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BUSINESS | Page 1

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Dropping anchor at Old Doha Port



Old Doha Port has become a destination of choice for people to spend their evenings with friends and families especially during the weekends. The Mina District, located within the Old Doha Port, is one of the most vibrant and "Instagrammable" waterfront destinations in Qatar due to its charming pastel-coloured buildings, cobblestone streets, and Mediterranean-inspired architecture. **PICTURE:** Thajudheen

Qatar calls for total elimination of nuclear arms in Middle East

• Says complete disarmament is the only safeguard against nuclear threats

QNA New York

Qatar has renewed its commitment to advancing efforts toward a Middle East free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, emphasizing that the complete elimination of nuclear arms remains the only guarantee against their use or threat thereof.

This position was outlined by Saud Musfer al-Shahwani, a member of Qatar's delegation participating in the 2026 Review Conference of the States Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). He delivered Qatar's statement before the First Main Committee on Disarmament at the United Nations headquarters in New York.

Al-Shahwani underscored that nuclear disarmament, as one of the three core pillars of the NPT, constitutes a fundamental step in global efforts to eliminate nuclear weapons and dismantle their stockpiles and remnants. He noted that Article VI of the treaty establishes a clear legal obligation on nuclear-armed states to engage in good-faith negotiations leading to complete nuclear disarmament.

He warned that delays in fulfilling these commitments undermine the credibility of the international system, reiterating that total elimination is the only reliable safeguard against nuclear use. He further stressed that the continued existence of military nuclear capabilities outside any international verification or accountability framework erodes trust, fuels arms races, and creates a fragile and escalation-prone security environment.

In this context, al-Shahwani



Saud Musfer al-Shahwani

highlighted calls for adopting a gradual and verifiable approach, based on achieving regular and measurable reductions in nuclear arsenals, enhancing transparency around nuclear military doctrines and readiness levels, and expanding confidence-building measures to reduce the risks of accidental or unintended use of nuclear weapons.

He explained that such steps not only advance the goal of nuclear disarmament but also help ease global strategic tensions, thereby strengthening international stability and positively impacting regional and global peace and security. He added that nuclear disarmament is not merely a technical or legal issue, but a strategic choice reflecting the international community's commitment to human security and the future of coming generations.

In conclusion, al-Shahwani stressed that the Middle East - given its longstanding security challenges - deserves to be at the forefront of this global effort. He reaffirmed Qatar's full commitment to working with regional countries and the international community to advance toward a Middle East free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, founded on collective security, mutual respect, and sustainable development.

Ministry urges immediate reporting of suspicious objects in territorial waters

The Ministry of Interior (MoI) has urged the public to immediately report any unidentified objects or debris suspected to be remnants of intercepted missiles or drones found at sea within the country's territorial waters. In a statement posted on its official account on platform X, the ministry stressed that such objects must only be handled by the competent authorities, warning that they may contain hazardous materials that pose a risk to public safety. The ministry further urged the public not to approach or touch such objects, and to report them immediately by calling 999, so that the necessary measures can be taken in accordance with approved procedures. **(QNA)**

MoT announces full return of maritime navigation activities

The Ministry of Transport (MoT) has announced the full return of maritime navigation activities all day long for all types of maritime vessels and ships, from Saturday (today) beginning 12 midnight.

Trump says 'not satisfied' with new Iranian proposal

US President Donald Trump said yesterday that he was "not satisfied" with a new Iranian negotiating proposal, with peace talks between the two sides frozen despite a weeks-long ceasefire. Iran delivered the text of the proposal to mediator Pakistan on Thursday evening, the IRNA news agency reported, without offering details as to its contents. "At this moment I'm not satisfied with what they're offering," Trump told reporters, laying blame for the stalled talks with Iran due to "tremendous discord" within its leadership. "Do we want to go and just blast the hell out of them and finish them forever - or do we want to try and make a deal? I mean, those are the options," he said when asked about next steps, adding he would "prefer not" to take the first option "on a human basis".

The war, launched by the United States and Israel with a wave of surprise strikes on February 28, has been on hold since April 8, but only one failed round of direct talks has taken place



US President Donald Trump on his arrival at Ocala International Airport in Florida. **(AFP)**

between Iranian and US representatives. In the meantime, Iran has maintained its stranglehold on the Strait of Hormuz, cutting off vast amounts of oil, gas and fertiliser from the world economy, while the US has imposed a counterblockade on Iranian ports. Despite the failure to negotiate an end to the war, the ceasefire has held. Yesterday, Iranian judiciary chief Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei said "the Islamic Republic has never shied

away from negotiations"

But he added in a video shared by the judiciary's Mizan Online website, "we certainly do not accept imposition" - though Tehran did not want a return to war.

The White House has declined to comment on the details of the new Iranian proposal. But the news site Axios reported that US envoy Steve Witkoff earlier this week had submitted amendments to a previous proposal seeking to reinject the issue of Tehran's nuclear programme into the negotiations. Citing a source familiar with the matter, Axios said they included a demand that Iran not try to move enriched uranium out of sites bombed during a brief war last year, or resume any activity there while talks continue.

Optimism after news of the Iranian proposal sent oil prices falling by nearly five percent for US benchmark West Texas Intermediate. However, prices are still roughly 50% above their prewar levels as traders confront the prolonged closure of Hormuz. **(AFP)**

Innovation should be key priority during crisis times: QRDI researchers

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

Research, development and innovation (RDI) must be repositioned as the core pillars of national resilience, noted two researchers from Qatar Research Development and Innovation (QRDI) Council. As geopolitical instability intensifies and global systems face increasing disruption, Dr Mohammed al-Housani and Dr Abdellahi Hussein from QRDI in an article published on QRDI website argue that countries should focus more on innovation during periods of crisis.

Qatar, the authors noted that is relatively well-positioned due to sustained investment in its innovation ecosystem over the past two decades. "The country has established research funding institutions, developed a national RDI strategy under QRDI 2030, and built strong academic and research infrastructure. It has also attracted global talent and fostered partnerships that support a

"Countries with robust RDI ecosystems are better positioned to adapt to disruptions, whether caused by pandemics, conflicts, or supply chain breakdowns"

growing innovation-driven private sector," they highlighted.

According to the QRDI scientists, RDI builds the underlying systems necessary for resilience. "Investments in research and innovation strengthen technological capabilities, cultivate skilled talent, and establish institutions capable of responding effectively to sudden shocks. Countries with robust RDI ecosystems are better positioned to adapt to disruptions, whether caused by pandemics, conflicts, or supply chain breakdowns," they explained.

"RDI plays a fundamental role in national development. It strengthens technological capability, raises productivity and supports long-term competitiveness. Countries with advanced RDI ecosystems are better able to diversify their economies, create

high-value industries and reduce dependence on narrow sectors. More importantly, they are better equipped to respond when the external environment changes suddenly," continued the authors.

The researchers noted that RDI builds the systems, talent base, institutions and knowledge networks that make future resilience possible. "It creates the conditions for faster adaptation when shocks arrive. Without that base, countries are left reacting with limited tools and little room to manoeuvre. The real value of RDI is not just in what it produces during stable periods. It is in the capability it creates before crisis hits," they underlined.

The authors said that history offers repeated evidence that major technological breakthroughs are accelerated in periods of crisis



Dr Mohammed al-Housani and Dr Abdellahi Hussein.

but made possible by capabilities developed over time. "World War II accelerated advances in computing, radar and aviation. The Cold War drove major leaps in the Internet, GPS and satellite systems. During Covid-19, mRNA vaccines and digital platforms moved from scientific promise to global deployment at extraordinary speed. This is precisely when countries should deepen, not defer, their investment in RDI,

because crises reward those that have already built the capacity to respond at speed," they stressed.

The article highlighted that the same principle applies today. It said: "Many of the technologies shaping current conflicts in the region, including artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, satellite communications and cyber capabilities, are not short-term inventions. They are the result of decades of sus-

tained RDI investment. That is the lesson policymakers should not miss. Crisis performance is determined by the investments made much earlier."

The authors also spoke about international examples how leading countries integrate RDI into their crisis response strategies. "Singapore accelerated innovation in diagnostics and vaccine production during the pandemic," they described. "South Korea expanded its semiconductor research and manufacturing capacity to address global supply chain vulnerabilities. Japan, following the Fukushima disaster, embedded science and technology into long-term reconstruction efforts. In each case, RDI was not deprioritised but instead elevated to the centre of national strategy."

"Countries that underinvest in RDI during peace are unprepared in crisis. Countries that deprioritise RDI during crisis fall behind. Countries that protect and refocus RDI emerge stronger, more competitive and more resilient," they added.

Qatar has reiterated the importance of eliminating racism and racial discrimination in all its forms, highlighting steps taken to promote equality, tolerance and social cohesion.

The statement was delivered by the Deputy Permanent Representative of the Permanent Delegation of Qatar to the UN Office in Geneva, Jawhara bint Abdulaziz al-Suwaidi, during an informal meeting

Qatar reaffirms commitment to combating racial discrimination during meeting at UN

of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination with state parties to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

The envoy said that Qatar had adopted policies and plans that are aimed at fostering an inclusive and safe society free from intolerance, hatred and discrimination, stressing that racism contra-

venes international and national laws and norms.

Al-Suwaidi also emphasised the importance of maintaining neutrality, objectivity and mutual respect in the

committee's work, noting that such principles strengthen trust in international mechanisms and ensure their effectiveness.

She warned against approaches that could fuel division or justify exclusion based on race or origin, particularly amid current regional and global challenges, and called for preserving constructive dialogue and co-operation in addressing related issues. - QNA



Workers are the backbone of Qatar's civic sector: Minister

HE the Minister of Municipality Abdullah bin Hamad bin Abdullah al-Attiyah has affirmed that workers across the ministry's various sectors represent the backbone of Qatar's municipal sector, praising their efforts and vital role in serving the community.

During a ceremony organised to mark International Workers' Day, observed annually on May 1, the minister noted that workers have consistently demonstrated high levels of efficiency and commitment under various conditions and challenges, with their continued contributions playing a tangible role in supporting comprehensive development, enhancing municipal services, and improving

overall performance across sectors.

HE al-Attiyah expressed his appreciation to all workers, commending their daily efforts across the ministry's sectors and municipalities, which directly contribute to maintaining quality of life and promoting sustainability in Qatar.

Assistant Undersecretary for Public Services Affairs Eng. Abdullah Ahmed al-Karani said during the ceremony that workers are the true foundation of the ministry's operations, with their daily efforts reflected in city cleanliness, maintenance of facilities, and continuous improvement of service delivery.

He added that the ministry remains com-

mitted to providing a safe and supportive working environment that ensures workers' well-being and enhances their performance, based on its belief that workforce stability is key to maintaining quality and service continuity.

The ceremony included the honouring of several workers from various municipalities and departments in recognition of their outstanding contributions.

The event also featured a video expressing appreciation for the ministry's workforce, along with artistic, entertainment, and interactive segments involving employee participation. - QNA

Real estate firm ordered to pay client QR715,000

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

The Investment and Commerce Court has ruled in favour of a Qatari citizen in a real estate dispute, ordering a property development company to refund QR650,000 and jointly pay an additional QR65,000 in compensation with a second company, after failing to deliver a residential unit more than four years past the agreed deadline.

According to court documents, the plaintiff filed the case through his legal representative, lawyer Mohamed Hadi al-Khayareen, seeking the termination of a property sale contract that was signed six years ago, on January 1, 2020.

The agreement, concluded with a real estate developer and its representative company, involved the purchase of a residential unit that was valued at QR930,000, with delivery initially scheduled for December 2022 and an optional extension of 10 months.

The claimant fulfilled his contractual obligations, paying a total of QR650,500 via bank transfers.

However, despite the expiration of both the original deadline and the extended grace period laid out in the contract, which

ended on June 24, 2023, the unit was never delivered, prompting such legal action.

The delay, which extended beyond four years from the agreed delivery timeline, resulted in financial losses and missed opportunities, including the inability to use the property for housing or investment purposes.

Eventually, the court found that the defendants had failed to meet their contractual obligations despite repeated amicable requests, justifying the order for the termination of the agreement and the reimbursement of funds.

The court further ruled that the companies must compensate the plaintiff for damages incurred.

In its reasoning, the court noted that both defendants were not registered in the official developers' registry maintained by the Real Estate Regulatory Authority, meaning they did not qualify as licensed developers under applicable real estate development laws.

The judgment further cited the provisions of the Qatari Civil Code, stressing that contracts are binding for both parties, and that failure by one party to fulfill obligations laid out in the contract entitles the other to seek termination and compensation after due notice.

Online court auctions in Q1 2026 generate more than QR580mn

The total proceeds from the online judicial auctions exceeded QR580mn during the first quarter (Q1) of this year, the Supreme Judiciary Council (SJC) has announced.

Such figures, the SJC said, indicate strong performance and sustained activity across multiple sectors, while reflecting growing participation and confidence in the system as an effective mechanism for asset management and dispute resolution.

The council also revealed that during this period, a total of 5,668 lawsuits were recorded, of which 3,786 cases were successfully closed, demonstrating notable progress in case resolution.

Online auction activities remain particularly high, with 40,206 bids submitted for the items on auction.

In terms of assets, 2,098 items were offered through these online judicial auctions, with 1,267 items successfully sold.

The SJC added that the auctions covered seven categories: real estate, vehicles, equipment, private auctions, movable assets, valuable collectibles, and special fancy licence plates, showcasing the breadth of assets managed under the judicial auction framework.

Accordingly, the council said, such auctions have contributed to enhancing transparency, efficiency, and accessibility within the involved processes while effectively aiding the resolution of pending cases.

Visit Qatar, Pierre Hermé unveil exclusive macaron collaboration

Visit Qatar, in collaboration with Paris Saint-Germain, has launched a limited-edition macaron collection in partnership with renowned French pastry chef Pierre Hermé, blending Parisian craftsmanship with Qatari culinary heritage.

The collaboration forms part of a wider, multi-layered campaign centred around Paris Saint-Germain's match against Lorient today at Parc des Princes.

The campaign combines prominent in-stadium visibility, including Visit Qatar's branding on the team's jersey, with a targeted activation through Pierre Hermé giveaways at the PSG Store in Paris, extending engagement with fans beyond the pitch.

As part of this initiative, Pierre Hermé has created an exclusive macaron flavour inspired by Qatari milk tea locally known as Karak and dates, reinterpreting iconic local tastes through a refined French lens.

The collaboration underscores gastronomy as a key pillar of cultural exchange, connecting Doha and Paris through a shared appreciation for flavour, craftsmanship and hospitality.

Today the limited-edition collection will be distributed across select locations in both cities, including the Paris Saint-Germain Store on the Champs-Élysées in Paris and Pierre Hermé's café at Lagoona Mall in Doha.

This initiative reflects the continued strategic partnership between Visit Qatar and 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.



Qatar and S Korea explore strategic co-operation in trade, investment

Qatar and the Republic of Korea discussed bilateral co-operation and opportunities for collaboration in strategic projects, as well as strengthening and developing partnerships, particularly in trade and investment, during an official visit by a delegation to Seoul led by HE the Minister of State for Foreign Trade Affairs at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al-Sayed.

The delegation was in South Korea to explore co-operation opportunities in strategic projects and enhance bilateral partnerships, especially in artificial intelligence (AI), advanced industries, and technology.

During the visit, HE Dr al-Sayed held a meeting with Korean Prime Minister Kim Min-seok to address bilateral relations and ways to further strengthen them in trade and investment, along with other topics of mutual interest.

The minister also held a series of meetings with senior Korean officials, including the Special Envoy of the President of Korea and Presidential Chief of Staff Kang Hoon-sik, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Science and Information and Communications Technology Bae Kyung-hoon, Minister of

Trade Yeo Han-koo, and Minister of Small- and Medium-sized Enterprises and Startups Han Seong-sook.

The meetings also touched on co-operation between the two countries and explored ways to further expand it in the area of trade and investment, as well as in advanced industries such as AI, semiconductors, and biotechnology.

This comes as a follow-up to the outcomes of Kang's visit to Qatar last month, with both sides emphasising the importance of expanding strategic investment co-operation.

HE Dr al-Sayed also met with chief executives of Korean technology companies to explore co-operation opportunities, develop joint projects, and enhance their presence in the Qatar market. - QNA



More than 18,000 transactions done by government services centres in March

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

Government services centres across the country accomplished 18,238 services during March, the Civil Service and Government Development Bureau has revealed.

According to data published on the "Sharek" platform, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) led all government entities in service delivery, completing 6,763 transactions.

The MoFA also received 656 customer feedback surveys, reflecting active public engagement in evaluating service quality.

The Ministry of Justice ranked second with 4,252 completed services, supported by 470 customer surveys measuring satisfaction levels.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Labour secured third place, delivering 3,357 services and gathering 242 feedback responses.

Strong performance was also recorded by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI), which completed 2,087 services

during the same period.

Further, the Civil Service and Government Development Bureau itself carried out 477 services within its various mandates.

Other entities demonstrated steady contributions: the Ministry of Municipality delivered 319 services alongside 28 surveys, while the Ministry of Social Development and Family completed 288 services with 31 feedback responses.

Service activity extended to utilities and financial entities.

The Qatar General Electricity and Water Corporation (Kahramaa) processed 275 services and received 36 surveys from subscribers, while the Qatar Central Securities Depository recorded 266 services in addition to 33 questionnaires to measure quality performance.

The report further included the Supreme Judiciary Council (SJC), which completed 114 services, and the General Retirement and Social Insurance Authority, which delivered 40 services within the same period.

The Bureau stressed that public participation in service evalu-

ation remains a cornerstone of government performance improvement, encouraging users to share their feedback via the "Sharek" platform after receiving services.

This would eventually drive continued improvements in efficiency and user experience as part of the country's administrative excellence drive.

This initiative, launched under the slogan *Be part of service development and contribute your opinion*, aims to enhance transparency, boost administrative efficiency, and ensure faster, higher-quality public services, aligned with the objectives of Qatar's Third National Development Strategy and its broader vision for sustainable institutional transformation.

In the meantime, the Bureau has honoured employees who demonstrated outstanding performance in government services centres during March 2026, highlighting their role in delivering services that meet the highest quality standards and support ongoing government efficiency reforms.

Lebanon says six killed, eight injured in Israeli strikes on southern town

Hezbollah 'has reinforced fighters in south Lebanon'

Hezbollah has brought reinforcements and weapons to the south of the country since the start of the war with Israel on March 2, the organisation's director of media relations said yesterday.

The Lebanese army said in January that it had finished disarming the group near the Israeli border in southern Lebanon, the scene of multiple wars between Israel and Hezbollah, the most recent of which was brought to a halt on April 17 by a ceasefire. The army had been enacting a plan that it drew up after a 2024 ceasefire agreement that ended the last war between the two.

Speaking during an interview with a group of journalists including from AFP, Youssef al-Zein said the group had been able to "introduce forces and arms in the course of the battle" with Israel.

He said the reinforcements did not use roads controlled by the Lebanese army. "We are convinced that the army is a national army" that "will not enter into a confrontation with Hezbollah", he said.

Al-Zein said that if Israel had been able to penetrate deeper into Lebanese territory it was because Hezbollah had been disarmed south of the Litani river, which runs around 30km (20 miles) from the border, and its infrastructure there, including tunnels, destroyed.

Nevertheless, he insisted that Hezbollah was able to "reconstitute its forces" after the last war with Israel, and that it was "prepared for a long battle".

Israel announced on April 7 that it had completed the deployment of its ground forces in southern Lebanon and would maintain a 10km-deep "security zone". - **AFP**

AFP
Beirut

Lebanon's health ministry said six people including a woman and a child were killed yesterday in Israeli strikes on a southern town where Israel's army had issued an evacuation order despite a ceasefire.

The ministry statement said eight other people including a woman and a child were wounded in the two strikes on Habboush, where an AFP photographer saw clouds of smoke rising after the raids.

The state-run National News Agency (NNA) reported unspecified casualties in Habboush after Israeli warplanes "launched a series of heavy strikes... less than an hour after warning" residents to evacuate.

Israel's military had warned it would act "forcefully" against Hezbollah after the Iran-backed group's "violations of the ceasefire agreement", and told residents to flee to open areas at least one

kilometre from the town.

The NNA also reported Israeli strikes and artillery fire on other south Lebanon locations including a strike on the coastal city of Tyre.

Israel has kept up deadly strikes on Lebanon despite a April 17 ceasefire that sought to halt more than six weeks of war between Israel and Hezbollah.

The ceasefire text grants Israel the right to act against "planned, imminent or on-going attacks".

Israeli soldiers are operating inside a "Yellow Line" running some 10km (six miles) deep inside Lebanon's border where they are carrying out wide-scale detonations and demolitions of buildings.

The NNA said Israeli troops carried out detonations in the southern town of Shamaa and "demolished a monastery and a school" run by a religious order in the town of Yaroun after other detonations there of "homes, shops and roads".

Hezbollah meanwhile claimed a series of attacks on Israeli troops and sites in

southern Lebanon yesterday, saying they came in response to Israeli ceasefire violations.

The group drew Lebanon into the Middle East war in March with rocket fire at Israel to avenge the US-Israeli killing of Iranian supreme leader Ali Khamenei.

Lebanon's health ministry has raised the toll in Israeli strikes since March 2 to more than 2,600 dead, including 103 emergency workers and paramedics.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' under-secretary-general for national society development and co-ordination, Xavier Castellanos, said that when Lebanese Red Cross volunteers go on a mission, "they fear for their lives".

Two Lebanese Red Cross paramedics are among those killed in Israeli strikes.

"That a person that is trying to save lives, is trying to alleviate human suffering, might be targeted, might be killed... this is something that I found absolutely unacceptable," Castellanos told reporters near Beirut.

14 Iranian soldiers killed in demining operation: local media

Fourteen soldiers were killed yesterday during operations to defuse unexploded ordnance in Iran's northwestern Zanjan province, local media reported.

"Following enemy airstrikes using cluster bombs and aerial mines, parts of Zanjan province, including about 1,200 hectares

of agricultural land, were contaminated by bombs," Fars news agency reported, citing the country's Revolutionary Guards.

Revolutionary Guards specialists were working to clear the areas, and had neutralised more than 15,000 items, it added.

"However, today, during one of these

missions, 14 of these dedicated forces were martyred and two were injured," it said.

Iran has previously accused the US and Israel of using cluster munitions, which explode in mid-air and scatter smaller bomblets - some of which fail to explode, creating a danger that can last for decades.

Israel has also accused Iran of using the munitions in missile strikes on Israeli cities.

Iran, Israel and the US have all declined to join the more than 100 countries that are party to the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions, which prohibits their use, transfer, production and storage. - **AFP**

China's envoy to UN stresses urgent need to maintain Iran war ceasefire

Reuters
United Nations

China's UN ambassador Fu Cong said yesterday that it is an urgent necessity to maintain the Iran war ceasefire and that he is sure the Strait of Hormuz issue would be high on the agenda if it is still closed when US President Donald Trump goes to China this month.

Fu told reporters at the United Nations the strait needed to be reopened as quickly as possible.

He said China was very concerned about remarks it had heard recently about the ceasefire being temporary and the need to initiate another round of attacks.

"Iran needs to lift its restrictions on the Strait of Hormuz, and the US needs to lift its naval blockade," he said.

"The most urgent issue is to keep the ceasefire," the envoy said. "And the ceasefire needs to last, and there has to be a good-faith negotiation between the two sides."

"I think the international community should be mobilised and raise our voices against the resumption of fighting," Fu added.

Asked about Trump's visit to China scheduled for this month, he said: "I'm sure if Hormuz is still closed by the time President Trump goes to China, this issue will be high on the agenda of the bilateral talks."

Fu also rejected allegations from some US officials about military co-operation between China and Iran as "false".

He was briefing at the start of the month-long Chinese presidency of the UN Security Council and said Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi will chair a session of the council on May 26.

The US State Department did not respond immediately when asked if there were plans for US Secretary of State Marco Rubio to meet Wang while he was in the US.

Pro-Gaza activists seized by Israel disembark in Crete

Reuters/AFP
Athens

Dozens of activists on a Gaza-bound aid flotilla which was intercepted by Israeli forces in international waters off Crete disembarked yesterday in the Greek island, an AFP journalist saw.

Escorted by Greek coastguards, around 175 activists, the majority of them nationals of European countries, were taken by coach to the port of Athenerinolakkos, in the southeast of the island before being moved to Heraklion, the main city in Crete.

As they approached the port, the activists chanted "Free Palestine," AFP saw.

The activists were part of a second Global Sumud flotilla, launched in recent months in an attempt to break Israel's blockade of Gaza by delivering humanitarian assistance.

The ships set sail from the Spanish port of Barcelona on April 12.

Yesterday an Israeli army ship transferred 168 members of the flotilla crew to Greek boats, which then took them to shore where buses and an ambulance waited for them, organisers said and Reuters footage showed.

Israel's foreign ministry called the flotilla organisers "professional provocateurs" and said: "Israel will not allow the breach of the lawful naval blockade on Gaza".

Turkiye's foreign ministry said some 20 Turkish nationals in the flotilla who had been detained and taken to Crete would be repatriated.

It said "certain participants from third countries" would also be sent to Turkiye.

Two activists were detained by Israeli authorities, according to statements from Israel



Activists from the Global Sumud Flotilla, which was intercepted on international waters by the Israeli navy, walk towards the airport of Heraklion, on the island of Crete, Greece. - **Reuters**

and the organisers of the flotilla, who identified them as Saif Abu Keshek, a Spanish national of Palestinian origin, and Brazilian Thiago Avila.

Spain's foreign minister, Jose Manuel Albares, accused Israel of illegally arresting Abu Keshek and demanded his immediate release.

Israel's foreign ministry said that Abu Keshek was suspected of affiliation with a terrorist organisation and Avila suspected of illegal activity, adding that both would be taken to Israel for questioning.

In a post on their Telegram channel, organisers of the flotilla alleged that activists had been denied adequate food and water and "forced to sleep on floors that were deliberately and repeatedly flooded" aboard an

Israeli naval vessel, describing their treatment as "40 hours of calculated cruelty".

It said that some suffered injuries including broken noses and cracked ribs when they were kicked and dragged across the deck with their hands tied after they tried to protest against the detention of their two fellow activists.

There was no immediate comment from Israel on the allegations of mistreatment.

A source who asked not to be identified said that while 22 boats had been intercepted by Israel, 47 others were still sailing off southern Crete and planned to anchor there at some point before continuing onwards to Gaza.

Each ship is carrying about a tonne of food, medical and other

equipment, the source said.

The 22 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.

In a statement on Thursday, the US State Department threatened "to impose consequences" against those who support the flotilla, which it cast as pro-Hamas.

Pro-Palestinian activists say that Israel and the US wrongly conflate their advocacy for Palestinian rights as support for Hamas.

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

Israel's death penalty law 'perpetuates discrimination'

Israel's new death penalty law permitting the execution of Palestinians convicted of deadly attacks perpetuates racial discrimination against them, a UN committee said yesterday, urging its immediate repeal.

The law amounts to a grave erosion of human rights, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination said in a statement.

Under the new law, passed by the Israeli parliament in March, Palestinians in the occupied West Bank convicted by military courts of carrying out deadly attacks classified as "terrorism" will face the death penalty as a default sentence.

"The new law is a severe blow to human rights, rolling back Israel's long-standing de facto moratorium on executions since 1962 and expanding the use of the death penalty," the committee said.

The law is "de facto applicable to Palestinians only" and sets a 90-day deadline for executions once a final judgment is rendered, the committee said.

Furthermore, it said Israel should ensure that all Palestinian detainees "are guaranteed their rights to equal treatment before the law, security of person, protection against violence or bodily harm, and access to justice".

The committee also called on Israel to "end all policies and practices that amount to racial discrimination against and segregation of Palestinians".

It said other countries should "ensure that their resources are not used to enforce or support discriminatory policies and practices against Palestinians living in the Occupied Palestinian Territory".

The committee of 18 independent experts monitors adherence to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination by its 182 states parties.

Under the convention, which came into force in 1969, countries must eliminate racial discrimination, eradicate practices of segregation and guarantee equality before the law without distinction as to race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin.

Israel ratified the convention in 1979.

In March, UN rights chief Volker Turk branded Israel's new law "cruel and discriminatory", warning that applying it in occupied Palestinian territory "would constitute a war crime".

Israel has occupied the West Bank since 1967 and violence in the territory has soared since the events of October 7, 2023. - **AFP**

Rats infest Gaza's tent camps, biting children and spreading disease

By Nidal al-Mughrabi and Haseeb Alwazeer
Reuters

Rats and parasites are spreading through Gaza's tent camps for displaced Palestinians, biting children's fingers and toes as they sleep, gnawing through people's few remaining treasured possessions, and spreading disease.

The outbreak is unfolding as most of Gaza's more than 2mn people have been displaced, many now living in bombed-out homes and makeshift tents pitched on open ground, roadsides, or atop the ruins of destroyed buildings.

Just days before her wedding day, Amani Abu Selmi, displaced with her family in Khan Younis in the south, discovered that rats had gnawed through the garments and bags of her wedding trousseau inside the tattered tent where they have been sheltering.

She and her mother showed Reuters holes the rodents had eaten through her gown, a

traditional burgundy embroidered dress that is customary in Palestinian weddings.

"All my happiness was gone, it turned to sadness, turned to heartbreak - that my things are gone, my wedding trousseau is gone," said Abu Selmi, 20.

A rat bit the hand and toes of Khalil al-Mashharawi's three-year-old son several weeks ago, he said.

Last Friday, he himself was bitten.

He said he and his wife now sleep in shifts to protect their children and one another from an infestation they are unable to control or defend themselves against, with rodent traps largely ineffective in Gaza's ruined homes and tent encampments.

"They strike in our sleep," said al-Mashharawi, 26, who lives with his family in the ruins of their house in Tuffah neighbourhood in northern Gaza. "They may disappear for a day or two before they strike again, (forcing) their way under the tiles of the floor of the house."

Mohamed Abu Selmia, head of Gaza's largest hospital, Al-Shifa, said he expects

the problem to worsen as summer approaches and amid an Israeli ban on pest control materials such as rat poison.

Israel generally restricts the entry to Gaza of items that it says can have dual military or civilian use.

As part of what it said was an effort with "all actors and international partners" to address the sanitation problem, COGAT, the Israeli military agency that controls access to Gaza, said that, in recent weeks, it has facilitated the transfer of about 90 tonnes of pest control materials and over 1,000 mousetraps into the enclave.

"Every day, hospitals record cases of patients being admitted due to rodent-related incidents, particularly among children, the elderly, and the sick," Abu Selmia said.

There is also widespread fear about the spread of dangerous diseases, including rat-bite fever, leptospirosis, and even plague, he said.

An October ceasefire between Israel and Hamas has done little to ease the suffering of Palestinians in Gaza where sewage and sani-

tation systems have been mostly destroyed by Israel and humanitarian aid is subject to Israeli restrictions.

Israel cites security concerns for curbs on Gaza, where it has continued to carry out deadly attacks, saying its action is due to threats from Hamas.

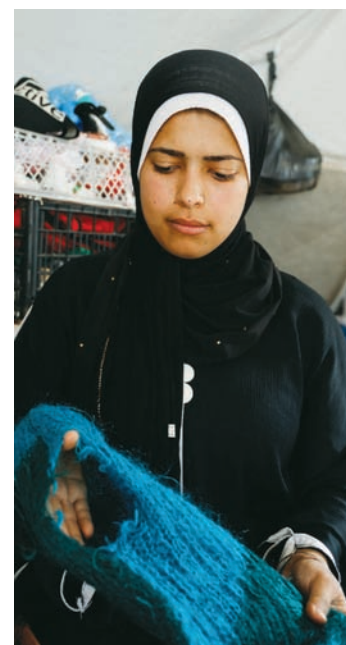
It has killed more than 800 Palestinians since October, with four Israeli soldiers killed during the same period.

With waste collection largely halted, contaminated water and refuse have accumulated near the tent cities where families sleep, cook, and wash.

This has given rodents and parasites a unique environment within which they can spread, aid groups say.

Reinhilde Van de Weerd, the World Health Organisation (WHO)'s local representative, said there were around 17,000 rodent and ectoparasitic infection-related cases in Gaza so far this year.

"This is just the unfortunate but predictable consequence when people live in a collapsed living environment," she said.



Amani Abu Selmi holds a damaged wool garment inside a tent in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip. - **Reuters**



DR Congo ex-president condemns blacklisting by US

AFP
Kinshasa

Democratic Republic of Congo ex-president Joseph Kabila condemned yesterday a US decision to sanction him for allegedly aiding Rwanda-backed M23 rebels who have seized swathes of the east of his country.

Washington's move was "profoundly unjustified, politically motivated and based on unsubstantiated accusations", Kabila said in a statement sent to AFP.

The government in Kinshasa said earlier on Friday it welcomed the sanctions as "an important step in the fight against impunity".

The United States blacklisted

Kabila on Thursday, accusing him of providing "financial and political support" to groups that are "the principal drivers of violence and instability" in the Great Lakes region of central Africa.

Washington has already imposed sanctions on the DRC's neighbour, Rwanda, in an attempt to enforce an unsuccessful peace deal between the M23 and the Congolese government.

The peace accord, which US President Donald Trump announced with great fanfare in December, includes a provision for US industries to gain privileged access to the eastern DRC's vast mineral riches.

He said the US decision to blacklist him was "based on the narrative



Joseph Kabila. (Reuters/File Photo)

of the Kinshasa authorities, who have been unable to substantiate the accusations made against him".

The DRC government, by contrast, welcomed the US sanctions.

It said they had "operational implications" because they would restrict Kabila's alleged "capacity for mobilising finance" or "logistical support that could fuel and prolong the war".

Last year, a Congolese military court sentenced Kabila to death in absentia for treason for "complicity" with the M23 and its political branch, the Congo River Alliance (Alliance Fleuve Congo or AFC), which is seeking to oust DRC President Felix Tshisekedi.

The conviction effectively blocks Kabila from returning to Kinshasa to seek any political comeback.

The M23 has not reacted publicly to the US sanctions.

Tanzania shuts camp housing thousands of Burundi refugees

AFP
Nairobi

Tanzania has closed a camp housing thousands of Burundian refugees and repatriated all but a handful, activists and the UN said yesterday.

Burundian refugees have complained in recent months of being forcibly evicted from the Nduta camp in northwestern Tanzania, following a deal between the governments in Dar Es Salaam and Bujumbura to repatriate around 100,000 of them by June.

As of late 2025, there were an estimated 142,000 Burundian refugees housed in two Tanzanian camps – Nduta and Nyarugusu, according to the UN refugee agency (UNHCR).

They had fled years of civil war, political repression and entrenched poverty in their small country in the Great Lakes region of Africa.

"The approximately 3,000 refugees who remained in the (Nduta) camp were forcibly loaded onto vehicles to be sent back to Burundi on Thursday," the Coalition for Human Rights/Living in Refugee Camps (CDH/VICAR) said.

"Only around 10 families remained on site, awaiting transfer to the Nyarugusu camp, where 198 families had already been sent following a widely contested selection process."

Nyarugusu is scheduled to close on June 30, according to Tanzanian authorities.

CDH/VICAR said refugees in Nduta had been subjected in recent months to "increasingly coercive measures".

These included "restrictions on freedom of movement, pressure to register for repatriation, the linking of humanitarian assistance to registration for return, and the gradual demolition of homes in the camp", as well as "night-time violence, intimidation, arrests and enforced disappearances".

The NGO said these coercive measures had "culminated in recent days in a sudden surge in departures, leading to the complete closure of the camp".

The charity also condemned UNHCR for facilitating the Tanzanian government's operations instead of "fulfilling its mandate" to protect the refugees.

A UNHCR spokesperson told AFP the camp had been closed by the Tanzanian government.

This move, they said, was in line with an agreement on "the voluntary repatriation of Burundian refugees" between the UN agency and the governments of the two east African countries.

The UNHCR had "consistently raised concerns with the authorities whenever reports of pressure or abuse emerged, reiterating clearly that all refugee returns must be voluntary, safe and dignified", the spokesperson said.

A separate UNHCR official, speaking anonymously, confirmed the repatriations but declined to comment on accusations of coercion.

UN extends South Sudan peacekeeping mission

AFP
UN

The UN Security Council on Thursday passed a resolution extending the UN peacekeeping mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) by one year but reducing its size, despite pushback from several member states.

The resolution, adopted with 13 votes in favour and abstentions from Russia and China, prolongs the mission until April 30, 2027.

The mission, which began in 2011 when South Sudan first gained independence, will have a new cap of authorised peacekeepers with a maximum of 12,500 soldiers – down from the previous limit of 17,000 soldiers – as well as some 2,100 police officers.

The resolution also asks the Office of the Secretary-General to conduct a "capability study" of the mission within the next 120 days to assess "the adequacy of the Mission's current force levels".

The reduction in peacekeeping troops drew ire from China, Russia and Pakistan, as well as the three African nations currently on the council: Somalia, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

However, the new cap will not reduce the number of peacekeepers currently deployed in South Sudan, as the mission has already had to downsize due to budget cuts.

According to UN figures, UNMISS had about 9,000 soldiers on the ground at the end of March, a sharp decrease from nearly 14,000 deployed a year ago.

"The contingency drawdown

has already affected the mission's functions in protecting civilians and assisting in humanitarian aid," Chinese ambassador Sun Lei said, adding that the UNMISS should instead be "optimised and strengthened" given recent developments in the country.

Russian deputy ambassador Anna Evstigneeva for her part said the peacekeeping mission should have a "sufficient level of resources" to "be ready for any scenarios".

The resolution passed Thursday was the result of a painstaking compromise, diplomatic sources told AFP, as the US, which drafted the text, wanted initially to reduce the maximum number of troops to 7,000.

As a result, US ambassador Mike Waltz expressed disap-

pointment, though he voted for the resolution, noting that it was still "taking a serious step to streamline UNMISS".

"We spent considerable time debating mandate language and operational adjustments... when the core problem is staring us right in the face. The core problem is a host government that actively undermines its commitments to peace and the mission it agreed to accept," he added.

Since gaining independence in 2011, South Sudan has been the site of several deadly conflicts.

Recent weeks have seen a resurgence in fighting between government forces loyal to President Salva Kiir and opposition militias supporting suspended vice president Riek Machar, who was placed under house arrest last year.

Ethiopia heads for one of 'least competitive' elections on June 1

AFP
Addis Ababa

Ethiopia holds a general election on June 1, with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed all but guaranteed of victory despite multiple armed conflicts and the economic impact of the Middle East war.

Who will win?

Abiy has been in power since 2018 and his Prosperity Party (PP) won a landslide – 485 of the 502 contested seats – at the last general election in 2021.

That ballot was partially disrupted by the devastating civil war between the central government and the leaders of the Tigray region that claimed an estimated 600,000 lives.

Abiy was initially feted for improving civil liberties and earned a Nobel Peace Prize for restoring relations with Eritrea.

But his government has returned to a familiar authoritarianism, cracking down on opponents, rights groups and journalists.

Abiy has focused on gradually liberalising the heavily controlled economy in the hope of attracting investment and has projected double-digit growth this year.

But Ethiopia's heavy reliance on oil imports means it has been among the worst hit by Israeli-US war against Iran.

That is unlikely to prevent another landslide, and the ruling

The national election authority has said voting will not take place in Tigray, where 1mn people are still displaced from the civil war, and the dominant regional party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front, remains at odds with the government

party has barely bothered with campaigning, policy announcements or even slogans.

Abiy has not even confirmed he is running, although few doubt he will return to power.

"This election going to be among the least competitive since multi-party democracy was introduced (in 1991)," Abel Abate Demissie of the Chatham House think tank told AFP.

What's the security situation?

The most populous regions, Oromia and Amhara, are experiencing long-running insurgencies and voting has already been cancelled in 30 of Amhara's 137 constituencies.

Amhara militant group, the Fano, warned voters in March that it would consider anyone participating in the election "as complicit and fight against you".

Despite the presence of some 500,000 federal soldiers and 30,000 police, "opportunities for spoilers abound", said the Washington-based Africa Center for Strategic Studies in a recent report.

The national election authority

has said voting will not take place in Tigray, where 1mn people are still displaced from the civil war, and the dominant regional party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front, remains at odds with the government.

Is anyone else running?

There are 23 parties registered for the election but most are close to the PP.

"Many of the formidable opposition are reluctant to engage in elections. Some of them are in the bush and others in exile," said Abel from Chatham House.

Ethiopia has never experienced truly free elections. In 2015, for instance, the ruling coalition won all the seats.

The organisation is demanding.

A budget of 10bn birr (\$64mn) has been allocated to organise the vote across some 49,000 polling stations in a country that covers over 1.1mn sq km (425,000 square miles).

In any case, the result is "pretty clear and it is likely (to be) another landslide for the incumbent", said Abel.

Flintlock exercises in Ivory Coast



An Ivorian parachutist jumps during the closing ceremony of the US-sponsored Flintlock exercises at the site of the new French-backed international counter-terrorism academy, in Jacqueville, Ivory Coast, on Thursday. (Reuters)

Ugandans slam bill as mimicking Russian 'foreign agents' law

AFP
Nairobi

A proposed Ugandan law has been fiercely criticised by rights groups, journalists and businesses for replicating the language of "foreign agents" used in a Russian law aimed at silencing dissent.

The east African country has been under the increasingly authoritarian rule of President Yoweri Museveni for 40 years.

The 81-year-old was re-elected in January amid a days-long internet shutdown and repression of the opposition that forced his main opponent, Bobi Wine, into hiding.

Critics say the new "Protection of Sovereignty Bill" adds a new weapon to be used against political opponents.

It criminalises anything that promotes the "interests of a foreigner against the interests of Uganda" and allows anyone receiving money from abroad to be labelled a "foreign agent".

Those convicted face sentences of up to 20 years in prison.

The bill even defines Ugandans abroad as "foreigners" – a breach of the constitution, rights groups say – threatening thousands in the diaspora who send funds back to their families. The text is due before parliament next week. It is likely to be waved through given

the dominance of Museveni loyalists, despite widespread criticism from civil society and even members of the ruling party.

"This bill has been opposed by almost all segments of society," said Mwesigwa Rukutana, a former deputy attorney general and finance minister.

"My advice is... to do widespread consultations to improve on it, to make it less toxic – or better still, shelve it," he added.

Human Rights Watch said it "mimics" laws passed in Russia and allied countries, using deliberately vague terms that can be applied to any campaigner deemed a nuisance. "From Russia to Nicaragua, these laws are never about protecting the people," added Job Kijja, deputy director of Innovations for Democratic Engagement and Action, a Ugandan think-tank.

Ghana cocoa buyers divert funds to purchase smuggled beans, regulator says

Reuters
Accra

Ghana's cocoa regulator has accused some officials at licensed buying companies of using government funds to buy cheap beans smuggled from the Ivory Coast, depriving local growers of income and threatening Ghana's reputation for quality cocoa.

Jake Kudjo Semahar, director of special services at the Ghana Cocoa Board (COCOBOD), told Reuters the practice had spread across four regions along the Ghana-Ivory Coast border, marking a reversal from earlier smuggling patterns,

when Ghanaian beans were trafficked into Ivory Coast and Togo.

"We were fighting smuggling of Ghana's cocoa to Ivory Coast, now the reverse is the situation and we should be concerned," Semahar said.

The practice is driven by a wide price gap. Ivory Coast is selling cocoa at the equivalent of 1,200 cedis (\$107.33) per 64kg bag, compared with Ghana's farmgate price of 2,587 cedis.

Semahar said some officers and clerks were exploiting the spread to generate illicit profits.

The Licensed Cocoa Buyers Association of Ghana distanced member companies from direct responsibility.



A cocoa farmer sun-dries cocoa beans at his home in Zambolee, Central Region, Ghana. (Reuters/File Photo)

General Secretary Vitus Dzah told Reuters no licensed buying company would sanction such purchases, blaming individual purchasing clerks acting out of personal greed.

"They go to the extent of giving money to middlemen who go inside Ivory Coast and buy the cocoa for them," he said, adding that LBCs had suffered heavy losses from a similar episode in the 2004/2005 season. The allegations deepen concerns over a prolonged liquidity crisis that has plagued Ghana's cocoa sector for months, leaving farmers unpaid for beans delivered since November 2025.

"Apart from denying farmers their income, Ghana is effectively

subsidising producers in Ivory Coast," Semahar said, warning that blending foreign beans with Ghanaian supplies risked eroding the premium quality status that gives the country's cocoa its global market advantage.

COCOBOD's anti-smuggling unit last week arrested four suspects and impounded over 100 bags of Ivorian cocoa in Nkrankwanta in the Dormaa West District, an operation Semahar described as the start of a broader crackdown.

The board said it had opened investigations into the matter and that sanctions would follow if involvement by LBCs was confirmed at the institutional level.

Mexican governor hit with US drug charges under scrutiny

AFP
Mexico City

Before the US government accused Mexican politician Ruben Rocha Moya of narco-trafficking ties this week, he was linked to the capture of a notorious Mexican druglord in the United States.

In July 2024, authorities in El Paso, Texas, suddenly arrested Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada, long-time leader of the Sinaloa cartel, along with two sons of Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman, the co-cartel boss who has been in prison in the United States for almost a decade.

In a letter published from US prison days later, El Mayo said he was "kidnapped" and betrayed by Guzman's sons, alleging that they had called for a meeting with Sinaloa Governor Rocha Moya to smooth over political problems in the northwestern state.

But the plane carrying El Mayo landed in El Paso in the United States, instead of Sinaloa. His capture unleashed a war between factions of the notorious cartel that left thousands dead or disappeared.

Rocha Moya quickly rejected any ties to the drug trade, arguing he was in the United States on the day of the supposed meeting. "We are not complicit with anyone," he said.

Then-president Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, an ally of current leader Claudia Sheinbaum, defended Rocha Moya and channeled his wrath towards the United States, whose capture of El Mayo he blamed for the subsequent war in Sinaloa between rival factions.

"You can't act that way," Lopez Obrador said in a press conference at the time, attacking El Mayo's controversial capture.

Rocha Moya "is really close to Lopez Obrador, he's been friends with him for decades, he cam-



Sinaloa governor Ruben Rocha. (Reuters)

aigned with him," David Mora, analyst for the International Crisis Group think tank, told AFP.

On Wednesday, the US Justice Department unveiled charges against Rocha Moya and nine other current and former officials, accusing them of working primarily with the faction of the Sinaloa cartel tied to Guzman to traffic "massive

quantities" of narcotics to the US.

The US Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York accuses Rocha Moya of receiving help from "El Chapo's" sons, known as "Chapitos," to become governor.

"In exchange, both before and after he became governor, Rocha Moya allegedly attended meetings with the Chapitos, at which he

promised to protect the Chapitos as they distributed massive quantities of drugs to the United States," the indictment states.

The governor denied the drug charges "categorically and absolutely" in a statement on X.

The 76-year-old Rocha Moya was born in Badiraguato, the Sinaloa village where the Guzman clan is from. A teacher by profession, he was consistently active in left-leaning parties, balancing politics and academic pursuits.

He became a lawmaker at the state level in the 1980s, the rector of the Autonomous University of Sinaloa in the 1990s, then a senator allied with Lopez Obrador in 2018.

The former left-leaning president was a crucial supporter of Rocha Moya's successful gubernatorial campaign in 2021.

Politician Mario Zamora, who ran against Rocha Moya in that election, claimed after his loss that

organized crime had influenced the voting. There was "very clear interference, documented with all the evidence, where organized crime forcefully supported a political project," Zamora told Mexican media on Thursday.

The criminals "became owners of a state," the current congressional deputy said.

The analyst Mora stressed that Rocha Moya's closeness with Lopez Obrador leaves Sheinbaum in a "very complex" position that may be her "most difficult" moment in 19 months as president.

US President Donald Trump has been pressuring Mexico to crack down on narco-trafficking, and Mexico, Canada and the United States are renegotiating a trilateral trade agreement that Trump has fiercely criticised.

"They are making Sheinbaum choose between her party and Trump, and the costs are high in both cases," Mora said.

David Rivera convicted of secretly lobbying for Venezuela

Former US Congressman David Rivera was found guilty yesterday of illegally lobbying US officials to ease pressure on ousted Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro's government. Rivera's conviction came after a six-week trial in federal court in Miami, which featured testimony from US Secretary of State Marco Rubio. Rivera, a Republican who represented southern Florida in the US House of Representatives from 2011 to 2013, pleaded not guilty. Prosecutors said Rivera lobbied US officials on behalf of Venezuela's government in 2017 without registering as a foreign lobbyist as required by the Foreign Agents Registration Act. And he was paid \$20 million by the US subsidiary of a Venezuelan state-owned company. Rivera's lawyers argued he was working to help Venezuela's opposition remove Maduro from power, not benefit his government. Rubio testified that Rivera did not tell him that he had a contract with oil refiner Citgo, a US subsidiary of Venezuelan state oil company Petroleos de Venezuela, when he took a meeting with Rivera about Venezuela in 2017. Rubio was a US senator at the time.

US likely to raise tariffs on EU autos

Reuters
Washington

US President Donald Trump said yesterday he would increase tariffs on cars and trucks from the European Union to 25%, saying the bloc had not complied with its trade deal with Washington.

"Based on the fact the European Union is not complying with our fully agreed to Trade Deal, next week I will be increasing Tariffs charged to the European Union for Cars and Trucks coming into the US," he wrote in a social media post.

"It is fully understood and agreed that, if they produce Cars and Trucks in USA. Plants, there will be NO TARIFF."

Trump told reporters at the White House the higher tariff would force European car makers to move their factory production to the US more quickly.

"We have a trade deal with the European Union. They were not adhering to it. So I raised the tariffs on cars and trucks to 25%, that's billions of dollars coming into the US, and it forces them to move their factory production much faster."

The Trump administration last year imposed a 25% tariff on global automotive imports under a national security trade law. However, the US reached a deal with the EU in August to lower those duties to a



US President Donald Trump speaks with the media prior to departing from the South Lawn of the White House in Washington, DC, yesterday. (AFP)

net 15%, inclusive of prior duties.

In exchange, the EU agreed to eliminate duties on US industrial goods, including autos, and accept US safety and

emissions standards on vehicles.

Although EU lawmakers advanced legislation in March to implement the tariff reductions, the process is not expected to be

completed before June, as EU governments and the European Parliament negotiate final texts.

"President Trump's behavior is unacceptable," Bernd Lange, the chair of the European Parliament's international trade committee, told Reuters.

"This latest move demonstrates just how unreliable the US side is. We have already witnessed these arbitrary attacks from the US in the case of Greenland; this is no way to treat close partners. Now we can only respond with the utmost clarity and firmness, drawing on the strength of our position," Lange said.

But a Trump administration official, asked to explain Trump's move, said: "The EU has not complied with the autos deal after eight months."

Shares of Ford Motor fell 2% after Trump's announcement, while those of Stellantis were down 1.7%. General Motors shares dropped 1.1%.

Ryan Majerus, a former senior US Commerce Department official who is now a partner with King & Spalding, said the president's move also may be related to Trump's frustration that some European countries had balked at supporting the US-Israeli war against Iran.

"This is not going to sit well in the EU, and I'm not sure the administration cares, because they're so incredibly antagonistic toward the EU," Majerus said.

Canada says it plans to host new multilateral defence bank

Reuters
London

Canada is set to host a proposed multilateral defence bank designed to help fund the rearmament of nations facing heightened geopolitical risks, Prime Minister Mark Carney said. Carney spoke after the federal finance ministry said Canada had been working in Montreal with allies to agree on a founding charter for the planned Defence, Security and Resilience Bank. The other countries were not identified.

The DSRB was proposed by former NATO security advisers, senior ex-military personnel and bankers. It aims to be a triple-A rated institution capable of raising 100 billion pounds (\$135 billion) to fund defence projects, particularly



PM Mark Carney. (Reuters)

in countries that 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.

Canada has been the project's most high-profile backer. However, the initiative has also faced setbacks, with Britain and Germany distancing themselves.

"It's the first step; there's more to be done. This will unfold over certainly months, and I would say over quarters, in terms of process to move forward, but it's a very welcome development," Carney told reporters in Oakville, Ontario, saying more nations might become members. Britain has separately championed its own multilateral finance initiative

to help drum up private finance to procure weapons, munitions and military equipment.

Iran sport official says he was allowed to enter Canada but chose to turn back

Iranian soccer federation president Mehdi Taj said Canadian officials cleared him to enter the country for the FIFA Congress, but Iran's delegation chose to turn back after being held for three hours and questioned at a Toronto airport, Iranian media reported yesterday.

Taj, a former member of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), said he was questioned by Canadian immigration about his ties to the group, but was ultimately allowed into the country for the pre-World Cup gathering in Vancouver.

Canadian authorities have said members of the IRGC are prohibited from entering the country, which is set to co-host the World Cup from June along with the United States and Mexico.

"We all had visas and were even checked in Turkey. They told us they had questions for you and asked if we were members of the IRGC," Iran's semi-official news agency Tasnim quoted Taj as saying. "We told them that there are 90 million IRGC members in Iran. They said that we don't allow people from this organisation in. They said that it is the laws of our country. After a while, they said you can enter but we decided to return. They didn't deport us and we decided to return ourselves... I told the Canadians that you kept us at the airport for three hours, you made us wait for nothing."

Reuters has contacted Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, which issues visas to travel to the country, for comment.

Taj said FIFA president Gianni Infantino had offered to send a jet to take the Iranian delegation to Canada after they returned to Turkey, but they refused. "I told the FIFA secretary general (Mattias Grafstrom) that you are intimidated by America and that you say 'yes sir' to whatever they say," he said.

Infantino insisted on Thursday that Iran would play World Cup matches in the US, despite tensions between the two countries. FIFA earlier rejected Tehran's request for alternative venues for matches on US soil.

"We need to hold a meeting with FIFA officials to ensure that if we are to come to the World Cup, there should be no side issues and controversies for our team," Taj said. (Reuters)

Trump gives Spirit final rescue proposal as airline prepares possible shutdown



A Spirit Airlines flight arrives at Fort Lauderdale - Hollywood International Airport, in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. (Reuters/File Photo)

Reuters
Washington

President Donald Trump said yesterday the White House had given Spirit Airlines and its creditors a final proposal to try to rescue the bankrupt airline, even as the budget carrier makes preparations to shut down if no deal is reached.

"We're looking at Spirit. If we can help them, we will, but we have to come first," Trump told reporters. "If we could do it, we'd do it, but only if it's a good deal."

Trump added he expected an announcement later yesterday.

Two people familiar with the matter confirmed a *Wall Street Journal* report that Spirit is preparing to cease operations after hitting an impasse in talks with some creditors on a \$500 million government bailout plan.

The White House has reached out to other airlines to discuss how to accommodate people who have

Spirit tickets and could be stranded if the airline stops operating. United Airlines said it was preparing to support Spirit customers if the rival shuts down.

Trump said last month his administration was looking to buy the embattled carrier at the "right price."

Sources later said the administration had proposed \$500 million in financing in exchange for warrants equivalent to 90% of Spirit's equity.

There had been disagreements inside the Trump administration over whether and how to fund the bailout, the *Journal* report said, citing people familiar with the matter.

Not all Spirit bondholders were on board with the deal, the report added.

A rescue hearing scheduled for Thursday did not take place after talks over the terms of the government bailout continued.

A company spokesperson declined to comment on ongoing

discussions, adding, "Spirit is operating as usual." The carrier's demise would mark the industry's first casualty linked to the Iran war.

Spirit's volatile stock was down 25% yesterday.

Shares of rival Frontier Airlines rose 10%, while JetBlue Airways gained 7% following the *Journal* report. Spirit had earlier reached a deal with its lenders that would have helped it emerge from its second bankruptcy by late spring or early summer.

Those plans were derailed after the war triggered a spike in jet fuel prices, upending Spirit's cost projections and complicating its bankruptcy exit.

The carrier built its turnaround plan on jet fuel costs averaging about \$2.24 per gallon in 2026 and \$2.14 in 2027, according to March disclosures.

By the end of April, prices had climbed to around \$4.51 a gallon, double the level assumed in its projections.



Pentagon signs classified AI deals with tech giants

AFP
Washington

The Pentagon on Friday announced agreements with seven leading artificial intelligence companies to deploy their technology on classified military networks, a move that pointedly excludes Anthropic amid its ongoing dispute with the Defense Department.

SpaceX, OpenAI, Google, Nvidia, Reflection, Microsoft and Amazon Web Services will be integrated into the Defense Department's most sensitive classified systems, used for mission planning, weapons targeting and other purposes, according to a statement.

The statement did not mention Anthropic, which is caught up in a fight with the Pentagon over guardrails governing how the military could use its AI tools.

The US military currently uses Anthropic's AI but is weaning itself from it after the company objected to its technology being used for mass domestic surveillance or to directly control lethal



autonomous weapons. The Pentagon subsequently labeled the AI startup a supply-chain risk earlier this year, barring its use by the US military and its contractors.

In February, Trump instructed the government to "immediately cease" using Anthropic's technology — a designation typically reserved for organizations from unfriendly foreign countries.

"What we've learned...is that it's irresponsible to be reliant on any one partner," Emil Michael, the Pentagon's de facto chief tech-

nology officer, told CNBC.

Michael added that the deals included a mix of closed and open-source models, with a source familiar with the matter telling AFP that the latter would be provided by Nvidia and AI firm Reflection.

Open-source models, which can be run without ongoing licensing fees or vendor access, offer the Pentagon greater operational flexibility and reduce dependence on any single commercial provider.

Anthropic's AI model, Claude,

— which is not open source — had been the only one authorised for use in classified military operations and remains in use. The company is now fighting the Pentagon punitive measures in court.

Tensions had shown signs of easing ahead of Friday's announcement. Trump said last week he thought the administration would get along with Anthropic "just fine," after CEO Dario Amodei visited the White House for talks that a spokesperson described as "productive and constructive."

Yesterday's announcement framed the deals with Anthropic's rivals as central to the Trump administration's push to build what it called an "AI-first fighting force." The integrations would "streamline data synthesis, elevate situational understanding, and augment warfighter decision-making," it said.

The Pentagon said its GenAI.mil platform — described as its official AI system — had already been used by more than 1.3 million department personnel, generating tens of millions of prompts and deploying

hundreds of thousands of agents in five months.

More than 600 Google employees demanded Monday that the company reject the Pentagon deal. In 2018, an employee movement successfully pushed Google to abandon Project Maven, a Pentagon program to integrate AI into drone operations.

In recent years the company has embarked on a strategy shift, steadily rebuilding its military business and competing with rivals for defense contracts.

Project Maven is now led by AI firm Palantir and has since evolved into an AI-assisted targeting and battlefield management system that has vastly accelerated the kill chain — the process from initial detection to destruction.

During Operation Epic Fury against Iran, Maven reportedly enabled the processing of more than 1,000 targets within the first 24 hours.

An AWS spokesperson said the company was committed to supporting the military and looked forward to helping the Defense Department modernise with AI.

US targets Chinese oil terminal in new Iran sanctions

The United States yesterday imposed sanctions on a Chinese oil terminal as part of a slew of new measures on Iran, as it warned of repercussions for ships paying "tolls" demanded by Tehran. The new measures come amid a standstill in diplomacy after Trump halted US-Israeli attacks against Iran, and were announced just two weeks before Trump visits China, a key customer for Iran's oil.

The United States since President Donald Trump's first term has unilaterally sought to stop all other countries from buying oil from Iran.

The State Department said the United States was imposing sanctions on Qingdao Haiye Oil Terminal Co Ltd, which it said has imported "tens of millions of barrels" of Iranian crude oil, helping Iran generate billions of dollars.

"So long as Iran attempts to generate oil revenues to fund its destabilising activities, the United States will hold both Iran and all its sanctions-evading partners accountable," the State Department said in a statement. The sanctions will criminalise any transactions involving the US through the terminal operator. (AFP)

Cuba's Raul Castro joins May Day march

Reuters
Havana

Ninety-four-year-old former leader Raul Castro joined thousands of Cubans in an International Workers' Day march yesterday that passed through the capital of Havana's waterfront and by the US embassy as tensions between the nations reach near-unprecedented levels.

Washington has repeatedly suggested that it could take military action against the communist-run Caribbean island and since January has imposed an oil blockade, forcing authorities to ration key services and the UN to warn of a humanitarian crisis.

Castro, the brother of Fidel Castro who handed over the presidency in 2018, was presented with a book containing over 6 million Cuban signatures — nearly two-thirds of the population — demonstrating popular will to defend the country from a possible direct military attack from the US.

"Today Cuba demonstrated once again that this people does not give up, and that we will defend our homeland tooth and nail, even though we want peace," said Milagros Morales, 34, a Havana resident who took part in the march.

This year's march was somewhat scaled back, with the government unable to provide the transportation and special routes it typically organizes due to the US oil blockade, but authorities still counted over half a million people in Havana.

While delegations from the US and Cuba engaged in talks on the Caribbean island this month as the US pushes Cuba to reform its



Cuba's former President Raul Castro and Cuba's President Miguel Diaz-Canel arrive for a May Day rally in Havana. (Reuters)

Trump expands US sanctions on Cuban government

President Donald Trump yesterday signed an executive order broadening US sanctions against the Cuban government, two White House officials said, as he seeks to put more pressure on Havana after ousting Venezuela's leader from power.

The fresh sanctions target people, entities and affiliates that support the Cuban government's security apparatus or are complicit in corruption or serious human rights violations, the officials said, as well as agents, officials or

supporters of the government.

The order authorises secondary sanctions for conducting or facilitating transactions with those targeted under the order. The order contained a warning that the Cuban government has aligned itself with Iran and militant groups like Hezbollah.

"Cuba provides a permissive environment for hostile foreign intelligence, military, and terrorist operations less than 100 miles from the American homeland," one official said. (Reuters)

economy, an agreement has yet to be announced.

Castro's son Alejandro Castro, and his grandson Raul Rodriguez have been in talks with US officials, according to several media reports, suggesting the prominent role the family still plays politi-

cally despite Castro's retirement.

Castro appeared tired during the march, where he walked in military uniform accompanied by President Miguel Diaz-Canel and other officials waving flags under the hot Caribbean sun, and had to sit down suddenly during the ceremony.

Venezuela's oil exports jump to highest since 2018, with major sales to US, India



Vehicles sit parked at fuel pumps as regular gasoline prices above \$6 per gallon and diesel prices above \$7 per gallon are displayed outside a Mobil gas station in Redondo Beach, California on Thursday. (AFP)

Venezuela's oil exports rose 14% to 1.23 mn barrels per day in April, the highest in more than seven years, fueled by more sales to the United States, India and Europe, shipping data and documents from state company PDVSA showed yesterday.

The South American country has been draining oil inventories and recovering crude output in recent months following the US capture of President Nicolas Maduro in January, which led to a flagship supply pact between the governments of US President Donald Trump and Venezuela's interim President Delcy Rodriguez.

The agreement, coupled with US licences easing sanctions on the country this year, has allowed PDVSA's joint-venture partners and trading houses including Vitol and Trafigura to receive cargoes from the state firm for sales to refiners in the US, Europe and Asia.

In April, a total of 66 vessels departed from Venezuelan wa-

ters, compared with 61 ships that carried 1.08 mn bpd of crude and refined products in March, according to the data, based on tanker movements.

The April average is the highest monthly volume since late 2018, before US sanctions were imposed on Venezuela's energy industry.

The main destination of Venezuela's oil last month was the US, with some 445,000 bpd directly exported, above the 363,000 bpd of March. Exports to India rose to 374,000 bpd from 342,000 bpd the previous month, while shipments to Europe increased to some 165,000 bpd from 144,000 bpd.

Some 187,000 bpd of Venezuelan crude and fuel went to storage terminals in the Caribbean for further sales.

The trading firms carried about 56% of total exports or 691,000 bpd, while US company Chevron was responsible for 25% or 308,000 bpd, an increase from 267,000 bpd in March.

Indian refiner Reliance Industries received a large crude cargo directly from PDVSA and bought several from the traders last month, the data showed.

Under the supply pact, Venezuela's oil exports have gained diversity while reaching more customers over recent months, a shift from limitations imposed by previous sanctions. The US continues controlling the OPEC country's sale proceeds through Treasury Department-supervised accounts.

Sales to Reliance are set to continue growing this month, with at least three supertankers chartered by the Indian firm waiting to load at Venezuela's ports, according to LSEG ship monitoring data.

Venezuela also exported 360,000 metric tons of oil by-products and petrochemicals in April, slightly below the 382,000 tons of the previous month; and imported some 141,000 bpd of naphtha versus 155,000 bpd in March. (Reuters)

Blockbuster EU-Mercosur trade deal enters into force

AFP
Brussels

The European Union's mammoth trade deal with South American bloc Mercosur provisionally enters into force yesterday, despite a pending court ruling on its legality. The agreement to create one of the world's biggest free-trade zones was sealed in January after more than 25 years of intermittent negotiations.

Together, the EU and Mercosur account for 30% of global GDP and more than 700 mn consumers.

The deal, which eliminates tariffs on more than 90% of trade between the two sides, has proven divisive in Europe. France has led opposition over concerns some of its farmers will be left worse off.

But — backed by a majority of EU countries — Brussels ploughed ahead as it pushes to diversify trade in the face of challenges from the US and China.



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen arrives to give a speech on at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, eastern France, on Wednesday. (AFP)

European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen yesterday hailed the start of the deal's implementation, stating on X: "Provisional application will show the agreement's tangible benefits." She said

that "as of now... tariffs start falling" and European companies "are gaining access to new markets".

The agreement favours European exports of cars, wine and cheese, while making it easier for

South American beef, poultry, sugar, rice, honey and soybeans to enter Europe.

Von der Leyen and Antonio Costa, the president of the European Council, held a video call to mark

the occasion with Mercosur leaders, which include Argentina and Brazil.

Afterwards, Costa said the agreement was "more than a trade deal" but "a partnership that reflects our shared vision of the world". "A resilient multilateral system rests on win-win agreements like this, grounded on rules, values and shared interests," he wrote on X.

Von der Leyen said that "legitimate" sensitivities in the EU had been addressed while trade commissioner Maros Sefcovic called it "a big day for EU trade". "It's a chance for growth and stronger ties with important global partners," he wrote on X.

The application of the deal comes after the European Parliament referred it to the EU's top court in January, instead of giving it the green light. France unsuccessfully attempted to block the deal over worries for its farmers, who fear being undercut by cheaper goods from agricultural power-

house Brazil and its neighbours.

The staunch French opposition to the pact caused a public rift with export-dependent Germany, pitting the EU's two biggest countries against each other. French left-wing MEP Manon Aubry told AFP it was a "dark day". European farmers "will be facing unfair competition from hundreds of thousands of tonnes of agricultural products that will flood the European market", she said.

Health and environmental standards would not be as high, Aubry added. In the run-up to the signing of the deal, farmers in tractors, with smoke flares and flags, turned out in force on the streets of Brussels and Strasbourg, to voice their opposition.

But German Foreign Minister Johann Wadepuhl yesterday issued his own social media post hailing the Mercosur deal's implementation.

"This strengthens our resilience & rules-based trade," he said on X.

UN troubled by rejected appeal of Cambodian opposition leader

AFP
Geneva

The UN rights chief said yesterday he was “deeply concerned” by a Cambodian court rejecting the appeal of detained opposition leader Kem Sokha against his nearly three-decade sentence for treason.

The 72-year-old politician was convicted for trying to topple the government of long-ruling former prime minister Hun Sen, who is

the father of the current leader and remains an influential figure in national politics.

Kem Sokha was sentenced in 2023 to 27 years in prison for treason but was ordered to serve the time under house arrest in the capital Phnom Penh.

Volker Turk, the United Nations’ high commissioner for human rights, said he “deeply concerned by the upholding of the conviction” by the Phnom Penh appeals court on Thursday.

The co-founder of the dis-

solved opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party, Kem Sokha has repeatedly denied the charge since his 2017 arrest in connection with a speech he gave in Australia four years earlier.

Rights groups have long accused Cambodian authorities of using legal cases as a tactic to silence opposition voices and legitimate political dissent.

Turk also voiced concerns about the convictions of 33 other opposition activists, human rights defenders and social media users, in

a separate case on Wednesday.

The Phnom Penh first instance court imposed sentences ranging from 18 months suspended to two years in prison, Turk’s OHCHR office said, on charges of “incitement to cause social chaos” over public comments they made in 2024 about the Cambodia-Laos-Vietnam Development Triangle Area project.

“These convictions and sentences are clearly inconsistent with international human rights law and risk further deepening the already-considerable chilling

effects of broad, vaguely-worded criminal laws and their arbitrary enforcement on civil society, journalists and the broader population in Cambodia,” OHCHR spokesman Jeremy Laurence said.

“Kem Sokha and the other 33 individuals were all exercising their rights to freedom of expression. Their trials also raise concerns about violations of due process and fair trial rights,” he told a press conference in Geneva.

Turk urged Cambodia to ensure that legitimate criticism and ex-

pression are protected rather than criminalised, to safeguard civic space, to guarantee the independence of the judiciary and uphold fair trial guarantees.

“The authorities should promptly quash these latest convictions and sentences, and unconditionally release Kem Sokha and all others arbitrarily detained for exercising their rights,” said Laurence.

Laurence said OHCHR had consistently raised concerns with the Cambodian authorities “on general repression”.

Train hits car in Indonesia, killing four people: police

A train hit a car in Indonesia yesterday, killing four people including two children, police said, days after another deadly train crash outside the capital Jakarta.

The driver of the car involved in the collision in Central Java province did not see the oncoming train on a level crossing due to thick fog, local traffic officer Eko Ari Kisworo said in a statement issued by the police.

The train then collided with the car, which carried nine people and was flung about 20 metres (66 feet) before hitting a pole and flipping into a rice field, Eko said.

Four passengers, including a two-year-old girl and another who was 10, were killed, while the driver and the remaining passengers were injured, the officer added.

The accident came just days after a long-distance train slammed into a commuter train near the Bekasi Timur station in West Java on Monday, killing 16 women and injuring at least 90 people.

President Prabowo Subianto has blamed that incident on unsafe level crossings and ordered a countrywide upgrade with guard posts or flyovers. (AFP)

Indonesia to cut ride-hailing companies’ commission to 8%

Indonesia will cut the caps on the commissions that ride-hailing companies take from drivers for each trip to 8% from 20%, President Prabowo Subianto said yesterday in Jakarta.

Prabowo said he signed a presidential regulation which was the basis for the new maximum commission cap that ride-hailing firms could take from their driver partners.

“The revenue share for drivers has been increased from 80% to a minimum of 92%,” he said during a speech. Prabowo did not say when the regulation would take effect.

Aside from the lower commission

cap, the regulation will also require ride-hailing firms to provide accident and health insurance, Prabowo said.

“It’s just not right that you’re (drivers) the one sweating while they’re (the platforms) the ones making the money,” Prabowo added. In January, Reuters exclusively reported on the planned regulation that will threaten the profitability of ride-hailing platforms in their largest market in Southeast Asia.

The rule will affect ride-hailing firms such as Indonesian tech firm GoTo and Singapore-based rival Grab. (Reuters)

House arrest sparks little hope of Suu Kyi reclaiming limelight

AFP
Yangon

At the leafy villa where Myanmar’s Aung San Suu Kyi had spent years locked up, there were no signs yesterday it would become a renewed site of political pilgrimage as it did during her previous house arrest.

While her shift to private detention appeared to be a rare concession by the authorities that have detained the deposed leader since a 2021 coup, supporters fear that any contact with the public would be severely restricted.

The Yangon lakeside mansion where Suu Kyi had been siloed under military detention, including when she was awarded the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize for pro-democracy activism, was under its usual security lockdown.

Barbed-wire traffic barricades remained in place next to a police post – but with no significant buildup that would suggest the villa would host her after the transfer to house arrest was announced Thursday.

“I welcome her release from prison to house arrest. I want her to be free, and I want our country to thrive and prosper,” said a 65-year-old Yangon housewife, speaking anonymously for security reasons.

“I also want to see concrete evi-



Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi greets supporters. (AFP/ File photo)

dence that aunty is alive and well, both for the people of our country and the world,” she added, using an affectionate term for Suu Kyi.

Suu Kyi has been detained since the 2021 coup ousted her administration, triggering a ruinous civil war and a crackdown on dissent.

In earlier years of activism she defied house arrest in Yangon to rally supporters with speeches over the boundary wall, building momentum for a decade-long experiment with democracy she was to lead.

But there were no signals yesterday that her family mansion would again draw crowds of followers, with only a single gardener there watering the roadside lawn out front.

A member of Suu Kyi’s dissolved

National League for Democracy party said she would likely be kept in the capital Naypyidaw, a sprawling garrison city of high walls and secretive compounds.

A security source, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to share information, said the 80-year-old would stay at a property inside a military perimeter.

Min Aung Hlaing – who ousted Suu Kyi as military chief and oversaw prosecution on charges rights groups deride as bogus – made a personal order Suu Kyi serve her remaining term at a “designated residence”.

It did not say where that will be, nor how much remains of her sentence.

Last month Min Aung Hlaing took over as civilian president after an election excluding Suu Kyi’s party, claiming the country had entered a new chapter and rolling back some post-coup crackdown measures.

Pro-democracy rebel Bo Thanmani, who disrobed from the monkhood to fight military rule in the northern region of Sagaing, called Suu Kyi’s house arrest “a good move”.

“We don’t want to thank the regime, this was an unfair arrest,” he said.

But this could be the start of a “step-by-step” reconciliation process between sides estranged by the coup, he added.

Suu Kyi’s family, activists and some analysts, however, dismiss the election and Min Aung Hlaing’s touted concessions as a propaganda ploy to rebrand and therefore legitimise his rule.

The real test of her freedom, they say, will be whether she will be allowed to commune again with Myanmar’s citizens – and whether they will again feel safe to openly support her.

“I don’t see any political changes by moving to house arrest,” said one Yangon doctor, speaking anonymously out of security concerns. “I am still worried,” they said. “I hope to return to a better situation.”

China slams US regulator’s move to ban labs from electronic testing

AFP
Beijing

China yesterday slammed a proposal from a US regulator that would bar its labs from testing electronic devices for use in the US, saying it undermined bilateral trade relations.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) voted on Thursday to advance the proposal which, if green-lit, would hit devices rang-

ing from smartphones to cameras. Around 75% of certified devices in the US are tested in recognised labs in China, the FCC estimates.

China’s commerce ministry said yesterday the restrictions would “seriously undermine the international economic and trade order”, vowing to hit back if implemented.

“If the US insists on going down the wrong path, China will resolutely take necessary measures to firmly safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese en-

terprises,” it said in a statement.

It accused the FCC of repeatedly introducing restrictive measures towards Chinese products and companies.

“These... undermine the hard-won stability in China-US economic and trade relations, run counter to the consensus reached by the two heads of state,” the statement added. The proposal, which the FCC says aimed to “prioritise national security”, comes a year after the agency adopted

rules to ban test labs “owned or controlled by foreign adversaries”.

The measure bans recognition of test labs and certification bodies in countries that do not have a mutual recognition agreement with the US, or other comparable reciprocal trade agreement, the FCC said.

China does not have such a pact with the FCC, according to its website. If approved, products tested and certified in such labs would be phased out over two years after final rules are implemented.

China urges US to preserve ‘stability’ in ties, warns Taiwan is ‘risk point’

China’s foreign minister on Thursday urged the US to maintain “stability” between the two powers and warned that Taiwan posed the biggest risk, weeks before President Donald Trump visits Beijing.

In a call with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said that Beijing and Washington should “safeguard the hard-won stability” in China-US relations, China’s foreign ministry said.

The talks also discussed the Middle

East, where China has been a key partner of Tehran but has largely kept its distance after Trump joined Israel in attacking Iran, sending global oil prices spiralling.

A State Department official confirmed the phone call and said it was to arrange Trump’s trip but did not give further details.

Trump is scheduled to visit China on May 14-15 to see President Xi Jinping – the Republican billionaire’s first trip to the rival power since returning to the White House in January 2025.

During Trump’s first year back in office, Washington and Beijing clashed over trade and tariffs until a truce was declared in October, when Trump and Xi met in South Korea.

“Both sides should safeguard the hard-won stability, prepare well for key high-level interactions, expand areas of cooperation” and manage their differences, Wang told Rubio, according to a readout from the Chinese foreign ministry.

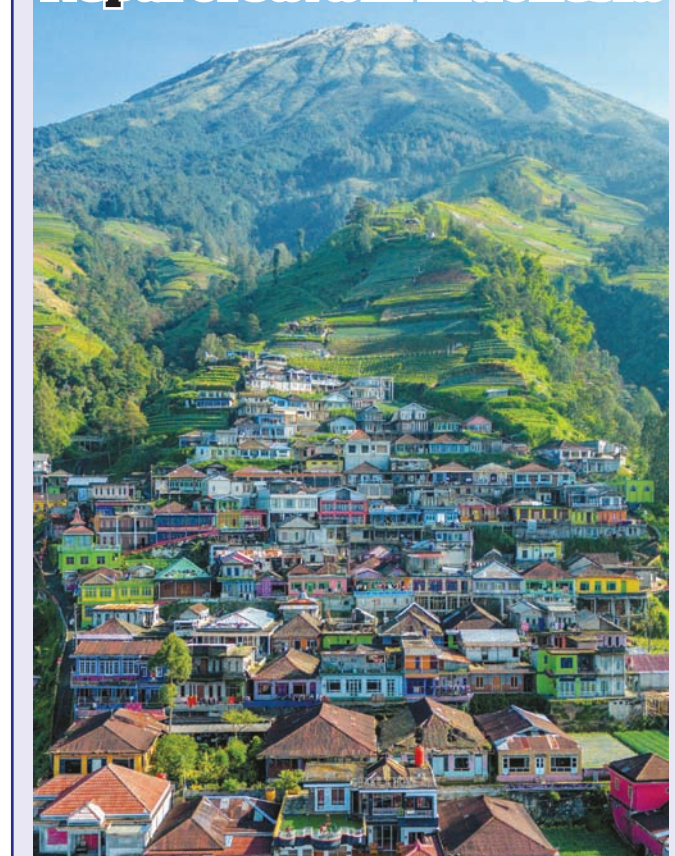
While ties have “generally remained stable” under Trump and Xi, Wang “emphasised that the Taiwan issue

concerns China’s core interests and is the biggest risk point in China-US relations”, it said.

Beijing claims Taiwan as part of its territory awaiting reunification and is sharply critical of US military assistance to the self-ruled island and its support of Taipei on the international stage.

“The US must honour its commitments and make the right choices, opening new perspectives for bilateral cooperation and do its part to promote world peace,” Wang said. (AFP)

Nepal of Java in Indonesia



This aerial photograph shows colourful houses in Butuh village, popularly known as Nepal Van Java, or Nepal of Java, for its resemblance to hillside villages in Nepal, on the slopes of Mount Sumbing in Magelang, Central Java, Indonesia. (AFP)

Manila landfill fire leaves locals gasping

AFP
Obando, Philippines

Philippine ferry dispatcher Dave Delos Reyes has been handing out N95 masks for nearly three weeks to protect passengers against the smoke that a landfill fire has sent billowing above a stretch of Manila Bay.

The fire at Metro Manila’s Navotas landfill is largely invisible to the naked eye, combusting as deep as 15m (50 feet) below the surface and releasing a toxic brew of methane as well as carbon dioxide.

Nearly 500 people who lived on islands near the site have been evacuated to the town centre of Obando municipality, about 2.5km (1.6 miles) away, but it is not nearly far enough to escape the smoke.

“Honestly, sometimes the smell is so strong that it can still seep through the N95 masks. It hurts our

throat and heads,” Delos Reyes told visiting AFP reporters on Thursday.

At its peak, smoke from the underground fire was affecting air quality across Metro Manila, where an “acutely unhealthy” reading was recorded in multiple areas, according to a local monitor.

Those numbers are finally returning to normal, the Philippine Space Agency’s Ernest Macalalad told AFP, the result of around-the-clock efforts to snuff out the fire by covering it with tons of soil, depriving it of oxygen.

But in Obando, residents and evacuees alike said the smoke was still impacting their health and livelihoods.

AFP journalists who travelled to the landfill site by boat saw billows of thick, gray smoke completely enveloping houses on Salambao – one of the islands from which people were evacuated.

“The smoke from the landfill

comes and goes. We can feel it for around 20 minutes, then it will be gone,” said Monica Verses, who sells candy and drinks from the open window of her tiny convenience store.

“Every time the smoke reaches my store, my chest tightens, and I cough a lot,” the 62-year-old said.

The US government’s disaster agency has linked emissions from landfill fires to cancer, liver damage, rashes and reproductive disorders.

Multiple residents told AFP the smoke from the landfill, which stopped receiving trash last August, only gets thicker at night.

Fires like the one at Navotas pose a different set of challenges from aboveground blazes, said Superintendent Anthony Arroyo, a spokesman for Manila’s fire bureau.

“It’s not a typical fire with surface combustion or a blaze... there’s layers of rubbish in a mountainous area, and below

that... methane gas,” he said.

Fires that start below the surface often begin spontaneously, as organic matter decomposes and creates heat, fuelled by oxygen that sneaks in through the cracks.

Flooding the area with water had not been considered, as it risked compromising the liner that prevents chemicals from leaking into the ground below, Arroyo said.

Instead, firefighters and public works employees were covering the site inch by inch with soil dredged from a nearby site.

“The soil itself absorbs heat. At the same time, it serves as a smothering method, removing the oxygen from the subsurface fire.”

While about 50% of the affected area has now been covered, work has been slow-going, Arroyo added, with heavy equipment unable to be used in some parts of the landfill due to its sloping walls of refuse.

For evacuees like Ramon Adino,



Fishermen sail past grey smoke billowing from a burning landfill in the nearby Navotas City as seen from Obando town, Bulacan province, on Thursday. (AFP)

68, who is living in a cramped school classroom with 12 other families, a return to “normal life” is now just a matter of waiting.

“I’m slightly better now, but I’m still struggling to breathe normally... It’s like I’m always catching my breath,” he said, adding he hoped the

fire would “be extinguished soon”.

Food vendor Marissa Gusi, 62, said that while living conditions at the evacuation site were difficult, she planned to prioritise her health.

“I’d rather stay here indefinitely than lose my life because of that smoke,” she said.



India raises cooking gas, jet fuel prices

AFP
New Delhi

India raised yesterday the prices of commercial liquefied petroleum gas and jet fuel for international airlines, according to a state-run energy firm, as supply pressures from the Iran war mount.

The South Asian nation is heavily dependent on imported energy, including for roughly 60% of its liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), the fuel used for cooking by a vast section of its population, the largest in the world.

As imports have been disrupted since the Middle East war began in late February, New Delhi has moved to ensure households and essential sectors remain adequately supplied, leaving many restaurants, manufacturers and power plants in the lurch.

The government has maintained India faces no overall fuel shortage.

"Prices of bulk and commercial LPG cylinders have been revised," the state-run Indian Oil Corp Limited (IOCL), the country's leading



People arriving with empty LPG cylinders for refilling, in a village on the outskirts of Uttar Pradesh's Jewar district. (AFP)

energy marketing company, said.

IOCL's price chart shows an increase of 993 rupees (\$10.50) in the price of a 19-kilogramme LPG cylinder meant for commercial use.

That amounts to a nearly 48-percent rise in the capital New Delhi. Local levies mean rates vary across cities.

The sharp hike will hit restaur-

ants particularly hard, with many already scaling back operations during the Middle East war.

The oil company said that the price of jet fuel for international airline operations has also "been adjusted upward".

Aviation turbine fuel (ATF) has gone up by around five % in Delhi, according to IOCL's catalogue.

Man convicted of attempting violent assault at London embassy

Reuters
London

A man who last year tried to enter Israel's London embassy armed with two knives and carrying a "martyrdom note" was yesterday convicted in a London court of preparing an act of terrorism.

Abdullah Albadri, 34, (pictured) a failed asylum seeker from Kuwait, attempted to breach the embassy's perimeter in April 2025 because he wanted to send a message about "the killing of children", prosecutors said at his trial this month.

Albadri denied charges of preparing an act of terrorism and possession of two bladed articles, telling police he had the knives because he was homeless, but a jury found him guilty yesterday.

The verdicts came two days after two Jewish men were stabbed in north London in what police



described as a suspected terrorist incident, adding to heightened fears within Britain's Jewish community.

Albadri was arrested by two armed officers as he tried to scale the fence outside the embassy in west London last April. Prosecutors said he later told police he wanted to send a message about stopping the war, a reference to the Israeli-Hamas conflict in Gaza.

"The prosecution say that Mr Albadri's intention was to use or threaten serious violence against the Israeli government, to exact

revenge for its alleged murder of children," Catherine Pattison told jurors at the Old Bailey.

Pattison said Albadri had arrived in Britain via a small boat on two occasions and most recently entered the country in April last year, when he applied for asylum, claiming he faced risks in Kuwait as a human rights activist.

However, exchanges on his phone showed his asylum claim was rejected later that month, after which his intention began to shift to "far more sinister matters" and he started searching for the location of the Israeli embassy, Pattison said.

Commander Helen Flanagan, head of Counter Terrorism Policing London, said the Israeli embassy has faced a number of security alerts but police "continuously review and strengthen protective security plans to ensure the site and the wider community is kept as safe as possible".

British police charge driver over 2023 deaths of two schoolgirls

AFP
London

UK police have charged a driver who crashed her car into a southwest London school three years ago killing two young girls, police and prosecutors said yesterday.

Claire Freemantle, 49, was charged with causing death by dangerous driving over the July 2023 crash in Wimbledon after "significant new evidence" was passed to the Crown Prosecution Service, said David Malone, deputy chief prosecutor.

Nuria Sajjad and Selena Lau, both eight, were killed when a Land Rover crashed into The Study Prep private school as pupils were outside on the lawn celebrating the end of term. Ten others were treated for their injuries in hospital.

The crash triggered shock around the country.

Prosecutors said in June 2024 that they would not be charging Freemantle over the incident, as she had had an epileptic seizure behind the wheel of her car.

That had caused her to "lose control of the vehicle which then drove into the school," they said at the time.

But police reopened inquiries in October 2024 after concerns were raised by the victims' families, according to Commander Charmain Brenyah, who leads the roads and transport division of London's Metropolitan police.

"These charges follow a complex and rigorous reinvestigation



Floral tributes are laid outside a school gate after an eight-year-old girl died after a car crashed into The Study Preparatory School in Wimbledon, London. (Reuters/File Photo)

by detectives," she said in a statement, which "identified a number of issues relating to the first investigation".

Lawyers for Freemantle said in a statement that she would plead not guilty at a court appearance set for June 16.

"As a mother of school-aged children herself, Claire will be tortured for the rest of her life by the dreadful loss and injury resulting from the unimaginable tragedy of that day," defence lawyer Mark Jones said in a statement.

"However, Claire has no recollection of that terrible tragedy. Moments before the crash Claire suffered an epileptic seizure with loss of consciousness and memory."

He added the diagnosis had been made by an independent medical expert, who also confirmed that Freemantle had never before suffered an epileptic fit.

The girls' parents have long fought for their daughters' deaths to be re-investigated, arguing questions remained unanswered about exactly what had happened.

"From the very beginning, we have demanded one thing: the truth about why our daughters were killed," they said in a statement to the BBC.

The Metropolitan police said complaints against 11 officers involved in the previous inquiry were now being probed, and it had referred the case to the UK's independent police watchdog.

UK man appears in court over stabbing of two men

Reuters
London

A 45-year-old man appeared in a London court yesterday charged with attempted murder over an attack during which two Jewish men were stabbed in Golders Green, north London, in what police are treating as a terrorist incident.

In its wake, government officials raised the national terrorism threat to its second-highest level, meaning a terrorist attack is highly likely within the next six months.

The stabbings, on Wednesday, followed a spate of incidents targeting Jewish premises in the same area of north London, home to a large Jewish population, prompting British Prime Minister Keir Starmer to vow stronger action to protect Jewish people.

Pro-Palestinian marches — which critics say have encouraged antisemitism — could now face new restrictions amid widespread calls for more protection for Britain's small Jewish community of about 290,000.

Yesterday, Essa Suleiman appeared at London's Westminster Magistrates' Court charged with two counts of the attempted murder of 34-year-old Shloime Rand and 76-year-old Moshe Shine — named in the charges as Norman Shine — and possession of a bladed article in relation to Wednesday's attack.



A Police van leaves Westminster Magistrates Court, on the day Essa Suleiman appeared in the court, after he was charged with the attempted murder of two men in Golders Green, in London, yesterday. (Reuters)

Suleiman, a British national who was born in Somalia, was also charged with attempted murder in relation to a separate incident earlier on the same day in south London, when prosecutor Emma Harraway said he had visited a man's home and allegedly tried to stab him.

He allegedly then travelled to the north of the British capital later that day, she said.

The first victim, Rand, had been studying at a synagogue in Golders Green and was wearing "traditional clothing associated with an Orthodox Jewish man" when Suleiman allegedly ran at him and stabbed him with the knife, Harraway said.

Suleiman then allegedly attacked Shine, also wearing traditional Jewish attire, as he waited at a bus stop, the pros-

ecutor added, before the suspect was arrested by police using a stun gun, Harraway said.

Rand suffered a punctured lung but has since been released from hospital, while Shine suffered a stab wound to his neck, although the wound was not life threatening.

Suleiman, flanked by two security guards, appeared in the dock wearing a grey tracksuit, often stroking his goatee beard, and was remanded in custody until his next appearance at London's Old Bailey court on May 15.

Speaking only to confirm his name and date of birth, he gave no indication of any pleas to the charges, and the court was told by the prosecution his address was a mental health facility in south London.

Solomon Islands leader to face no-confidence vote after appeal court loss

AFP
Sydney

Solomon Islands Prime Minister Jeremiah Manele agreed yesterday to recall the South Pacific nation's parliament to face a vote of no confidence after losing a court appeal.

The government has been in an impasse since March, when it was hit by mass cabinet resignations and

the exit of two coalition partners.

The defections led the opposition to claim the government had lost its majority in parliament.

Manele has since avoided a confidence vote, which would eject him and his government from power if he loses.

The High Court ruled last month that the prime minister should recall parliament or resign, after he continued to avoid a no-confidence motion lodged by the

opposition coalition.

The appeal court said yesterday that Manele must take steps before noon on Tuesday to facilitate convening parliament so lawmakers can sit by May 7.

"The continued failure to take steps to facilitate the convening of parliament is inconsistent with the constitution," said a copy of the judgment viewed by AFP.

It dismissed Manele's argument that the High Court had ex-

ceeded its powers.

"The court does not intrude on parliament by ensuring parliament can sit," the judgment said.

A statement released by his office said Manele acknowledged the court ruling.

"The Prime Minister confirms that he will comply with the orders as given by the court," it said. "The Prime Minister looks forward to the Motion of No Confidence being debated on the floor of Parliament."

Attorney General John Muria told SBM Online earlier outside the court he was disappointed "but the court has spoken".

The Royal Solomon Islands Police Force deployed officers outside the court and called for calm.

Commissioner of Police Ian Vaevaso, sworn in by Manele on Wednesday, issued a statement earlier saying "police are independent of politics" and would not take sides. A no-confidence motion against

Manele was filed in March after 12 cabinet ministers resigned from his government and two parties quit the governing coalition.

The new opposition coalition of six political parties says that it commands 27 seats compared to the government's 23.

Following the resignations, Manele appointed former leader and staunch Beijing ally Manasseh Sogavare as deputy prime minister, deepening the turmoil.

Clashes erupt in Australian town over death of Indigenous girl

AFP
Sydney

An angry crowd clashed with Australian police outside a hospital treating the suspected killer of a five-year-old Indigenous girl in the outback town of Alice Springs.

Images on local media yesterday showed teargas in the air, a police van in flames and crowds yelling at armed officers keeping people at bay during the overnight confrontation.

The violence followed the discovery Thursday of a body south of Alice Springs believed to be that of the little girl, referred to at her family's request as Kumanjayi Little Baby.

She had disappeared from an Indigenous community camp called Old Timers late on Saturday night, sparking a vast, days-long search on foot, horseback, and by heli-



A police vehicle burns after community members clashed with police outside Alice Springs Hospital, where a 47-year-old man arrested in connection with the alleged killing of five-year-old Kumanjayi Little Baby was taken, in Alice Springs. (Reuters)

copter that gripped much of the country.

Police said a formal autopsy would be held on the child's body, which was found about five kilometres (three miles) from the camp.

Hours after her body was found, police announced they had arrested the suspect, Jefferson Lewis.

Lewis was beaten until he was unconscious after turning himself in to Indigenous community

members on Thursday evening at a camp by Alice Springs, in central Australia.

When police and emergency services intervened, they too came under attack, said Northern Territory Police Force Commissioner Martin Dole.

"At the time of his apprehension by us, he was unconscious and he was in the process of being treated by St John's Ambulance when they were set upon, as were the police," he told a news conference.

Lewis was then taken to hospital.

"A large crowd gathered and tried to gain access to that hospital," the police commissioner said.

"We called out all the resources we had available to quell that violent disturbance. And just let me say that the behaviour that we saw last night cannot be explained away, excused or accepted."

Dole said "a number" of police were injured at the hospital, and



A woman is carried by police during community unrest outside Alice Springs Hospital, in Alice Springs. (Reuters)

one officer was treated for a head wound inflicted during the suspect's arrest.

Ambulance and fire crew members were also attacked, he said, with one fire and rescue officer receiving a "significant facial injury". One woman was being investigated for allegedly trying to set a police car alight.

Many people outside the hospital shouted that Lewis must face

"payback", public broadcaster ABC reported, referring to a traditional punishment in central Australian Indigenous communities.

"I just call for calm across the community," Dole said.

Police said they removed Lewis for his safety from hospital to the Northern Territory capital of Darwin, where he was being held in custody. He is expected to face charges in the coming days.

US Hormuz coalition 'not in competition' with France, Britain-led bid: French FM

AFP
Abu Dhabi

France's top diplomat yesterday said a new US-led coalition to reopen the Strait of Hormuz would complement and not compete with a similar mission spearheaded by France and Britain.

Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot, speaking in Abu Dhabi following a regional tour, said he briefed Gulf allies on the UK-France initiative which was now at an "advanced" stage.

On Thursday, a US official confirmed to AFP that Washington was launching an international coalition dubbed the "Maritime Freedom Construct" to restart shipping in the vital route.

The strait, which normally carries

one-fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas, has been effectively blockaded by Iran over the Middle East war, sending prices soaring and choking trade networks.

The UK and France have led talks on a separate maritime effort, recently holding a meeting with more than 50 countries.

The US mission is "not of the same nature as the one we established... it comes as a sort of complement", Barrot said in the capital of the United Arab Emirates, following visits to Saudi Arabia and Oman.

"It is not in competition with the initiative we have launched and on which we are focused," he added.

The *Wall Street Journal* said a reported diplomatic cable called on US embassies to press foreign

governments to take part in the US-led effort.

Asked whether France would join Washington's initiative, Barrot said he could not comment at this stage.

The UK-France mission "is now at an advanced stage, the planning has been finalised, and I have come to present the concept of this mission to a number of our closest partners in the region", he added.

US President Donald Trump has lashed out at allies' reluctance to get involved in the US-Israeli war on Iran, and previously urged oil-reliant nations to take responsibility for reopening the strait.

Iran has vowed not to reopen the waterway as long as the US blockades its ports. The closure has had a widespread impact on the global economy, with oil prices hitting a four-year high this week.

France, Germany send firefighters to help battle Dutch blazes

AFP
Amsterdam

France and Germany sent firefighting units to the Netherlands yesterday to help battle woodland blazes flaring in several areas.

Many of the fires, which sparked on Wednesday and Thursday, were raging in land used for military training, including an artillery range, in the south. Stretched Dutch authorities requested help facing the emergency through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, with France and Germany responding. French Interior Minister Laurent Nunez said on X that Paris had despatched 41 civil security personnel and 10 vehicles.

A total of 67 firefighters, 21 vehicles and three trailers were



A firefighter works to extinguish a wildfire near Budel, yesterday, a day after it broke out at a military training ground where a military exercise was taking place. (AFP)

sent by the Bonn fire service in Germany. A Dutch military spokesman, Major Mike Hofman, yesterday confirmed to AFP that army "training grounds were in use at the time the fires broke out".

He said an investigation was under way "examining whether there is a connection between

the military operations and the origin of the fires". The head of the Dutch armed forces said on Thursday that extra precautions were being taken on terrain used for drills because of a drought currently parching the country. He added, however, that the military exercises being conducted would not be suspended.

Turkish police fire tear gas, arrest scores at May Day rallies

AFP
Istanbul

Turkish police yesterday fired tear gas and arrested hundreds of people holding May Day demonstrations in Istanbul, as thousands rallied nationwide.

A statement from the office of the governor of Istanbul said that as of 6:00pm (1500 GMT), police had arrested 575 people, describing them as people who had defied security decisions.

Earlier, the CHD Lawyers' Association said police had arrested at least 550 people by mid-afternoon in Istanbul, where police fired tear gas from riot-control vehicles into the crowd, AFP journalists observed.

Large numbers of police, many in riot gear, had set up metal barricades to cut off access to central neighbourhoods of Istanbul, including Taksim Square, the site of many gatherings.

Images aired on the opposition channel HALK TV also showed the president of the Turkish Workers' Party, Erkan Bas, engulfed in pepper spray.

"Those in power already speak 365 days a year, so let workers talk about the hardships they face at least one day a year," he said.

Police focussed on groups who



Police officers block access to Taksim Square using barriers during a May Day (Labour Day), marking International Workers' Day, in the Taksim district of Istanbul, yesterday. (AFP)

had signalled their intention to march to Taksim Square — the scene of several anti-government protests in the past — which had been sealed off overnight by police.

A union official, Basaran Aksu, was arrested just after denouncing the Taksim lockdown.

"You can't close off a square to the workers of Turkey," he said.

"Everyone uses Taksim, for

official ceremonies, for celebrations. Only the labourers, the workers, the poor find the square closed to them."

May Day, which celebrates workers and the working classes, sees a major police deployment in Turkey every year, with a large area in the heart of Istanbul sealed off.

Last year, protests moved to the Kadikoy area of the city and more

than 400 people were arrested.

In the Mecidiyekoy district, AFP reporters saw police use tear gas on the crowd, which included members of a Marxist party, the HKP, as they tried to push through while chanting "USA murderer, AKP (Turkey's ruling party) accomplice".

Police encircling the Besiktas neighbourhood stepped in — sometimes violently — whenever a chant was taken up by the demonstrators. AFP saw several protesters thrown to the ground.

Unions and civil society associations had called for the May 1 demonstrations under the slogan "Bread. Peace. Freedom".

While inflation in Turkey is officially pegged at 30%, it is closer to 40, according to independent estimates.

In Ankara, about 100 coal miners who had staged a nine-day hunger strike to demand wage arrears were cheered as they joined the May Day march.

The turnout, notably large and youthful, was monitored by a significant police presence, an AFP journalist said.

Earlier this week, Turkish authorities issued arrest and search warrants against 62 people, of whom they deemed 46 — including journalists, trade unionists and opposition figures — "likely to carry out attacks".

Missing Oscar statuette for Mr. Nobody Against Putin found

Reuters
London

An Oscar statuette belonging to Russian director Pavel Talankin (pictured) who won best documentary this year for *Mr. Nobody Against Putin* has been found after going missing on a flight from New York to Germany, German airline Lufthansa said yesterday.

Talankin had been forced to check the award into hold luggage before boarding a flight from John F Kennedy International Airport to Frankfurt, according to a post by his co-director David Borenstein on Instagram. Transportation Security Administration (TSA) agents told Talankin that the 8.5lb (3.8kg) statuette posed a potential security threat, Borenstein said, adding that the award then went missing.

"We can confirm that the Oscar statue has now been located and is safely in our care in Frankfurt. We are in direct contact with the guest to arrange its personal return as quickly as possible," a spokesperson for Lufthansa said.

"We sincerely regret the inconvenience caused and have apologised to the owner. The careful and secure handling of our guests' belongings is of the utmost importance to us. An internal review of the circumstances is ongoing."

The TSA did not immediately reply to an e-mailed request for comment.



"At the airport, a TSA agent stopped him and said the Oscar could be used as a weapon," Borenstein said on Instagram about Talankin.

"Pavel didn't have a bag to check it in, so the TSA put the Oscar in a box and sent it to the bottom of the plane," he said, posting a series of pictures, including of the box.

Speaking to the online magazine *Deadline.com* after arriving in Germany on Thursday, Talankin said it was "completely baffling how they consider an Oscar a weapon".

On previous flights on various airlines, he had flown with it "in the cabin, and there never was any kind of problem," he told the outlet. Talankin and Borenstein's documentary used two years of footage that Talankin had recorded at a school where he worked in Russia's Chelyabinsk region to show how students were exposed to messaging in favour of President Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine.

Baguettes take centre stage on France's Labour Day

AFP
Paris

French bakeries sold crusty baguettes and flaky croissants with government backing yesterday, defying labour unions arguing that May 1 should remain a day of compulsory rest.

Prime Minister Sebastien Lecornu ordered several baguettes for lunch in front of the cameras in the village of Saint-Julien-Chapteuil in central France.

"Let's have several... at least four," he said, as he sought to promote a new bill to clearly exempt independent bread and flower shops from mandatory rest on Labour Day.

Under French law, "May 1 is a public holiday and a non-working day". Essential services — such as hospitals and hotels — can remain open but must pay their staff double.

But there has been confusion

about whether bakeries can make their employees work.

Labour inspectors on the public holiday in 2024 reported five bakers to the authorities for operating. Although the bakers were all acquitted last year, their plight sparked debate across France.

The government earlier this week encouraged bakers to work on May 1, saying they were "indispensable to the continuity of social life". It also said florists could employ staff to sell fragrant lily of the valley, which is traditionally sold on Labour Day in France.

On Wednesday, the cabinet put forward a bill — that has yet to go to a vote in parliament — to allow both bakeries and florists to open on the first day of May, provided staff volunteer to work in writing and are paid double wages.

The government decided not to back a previous proposal for more businesses including butchers and fishmongers to open on the public holiday.



An employee works in a bakery in Quimper, western France. (AFP)

The country's main unions argue that no employee is truly free to volunteer when they are seeking to keep a work contract.

They fear French workers will soon all be required to work on the holiday as exceptions gradually become the rule.

"Hands off May 1," read the poster of a hard-left activist at a May Day protest in Paris.

Leader of the main CGT union

Sophie Binet criticised "employers who feel entitled to open all their businesses and make their staff work on May 1, even though it's not allowed".

"The government must ensure that the law and the rule of law are upheld," she said, leading the protest in the capital.

She added that the public holiday was not however her chief concern.

Thousands evacuated as Tuscany wildfire spreads

AFP/Reuters
Rome

Italian authorities yesterday evacuated some 3,500 people in its famed Tuscany region as they try to tame a wildfire there that has been raging for more than 24 hours.

Over 800 hectares (nearly 2,000 acres) have been ravaged by the fire in the mountains between the historic cities of Lucca and Pisa.

It was likely provoked by the burning of olive tree prunings that got out of hand, Matteo Cecchelli told public broadcaster RAI.

"Around 3,500 people are affected," the municipality of San Giuliano Terme said in a statement.

"The wind... has pushed the



ANPAS Volunteer fighters extinguish a spot fire on the edges of a wildfire in Faeta mount forest near Pisa province in Santa Maria del Giudice yesterday. (AFP)

flames farther downhill" towards the village of Asciano, it said.

The statement said that three Canadair water-dumping planes

and a helicopter were dousing the wildfire.

"The fire is still very much active," the deputy mayor of Lucca, Fabio Barsanti, said in a Facebook video.

"All efforts are being made to contain as much as possible the perimeter of the fire, but we cannot relax or make predictions because we are at the mercy of the wind," he said.

It added that there were 19 fire brigade vehicles and army and police were assisting with the evacuation. Two gyms in the area equipped to put up evacuees were housing around 107 people, the statement said. Wildfires are common in Italy but usually in the summer months yet to come — although the season has been starting sooner because of rising temperatures.



A firefighting plane sprays repellent to fight a wildfire in Faeta mount forest near Pisa province in Santa Maria del Giudice yesterday. (AFP)



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GULF TIMES

Orban faces uncertain path after Hungary election rout

Viktor Orban's crushing election defeat has thrown the Hungarian nationalist's political future into doubt and shattered his reputation as an all-powerful leader. While senior members of Orban's Fidesz party seem to have closed ranks behind him, rare public dissent from the party has seeped out, and analysts say it will be difficult to recover from the landslide loss that ended his 16-year rule.

Last week, Orban -- who aimed to make the central European country of 9.5mn people a model of "illiberal democracy" -- announced he would not take up his parliamentary seat, saying he was needed for the "reorganisation of the national camp".

This marks the first time the 62-year-old -- who has cultivated close ties with US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin -- will be absent from parliament since Hungary's democratisation in 1990. Orban was routed in the April 12 elections by newcomer Peter Magyar, whose party won with 55%, securing a two-thirds majority in parliament, on the promise of "regime change".

Orban's Fidesz-KDNP alliance lost more than half its parliamentary seats, getting 39% of the vote. Following the loss, Orban on Tuesday offered to resign as Fidesz leader, but the party's national board reportedly rejected his resignation. He is expected to run unopposed for the post at a Fidesz congress on June 13, as analysts say his grip on the party remains firm as ever.

"He turned Fidesz into his personal party, where the primary unifying force is admiration, respect, loyalty or a mixture of these towards him," Szabolcs Dull, who runs the political podcast Optontban, told AFP. But the election results have prompted some rare criticism from within Fidesz.

Orban's Fidesz-KDNP alliance lost more than half its parliamentary seats, getting 39% of the vote. Following the loss, Orban on Tuesday offered to resign as Fidesz leader, but the party's national board reportedly rejected his resignation

Outgoing lawmaker Orsolya Ferencz, 55, insisted the party needed to learn from the loss, which she compared to a "divine judgment". "The responsibility of certain politicians, business circles, think tanks and the media must be examined," she told AFP, but declined to be more specific. "The lack of morality, often manifesting as the pursuit of financial (gain) or power at all costs, adverse selection, and the trampling of professionalism, is unacceptable."

But Ferencz stressed it was up to Orban to decide what kind of role he seeks in "rebuilding" their political community, lauding him for his "historic accomplishments".

Orban managed to bounce back once before: Ousted in 2002 after his first term as premier, he returned eight years later. "He has a unique capacity for adaptability, and resilience in Hungarian politics," said Zoltan Novak, project director at the Centre for Fair Political Analysis.

"But now his presence jeopardises renewal, because he represents the 16-year period that voters have overwhelmingly rejected," he added. Incoming premier Magyar, 45, has pledged to enshrine a two-term limit in the constitution for prime ministers, theoretically preventing Orban's return to power.

Some Fidesz voters have felt deceived -- with Orban's allies insisting even on election night that polls predicted their win. A fresh survey from pollster Median found Fidesz had lost about a third of its support base post-election. It also indicated that almost half the population -- even 18% of Fidesz voters -- believe Orban's coalition lost because of corruption.

Magyar put the issue at the forefront of his campaign, blaming underfunded public services on allegedly corrupt oligarchs. The pro-EU conservative has pledged a sweeping crackdown on corruption, urging authorities to stop Fidesz cronies from moving their capital abroad to the "United States, Uruguay and the United Arab Emirates" until then.

But Orban, in his sole post-election interview, denied graft was ever a problem under his governance, putting the blame on business associates "flexing" their wealth.

He is "unable" to admit this, because "corruption and avoiding responsibility" were the main features of Orban's system, according to Rafael Labanino, a political scientist from Germany's Nuerntingen-Geislingen University. Labanino said he expects Orban's position will deteriorate further as the generous state funding pro-Fidesz media enjoyed over the past 16 years will "dry up". -- AFP

May Day break



A boy poses for photos with Chinese flags on the Great Wall of China at Badaling, north of Beijing, yesterday on the first day of a five-day national May Day holiday. -- AFP

'Dialogue, adherence to international law core pillars of conflict resolution'

HE Sheikha Alya reiterates Qatar's position before the United Nations Security Council's quarterly open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question at the UN headquarters in New York

QNA
New York

Qatar has affirmed that serious dialogue and adherence to the principles of international law and good neighbourliness are the fundamental pillars for resolving crises and avoiding their dangerous repercussions.

This came in a statement delivered by HE Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the United Nations, Sheikha Alya Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani, before the United Nations Security Council's quarterly open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question at the UN headquarters in New York.

HE Sheikha Alya noted that the Council meeting is being held amidst the current situation in the Arabian Gulf region, since Feb 28, and the subsequent serious and multifaceted repercussions for it has on international peace and security. She reaffirmed Qatar's condemnation of attacks by the Islamic Republic of Iran against Qatar and Gulf states, as well as all violations targeting the national sovereignty of Qatar and the countries of the region, including attacks on residential areas, vital infrastructure, and energy facilities, which resulted in civilian casualties and material losses, constituting violations of international law and international humanitarian law.

The UN Security Council Resolution 2817, submitted by the Kingdom of Bahrain on behalf of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states and Jordan and backed by 136 countries, underscored strong support for the territorial integrity, sovereignty, and political independence of these



HE Sheikha Alya Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani

states, she said, adding that it also emphasized respect for navigational rights and freedoms in accordance with international law, particularly concerning vital maritime routes.

Regarding developments in the Strait of Hormuz, HE the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the UN stressed the importance of ensuring security of maritime routes, freedom of navigation and international trade in line with international law. The strait's security is linked to global energy security and supply chains, calling for concerted efforts to guarantee freedom of navigation and the opening of maritime routes, as it has regional and international implications.

She noted that Qatar welcomed the US-Iran ceasefire announcement on April 8, expressing appreciation for mediation efforts by Pakistan and other parties, and stressed the importance of full commitment to consolidating de-escalation and creating suitable conditions for dialogue.

Regarding the occupied Palestinian territories, Qatar condemned the illegal Israeli

occupation's measures in the West Bank, including reclassifying Palestinian land as so-called Israeli "state land," accelerating settlement activity, approving legislation allowing the death penalty, and restricting freedom of worship in occupied Jerusalem. It reaffirmed its support for a two-state solution based on international legitimacy, ensuring the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, and the necessity of ending the occupation, settlement activity, and all illegal Israeli practices in the occupied territory.

Regarding the current situation in the Gaza Strip, she explained that Qatar emphasises the necessity for all parties to fully implement the ceasefire agreement in Gaza and to open the crossings to ensure the sustainable and unhindered flow of humanitarian aid to the Strip. She affirmed Qatar's full and unwavering commitment to the Peace Council since the inception of mediation efforts, up to and including the signing of the Sharm El-Sheikh

Agreement with partners. She also reiterated Qatar's continued coordination of humanitarian efforts with partners in the United Nations and the Peace Council, supporting the recovery and reconstruction process and enhancing the prospects for sustainable peace.

As for the situation in the Gaza Strip, Qatar stressed the need for full implementation of the ceasefire agreement, the opening of crossings to ensure sustained and unhindered humanitarian aid, and reaffirmed its continued commitment to mediation efforts and co-ordination with UN partners to support recovery, reconstruction, and prospects for lasting peace.

HE Sheikha Alya affirmed Qatar's unwavering commitment to the Peace Council up to, and including, the signing of the Sharm El-Sheikh Agreement with partners. She also reiterated Qatar's continued co-ordination of humanitarian efforts with partners in the United Nations and the Peace Council to support the reconstruction process and enhance the prospects for sustainable peace.

She stated that Qatar reaffirms its support for the sovereignty and unity of Syria, condemning Israeli attacks that violate international law, and affirmed its firm stance on the unity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Lebanon, expressing full solidarity with measures taken to preserve its security and stability.

HE the Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the United Nations also pointed out that Qatar welcomes the ceasefire as an initial step toward de-escalation and appreciates mediation efforts, including those by US President Donald Trump, stressing the need to uphold and build on the ceasefire.

NPT essential instrument for achieving collective security: Qatar

NEW YORK: Qatar stressed the importance of strict implementation of the obligations arising from international agreements in the field of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

This came in a statement delivered by HE Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the United Nations Sheikha Alya Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani, who headed Qatar's delegation participating in the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), before the general debate of the 2026 NPT Review Conference, at the UN headquarters in New York.

HE Sheikha Alya stressed that the NPT is the cornerstone of the international disarmament and non-proliferation regime and an essential instrument for achieving collective security, which requires a full, balanced and non-selective commitment to implementing its three pillars, noting that the Review Conference contributes to focusing efforts to achieve the goals set out in this important treaty.

Regarding the Middle East, she said that the 1995 resolution on the Middle East is an integral part of the treaty system, stressing the need to implement this resolution by establishing a zone free of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East, which is a

fundamental step towards achieving security and stability in the region.

She also expressed Qatar's hope that the current session of the NPT Review Conference would adopt outcomes that support this goal, stressing Qatar's support for the fraternal Sultanate of Oman as chair of the current session of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction.

Regarding the failure of the NPT review conferences in 2015 and 2022 to produce a consensus document, HE the Permanent Representative stressed the importance of redoubling efforts and demonstrating genuine political will to revive international consensus in order to reach outcomes and results that contribute to achieving the objectives of the current Review Conference and to achieving international security, while emphasizing the importance of nuclear-weapon states making concrete and time-bound commitments to the complete and total elimination of those weapons in accordance with Article VI of the NPT.

She stressed that Qatar emphasises the pivotal role of the International Atomic Energy

Agency as the competent international body for verifying states' commitment to using nuclear materials and technology for peaceful purposes only, while also stressing the importance of strengthening the comprehensive safeguards system and the Additional Protocol, as well as good faith full co-operation to ensure the peaceful and responsible nature of nuclear activities.

HE Sheikha Alya underscored the importance of taking into account the highest standards of safety and security, and limiting the risks of radioactive leakage and its effects on neighbouring countries, the environment and water sources, with verifiable guarantees that it will not be diverted for military purposes. She called for all countries to join international agreements related to nuclear safety, and to commit to not transferring nuclear technology and materials to countries that are not parties to the treaty without meeting safety and security requirements.

HE the Permanent Representative affirmed that Qatar will continue to work with its partners to ensure that this conference leads to real results that enhance collective security and brings everyone closer to that goal. **(QNA)**

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Ukraine rolls out army reform plan

Reuters
Kyiv

Ukraine announced plans yesterday to carry out reforms of the army this summer to address problems with infantry shortages and the discharge of the longest-serving soldiers, four years into a grinding war with Russia in which talks have stalled.

Despite an initial influx of volunteers, Ukraine's military has been significantly outmanned throughout the war since Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022.

Manpower shortages have become an even more pressing issue as enthusiasm for service has waned amid reports of poor training and support, as well as heavy-handed draft officers.

"Now, in May, all key details will be finalised. In June, the reform will begin — and the first results must already be delivered in June," President Volodymyr Zelensky said on Telegram.

He promised higher pay for the infantry, one of the least desirable and most dangerous roles, with troops on the front line exposed to non-stop drone attacks.

"A Ukrainian infantryman who holds the front line must feel that our state truly respects him," Zelensky said.



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine Kyrylo Budanov, Secretary of National Security and Defence Council Rustem Umerov and Commander in Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskiy attend a National Security and Defence Council meeting, in Kyiv. (Reuters/File Photo)

With US-mediated peace talks stalled, Zelensky has said Ukraine must be ready to fight on if a deal cannot be reached.

Military analysts estimate that more than a million people are serving in the defence of Ukraine. Conscription and military issues, including pay and length of service, are divisive in Ukrainian society and are politically sensitive.

Mykhailo Fedorov, who was named defence minister in January with a mandate to improve mobilisation and deal with draft evasion, said the changes announced yesterday amounted to a "systemic

transformation of the army.

"We are preparing to implement the first projects under the reform: a fair-pay model, a new contract system with clear terms of service and a transparent rotation policy, new approaches to staffing our units, and more," Fedorov said on Telegram.

Zelensky said that under the new system, wages for non-combat positions should reach at least 30,000 hryvnias (\$683) a month, a one-third increase from the current rate.

"For combat positions, it should be several times higher," he added.

"For Ukrainian commanders, combat sergeants and officers, pay must be dignified and significantly higher."

Special contracts for the infantry will range from 250,000 to 400,000 hryvnias, Zelensky added.

Introducing these changes will increase Ukraine's financial constraints as it depends on foreign aid and frequently needs to review its budget to cover expanding military needs.

Most servicemen who have joined the army since the 2022 invasion do not have fixed terms of service. Media reports have frequently emerged of troops serving for months at the same positions without rotation.

The planned changes should eventually make possible the discharge of those serving for a long time, officials said.

Zelensky said he wants to see that "defined service duration terms are ensured and — starting this year — a phased discharge from service becomes possible for those who were mobilised earlier, based on clear time-based criteria".

Serhii Sternenko, a well-known military volunteer who is now a defence ministry adviser, said:

"If we manage to carry out everything the Ministry of Defence has planned, we will defeat Russia. There's no other option."

Russia pounds Ukraine with drones in daytime attack



Firefighters work at the site of a gas station hit by a Russian drone strike, in Kharkiv, yesterday. (Reuters)

Reuters
Kyiv

Russia launched more than 400 drones at Ukraine in a daytime attack, injuring 10 people in the western city of Ternopil, Ukrainian officials said yesterday.

Ukraine's air force said Russia attacked the country with 409 drones between 8am and 3.30pm local time (0500-1230 GMT). Air force units downed or neutralised 388 of them in the north, south, centre and west of the country, it said.

The air force had earlier said that Russia sent 210 drones at Ukraine in an overnight attack.

Since the beginning of the war more than four years ago, Russia has mainly carried out major drone and missile strikes at night. In recent weeks, it has repeatedly sent hundreds of drones and missiles during the daytime, setting a record for the number of weapons used in one such strike on March 24.

In Ternopil, which lies some 150-200km from the Polish border, 10 people were hurt in

the attack, which hit industrial and infrastructure facilities, the city's mayor said.

The attack also caused blackouts in some areas, Serhiy Nadal said on Telegram, adding that over 50 drones had been involved.

In central Ukraine, 19 drones were downed over the Cherkasy region, the regional governor said, reporting damage to a nursery, a school, seven private houses and a power line.

A woman was hurt in the central Vinnytsia region, the local governor said, adding that a building was destroyed in the attack.

Near the southern city of Odesa, which had come under the overnight attack, another daytime attack damaged the roof of a shopping centre and caused a fire, the regional governor said.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian drones struck Russia's Black Sea port of Tuapse yesterday for the fourth time in 16 days as authorities struggled with a mounting environmental disaster from toxic black smoke clouds and oil leaking into the sea.

EU suspends funds for Serbia over law reforms

AFP
Belgrade

The European Union has frozen funds earmarked for Serbia under a special aid project for six Balkan countries over controversial judicial reforms, the bloc's enlargement commissioner has said.

The EU Growth Plan for the Western Balkans provides six billion euros (\$7.06bn) in funding for 2024-2027 to boost the economies of these countries and accelerate EU integration of the region.

"For the time being, we have stopped all payments from the Growth Plan because it was backsliding in the judiciary," EU commissioner Marta Kos said late Thursday in Switzerland.

"As long as this is not repaired, they will not

be able to get European financial support," she told an event at the University of Fribourg.

Her remarks came after Serbia's parliament passed judicial reforms without consulting prosecutors, judges, the European Union or other expert bodies.

Critics say the amendments, passed in January, give court presidents greater powers over judges and remove safeguards guaranteeing prosecutors' independence, raising concerns in the EU and the Council of Europe.

The changes come amid several high-profile corruption investigations targeting senior government and ruling party officials.

AFP contacted the European Commission to ask whether a formal decision had been made on the funding pause, but has not received a response.

The disbursement of Growth Plan funds are

conditional on reforms, including ensuring judicial independence and fighting corruption.

Serbia received its first tranche of 56.5m euros (\$66.3m) in mid-January under the plan, with a total of 1.58bn euros (\$1.85bn) earmarked for the EU candidate.

Kos also criticised curbs on democracy and media freedom.

"Serbia is highly polarised today," she said, referring to the heated political climate after almost a year and a half of anti-corruption protests.

"It has been a candidate for more than a decade, and unfortunately, we are seeing backsliding," she added, also criticising Serbia's foreign policy.

Serbia remains a close Kremlin ally and one of the few European states not to sanction Russia over the war in Ukraine.

"You cannot sit on two chairs," Kos said.

French hub monitors Hormuz tensions from afar

AFP
Brest

A dozen members of the French navy scour screens for blinking lights indicating movement thousands of kilometres away near the Strait of Hormuz.

Since the start of the Iran war in late February, staff at a maritime security centre in western France have been helping merchant ships trapped in the Gulf.

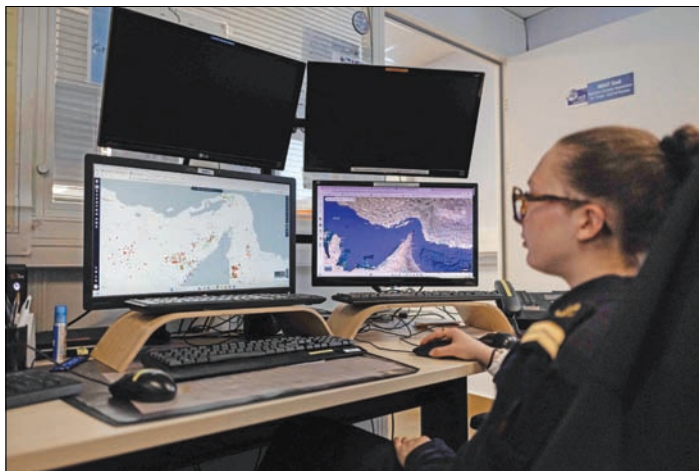
Twin Iranian and US blockades of the Strait of Hormuz have left more than 750 civilian ships stranded on the Gulf side of the passageway, through which a fifth of global crude oil and liquefied natural gas transited before the conflict. Only a handful have managed to leave in recent weeks.

If the Maritime Information Co-operation and Awareness Center (MICA centre) detects any form of bombardment, it immediately sends nearby ships — container ships, cargo vessels and cruise liners — an encrypted message.

"We share the nature of the event, its context and exact position," commanding officer Thomas Scalabre tells AFP in a basement in the French city of Brest.

"They can respond quickly, moving away from the danger if there are shots or debris, or even turn off their transponders so as not to be detected," he adds.

This information is sent within a radius of 50 nautical miles. For



A worker of the Maritime International Co-operation and Awareness (MICA) centre looks at screens at the MICA in Brest. (AFP)

comparison, the strait itself is 29 nautical miles wide at its narrowest point.

The information on the MICA centre's monitoring screens is a mixture of satellite images, ship locations emitted by their transponders, and information shared by crews at sea.

It provides help to 85 maritime transport companies, including French group CMA CGM and Danish giant Maersk.

Beyond threats from the Middle East war, the MICA centre also tracks the rest of the world's waters — including Yemeni rebel missile and drone attacks in the Red Sea, piracy off Somalia, and drug smuggling.

MICA has recorded around 40

security incidents, including 24 Iranian direct attacks on commercial vessels since February 28, some of them deadly, Scalabre says.

France and the United Kingdom have pledged to set up a peaceful coalition to re-open the Strait of Hormuz — but it is not to operate until after the conflict is resolved. Peace talks have stalled in recent weeks.

In the meantime, "the rules Iran imposes on navigation remain very unclear and are constantly shifting," Scalabre says, including with regards to which ships the Iran's Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) might decide to single out.

"There isn't necessarily any logic in the IRGC's targeting policy.

We've seen many different nationalities and types of vessels" being targeted, he said.

IRGC gunboats on April 18 fired at India-flagged tanker Sanmar Herald without prior radio contact, security intelligence firm Vanguard Tech reported, despite India being viewed as a "friend" of Iran, as are China, Russia, Iraq and Pakistan.

Iran also claims to have laid sea mines in the main part of the waterway.

"What matters is the psychological effect. No one will take the risk of venturing there," Scalabre says.

Tehran can authorise some ships to leave the Gulf or enter it via the Strait of Hormuz.

But "even when they obtain it, the IRGC's 'mosquito fleet' can emerge to block their way," Scalabre says.

In his office, the commanding officer enlarges an image showing a swarm of speedboats carrying out such an attack.

A dozen Iranian patrol boats burst forth, carving white foamy wakes behind them as they encircle and seize a vessel before it can leave.

"They sometimes carry out indiscriminate attacks, whether the country is considered friendly or not," the French navy officer says.

"For Tehran, controlling the Strait of Hormuz remains one of its trump cards to exert pressure and negotiate" a way out of the conflict, he adds.

War criminal Mladic asks for release from prison

AFP
The Hague

Lawyers for Bosnian Serb war criminal Ratko Mladic, 84, serving a life sentence in The Hague, asked for his release yesterday, saying he was seriously ill and close to death following a stroke.

The defence team behind the urgent motion asserted that Mladic, convicted of genocide nine years ago, is "in a state of advanced, irreversible medical decline resulting from a medical incident... and is approaching the end of his life".

His lawyers hope to secure his provisional release to allow the former Bosnian Serb mili-

tary commander's transfer to Serbia for medical treatment, according to the motion dated April 30.

Mladic's son Darko Mladic told Bosnian Serb public television April 15 he had received information on his father's health via a UN-authorised doctor, who he said informed him his father had suffered "a silent (minor) stroke".

A UN tribunal in 2017 sentenced Mladic to life imprisonment for genocide and war crimes during Bosnia's 1990s war, which claimed an estimated 100,000 lives. The verdict was confirmed on appeal in 2021.

One of the crimes ascribed to him was the July 1995 massacre of approximately 8,000 Bosnian men and boys in the eastern Srebrenica region.

Mladic was arrested in Serbia in 2011.

Mladic's defence counsel said he had suffered "an acute neurological/medical episode characterised by sudden total aphasia" or loss of the ability to speak and was having difficulty swallowing as evidenced from a video call with his son, which had led to his emergency hospitalisation.

"Doctors have offered reports that confirm the fact that Mr Mladic's condition is serious, life-threatening... and such that it cannot be adequately treated in the hospital prison," his defence team stated in the motion.

In late April, several associations representing Bosnian victims of the 1992-1995 war urged the international court not to authorise Mladic's transfer to Serbia.

Russia successfully test launches Soyuz-5 rocket

Reuters
Moscow

Russia has test launched its new Soyuz-5 rocket for the first time, the country's space agency said late on Thursday, saying it had lifted off from the Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan without any issues.

The Soyuz-5, which Roscosmos, Russia's space agency, describes as a launch vehicle equipped with the world's most powerful liquid-fuelled engine, lifted off successfully at 2100 Moscow time (1800 GMT) on

April 30, it said in a statement.

The new rocket is capable of carrying payloads of up to 17 metric tonnes, will significantly reduce launch costs, and is more effective than its predecessors at placing objects like satellites in near earth orbit, the agency said.

Dmitry Bakanov, the head of Roskosmos, said the rocket — which he hailed as a "new step in space exploration" — would create new jobs in Russia and Kazakhstan.

Bakanov has previously told President Vladimir Putin that the Soyuz-5 is the first new launch vehicle that Russia has developed since 2014.

Azerbaijan summons EU envoy in row over treatment of Karabakh Armenians



Vehicles carrying refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh, a region inhabited by ethnic Armenians, queue on the road leading towards the Armenian border, in Nagorno-Karabakh. (Reuters/File Photo)

Reuters
Baku

Azerbaijan summoned the EU's ambassador yesterday to protest against a European Parliament resolution condemning Baku's detention of Armenian prisoners of war and backing the rights of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh.

The resolution denounced what it called Azerbaijan's "unjust detention" of Armenian prisoners of war, detainees and hostages" and demanded their immediate release. It also reiterated the European Union's support for the rights of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians and called for accountability for the destruction of their cultural and religious heritage.

Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry dismissed the resolution as "unfounded and biased", saying Karabakh Armenians had left the region voluntarily. It said those described by the EU as prisoners of war had committed serious crimes, including war crimes.

Ethnic Armenians in Karabakh, an internationally recognised part of Azerbaijan, broke away from Baku's control as the

Soviet Union fell apart in 1991.

Azerbaijan and Armenia fought two wars over the mountainous territory before Baku took it back in 2023 and its entire ethnic Armenian population of around 100,000 people fled to neighbouring Armenia.

Karabakh officials captured at that time were placed on trial in Baku in January 2025, accused of a battery of charges including war crimes. International human rights groups have raised concerns about the fairness of the trial.

In February, Ruben Vardanyan, an Armenian-born billionaire banker who served as a senior official in Nagorno-Karabakh, was sentenced to 20 years in prison.

In a further sign of fury at the European Parliament's resolution, Azerbaijan's parliament said it was severing ties with the assembly, which it accused of conducting a "smear campaign" against Baku.

"This organisation not only hinders the development of relations between Azerbaijan and the European Union, but also opposes measures aimed at establishing long-term peace and stability in our region," the parliament said in a statement.

Umm Al Seneem Park big draw for fitness enthusiasts, nature lovers



The Umm Al Seneem Park has become a favourite spot for fitness enthusiasts and nature lovers as the winter season is over. Its innovative feature that maintains a pleasant temperature on its walking and jogging tracks attracts a large number fitness enthusiasts and families. Located in Ain Khaled area with an air-conditioned outdoor walking and jogging track of 1.143km, the park offers a refreshing escape from the scorching heat and provides a comfortable outdoor workout experience. The park's temperature-controlled tracks, provides exceptional venue for those seeking to maintain their fitness routines despite the summer heat.

PICTURES: Shaji Kayamkulam

Autism care: Adaptive support systems pip early intervention



By Shaima Sheriff
Staff Reporter

A growing call is emerging in Qatar to move beyond early intervention in autism and learning disabilities, focusing instead on lifelong, adaptive support systems that evolve with individuals and their needs.

Experts are increasingly urging a shift in perspective, away from limitations and towards recognising ability, diversity and potential. Autism and learning disabilities, they stress, are not a lack of ability, but "differences in how individuals think, learn, and interact".

Addressing a gathering at Msheireb Museums Dr Sahar Da'as, research manager at Sidra

Medicine and lead of the Science Cafe initiative said that the evolving understanding is being driven by institutions such as Sidra Medicine, where efforts are underway to connect scientific advances with real-life community impact. Through precision medicine, including genetic screening and emerging AI tools, experts are exploring more informed diagnoses and personalised pathways of care.

However, a critical gap remains. While early intervention services have significantly improved outcomes for children, support often diminishes as individuals grow older. "Early support is critical, but the need does not disappear, it evolves over time," experts note, pointing to adolescence and adulthood as stages where services

are often limited or fragmented. This gap is not just systemic, it is deeply personal.

Reflecting on lived experience, one parent shared how early intervention made "a significant difference" due to the availability of support in Qatar. Yet as their child entered adolescence, "the challenges changed, and the support systems did not evolve accordingly", ultimately leading to the difficult decision to seek specialised care abroad.

Such experiences underscore the urgent need to move beyond short-term solutions towards continuous, adaptive support systems.

Collaboration is seen as key. Partnerships between organisations like Msheireb Museums and Sidra Medicine are helping bridge the gap between research and public under-

standing, translating complex science into conversations that families can relate to and benefit from.

Looking ahead, experts are calling for tangible changes across sectors. These include expanding services beyond early intervention into later life stages, establishing specialised healthcare services such as ophthalmology and dental care for individuals with special needs, and creating more inclusive educational environments.

Equally important is improving accessibility, reducing long waiting lists, lowering costs, and developing community centres that provide ongoing support.

The vision is clear: a system that grows with individuals, rather than one they outgrow. Inclusion, experts argue, is not a phase



confined to early childhood. It is a lifelong journey, one that requires sustained commitment, collaboration and a fundamental shift in how ability is understood and supported in society.



Mathaf marks 15 years with exhibition

Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art has launched a major exhibition titled 'Resolutions: Evolving Realities' as part of its 15th anniversary programme, reflecting on its origins while highlighting its future direction. Running until August 22, 2026, the exhibition spans the museum's Atrium and Ground Floor Galleries and brings together key works from its early years alongside new artistic productions.

It also features the world premiere of a large-scale sculptural work by Iraqi artist Ismail Fattah, created during an art-

ist residency that predated the museum's opening as a public institution in 2010. The exhibition revisits works first shown following Mathaf's transformation from a private collection into a public museum, placing them in dialogue with contemporary perspectives and new commissions. According to Mathaf director Zeina Arida, the show highlights the institution's early exhibition history and its commitment to inter-generational artistic dialogue. Featuring works by 10 artists and collectives, including Farid Belkhaia, Ghada Amer, Hassan

Sharif, Ibrahim El Salahi, Raqs Media Collective, Akram Zaatar and Buthayna Ali, the exhibition explores social, cultural and political realities across the region.

It also coincides with the re-launch of the Mathaf Encyclopedia of Modern Art and the Arab World, expanding digital access to research and artist biographies. The anniversary program is part of Qatar's wider cultural initiative Evolution Nation, which marks 50 years since the founding of the National Museum of Qatar and highlights the country's cultural development and future ambitions. (QNA)

QatarDebate contest addresses a range of pressing global issues

QNA
Doha

QatarDebate Center, a member of Qatar Foundation in collaboration with the US Arabic Debate Union, concluded the second Midwest Arabic Universities Debating Championship, hosted by the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

In a statement, the centre noted that the championship saw the participation of elite debaters representing nine universities from across the United States. Over three days, they engaged in intensive debates, alongside accompanying cultural activities designed to foster interaction and reinforce the values of constructive dialogue in Arabic.

The statement added that the debates addressed a range of pressing global issues, including the role of social media in news dissemination, the impact of tourism on developing nations, ethical responsibilities in conflict zones and youth-led paths

for social change. Participants demonstrated advanced levels of critical thinking and deep analytical skills.

This event exemplifies the growing impact and institutional sustainability of QatarDebate Center in the United States. Since 2019, over 1,000 debaters from more than 70 academic institutions have participated in the centre's programs, contributing to the development of a comprehensive system for dialogue and intellectual exchange.

This system is supported by a "Capacity Building Program" aimed at training personnel in the areas of judging, technical training, and tournament organisation.

The Midwest Championship serves as a prime example of this success; it was managed and executed entirely by US-based teams, including organisers, debaters, judges, and media contributors, reflecting the maturity and self-reliance of the local Arabic debate community.

At the conclusion of the competition, the University of Missouri was crowned champion,

followed by Macalester College in second place. In the individual awards, Ahmed Bamrez, a student at Missouri State University, won the title of Best Speaker in the Arabic category, while Maximilian Sju Lun Beh, a student at Columbia University, won the award for Best Speaker in the Arabic as a Second Language category.

Head of the Department of Linguistics at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Professor Tania Ion, was also in attendance as Guest of Honor.

On this occasion, Championship Co-ordinator Dr Iman Saadeh said "Driven by our deep belief in the Arabic language as a bridge for identity and culture, we ensure these championships are more than an intellectual competition.

They are a living experience that restores the presence of the language in the hearts and minds of youth. We are not organising fleeting events; we are establishing dialogue spaces that foster pride in Arabic and showcase its ability to address contemporary issues with depth." (QNA)



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John Legend Live: An Evening of Songs & Stories rescheduled to September 10

Visit Qatar has announced that the John Legend Live: An Evening of Songs & Stories in Doha concert, originally scheduled to take place on April 17, 2026 at the Qatar National Convention Centre (QNCC), has been rescheduled to September 10.

All previously purchased tickets will remain valid for the new concert date. Ticket holders are advised to retain their tickets and refer to the official ticketing platform for any further updates. Your current tickets will be automatically transferred to the new date, with their category unchanged, and no further action is required.