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Financial Results (Q1 2026)

Gross Written Premiums (GWP)

13% ▲

QAR 3.2B

Net Profit

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QAR 217M

Investment Income:

10% ▲

QAR 238M

Insurance Service Results:

70% ▲

QAR 130M

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GULF TIMES



0 668039 136499

SUNDAY Vol. XXXXVI No. 13729



May 3, 2026
Dhul-Qi'dah 16, 1447 AH

www.gulf-times.com 2 Riyals

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BUSINESS | Page 1

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SCAN TO SHOP

PM underpins Qatar's support for mediation

Iranian FM briefs on ongoing negotiations

HE Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani received a phone call from Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs Abbas Araghchi. The Iranian Foreign Minister briefed the prime minister on the ongoing negotiations, the latest developments and the current diplomatic activity surrounding them. The prime minister affirmed Qatar's full support for mediation efforts aimed at resolving the crisis through peaceful means, stressing the need for all parties to respond positively to these efforts in a way that helps create suitable

conditions for progress in the negotiations and reduces the risk of renewed escalation. The PM also emphasised that freedom of navigation is a well-established and non-negotiable principle, and that closing the Strait of Hormuz or using it as a bargaining chip would only exacerbate the crisis and jeopardise the vital interests of the region's countries. He noted the potential negative repercussions this could have on global energy and food supplies as well as on the market and supply chains' stability. In this context, the prime minister stressed the need to adhere to the provisions of international law and the Charter of the United Nations, and to prioritise the interests of the region and its people to contribute to strengthening regional and international security and stability and to

support efforts to de-escalate tensions. The latest exchange forms part of a sustained pattern of high-level Qatari engagement with the Iranian leadership, dating back to well before the current US-Israel war on Iran. The prime minister has held repeated calls with Araghchi over recent months, while His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani personally reached out to President Masoud Pezeshkian on more than one occasion to urge restraint and keep diplomatic channels open. Doha's quiet shuttle work – co-ordinated in parallel with Washington, Islamabad and key European capitals – has positioned Qatar as a trusted interlocutor between Tehran and the wider international community, even as the regional security environment has deteriorated sharply. **(QNA)**



Qatar's strategic clarity shines through a crisis-muddled region

By Kamran Rehmat
Doha

Qatar's response to the current regional crisis is notable not for what it has done, but for what it has chosen not to do. In the wake of the February 28 US-Israeli strikes on Iran, and the subsequent Iranian attacks on its own territory, it has resisted the gravitational pull of escalation.



Instead, Qatar has leaned into a strategy that is at once familiar and, under the circumstances, unusually exacting: sustained diplomacy.

The costs of that restraint are neither abstract nor symbolic. When Iranian missiles struck Ras Laffan Industrial City, they hit the core of Qatar's economic engine. Roughly 17% of the country's LNG production capacity – about 12.8mn tonnes annually – was knocked offline, with recovery expected to take years. The damaged infrastructure represents tens of billions of dollars in investment, alongside significant projected revenue losses.

hostilities, senior-level contacts between Qatar and Iran have continued at a steady pace, including multiple calls between HE the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani and his Iranian counterpart, Abbas Araghchi, including the latest one yesterday. These exchanges have not been perfunctory. They have consistently emphasised de-escalation, the need to address underlying drivers of the conflict, and the importance of insulating critical domains such as maritime routes from coercive pressure.

The conventional logic of deterrence would suggest a retaliatory response. Qatar rejected that script. While condemning the strikes as clear violations and expelling Iranian military attaches, it has kept its diplomatic channels open. The signal is deliberate: punishment may satisfy immediate political instincts, but it does little to stabilise a system already tilting toward wider confrontation.

This approach did not emerge in response to the current crisis; it is the product of a longer strategic orientation. Over the past decade, Qatar has invested heavily in positioning itself as a reliable intermediary in conflicts others find intractable. From Afghanistan to Gaza, its diplomacy has hinged on a simple but demanding premise: that maintaining channels with all sides, especially adversaries, creates leverage that isolation cannot. **To Page 11**

Instead, Qatar has opted for continuity. Since the outbreak of

Tourism boom to power 458,000 jobs by 2035

WTTC sees sector adding over 100,000 roles in a decade

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

Qatar's tourism sector is on track to support more than 458,000 jobs over the next decade, according to World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) projections – a sharp climb from the 350,000 roles it sustained last year, and a sign that the post-World Cup momentum is firmly reshaping the country's labour market.



PICTURE: Qatar Tourism

The boom is rippling well beyond hotel lobbies and stadium gates. Taxi drivers, souq vendors, caterers, retail staff, engineers and event crews are all riding a wave of visitors drawn to Qatar's culture, heritage, eco-trails, exhibitions and marquee sporting calendar – a pipeline the country has turned into a globally recognised brand for staging world-class events.

and encouraged them to expand, as more people from around the world began to view Qatar as a fresh destination with strong potential for memorable experiences. The country has established itself as a highly efficient host of major events, setting new benchmarks for the industry and making it challenging for others to match such standards.

The influx of tourists in the years before and after the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 has helped sustain many businesses

“During these major events, I have more than excellent business. I work until late at night and enjoy it, as I have many orders and

some customers are willing to give generous tips,” said Nasser, a taxi driver who uses smart transport applications. Before the World Cup, he worked in construction but switched to driving as building work tapered off.

He added that he used to make almost QR500 a day during some of these events, even though it meant longer hours. However, with the hot summer months and a dip in tourist numbers, business has become less profitable. **To Page 11**

Qatar Airways set to resume flights to Iraq on May 10

Qatar Airways announced the return of passenger flights to Baghdad (BGW), Basra (BSR), and Erbil (EBL) in Iraq, starting on May 10, 2026, as the airline continues to reinstate its network across the Middle East. In a statement yesterday, Qatar Airways also announced that it will reintroduce freighter services to Baghdad from May 7, 2026, further supporting cargo flows. These resumptons follow the

airline's recent announcements confirming the return of daily passenger services to Dubai (DXB) and Sharjah (SHJ), and to Bahrain (BAH), Damascus (DAM) and Kozhikode (CCJ), providing passengers with greater flexibility and enhanced connectivity across the region and beyond.

expanding from June 16, 2026 to more than 150 destinations across six continents. Qatar Airways advised passengers to regularly check its official website or app, and ensure their contact details are correct and updated. It added that flight schedules are subject to change or cancellation due to operational, regulatory, safety, or other circumstances beyond its control. **(QNA)**

Qatar charts course beyond LNG to maritime mastery

Physical Infrastructure & Scale

- 50% Transshipment Volume

International shipping lines increasingly use Qatar ports as regional redistribution hubs.
- 200-Vessel LNG Fleet

QatarEnergy is expanding its fleet within five years to anchor global maritime demand.
- Strategic Industrial Clusters

Seamless integration of Hamad Port with Ras Laffan and Mesaieed industrial zones.

Digital & Service Ecosystem

- \$1.1bn Smart Port Market

Heavy investment in AI-driven customs and blockchain-based marine service platforms.
- Advanced Service Integration

Developing specialised maritime finance, arbitration centres, and flexible shipping registries.
- Digitalised Logistics

The MIVANNA Port Community System now connects over 1,600 maritime entities.

GT GRAPHICS

By Santhosh V Perumal
Business Reporter

Qatar is recasting its maritime identity. Once defined by the sheer scale of its LNG shipments, the country is now staking a claim as the Gulf's next-generation maritime logistics ecosystem, weaving together hydrocarbons, world-class infrastructure, special economic zoning and digital convergence into a single integrated play. The ambition is clear; the execution will demand more.

leap from time-critical logistics provider to fully fledged marine services integrator will test its appetite for reform – even as geopolitical disruption and competition from entrenched hubs present both risk and opportunity.

Qatar's LNG, which offers predictable long-term cargo flows, anchors demand for integrated marine solutions across the value chain – from shipping and bunkering to offshore field support.

binning production, shipping and trading into a unified global service platform.

The development of world-class, future-ready infrastructure such as Hamad Port, alongside the industrial clusters of Ras Laffan and Mesaieed, has reshaped demand patterns, calling for round-the-clock, high-speed, compliant supply chains capable of serving LNG carriers and complex offshore operations.

With a mainland coastline stretching some 563km along the Arabian Gulf, Qatar has built a strong foundation for maritime integration. But the

Qatar has unmatched LNG-linked shipping scale, but to become an impactful marine services integrator it must create a marine ecosystem that extends beyond hydrocarbons – and the country's regulatory agility supports this. **To Page 3**

Mwani Qatar records rise in port activity



By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

Qatar's maritime sector recorded solid growth in April, with Mwani Qatar reporting a notable increase in cargo and vessel activity across the country's main ports.

Official figures for April show that container handling volumes rose by 14% compared to March this year, underscoring continued momentum in Qatar's logistics and trade sectors.

According to data released by Mwani Qatar, a total of 50,738 (standard containers) twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) were processed last month, reflecting stronger demand for containerised shipping linked to both imports and re-exports.

The rise aligns with broader regional trends, where Gulf ports have been expanding capacity and efficiency to capture growing trade flows between Asia, Europe, and Africa.

The number of vessels calling at Qatar's ports also increased during the month, climbing by 9% or 93 ships.

This uptick highlights Qatar's expanding connectivity and its ability to attract a diverse range of maritime traffic, including container ships, bulk carriers, and livestock vessels.

General and bulk cargo volumes together exceeded 19,000 tonnes.

Mwani's figures indicate that 10,437 tonnes of general cargo, comprising a wide range of goods, such as machinery, construction materials, and consumer products, among others, were handled during the same period.

Meanwhile, bulk cargo volumes reached approximately 8,600 tonnes, including commodities, such as collections, grains, and industrial raw materials.

The livestock segment also saw considerable activity, with Qatar's ports receiving 9,379 heads of cattle in April.

This reflects the country's ongoing efforts to ensure food security and maintain diversified supply

chains, particularly for essential goods.

Livestock imports remain a critical component of Qatar's broader strategy to stabilise domestic markets and meet consumption needs.

Operations across the country's three main ports – Hamad Port, Al Ruwais Port, and Old Doha Port – were cited as key contributors to the overall performance.

Each facility plays a distinct role within Qatar's maritime ecosystem.

Hamad Port, the nation's flagship deep-water port, handles the majority of containerised and large-scale cargo traffic and is equipped with advanced automated systems designed to streamline operations.

Al Ruwais Port, located in the north, primarily serves regional trade routes and supports smaller vessels, including those involved in coastal shipping and fishing industries.

Meanwhile, Old Doha Port has increasingly evolved into a mixed-use terminal, accommodating cruise tourism alongside limited cargo handling, contributing to both eco-

nomically diversified and urban renovation efforts.

In recent years Mwani Qatar has implemented smart port technologies aimed at reducing turnaround times and improving cargo tracking.

These measures are part of a broader national agenda to position Qatar as a regional logistics hub under the Qatar National Vision 2030 framework.

Further, the resilience of Qatar's ports continues to be reinforced by diversified trade partnerships and the country's strategic geographic location along key maritime routes.

Since the commissioning of Hamad Port in 2017, Qatar has significantly introduced more direct shipping links with major global markets, such as India, China and Europe, which has increased the country's role in facilitating regional trade.

The expansion of shipping routes and the introduction of new feeder services have enhanced connectivity, making Qatari ports more attractive for international shipping companies seeking efficient Gulf distribution points.

Sao Tome and Principe president receives credentials of Qatar's envoy



President Carlos Vila Nova has received the credentials of Yousef bin Mohammed al-Hail as ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary (non-resident) to Sao Tome and Principe.

The ambassador conveyed the greetings of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani to the president, wishing him good health and happiness, and for the government and people of Sao Tome and Principe continued progress and prosperity.

In turn, the president entrusted the ambassador to convey his greetings to His Highness the Amir, wishing him good health and happiness, and Qatar continued progress and development. - QNA

QSCCB lecture stresses importance of self-awareness, inner strength

The Qatar Social and Cultural Centre for Blind (QSCCB) organised an awareness lecture on "Discover Your Strength: Self-Awareness and the Power of Communication" as part of its ongoing efforts to promote awareness and develop members' personal skills.

The lecture, delivered by mental health specialist and life skills coach Tarek Mohamedin, highlighted the importance of self-awareness amid rapid societal changes and the pressures they bring, stressing that understanding oneself is the first step toward meaningful personal development.

It also addressed the impact of social media on patterns of thinking and behaviour, emphasising the need for conscious adaptation to contemporary realities, and focused on the concept of "discovering inner strength" by identifying and reinforcing strengths while addressing weaknesses.

The lecture reviewed the concept of the cognitive model as a "mental framework" that explains how individuals receive and process information and how this is re-



lected in behaviour, noting that changing this model, particularly when negative, can directly improve psychological and behavioural outcomes.

Mohamedin also discussed the cognitive triangle of thoughts, emotions, and behaviour, as well as the influence of the body and the surrounding environment, explaining how these elements interact in shaping human responses.

The lecture underscored the significance of effective communication skills, such as active listening, expression, and dialogue management, as essential tools for personal and professional success. - QNA

Mounting challenges, digital transformation fundamentally reshaping media landscape

The world observes World Press Freedom Day on May 3 each year, an international initiative established by the United Nations in 1993 to underscore the essential role of press freedom as a pillar of democratic governance, sustainable development, and social stability.

The occasion reaffirms access to information as a fundamental human right and provides an opportunity to assess global trends in media freedom, as well as the challenges facing journalists and media institutions.

This year's observance takes place amid rapid transformations in the global media landscape, driven by technological advances and evolving professional and ethical challenges.

These developments are prompting broader reflection on the future of journalism and the need to strengthen its independence, professionalism, and resilience.

World Press Freedom Day also provides a platform to examine responses to the challenges confronting journalism, including achieving an appropriate balance between freedom of expression and professional responsibility, strengthening legal and regulatory frameworks that safeguard media independence, and enhancing the economic sustainability of media institutions.



QPC director-general Sadiq Mohammed al-Amari



Dr Abdul-Muttalib Sadiq Makki

It further highlights the importance of addressing misinformation and rebuilding public trust in media content in the context of ongoing digital transformation.

Reports by international press organisations indicate a deterioration in press freedom indicators, amid tightening restrictions, increased censorship, and growing threats to journalists – particularly in conflict settings, where many face arrest, harassment, or death each year.

Professional ethics remain fundamental to journalism, anchored in accuracy, objectivity, integrity, and respect for privacy.

However, these principles are under increasing strain due to heightened competition for breaking news and the pressures of accelerated publishing cycles.

Experts in media and communication note that declining adherence to ethical standards across some platforms has contributed to the proliferation of unverified and unprofessional content, undermining media credibility and eroding public trust.

In an environment characterised by rapidly evolving events and expanding information flows, free and responsible journalism remains a critical pillar in fostering informed societies capable of addressing complex challenges.

The proliferation of misinformation is one of the most pressing challenges facing journalism today

Qatar Press Centre (QPC) director-general Sadiq Mohammed al-Amari has said that the decline in global press freedom rankings is driven by multiple factors, including shrinking freedoms and mounting financial pressures on media outlets – particularly print institutions and private television channels – struggling to secure sustainable funding and keep pace with rapid sectoral changes.

In remarks to the Qatar News Agency (QNA), he identified the proliferation of misinformation as one of the most pressing challenges facing journalism today.

In an era of abundant and accessible information, he stressed the importance of verification and cautioned against publishing inaccurate or unreliable content.

Al-Amari noted that the profession is increasingly caught between the pressure to publish rapidly – with potential consequences – and the risk of being perceived as out of step if reporting is delayed.

He added that access to information remains constrained in some contexts, with insufficient facilitation in obtaining accurate data from primary sources, while legal liabilities associated with publication have become more stringent in several jurisdictions.

Al-Amari further noted that Arab journalism, like many media sectors globally, is facing mounting economic pressures, leading to layoffs, wage reductions, and challenges for institutions in adapting to rapid transformations.



Advancements in technology increasingly compete with human input in content production



He underscored the need for media organisations to invest more in developing journalists' skills to keep pace with evolving demands.

The official also praised Qatar's media landscape, noting that it now features advanced and effective digital platforms, reflecting significant progress in the sector.

Al-Amari concluded by highlighting the role of the QPC in advancing journalistic practice, noting that it delivers continuous training programmes aimed at enhancing journalists' capabilities and strengthening professional skills, alongside efforts to raise public awareness.

Journalist and academic Dr Abdul-Muttalib Sadiq Makki said that World Press Freedom Day prompts journalists, media institutions, and relevant organisations to revisit fundamental questions surrounding press freedom, including its scope, legal frameworks, and the protection of journalists, particularly in conflict zones.

He noted that journalism has undergone profound transformations in its understanding of freedom.

What was once largely confined to freedom of expression, private ownership of media outlets, and legal safeguards for journalists has expanded to encompass the challenges of the digital age and artificial intelligence (AI).

Makki said that these developments now affect the core of media work, as technological advancements increasingly compete with human input in content production.

This shift, he said, places the media industry at the forefront of unprecedented transformation, requiring a high degree of institutional adaptation and continuous development.

Makki highlighted that the media in Qatar offers a notable example of adaptation to these changes by strengthening its digital presence and advancing professional tools.

He pointed to integration into the digital environment, as well as expanded access to information in multiple languages, which has reinforced credibility amid the growing volume of unregulated content across digital platforms.

The journalist and academic added that this adaptability is evident across several media institutions, including the QNA, which has made significant progress in expanding access to information sources and developing multilingual digital translation services.

Local newspapers, he noted, continue to benefit from strong public trust despite the rapid flow of information across digital platforms.

Makki also spoke on the issue of balancing freedom of expression with professional responsibility.

He said this principle is at the core of socially responsible journalism, which seeks to uphold freedom while adhering to truth, safeguarding the public interest, and avoiding defamation.

However, he noted that this model faces increasing difficulty in competing with fast-moving digital platforms.

On the financial front, Makki stressed that funding remains the most pressing challenge for global media.


Declining advertising revenues, he said, threaten the sustainability of media institutions, despite technological advances that have helped reduce certain operational costs.

This, Makki continued, underscores the need for institutional support to ensure that public media can continue to fulfill its societal role.

Amid these overlapping challenges, media experts emphasise that the future of journalism depends on closer integration between traditional and digital platforms, alongside sustained investment in professional training, enhanced fact-checking tools, and stronger commitments to transparency and accountability.




Experts add that the evolving media landscape is reshaping the relationship between media and society in ways that preserve press freedom while reinforcing professional responsibility, making World Press Freedom Day a vital occasion to renew commitment to a free, credible, and safe media environment. - QNA

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QPC calls for strengthening national press role

By A Staff Reporter
Doha

On the occasion of World Press Freedom Day, observed annually on May 3, the Qatar Press Centre (QPC) reaffirms its unwavering commitment to defending press freedom and safeguarding the rights of journalists to perform their professional duties with complete independence and responsibility, recognising it as a fundamental pillar in building societies and upholding the principles of justice, transparency, and the rule of law.

The centre notes the escalation of security threats witnessed in the region recently, accompanied by intensive disinformation campaigns. This necessitates strengthening the role of national press in confronting waves of fake news and malicious rumours aimed at undermining trust, terrorising populations, and sowing anxiety within communities.

The centre reiterates its call to the international community, human rights and press organisations, and UN bodies to fulfill their responsibilities in providing com-

prehensive protection for journalists, particularly in conflict and crisis zones, where they face grave dangers in their pursuit of truth, amidst an alarming escalation of violations fueled by a culture of impunity and a lack of accountability.

On this occasion, the world pays tribute to the sacrifices of journalists who have paid with their lives for carrying out their professional duty, as a result of Israeli attacks in Palestine and Lebanon, and armed conflicts in Sudan. According to credible international reports, 129 journalists and media workers were killed worldwide last year, the highest toll recorded in decades. The vast majority of these crimes occurred in the context of armed conflicts, with a dangerous increase in the direct targeting of journalists, including by drones.

In this context, the centre dedicates a special section to commemorating the martyrs of journalism in the Gaza Strip, who embodied the highest ideals of professional courage and dedication. They continued to perform their duties under bombardment and in extremely harsh humanitarian conditions, conveying the suffering of civilians to the world with honesty and responsibility.



Since the outbreak of the genocidal war, the number of journalists killed in the Gaza Strip has reached 262, including 38 women, a stark indicator of the systematic targeting of media professionals while performing their duties. Meanwhile, Israeli authorities are holding approximately 22 journalists in their prisons, in flagrant violation of international laws and conventions that guarantee freedom of the press and ensure the protection of journalists, especially given the existence of a law that

allows the occupation forces to execute prisoners.

The centre emphasises that the continued absence of accountability is a primary reason for the escalation of these violations. The perpetrators of the assassinations and deliberate killings of journalists have not been brought to justice, sending dangerous messages that undermine freedom of expression and threaten the future of journalism globally.

The centre draws attention to the escalating challenges facing journalism internationally, including attacks, arrests, and security and judicial prosecutions under vaguely worded legal provisions that are hostile to freedom of opinion and expression. It also highlights the severe economic crises plaguing media institutions, particularly print newspapers, which have forced many to take drastic measures, such as salary cuts, layoffs of large numbers of journalists and technical staff, and even the closure of some newspapers and news platforms.

This comes in parallel with the rapid transformations brought about by artificial intelligence and the content creation economy, placing the media industry at

a crossroads that demands a high degree of adaptation and innovation without compromising the principles of professionalism and credibility. In this context, the centre emphasises the importance of strengthening field journalism and supporting authentic, professional content by both government institutions and the private sector, as this is the true guarantor of media credibility in the face of the deluge of automated content.

The centre calls on fellow journalists to strictly adhere to professional ethics, uphold the values of integrity, accuracy, and objectivity, and prioritise the public interest above all else. This will safeguard the press's position as a responsible source of information and a trustworthy voice reflecting the concerns and aspirations of society, contributing to reform and raising awareness. The QPC also reiterates that protecting journalists is not an option, but an international obligation and a collective responsibility that requires concerted efforts to ensure a safe and free media environment. This environment must enable journalists to perform their duties without intimidation or threats and protect their right to report the whole truth.

Qatar's wild meadows regain vitality

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change's (MoECC) efforts in maintaining wild meadows across the country have significantly revived the green landscape, effectively maintaining the biodiversity within the local environment.

These efforts included various field inspection tours, field surveys, and field trips to designated areas to raise public awareness about the key importance of such places for the overall ecosystems of the country.

The ministry has been actively engaging with all stakeholders to increase public awareness, urging everyone to maintain positive behaviour towards these places and enjoy them while ensuring they remain clean and unharmed.

Similarly, the ministry has adopted a sustainable approach to improve the conditions of these meadows and give them adequate opportunity to develop naturally, such as planting local wild trees, regular cleaning of the wild areas, and fencing off certain meadows to protect them against potential encroachments and violations.

These meadows play a critical role in sustaining biodiversity, supporting native plant species, and stabilising fragile desert ecosystems. Recent field assessments conducted by the ministry indicate that protected meadow areas have recorded 15% to 25% vegetation



recovery rates over the past three years, particularly in zones where human activity has been restricted.

Such progress was the result of a coordinated strategy combining field monitoring, restoration initiatives, and public engagement.

Over the past year alone, MoECC teams have conducted more than 200 field inspection tours and ecological surveys across key meadow sites.

These efforts include biodiversity assessments, soil condition monitoring, and the use of geospatial mapping technologies to track vegetation changes over time.

The ministry has also intensified its awareness campaigns, organising dozens of field visits and educational trips aimed at schools, universities, and community groups.

These initiatives are designed to highlight the environmental importance of the wild meadows

and encourage responsible public behaviour, with officials urging visitors to preserve these areas by avoiding littering, off-road driving, and other harmful practices.

According to MoECC data, fenced and protected meadows have shown up to 30% higher vegetation density compared to unprotected areas, underscoring the effectiveness of these measures. Early observations suggest a gradual return of native species, including small mammals, reptiles, and migratory birds, to the rehabilitated areas, further enhancing native biodiversity in the country.

The environmental impact of these initiatives extends beyond vegetation recovery, as experts noted that healthier meadow ecosystems contribute to improved soil stability, reduced desertification, and enhanced micro-climates that support a wider range of flora and fauna.



Over the past year alone, MoECC teams have conducted more than 200 field inspection tours and ecological surveys across key meadow sites.

Qatar charts course beyond LNG to maritime mastery

From Page 1

Qatar has to now move towards such an ecosystem to fully capture the regional potential, according to experts in the field.

The country, which has a natural advantage in leading green shipping corridors, should establish marine arbitration centres, flexible shipping registries and specialised maritime finance to attract global sectoral players to co-locate operations, which could accelerate ecosystem growth.

Ship registration is handled by the Ministry of Transport – Maritime Transport Affairs Department, and at present, maritime arbitration is conducted through the Qatar International Court and Dispute Resolution Centre and the Qatar International Arbitration Centre. The evolving special economic zones (SEZs) and logistics corridors complement the LNG-led maritime dominance of Qatar, whose prominence is growing, especially in regional maritime supply chains, as seen from transshipment volumes, their growth and increasing share.

Qatar is now moving from a high-performing port economy to a coordinated maritime services ecosystem, in line with global regulations such as IMO, SOLAS and MARPOL. Transshipments have, by and large, accounted for 50% of container volumes, with more international shipping lines calling at Qatari ports – indicating the country's growing prominence in regional trade. Maritime hubs that have etched their place on the global stage

differentiate themselves through a cluster approach: bunkering, ship repair, chandlery, legal arbitration, insurance and brokerage all co-located.

Taking a leaf out of Rotterdam's role as a gateway into Europe and Singapore as a node for intra-Asia trade, industry experts are of the view that Qatar should strengthen its redistribution capabilities to better serve secondary markets across East Africa and South Asia. The development of maritime clusters positions Qatar as a regional export hub for high-value marine services, not just hydrocarbons. Milaha Trading's bottom line saw a jump in 2025 even as the group's total net earnings declined, on the back of higher ship chandlery income.

The right balance of physical and digital infrastructure has already enhanced competitiveness in Qatar's ports sector, whose maritime integration is central to the Qatar National Vision 2030. The Container Port Performance Index (CPII), issued by the World Bank in collaboration with S&P Global Market Intelligence, had earlier reinforced Qatar's standing as a key regional hub for trade and logistics.

Integration today is as much about data as physical assets, and there is a need to further refine the existing MWANINA Port Community System, which is used by as many as 51 shipping lines, more than 800 freight agents, 128 customs clearance companies, 68 shipping agents and over 659 transport firms across Qatar.

In view of this, analysts have called for building advanced vessel traffic systems, predictive scheduling and digital freight marketplaces.

The General Authority of Customs earlier this year launched a new package of artificial intelligence services, including a Smart Harmonised System Classification Tool, which transforms documents into intelligent decisions within the customs declaration process and provides importers, exporters and customs brokers with accurate classification from the first data entry of shipment information.

The Digital Port and Marine Services Platform, developed by Milaha in collaboration with US data automation provider Vendia, represents a pioneering effort to leverage blockchain technology within the maritime sector.

The Qatar Smart Ports and Logistics Automation Market is valued at \$1.1bn, based on a five-year historical analysis, according to Ken Research.

Stressing that data is as important as capital, analysts said smart ports, predictive logistics and AI-driven operations will define the leaders of tomorrow.

Qatar has the potential to ensure seamless trade flows as innovation thrives, with value created across the entire maritime ecosystem, they added.

By strengthening interoperability, investing in smart maritime technologies and positioning itself as a hub for East-West trade and offshore energy operations, Qatar can further reap the rewards of a high-value maritime ecosystem.

 Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar

Healing Hands Essay Competition 2026



We are pleased to announce the annual Healing Hands Essay Competition for 2026, which encourages young people to share their views on becoming a doctor in Qatar. Four lucky winners will receive valuable prizes.

This year's topic is "The Humanities and the Future of Medicine in an Age of AI"

Artificial intelligence is rapidly transforming medicine. Algorithms can now analyze symptoms, recognize patterns, and even suggest diagnoses with remarkable accuracy. If AI can increasingly determine what disease a patient has, what role remains for the human doctor?

Some argue that medicine is more than data processing. As Bleakly, Eichbaum, and Ellaway (2024) write: "The heart of clinical encounters is still about flesh-and-blood exchanges between doctors and patients, and between doctors and other health professionals working with and around their patients. At the heart of this clinical work, often carried out under conditions of ambiguity and uncertainty, is the necessary expression, exchange, and regulation of emotions and feelings guided by the senses, and the exercise of the most mysterious of human qualities: intuition and imagination (typically expressed as forms of creativity)."

Even in a technologically advanced world, clinical care involves emotion, interpretation, and creativity. It requires doctors to respond to uncertainty, complexity, and the lived experiences of patients.

In this essay, consider the role of the humanities—such as literature, philosophy, history, ethics, or the arts—in shaping future physicians. If machines can diagnose patients, what remains distinctly human in medicine? How might empathy, reflective practice, dialectical reasoning, and imagination matter in an AI-driven healthcare system? Can algorithms replace intuition? Should they?

Write an 800-word essay to present a clear thesis and support it with careful reasoning and examples. Your essay should explore what kind of education best prepares doctors not only to diagnose disease but also to care for human beings.

Please also submit a two-minute video presenting your thesis and explaining how you planned your essay. (Please make sure that the video upload is no more than 150 megabytes).

Deadline: May 9, 2026

General Terms and Conditions

- Competition is open to all Qatari nationals currently enrolled in high schools
- The essay must be the student's original work and written in English
- The applicants need to complete an online application to submit their essays
- Proof of nationality and latest school report are needed.

For more information visit our website at: <https://qatar-weill.cornell.edu/>



For additional information, please contact the Office of Student Outreach and Educational Development at: healinghands@qatar-med.cornell.edu or call 4492 8521

Iran military 'expects renewed war with US'

AFP
Tehran

A senior Iranian military officer said yesterday that renewed fighting with the US was "likely", hours after President Donald Trump said he was not satisfied with an Iranian negotiating proposal.

Iran delivered the new draft to mediator Pakistan on Thursday evening, state media reported, without detailing its contents.

The war, launched by the US and Israel in late February, has been on hold since April 8, with one failed round of peace talks having taken place in Pakistan.

"At this moment I'm not satisfied with what they're offering," Trump told reporters, blaming the stalled talks on "tremendous discord" within Iran's leadership.

He added that the decision he faced was between whether to "just blast the hell out of them" or to "try and make a deal", saying that he would rather not take the first option.

Yesterday Mohammad Jafar Asadi, a senior figure in the Iranian military's central command, said "a renewed conflict between Iran and the United States is likely", in quotes published by Iran's Fars news agency.

"Evidence has shown that the United States is not committed to any promises or agreements," he added.

Deputy foreign minister Kazem Gharibabadi told diplomats in Tehran that "the ball is in the United States' court to choose the path of diplomacy or the continuation of a confrontational approach".

Iran, he said, was "prepared for both paths".

Iran's judiciary chief Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei said on Friday that his country had "never shielded away from negotiations", but would not accept the "imposition" of peace terms.

The White House has declined to provide details on the latest Iranian proposal, but news site Axios reported that US envoy Steve Witkoff had submitted amendments to a previous one putting

Tehran's nuclear programme back on the negotiating table.

Iran's mission to the UN pointed to the United States' massive nuclear arsenal, accusing it yesterday of "hypocritical behaviour" towards Iran's own atomic programme.

It went on to insist there was no legal "restriction on the level of uranium enrichment, so long as it is conducted under the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)'s supervision, as was the case with Iran".

News of the new Iranian proposal had briefly pushed oil prices down nearly 5%, though they remain about 50% above pre-war levels amid the ongoing closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran has maintained a stranglehold on the strait since the war began, choking off major flows of oil, gas and fertiliser to the world economy, while the United States has imposed a counter-blockade on Iranian ports.

Speaking at a rally on Friday, Trump said "we're like pirates" as he described an earlier helicop-



People walk near a display at a currency exchange bureau in Tehran, as the value of the Iranian rial drops. - Reuters

ter raid on an oil tanker under the blockade.

The vice-speaker of Iran's parliament, meanwhile, said Iran would not "relinquish our rights in the Strait of Hormuz, and the movement of vessels in the Strait of Hormuz will not be the same as before".

Ali Nikzad added that under legislation before parliament for managing the waterway, 30% of tolls collected would go towards military infrastructure, with the rest earmarked for "economic development".

"Managing the Strait of Hormuz is more important than acquiring nuclear weapons," he said.

Despite the ceasefire in the Gulf, fighting has continued in Lebanon, where Israel has carried out deadly strikes despite a sepa-

rate truce with the Iran-backed group Hezbollah.

Lebanese state media reported a fresh series of strikes in the south yesterday, while Hezbollah claimed new attacks targeting Israeli troops.

In Iran, the war's economic toll is deepening, with oil exports crimped and inflation surging past 50%.

"Everyone is trying to endure it, but... they are falling apart," 40-year-old Amir, a Tehran resident, told an AFP reporter based outside the country.

"We still have not seen much of the economic effects because everyone had a bit of savings," he said, adding: "They had some gold and dollars for a rainy day."

"When they run out, things will change."

Two men executed in Iran for spying for Israel

AFP/Reuters
Tehran

Iran executed two men yesterday accused of spying for Israel, including one accused of gathering intelligence near the Natanz nuclear site in central Isfahan province, Iranian media reported.

They quoted the judiciary as saying that Yaghoob Karimpour and Nasser Bakarzadeh were hanged after being found guilty of intelligence co-operation with Israel and its spy agency, Mossad.

They said Karimpour passed sensitive information to a Mossad officer, while Bakarzadeh was accused of collecting details on government and religious figures and key sites, including in the Natanz area.

It was not immediately clear when the two men were arrested.

The judiciary's Mizan Online website said that Karimpour was convicted of the capital offence of "moharebeh", or waging war against God, over "filming and photographing security and military locations and sending them to a Mossad officer during the imposed war", referring to Iran's 12-day war with Israel in June 2025.

It added that Bekrzadeh cooperated with Mossad by sending information on "religious and provincial figures, as well as important centres such as the Natanz area", home to a key nuclear site.

Mizan did not specify whether Bekrzadeh's activities took place during wartime.

Iran has in recent weeks carried out multiple executions of people linked to mass protests in January, which authorities say were instigated by Israel, the United States and opposition groups, including the banned People's Mujahedin organisation.

On Thursday, Iran said it hanged a man, identified as Sasan Azadvar, who was convicted of acting on behalf of such groups by "attacking police officers" in the central province of Isfahan during the pre-war protests.

The demonstrations began in late December over rising living costs before spreading nationwide and evolving into anti-government protests that peaked on January 8-9.

Iranian authorities said the rallies began peacefully before turning into "foreign-instigated riots" involving killings and vandalism.

In south Syria, families fear for relatives seized by Israel

By Maher al-Mounes
AFP

Whenever Fatima al-Safadi hears a knock at the door, she imagines it might be her sons - among dozens of people that Israel has seized from southern Syria and whose fate remains unknown months later.

Mohammed, 40, and Ahmed, 36, were among seven people seized in a nighttime Israeli army incursion into the village of Beit Jinn, southwest of Damascus, in June last year.

Israel's army said it apprehended several alleged members of Palestinian group Hamas, accused of planning attacks on Israeli civilians and troops, and transferred them to Israeli territory "for further interrogation".

Syria said a civilian was killed in the incident.

Safadi, 57, has not seen her two sons since.

"Sometimes I hear a knock at the door and I rush to open it, but there is nobody there," she said, holding a picture of her sons close.

"I'm afraid about what has happened... and that they won't be released."

Beit Jinn is located near the Israeli-annexed Syrian Golan Heights and at the foot of Mount Hermon, known in Arabic as Jabal al-Sheikh.

Israel moved its forces into a UN-patrolled demilitarised zone on the Golan after the December 2024 ousting of longtime Syrian ruler Bashar al-Assad and now controls a permanent position at the summit of Mount Hermon.

It has also launched hundreds of strikes on Syria and carries out regular incursions



Fatima al-Safadi (left) sits in her house with her grandchildren, whose father was detained by Israel, in the southern Syrian village of Bayt Jinn, near the Israeli-annexed Syrian Golan Heights and at the foot Mount Hermon, known in Arabic as Jabal al-Sheikh. - AFP

into the country's south, where it demands a demilitarised zone.

Safadi said her joy at Assad's overthrow was overtaken by suffering after her sons were taken.

Along the road leading from Damascus to Beit Jinn, Syrian soldiers with light weapons man checkpoints, while heavy army vehicles previously stationed near Jabal al-Sheikh are gone.

Another resident, Aisha al-Safadi, 53, fought back tears as she spoke of her son Hassane who was among those seized in Beit Jinn last June.

"It's hard because we don't know what's happened to him," she said, kissing one of his photographs.

"I've been counting the days and nights" since he was taken, she said, his three children gathered around her. "Every day, I say to myself, he'll be released."

She pleaded for the Syrian government to "help in every way possible to get our people released from Israel".

In a report this week, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said that since Assad's fall, Israeli forces have "carried out frequent ground raids, airstrikes, and other operations in Quneitra, Daraa, and Sweida" provinces in the country's south.

"Israeli forces have also arbitrarily detained Syrian civilians and transferred them into Israel, where they are held without charge and incommunicado," it added.

Last November, the Israeli army said it carried out an operation in Beit Jinn to apprehend suspects from Lebanese Islamist group Jamaa Islamiya, a Hamas ally which denied having any activity outside Lebanon.

The operation left 13 Syrians dead and six Israeli soldiers wounded.

In a government building close to a new Israeli military base, Quneitra province official Mohammed al-Saeed said that "the Israeli army has kidnapped more than 50 people" from the region.

Israel "has occupied new lands at a depth between 500m (1,640') and 1km, over an area of around 240sq km" where its forces have set up temporary checkpoints and stormed homes, he added.

Israel's army told AFP's Jerusalem bureau that in Syria its forces "have apprehended individuals where there was reasonable suspicion of their involvement in terrorist activity against the State of Israel".

"In appropriate cases, continued detention is carried out for preventive security purposes, in accordance with Israeli law and the applicable rules of international law," it said in a statement. "Detention orders and their duration are subject to judicial review as required by law."

Since ousting Assad, Syria's Islamist authorities have held a series of talks with Israeli officials.

This year, under US pressure, Israel and Syria agreed to establish an intelligence-sharing mechanism as the two countries edge towards a security agreement after decades of hostilities.

In the Quneitra province town of Khan Arnabah, real estate agent Mohammed al-Sayed, 45, recounted with anguish his detention by Israeli forces last year.

"During my 65 days in prison, every moment far from our families, our children, our relatives, was like being besieged," he said. "Every moment that passed was a torment."

"What about those who have been there for more than a year without any news of their families, and without their families knowing what has happened to them?"

Israel army says troops damaged 'religious building' in Lebanon

AFP
Jerusalem

The Israeli military said yesterday that its forces damaged a "religious building" in south Lebanon, drawing condemnation from a Catholic charity, which identified it as a convent and denounced the "deliberate" targeting of a place of worship.

The military said troops operating in the village of Yaroun had damaged a structure inside a religious compound while dismantling what it described as "terrorist infrastructure" in the area.

"It was determined that during the forces' operations to destroy terrorist infrastructure, one of the houses located in a religious compound was damaged," the military's Arabic-language spokesman, Colonel Avichay Adraee, said on X. "There were no visible signs indicat-

ing this was a religious building," he continued. "Once clear identifying features were observed on another building in the compound, the forces acted to prevent any further damage to the compound."

Adraee justified the presence of troops in the area by citing multiple rocket attacks launched by Hezbollah from within the compound toward Israeli territory, as fighting continues in spite of a ceasefire.

The French Catholic charity L'Oeuvre d'Orient said the troops had "destroyed" a convent belonging to the Salvatorian Sisters, a Greek-Catholic religious order with which the charity is affiliated.

"L'Oeuvre d'Orient strongly condemns this deliberate act of destruction against a place of worship, as well as the systematic demolition of homes in southern Lebanon aimed at preventing the return of civilian populations," it said in a statement.

However, Israel's foreign ministry denied that the site - which it described as "a monastery" - had been destroyed, saying on X that the site was "intact and safe", posting a photograph of a two-storey house.

The incident comes days after the military jailed two soldiers for 30 days for desecrating a statue of the Christ in the Christian village of Debl in south Lebanon, near the border with Israel.

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

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

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

Angry Birds-style video draws rebuke from Hezbollah

AFP
Beirut

A video published by a Lebanese TV outlet caricaturing Hezbollah's leaders and fighters as characters from the Angry Birds mobile phone games has drawn a rebuke from the armed group, which called the clip "offensive" yesterday.

On social media, Hezbollah's supporters condemned what they considered the ridiculing of leader Naim Qassem, who is also a Shia cleric, with some reacting by sharing images insulting Maronite Patriarch Beshara Rai, the highest Christian authority in Lebanon.

The video, shared by the LBCI channel on Friday, depicts Qassem addressing his fighters - with all of them depicted as birds from the popular video games - as they fight the Israeli army, which was also portrayed.

Hezbollah said in a statement that the video contained "offensive and cheap insults that degrade political discourse to a repulsive level".

The group also called on supporters not to be "drawn into" the controversy "orchestrated by the enemies of the resistance".

LBCI was founded in the 1980s by the Lebanese Forces, a Christian party opposed to Hezbollah.

However, the channel distanced itself from the party years ago and has been trying to present a more independent image since.

President Joseph Aoun in a statement yesterday "condemned and rejected any attacks on the heads of Christian and Muslim religious communities and spiritual figures in Lebanon".

He also urged the public "to refrain from personal insults, given the negative repercussions of such practices, especially in the current circumstances the country is going through, which require broad national solidarity".

ARPM Tender Committee announces the following Tender

Tender No.	(Tender Title) Scope of work	Tender Fee	Tender Bond	Opening Date	Closing Date
ARPM/254/2026/TEN/DOH	Provision of Facility Maintenance and Housekeeping Services for AL Diyafa Furnished Suites and Madaf Tower - 2 Year Term	1000	10,000	03-May-26	07-Jun-26
ARPM/255/2026/TEN/DOH	Tender for Nurse Services at ARPM Hotels	500	5,000	03-May-26	07-Jun-26
ARPM/256/2026/TEN/DOH	Tender for the Supply of Linen to ARPM Hotels	500	5,000	03-May-26	07-Jun-26

- Interested parties can collect copies of the tender documents from ARPM Purchasing Department, via email to m.aseef@arpm.com.qa and j.castillo@arpm.com.qa during working hours 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. (Fri & Sat Closed)
- A payment of a non-refundable document's fees should be deposited in cash to:
 - Beneficiary Name:** Al-Rayyan Projects Management (ARPM)
 - Account No.** 0013-022375-004 (Qatar National Bank)
 - IBAN No.** QA86QNBAA00000000013022375004

And the original deposit receipt should be submitted upon receiving of the terms and conditions.

- A tender bond (as stated above), issued by a bank operating in the State of Qatar and valid for 180 days from the closing date should accompany tenders. **The executed tender bond should be included with the technical offer.**
- All tenderers MUST collect their original bonds from ARPM - Purchasing department upon expiry of the Tender Bond, unless alternative instructions are issued by ARPM.
- Proposal to be submitted in sealed envelopes as per the RFP requirements in both HARD COPY & SOFT COPY on CD or USB.
- Copies of valid **Company Commercial Registration, Computer Card & Authorization Letter** must be submitted in order to collect the tender documents.
- The successful tenderer is required to submit a performance bond issued by a bank operating in the State of Qatar equivalent to 10% of the total contract sum and shall be valid for a period expiring 180 days after contract expiry.
- Offers should be valid for 180 days commencing from the closing date (as stated above).
- ARPM has the right to increase or decrease the scope of services by 20% with the same terms and conditions.
- ARPM is not bound to accept the lowest tender or any other tender and is under no obligation to show any reasons thereof.
- Bids should be submitted not later than 12:00 noon on the closing date and must be deposited into the Box, provided in the ARPM Purchasing office, located at the 9th Floor, ARPM, Head office and should be in sealed envelopes addressed to the Chairman - Tenders Committee, quoting the Tender Number and Subject.
- Deadline for accepting requests and inquiries, 7 days prior to closing date.
- Offers arriving thereafter may not be considered.

CHAIRMAN - TENDER COMMITTEE
TEL: 40341804



US drawdown should spur Europe's defence: Germany

Reuters
Berlin

Planned drawdown of 5,000 US troops from Germany should spur Europe to strengthen its own defences, German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius said yesterday, while two top US Republican lawmakers expressed concern, saying the troops should not leave Europe.

The Pentagon announced the drawdown from Germany, its largest European base, on Friday, as a rift over the Iran war and tariff tensions place further strain on relations between the US and Europe.

As part of the US decision, a Biden-era plan to deploy a US battalion with long-range Tomahawk missiles to Germany has also been dropped — a blow to Berlin, which had pushed for the move as a powerful deterrent against Russia.

Republican lawmakers Senator Roger Wicker and Representative Mike Rogers, the chairs of the Senate and House armed services committees, said they were “very concerned.” They said the troops should not be moved from Europe, but moved east. “Prematurely reducing America’s forward presence in Europe before those capabilities are fully realised risks undermining deterrence and sending the wrong signal to (Russian President) Vladimir Putin,” they said in a joint statement.

Pistorius said the partial withdrawal was expected and would affect a current US presence of almost 40,000 soldiers stationed in Germany. “We Europeans must take on more responsibility for our own security,” Pistorius said, adding, “Germany is on the right track” by expanding its armed forces, speeding up military procurement and building infrastructure.

US President Donald Trump called for a reduced military presence in Germany as far back as his first term and has repeatedly urged Europe to take responsibility for its



Combat aircraft from a NATO country stand in front of a hangar at the American military's Ramstein Air Base, near Ramstein-Miesenbach, Germany. (Reuters/File Photo)

defence. However, he stepped up the threat earlier this week after sparring with German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, who has questioned Washington's exit strategy in the Middle East.

The Pentagon said the troop withdrawal was expected to be completed over the next six to 12 months. It did not say which bases would be affected, nor whether the troops would return to the US or be redeployed within Europe or elsewhere.

A Nato spokesperson said the alliance was working with the US to understand the details of the decision. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, whose country is seeking assurances of continued US support on Nato's eastern flank amid the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, also expressed concern about the latest setback to the alliance.

“The greatest threat to the transatlantic community are not its external enemies, but the ongoing disintegration of our alliance. We must all do what it takes

to reverse this disastrous trend,” Tusk wrote on X on Saturday. The Pentagon's plans were the latest blow to Germany from Washington this weekend, after Trump said he would ratchet up tariffs on EU auto imports to 25% — a move that threatens to cost the German economy billions.

A foreign policy official from Chancellor Merz's CDU party said the two announcements should be viewed in light of pressure on Trump both at home and abroad, amid weak opinion polling and pressure over unresolved conflicts in Ukraine, Venezuela and Iran.

“Against this backdrop, both the troop withdrawal and the trade policy seem less like the expression of a coherent strategy and more like a political reflex and a reaction born of frustration,” Peter Beyer told Reuters.

Nato members have pledged to take on more responsibility for their own defence but with tight budgets and vast gaps in military capability it will take years for the region to

meet its own security needs.

Germany wants to boost the number of active-duty Bundeswehr soldiers from a current 185,000 to 260,000, though critics of the defence minister have called for more in response to a widely perceived growing threat from Russia.

The US military presence in Germany began as an occupation force after World War Two, peaked during the 1960s to counter the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

The presence includes the giant Ramstein airbase and Landstuhl hospital, both of which have been used by the US to support its war in Iran, as well as previous conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Pentagon decision means one full brigade will leave Germany and a long-range fires battalion that was due to be deployed later this year will be cancelled. The long-range fires had been due to form a significant extra element of deterrence against Russia while Europeans developed such long-range missiles themselves.

Airlines come to stranded Spirit passengers' aid



Major airlines and the US government scrambled to help stranded passengers and employees after bankrupt discount carrier Spirit Airlines ceased operations yesterday, the industry's first casualty linked to the Iran war. The collapse overnight of the carrier following a doubling in jet fuel prices during the two-month-old Iran war will cost thousands of jobs. It is a blow to President Donald Trump, who had proposed \$500 million to save Spirit despite opposition from some of his closest advisers and many Republicans in Congress.

Spirit's demise highlights the unintended consequences of the US-Israel war against Iran, despite an uneasy ceasefire. While Spirit was already struggling to turn a profit before the fuel shock, global carriers are contending with surging jet fuel prices due to blockades of ports by the US and Iran. Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy told a news conference that creditors had rejected the deal despite intense efforts by the Trump administration to keep Spirit alive. The collapse will result in the loss of about 15,000 jobs of Spirit employees and contractors, the airline said.

Some of Spirit's largest creditors, including Ken Griffin's Citadel, a major hedge fund and one of the airline's top bondholders, opposed the government-backed rescue, arguing the terms would dilute the value of their claims by placing federal financ-

ing ahead of existing debt.

No US carrier of Spirit's size — it accounted for 5% of US flights last year — has liquidated in two decades. Spirit helped keep fares lower in markets where it competed against major carriers.

At the Orlando International Airport, a digital departure display sign was filled with bright red notifications of canceled Spirit flights that had destinations everywhere from Nashville to San Juan, Puerto Rico.

United Airlines, Delta Air Lines, JetBlue and Southwest are all capping ticket prices for Spirit customers who now need to rebook canceled flights and customers must provide a Spirit flight confirmation number to qualify. Rival airlines are also offering free seats to help Spirit employees get home.

“This is the airline industry stepping up,” Duffy said.

Duffy noted that U.S. low-cost carriers have sought \$2.5 billion in government aid to address higher fuel costs, but he did not think a government bailout was necessary “at this point.”

Duffy took a swipe at the former administration of President Joe Biden, arguing that its blocking of a merger in 2024 between JetBlue and Spirit paved the way for the airline's collapse. Spirit had filed for bankruptcy protection twice within a year and had not made a profit since 2019.

Spirit's shutdown will benefit rivals such as JetBlue and Frontier Airlines, also reeling from the cost shock. (Reuters)

New Mexico trial could force sweeping changes at Meta

A trial beginning in New Mexico on Monday could prompt a judge to order sweeping changes to how Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp operate — a move Meta Platforms has warned could force it to withdraw from the state.

The case, which will be tried before a judge in Santa Fe, stems from a lawsuit filed by New Mexico Attorney General Raúl Torrez, a Democrat, accusing the social media giant of designing its products to addict young users and failing to protect children from sexual exploitation on its platforms.

At the heart of the trial is whether Meta's platforms have created a “public nuisance” under New Mexico law. That finding would allow the judge to order wide-ranging remedies aimed at curbing alleged harms to young users. The case is being closely watched as states, municipalities and school districts across the country pursue similar claims seeking to force changes at the industry level.

Monday's trial marks the second

phase of New Mexico's lawsuit. A jury in March found Meta violated the state's consumer protection law by misrepresenting the safety of Facebook and Instagram for young users. It ordered the company to pay \$375 million in damages.

Criticism of children's safety on social media has been mounting for years. On Wednesday, Meta warned investors that legal and regulatory blowback in the European Union and the US “could significantly impact our business and financial results.”

REMEDIES AT STAKE

Torrez's office is expected to seek both billions of dollars more in damages and an order requiring Meta to make substantial changes to its platforms for New Mexico users, according to court filings.

Meta has said it has already addressed many of the state's concerns and taken extensive measures to ensure its young users are safe. The company said in court filings last week that many of the changes Torrez's office is seeking

are impossible for it to comply with and may force it to withdraw from the state entirely.

“The New Mexico Attorney General's focus on a single platform is a misguided strategy that ignores the hundreds of other apps teens use daily,” a Meta spokesperson said in a statement ahead of the trial. “Rather than providing comprehensive protections, the state's proposed mandates infringe on parental rights and stifle free expression for all New Mexicans.”

A ‘PUBLIC NUISANCE’

The trial before Judge Bryan Biedscheid will examine whether Meta's conduct meets the standard for a public nuisance under New Mexico law, which would allow the court to impose remedies aimed at abating the alleged harm.

A public nuisance claim targets activities that unreasonably interfere with the health and safety of a community. Classic examples include blocking a public road, polluting a waterway or emitting noxious fumes. State governments

have invoked public nuisance law in recent decades to pursue a broader range of industries, including litigation tied to tobacco, opioids, climate change, and vaping, said Adam Zimmerman, a professor at USC's Gould School of Law.

New Mexico's case is among a growing number of lawsuits accusing Meta and other social media companies of intentionally designing products to be addictive to young people. While many cases have been filed by families over specific injuries to individuals, more than 40 other states and over 1,300 school districts have filed lawsuits seeking court-ordered changes and damages under public nuisance law.

New Mexico said it plans to ask the judge to order Meta to make changes including verifying users' ages; redesigning its algorithm to promote quality content for minors; and ending autoplay and infinite scrolling for minors.

“It will be an opportunity for us to explore more deeply the size and



The logo of Meta is seen at a conference in Paris. (Reuters)

scale and effectively the monetary value of the public nuisance harm that was a product of this business's behavior for the last, you know, 10 or 15 years,” Torrez told reporters at a press conference on Thursday ahead of the trial.

The company has said in court filings that it cannot have created a public nuisance because it has not interfered with a public right. It also said there is no scientific evidence to support the idea that social media has caused mental health problems, and that many of the state's requests are “technologically impractical or completely impossible.”

In a public nuisance case, the state can also seek money damages to abate the harm. That sum could be substantial when the impact is said to have affected large segments of the population. Torrez's office has not detailed the amount it will seek.

Meta said in court filings New Mexico plans to ask for \$3.7 billion in damages to fund a 15-year mental health plan including new healthcare facilities and hiring providers, a request it said would require it pay for mental health care for all teens in the state regardless of the cause of their needs. (Reuters)

ANNOUNCEMENT

I, SHAH MOHAMMAD TAZUL ISLAM

holder of

Bangladesh Passport No. EL0081325
QID No. 28805003491

hereby change my name

from

SHAH MOHAMMAD TAZUL ISLAM

to

SHAH MD TAZUL ISLAM

Any objection, please contact

THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE FOR
NATIONALITY AFFAIRS

within 15 days from the publication of this notice.

‘Bookless bookstore’: audio-only book shop opens in New York

AFP
New York

Audiobook giant Audible opened what it billed as the first “bookless bookstore” in New York on Friday as industry statistics show more American consumers embracing the format.

There is no rustle of pages or stacks of best-selling novels at the pop-up store opened by the Amazon subsidiary on the Lower East Side in Manhattan.

“This is a physical place entirely dedicated to bringing audio storytelling to life,” Audible CEO Bob Carrigan said during a press tour of the “Audible Story House” on Thursday.

It was a slightly “wild idea” which “took quite a bit of imagination,” Carrigan said, adding that the month-long pop-up aims to “bring audiobooks to life in this environment where you can



Customers shop at the Audible Story House in New York. (AFP)

browse, you can connect with people.”

According to the Audio Publishers Association (APA), audiobook sales reached \$2.22 billion in the United

States in 2024, nearly doubling over the past five years.

In the store, audiobook tablets called “story tiles” line the shelves, ready to

be inserted into a player for listening through headphones.

Each tile plays a short excerpt and the full title can be accessed on the Audible app.

The platform, which dominates the audiobook market, offers paid subscriptions, individual purchases and free access to some titles for Amazon account holders.

The venue also has a room lined with speakers for headphone-free listening, as well as a “Listening Bar” where “Story Tenders” will “guide attendees in finding the perfect audiobook for their tastes and interest,” according to the press release.

The space aims to reflect the fast-growing popularity of the format as well as the “shift toward offline experiences and real-world connection.”

“Audible Story House taps into the nostalgia and community feel of book culture while bringing it fully into the present,” the company said.

Workers pledge fidelity to the left as Colombia goes to polls

AFP
Bogotá

Colombian workers on Friday had a message for the two right-wing candidates trying to flip the presidency four years after the country elected its first leftist leader: “We’re not going back.” The South American country goes to the polls on May 31 to choose a successor to firebrand President Gustavo Petro, famous for his skirmishes on X with President Donald Trump.

Polls show Petro’s political heir, Senator Ivan Cepeda, winning the first round of voting with a program of continued social support for the poor in one of the world’s most unequal countries.

But it is unclear whether he can triumph in a run-off against ultra-right lawyer Abelardo de la Espriella or conservative senator Paloma Valencia in an election shadowed by a surge in guerrilla violence, which the right has laid at Petro’s feet.

Addressing a May Day rally in Bogotá on Friday, Cepeda warned that workers’ rights, including an unprecedented increase in the

minimum wage, would be rolled back if the right came to power.

His rivals, he declared, represented the “neoliberal model of opulence for a narrow, unscrupulous and unproductive elite” that dominated Colombia’s history until Petro, a former leftist guerrilla, came to power in 2022.

“Comrades, don’t allow them to take away what we have achieved!” Cepeda told thousands of supporters gathered outside Congress under a hot Andean sun. “The people have awoken. There’s no going back.” former health minister Carolina Corcho roared from the stage.

‘Peace of mind’

A few months ago, the odds appeared to be stacked against the left. From Argentina to Bolivia to Chile, Latin American voters were tossing out left-wing governments, accusing them of corruption, shambolic economic management and/or failing to halt crime and illegal migration.

Petro was in the crosshairs of US President Donald Trump, who in January told him to “watch his ass” after overthrowing fellow left-winger Nicolas Maduro of Venezuela.



Colombia's President Gustavo Petro waves to supporters during a rally marking International Workers Day in Medellín on Friday. (AFP)

But after patching up relations with Trump during a White House visit, and implementing a 23% minimum wage hike, Petro’s

popularity soared, and with it that of Cepeda.

For Alejandro Guayara, a 38-year-old father of two struggling to make ends meet as a doorman in a Bogotá apartment building, the wage hike represented “peace of mind.”

While only 2.4 million Colombians are paid the minimum wage, many others have benefitted from increases to night-time and weekend pay pushed through by Petro last year as part of a major labor reform.

“People have experienced newfound hope with this president because ordinary people are being taken into account,” Guayara said.

“Today the power is in our hands, that of the people,” Jose Cruz, a 60-year-old former member of the M-19 urban guerrilla group to which Petro belonged in his youth, told AFP.

Petro’s past within M-19, which disbanded in 1990, has been used by critics to suggest he is cozy with the myriad armed groups that still rule large parts of Colombia’s northeast and south.

Yann Basset, a professor of political science at the University of Rosario in Bogotá, said the Colombian

left was long dogged by its association with left-wing guerrillas.

But now “a large part of the population associate it with something else, with the social reforms of the Petro government in particular, and much less with violence.”

Petro’s failure to broker peace with the country’s various cocaine-trafficking armed groups has however tainted his legacy for some left-wing voters.

It has also soured them on Cepeda, a key architect of the peace talks strategy.

Last year was the most violent in the decade since the Marxist rebel army FARC signed a historic peace deal ending half a century of war with the state.

Last weekend, a dissident FARC faction opposed to the peace deal bombed a highway in southern Colombia, killing 21 people, in what it later said was an “error.”

The situation has boosted calls for a “mano dura” approach of the kind promoted by de la Espriella and Valencia.

“Security has been terrible in recent years,” 18-year-old engineering student Juan Manuel Cespedes said, calling for harsher prison sentences.

US sanctions are collective punishment, says Cuba

AFP
Havana

Cuba said that US President Donald Trump’s fresh sanctions on the island amounted to “collective punishment,” as an enormous May 1 procession outside the American embassy in Havana vowed to “defend the homeland.”

Trump has mused about taking over Cuba, which lies 145 kms (90 miles) from Florida and has been under a nearly continuous US trade embargo since Fidel Castro led a communist revolution in 1959. Late Friday, he told an audience in Florida that the US would be “taking over” the Caribbean island “almost immediately.” In an executive order on the same day, the US leader said he would impose sanctions on people involved in sweeping sections of the Cuban economy, which is steered by the government.

The latest sanctions constitute “collective punishment” of the nation’s people, Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez said. “We firmly reject the recent unilateral coercive measures adopted by the #UnitedStates government,” he posted on X in English. “These actions demonstrate an intention to impose, once again, collective punishment on the Cuban people.”

In a Spanish-language statement, he called the sanctions “illegal” and “abusive.” Trump’s order said the measures target people known to “operate in or have operated in the energy, defense and related materiel, metals and mining,

financial services, or security sector of the Cuban economy, or any other sector of the Cuban economy,” as well as Cuban officials judged to have engaged in “serious human rights abuses” or corruption.

Already in the throes of economic stagnation, the situation worsened for Cuba following a fuel blockade imposed by Washington in January, with only one Russian oil tanker making it through since then.

Supply shortages and power cuts have become the norm, and tourism – once Cuba’s most lucrative industry – has plummeted. The sanctions come despite moves toward dialogue between the two countries, with senior US officials visiting the island for talks in April.

Friday’s fresh measures took effect during May 1 celebrations, which saw huge crowds in Havana march to the US embassy under the slogan “Defend the Homeland.” The march was led by Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel and former revolutionary leader Raul Castro.

The day before, Diaz-Canel had called on Cubans to mobilise “against the genocidal blockade and the crude imperial threats to our country,” referring to US actions and rhetoric. During the rally, authorities claimed to have collected more than six million signatures from Cubans “for the homeland and for peace” over the past six weeks.

Opponents, however, have questioned the method by which the signatures were collected.

State television showed thousands more people assembling in other Cuban cities.

Protesters call wage hike ‘a joke, a trick’ in Venezuela

About 1,500 people demonstrated in Venezuela on Friday, denouncing a 26% income increase announced by the government as grossly insufficient in a crisis-hit economy.

Acting president Delcy Rodriguez on Thursday hiked the monthly “comprehensive minimum income” from \$190 to \$240 – a package comprised mostly of government bonuses that do not count toward retirement benefits or holiday pay. Protesters chanted “a bonus is not a salary” as they marched through the center of Caracas.

A family of five’s basic food needs are estimated to cost about \$700 a month in Venezuela, which has the world’s largest proven oil reserves.

Juraina Palacios, a 55-year-old teacher, said of Rodriguez: “What she did yesterday was an outrage.” “It’s a joke, a trick,” said union leader Franklin Velasquez, 61.

Announcing the new minimum wage package, Rodriguez said it was “the most significant increase in recent years” but acknowledged that it was still “not enough.”

Demands for better working conditions are intensifying in a devastated economy. In 2025, Venezuela recorded inflation of 475%, the highest in the world.

“Workers cannot continue to bear the burden of a crisis they did not cause,” union leader Jose Patines said. Rodriguez has promised better days ahead thanks to reforms opening the oil and mining sector to investment. The country has signed agreements with various multinational oil companies, and on Thursday welcomed the first direct flight from the United States in seven years. (AFP)

Mexican governor to step down after US accusations



Governor Ruben Rocha Moya. (AFP)

Reuters
Mexico City

The governor of Mexico’s Sinaloa state, who has been accused by the US of aiding one of the country’s most powerful drug cartels, said on Friday he would step down temporarily as a local investigation into the charges proceeds.

In televised remarks late Friday, Ruben Rocha said he was innocent and left his post with a “clean conscience.” He criticised the US charges against him as an attack on the ruling

political movement to which he belongs.

Rocha is of the same Morena party as President Claudia Sheinbaum, making the US indictment announced on Wednesday a thorny issue for the Mexican leader.

Rocha is also a long-time ally of Sheinbaum’s predecessor and mentor, former President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador.

Alongside Rocha, the indictment also charged a slew of other current and former Mexican officials for allegedly conspiring with the Sinaloa Cartel to import massive quantities of narcotics into the United States.

While corruption is a top concern for Mexicans, who are angry about perceived collusion between politicians and organised-crime groups, there is also immense sensitivity in the country about US interference, especially at a time when President Donald Trump has repeatedly threatened US military action against the cartels.

Sheinbaum has vowed to defend Mexican sovereignty, demanding that the relationship with the economic and military superpower to the north be one of equals and not of subordination.

Rocha’s decision to step aside came as the US has been exerting increasing pressure on Mexico to step up efforts to root out corruption and official collusion with organised crime.

Sheinbaum said earlier that the US extradition requests that accompanied the charges would have to be evaluated by Mexico and that “clear evidence” would be required for arrest warrants to be executed.

The US Embassy in Mexico City and the Sinaloa state government did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Rocha remained defiant as he announced that he was stepping aside to facilitate investigations.

“I can look at my people and my family in the eye because I have not betrayed them and I will never betray them, and I will demonstrate that firmly at the moment when the institutions of justice of our country require it,” he said.

How Iran standoff could leave Trump in troubled waters

Reuters
Washington

More than two months into a conflict that has failed to deliver a decisive military or diplomatic win, President Donald Trump faces the risk that a standoff with Iran will drag on indefinitely and leave an even bigger problem for the US and the world than before he launched the war. With both sides outwardly confident they hold the upper hand and their positions far apart, there is no obvious off-ramp in sight, even as Iran submitted a fresh proposal to restart negotiations. Trump quickly rejected it on Friday.

For the US president and his Republican Party, the implications of a continued impasse are grim. An unresolved conflict would likely mean the global economic fallout, including high US gasoline prices, will persist, putting further pressure on Trump, whose poll numbers are falling, and darkening Republican candidates’ prospects ahead of November’s midterm congressional elections.

UNMET GOALS

Those costs highlight a deeper problem: the war has failed to achieve many of Trump’s stated goals. While there is little doubt that waves of US and Israeli strikes heavily degraded Iran’s military capabilities, many of Trump’s often-shifting war objectives – from

regime change to shutting Iran’s path to a nuclear weapon – remain unfulfilled. Fears for a more protracted deadlock have grown since Trump called off a trip by his negotiators to Islamabad last weekend and then dismissed an Iranian offer to halt the war, suspended since April 8 under a ceasefire agreement. Tehran proposed setting aside discussion of its nuclear program until the conflict is formally ended and a deal is reached on reopening the Strait of Hormuz. That was a non-starter for Trump, who has demanded the nuclear issue be dealt with at the outset.

There was a glimmer of hope on Friday when state news agency IRNA reported Tehran had sent a revised proposal through Pakistani mediators, causing a drop in global oil prices that had risen sharply since Iran effectively closed the strait. Trump told reporters he was “not satisfied” with the offer, though he said there were ongoing contacts by phone.

A failure to wrest the vital oil-shipping waterway from Iranian control at the conclusion of the conflict would be a major blow to Trump’s legacy. “He’d be remembered as the US president who made the world less safe,” said Laura Blumenfeld, a Middle East expert at Johns Hopkins University in Washington.

White House spokeswoman Olivia Wales said Iran’s “desperation” is increasing due to mili-



President Trump departs the White House over the weekend. (Reuters)

tary and economic pressure, and Trump “holds all the cards and has all the time he needs to make the best deal.”

RESUMING HOSTILITIES?

With his next steps uncertain and no clear endgame, Trump has in private meetings raised the prospect of a prolonged naval blockade of Iran, possibly for months more, aimed at further squeezing off its oil exports and forcing it to reach a denuclearisation agreement, a White House official said on condition of anonymity.

At the same time, he has left the door open to resuming military action. The US Central Command has prepared options for a “short and powerful” series of strikes as well as for taking over part of the strait to

reopen it to shipping, Axios reported on Thursday. European diplomats said their governments, whose relations with Trump have been strained by the war, expect the current situation with Iran to persist. “It’s hard to see how this will end soon,” said one, speaking on condition of anonymity. Iran has remained defiant.

It has exerted powerful leverage against the US and its allies, triggering an unprecedented energy supply shock by choking off shipping in the strait, where tanker traffic flowed freely before the war, carrying a fifth of the world’s oil.

Analysts say Iran will be emboldened knowing that it will have this weapon at its disposal even after the war. “Iran has realised that, even in a weakened state, it can

shut off the Strait at will,” said Jon Alterman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. “That knowledge leaves Iran stronger than it was before the war.”

Trump, who took office promising to avoid entanglement in foreign interventions, has also failed to achieve his main stated aim in attacking Iran on February 28: to close off its path to a nuclear weapon. A stockpile of highly enriched uranium is believed to remain buried following US and Israeli airstrikes last June and could be recovered and further processed into bomb-grade material. Iran says it wants the US to recognise its right to enrich uranium for what it says are peaceful purposes.

Another of Trump’s declared war goals – forcing Iran to stop support for proxy groups such as Lebanon’s Hezbollah, Yemen’s Houthis and Palestinian Hamas – also remains unmet.

Renewed peace talks are unlikely to yield a quick resolution, given the large gaps. At the request of Trump’s aides, intelligence agencies are studying how Iran would respond if he declared a unilateral victory and pulled back, US officials have told Reuters.

‘FROZEN CONFLICT’ RISK

With negotiations deadlocked, some analysts have suggested the war could devolve into a frozen conflict that would defy a permanent solution. That could prevent

Trump from significantly scaling down forces in the Middle East.

The US is already paying new strategic costs. Those include fractures with traditional European allies, who were not consulted before Trump went to war.

Trump also must deal with a more hardline Iranian leadership, dominated by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

The president’s call at the start of the conflict for the Iranian people to overthrow their rulers has gone unheeded. At home, Trump is under pressure to end a war that has dragged his approval rating to the lowest level of his term and spiked gasoline prices above \$4 a gallon ahead of the midterms, in which Republicans are at risk of losing control of Congress.

A second White House spokeswoman, Taylor Rogers, said Trump was committed to maintaining his party’s congressional majority and that high gasoline prices were only “short-term disruptions” that would be overcome as the conflict subsides.

The Iranians, however, are mindful of Trump’s domestic troubles and may be prepared to wait him out, but the question remains how long they can stave off economic calamity.

“Iran isn’t fractured or folding, it’s playing for time,” Sina Toossi, a senior fellow at the Center for International Policy think tank in Washington, wrote on X.



Seoul holds 'power nap contest' in sleep-deprived South Korea

Reuters
Seoul

Under hazy spring sunshine yesterday, hundreds of young Seoulites turned up at a park by the Han River at the invitation of the city government to try to do something many overworked South Koreans never get enough of - sleep. The Seoul Metropolitan Government staged its third annual spring event, dubbed a power nap contest, from 3pm (0600 GMT), under a refreshed set of admission requirements for would-be participants: wear outfits befitting either a sleeping beauty or prince, come tired, with a full belly.

For a metropolis that famously runs on 24-hour shopping malls, competitive hustle and iced Americans, the underlying exhaustion on the lawn was palpable. "Between exam prep and part-time jobs, I survive on three or four hours of sleep a night, patching it up with desk naps during the day," said Park Jun-seok, who showed up draped in the silken, crimson robes of a Joseon Dynasty monarch.

"I'm here to show off my napping skills, and to demonstrate exactly how a king sleeps," said Park, a 20-year-old university student. Nearby, Yoo Mi-yeon, 24, an Eng-



Participants sleep during the 2026 power nap contest at Han River park in Seoul, South Korea, yesterday. (Reuters)

lish teacher from Ilsan north of Seoul, stood out in a plush, oversized koala-themed onesie.

"I've always suffered from insomnia, I struggle to fall asleep, and wake up easily," she said. "Koalas are famous for their deep slumber. I came dressed as one hoping to borrow a little of their magic." Now in its third consecutive year, the sleep competition underscores a chronic issue for South Koreans. Data show South Korea is one of the most overworked and sleep-deprived nations among Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development members, and, as a consequence, people have some

of the fewest sleep hours.

As the clock struck three and eye masks descended across the park, officials went around to measure participants' heart rate to make sure they had a stable reading - an indicator of deep, peaceful sleep.

The winner of the contest was a man in his 80s.

Hwang Du-seong, a 37-year-old office worker, was a runner-up.

"I was completely drained, having done night shifts often on top of going to work everyday plus I also drive a lot for work. So when I saw the contest I was determined to sleep to fully recharge amid river breeze, and I'm very happy to be placed second place, luckily!"

Korean Air bans roosters on US-Philippine routes

AFP
Manila

Animal rights advocates were crowing yesterday after Korean Air banned transporting roosters on flights from the US to the Philippines, which has a huge cockfighting industry.

Filipinos wager tens of millions of dollars daily by some industry estimates as they watch two roosters armed with metal spurs fight to the death in clashes that can end in less than a minute.

The US is an important source of roosters for these fights, according to activists as well as local breeder Eduardo Eugenio, who told AFP shutting down US imports would have a "huge impact".

The South Korean carrier said in a statement sent to AFP yesterday that it had "suspended the transportation of roosters of all ages on routes from the US to the Philippines".

"Korean Air is committed to the lawful and safe transport of live animals, in accordance with applicable laws and regulations," it added.

US campaigner Animal Wellness Action said Korean Air was "in our estimation, the biggest

global air carrier of illegally trafficked fighting birds".

The company did not specifically mention cockfighting roosters in its statement, but animal rights groups said the ban was the result of their campaigning against what they describe as a cruel sport.

Jana Sevilla, spokeswoman for People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals in the Philippines, told AFP that Korean Air's decision was "for sure" about cockfighting.

"We actually hope that other airlines will follow suit... We commend Korean Air for this move."

She noted the Philippines was among a number of countries where cockfighting is still allowed, saying it "should be illegal all over the world".

Animal Wellness Action took credit for the airline's action "after months of investigations, and more recent inter-corporate engagement" in a statement released this week.

"Korean Air... has agreed to our demand to halt all shipments of roosters to the Philippines," it said.

The group said US suppliers who often pose as farmers or "benign breeders" have been sending fighting birds to the Philippines "by the tens of thousands" every year.

China railway handles record passengers on May Day

China's railway network handled 24.8mn passengers on May 1, a single-day record, the China State Railway Group said yesterday.

Another 19.7mn journeys were expected on Saturday, the group wrote in a post on WeChat, with official booking channels racking up sales of 117mn train tickets so far for the May Day holiday period, which runs until Tuesday.

The figures point to strong domestic tourism during the holiday and a potential uptick in consumer spending, which has remained fragile in the world's second-largest economy since the Covid-19 pandemic.

Faced with weak consumption and a prolonged property market slump, China has in recent years relied on exports to drive economic growth, despite a raft of pro-consumption policies.

This year's May 1 figure for railway trips was 1.7mn higher than on the same day in 2025.

The railway network has added thousands of additional train services to cope with the holiday demand, the China State Railway Group said. (AFP)

China's commerce ministry blocks US sanctions on refiners

AFP, Reuters
Beijing

China will not comply with US sanctions against five firms targeted for purchasing Iranian oil, Beijing's commerce ministry said yesterday.

China's Ministry of Commerce said yesterday it had issued an injunction to block US sanctions imposed on five Chinese refiners accused of buying Iranian oil, according to state news agency Xinhua.

The ministry named the five as Hengli Petrochemical (Dalian) Refinery, and so called 'teapot' refineries Shandong Jincheng Petrochemical Group, Hebei Xinhai Chemical Group, Shouguang Luqing Petrochemical and Shandong Shengxing Chemical.

China is a key customer for Iranian oil, mainly through independent "teapot" refineries that rely on discounted crude from the Islamic republic.

The US, seeking to choke off revenue to Tehran, has ramped up sanctions on such refineries.

The commerce ministry's injunction, relating to sanctions announced separately since last year, states that the US measures "shall not be recognised, implemented, or complied with".

The sanctions "improperly prohibit or restrict Chinese enterprises from conducting normal economic, trade and related activities with third countries... and violate international law and the basic norms governing international relations," the ministry said in a statement.

"The Chinese government

has consistently opposed unilateral sanctions lacking UN authorisation and a basis in international law."

"The injunction stipulates that the United States cannot recognise, implement, or comply with the sanctions imposed on the aforementioned five Chinese companies," added the ministry.

The injunction applies to three companies in Shandong province - Shandong Jincheng Petrochemical Group, Shandong Shouguang Luqing Petrochemical and Shandong Shengxing Chemical - and two others based elsewhere in China, Hengli Petrochemical (Dalian) Refinery and Hebei Xinhai Chemical Group.

Washington imposed on Friday sanctions on yet another Chinese firm which it said had imported "tens of millions of barrels" of Iranian crude oil, generating billions of dollars in revenue for Tehran.

The firm, Qingdao Haiye Oil Terminal Co, Ltd, was not mentioned in the commerce ministry's injunction.

The latest sanctions come as Washington and Tehran have been locked in a diplomatic standoff, with no permanent resolution in sight for the conflict that erupted with US-Israeli strikes on Iran in late February.

The sanctions created some hurdles for the refiners, including difficulties receiving crude and having to sell refined products under different names. Teapots account for a quarter of Chinese refinery capacity, operate with narrow and sometimes negative margins and have been squeezed recently by tepid domestic demand.

Japan's Takaichi meets top Vietnam leaders in Hanoi

AFP
Hanoi

Japan's prime minister vowed yesterday to do more to ensure a "free and open Indo-Pacific", using a speech in communist Vietnam to tout a regional strategy that has long rankled neighbouring China.

"I am renewing my determination to fulfil Japan's responsibilities and... to play an even more proactive role than ever before in building an international order based on freedom, openness, diversity, inclusiveness, and the rule of law," Sanae Takaichi said in an address at a Hanoi university.

In an era of "intensifying geopolitical competition, accelerating technological innovation", the Japanese premier called for Asian countries to cultivate "resilience" and the ability to "determine their own future".

Japan and Vietnam share common concerns about China's territorial claims in the East and South China Seas, and both have sought to hedge against US-driven trade disruptions by broadening economic and security ties.

But Hanoi aims to stay on good terms with all global powers through its traditional "bamboo diplomacy" approach, while Tokyo has seen its already frosty relations with Beijing deteriorate markedly in recent months.

That makes Vietnam a striking choice of venue for a Japanese foreign policy speech touting a strategy backed by Washington and closely associated with US President Donald Trump.

First articulated a decade ago by Takaichi's mentor Shinzo Abe,



Vietnamese President and General Secretary of the Communist Party To Lam (right) and Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi pose for a photo at the Presidential Palace in Hanoi yesterday. (AFP)

the idea of a "free and open" Indo-Pacific has since been embraced by multiple US partners and allies seeking to curb China's influence in the region.

Beijing has slammed the initiative as veiled attempt to promote bloc confrontation, with Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian accusing Tokyo of "stirring up confrontation between camps".

In her address yesterday, Takaichi said she was updating the diplomatic vision for a "challenging" new era.

Without naming Beijing directly, she warned against "excessive dependence on a single country for critical goods", saying this often results from "unduly low prices" and calling for a "level playing field".

She also underscored the importance of open shipping lanes, saying "regional supply chains are underpinned by the safe and open navigation of sea".

Long considered a China hawk, Takaichi drew a sharp rebuke from Beijing in November when



Vietnam's Prime Minister Le Minh Hung (right) and Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi wave at the Government Office in Hanoi yesterday. (AFP)

she suggested that close US ally Japan might intervene militarily to thwart any Chinese attempt to take Taiwan.

China, which regards democratic Taiwan as part of its territory and has not ruled out using force to annex it, summoned Japan's ambassador, warned Chinese citizens against visiting Japan and imposed

trade restrictions.

Japan, which like others in the region has territorial disputes with China, has moved to deepen security cooperation ties, in particular with the Philippines.

Takaichi, on her first visit to Vietnam since becoming prime minister in October, aims to deepen bilateral cooperation on energy security and supply chain resilience amid major disruptions stemming from the Middle East crisis.

Japan is Vietnam's largest provider of official development assistance and a key investor and trading partner, with two-way trade surpassing \$50bn for the first time last year.

Takaichi met yesterday with Prime Minister Le Minh Hung as well as top leader To Lam, the Communist Party boss who last month became president as well.

They agreed to advance their high-level strategic partnership to a "new phase of development", Hung said, and inked six agreements spanning technology, climate preparedness and information and communication.

The two sides also agreed to deepen security co-operation and "reaffirmed the importance of resolving disputes in the South China Sea through peaceful means based on international law" according to the Vietnamese prime minister.

Prior to her speech, Takaichi said "Vietnam highlights strategic self-reliance with a positive and active external foreign policy".

"Therefore, increasing cooperation with Vietnam is extremely important for the realisation and progress of (a) free and open Indo-Pacific".

Takaichi will travel to Australia after departing Vietnam today.

US, Philippines deploy anti-ship missile system in Batanes near Taiwan

More than 17,000 troops are taking part in this year's war games, including about 10,000 from the US

Reuters
Batanes

Philippine and US forces yesterday showcased the NME-SIS anti-ship missile system in Batanes province, near Taiwan, during annual war games, as tensions simmer over the self-governed island that China views as its own territory.

The Philippines' northernmost province, with about 20,000 residents, sits around 100 miles south of Taiwan, along the Luzon Strait, a strategic corridor on the frontline of the great power competition between the US and China for dominance in the Asia-Pacific region.

"Training out here in Batanes

allows us a different environment than what we're normally allowed to operate in," said US Staff Sergeant Darren Gibbs.

"So it gives us unique opportunities to actually utilise the system and train within our capabilities, and it offers experiences we don't normally get offered in our day-to-day training."

Gibbs said the NME-SIS is designed for remote operation, and that "the purpose of this system is for it to be fully autonomous, for us not to require a driver or passenger inside the vehicle itself."

"We will tell it where to go and then we program what it needs to do," he said.

The NME-SIS, a highly mobile coastal anti-ship missile system designed to target surface vessels from land-based positions at ranges of about 185km (115 miles), was flown into Batanes on a US C-130 transport aircraft, and positioned in the capital Basco, which has one of the island province's two small runways.



Philippine and US military personnel stand beside vehicles and equipment used for the NME-SIS anti-ship missile system during joint military exercises in Basco, Batanes province, Philippines, yesterday. (Reuters)

Francisco Lorenzo, Philippine exercise director, told Reuters that deployment of US weapons such as the NME-SIS to Batanes was part of efforts to test operational feasibility in remote locations. The NME-SIS was also deployed to Batanes in last year's war games.

"It is part of training so as to test the feasibility or rehearse their deployment there when need arises," Lorenzo said. One of the objec-

tives of the Balikatan, as the annual "shoulder-to-shoulder" drills of US and Philippine forces are called, is to practice "defence of our territory with our allies", he said.

The NME-SIS would not be used in live exercise operations and was brought to Batanes only for deployment rehearsal and simulation support during the war games.

He said the system would be withdrawn from Batanes once the

drills were finished. The US also deployed its Typhon missile system to the Philippines in 2024 for use in joint exercises.

Beijing routinely criticises the deployment of US weapons in the Philippines, saying it heightens regional tension.

Security analyst Chester Cabalza, founder and president of the Manila-based think tank International Development and Security Cooperation, told Reuters "the NME-SIS can spark a powder keg for Beijing and asymmetric deterrence for Manila and Taipei in the Bashi Channel along the Luzon Strait".

The system can be airlifted and deployed to any coastline in the Philippine archipelago within hours, Cabalza said, and its placement in Batanes is likely viewed by Beijing as part of the "U.S.-led encirclement" of China.

Philippine and US forces also carried out maritime strike drills in Itbayat, a Batanes municipality about 155km from Taiwan and the northernmost part of the country.

More than 17,000 troops are taking part in this year's war games, including about 10,000 from the US, even as Washington remains heavily engaged in the Middle East.

China recently intensified its activities in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait, increasing its naval presence around Taiwan and sending an aircraft carrier through the strait. It also put up a barrier this month at the mouth of the Scarborough Shoal, according to satellite images reviewed by Reuters.

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr has said Filipinos working and living in Taiwan would have to be evacuated in the event of war over the self-governed island and that would "drag the Philippines kicking and screaming into the conflict".

Philippine Defence Secretary Gilberto Teodoro said in an April 28 interview with Reuters that Manila has a contingency plan to evacuate Filipinos in Taiwan if conflict erupts but gave no further details.

PM Starmer says some pro-Palestinian marches could be banned in UK

AFP
London

Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer said in an interview broadcast yesterday that banning some pro-Palestinian marches could be justified.

Labour leader Starmer is under pressure to act after a spate of antisemitic incidents, including this week, when two men were stabbed in the north London suburb of Golders Green, which is home to a large Jewish community.

A 45-year-old British national who was born in Somalia was remanded in custody when he made his first appearance in court on Friday accused of attempted murder.

Starmer visited the scene of the attacks and a Jewish volunteer ambulance service on Thursday and was booed by some

locals, who accused him of not doing enough to protect them.

They also denounced pro-Palestinian activists holding marches in British cities.

The prime minister, a former human rights lawyer and chief public prosecutor whose wife is of Jewish origin, said many Jewish people had told them they were affected by "the repeat nature" of the protests.

"I'm a big defender of freedom of expression, peaceful protests," he told the BBC.

Starmer said he wanted to police the language used on marches more strongly and that there were "instances" when some protests should be stopped altogether.

Discussions had been taking place with the police for some time about what further action could be taken, he added.

The police have said they would look closely at all calls about future protests.

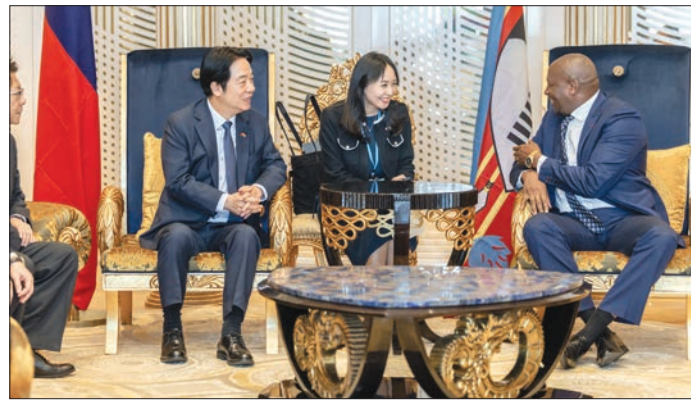
Taiwan president arrives in Eswatini after blaming China for cancellation of prior trip

Reuters
Taipei

Taiwan President Lai Ching-te reached Eswatini yesterday, two weeks after he was forced to postpone a trip to a diplomatically because Indian Ocean states had blocked his flight, which Taiwan's government blamed on Beijing's pressure.

Eswatini in southern Africa is one of just 12 small states, mostly in Latin America, the Caribbean and the Pacific, that have diplomatic relations with Taiwan. Maintaining ties with them is a priority for the government of the democratically ruled island, which China views as part of its own territory.

Last month, Lai postponed a visit to attend the 40th anniversary of King Mswati III's accession, with Taiwan saying the Seychelles, Mauritius and Madagascar had unilaterally revoked flight permits for Lai's aircraft to cross airspace they manage because of Chinese pressure.



Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te (left) speaking with Eswatini's Prime Minister Russell Mmiso Dlamini (right) upon his arrival in Eswatini at King Mswati III International Airport in Sikhuphe, yesterday. (AFP)

That was the first time a Taiwan president had cancelled an entire foreign trip due to denial of airspace access, representing what appeared to be a new Chinese strategy to curb the island's international engagement.

In posts on his Facebook and X accounts, Lai said he had arrived in Eswatini yesterday on a trip not

previously announced by either government.

"Taiwan will never be deterred by external pressures. Our resolve & commitment are underpinned by the understanding that Taiwan will continue to engage with the world - no matter the challenges faced," he wrote in English on X. Neither his posts nor a statement

from his office on the trip mentioned how he had gotten there, though he showed a picture of himself stepping off what looked like an Eswatini government jet which this week brought Deputy Prime Minister Thulisile Dladla to Taipei.

China's Foreign Ministry said Lai had "secretly slipped aboard a foreign aircraft and sneaked out of Taiwan, lavishly squandering public funds".

"No matter how the Democratic Progressive Party authorities collude with external forces or in what form they 'buy the loyalty of others,' it is all a futile effort that cannot change the fact that Taiwan is part of China," it said in a statement referring to Lai's party.

Lai's cancelled plans last month had prompted criticism of China from the US, and concern from the European Union, Britain, France and Germany.

Lai rejects Beijing's sovereignty claims, saying Taiwan has a right to engage with other countries and only the island's people can decide their future.

King Charles gets warm welcome in Bermuda

AFP
Hamilton, Bermuda

King Charles III spent a day in the British island territory of Bermuda on Friday after a high-stakes visit to the US where he sought to heal strained ties between Washington and London.

It was the first visit by a British king to Bermuda in its 400-year history, Charles said - a history that involved making the archipelago a maritime hub of Britain's transatlantic slave trade, which the monarchy has been pressured to address.

The king toured a museum exhibit on the slave trade and watched a dance with roots in the era.

"I'm told, to my amazement, it is also the first time in Bermuda's 400 year history, the islands have actually received a reigning king," Charles said during a reception at Government House in Bermuda's capital of Hamilton. "So I'm terribly sorry it has taken so long."

Charles was visiting the archipelago without Queen Camilla, who had accompanied him to the US.



Britain's King Charles III tours the operation room at the newly opened Great Bay Coast Guard Station in St. David's, Bermuda, yesterday. (AFP)

Early in the day the British monarch greeted a line of schoolchildren, pausing to chat with them, on the steps of the whitewashed St. Peter's Church in St. George's, the Atlantic Ocean territory's first English settlement.

"Thank you for coming," said one crowd member who held a miniature Union Jack flag.

"Get home safe," said another

member of the hundreds-strong crowd gathered in King's Square.

One well-wisher wore a plastic crown speckled with imitation jewels as she filmed the gathering on her cell phone after a 21-gun salute.

Charles received a Royal Salute and the Royal Bermuda Regiment's band played the national anthem before setting a more relaxed tone with Bob Marley and the Wailers'

song "Jamming".

In Sandys Parish, the royal party was treated to a performance by Gombey dancers - dancers who maintain a folklore tradition with African, Caribbean and Native American influences.

Their vibrant costumes evolved from the era of slavery, when performances were restricted and painted masks helped conceal dancers' identities.

Charles also visited Trunk Island, an island in Bermuda's Harrington Sound where the local zoological society runs education programs.

Long a vocal conservationist, Charles appeared "right at home" on the island, Bermuda Zoological Society spokeswoman Robyn Bardgett told AFP, adding it was clear his passion for the environment was "completely genuine."

Charles asked a society staff member "are you getting the message through?"

The king took "real time to chat with them about what (members) are learning about coral reefs," Bardgett added.

Charles is scheduled to depart for the United Kingdom on Saturday.

US calls for Suu Kyi's immediate release

AFP
Washington

The US on Friday called for Myanmar to immediately release deposed leader Aung San Suu Kyi after the junta said it would move her to house arrest, five years since putting her into detention in a coup.

A senior source from her dissolved National League for Democracy (NLD) party told AFP she would likely be kept under arrest at an address in the capital Naypyidaw.

Junta leader Min Aung Hlaing toppled Suu Kyi's elected government in 2021, detaining her on a host of charges which rights groups say were confected to sideline her.

The ensuing civil war has killed

thousands and displaced millions in the southeast Asian country of roughly 50mn.

Suu Kyi, 80, remains massively popular inside Myanmar, but has been held almost completely incommunicado as her family warned of her ailing health.

"We continue to call for her immediate and unconditional release," a US State Department spokesman said.

"We urge the regime to ensure Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has proper access to medical care given continued reports of her poor health."

The office of Min Aung Hlaing on Thursday shared a photograph seeming to show Suu Kyi sitting flanked by two men - one in a khaki shirt and another in a police uniform.

Decade-long study reveals whale shark Indonesia hotspots

AFP
Bangkok

A decade-long study tracking dozens of whale sharks off Indonesia's coast has revealed the secrets of their migrations and two hotspots where they gather year-round.

The research published on Thursday fills in critical gaps in knowledge about the endangered species, and builds the case for increased protection of the Indonesian bays that the species flocks to, scientists said.

Whale sharks, which are a type of shark, not whale, face threats including pollution, tourism and vessel strikes.

While their speckled skin and stunning size make them instantly recognisable and a tourist draw, little was known about how



A whale shark in the waters off Raja Ampat Islands in West Papua, Indonesia. (AFP)

the species moved between well-established gathering points.

Researchers in Indonesia aimed to change that by tagging Indo-Pacific whale sharks, which represent about 60% of the species, and tracing their movements.

Over a decade, they tagged 70 whale sharks at sites in Indonesia. Some were tracked for nearly three years.

"We could actually map or

identify many variations of whale shark movement," said Mochamad Iqbal Herwata Putra, the study's lead author.

"The whale sharks that we tagged moved through (waters of) 13 different countries as well as the high seas," he told AFP.

The research, published in the *Frontiers in Marine Science* journal, also revealed that two bays in Indonesia host whale sharks year-round, rather than seasonally as previously thought.

"This is very unique," said Putra, focal species conservation senior manager at NGO Konservasi Indonesia.

While most "aggregation sites" for whale sharks are believed to be seasonal gathering points, Cenderawasih Bay off Indonesia's Papua province and Saleh Bay in Sumbawa are "like home for them", Putra said.

A combination of protection from predators and high availability of food such as krill make the bays crucial hotspots, with some evidence they may also function as nurseries.

Cenderawasih Bay is already protected as a national park, and its remote location has helped temper mass tourism.

But Saleh Bay is both popular with visitors and in a region with growing corn production on land and aquaculture at sea.

Both these industries can produce pollution - include pesticide runoff and sedimentation - that impacts water quality and whale sharks.

Putra noted that Indonesia recorded dozens of whale shark strandings in recent years. Pollution and interactions with fishing vessels are believed to be among the causes.

Mumbai-Pune Expressway Missing Link project



A drone view of traffic moving on the new Mumbai-Pune Expressway Missing Link project in Khopoli, India. (Reuters)

No 'meaningful' shift from social media sites after Australia teen ban: govt report

AFP
Sydney

There was "no meaningful shift" away from big tech platforms like TikTok and Instagram in the immediate wake of Australia's world-leading teen social media ban, government documents obtained by AFP show.

Australia in December banned under 16s from a raft of popular social media platforms, launching a world-first crackdown designed to protect children from online bullying and "predatory algorithms".

There is strong global interest in whether Australia's laws could pro-

vide a blueprint for how to rein-in increasingly powerful tech giants.

Government documents obtained by AFP using freedom of information laws give an early glimpse into how the restrictions are working.

They showed that platforms such as Instagram and TikTok were still "dominating app store rankings and downloads" one month on from the ban.

Data compiled throughout January showed "no meaningful shift away" from these platforms, noted an internal briefing from Australia's eSafety Commission.

Users dabbled with other apps not covered by the ban but "large-

ly returned to major, established platforms", officials wrote in the briefing dated February 2.

A separate document cautioned it was hard to draw firm conclusions from app download data so soon after the ban.

"Limitations of this data are that it does not reflect usage of an app or the age of the user, however it gives early indicators if an app is rising in popularity."

One of the chief concerns driving Australia's social media ban was the desire to stamp out cyberbullying.

Complaints of cyberbullying on banned social media platforms increased 26% when comparing January 2026 with Janu-

ary 2025, the documents said. Complaints had largely stemmed from TikTok.

A spokeswoman for the eSafety Commission - Australia's online watchdog - said the documents only covered a short period of time as the laws were bedding down.

"Continued analysis as more data becomes available will support more robust, evidence-based conclusions regarding longer-term trends, reporting behaviours and impacts of (a minimum age for social media)," the commission told AFP in a statement.

TikTok was approached for comment.

A raft of nations are now re-

portedly mulling a similar social media crackdown.

The documents showed that Israel, the United Kingdom, Norway and New Zealand met with Australian officials after expressing an "interest" in the ban. "eSafety has experienced significant global interest in the world's first social media minimum age legislation, including implementation and compliance," the commission said.

"The internet doesn't stop at the border and nor should our efforts to minimise harm, especially to children."

Australia in March accused big tech companies of "failing to obey" their obligations under the new laws.

The eSafety Commission found a "substantial proportion of Australian children" were still scrolling banned platforms.

"Australia's world-leading social media laws are not failing. But big tech is failing to obey the laws," Communications Minister Anika Wells told reporters at the time.

"Australia will not let the social media giants take us for mugs."

Tech companies face fines of up to \$33.9mn (Aus\$49.5mn) under the laws.

More than 5mn accounts belonging to underage Australian users have been removed since the laws came into effect, according to government figures.

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GULF TIMES

US court ruling clears Republican path to redraw House districts

The US Supreme Court's decision last week weakening a landmark voting rights law opens the door for Republican lawmakers to dismantle Democratic-held US House districts with majority Black or Latino populations across the South, potentially giving Republicans an electoral advantage for years to come.

The ruling escalates a national battle over congressional maps that has raged since last year, when President Donald Trump launched an unprecedented mid-decade redistricting campaign to protect his Republicans' narrow House majority in this November's midterm elections. Typically, states only draw maps at the start of each decade to account for the US Census count.

The decision severely weakens legal constraints that have historically forced state legislators to ensure voters of colour are not marginalised when drawing maps. It is likely to result in a fresh round of tit-for-tat redistricting that extends into the 2028 election. It remains to be seen whether statehouses will use the court's ruling to try to install new electoral maps before November. Lawmakers have little time to do so. Most states are well into their 2026 election calendar, with filing deadlines for candidates already past and primary votes looming.

In Georgia and Alabama, for instance, two states where Republican legislators might be expected to take advantage of the ruling by eliminating majority-Black districts, voters have begun casting early ballots ahead of their May 19 primary elections.

Even in Louisiana, whose congressional map was struck down in the Supreme Court case, lawmakers face hurdles in passing new district lines. Candidates have been raising money and campaigning for months. The state has mailed absentee ballots and early voting begins on Saturday for the May 16 primary.

Early voting under way complicates potential map changes before primaries

In court filings, Louisiana's top election official had asked the court to rule no later than early January to ensure enough time to administer the election. "It is very late in the cycle to make changes to maps," said Danielle Lang, vice president for voting rights at the nonpartisan Campaign Legal Center. "It would be enormously disruptive and chaotic."

House Speaker Mike Johnson, a Louisiana Republican, told reporters it wasn't clear whether lawmakers would try to draw a new map immediately. "We have, as you know, a primary coming up in about two weeks," he said. "So we'll see if the state legislature deems it appropriate to go in and draw new maps."

Even if states hold their fire until after the November election, Republicans appear poised to target as many as a dozen Democratic-held districts with a majority of Black or Latino voters ahead of the 2028 presidential election. Democrats could even respond by taking apart majority-minority districts in states they control, with the aim of spreading Black and Latino voters, who traditionally vote Democratic, across more districts.

The result would be to dilute the voting power of racial minorities across the country by denying them the opportunity to elect candidates of their choice, advocates said. Janai Nelson, president of the Legal Defense Fund, who argued the case before the Supreme Court on behalf of Black voters in Louisiana, said it was too soon to tell whether states would try to redistrict immediately, but she noted that state lawmakers have "wide latitude" to change elections even in unprecedented ways.

Either way, she said, the decision would upend decades of protections for voters of colour. "This is a day of infamy for the court," she told reporters. "It is a day of devastation for our democracy." The ruling adds fuel to a national redistricting war, which started last summer when Trump convinced Texas Republicans to draw a new map taking aim at five Democratic incumbents.

Other states, both Republican- and Democratic-led, have followed suit. As it happens, Wednesday's ruling arrived as Florida Republicans were debating a new partisan map, drawn by Governor Ron DeSantis, intended to flip four Democratic seats in November. The legislature approved the plan shortly thereafter.

States are already permitted to draw maps for partisan advantage, a practice known as gerrymandering, thanks to a 2019 Supreme Court decision. "The court has just added more chaos to a system that's already chaotic," said Kareem Crayton, a redistricting expert at the Brennan Center for Justice.

With Trump's mid-cycle push and the Supreme Court's latest ruling, the legal and institutional guardrails that once constrained redistricting may be giving way to a free-for-all, turning voters into "pawns in a set of political games instead of being the decision-makers themselves," Lang said. — Reuters

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Safe passage for Janina



A common merganser (*Mergus merganser*) mother nicknamed Janina leads her ducklings from Lazienkowski Park in central Warsaw towards the Vistula River under the watchful eyes of volunteers and city parks department employees in Warsaw, Poland. Every year ducklings take the risky route from a centrally-located park where they hatch to the Vistula river flowing through the Polish capital mobilising residents who scramble to help ensure their safe passage. (AFP)

The death of a Lebanese village

As Israeli military offensive expands along Lebanon's southern border, villages like Kfar Kila are being reduced to rubble, uprooting communities with deep historical and emotional ties to the land

By Alexander Dziadosz
Reuters

In a parking lot strewn with rubbish near Beirut's Mediterranean coast, Hassan Yahya has taped a cardboard sign to a traffic signal pole beside the tarp tent that now serves as his home.

"Kfar Kila welcomes you," read the lines scrawled in thin pen.

The flimsy board recalls a signpost that once stood dozens of miles away at the entrance of the centuries-old village of that name. Kfar Kila is one of about a dozen villages along Lebanon's southern border that have been progressively flattened by waves of Israeli bombardment over the past two and a half years.

Now, as Israeli forces move in with controlled detonations and bulldozers, the villages are being effectively erased, vibrant communities reduced to lifeless moonscapes. Like tens of thousands of other southerners, Yahya has watched his ancestral lands transformed into a "buffer zone" that Israel is clearing to secure its border.

CULTURAL SPACE

In Lebanon, villages occupy a profound psychological and cultural space: centres of gravity where families converge from across the country and world, maintaining roots by investing in homes and forging communal ties to the rhythm of weddings, holidays and olive harvests.

Practically everyone knows their family's village - "day'a" in the local dialect - even if they left generations ago. The sudden disappearance of these settlements has cut hundreds of thousands adrift.

"It's like fish, if they leave the water, they die," said 58-year-old Yahya, squatting on a plastic chair in his tent as a generator thrummed behind him. "We can't leave. We die."

Israeli forces say Kfar Kila and other levelled villages are havens for Hezbollah, the political and military movement they have fought since October 7.

The latest round of fighting, which broke out early last month when Hezbollah fired rockets at Israel in solidarity with its attacked ally Iran, has forced 1.2mn Lebanese people from their homes, about a fifth of the population. To reconstruct life in one of Lebanon's vanished villages, Reuters spoke to five former residents of Kfar Kila now scattered across the country and used satellite images, social media posts, and photos and videos shared by them and others to see what has become of their communities.

Some of the earliest mentions of Kfar Kila appear in the 10th-century travelogues of the Arab geographer Al-Maqdisi and later in the records of Ottoman tax collectors and colonial-era British surveyors. Before war erupted in 2023, about 5,500 people lived there, according to Kfar Kila mayor Hassan Sheet. Farming dominated life, the climate supporting crops from wheat and grapes to watermelons, tobacco, tomatoes, parsley, fava beans and olives. The village prized its olive oil, sold nationwide and drawing buyers from as far as Beirut, he added.

Daily life revolved around bakeries, restaurants and cafes where residents gathered to play cards and trade gossip and jokes. During weddings, the community would come together for a week of feasting funded by gifts to the groom. On the day of Ashura, crowds thronged in the village centre, climbing onto rooftops to watch men in medieval dress reenact the Battle of Karbala.

'IT ALL WENT UP IN SMOKE'

Much of the two decades preceding the October 7, 2023, saw relative prosperity for Kfar Kila, Sheet said. Schools and clinics opened, literacy rose, roads

to the city of Nabatieh and other nearby hubs expanded horizons. Expats sent money home from Europe, the Gulf and Africa.

Yahya's brother's children, who lived in Sweden, built a house beside the Fatima Gate, a historic border crossing which became a local attraction as restaurants sprang up near a replica of Jerusalem's Dome of the Rock and a graffiti-covered wall built by Israel along the frontier. Yahya himself built a three-storey house of cement and stone in the village, and installed an oven in the basement to serve pastries to friends.

Within days of the attacks, though, Hezbollah launched a "war of support" firing missiles into Israel. The Israeli border town of Metula was particularly heavily hit, with hundreds of homes damaged or destroyed, according to Israeli media outlets. Israel responded with a ferocious air and ground campaign, concentrated heavily in the south. By January 2024, Kfar Kila was nearly empty, Sheet said.

Hezbollah officials have repeatedly condemned the village demolitions and denied the group places military infrastructure in areas where civilians live. Its media office didn't immediately respond to a request for comment on the demolitions. Before the war, Hezbollah made no secret of its plans to invade northern Israel, even inviting reporters to observe its fighters simulate such an attack, and described its tunnel network as extensive.

Soon after the conflict broke out, Yahya went north from Kfar Kila before ending up in Beirut. His neighbour and childhood friend, Kheder Hammoud, settled near the Syrian border. Grocery store owner Jameel Fawwaz, whose shop and home were destroyed, fled first to the southern town of Habbouch and later to a school in the coastal city of Sidon that sheltered hundreds of people who had lost their homes.

"It all went up in smoke," Fawwaz said, sitting by a wall at the school bearing dozens of paper signs put on display by displaced residents to remember the names of villages hit by the war, including Kfar Kila.

IRAN WAR BRINGS FRESH PAIN

A ceasefire in November 2024 prompted some residents to return. But by then nearly 85% of buildings in Kfar Kila had been destroyed, Sheet said. Among them was the newly built home of Yahya's extended family, completed just before the war.

A few residents, including Hammoud, set up prefabricated homes near the ruins, hoping to rebuild. In February this year, Prime Minister Nawaf Salam visited Kfar Kila and promised impatient residents that reconstruction would start soon. Instead, war returned within a month. This time, Israeli forces used controlled demolitions and bulldozers.

In one video, verified by Reuters and first posted on social media in late March, an earthmover can be seen moving on the western outskirts of the village. Reuters could not confirm who was operating the machine.

By late April, Israeli forces had destroyed over 90% of homes in Kfar Kila, an Israeli military official told Reuters, requesting anonymity to discuss security matters. With little hope of returning soon, many former Kfar Kila residents now rely on sporadic calls to maintain ties. When someone dies, Yahya said, "We just pick up the phone. That's it." Marriages, if they happen at all, often take place without fanfare, Sheet said.

Though Israel says the buffer zone is temporary, many Lebanese fear it will become permanent. The Golan Heights, captured from Syria in the 1967 Middle East war, was annexed in 1981. The West Bank, captured from Jordan in the same war, is now home to hundreds of thousands of Israeli settlers.

One day this month, Hammoud drove his battered sedan from the northern mountains to the Beirut parking lot to visit Yahya. They paced together, Hammoud leaning on his late mother's walking stick, one of the few items salvaged from his home, and recalling the days of their youth. "Everything in the old village has meaning and significance for us - the historic houses, our family's homes, the homes of our ancestors," he said. "These things are impossible to bring back."

Sheet, the mayor, echoed this as he sat in his uncle's home in a village in the country's central mountains, where he'd taken refuge. "There's a spiritual connection, psychological connection, a connection with your roots - a very strong one. This is fundamental for Kfar Kila," he said. "It'll take time, for sure, but when we get back, we'll rebuild."

He paused. "This isn't just talk," he said. "We're going back."



A satellite image shows destroyed buildings in the village of Kfar Kila, Lebanon. (Reuters)

Qatar's strategic clarity shines through a crisis-muddled region

From Page 1

What makes the present moment different is that Qatar is now applying this doctrine under direct duress. The test is no longer whether it can facilitate dialogue between others, but whether it can sustain dialogue with a state that has inflicted tangible damage on its own territory. That distinction matters. It transforms diplomacy from a tool of influence into an instrument of national resilience.

There may be risk embedded in this posture, where engagement can be misread and restraint invite further probing. Yet Qatar appears to be wagering that escalation carries the greater danger — not only for itself, but for a region where miscalculation can quickly become systemic crisis. Its insistence on keeping maritime corridors open, and on preventing their use as bargaining chips, reflects an acute awareness that the conflict's economic spillovers could prove as destabilising as its military ones.

In that sense, Qatar's policy is less an act of restraint than an assertion of strategic clarity. It rests on the judgment that, in a tightly interdependent region, the utility of force is ultimately limited, while the value of dialogue compounds over time — even when conducted under pressure.

What is clear is that Qatar has chosen to absorb immediate costs in service of a longer-term equilibrium. In a region too often defined by the loudest weapon, Qatar continues to make the quieter, harder bet: that peacemaking, carried steadily on its shoulders, still builds a better world.

Tourism boom to power 458,000 jobs by 2035

From Page 1

Haseeb, a gifts and accessories salesman at the souq near the Doha Corniche, echoed the sentiment. When tourist numbers rise in Doha, his sales climb sharply, with many visitors paying willingly without bargaining because they enjoy the atmosphere of Qatar's marketplaces. More tourists, he said, mean more business and a cushion against the slower days.

The expansion in hotels and tourist facilities has also created thousands of jobs over the years, with contracting companies hiring engineers,

skilled and unskilled workers and administrative staff in large numbers.

"I used to be very busy, constantly receiving lucrative offers with excellent packages, as the construction industry was racing against time to deliver these facilities and hotels. My company maintained thousands of jobs, but now we have only a few — which is normal, as the projects have been completed," said Engineer Ahmed, an architect.

He noted that many former colleagues have moved into the services sector to keep pace with daily expenses as construction demand has eased.

Most visitors arrive by air — an estimated 56% — with 37% coming by land and around 7% by sea. Beyond international tourism, Qatar has emerged as a highly attractive destination for GCC citizens and residents, many of whom return regularly for short breaks. GCC visitors in particular have praised the country's balance between ultramodern infrastructure and traditional heritage, alongside its festivals and entertainment offerings, which are organised to the highest global standards.

Despite regional uncertainties, the outlook for Qatar's tourism industry remains bright, underpinned

by the country's high global ranking for security and stability and its reputation as a magnet for international events. The sector's contribution to the Qatari economy is expected to exceed QR166bn by 2035, with an annual target of six to seven million visitors.

"The country is beautiful, warm and sunny, and very safe and hospitable. You can enjoy a unique atmosphere and lovely nature in the winter months. It is also very easy to get around and take in multiple activities and sites in a short time," said Hannah, a German tourist who visited Qatar during the winter season.

Spain slams 'illegal' Israeli detention of citizen from Gaza flotilla

AFP
Madrid

Spain yesterday condemned the "illegal detention" of one of its citizens who was taken to Israel after being seized in an Israeli military operation against a Gaza aid flotilla in international waters.

Saif Abu Keshek "must be released immediately so that he can return to Spain", Spanish Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares told Racl radio.

"We are facing an illegal detention in international waters, outside any jurisdiction of the Israeli

authorities," Albares said.

Israeli forces on Wednesday night intercepted the flotilla, a group of more than 50 vessels seeking to break an Israeli blockade of Gaza to deliver needed supplies.

The vessels were boarded in international waters off Greece. Organisers said armed Israeli personnel smashed equipment on the vessels, leaving them helpless and incommunicado at sea.

Israel said it had removed around 175 activists from the flotilla, but organisers accused Israeli personnel of "kidnapping" 211 people.

Israel released almost all the activists later and they were escorted by the Greek coast guard on

Friday to the island of Crete.

But Israel kept Abu Keshek and a Brazilian activist, Thiago Avila. Yesterday, the Israeli foreign ministry said the two were in Israel for "questioning by law enforcement authorities".

The ministry alleged the two were affiliated with an organisation, the Popular Conference for Palestinians Abroad (PCPA), which is under US sanctions for purported links to Hamas.

Albares said that, after requesting information, he had seen no indications of any link between Abu Keshek and Hamas.

The foreign minister called Israel's actions "unacceptable".

Fighting reaches outskirts of Ukraine's Kostiantynivka

Reuters
Kyiv

Russian troops are inching towards the city of Kostiantynivka in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region, trying to establish a foothold close to a heavily defended area, Ukraine's top army official said yesterday.

Kostiantynivka, along with other cities, forms a so-called fortress belt in the country's east — an area well fortified by the Ukrainian military.

"We are repelling the Russian occupiers' persistent attempts to gain a foothold in the outskirts of Kostiantynivka using infiltration tactics. Counter-sabotage measures are going on in the city," Oleksandr Syrskyi, Ukraine's army chief, said on the Telegram app.

A Ukrainian battlefield mapping project called DeepState shows Russian troops control an area around only one kilometre (0.6 mile) from the city's southern outskirts.

Small chunks of Kostiantynivka in the southeast are marked as a grey zone, meaning neither Ukraine nor Russia has full control over them.

Russia's defence ministry said on Wednesday its forces had taken control of Novodmytrivka, just north of Kostiantynivka. Moscow's



A fuel station burns after it was hit by a Russian drone strike, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Kharkiv, Ukraine, yesterday. (Reuters)

top general Valery Gerasimov said in April that troops were advancing in the north and south of the city.

Syrskyi said that Russian offensive attempts had risen noticeably in April. Since Monday, Russian troops have carried out 83 assaults in this sector using small infantry groups, he added.

Russia demands that Ukraine pull back from areas in the Donetsk and neighbouring Luhansk regions that it failed to capture in its four-year full-scale war. U.S.-brokered peace talks stalled over the issue as Ukrainian officials say Kyiv will not cede land it still controls.

For the past few years, Russian troops have not managed to capture any big city agglomerations

in Ukraine, inching forward and taking control over small settlements, mostly in Ukraine's east.

The small city of Pokrovsk, whose more than 60,000 pre-war population mostly fled, was the most significant gain in the past year. It took Moscow's troops months to advance, and Kyiv says it still has some positions in the city.

Two killed in attack on bus in Kherson

A Russian drone attack on a bus in Ukraine's southern city of Kherson killed two people and injured seven more early yesterday, officials said.

Most of the casualties were public utilities workers, regional

governor Oleksandr Prokudin added on Telegram. He posted images from the site that showed the bus with blown-out windows and a body with traces of blood lying on its floor.

"Such attacks are part of a systemic policy of terror against the civilian population," Dmytro Lubinets, Ukraine's human rights ombudsman, said on the Telegram app.

Kherson, the only regional capital seized by Russian forces in their 2022 full-scale invasion, was recaptured by Ukrainian troops later that year but has increasingly come under attack from Russian forces across the Dnipro River.

Ukrainian officials and human rights organisations have accused Moscow's troops of deliberate and systemic small-drone attacks on civilians across areas close to the frontline, in particular in Kherson.

The southern Odesa region, targeted by Russian strikes almost daily over the last couple of months, also came under attack overnight, the regional governor Oleh Kiper said.

A warehouse and neighbouring buildings were damaged at a port, he added on Telegram.

Ukraine's air force said it downed 142 out of 163 long-range drones launched by Russia overnight.

Turkiye releases arrested May Day protesters

AFP
Istanbul

Turkish authorities have released more than 500 protesters arrested at May Day rallies in Istanbul, a lawyers' association said yesterday.

Police cracked down on Friday's demonstrations, firing tear gas to break them up and arresting hundreds of people.

All 576 people arrested were released by Saturday morning, including union official Basaran Aksu, the lawyers' association CHD said on X.

The association's Istanbul branch had deployed members into the city's streets to document arrests and aid those detained.

The Istanbul governor's office put the number of arrests at 575.

Another 47 people were arrested on April 28 ahead of the planned May Day rallies, of whom four have been placed in custody and nine on house arrest, CHD said.

The demonstrations were concentrated around Taksim Square, which the authorities have closed to rallies since a massive wave of anti-government protests in 2013.

Aksu had condemned the authorities for imposing a lockdown on the square, a symbolic site often used for mass gatherings in Turkey.

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

"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.

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

Illegal party at French military site draws up to 40,000 ravers

Up to 40,000 partygoers gathered yesterday for an illegal rave at a military site in France, defying warnings about the risk of possible explosions from old ordnance.

Thumping techno music echoed across a vast firing range near the central French town of Bourges as revellers assembled for the unauthorised event, known as a "free party", which began on Friday.

Behind them, tents and vans stretched across the grassy field.

Authorities had estimated attendance at 20,000 yesterday morning, but more ravers arrived during the day and Tekno Anti Rep, a free party support network present at the site, told AFP the total was between 35,000 and 40,000 by the evening.

Bomb disposal experts had to intervene after a shell was discovered near a road passing through the party site, the local officials said.

The gathering comes as the French parliament is seeking to

tighten legislation against unauthorised rave parties, introducing prison sentences for organisers and fines for attendees.

"Despite its illegal nature, the government has mobilised to ensure the safety of this event and limit any disturbances," the prefecture said.

Philippe Le Moing Surzur, the local prefect, said the site was "extremely dangerous due to the unexploded ordnance it may contain".

He said that even the France's Directorate General of Armaments, which owns the land, did not have precise knowledge of the risks.

"This is a site that has been in use for 150 years, and we know there are potentially old artillery shells there," he said, adding that bomb disposal experts discover them regularly.

The firing range covers 10,000 hectares (25,000 acres) and is crisscrossed by roads that are closed during tests but open to the public at other times. (AFP)

Stranded whale 'Timmy' released into North Sea in dramatic rescue

A humpback whale that had been struggling to survive after beaching near the German coast was released yesterday into the North Sea off Denmark, after being transported in a barge in a last-ditch rescue operation.

The whale, dubbed "Timmy" in Germany — where its ordeal captured hearts and sparked a media frenzy — exited the barge, blew air through its blowhole and swam off, said Karin Walter-Mommert, one of the wealthy entrepreneurs who financed the rescue initiative. It was now swimming on its own and, at least for the time being, in the right direction, she said. The whale "has some small injuries — probably from being transported in rough seas — but they

are superficial", said Walter-Mommert. It "should now swim up the Norwegian coast toward the Arctic", added the entrepreneur, who made her fortune in horse racing.

The whale was first spotted stuck on a sandbank on March 23 near the city of Luebeck, on Germany's Baltic Sea coast, before freeing itself and then becoming stuck again several times.

Various attempts to save it had failed, and authorities had announced they were giving up — prompting Walter-Mommert and another wealthy entrepreneur to step in.

They came up with what many saw as a long-shot plan: coax the whale into the water-filled hold of a

special barge and tow it back to its natural habitat. Some experts criticised the privately financed rescue plan, saying it would only cause the animal more distress.

But the plan appeared to have succeeded against the odds, as the whale left the barge from Wismar Bay on the Baltic coast at around 8:45am (0645 GMT), organisers said.

To get the whale onto the barge, rescuers had attached straps to it and heaved it down a channel that had been specially dug in the sand to allow it to reach the vessel. Rescuers then swam alongside it as it sped up and entered the barge — sparking cheers from the crowd watching from shore. (AFP)

Afghans celebrate spring in bright red poppy fields

AFP
Shirin Tagab, Afghanistan

In the middle of a field filled with bright red poppies, Afghans frolic among the spring flowers in a tradition deeply rooted in the country's north.

Families flocked to the valleys of Shirin Tagab district, near the border with Turkmenistan, to be among thousands of flowers that appeared after abundant rain.

"There has been a drought for almost 10 years. No flowers or greenery grew," said Ghawsudin, who only uses one name.

"This year has been very good, and God is merciful," said the 79-year-old, who drove for three hours just to see the flowers.

Mohammad Ashraf, a 35-year-old visitor, said he hadn't seen so many poppies for more than a dec-

ade. "Now there are so many red flowers, and you see people come here for picnics," he told AFP.

The landscape in Shirin Tagab is brightened by the common poppy, not the opium poppy that authorities have banned.

Many Afghans living in the north used to travel to see the poppies after celebrating Persian New Year, Nowruz, in the city of Mazar-i-Sharif.

The Taliban government, which applies a strict interpretation of Islamic law, has stopped such celebrations each spring.

But the tradition of visiting the poppies, which are widely revered in poems and songs, has endured.

Oriane Zerah, a photographer who published a book about Afghans and flowers, said they are an integral part of daily life.

"As soon as an Afghan has a little space in their garden, they



An Afghan man taking a selfie as he stands among the common poppy flowers on a hillside in the Jalayer Valley of Northern Afghanistan's Shirin Tagab district. (AFP)

plant a flower. Even in displacement camps, there'll be a flower somewhere. They put them on their pakol, one of their traditional hats, and there are desserts made with flowers," she told AFP.

The poppy has also been associ-

ated with wartime in the country, with the flower often placed on the coffins of fighters, according to Afghan writer Taqi Wahidi.

"Dying in the path of the homeland, or in the path of religion and faith, was considered a kind of



Afghan men picnicking near the common poppy flowers on a hillside in the Jalayer Valley of Northern Afghanistan's Shirin Tagab district. (AFP)

new resurrection and entry into a new life," he told AFP.

The same flower is widely used in countries, such as Britain, Australia and New Zealand, where people wear artificial poppies to remember those killed in past conflicts.

Nowadays in Afghanistan, however, the poppy "symbolises vitality and freshness", according to Wahidi.

"At the same time that nature is renewed, human beings also want to bring new colours into their lives," he said.

Doha's skyline: The vision that turned Qatar into a global icon

From the gleaming towers of West Bay to the cultural landmarks along the Corniche, the city's skyline has become the defining image of modern Qatar

By Peter Alagos
Business Editor

The West Bay Skyline, also known as the "Doha Skyline," has established itself as an iconic architectural assembly that has successfully placed Qatar on the global tourism map.

This distinctive vista has also become the primary face of Qatar, appearing prominently on souvenirs across tourist hotspots like Souq Waqif, local malls, and gift shops.

The strategy for this modern identity began in the late 1990s as a government initiative to enhance Qatar's international visibility and global recognition. Sheikh Saud bin Mohammad al-Thani, then Minister of Culture, Arts and Heritage, viewed the West Bay Skyline as a national asset that required significant investment to compete with other global capitals.

The skyline also promotes the nation's unique culture, values, and achievements, positioning it as a significant player in international affairs and fostering a sense of pride among its citizens.

Under a mandate to develop architectural distinction, Sheikh Saud initiated policies that resulted in iconic landmarks intended to give the city a contemporary identity while reflecting Islamic heritage.

The business district features world-renowned high-rises, including the Jean Nouvel-designed Doha Tower, the Tornado Tower, the twin Palm Towers, the historic Sheraton Grand Doha Resort & Convention Hotel, the Burj AlMana, the Al Bidda Tower, the World Trade Centre, and the Doha Bank Tower, among others.

Beyond the clustered skyscrapers of West Bay, the Aspire Tower, also known as "The Torch Doha," the Museum of Islamic Art (MIA),



and the National Museum of Qatar serve as standalone iconic structures in their own right. These landmarks provide a central hub for the country's diverse expatriate community.

"The view here is beautiful, especially on Friday nights," said Viraj, a South Asian bachelor, who marvels at the skyline during regular weekend strolls along the Corniche. His friend Anish added that the lights of these buildings make the long walk along the seaside more enjoyable for the many expatriate communities that congregate in the area.

Filipinos also frequently use the

vista for social purposes. "We always come here because the buildings look amazing in photos," Mely said. Similarly, Rina noted that the skyline provides the perfect backdrop for their favourite selfies and family group photos.

Other expatriates also find specific vantage points for the city's architecture. Carl from the US pointed out that his favourite view of the Doha skyline is from the shorelines of the MIA Park. His wife, Meryl, added that the park offers a unique perspective where the modern towers contrast beautifully with the water.

Volume 2 of the Qatar Urban

Design Compendium pointed out that these urban developments are part of a broader national strategy for excellence and international appeal. "Underpinned by the Qatar National Vision 2030 and the Qatar National Masterplan, the country is striving to become ever more attractive as an international destination for high-end business, outstanding education, science, research, health, and high-quality leisure," HE the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Dr Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki al-Subaie stated in the compendium.

Beyond the West Bay Skyline,

Lusail City and Msheireb Downtown Doha are also reshaping Doha's urban landscape.

The integration of cutting-edge technology and eco-friendly practices has redefined how urban environments can function harmoniously with their natural surroundings.

According to al-Subaie, "The ministry recognises that the form of Qatar's cities, urban areas, towns, and villages will play a critical role in meeting Qatar's national vision and international responsibilities towards a sustainable, economically prosperous, and socially equitable future."

Stepping into the future: Graduates reflect on resilience, dreams, leadership

By Shaima Sheriff
Staff Reporter

Graduates from Qatar's leading universities are stepping into the future with ambition and resilience, sharing personal journeys shaped by challenge, opportunity, and a strong foundation in education and leadership.

Behind every graduation is a story of persistence, ambition, and transformation. For many students emerging from institutions under Qatar Foundation, the journey is

not simply academic, it is deeply personal, marked by growth, resilience and the pursuit of long-held dreams.

Muneera al-Qahtani, graduating in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science from Texas A&M University at Qatar, describes her achievement as both a milestone and a legacy. "I am the seventh 'Aggie' in my family and the last 'Aggie' I'm truly proud of myself," she said, reflecting on a journey rooted in family inspiration.

Her path was shaped early on by a clear goal. "It was my first dream

to become a student in Texas A&M...and here I am graduating," she noted. Looking ahead, al-Qahtani plans to enter the power industry, with aspirations to pursue postgraduate studies in the future. She also acknowledged the broader environment that enabled her journey, expressing gratitude for the role of leadership in empowering women in Qatar.

For Naema al-Hail, also a graduate of Texas A&M Qatar in electrical engineering with a minor in mathematics, the journey was defined by challenge and growth. "It's a very long and hard and

challenging roller coaster. I have passed through many challenges... that made me the character that I am now," she said candidly.

Now working at Shell Qatar, al-Hail credits her university experience for shaping her leadership skills.

"Qatar Foundation and Texas A&M both gave me the opportunity to lead and to get critical skills that made me a leader in my work field," she said, noting that her long-term ambition is to take on leadership roles.

Her reflections also highlighted the importance of support sys-

tems. "My parents are the first cheerleaders for me... and my friends made the whole journey very fun and memorable," she added.

Meanwhile, Wei Quan, a graduate of the Executive MBA programme at HEC Paris, emphasised the importance of purpose and perseverance. "When you have a dream in your heart... just stick to that," she said.

She described education as a guiding framework, noting that institutions provide a "North Star" that helps individuals stay focused on their goals. "They make you

dare to dream and give you adequate support when needed," she said, adding that growth comes from pushing limits. "The growth always happens when you are willing to stretch your boundary," she added.

Across these journeys, a common thread emerges: success is not defined by ease, but by resilience.

Together, these voices reflect a generation shaped not only by academic excellence, but by determination, support and a clear sense of purpose, ready to lead, innovate and contribute to a rapidly evolving world.



Muneera al-Qahtani



Wei Quan



Naema al-Hail

Qatari publishing houses ready for DIBF

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

A number of publishing house officials and book industry specialists have confirmed their readiness to participate in the 35th Doha International Book Fair (DIBF), which opens on May 14 at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre (DECC).

They noted that the event represents a leading cultural platform that reflects the development of the cultural landscape in Qatar and reinforces its presence as a regional knowledge hub.

Similarly, they explained that this year's fair is witnessing intensive preparations, including the launch of hundreds of new publications spanning literature, thought, children's books, and academic works, in addition to organising book signings and events targeting various audience segments.

The participants emphasised the importance of developing organisational and logistical aspects and expanding the scope of interactive events to enhance the experience for both visitors and publishers. Also, they affirmed that the continued success of the fair reflects Qatar's interest in and support for culture as a driver of development and the building of societal awareness. They



DIBF represents a leading cultural platform that reflects the development of the cultural landscape in Qatar. (File photo)

noted the growing interest among publishing houses in focusing on high-quality content that blends authenticity and modernity, along with the expansion of children's and young adult publications and the introduction of carefully translated titles, keeping pace with readers' aspirations and reflecting the development of the publishing industry both locally and regionally.

The exhibition has transformed into a comprehensive cultural experience combining knowledge with direct interaction, thanks to the diverse range of accompanying events, including seminars, workshops, and activities geared towards children and families, they pointed out.

Amira al-Muhammadi, director of Katara Publishing House, said that participating in the Doha Interna-

tional Book Fair represents a significant cultural milestone, reflecting Qatar's position as a regional knowledge hub.

She noted that the exhibition contributes to supporting the publishing industry and promoting local books, in addition to its role in enriching the cultural landscape and strengthening communication between writers and readers.

She explained that the publishing house is keen to prepare early for participation by releasing new publications and organising book signings for authors.

She noted that Katara has published approximately 18 books in the past four months, covering a diverse range of topics including politics, law, heritage, history, science, management, biographies, memoirs, and

other literary and intellectual works.

Al-Muhammadi pointed out that among the most prominent of these publications are books documenting Qatari figures and experiences, works on local heritage, and books on thought, politics, and literature. She noted that Katara continues to publish the winning novels of the Katara Prize for Arabic Fiction, as well as series specialising in novel criticism, and periodicals published in both Arabic and English.

Regarding the importance of this year's exhibition, she explained that the diversity of participating publishing houses, which usually exceeds 500 from more than 40 countries, provides a wealth of knowledge and contributes to the exchange of expertise among publishers.

Al-Muhammadi emphasised that the exhibition is a comprehensive cultural space that includes seminars, workshops, lectures, artistic performances, and events for children.

Regarding organisational aspects, al-Muhammadi noted that the exhibition enjoys comprehensive supervision and organisation by the Ministry of Culture, which is committed to supporting publishing houses and providing a suitable environment for exhibitors and visitors. She emphasised that this support contributes to the event's success and boosts attendance.

Visit Qatar launches 'Kids Go Free' campaign for 'Hala Summer' 2026

Visit Qatar has announced the launch of its latest promotional campaign, 'Kids Go Free,' as part of the 'Hala Summer' 2026 season. The campaign introduces a range of family-focused offers across the country, inviting citizens and residents with confirmed hotel bookings, to rediscover Qatar through exceptional staycation experiences combining entertainment, leisure, and added value.

Running from May 1 to Sept 30, the five-month campaign offers a simple proposition: children under the age of 12 can stay, dine, and enjoy a wide range of experiences free of charge when accompanied by a paying adult, while also benefiting from added-value offers across selected attractions, restaurants, tours, and entertainment venues. This applies across all participating offers, subject to individual partner terms and conditions.

More than 100 hotels and resorts across Qatar will offer Kids Stay Free, allowing up to two children to stay at no additional cost when sharing their parents' room using existing bedding or complimentary rollaway beds or cots. Participating hotels will also offer Kids Eat Free, enabling complimentary dining for breakfast, lunch, and dinner at hotel restaurants, excluding room service and minibar.

Under the Kids Explore Free offer, families can further explore Qatar through a variety of tours organised by participating partners, including desert safaris, cultural experiences, and marine activities, with selected excursions available at no additional cost under the campaign.

Across the destination, participating theme parks and waterparks will introduce family-friendly ticket promotions, including "buy two, get one free" offers for children, alongside selected "buy one, get one free" promotions, subject to individual venue terms and availability. Additionally, select museums,



cultural attractions, and entertainment venues will also offer one complimentary child ticket with the purchase of a paid adult ticket. Dining offers extend beyond hotels to participating restaurants and food and beverage outlets, where one child can dine free from the kids' menu when accompanied by a paying adult, subject to venue-specific terms and menu selections.

Additional benefits include prepaid credit bundles at select venues, providing bonus credit redeemable across dining, retail, and selected activities within participating locations.

To enhance the visitor experience, cross-destination value-added offers will be accessible through the Visit Qatar Wallet, activated exclusively for guests with confirmed hotel bookings. Upon check-in, guests will receive a QR code to unlock their offers, with vouchers loaded into the wallet for one-time use per vendor, encouraging exploration across the destination.

Kids Go Free forms part of the wider 'Hala Summer' season, featuring a packed calendar of events including the Qatar Toy Festival, alongside global attractions such as Minecraft World, Colorverse, Fontana Circus performances, and Sneaker Con. Activities will also take place across 10 of the country's leading shopping malls, offering live entertainment, character appearances, and family activations.

QNL announces diverse calendar of events for May

As the academic year enters its final stretch, the Qatar National Library (QNL) has invited students, parents, and lifelong learners to a month of shared experiences designed to inform and inspire.

Taking centre stage is the Mursheed programme, an academic and career mentoring initiative connecting students with leading professionals from Education City and across Qatar. Running every Saturday in May, the programme offers personalised guidance on univer-

sity applications and career paths. The series features a special session on May 9, "My Next Step," where Dr Shaker Lashuel and Jacqueline L Nottingham will lead an interactive Q&A to help students and their parents navigate the transition to higher education.

Prioritising mental wellness, the QNL will host "Mind Matters: Practical Tools for Stress Management and Emotional Wellbeing" on May 7.

Part of the "My Health, My Choice" series, this session pro-

vides evidence-informed strategies to help participants build resilience and cultivate balance in everyday life. The cultural highlight of the month arrives on May 14 as the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra returns for "Art of Women". This captivating evening shines a light on women composers from the Baroque era through the 20th century, weaving together rarely performed works in the QNL's unique setting.

The conversation shifts to the digital frontier on May 17 as the Science Book Forum explores "AI in

Education". Experts from Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar (CMU-Q) will discuss how intelligent tutoring systems and personalised learning tools are fundamentally reshaping the modern classroom. Concluding the month's offerings, the "Ready for School" initiative on May 18, 19, and 21 targets parents and educators of children aged 3-6. These workshops provide practical tools to strengthen a child's cognitive and emotional independence ahead of their first school experience. — QNA