appeal in Wellington while being held in a specialist unit for prisoners of extreme risk at Auckland Prison. (AFP/File Photo)

mental health professionals at the time of him entering his pleas."

The judges found Tarrant's guilty pleas were voluntary and "he was not coerced or pressured in any way to plead guilty".

"The evidence overwhelmingly demonstrates that he was not suffering any significant psychological impacts as a result of his prison conditions at the time he pleaded guilty," the court said.

The court said Tarrant's "proposed conviction appeal is utterly devoid of merit".

"The facts concerning Mr Tarrant's offending are beyond dis-

pute. He has not identified any arguable defence, or indeed any defence known to the law."

Tarrant's penalty of life imprisonment without parole was the stiffest in New Zealand history.

Armed with an arsenal of semi-automatic weapons, Tarrant attacked worshippers at two mosques in Christchurch on March 15, 2019.

He published an online manifesto before the attacks and then livestreamed the killings for 17 minutes.

His victims were all Muslim and included children, women

and the elderly.

The court's decision was complicated one week after Tarrant's February hearing when he sought to abandon his appeal entirely.

The judges said the court received a notice of abandonment of appeal signed by Tarrant using a "self-styled moniker" but the document was thrown out because it was not dated or witnessed.

Tarrant filed a second notice later that week, again using a pseudonym, which was dated and witnessed.

He said he "no longer wishes to have a lawyer" and the appeal should not continue as "it would likely lead to a miscarriage of justice".

Lawyers acting for the survivors and families of victims told national broadcaster RNZ the decision had been a "huge relief".

"The law has now done its job," they said.

"The families, and frankly all of us, will be spared the trauma of reliving the 15th of March all over again in a trial.

"It is a huge relief that the difficult and often unsupported journey families are on will not now be added to by the great burden of a new trial. It would have been unimaginably traumatic."

Indian opposition slams Nicobar megaport plan as 'destruction'

Indian opposition leader Rahul Gandhi said Wednesday a proposed \$9bn megaport and city project on the strategic Great Nicobar Island is "destruction dressed in development's language".

The island, nearly 3,000 kilometres (1,860 miles) from New Delhi, sits at the entrance to one of the world's busiest waterways — the Strait of Malacca, through which up to 30% of global maritime trade passes.

The plan to develop the 910 square kilometre (351 square miles) island with a container port, airport and city see swathes of pristine rainforest cut down, including land inhabited for millennia by

communities with minimal outside contact.

"What is being done in Great Nicobar is one of the biggest scams and gravest crimes against this country's natural and tribal heritage in our lifetime," Gandhi said in a video message posted on social media, showing him walking through the island's forests.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said the Great Nicobar Island Project "is of strategic, defence and national importance", and India's environmental court gave the green light in February. But Gandhi said he would try to stop it. "What I have seen is not a project," he added. "It is millions

of trees marked for the axe. It is 160 square kilometres of rainforest condemned to die. It is communities that have been ignored while their homes have been snatched away."

Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav last year insisted that the project "poses no threat to the island's tribal groups" and "does not jeopardise the eco-sensitivity of the region". Around 9,000 people live on the island, including around 1,200 from Indigenous groups, including the Nicobarese and the Shompen, hunter-gatherers who have shunned contact with outsiders, according to rights group Survival International. (AFP)

Australian climber on record sea-to-summit Everest bid

AFP
Kathmandu

Among the hundreds of climbers hoping to scale Everest this season, 27-year-old Australian Oliver Foran began his journey far away, cycling and then walking all the way from the sea.

Foran is seeking to break the 67-day "sea-to-summit" record, first pedalling 1,150 kilometres (715 miles) from the warm waves of the Bay of Bengal in India to Nepal and now trekking to the icy 8,849-metre (29,032-foot) peak.

"I always wanted to climb Mount Everest, but I wanted to do it in a special way," Foran told AFP by telephone on a break from his long hike upwards to Everest Base Camp, and then to the highest place on Earth.

It is also a deeply personal journey, with Foran raising funds for youth mental health.

The former real estate agent climbed his first major mountain, Nepal's 6,189-metre (20,305-foot) Island Peak, in 2024.



He then summited 6,812-metre (22,349-foot) Ama Dablam last year. He hopes Everest will be his first 8,000-metre mountain.

He has been training — cycling, exercising and working on his breathing — for the past six months to build endurance for the altitude.

The sea-to-summit is a rare feat, first completed by another Australian, Tim Macartney-Snape, in

1990. Macartney-Snape spent three months walking from sea level to the Everest summit, and it was his documentary that sparked the idea for Foran. The current record is held by South Korean climber Kim Changho, who walked and then kayaked the Ganges river, cycled to Nepal and then trekked up to the base camp in 2013, five years before his death on another mountain.

Foran aims to slash a week off that record and reach the summit in 60 days. "It is a challenging task and a unique one," said Gelje Sherpa, his lead guide and expedition organiser at AGA Adventures.

"There are so many facilities and options to summit Everest in a record time now, but he is using only his own human power. That is big."

Foran cycled across India and Nepal in the first 16 days, navigating sweltering hot plains before steep, relentless hills.

He said he is driven by "something bigger" than himself, the memory of his teenage grief when his mother died of brain cancer. "I didn't know how to process it... Life on the outside looked pretty good, but inside I was just emptier than ever," he said.

The unresolved grief reached a breaking point seven years later. Foran said he had "made up my mind that that was it" — but a call to a friend proved life-saving.

"I made the decision then that... if I ever got the opportunity to stop somebody else from getting to that point or to give them another way, I



Australian climber Oliver Foran (right) trekking in Kothe at Makalu Barun National Park in Nepal. (AFP)

would," he said.

That commitment underlines his Everest expedition. Foran is partnering with Australian organisation Youturn with a target to raise \$200,000 to build a youth mental health support centre back home.

Aaron Minton, a director at Youturn, said it would be a "youth-focused mental health and well-being hub".

Foran hopes his journey can offer both awareness and inspiration, sharing the good parts and the struggles of his journey through his social media.

"What's really motivating me is, hopefully, having an inspiration on some of these younger people — that might be a little bit stuck with where they are right now in their lives," he said.

White supremacist found guilty of plotting attack

Reuters
London

A British white supremacist who prosecutors said idolised Adolf Hitler was yesterday convicted of preparing terrorism acts after trying to buy a gun and ammunition from undercover officers.

Alfie Coleman paid 3,500 pounds (\$4,730) for a pistol and around 200 rounds of ammunition before being arrested by police in September 2023.

The 21-year-old venerated Nazi dictator Hitler and Thomas Mair, a loner obsessed with the Nazis who murdered lawmaker Jo Cox in a frenzied street attack in 2016, prosecutors said.

Manifestos written by Dylann Roof, who killed nine Black people at a South Carolina church in 2015, and Brenton Tarrant, who killed 51 Muslim worshippers at mosques in Christchurch, were found on Coleman's devices when he was arrested.

Prosecutor Nicholas de la Poer told jurors at London's Old Bailey court that Coleman had

written his own manifesto as a diary, in which he stated: "All people whom are not on our side must die."

Coleman pleaded guilty to possessing the gun and 10 charges relating to documents containing information likely to be useful to terrorists, but denied the preparation of terrorist acts.

He was convicted by a jury after a retrial and will be sentenced in July.

Police previously said Coleman had extensively consumed extreme right-wing material online as a teenager, particularly during the Covid-19 lockdown in 2020, when he was 15.

Bethan David, head of counter terrorism at the Crown Prosecution Service, described Coleman as "a dangerous man who planned to commit a terrorist attack to further his extreme racist and white supremacist agenda".

"He was motivated by an extreme ideology and hatred of people of other races and religions, he was clearly intent on acting on these ideas and causing harm," David added.

Head of crime family to run again for seat in Irish parliament

Gerard Hutch, named in a 2023 court case as the head of a well-known crime family in Ireland, will seek election to the Irish parliament in a by-election next month after narrowly missing out on a seat in a parliamentary election 18 months ago.

Hutch's name is among the confirmed candidates on the Dublin city returning officer's website for the May 22 Dublin Central constituency by-election for the seat vacated by former Irish finance minister Paschal Donohoe.

Hutch, better known as "The Monk", finished in fifth place in the four-seat constituency at the 2024 national election.

Analysts say he faces a potentially tougher task this time round with just one seat up for grabs and all the parties whose candidates were elected last time competing again. Hutch's surge at the national election also faltered when he struggled to attract vote transfers from other candidates.

"I think it's great to put someone in there with a chequered past. That's what we need in the Dail (parliament), you need change," Hutch told the *Irish Times* this week when asked what it would mean if someone with his past were elected to parliament. "You need a man like me in there who can talk to the guy in the street." (Reuters)



A duty mankind owes to Allah

Pilgrims to Makkah have begun filling the sky with talbiyyah (declaration of answering the call to Haj) and takbeer (declaring Allah's greatness). They come from all corners of the earth, east and west, to fulfil this awesome obligation.

Allah the Most High says:
And Haj to the House (Al-Ka'aba) is a duty mankind owes to Allah, those who can afford the expenses and whoever disbelieves, then Allah is not in need of any of the 'Alameen (mankind, jinn, and all that exists). [Ale-Imraan 97]
Also His statement: And perform properly the Haj and the 'Umrah for Allah. [Al-Baqarah 196] And finally: And proclaim to mankind the Haj. They will come to you on foot and on every lean camel, they will come from every deep and distant mountain highway. [Al-Haj 27].

Dear Muslims, Haj is one of the five pillars of Islam. The Messenger of Allah, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: Islam is founded upon five pillars: The declaration that there is no true deity worthy of worship besides Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, the performance of prayer (salaah), giving zakat (due alms), fasting in the month of Ramadan, and pilgrimage (Haj) to the inviolable House of Allah for whoever has the means. [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

Is a duty for every Muslim who is able to hurry to perform the Haj before falling into sin. The Messenger of Allah stated: Hasten to the Haj because none of you knows what will happen to him. [Ahmed].

It is narrated from Abdur-Rahman Ibn Saabit: Whoever dies without having performed the Haj and there was no debilitating illness as an obstacle nor unjust ruler or some overwhelming necessity preventing him, would die in the state of either a Jew or a Christian. [This statement is considered a da'eef (weak) hadith but it is supported by a similar statement by 'Umar Ibn al-Khattaab and therefore known to have a sound origin according to Al-Haafiz Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani in Talkhees Al-Kabeer]

It is narrated by Sa'eed ibn Mansour that Umar Ibn al-Khattaab (radiallahu 'anhu) said: I have considered sending a man to the various cities to see whoever has the means but has not made the Haj to then impose the jizyah (a tax imposed upon non-Muslim subjects in an Islamic state). They are not Muslims. They are not Muslims.

It is therefore a duty for every Muslim to fulfil this great obligation when it is easy (at this time) for you to do so, and all praise is due to Allah. Don't let the Shaitaan cause you to sit and be overtaken by procrastination and be distracted by some desire. Ask yourself...How long will you delay it? Till next year? Who knows what condition you will be in next year? Think of the generations and how they used to trek to the Haj for months to reach the Ancient House!

The benefits of Haj are tremendous and its reward is glorious. It combines both physical and material forms of worship. The former due to the undergoing any hardship, exertion, fatigue, strain, harsh conditions and travel. The latter is due to the expenditure the pilgrim makes for and during the Haj.

The Messenger of Allah, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: From 'Umrah to 'Umrah is an expiation for what occurs between the two (i.e. sins), and there is no reward for the accepted Haj other than Al-Jannah. Also he (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) stated: Whoever makes Haj and neither quarrels



or commits indecency will return home like the day his mother gave birth to him. [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

The Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, strongly urged increasing one's obedience and adherence between the Haj and the 'Umrah for he said: Make the Haj and the 'Umrah follow each other closely, for they remove poverty and sins as a blacksmith's bellows remove impurities from iron, gold and silver; and Haj which is accepted gets no less a reward than Paradise. [Al-Tirmidhi Hadith 2524 Narrated by Abdullah ibn Mas'ud; Umar ibn al-Khattaab, Tirmidhi and Nasa'i transmitted it, and Ahmad and Ibn Maajah transmitted it from Umar up to "from iron."]

He (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) also said in a hadith that enlivens the feelings and hurries you on: From 'Umrah to 'Umrah is expiation for all that occurs between them (of sins) and the accepted Haj has no reward other than Al-Jannah. [Muslim]

Along with this great reward is the fact that the days of Haj are few. So don't hesitate and undervalue this chance while the means to travel are much easier compared to past days and you live a life of relative plenty. Favours call for gratitude and life is for the purpose of worshipping Allah. Don't delay further or procrastinate and receive the good tidings as one of the delegations of Ar-Rahmaan (the Most Merciful), Allah,

who has called them and they have answered Him and He has given to them.

Receive the glad tidings of a great day in which there will be many false steps and slips of the tongue forgiven for the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: There is not a day when more slaves are freed from the Hellfire than on the Day of Arafah. [Muslim]

Be happy and find comfort and prepare for the meeting with Allah the Glorified and Majestic, and benefit from your time by doing that which will benefit you in the next life and it will then be cause for joy at the time when no amount of wealth nor progeny will avail you. The Day when the records will be made to fly and hearts will be trembling and transformed and you will see people as though they are drunken however they will not be... rather it will be the intense punishment from Allah.

Dear brothers and sisters, work for this world to the extent needed to live in it, but work also for the Hereafter in order to live in it. Don't put things off when death is indeed before you and sickness stops you or you become engulfed in work. Instead, escape from all that and seek Allah's aid and depend upon Him and be among those who are answering the call to Haj and remembering Allah's greatness this year.

If Allah has already opened your breast and you have decided to perform the Haj for

His sake and the reward of the Hereafter, we remind you of the following matters:

1. Ask Allah For Guidance And Advice (Al-Istikhaarah and Al-Istishaara): The one who seeks guidance will not fail, nor will the one who seeks advice regret it. Seek the guidance of Allah regarding the appropriate time, transportation and companions for your journey. The Istikhaarah prayer is to perform two units (rak'at) of prayer and afterwards supplicate to Allah saying the supplication of Al-Istikhaarah which is as follows: O Allah, I consult You as You are All-Knowing and I appeal to You to give me power as You are Omnipotent, I ask You for Your great favour, for You have power and I do not, and You know all of the hidden matters. O Allah! If you know that this matter (then he should mention it) is good for me in my religion, my livelihood, and for my life in the Hereafter, (or he said: 'for my present and future life,') then make it (easy) for me. And if you know that this matter is not good for me in my religion, my livelihood and my life in the Hereafter, (or he said: 'for my present and future life,') then keep it away from me and take me away from it and choose what is good for me wherever it is and please me with it." [Al-Bukhari]

2. Purify Your Intention To Perform The Haj For Allah Alone: It is incumbent upon the person undertaking the Haj to intend their Haj and 'Umrah for the sake of pleasing Allah alone and attaining the reward of the Hereafter. This, so that all one's actions and speech and expenditure is a means to get closer to Allah. The Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: Verily deeds are judged and motivated by intention and verily every person shall get what they intended. [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

3. Learn The Rites of Haj And 'Umrah And Related Issues: Learn the conditions of Haj and its obligations, its pillars and sunnah or supererogatory aspects to the point that you can worship Allah with insight clarity and knowledge and you will also avoid errors which may spoil your Haj. Books on Haj are plentiful and easy to obtain. Your local mosque may have preparatory classes as well.

4. Leave Plenty Of Provisions For Your Family And Advise Them To Have Fear Of Allah (Taqwaa): It is obligatory for whoever intends to make Haj that they leave adequate provisions for those whose maintenance they are responsible for of money, food, and drink. One should be confident that their family is safe and sound and not left in a situation of trial or danger. It is highly recommended (and many scholars say obligatory) to have one's will prepared before travelling.

5. Sincere Repentance To Allah For All Sins And Disobedience: Allah, Who is free of all imperfections, states: And all of you beg Allah to forgive you all, O believers, that you may be successful. [An-Noor 31] True repentance (At-Taubah) is when one renounces all his or her sins and disobedience to Allah and His Messenger, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, and discontinues doing them and feel truly remorseful for those past ill deeds and is determined not to return to them. If someone else's rights have been violated they must be given back their rightful possessions or made amends with no matter what the violation may have been.

6. Use Only Lawful (halal) Funds: Funds that were lawfully earned so that nothing

sinful may touch your Haj. It may be that you Haj is accepted but tainted with some sin from some other way. It is stated in a hadith of the Messenger of Allah, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, where he said: As soon as a pilgrim sets out for Haj with a provision which is lawful, and puts his foot in the stirrup (rides his mount) and calls out: 'O Allah! Here I am in response to Your call; an announcer answers him from the heavens above, saying: 'Your call has been heard; you are a happy one; your provisions are lawful, your mount is lawful and your pilgrimage is free of sin and acceptable! But, if his provisions are unlawfully gained, and he puts his foot in the stirrup and calls out: 'O Allah! Here I am in response to Your call; an announcer from the heavens above answers him back, saying: 'Your call is not accepted; nor are you welcome; your food is unlawful; your provisions are unlawful; and your pilgrimage is not free of sin and unacceptable.'" Al-Mundhri says: "This is reported by At-Tabarani in Al-Awsat, and also by Al-Asbahani in a mursal hadith from Aslam, the freed slave of 'Umar bin al-Khattaab"

It is said in a poem:
When you make Haj with wealth whose origin is unlawful
You have not made a Haj but a Haj of no consequence

Allah accepts not except all that is virtuous. Not all who make the Haj to the House of Allah are successful

1. Choose Righteous Companions: They will be good for you during travel for they will remind you of what you may have forgotten and inform you of what you may not know and look out for you and show you brotherly love. They will consider all of that as an act of worship gaining them nearness to Allah the Mighty and Majestic.

2. Adhere To The Etiquette Of Travel: Make those supplications that are well known, such as the supplication of travel and the takbeer when ascending to a high point and the tasbeeh (Subhaanallah - glorification of Allah as free of all perfection) when descending in a valley, along with supplications when stopping at places along the road etc.

3. Mentally Prepare For The Haj: Just as important as preparing physically you should prepare to make psychological adjustments to deal with the hardships, toils and inconvenience of traveling and Haj and consider all of it as good to be added to your scale of deeds. There are those who just complain and mumble about the heat, the food, the long trip... Haj is not a vacation or recreational activity! Know that the highest type of patience, and the type that is most greatly rewarded, is patience in the obedience of Allah. Even with all the transportation and road facilities, some hardship and toil will remain. Don't nullify your deeds dear pilgrim by mentioning all you have done or irritations and petty annoyances and driving away other Muslims by your hand or your tongue. You must apply kindness and compassion.

4. Lower The Gaze From What Allah Has Made Haram To Look At: Be conscious and fear Allah regarding those things which are unlawful. You will be in holy places of tremendous religious significance, so hold your tongue and control your limbs so that your Haj is not a sinful or false one that will be a burden upon your back on the Day of Resurrection.

May Allah accept our obedience and adherence and excuse us of our shortcomings.

A history of Haj

Haj literally means 'to set out for a place'. Islamically, however, it refers to the annual pilgrimage that Muslims make to Makkah with the intention of performing certain religious rites in accordance with the method prescribed by the Prophet Muhammad, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam.

Haj and its rites were first ordained by Allah in the time of the Prophet Ibraaheem (Abraham) ('alaihi s-salaam) and he was the one who was entrusted by Allah to build the Ka'aba - the House of Allah - along with his son Ismaa'eel [Ishmael] at Makkah. Allah described the Ka'aba and its building as follows:

"And remember when We showed Ibraaheem the site of the [Sacred] House [saying]: Associate not anything [in worship with Me and purify My House for those who circumambulate it [i.e. perform tawaaf] and those who stand up for prayer and those who bow down and make prostration [in prayer, etc.]" (Surah al-Haj 22:26)

After building the Ka'aba, Ibraaheem would come to Makkah to perform Haj every year, and after his death, this practice was continued by his son. However, gradually with the passage of time, both the form and the goal of the Haj rites were changed. As idolatry spread throughout Arabia, the Ka'aba lost its purity and idols were placed inside it. Its walls became covered with poems and paintings, including one of Jesus and his mother Maryam and eventually over 360 idols came to be placed around the Ka'aba.

During the Haj period itself, the atmosphere around the sacred precincts of the Ka'aba was like a circus. Men and women would go round the Ka'aba naked, arguing that they should present themselves before Allah in the same condition they were born. Their prayer became devoid of all sincere remembrance of Allah and was instead reduced to a series of hand clapping, whistling and the blowing of horns. Even the talbiyyah* was distorted by them with the following additions: 'No one is Your partner except one who is permitted by you. You are his Master and the Master of what he possesses!'

Sacrifices were also made in the name of God. However, the blood of the sacrificed animals was poured onto the walls of the Ka'aba and the flesh was hung from pillars around the Ka'aba, in the belief that Allah demanded the flesh and blood of these animals.

Singing, drinking, adultery and other acts of immorality were rife amongst the pilgrims and the poetry competitions, which were held, were a major

part of the whole Haj event. In these competitions, poets would praise the bravery and splendour of their own tribesmen and tell exaggerated tales of the cowardice and miserliness of other tribes. Competitions in generosity were also staged where the chief of each tribe would set up huge cauldrons and feed the pilgrims, only so that they could become well-known for their extreme generosity.

Thus the people had totally abandoned the teachings of their forefather and leader Ibraaheem. The House that he had made pure for the worship of Allah alone, had been totally desecrated by the pagans and the rites which he had established were completely distorted by them. This sad state of affairs continued for nearly two and a half thousand years. But then after this long period, the time came for the supplication of Ibraaheem to be answered:

"Our Lord! Send amongst them a Messenger of their own, who shall recite unto them your ayaat (verses) and instruct them in the book and the Wisdom and sanctify them. Verily you are the 'Azeedul-Hakeem [the All-Mighty, the All-Wise]!" (Surah al-Baqarah 2:129)

Sure enough, a man named Muhammad ibn 'Abdullaah (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) was born in the very city that Ibraaheem (AS) had made this supplication centuries earlier. For 23 years, the Prophet Muhammad, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, spread the message of Tawheed [true monotheism] - the same message that Ibraaheem and all the other Prophets came with - and established the law of Allah upon the land. He expended every effort into making the word of Allah supreme and his victory over falsehood culminated in the smashing of the idols inside the Ka'aba which once again became the universal centre for the worshippers of the one True God.

Not only did the Prophet rid the Ka'aba of all its impurities, but he also reinstated all the rites of Haj which were established by Allah's Permission, in the time of Ibraaheem. Specific injunctions in the Qur'an were revealed in order to eliminate all the false rites which had become rampant in the pre-Islamic period. All indecent and shameful acts were strictly banned in Allah's statement:

"There is to be no lewdness nor wrangles during Haj." (Surah al-Baqarah 2:197)

Competitions among poets in the exaltations of their forefathers and their tribesmen's' achievements were all stopped. Instead, Allah told them:

"And when you have completed your rites [of Haj]



then remember Allah as you remember your forefathers; nay with a more vigorous remembrance." (Surah al-Baqarah 2:200)

Competitions in generosity were also prohibited. Of course, the feeding of the poor pilgrims was still encouraged as this was done in the time of Ibraaheem but Allah commanded that the slaughtering of the animals which was done for this purpose should be done seeking the pleasure of Allah rather than fame and the praise of the people. He said:

"So mention the name of Allah over these animals when they are drawn up in lines. Then, when they are drawn on their sides [after the slaughter], eat thereof and feed the beggar who does not ask, and the beggar who asks." (Surah al-Haj 22:36)

As for the deplorable practice of spattering blood of the sacrificed animals on the walls of the Ka'aba and hanging their flesh on altars, then Allah clearly informed them that:

"It is neither their meat nor their blood that reaches Allah, but it is Taqwaa (piety) from you that reaches Him." (Surah al-Haj 22:37)

The Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, also put a stop to the practice of circling the Ka'aba in a state of nudity and the argument that the pagans put forward to justify this ritual was sharply rebutted in Allah's question:

"Say: Who has forbidden the adornment [i.e. clothes] given by Allah which He has produced for His Slaves?" (Surah al-A'raaf 7:32)

Another custom which was prohibited through the Qur'an was that of setting off for Haj without taking any provisions for the journey. In the pre-Islamic pe-

riod, some people who claimed to be mutawakkiloon (those having complete trust in Allah) would travel to perform Haj begging food the whole journey. They considered this form of behaviour a sign of piety and an indication of how much faith they had in Allah. However Allah told mankind that to have sufficient provisions for the journey was one of the preconditions for making Haj. He said:

"And take a provision [with you] for the journey, but the best provision is at-Taqwaa (piety)." (Surah al-Baqarah 2:197)

In this way, all the pre-Islamic practices, which were based in ignorance, were abolished and Haj was once more made a model of piety, fear of Allah, purity, simplicity and austerity. Now, when the pilgrims reached the Ka'aba, they no longer found the carnivals and the frolic and frivolity that had once occupied the minds of the pilgrims there before. Now, there was the remembrance of Allah at every step and every action and every sacrifice was devoted to Him alone. It was this kind of Haj that was worthy of the reward of paradise, as the Prophet (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) said: "The reward for an accepted Haj is nothing less than paradise." [Saheeh al-Bukhari]

May Allah grant us all the ability to visit His House and perform the Haj in the manner of the Prophet Muhammad, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam.

Footnote:
● Labbaik Allaahumma labbaik... (Here I am present, O' Allah, I am present...) This is the chant which the pilgrims say when they are going around the Ka'aba.

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GULF TIMES

The race for the Nobel Peace Prize has begun

This year's Nobel Peace Prize will be keenly watched as US President Donald Trump is said to be one of the contenders. Some 287 candidates will be considered for the 2026 prize, the Norwegian Nobel Committee said, including 208 individuals and 79 organisations. Here is a look at how the award works.

The Norwegian Nobel Committee consists of five individuals appointed by the Norwegian parliament. Members are often, but not always, retired politicians. The current committee is led by the head of the Norwegian branch of PEN International, a group defending freedom of expression. Another member is an academic. They are all put forward by Norwegian political parties and their appointments reflect the balance of power in Norway's parliament.

The short answer is: whoever fits the description set out in the 1895 will of Swedish industrialist Alfred Nobel. It says the prize should go to the person "who has done the most or best to advance fellowship among nations, the abolition or reduction of standing armies, and the establishment and promotion of peace congresses".

The more complicated answer is that the prize "needs to be placed in the current context", according to Kristian Berg Harpviken, the award committee's secretary, who prepares the work for the award body. He participates in the deliberations but does not vote. "They will look at the world, see what is happening, what are the global trends, what are the main concerns, what are the most promising processes that we see," he told Reuters last year.

The 2026 prize will be announced on October 9 in Oslo; 287 candidates in the running

"And processes here can mean anything from a specific peace process to a new type of international agreement that is under development or that has recently been adopted."

Does the Norwegian government decide who gets the prize? No. Once the political parties appoint their respective candidates to the committee, they do not get involved in its work.

Only the five members

of the committee and its secretary participate in the meetings. No minutes are kept.

The government finds out the name of the laureate, or laureates, at the same time as everyone else, when the chair announces it in October. Thousands of people worldwide can propose names: members of governments and parliaments; current heads of state; university professors of history, social sciences, law and philosophy; and former Nobel Peace Prize laureates, among others.

Nominations closed on January 31. Members of the committee can make their own nominations too, no later than at their first meeting in February. The full list is locked in a vault for 50 years.

The leaders of Cambodia, Israel and Pakistan have said they nominated US President Donald Trump for this year's prize. Their nominations, if made, would have been done in spring and summer 2025 so they are valid for the 2026 prize. There is no way of verifying they have done as they have said.

The committee discusses all the nominations, then establishes a shortlist. Each nominee is then assessed and examined by a group of permanent advisers and other experts. The committee meets roughly once a month to discuss the nominations. The decision tends to be taken in August or September, said Harpviken.

The committee seeks to reach a consensus on its selection. If it cannot, the decision is made by majority vote. The last time a member quit in protest was in 1994, when Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat shared the prize with Israel's Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Rabin.

A gold medal, a diploma, 11mn Swedish crowns (\$1.18mn) and immediate global attention.

The announcement will take place on October 9 at the Norwegian Nobel Institute in Oslo and is made by the committee's chair. The ceremony takes place at the Oslo City Hall on December 10, the anniversary of Alfred Nobel's death. — Reuters

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Sunset in Basra



A fishing boat sails along the Shatt Al Arab river during sunset near the abandoned Maqal commercial port in the southern Iraqi city of Basra yesterday. (AFP)

QU's 49th graduation gains new milestone with first nursing cohort

Slated to be held this week, Qatar University's graduation ceremony will welcome the first cohort from the College of Nursing, says Student Affairs Vice-President Dr Mohammad Diab

QNA
Doha

Vice-President for Student Affairs at Qatar University (QU) Dr Mohammad Diab said the institution's 49th graduation ceremony, scheduled for the coming week, will mark a qualitative milestone with the graduation of the first cohort from the College of Nursing, reflecting the evolution of academic programs in line with national priorities, particularly in healthcare.

Speaking to Qatar News Agency (QNA), he noted that this year's class includes 4,024 graduates, 3,122 women and 902 men, underscoring the university's societal impact. More than 2,500 are Qataris, highlighting its central role in developing national talent, alongside nearly 1,500 non-Qatari graduates, reinforcing academic and cultural diversity.

He added that 3,587 graduates are at the undergraduate level, with 437 completing postgraduate studies, noting that the College of Arts and Sciences is the largest by number of graduates, exceeding 1,000.

Diab stressed that the graduation ceremony is not treated as a standalone event but as a reflection of the university's identity and national role, with early preparations and extensive co-ordination to ensure a seamless experience for graduates and their families. He reiterated that the graduation of the first nursing cohort marks a significant qualitative step aligned with state priorities.

He highlighted the extensive organisational efforts behind the ceremony, describing it as a large-scale event requiring high-level co-ordination across multiple sectors to accommodate thousands of graduates and attendees, ensuring a smooth and dignified experience that reflects the university's stature.

He emphasized that graduation is not merely celebratory but a yearly benchmark translating the university's outputs into the labour market, with

each cohort contributing qualified talent to meet national sector needs.

In another context, he said the diversity of disciplines and the high proportion of Qatari graduates strengthen the university's role in building human capital aligned with Qatar National Vision 2030.

He added that Qatar University operates within a clear strategic framework placing people at the core of education, aiming to produce graduates capable of contributing to the knowledge economy and adapting to rapid development, through an integrated system linking education with research and national needs.

He noted that the university experience extends beyond the classroom, with a comprehensive approach to personal development that enhances students' skills and engagement with society, including leadership, volunteer, and professional experiences that shape their readiness for the future.

On the mechanism used to prepare QU graduates for the labour market, Dr Diab said the institution prepares students not only for existing roles but for jobs yet to fully emerge, by emphasizing adaptable skills such as critical thinking, digital literacy, and initiative.

He stressed the importance of linking students to the labour market through training and practical experience, enabling graduates to enter the workplace with confidence and sustain continuous learning and development.

Diab underscored that the university operates in close alignment with employers, building strategic partnerships across sectors to provide tangible opportunities for students and graduates, including internships, government scholarships, and post-graduation employment pathways, while deepening their understanding of market needs to ease their transition into professional life.

He added that the Student Affairs sector mobilises all resources to support this direction, noting that the Career Development Center has partnered with more than 231 entities across



Dr Mohammad Diab

sectors, playing a key role in delivering quality career opportunities and preparing students and graduates for the job market.

The centre also equips students through specialised training, including CV writing and interview preparation, alongside workshops focused on soft skills development, aiming to produce graduates with the competencies required for effective workforce integration.

He emphasized that the university's relationship with students extends beyond graduation into a broader phase of engagement and partnership.

Diab also highlighted the Qatar University Alumni Association's role in building a sustainable global network that connects graduates, facilitates knowledge exchange, and engages them in professional and community activities, while linking alumni with current students through mentorship to enhance career readiness and long-term value.

Concluding his statements to QNA, he congratulated the Class of 2026, describing graduation as the beginning of a new phase of responsibility, where the knowledge gained forms a foundation, but its true value lies in how it is leveraged in service of the nation and society.

Will fuel shortages ruin summer vacations?

Concerns are growing that shortages of diesel and jet fuel due to supply problems caused by war between Iran and the United States could ruin summer vacations. The chief executive of French energy giant Patrick Pouyanne warned that if the Strait of Hormuz remains closed another two or three months all of the world will face "energy shortages like those certain Asian countries are facing".

Since the start of the war at the end of February travel through the Strait of Hormuz, through which around a fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) supplies normally pass, has been closed by Iran. Some 11mn barrels of oil per day are thus shut out from the market, according to the International Energy Agency. Gulf refineries also produce considerable amounts of diesel and jet fuel.

Pouyanne said the world can't make do without these supplies and not suffer serious consequences. Several nations in Africa and Asia -- which were more dependent upon Middle East supplies -- have already had to ration fuel or electricity. Both the European Commission and member states have sought to reassure consumers about supplies, at least in the short term.

Summer is traditionally the peak driving season as families pack their cars to drive to their vacation destinations or hop on a plane. When supplies dwindle competition for them intensifies between the two major importing regions: Asia and Europe. This happened in



Out-of-service fuel nozzle is seen at a gas station in Les Sorinieres, near Nantes, France, yesterday. (Reuters)

2022 following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and is shaping up to happen again. "Asia rations, switches to coal and can experience shortages in places" while "Europe pays very high prices to avoid shortages," said an energy industry insider on condition of anonymity.

That means Europe is first and foremost exposed to the risk of a price shock but shortages

could emerge if supplies from the Gulf remain choked off.

"Multiple cases point towards a shortage of diesel and jet fuel in Europe as the summer evolves, as imports from vital supply lines in the Middle East and Asia have waned with the current disruption," said Janiv Shah, vice-president of Oil Markets and Downstream Analysis at Rystad Energy. Airlines have raised ticket prices and cut back on their flight schedules to cope with high jet fuel prices, with warnings of shortages in jet fuel just weeks away.

"Unfortunately, it's very likely that many people's holidays will be affected, either by flight cancellations or very, very expensive tickets," the EU's energy commissioner Dan Jorgensen said on Sky News last week.

Most nations have strategic oil reserves and those part of the International Energy Agency have already tapped those reserves to help contain surging prices earlier in the war. The could do so again in order to ensure no shortages develop. EU nations are trying to boost refinery production as much as possible, and in some cases boost production of diesel and jet fuel for which the bloc depends on imports. Encouraging working from home and carpooling are also options to reduce consumption in the short term.

Over the longer-term, the electrification of transport and home heating aim to reduce reliance on imported fuels. Price also has an impact on consumption. —AFP

Afghan refugees stranded at Pakistan border amid renewed fighting

Reuters
Torkham Border, Pakistan

Saleha Bibi, 40, was one of hundreds of Afghan refugees waiting at the Pakistani border yesterday to be repatriated to Afghanistan — a country she has never seen — as fears rise for their safety due to fresh fighting between the neighbours. Islamabad wants all Afghan nationals to leave the country except for those with valid visas and has expelled more than 2mn out of 3mn back to their home country since 2023. Many are second- and third-generation refugees who fled violence at home in the 1980s.

The Afghans have been waiting for days for Pakistani officials to let them through the border amid fresh fighting between the two countries. Several Pakistanis, including women and children, were wounded in South Waziristan district by mortar shelling



Trucks loaded with Afghan refugees' belongings are parked at the Torkham border crossing in Torkham, Pakistan, yesterday. (Reuters)

in a fresh round of attacks from Afghanistan on Wednesday, Pakistan said.

"We never imagined that one day we would be asked to leave," Bibi said, adding she had never been to Afghanistan.

"We are going back with broken hearts," she told Reuters, sitting

in a temporary camp set up for the refugees at the Torkham border crossing in northwest Pakistan.

She said she was worried about her children's well-being, their safety and their education once they were back in Afghanistan. She has five sons and two daughters.

"What hurts me most is the

lack of educational opportunities for my children in Afghanistan."

Her father was just 17 when he migrated to Pakistan, Bibi said.

Pakistan and Afghanistan have seen the worst fighting this year since the Taliban took over in Kabul in 2021.

Islamabad says Kabul gives refuge to Islamist militants who attack inside Pakistan. Afghanistan denies this, saying the militancy is Pakistan's domestic problem.

Long queues of trucks loaded with the refugees and their luggage have been stationed on both sides of the road leading to the border crossing. Burhan Khan, 24, said he and his family had been waiting at the crossing for over 12 days. Others have waited even longer, he said.

Khan feared the fighting between the two countries would make it worse for the refugees.

"Women and children have been sitting inside the vehicles for nearly two weeks," he said.

Pakistan navy to add a fleet of advanced Chinese submarines

Reuters
Islamabad

Pakistan's Navy will be getting a fleet of advanced Chinese submarines, a statement from the military and a government official said yesterday, a move to strengthen Islamabad's maritime security as part of a growing defence co-operation with Beijing.

The subs are in addition to Chinese-made J10-C fighter jets, which were war-tested for the first time during last year's Pakistan-India conflict.

Pakistan and China are long-time allies and their defence co-operation has been enhanced since the conflict erupted.

Islamabad says the Chinese-made planes were part of its air assault that downed India's French-made Rafale fighter jets last summer.

A ceremony to commission the first of the submarines, which will be called Hangor, was held in Sanya, China, with Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari and naval chief Admiral Naveed Ashraf in attendance,

the military statement said. It didn't mention the number of submarines involved or any further details.

A Pakistani government official said the fleet would consist of eight submarines; four would be made in China and delivered to Islamabad, while another four will be made in Pakistan under a transfer-of-technology program.

"We will also be in a position to offer their exports under our defence production in future," he said. Ashraf called it "an important milestone to bolster our maritime defence and modernize our fleet with cutting-edge technology."

Hangor class submarines — armed with state-of-the-art weapons, advanced sensors and air-independent propulsion — will be a key to preserving maritime order and stability in the region and play a role in deterring aggression, Ashraf said.

The news on the submarines came after Pakistan tested a number of missiles in recent weeks.

Pakistan and India have fought three wars since their independence from British rule in 1947.

Press freedom at lowest level in 25 years: RSF

AFP
Paris

Press freedom has fallen to its lowest level in a quarter of a century, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) warned yesterday.

The media rights watchdog cited as examples US President Donald Trump's "systematic" attacks on journalists and Saudi Arabia, which executed a journalist in 2025.

"For the first time in the (RSF) Index's 25-year history, more than half the world's countries now fall into the 'difficult' or 'very serious' categories for press freedom," a statement said.

"The average score for all countries and territories worldwide has never been so low," it said.

At the same time, the share of the world's population living in a country where the press freedom situation is considered "good" has plunged from 20% to less than 1%.

Only seven countries in Northern Europe, led by Norway, fall into this category.

The US, which had already fallen from a "fairly good" to a "problematic" situation in 2024, the year of Donald Trump's re-election, has dropped a further seven places to 64, it said.

Beyond Trump's attacks on the press — "a systematic policy" — the situation in the US has also been marked by the detention and subsequent expulsion of Salvadoran journalist Mario Guevara, who denounced the arrest of migrants, and by drastic cuts to funding for US international broadcasting, the report said.

"Vladimir Putin's Russia (172nd) has become a specialist in using laws designed to combat terrorism, separatism and extremism to restrict press freedom," RSF warned.

"As of April 2026, the country held 48 journalists behind bars."



This published reports of French NGO RSF at their headquarters in Paris yesterday. (AFP)

The steepest decline in 2026 was in junta-led Niger (120th, down 37 places).

That "underscored the wider decline in press freedom in the Sahel region seen in recent years as attacks by armed groups and ruling juntas have suppressed the right to balanced information from diverse sources," RSF said.

Norway held the top spot in the rankings for the 10th year running, said RSF, while Eritrea came last for the third straight year.

The biggest improvement in press freedom had been in Syria following the ouster of Bashar al-Assad in late 2024.

While it climbed 36 places in the rankings to 141 in the rankings, RSF warned that the press freedom situation there remained "very serious".

"Current protection mechanisms are not strong enough," said RSF's editorial director Anne Bocande. "International law is being undermined and impunity is rife."

"We need firm guarantees and meaningful sanctions," she added.

Ukraine's army chief shakes up troop rotations after outcry

Reuters
Kyiv

Ukraine's top general ordered yesterday a mandatory two-month time limit for front-line troops serving in forward positions, a week after photos of emaciated soldiers on combat duty sparked a nationwide outcry.

Oleksandr Syrskyi's decree aims to address a key challenge for Kyiv's outmanned military in the fifth year of the war with Russia, and comes amid frequent and often harrowing reports of Ukrainian soldiers serving for months at a time under fire.

In a statement, Syrskyi said the dominance of drones along the sprawling, 1,200km (745-mile) front line has complicated battlefield logistics and "significantly transformed" the concept of combat operations.

"Commanders must ensure that conditions are in place for service personnel to remain at their posts for up to two months, followed by a mandatory rotation, which must take place within one month," he said.

"Timely rotation is not only a matter of organising service, but a matter of preserving the lives of our soldiers and the stability of defence."

Syrskyi's order comes after relatives of troops from the 14th Separate Mechanized Brigade



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky, deputy head of his office Brigadier General Pavlo Palisa and Commander in Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces General Oleksandr Syrskyi visit a position of Ukrainian service members in the front line. (Reuters/File photo)

posted images of emaciated loved ones, alleging they had been left on the line for months without a steady supply of food or water.

In some cases, the troops had resorted to drinking rain water, they said.

Ukraine's General Staff said last Friday it had fired the brigade and corps commanders over the case.

In his statement, Syrskyi said his decree included mandatory medical evaluations and the timely provision of food and ammunition for front-line troops.

The testimony from the 14th Brigade is the latest in a string of reports detailing months-long deployments of Ukrainian troops to forward positions.

A so-called "kill zone" spanning

dozens of kilometres on both sides of the front has made troop rotations, resupply and evacuations exceedingly dangerous.

Speaking to Ukrainian media this week, military ombudsman Olha Reshetylova said severe logistical failures like that faced by the 14th Brigade were rare, but that long-term deployments to forward positions remain "a big problem".

Prominent volunteer and military activist Maria Berlinska praised Syrskyi's order.

"This is a very good decision," she wrote on the Telegram messaging app. "Reasonable and humane. I fully support it."

However, it remains unclear how prepared Ukraine's stretched forces are to implement the decree.

Ariane 6 puts Amazon Internet satellites in orbit

Europe's most powerful rocket Ariane 6 successfully released 32 satellites into orbit yesterday for Amazon's Internet constellation, which is bidding to rival Elon Musk's giant Starlink.

The rocket blasted off into overcast skies at 5:57am (0857 GMT) from Europe's spaceport in Kourou, French Guiana, on the northeastern coast of South America.

A little under two hours after the launch, the satellites separated from the rocket and were released into low-Earth orbit in stages.

Applause rang out at the Guiana Space Centre after all 32 satellites were successfully deployed, an AFP correspondent reported.

It was the second Ariane 6 launch carrying 32 satellites for Amazon



Ariane 6 rocket, carrying the Amazon Leo LE-02 payload, launches at the Guiana Space Centre yesterday. (AFP)

The launch was the seventh Ariane 6 flight, and just the second using four boosters — its most powerful configuration. Similar to fellow billionaire Musk's Starlink, the Amazon Leo constellation aims to provide a reliable Internet connection for customers in areas

without an existing network. To do so, Amazon Leo plans to initially deploy 3,200 satellites into low-Earth orbit — however, there have been delays.

There are currently just 239 in space, including some launched by the rival SpaceX company of fellow billionaire Musk, according to data provided to AFP on Wednesday by Look Up, a French startup specialising in space surveillance.

The French company Arianespace, which operates the rocket, will carry out a total of 18 launches for Amazon Leo, its main commercial customer. Amazon Leo has become crucial for keeping Europe's relatively new Ariane 6 rocket competitive,

because many European commercial customers have opted to rely on reusable SpaceX rockets for launches. (AFP)

Jury of Italy's Venice Biennale resigns over Russia row

The international jury of the upcoming Venice Biennale Art Exhibition resigned yesterday in a row over the organisation's decision to allow Russia to participate in this year's event.

The resignations came a week after the jury said it would exclude countries from awards if the International Criminal Court (ICC) has issued arrest warrants for war crimes against their leaders — meaning Russia and Israel.

The exhibition is due to open on May 9. The organisers of the event said in March that they would allow Russia to take part but the decision has been strongly

criticised by Ukraine and the EU.

Brussels warned it could cut funding, while the Italian government — which has supported Ukraine in the war — stressed the Biennale was acting "entirely independently" of Rome's wishes.

Following the resignations, the Biennale said it has "decided that the award ceremony of the 61st International Art Exhibition, previously scheduled for May 9, will take place on Sunday November 22".

It also said it would hand out two awards, one which could be won by any one of the "National Participations included in the 61st Exhibition, as per the official list, follow-

ing the principle of inclusion and equal treatment".

The decision was "consistent with the founding spirit of La Biennale, based on openness, dialogue, and the rejection of any form of closure or censorship," it said in a statement.

"La Biennale seeks to be, and must remain, a place of truce in the name of art, culture, and artistic freedom," it said.

The Venice Biennale is an international cultural organisation started in 1895 that presents major cultural festivals and runs its flagship art exhibition and architecture exhibition on alternating years. (AFP)

Sweden fetes king's 80th birthday with flypast, banquet

AFP
Stockholm

Sweden feted its record-breaking monarch King Carl XVI Gustaf's 80th birthday yesterday with a choral tribute, a flypast and a gala banquet to be attended by royals from around the world.

The king, the longest reigning monarch in Swedish history, took part in a morning thanksgiving celebration, called a Te Deum, at the palace chapel.

Under sunny skies and unusually mild temperatures, large crowds thronged the palace grounds to then watch a military honour guard, after which young children lined up to hand over flowers to the royal.

The king, his guests and crowds thronging the streets around the royal palace were also treated to a flypast, including eight JAS Grip-

ens, as well as a 21-gun salute and a choral tribute.

"Seeing you all gathered here feels fantastic for my guests and me, to see this choir before me and that you've all come here to sing on this day," the king told the cheering crowd from a palace balcony.

Helene Lofstrand, a 52-year-old finance sector worker, was among those who came out to show her support.

"I think, personally, that His Majesty is doing a great job. The politically independent representative that he is for the country is very important, and I think we're all very proud of him," she told AFP.

A lunch of Arctic char and cake with berries for 200 guests was then held at City Hall.

In the evening, a banquet was to be held at the palace with a number of European royals and dignitaries invited, as well as Thailand's royal couple.

Attendees at the events included King Harald, Queen Sonja and Crown Prince Haakon of Norway; King Rama X and Queen Suthide of Thailand; Queen Sofia of Spain; and King Frederik, Queen Mary, Queen Margrethe and Princess Benedikte of Denmark.

In a recent interview with the Svenska Dagbladet daily, the king — who was known in his youth as a car-mad playboy — spoke of the burden of responsibility that comes with his role.

"It is heavy," he said. "I am king all the time. You have to be."

Speaking on Swedish Radio on Thursday, the king recalled a moment in 1966 when, as prince, he was in Sydney while sailing around the world with the Swedish navy.

An elderly weatherbeaten Swede, homesick and keen to speak some Swedish, approached him one night on the gangway, unaware of the young man's identity.

"It was one of the few times in my life that I have been completely anonymous," he said.

The king, whose role has been purely ceremonial since constitutional reform in 1974, celebrated his golden jubilee in 2023.

He was the world's youngest monarch when he was crowned aged 27 in 1973 following the death of his grandfather Gustaf VI Adolf.

Born on April 30, 1946, Carl Gustaf Folke Hubertus Bernadotte was only nine months old when his father, Prince Gustaf Adolf, died in a plane crash in Denmark.

Despite occasional scandals — the biggest when a 2010 book alleged he frequented sex clubs and had numerous affairs — the monarch enjoys broad support. A poll by the Ipsos institute in 2024 showed that 66% of Swedes wanted to maintain the monarchy and 20% wanted to abolish it.

However, the poll also indicated that 42% thought it was time for the



Sweden's King Carl XVI Gustaf (right) waves from the balcony with Sweden's Queen Silvia (left) as Prince Carl Philip (centre) holds Princess Ines next to Prince Gabriel as members of the Swedish Armed Forces pay tribute to the King at the Outer Courtyard of the Royal Palace in Stockholm, Sweden, yesterday. (AFP)

king to abdicate and pass the throne to his 48-year-old daughter, Crown Princess Victoria, compared to 38% who thought he should stay on.

He has however made it clear he has no plans to step down, telling Svenska Dagbladet he would stay on "as long as I have the strength".

He paid tribute to Victoria, known for her down-to-earth at-

titude and diligence. "She is ambitious," he said. "Preparing herself enormously in various fields, most recently as an officer in the different branches of the armed forces. That's tough."

Carl XVI Gustaf is the European monarch with the longest reign after the abdication of his cousin Queen Margrethe of Denmark in 2024.



Amir fetes winners of Camel Race Festival



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani attended the final races of the annual Purebred Arabian Camel Racing Festival for HH The Amir's Sword (2025-2026 season) yesterday at Al Shahaniya Camel Racetrack. His Highness presented gold trophies to the winners of the four main races for Al Hail and Al Zamoul competitions (open rounds) for camels owned by the Sheikhs. The Amir also awarded the Silver Sword to Nasser Abdullah Ahmed al-Misnad, after his camel "Nathriya" won the Open Hail race for tribal camels on Wednesday. The closing day was attended by a number of senior officials, heads of camel racing federations from several countries, and large crowds of spectators. (QNA)



QCS provides nearly QR50mn assistance for treatment in '25

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

Qatar Cancer Society (QCS) has provided an assistance of approximately QR50mn for the treatment of about 1,750 cancer patients in 2025 in Qatar, disclosed the chairman of the society.

"In 2025 alone we have provided financial support worth QR49mn for approximately 1,750 adult and paediatric patients. Cancer treatment is very expensive and some of our non-Qatari colleagues living here, have certain difficulties in covering ex-

penses," HE Sheikh Dr Khalid bin Jaber al-Thani told *Gulf Times* in a recent interview.

Sheikh Khalid said that QCS is taking care of the patients who have difficulty in meeting the expenses for the treatment and the society has made the system simpler and more accessible for people to apply for the assistance.

"Recently we won an award for the whole process from His Highness the Amir. We have an application called 'Wayyikom' and through this, people can apply for the support from QCS. It is a platform that people can use to fill in the application. They can upload all the required

documents and if everything is fine it will be approved by the system within 24-48 hours," he explained.

He noted that if the application is approved, and the financial aid or any assistance is provided, it will be shown in the application within the time period.

The QCS chairman noted that 2025 marked a significant milestone in the journey of the organisation as it continued to translate its vision into tangible achievements through a comprehensive package of initiatives and services targeting patients, survivors, and the wider community.

"Additionally, 1,200 indi-

viduals directly benefited from psychological and social support programmes, while indirect beneficiaries exceeded 40,000, alongside specialised individual psychological support services provided to 50 survivors," he stated.

According to the QCS chairman, in the field of community awareness, QCS has implemented specialised campaigns and programmes through its Cancer Awareness Centre, the first of its kind in the Middle East. In 2025, more than 6.65mn indirect beneficiaries were served, in addition to 18,950 direct beneficiaries through workshops, programmes,



HE Sheikh Dr Khalid bin Jaber al-Thani

and field awareness activities.

"On a daily basis, we have groups of people getting their training in Qatar Cancer Society. They are getting trained in cancer treatment programmes. We have a programme with the Primary Health Care Corporation, Hama d Medical Corporation as well as with Sidra Medicine.

They keep sending their people for training with us," he noted.

"We have training programme meant for nursing staff. We also have programmes for physicians, health educators and health specialists. So all these programmes are going in tandem or in synchronisation with the respective institutions," added Sheikh Khalid.

Global partnerships drive Qatar's winter sports vision forward

By Shaima Sherif
Staff Reporter

Qatar's winter sports ambitions gained fresh momentum in Doha as international partnerships, cultural exchange initiatives, and grassroots participation highlighted the growing role of sport in uniting communities and developing emerging disciplines.

Qatar's efforts to develop winter sports are gaining traction through international collaboration and cultural exchange, as stakeholders emphasised the role of sport in fostering unity, engagement, and long-term growth.

At an event held as part of the Qatar-Canada and Mexico 2026 Year of Culture, officials and participants highlighted how such initiatives are helping to build a sustainable winter sports ecosystem while strengthening ties between nations.

Speaking at the event, Hassan Hissam al-Hababi, newly elected secretary-general of the Qatar Winter Sports Committee, underscored the significance of cultural exchange in shaping the programme.

"Today's event is in partnership... within the International Cultural Cooperation Initiative in Qatar," he said, noting a range of activities including curling showcases and a friendly match between Qatari and Canadian teams.



He emphasised that such initiatives go beyond competition. "Such events are related to cultures and exchange of experiences... many discussions took place on the sidelines," he said, adding that they provide opportunities to bring together diverse communities.

Al-Hababi described the initiative as an important platform for integration. "Such events are very important, as they are a way to integrate the Qatari team and the attendees from all backgrounds," he added.

The international dimension of the programme was echoed by José Guillermo Ordorica Robles, Ambassador of Mexico to Qatar who highlighted the broader scope of cooperation between Qatar, Canada, and Mexico.

"We are very excited... about the Year of Culture 2026 with the three countries participating in a

joint effort to foster cooperation through sports, public diplomacy, gastronomy, tourism, culture, arts and other expressions," he said.

Ordorica Robles noted that the collaboration reflects a growing relationship between the nations. "I am very happy about this and I am certain that in the future, the three countries will share even more, because we have truly built a strong friendship among us," he added.

On the ground, athletes are already witnessing the impact of these initiatives. Abdulrahman Alsaadi, a member of Qatar's curling team, highlighted the role of such events in raising awareness of lesser-known sports.

"The game is very old, but it has been in Doha for 10 years... we are very excited about these festivals because they let people know about the game," he said.



Hassan Hissam al-Hababi



José Guillermo Ordorica Robles

Alsaadi pointed to the importance of visibility in driving participation. "Because this is a winter game and not many people know about it... we hope that if people watch this, they will join us and practise with us," he added.

With growing international support, leadership engagement, and increasing public interest, Qatar's winter sports journey appears to be evolving from niche activity to a platform for cultural connection, youth engagement, and sporting development.

Winter sports initiative deepens Qatar-Canada cultural relations

By Shaima Sherif
Staff Reporter

The winter sports programme launched in Doha is strengthening cultural ties between Qatar and Canada, using sport to foster youth engagement, technical development, and long-term people-to-people connections.

The winter sports development initiative launched in Doha is positioning sport as a powerful tool for cultural diplomacy, with Canada playing a central role in fostering grassroots engagement and technical expertise in Qatar.

The programme, introduced as part of the Qatar-Canada and Mexico 2026 Year of Culture, marks the beginning of a year-round effort to expand participation in winter sports while strengthening ties between the two nations.

Speaking on the sidelines of the launch event, Karim Morcos, ambassador of Canada highlighted the cultural significance of the initiative, describing winter sports as "so intertwined with Canadian identity."

"Well, first of all, so happy to be here, a showcase of winter sports... we've got curling, speed skating, and we're very excited to have the game between Canada and Qatar, the hockey game," he said, expressing enthusiasm for the growing collaboration.

The event brought together Canadian and Qatari amateur teams for exhibition matches, alongside interactive activities aimed at introducing young participants to sports such as skating, curling, and ice hockey.

Morcos underscored the importance of youth engagement, noting the strong turnout at the event. "We've got hundreds of kids here today. They're all seeing and trying sports... which are growing sports here," he said. "They're fairly new, so I think the opportunities are huge for youth. The more they get exposed to this, the more they want to play."

The ambassador pointed to existing infrastructure as a key enabler for growth, adding that the foundations for winter sports in Qatar have been influenced by earlier international exposure. He referenced the connection to the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics, noting that inspiration for Qatar's winter sports



facilities stemmed from that experience, creating what he described as "a very special link... between Canada and Qatar."

Beyond infrastructure and competition, Morcos emphasised sport's broader societal role. "Sports are a unifying force in any culture," he said, sharing a personal reflection on identity. "My father immigrated to Canada, and hockey was a unifying force. It was a way to connect with Canadian identity."

He added that similar dynamics could emerge in Qatar over time. "I see hockey will come back here in five or 10 years... it will be a unifying factor for Qataris and Canadians," he said, expressing confidence in the country's potential to develop quickly in the sport.

Addressing the wider significance of such initiatives, Morcos stressed their importance in today's global context. "In these uncertain times, sports is what makes us human, what unifies us," he said. "Coming together... it builds that spirit, particularly for young people, and it brings us all together around culture and sports."

Canada's contribution extends beyond symbolic engagement to practical support in building technical capacity. Morcos noted that the Canadian community in Qatar has played a key role in developing the sport locally. "Canadians love to play hockey. They created an association... bringing Canadian hockey and culture and know-how to Qatar," he said.

He added that Canadian diplomats and community members are actively involved in coaching and mentoring, helping to lay the groundwork for a sustainable winter sports ecosystem.

As the programme unfolds, the initiative signals a shift from one-off cultural events to long-term collaboration, with sport emerging as a shared platform for exchange, development, and connection between Qatar and Canada.

