



## Qatar Insurance

Financial Results (Q1 2026)

Gross Written Premiums (GWP)

13% ▲

QAR 3.2B

Net Profit

6% ▲

QAR 217M

Investment Income:

10% ▲

QAR 238M

Insurance Service Results:

70% ▲

QAR 130M

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# GULF TIMES

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PICTURE: Aisha Al-Musallam

## Sheikha Moza graces QU Health Sector graduation

Her Highness the Chairperson of Qatar Foundation (QF) Sheikha Moza bint Nasser attended yesterday the graduation ceremony of students from Qatar University (QU)'s health sector colleges for the Class of 2026.

The ceremony honoured 349 graduates and was attended by a number of Their Excellencies senior officials as well as members of the academic and administrative staff, and families of the graduates.

This cohort included 130 graduates from the College of Health Sciences, 94 from the College of Pharmacy, 36 from

- First cohort from College of Nursing
- Health oath recited for the first time

the College of Nursing, 66 from the College of Medicine, and 23 from the College of Dental Medicine, reflecting the diversity of specialisations that supply the health sector in the country with qualified personnel.

The ceremony brought together undergraduate and postgraduate graduates across QU's Health Sector and marked a key milestone with the graduation of the first cohort from

the College of Nursing, reflecting QU's continued expansion of its academic offerings in support of the healthcare sector in Qatar.

For the first time, the ceremony also featured the Health Oath Recitation, symbolising graduates' transition into professional practice and reaffirming the values at the heart of health professions, service, responsibility, compassion, and integrity. **To Page 12**

## US, Gulf states push UNSC resolution on Strait of Hormuz

GT Report

Representatives of the United States and several Arab countries held joint consultations at the United Nations on a draft Security Council resolution concerning the Strait of Hormuz amid renewed diplomatic efforts to safeguard one of the world's most critical maritime routes.

According to a statement issued after the meeting, Bahrain, in co-ordination with the US and backed by Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, submitted the draft resolution to the UN Security Council (UNSC) as part of ongoing consultations on Gulf maritime security.

The statement described the Strait of Hormuz as one of the world's most vital waterways, underscoring its strategic importance for Gulf stability and the global economy. It said recent developments had reinforced the urgency of preserving the security of the passage and ensuring that it remains fully open to international navigation.

Bahrain's representative said the draft text, presented as a continuation of UN Security Council Resolution 2817, calls on Iran to

immediately halt all attacks and threats against commercial shipping. The proposal also addresses concerns related to the laying of sea mines and what it described as illegal towing operations.

The representative added that the draft was rooted in the principle of freedom of navigation under international law and aimed to support efforts toward sustainable peace and dialogue in the region.

The latest diplomatic move comes after an earlier, more forceful draft resolution failed to pass the Security Council in April following vetoes by Russia and China. Diplomats and international media reports said the revised text was deliberately softened to improve chances of broader support and avoid another deadlock at the council.

Reports from New York indicated that Security Council members have entered a fresh phase of closed consultations on the revised proposal rather than a formal public voting session.

The Strait of Hormuz remains a focal point of global concern, with nearly a fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas trade passing through the narrow waterway connecting the Gulf to international markets.

### PM, Pakistan counterpart, Egypt, Jordan FM's review situation

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani held a phone call yesterday with Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. The two sides discussed bilateral co-operation and ways to strengthen it, in addition to the latest regional developments and Pakistan's efforts to support de-escalation and promote security and stability.

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs expressed appreciation for Pakistan's efforts, along with other mediating parties, in facilitating the ceasefire between the US and Iran.

He reaffirmed Qatar's full support for mediation efforts aimed at resolving the crisis through peaceful means, stressing the importance of all parties responding constructively to create conditions for renewed negotiations leading to a comprehensive and sustainable peace agreement.

The Prime Minister also received a phone call from Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Immigration and Egyptian Expatriates of the Arab Republic of Egypt Badr Abdelatty. They discussed bilateral relations and ways to support and strengthen them besides developments in the region, particularly those related to the ceasefire between the US and Iran, and efforts aimed at de-escalation, contributing to enhancing security and stability in the region.

The Prime Minister also held a phone call with Jordanian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates Ayman Safadi. They discussed bilateral co-operation and ways to further enhance it, in addition to regional developments.

HE the Prime Minister emphasised the importance of all parties responding to ongoing mediation efforts to address the root causes of the crisis through peaceful means and dialogue, leading to a sustainable agreement that prevents renewed escalation. **(QNA)**

## Cloud kitchens drive Qatar delivery boom

By Peter Alagos  
Business Editor



Awais Malik, general manager for Kitchens at talabat.

Qatar's food delivery sector is expanding at a pace that is reshaping how restaurants operate, with cloud kitchens increasingly seen as a lower-risk, cost-efficient alternative to traditional brick-and-mortar establishments.

According to industry players, the cloud kitchen model is particularly well-suited to capture this growth, given its lower capital requirements and operational flexibility compared with conventional dining formats.

"Cloud kitchens are uniquely positioned to accelerate growth in a high-demand market like Qatar," Awais Malik, general manager for Kitchens at Mena-based food delivery platform talabat, told *Gulf Times* in an exclusive interview.

Unlike traditional brick-and-

mortar restaurants that require substantial upfront investment and are heavily impacted by rising real estate costs, Malik explained that cloud kitchens offer a more agile, asset-light model.

"These kitchens act as localised distribution hubs, reducing delivery distances and improving speed, contributing to delivery time improvements of up to 13% regionally versus brick and mortar," he pointed out.

The cloud kitchen model also carries implications for small and medium-sized enterprises, where high rental costs have long been a barrier to entry. Malik said the "asset-light" model "is a game-changer for SMEs." He emphasised that by significantly reducing upfront investment and ongoing overhead costs, cloud kitchens make it easier for entrepreneurs to enter the market and scale sustainably.

"At talabat Kitchens, partners benefit from significantly lower rental costs as a share of revenue, typically saving up to half compared to traditional dine-in locations. This more efficient cost structure enables stronger returns while supporting expansion into both prime and underserved areas."

In line with this, Malik said talabat's new kitchen in Wukair will serve as a launchpad for multiple well-loved and successful GCC brands entering and expanding within the market, helping bring greater variety and choice to customers in the area. **To Page 11**

### Tensions rise amid new US attacks on Iran

Iran accused the United States of violating a ceasefire by targeting two ships at the Strait of Hormuz and attacking civilian areas, the country's top joint military command said early today.

The US targeted "an Iranian oil tanker traveling from Iran's coastal waters near Jask toward the Strait of Hormuz, as well as another vessel entering the Strait of Hormuz near the Emirate port of Fujairah," a spokesperson for Iran's Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters said in a statement carried by state media.

"At the same time, with the co-operation of some regional countries, they carried out air attacks on civilian areas along the coasts of Bandar Khamir, Sirik, and Qeshm Island."

A Fox News reporter also said in a post on X, citing a senior US official, that the US military carried out strikes on Iran's Qeshm port and Bandar Abbas. The official said the strikes do not mean a restarting of the war or an end to the ceasefire announced on April 7, according to the post.

The strikes took place as the US awaited Iran's response to a US proposal that would halt fighting between the two countries but leave the most contentious issues, such as Iran's nuclear program, unresolved for now.

US military naval units operating in the area of the Strait of Hormuz came under Iranian missile fire following the attack by the US military on an Iranian oil tanker, Iranian state media, citing an unnamed military official, said yesterday. **To Page 11**

### Inter-agency drill



The Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya) concluded yesterday a joint exercise, with participation from the Qatar Armed Forces and the Ministry of Interior, as part of efforts to enhance co-ordination and integration between military and security agencies. The final drill featured a scenario simulating riot-control operations to assess readiness and the ability to manage emergency situations efficiently through joint inter-agency co-ordination. **Page 4**

COMMUNITY

See Page 5



## Qatar participates in GCC food safety ministerial meeting

Qatar participated in the 10th ministerial committee meeting on food safety for Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) states, held virtually yesterday.

Qatar was represented by HE the Minister of Public Health Mansoor bin Ebrahim al-Mahmoud.

The meeting addressed a range of key food safety issues, including facilitating the flow of food commodities across GCC markets through temporary exemptions under current exceptional circumstances, the GCC guide for imported food control, and the unified GCC food law.

They also discussed the GCC Centre for Food Risk Assessment, novel foods regulations, mechanisms for imposing and lifting bans on imports of animal-origin food products, the development of a unified GCC food safety policy document, and a proposed regional food safety action plan. - QNA

## Al-Muraikhi takes part in foreign ministers meeting



Qatar participated yesterday in a meeting of foreign ministers from the EU Mediterranean group (MED9), the League of Arab States, and Western Balkan countries, held via video conference.

Qatar was represented by HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi. The meeting discussed strengthening food security and facilitating access to fertilisers. - QNA

## Qatar warns of global impact of Hormuz closure at UN briefing

Qatar has warned that the closure of the Strait of Hormuz has caused significant economic disruption and risks escalating regional tensions into a global crisis.

The remarks were made yesterday by HE the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations Sheikhha Alya Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani during a UN media briefing on a draft Security Council resolution related to the strategic waterway.

The media stakeout also featured the permanent representatives of the US and several Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) countries, including Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. HE Sheikhha Alya said the closure of the vital maritime passage since March has had major economic consequences across Gulf states and the wider world, particularly affecting global energy markets.

According to her remarks, around 20% of global oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) trade has been disrupted, while supply chains have been fragmented and more than 20,000 seafarers remain stranded at sea.

HE Sheikhha Alya warned that the situation threatens not only global energy security and economic stability but also worsens humanitarian conditions and undermines regional stability, posing a serious risk to international peace and security.

She stressed that ensuring freedom of navigation through the strait is not only a requirement under international maritime law and relevant UN Security Council resolutions, but also a shared international responsibility.

Qatar expressed its hope for continued engagement with UN member states to build support for the draft resolution aimed at safeguarding maritime routes and ensuring freedom of navigation. - QNA

## Es'hailSat adds Sama Jordan TV to expand channel offerings

Es'hailSat, the Qatar satellite company, announced that it has expanded its channel offerings by incorporating Sama Jordan TV channel into its video distribution lineup at the 26° East orbital position, facilitated by the Es'hail-2 satellite.

"Es'hailSat is delighted to welcome Sama Jordan TV channel and bring on board one of the region's leading news broadcasters to our satellite hotspot," Es'hailSat president and chief executive Ali Ahmed al-Kuwari said.

"We believe that the reliability and expertise in providing satellite services by Es'hailSat aligns perfectly with Sama Jordan's vision to serve as a leading news broadcaster, providing comprehensive and reliable information to the country's public," he added.

"We have chosen to broadcast via the Es'hailSat satellite due to its strategic importance at the orbital position of 26° East," said Sama Jordan TV chief executive Rabea al-Awamleh. "This ensures that Sama Jordan TV will be alongside the majority of key channels in the region that also transmit through Es'hailSat."

The Es'hailSat satellite footprint strategically encompasses the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, optimising signal coverage and enabling significant viewership potential for the news broadcaster's channel from Jordan throughout this area. - QNA

## Ashghal completes over 1,800km of pedestrian, cycling paths in 5 years

The Public Works Authority (Ashghal) announced yesterday the completion of more than 1,800km of pedestrian and cycling paths between 2020 and 2025, as part of its comprehensive strategy to enhance sustainable mobility and provide a safer road environment.

The authority said the paths are part of highway, main road, and internal road projects aimed at separating pedestrian and cyclist traffic from vehicles, thereby improving traffic safety levels and enhancing traffic flow in cities and residential areas.

The network includes shared pedestrian and cycling routes as well as dedicated cycling lanes to ensure a safe and comfortable mobility experience for users, while also providing infrastructure that encourages active and healthy modes of transport.

Ashghal stated that these achievements reflect its commitment to developing a modern and integrated road network that supports sustainable development goals and enhances the quality of life for citizens and residents. - QNA

## Shura Council Speaker meets parliamentary leaders



HE the Speaker of the Shura Council Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanim met with Jordan's Senate President Faisal Akef al-Fayez and House of Representatives Speaker Mazen Qadi on the sidelines of the first Summit of Speakers of Parliaments and Presidents of Houses of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, held yesterday in Montenegro.

During the meeting, they reviewed parliamentary co-operation, relations and discussed topics on the summit's agenda, including parliamentary diplomacy, strengthening dialogue and co-operation between parliaments, and enhancing the resilience of democratic institutions.

HE al-Ghanim also met with Montenegro's Parliament President Andrija Mandic and discussed ways to enhance parliamentary co-operation and reviewed issues of mutual interest, in addition to the summit's agenda.

He further met with Malta's House of Representatives Speaker Angelo Farrugia, where discussions focused on parliamentary co-operation between the two sides, as well as an exchange of views on the main themes of the summit.

Meanwhile, Shura Council Secretary-General Nayef bin Mohammed al-Mahmoud met with Montenegro's Parliament Secretary-General Boban Stanisc. They reviewed administrative and parliamentary co-operation and co-ordination, and exchanged views on a number of issues of mutual interest. - QNA



# Qatar's focus on diplomacy, peaceful solutions affirmed

HE the Speaker of the Shura Council Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanim affirmed that Qatar, under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, leads a steady foreign policy that is based on dialogue, mediation, and peaceful solutions, pursuant to the principles of its constitution.

Such approach, he noted, has contributed to supporting several paths to de-escalation and bridging viewpoints on numerous regional and international issues.

Addressing the first summit of Speakers of Parliaments and Presidents of Houses of Representatives of Member and Partner States of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, held in Budva, Montenegro, as part of the 20th session of the Assembly, HE al-Ghanim said that the Shura Council plays a supportive role in Qatar's foreign policy by activating parliamentary diplomacy tools, actively participating in various parliamentary forums, and working to co-ordinate positions on issues of common interest, thereby strengthening international parliamentary co-operation.

He noted that this summit, dedicated to discussing parliamentary diplomacy and its role in strengthening the resilience of democratic institutions, comes amidst escalating international crises and tensions, and the security, political, and humanitarian repercussions

witnessed in the region.

HE al-Ghanim pointed out that the continued Israeli aggression against the occupied Palestinian territories and its worsening humanitarian and security consequences underscore the urgent need to bolster international efforts aimed at consolidating security and stability and respecting international law.

He commended the adoption of the emergency item proposed by the Shura Council, in co-operation with several other countries, which was added to the agenda of the recent General Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union held in Istanbul.

HE the Speaker explained that the item calls for concerted parliamentary efforts to uphold ceasefire agreements and support the establishment of peace, and it received broad support from various parliamentary groups, reflecting the importance of joint parliamentary action in supporting international peace and security.

He emphasised that parliaments represent the voice and will of the people and play a fundamental role in expressing citizens' aspirations and safeguarding their interests.

HE al-Ghanim pointed out that strengthening communication and dialogue channels between countries and consolidating a culture of understanding among peoples has become essential in light of the increasing challenges facing the international system and the declining

effectiveness of international institutions concerned with maintaining international peace and security.

The summit featured speeches by the participating speakers of parliaments and houses of representatives, addressing the importance of parliamentary diplomacy in fostering dialogue and understanding among nations and peoples, and supporting the resilience of democratic institutions in the face of current political, security, and economic challenges.

They also emphasised the importance of joint parliamentary action in promoting stability and peace.

Alongside the General Assembly meetings, the summit discussed various key topics, most notably parliamentary diplomacy and its role in strengthening institutional resilience, as well as issues of political and security co-operation, interfaith dialogue and human rights, economic and environmental challenges, and the issues of migration and children in armed conflict.

These discussions aimed to enhance parliamentary co-ordination and the exchange of expertise among member and partner states.

This summit is a significant milestone in the work of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, bringing together speakers of parliaments to discuss regional and international issues and strengthen joint parliamentary action. - QNA

## Qur'an memorisation centres in Gaza: Faith-filled spaces helping to heal souls weary from war

The devastating war waged by the Israeli entity against the Gaza Strip for over two years, and the immense destruction it left behind, were not enough to extinguish the flame of devotion to the Holy Qur'an and its memorisation and learning in the hearts of Gazans.

Despite the widespread destruction inflicted on infrastructure, religious and educational institutions, mosques, and Qur'an memorisation centres during the two years of war, the Gaza Strip is witnessing a remarkable official, popular, and community movement to reactivate Qur'an memorisation and teaching centres as an effective tool for spiritual and psychological recovery and for rebuilding the human capital exhausted by the brutal war.

Rami al-Shaqra, supervisor of the Al-Nour Centre for Qur'an Memorisation and Sciences in the Gaza Strip, affirmed that the centre's work represents an attempt to recover and rebuild Palestinian identity in the face of the repercussions of the war and attempts to undermine all aspects of life over the past two years.

He said that the Al-Nour Qur'an School was established on the ruins of what the occupation destroyed.

Al-Shaqra indicated that the current focus is on "rebuilding the most important human resource, the individual, and reconstruct-



A Qur'an school in Gaza.

ing the person exhausted by the deadly war through a comprehensive Qur'anic and educational programme."

He noted that the centre currently attracts approximately 800 male and female students of various ages, from young children to senior citizens over 60, for whom specific programmes are tailored to their age group.

The official added that this system is managed by an educational and training staff comprising about 60 supervisors and Qur'an teachers.

Regarding the nature of the programmes offered to students under the current circumstances, al-Shaqra explained that the centre's programme is not limited to traditional worship and memorisation, but rather stems from a comprehensive educational, psychological, and rehabilitative vision aimed at integrating the Holy Qur'an into the daily lives of citizens as a means of psychological healing and overcoming trauma.

"Immediately after the cessation of hostilities, we prepared comprehensive educational cur-

ricula suitable for all age groups," he said.

"This programme includes a key component for the psychological and emotional release of students, supervised by a select group of psychologists and counselors to rebuild the individual's personality and psyche," al-Shaqra added.

"Alongside this is an educational programme that explores Qur'anic stories, the biographies of the Companions, prominent figures, and influential Islamic and historical personalities to connect the generation to its roots and identity," he continued.

Abu Shaaban told the Qatar News Agency (QNA) that the Qur'anic study circles have become a psychological haven for children, providing them with a daily routine that has restored their sense of stability, in addition to instilling values of patience and mitigating the difficult behavioural effects of prolonged displacement.

Huda al-Farra, 56, said: "The Qur'anic School has been a great motivator for us to memorise the Book of God and learn Islamic jurisprudence and religious sciences." "After all we have endured - the loss of family and loved ones, injustice, and displacement - we have found in the Book of God a safe haven," she said. "And to hold on to strength and serenity so that we may begin our lives anew!" - QNA

# Thai fine jewellery house Dermond enters global stage

Distinguished Thai fine jewellery house Dermond, renowned for its diamond mastery and refined craftsmanship, has been honoured as one of the Top 100 Jewellery & Watch Brands of the World 2025 by Luxury Lifestyle Awards (LLA).

Marking another significant milestone, the house has also been welcomed as a member of the World Luxury Chamber of Commerce – a recognition that affirms Dermond's standing on the global luxury stage and its role as a leading representative of Thai fine jewellery artistry.

Renowned maisons such as Dermond are being featured at the Alfardan Jewellery Private Edition boutique event, running from May 3-9 at Doha Festival City, where an exclusive showcase presents a curated selection of novelties and exceptional high jewellery pieces.

As a Thai global fine jewellery house, Dermond continues to preserve and reinterpret the legacy of Thailand's master artisans, translating cultural heritage into contemporary fine jewellery of enduring meaning.

From Bangkok to the world, the house's creative vision is guided by Sirapat Pipatveeravat, creative director and second-generation heir, who reflects on more than three decades of excellence that have positioned Dermond at the forefront of Thailand's fine jewellery landscape.

"Our creations are not driven solely by timeless beauty," he said. "They are guided by purpose. Every diamond is meticulously selected, every detail crafted with intention, and each piece is designed to tell a story that resonates deeply with its wearer."

"As Dermond steps onto the international stage, I feel a profound sense of responsibility," Pipatveeravat said. "To be recognised as one of the Top 100 Jewellery & Watch Brands of the World 2025 by Luxury Lifestyle Awards, and to join the World Luxury Chamber of Commerce, is not only an honour for our house but a commitment to represent the depth and integrity of Thai craftsmanship on an international level."

"It is this equilibrium that al-



lows Dermond to stand gracefully alongside the world's most distinguished fine jewellery houses – not through excess but through purpose, restraint and enduring values," he added.

For Dermond, sustainability is not a trend but a long-standing philosophy grounded in respect – for materials, artisans and those who cherish the finished creation.



This principle informs every stage of the creative process, integrating social and environmental responsibility to ensure longevity in both design and craftsmanship.

Equally central to the house's philosophy is timeless service – a belief that care does not end at the moment of purchase. Dermond offers lifelong services



including maintenance, restoration, resizing and bespoke customisation, fostering enduring relationships and enriching the emotional value of each creation across generations.

Every diamond at Dermond is selected with deliberate care and every creation is designed to be distinctly individual.

The house upholds one of the most exacting diamond selection standards – one that extends far beyond certification alone.

Each diamond is meticulously evaluated for its brilliance, precision of cut and purity, ensuring complete freedom from undesirable characteristics such as brown

or green undertones, or any trace of cloudiness.

For round diamonds, Dermond selects exclusively those graded F colour, VVS clarity and Excellent cut, while fancy-shaped diamonds must meet the house's uncompromising E colour and VVS clarity standards.

This discipline applies without exception.

Discover fine jewellery imbued with meaning at Dermond's boutiques in Thailand, located at Siam Paragon, Central Chidlom, One Bangkok, and Central Pattaya, and experience the house's newly unveiled flagship at Siam Paragon today.

## Mouawad to showcase curated selection of creations at Alfardan private viewing



Mouawad is delighted to unveil a curated selection of its exceptional creations at an exclusive private viewing hosted by Alfardan.

Designed as an intimate and refined experience, the event invites discerning guests to immerse themselves in the Maison's world of high jewellery, within a distinguished setting that reflects a shared dedication to excellence, heritage, and the art of fine craftsmanship.

Founded in 1890, Mouawad stands among the few family-owned maisons to have preserved its legacy across five generations.

With over a century of heritage, the house is synonymous with exceptional craftsmanship, rare gemstones, and timeless design.

As a vertically integrated jeweller, Mouawad oversees every stage of creation – from the sourcing of the world's most exquisite gems to the final masterpiece – ensuring uncompromising quality and artistry.

Deeply rooted in the Middle East and celebrated worldwide, Mouawad continues to redefine masterpieces, high jewellery, as well as fine jewellery, seamlessly blending tradition while embracing modern sophistication.

For this private viewing, Mouawad will unveil two exceptional high jewellery creations and a curated selection of fine jewellery pieces, each reflecting the house's pursuit of beauty, rarity, and refinement.

Highlights include:  
 • Wind Flower White Diamond – An exquisite high jewellery creation inspired by the windflower, a rare bloom that symbolises a love that is delicate, meaningful, and enduring. Its design reflects petals shaped by the wind, with diamonds arranged to

create softness, movement, and radiant light.

Each piece is crafted with exceptional care, expressing Mouawad's legacy of timeless beauty and emotional storytelling.

This is a collection created to celebrate a love that is rare – and destined to last forever.

Over 300 hours of expert craftsmanship, showcasing Mouawad's legacy of high jewellery excellence and artfully crafted, three-dimensional windflower bloom.

This suite features 69.44 carats of brilliant diamonds selected for their clarity and brilliance.

• Ivy Tanzanite – A luminous creation inspired by the quiet strength and enduring elegance of the ivy plant.

Symbolising connection and resilience, the design captures the beauty of bonds that deepen and flourish through time.

Graceful curves of white gold intertwine like ivy climbing effortlessly upward, reflecting shared journeys and the harmony of lives growing together.

At the heart of the design, radiant blue tanzanite evokes trust and individuality, while brilliant diamonds illuminate the precious moments of love that define lasting relationships.

Expertly handcrafted in 18-karat white gold, this masterpiece features 90.79 carats of tanzanite and 40.67 carats of diamonds, brought to life through over 300 hours of meticulous artistry, a true testament to Mouawad's passion for perfection.

Mouawad looks forward to welcoming guests, collectors, and friends of the house to this exclusive gathering – an intimate celebration of heritage, artistry, and the enduring beauty of exceptional jewellery.

## Ooodles Wok announces second location in Doha

**Award-winning Asian fusion brand continues growth journey with new Doha opening**



Following the successful debut of its first outlet in Qatar, Ooodles Wok has announced the upcoming opening of its second location in Doha, marking another milestone in the brand's rapid expansion across the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC).

The new branch reflects strong momentum for the award-winning Asian fusion concept, which has quickly captured the attention of Qatar's diverse and trend-driven dining audience.

Globally celebrated and recognised for its innovative approach to fast-casual dining, Ooodles Wok has earned multiple industry accolades for its bold flavours, operational excellence, and unique "create-your-own" dining experience.

With more than 50 locations across the UK, Canada, the UAE, and now Qatar, the brand continues to redefine modern Asian street food.

Known for its signature customisable noodle and rice bowls, handcrafted sauces, and high-energy wok cooking, Ooodles Wok delivers on its promise of "Fresh, Fired, Flavourful".

The brand's award-winning status reinforces its position as a leader in the fast-casual Asian fusion segment.

"The response to our first location in

Qatar has been exceptional," said chief operating officer Vyanktesh Jaiswal. "As we expand with a second branch, our focus remains on maintaining operational excellence and delivering a consistent, high-quality experience that reflects the brand's global standards."

"Ooodles Wok's growth in Qatar reflects the strong connection the brand has built with customers in a short span of time," said head of operations Balu Subramanian. "We are excited to continue this journey, bringing our award-winning flavours and vibrant dining experience to an even wider audience."

The second Doha location represents a key step in Ooodles Wok's broader regional strategy, as it continues to expand its footprint across the GCC.

With strong early performance in Qatar, the brand is poised for sustained growth and deeper market penetration.

Further details, including the official opening date and location, will be announced soon.

## Nigaam Jewels: A legacy of craftsmanship, rarity and international vision

Nigaam Jewels is a global jewellery house shaped by the Nigam family's longstanding heritage in gemstone cutting and jewellery making.

Founded in the 1980s in Jaipur, the brand has evolved from a family-led atelier into an internationally recognised name, defined by rare gemstones, refined craftsmanship and a distinct design language.

At the heart of the house lies an exceptional expertise in sourcing gemstones.

Each stone is carefully selected, cut and set to reveal its full depth of colour

and brilliance, forming the foundation of every creation.

This commitment to precision and quality results in jewellery that feels both timeless and deeply personal, balancing structure, light and expression.

Over the decades, Nigaam has established a strong global presence, with showcases at Haute Jewels Geneva, the Doha Jewellery and Watches Exhibition, Bahrain Jewellery Centre and The Luxury by JCK Las Vegas.

The brand is also represented through select retail partnerships, including Bergdorf Goodman and Saks Fifth Avenue.

These touchpoints reflect longstanding relationships with royal families, private collectors and clients who value authenticity, rarity and exceptional design.



Design at Nigaam begins with the stone.

Guided by art, architecture and the natural world, each piece is brought to life by master artisans, where technical precision meets a sense of movement and individuality.


The result is jewellery that transcends time and trend, offering a quiet confidence rooted in heritage and craftsmanship.

With its expansion into Dubai, Nigaam enters a region known for its appreciation of high jewellery and exceptional gemstones.

This presence marks a new chapter for the house, allowing it to engage more closely with collectors across the Middle East while continuing to shape its global narrative.






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

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Successful candidates must be available to join within one month of interview.



## Consultations on National Human Rights Action Plan continue

Consultative sessions on the National Human Rights Action Plan (2026-30), organised by the committee tasked with preparing the plan, continued yesterday under the chair-

manship of HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation Dr Mariam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad, and hosted by HE the Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Ib-

rahim bin Ali bin Issa al-Hassan al-Mohannadi.

Committee members and specialists took part, discussing issues related to the responsibilities of the Ministry of Justice

and reviewing proposals and approaches to support the development of the plan and ensure its alignment with national policies and legislation.

At the conclusion of the session, the

participants emphasised on the necessity for the National Human Rights Action Plan as a national framework that reinforces the protection of human rights. - QNA



## Qatar concludes joint security exercise

The Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya) concluded yesterday a joint exercise, with participation from the Qatar Armed Forces and the Ministry of Interior (MoI), as part of efforts to enhance co-ordination and in-

tegration between military and security agencies.

The closing ceremony was attended by HE the Deputy Commander of the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya) Major-General Mohammed Mesfer al-Shahwan.

The final drill featured a scenario simulating riot-control operations to assess readiness and the ability to manage emergency situations efficiently through joint inter-agency co-ordination.

Participating units included the Qa-

tar Military Police Forces (QMPF), GHQ Support Force, Joint Special Forces, Combined Air Operations Centre (CAOC), and Signal Corps, alongside the MoI's support forces, the National Command Centre (NCC), Special Operations Command, Support and Reinforcement Group, and Lekhwiya's Female VIP Protection Unit. - QNA

## Zimbabwe returning 67 farms covered by treaties

Zimbabwe will return 67 farms seized from foreigners from four European countries covered by bilateral investment pacts, the country's agriculture minister said, as it seeks to mend ties with Western countries while it battles for debt relief.

The southern African country started seizing white-owned farms under its late leader Robert Mugabe in 2000, in a move the government said at the time was meant to resettle landless black people and redress colonial-era land ownership imbalances.

The seizures wrecked commercial agriculture, precipitated a currency collapse in 2008 and left Zimbabwe struggling to feed itself.

Mugabe's successor President Emmerson Mnangagwa has sought to improve ties with Western governments, which imposed sanctions on Zimbabwe over the land seizures and allegations of broader human rights abuses.

The land restitution drive is part of its efforts to secure debt relief, having been shut out of the global financial system for more than two decades after defaulting on debt owed to international lenders.

Its foreign debt stood at \$13.6bn in September 2025, with \$7.7bn of that in arrears. International lenders have demanded reforms, including resolving land-related disputes as conditions for debt relief.

Agriculture minister Anxious Masuka told lawmakers on Wednesday that the government would give the 67 farms back to nationals from Denmark, Switzerland, Germany and the Netherlands as they were covered by the bilateral investment protection agreements.

"We are in the process of returning those to them," Masuka said in response to a question by a lawmaker.

The European countries are part of the group of Western countries discussing debt relief with Zimbabwe and are also significant donors to the country.

Mnangagwa, a long-time ally of Mugabe who replaced his mentor in a 2017 coup, agreed a \$3.5bn compensation deal with about 4,000 white farmers in 2020, but his cash-strapped government has struggled to make significant payments. - Reuters

# Lebanon, Israel 'to hold new talks on May 14-15', says US

AFP/Reuters  
Washington

Lebanon and Israel will hold a new round of peace talks on May 14-15 in Washington, a US official said yesterday, despite a new Israeli strike in the heart of Beirut.

The attack late on Wednesday killed a senior commander of Hezbollah, with Israel saying that it will keep targeting the Iranian-backed group despite a ceasefire in place in Lebanon.

Next week's talks will be the third between Israel and Lebanon, which had not spoken directly for decades and have no diplomatic relations.

"There will be talks between Lebanon and Israel on Thursday and Friday next week in Washington," a State Department official said on condition of anonymity.

The official did not say who would participate in the meeting.

Israeli strikes in Lebanon have killed more than 2,700 people since March 2, including dozens since a ceasefire was declared, according to Lebanese authorities.

At the last talks on April 23, the two sides met in the White House with President Donald Trump, who announced a three-week extension of the ceasefire.

He also said that he expected a historic meeting

within the ceasefire period between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Lebanese President Joseph Aoun.

However, Aoun said on Monday that the timing was not yet right for a meeting, saying that first the two countries must reach a security agreement.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio, at a news conference on Tuesday, said that "there's no problem between the Lebanese government and the Israeli government" and that Hezbollah was the issue.

"By and large, I think a peace deal between Lebanon and Israel is eminently achievable and should be," he said.

Rubio added that peace required Lebanon's government to have the capability to fight Hezbollah.

Israel has carried out heavy bombings of Lebanon and as well as a ground invasion of southern Lebanon.

It was responding to rocket fire by Hezbollah, a group backed by Iran's ruling clerics which had vowed to avenge the killing of Iran's long-time supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, at the start of the war on Iran launched by Trump and Netanyahu on February 28.

An Israeli strike on Wednesday also killed four people in the eastern Bekaa Valley, with Israel saying it was targeting Hezbollah.

The two previous rounds of talks in Washington were held between the Israeli and Lebanese ambassadors to the United States.

## Two attacks in Mali kill dozens

AFP/Reuters  
Bamako

Two attacks in central Mali claimed by Al Qaeda-linked militants have killed more than 30 people, local, security and administrative sources told AFP yesterday.

Three sources - an aid worker, a diplomat and a security source - told Reuters, however, that the militants killed around 50 people, including members of pro-government self-defence forces and civilians, in the attacks yesterday.

The two strikes come less than a fortnight after a large-scale, co-ordinated offensive by religious militants and separatists on junta positions, which plunged the west African country into a fresh security crisis.

"At least 35 people were killed on Wednesday in near simultaneous attacks" on the villages of Korikori and Gomossogou, a youth official said.

A security and an administrative source both reported more than 30 dead in the assaults, claimed by the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM).

WAMAPS, a group of west African journalists specialising in Sahel security, said the provisional toll was more than 50 villagers killed and several still missing.



An Azawad Liberation Front (FLA) soldier stands on a pick-up truck next to a damaged Mi-24 helicopter at the former Africa Corps barracks at Camp 2 in Kidal. - AFP

"Villages have been looted and some properties set on fire," the group added.

The Malian army said yesterday that it had carried out "a targeted operation against terrorist armed groups" in the area and around a dozen fighters were "neutralised".

It did not give details.

The unprecedented assaults on April 25-26 by the JNIM and the Azawad Liberation Front (FLA), an ethnic Tuareg separatist movement, targeted strategic towns including Kidal in the desert north, and Kati, a garrison town near the capital Bamako.

Defence Minister Sadio Camara, the 47-year-old architect of Mali's military alliance with

Russia, was killed by a car bomb.

Kidal and other towns and villages in the north were captured and are now under the control of the FLA and the religious militants, who have since imposed a blockade on Bamako.

Since 2012, Mali has faced a deep security crisis fuelled in particular by violence from groups affiliated with Al Qaeda and the Islamic State, as well as local criminal gangs and pro-independence groups.

On April 30, the JNIM called for a "common front" to "put an end to the junta" and usher in a peaceful and inclusive transition.

The country has been under military rule since a back-to-back coups in 2020.

## South Sudan's army chief, finance minister sacked

South Sudan's President Salva Kiir has dismissed the country's military chief and a finance minister who had been in post for less than three months, state media reported late on Wednesday.

The dismissals were the latest of frequent changes in the top ranks of Kiir's government in recent years that analysts say signal an effort to consolidate power amid succession uncertainty.

The fired army chief, General Paul Nang, had occupied his position since October and his

tenure had come under increasing scrutiny amid worsening insecurity in the country while the finance minister, Salvatore Garang Mabiordit, had served in the position since February 23.

Kiir reappointed General Santino Deng Wol as the new army chief, state media South Sudan Broadcasting Corporation said.

Wol is a close ally of the president and had served in the same post between 2020 and 2024.

Kuol Daniel Ayulo, a career technocrat, has been appointed as finance minister, according to the state media. - Reuters

## Bahrain expels three lawmakers from parliament for Iran support

Bahrain's parliament expelled yesterday three MPs who opposed a royal decree on citizenship cases, after dozens were stripped of nationality for backing Iran during the Middle East war.

The Council of Representatives voted unanimously to expel Abdulnabi Salman, Mamdouh al-Saleh and Mahdi al-Showaikh, who were not present for the vote, according to video footage of the session.

Bahrain was hard-hit by Iranian attacks in March.

Last month, the kingdom stripped 69 people of citizenship for expressing support for Tehran.

The three lawmakers refused to vote for a royal decree abolishing

the right of appeal against government decisions on nationality.

King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa had earlier lashed out at "some members of the legislative authority who sided with traitors," the Bahrain News Agency said. - AFP



## Young talents shine at Qatar's 'Naqla' school chess contest

The third edition of the "Naqla" school chess project concluded with the participation of 102 students from 16 primary schools, highlighting growing interest in chess among young students in Qatar. The event was organised by the Qatar Chess Federation in co-operation with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and the Ministry of Sports and Youth.

The final tournament of the 2025-2026 edition was dedicated to primary schools and featured separate competitions for boys' and girls' government schools. Each category consisted of six rounds, attended by officials from both ministries and the federation.

Hittin Model School for Boys dominated the boys' individual competition, with Khalid al-Zeyara taking the first place, followed by Hamad al-Zeyara in second and Aser Hijab in third.

In the girls' individual category, Masa Ramadan of Al Markhiya Primary School for Girls secured first place, while her teammate Amira

al-Moumeni came second. Aisha al-Fakhro of Al Bayan Primary School for Girls finished third.

Hittin Model School for Boys also claimed the boys' team title, ahead of Malik Bin Anas Model School for Boys in second place and Khalifa Model School for Boys in third. In the girls' team standings, Al Markhiya Primary School for Girls won first place, followed by Maimouna Primary School for Girls in second and Al Bayan First Primary School for Girls in third.

The winners were honoured by Dr Ibrahim bin Saleh al-Nuaimi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education; Maha Zayed Al-Qaqqa al-Ruwaile, Assistant Undersecretary for Educational Affairs; and Mohammed al-Mudahka, president of the Qatar Chess Federation.

In a press statement, al-Mudahka said the tournament, now in its third consecutive year, forms part of the federation's broader "Chess in Schools" initiative aimed at developing and promoting the game across educational institutions.

He noted that the project seeks to expand participation in local tournaments and increase the number of players registered and internationally rated by the International Chess Federation.

He added that this year's edition revealed several promising young talents who could strengthen Qatar's chess scene in the future, while emphasising the federation's plans to increase the number of participating schools in upcoming editions.

Al-Mudahka also lauded the support provided by the Ministry of Sports and Youth and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in helping expand the reach of chess in schools.

The Qatar Chess Federation continues to organise educational and training programmes focused on the academic and developmental benefits of chess. These initiatives include teaching the fundamentals of the game, arbitration rules, and tournament organisation, as well as training teachers to supervise school chess teams and inter-school competitions.



## DPS-Modern Indian School inducts 122 leaders in investiture ceremony



The corridors of DPS-Modern Indian School resonated with a sense of pride and purpose as the school gathered to witness one of its most cherished traditions — 'Senior School Investiture Ceremony' on April 30.

The solemn yet celebratory occasion marked the formal induction of a new generation of student leaders, setting the tone for a year rooted in conviction, commitment, and character.

Principal Asna Nafees delivered an inspiring and thought-provoking address, urging students to embrace leadership as a responsibility rather than a privilege and to look beyond positions and titles to make a meaningful difference in the world.

She highlighted the school's outstanding Grade X results, with a perfect score of 500 out of 500 and a school average of 90%, while also acknowledging the accomplishments of its alumni, who are making their mark at leading universities and on prestigious



platforms across the globe.

The chief guest, George Thomas, vice-chairman of DPS Group of Institutions and president of DPS-MIS, in his address with warmth and wisdom, encouraged the newly invested council members to lead with integrity, mindfulness, and compassion, emphasising the importance of responsible leadership.

A total of 122 young parliamentarians took the oath of office, pledging to carry out their du-

ties to the best of their abilities within their respective portfolios. Head Boy Devam Vikram Liya and Head Girl Saara Bharadwaj delivered their acceptance speeches, expressing gratitude to the institution for its trust and support in helping them grow, both as learners and individuals.

The ceremony concluded on a note of inspiration, reaffirming the school's belief in the ability of young minds to lead with purpose and commitment.



## ICC launches mobile app for Indian community in Qatar

Indian Cultural Centre (ICC) launched its mobile application on May 3 at ICC Ashoka Hall, offering a wide range of community services and informational features for the Indian community in Qatar. The mobile app was launched by Indian ambassador Vipul, in the presence of Dr Vaibhav A Tandale, counsellor (head of Chancery and Consular) at the Embassy of India, ICC president AP Manikantan, ICC Advisory Council chairman P N Babu Rajan, ICC vice-president Shantanu Deshpande, ICC general-secretary Abraham K Joseph, and other ICC managing committee members. The app is available on both iOS and Android and is a comprehensive digital platform offering a wide range of community services



and informational features for the Indian community in Qatar. The app has a centralised dashboard that gives users instant access to the latest news, notifications, announcements, event alerts,

and quick links to major ICC services, ensuring seamless communication and accessibility. It also includes a dedicated job portal that supports job seekers and employers in the Indian expatriate community by enabling users

to explore employment opportunities, upload resumes, create and manage professional profiles, and securely track job applications. In addition, the app introduces the 'ICC Elite Club', a premium membership initiative that offers exclusive benefits, priority access to select services, partner discounts, and invitations to special cultural and networking events. The application further provides detailed information on ICC forums, clubs, and associated organisations, along with updates on social welfare schemes, cultural events, workshops, recreational activities, and community assistance programs, helping users stay informed and actively engaged with ICC Qatar's initiatives.



# Lula visits Trump seeking to avert new US trade tariffs

Reuters  
Washington

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva held talks at the White House yesterday with US President Donald Trump that were expected to focus on trade, security and critical minerals as Lula looked to reset their rocky relationship. The meeting between the two leaders, which included bilateral discussions and lunch, broke up without a previously scheduled appearance with reporters. There was no immediate explanation for the change in schedule.

As Lula prepared to address reporters at the Brazilian embassy, Trump said in a social media post that his meeting with “the very dynamic president of Brazil” focused on many topics, chiefly tariffs.

“The meeting went very well. Our Representatives are scheduled to get together to discuss certain key elements,” he said.

The meeting between Lula and Trump brought together two of the world’s most prominent populist figures despite their sharp ideological differences. Both leaders have built loyal political followings by positioning themselves against established elites, although they differ markedly on issues ranging from economic policy to international alliances.

Brazilian officials were hoping for the best to result from the meet-



The vehicle carrying Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva departs after meeting US President Donald Trump, without an expected photo opportunity with reporters in the Oval Office, at the White House in Washington, DC, yesterday. (Reuters)

ing given tensions last year over Trump’s tariff policy and his outrage over the trial and conviction of Brazilian ex-president Jair Bolsonaro.

“We don’t know if the visit will help,” one Brazilian official involved in arranging the meeting told Reuters. “But it’s more likely to help than doing nothing.” Last year, Trump hit Brazilian products with 50% tariffs, among the highest on any US imports, accusing the country of promoting a witch-hunt against Bolsonaro, who was later convicted for attempting to overthrow democracy. Trump later withdrew most of the levies,

including on Brazilian beef and coffee, at least in part to help calm rising US grocery prices. In February, the US Supreme Court struck down the global tariffs he imposed under a national emergencies law, eliminating many of the remaining levies. Brazilian products still face an extra 10% tariff due to expire in July. But, in recent weeks, Brazil has seen signs that its exports could be hit with fresh tariffs connected to a Section 301 investigation into unfair trade practices. Tensions remain over digital trade – as Brazil has blocked the US-backed renewal of a World Trade

Organisation e-commerce tariff moratorium – and high Brazilian tariffs on some goods, including ethanol. The Office of the US Trade Representative last month also alleged that nearly half of Brazil’s timber exports come from illegal sources – which the Lula administration denies, arguing that it brought deforestation rates to historically low levels.

Brazilian officials became alarmed that a new wave of tariffs could be near during a meeting two weeks ago with US Commerce Department officials. US officials asked few questions, people in the talks said, reinforcing a perception that the investigation aimed to justify tariffs rather than resolve trade issues.

“What they are doing is building a case, even if unfounded, to justify the later adoption of tariffs,” one Brazilian official said.

A thaw started last September at the UN General Assembly, when Trump made a comment about “excellent chemistry,” in part recognising Brazil’s vast reserves of critical minerals, said Monica de Bolle, a Brazilian economist and senior fellow at the Peterson Institute of International Economics.

The Lula administration does not expect a critical minerals deal to materialise, people close to the president told Reuters, because officials struggled to agree on even a basic memorandum of understanding.

# US targets Cuba in new sanctions



The building of ‘Grupo de Administracion Empresarial SA’ (Gaesa) is pictured in Havana yesterday. (AFP)

AFP  
Washington

The United States yesterday imposed new sanctions on key economic entities in Cuba as it seeks to ramp up pressure on the communist-led nemesis.

The sanctions announced by Secretary of State Marco Rubio included targeting a joint venture involving Canadian mining company Sherritt, which in a near simultaneous announcement said it was leaving Cuba.

Rubio also announced new measures against Gaesa, the military-backed conglomerate estimated to control some 40 percent of the Cuban economy.

Gaesa was already under US sanctions, but the new measures were imposed under an executive order signed last week by President Donald Trump that outlines parts of the Cuban economy for which foreign banks would incur sanctions if

they have transactions.

“Just 90 miles from the American homeland, the Cuban regime has brought the island to ruin and auctioned off the island as a platform for foreign intelligence, military and terror operations,” said Rubio, a Cuban-American and vociferous critic of Havana.

“Additional designations can be expected in the following days and weeks,” he warned.

Rubio said that Gaesa “is designed to generate income not for the Cuban people, but only for the benefit of its corrupt elite.”

A *Miami Herald* investigation based on purported leaked documents estimated that Gaesa had \$18 billion in assets in early 2024, in line with the level of expenditure from the state itself.

Trump has mused about taking over Cuba, which has been under a US embargo almost continuously since the 1959 communist revolution of Fidel Castro.

# US oil blockade on Cuba ‘energy starvation’: UN experts

AFP  
Geneva

The fuel blockade imposed on Cuba by the US amounts to “energy starvation,” and has “grave consequences” for human rights and development, three UN special rapporteurs said yesterday.

“Cuba has been subjected to energy starvation by the US, a condition in which the lack of fuel cripples the functioning of essential services required for a dignified life,” the experts said in a joint statement.

“This unlawful blockade is not only disrupting daily life but also undermining the enjoyment of a wide range of human rights.”

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 be-

come the norm, and tourism – once Cuba’s most lucrative industry – has plummeted.

“This measure has sharply worsened fuel shortages across the island, pushing essential services to the brink,” the experts said.

US President Donald Trump’s executive order “directly harms the enjoyment of human rights of the Cuban people,” they said.

The statement was penned by the special rapporteurs on the right to development, food and safe drinking water.

Trump has mused about taking over Cuba, which lies 145 kilometres (90 miles) from Florida and has been under a nearly continuous US trade embargo since Fidel Castro led a communist revolution in 1959.

UN special rapporteurs are independent experts mandated by the Human Rights Council to report their findings. They do not, therefore, speak for the UN itself.

The experts highlighted reports that fuel scarcity was preventing people from reaching hospitals and children from attending school.

They said the country’s health system is reportedly facing a backlog of more than 96,000 surgeries – including 11,000 for children.

“By depriving a population of the energy required to run essential services, this executive order is obstructing Cuban people’s right to development and undermining their rights to food, education, health, and water and sanitation,” the experts said.

“Energy starvation as a coercive tool is incompatible with international human rights norms.”

The experts said they had made their concerns clear to the US government.

The Trump administration began implementing a policy of maximum pressure on Cuba after its January 3 overthrow of Venezuela’s socialist president Nicolas Maduro, Cuba’s foremost backer.

The oil blockade has aggravated the country’s worst economic and energy crisis in decades, leading to warnings of a humanitarian disaster.

# NY governor orders ICE agents to unmask

New York’s governor yesterday ordered federal immigration agents operating in her state to not wear masks, a move likely to be challenged by President Donald Trump’s administration after courts overturned a similar effort in California. Since the beginning of Trump’s controversial mass deportation campaign, agents from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) have typically covered their faces, officially to avoid being identified and potentially threatened outside of work.

“For ICE, wearing masks without good cause is nothing short of an intimidation tactic, a cowardly attempt to evade responsibility,” New York Governor Kathy Hochul, a leading Democrat opponent of Trump and his immigration policies, said yesterday.

Images of heavily armed, masked,

plainclothes officers marauding around US cities including Minneapolis brutalising citizens and non-citizens alike garnered international attention earlier this year, peaking when ICE officers shot dead two Americans in the Midwestern city.

As well as the restriction on face coverings, Hochul announced that ICE agents would no longer be permitted to enter schools, libraries, community centres, polling sites, and other sensitive locations without a judicial warrant.

She also forbade local police from co-operating with the agency in any operation conducted solely on immigration grounds.

“Our officers, paid for by local taxpayer dollars, were hired to protect their communities... they’re not there to do the federal government’s bidding,” the governor added. (AFP)

# Paraguay president lauds friendship with Taiwan

Reuters  
Taipei

Paraguay and Taiwan share a friendship based on freedom and democracy that extends beyond diplomatic formalities, Paraguayan President Santiago Pena said yesterday, as China told him to sever ties with Taipei.

His visit comes as China steps up efforts to draw the South American nation away from its long-standing support for Taipei.

The trip is Pena’s second visit as president to Taiwan. Paraguay is one of 12 countries that still maintain formal diplomatic relations with the democratically-governed island that is claimed by Beijing.

Speaking in English to university students in Taipei after receiving an honorary doctorate, Pena said Paraguay and Taiwan have an alliance that is based on freedom.

“Paraguay and Taiwan share a friendship built on a solid founda-

tion, democracy, freedom, confidence in institutions, the dignity of hard work,” he said.

“Our bilateral relationship extends far beyond diplomatic formality. It is manifested in concrete actions, tangible achievements, and real opportunities for both of our nations.”

Addressing Pena at the same event, Taiwanese Vice-President Hsiao Bi-khim mentioned how she had first met and been impressed by him in Washington before he was elected president.

“And I am still extremely impressed by President Pena’s passion for serving the people of Paraguay,” she added. “President Pena, passion, people, Paraguay, five P’s. And plus, a principled partnership with Taiwan makes it ‘perfecto.’”

Neither mentioned China in their public remarks.

In Beijing earlier yesterday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said Paraguay should “stand on the right side of history”

and “sever so-called diplomatic relations with the Taiwan authorities.”

“The ‘One China’ principle is a fundamental norm of international relations and the universal consensus of the international community,” Lin said, referring to Beijing’s stance that both sides of the Taiwan Strait are part of a single country.

Paraguay is Taiwan’s last diplomatic ally in South America.

The two established diplomatic relations in 1957, in the early days of the rule of Paraguay dictator Alfredo Stroessner, a fervent anti-communist.

Pena has a good relationship with the US and in February visited Washington for US President Donald Trump’s new board of peace, where Trump called him a “young, handsome guy.”

China says Taiwan is one of its provinces, a position rejected by President Lai Ching-te and his government.

# EU mission ‘concerned’ about pre-election violence in Colombia



Jose Antonio de Gabriel, deputy director of the European Union of Electoral Observers EOM talks to the media in Bogota yesterday. (AFP)

AFP  
Bogota

An EU mission observing elections in Colombia said yesterday it was “very concerned” about surging violence across the country ahead of voting.

Colombians will cast ballots to elect a new president on May 31, with a possible run-off vote taking place on June 21 if no candidate wins outright in the first round.

The divisive electoral campaign has been marred by violence with guerrilla groups leading attacks across the country, including a bombing that killed 21 civilians in the southwestern Cauca region in April.

The Central General Command (EMC), an offshoot of the defunct Farc rebel army, later said the deadly attack was a “tactical error.”

Armed groups have also

harassed and murdered public figures and community representatives in the lead-up to the election, which is being monitored by a European Union observation mission.

Deputy mission head Jose Antonio Gabriel compared each attack to a “dagger driven into democracy.”

Violence affects “the ability to campaign, the freedom of voters,” he said at a press conference, where he announced the deployment of 150 observers across the country in the coming days.

Gabriel also denounced the “despicable” murder of journalist Mateo Perez Rueda in the northwestern Antioquia region, which was reported on Wednesday and attributed to dissident guerrillas by the Colombian Ombudsman.

Criminal organisations in Colombia often pressure the population as a way to influence elections, especially in remote areas with a weak state

presence.

In a statement Tuesday, leftist senator and poll frontrunner Ivan Cepeda denounced guerrilla attempts to sway the electorate, “including any that might supposedly be made in my favour.”

Despite these issues, the EU mission said Colombian democracy was stable.

The country “manages time and again to organise elections throughout the entire territory,” said Gabriel.

Left-wing President Gustavo Petro, who will leave office on August 7, has tried unsuccessfully to negotiate peace with drug-trafficking groups, which have grown in strength in recent years.

Cepeda, from the same party as Petro, is trailed in the polls by right-wing candidates Abelardo de la Espriella and Paloma Valencia, both of whom promise to renounce dialogue with armed groups and pursue a hardline approach instead.

# Dutch hantavirus victims visited Chile, Uruguay, Argentina before cruise

AFP  
Buenos Aires

The two Dutch cruise ship passengers who died of hantavirus had travelled through Chile, Uruguay and Argentina before boarding the MV Hondius, Argentina’s health ministry said Wednesday.

The ministry said that the husband-and-wife couple arrived in Argentina on November 27, then traveled to Chile and Uruguay before returning to Argentina on March 27 to board the MV Hondius on April 1.

The Argentine Ministry of

Health did not speculate on where the pair may have contracted the virus.

The Andes strain of the virus, which was confirmed in two of the cruise ship passengers, has not been detected in Tierra del Fuego province, where Ushuaia is situated, since 1996, officials said.

The Andes strain is the only one for which there is evidence of human-to-human transmission.

The Argentine health ministry said it was sending experts to Ushuaia to capture and test rodents for the virus “in areas linked to the route” of the Dutch couple.

The husband died onboard the ship on April 11. His body was dis-

embarked in Saint Helena, an island in the south Atlantic.

His wife, who was feeling unwell, also left the ship at Saint Helena. She was later evacuated to a hospital in Johannesburg, where she died.

The body of a German passenger, who also died, is still on the ship.

The WHO said earlier that three people – two crew members and one other person thought to be infected – were evacuated from the vessel, which had been in quarantine off the Cape Verde archipelago.

They were transferred to the Netherlands.

# Asean summit kicks off

**Calls for joint response to energy crisis**

Reuters  
Cebu, Philippines

The fallout of the Middle East crisis took centre stage at meetings of the Southeast Asian bloc Asean on yesterday, with renewed calls for a united front in the face of serious challenges for its fuel import-dependent economies.

Concerns of energy and food supply security following a blockade of the critical Strait of Hormuz weigh heavy on the bloc of 11 nations, home to nearly 700mn and one of the regions worst-hit after the Iran war choked off energy supplies.

The Philippines, this year's chair of the Association of South-east Asian Nations, has pushed to expedite approval of a regional oil-sharing framework agreement.

Economic ministers proposed ideas yesterday for diversifying supply sources and routes and streamlining crisis communications.

"Asean needs to strengthen our crisis co-ordination and institutional readiness in times of crisis," said Ma. Theresa Lazaro, the Philippine foreign affairs secretary.

"The ongoing crisis in the Middle East and its far-reaching repercussions... remind us that developments beyond our region can have immediate and profound effects on Asean," she said before a meeting with counterparts.

Diplomats and analysts say the energy issue will prove a test of the Philippines' skills as chair, forcing it to shape a rare regional response while preventing Asean's own conflicts from slipping down the agenda.

These include Myanmar's civil war and last year's deadly and still unresolved border dispute between Thailand and Cambodia, where a fragile ceasefire has held since late December.

The Philippines arranged a three-way meeting in Cebu of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr and the prime ministers of Thailand and Cambodia yesterday, ahead of a summit of Asean leaders the next day.

## THAI, CAMBODIAN LEADERS COMMIT TO SEEK PEACE

The leaders of Thailand and Cambodia agreed yesterday to pursue trust-building measures to advance a fragile ceasefire and establish peace, after rare talks over last year's deadly fighting between the two neighbours.

"Thailand and Cambodia are two neighbouring countries. It is best that we avoid conflict, it only brings

losses and suffering," said Anutin, who was swept back to power in a February election on a wave of nationalism fuelled by the conflict.

"Now is the time for us to look forward and walk this path together towards peace."

Troops remain deployed on both sides of the 817km (508-mile) Thai-Cambodia border after two rounds of fighting in July and December, when territorial skirmishes quickly escalated into air strikes and heavy exchanges of artillery and rockets.

"They want an atmosphere for an Asean meeting that will go well," Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul told reporters. "That's why they want us to see each other."

The first clashes ended after vaunted intervention by US President Donald Trump, but his efforts to halt the second flare-up failed and the two sides weeks later agreed bilaterally to a truce, ending 20 days of fighting.

But Thailand indicated no agreement would be reached on Thursday, with a government spokesperson saying the priority was rebuilding trust.

## ACTION BEYOND RHETORIC

Asean, with a combined gross domestic product of about \$3.8tn, has long struggled to coordinate its responses to crises, with meet-



Myanmar's Permanent Secretary of Foreign Affairs Hau Khan Sum, Malaysia's Foreign Minister Mohamad Hasan, Thailand's Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow, East Timor's Foreign Minister Bendito dos Santos Freitas, Vietnam's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Dang Hoang Giang, Philippines' Foreign Secretary Theresa Lazaro, Singapore's Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan, Brunei's Second Foreign Minister Erywan Pehin Yusof, Cambodia's Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn and Indonesia's Foreign Minister Sugiono hold hands for a group photo session at the Asean Foreign Ministers' Meeting ahead of the 48th Asean Summit and Related Meetings in Cebu City, Philippines, yesterday. (Reuters)

ings typically resulting in pledges to cooperate, rather than a clear strategy or binding agreements.

On Thursday, economic ministers "identified practical, concrete response measures" on strengthening energy and food security and committed to intensify coordination, the chair said in a statement that made no specific mention of the fuel-sharing plan.

Yet the scale of the energy supply shock was likely to push the bloc beyond rhetoric, as no Asean country could escape the issue, said former Philippine diplomat Laura del Rosario.

Asean leaders will today call for good-faith negotiations between the US and Iran and a halt in hostilities, according to a working draft of a statement seen by Reuters.

It also called for international law to be upheld and a reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, normally

a conduit for a fifth of the world's oil and gas supplies.

"We further stressed the need to preserve the unimpeded flow of energy and essential goods... in order to safeguard economic stability and strengthen resilience across Asean," it said.

The draft also urges swift progress to ratify an Asean fuel-sharing pact to ensure its "earliest possible entry into force", on a voluntary, commercial basis.

## MYANMAR SEEKS RE-ENGAGEMENT

Foreign ministers were also briefed by special envoy Lazaro on the crisis in Myanmar, an issue that has long divided the bloc. The Philippines gave no details of the briefing.

Myanmar's new, nominally civilian government is keen to re-engage with Asean following an

election swept by a party backed by the military, which had ruled for five years since a 2021 coup.

Asean has not recognised the election or indicated when the leadership of Myanmar, where coup leader Min Aung Hlaing is now president, can return to its summits after five years in the cold.

The army-backed government may need to convince Asean countries it is sincere about peace amid ongoing fighting, after two recent amnesties and a reduced sentence and transfer to house arrest for ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Little is known about the status or whereabouts of the Nobel Peace Prize winner and the Philippines called on Wednesday for the Asean special envoy to be given access to her, as a sign of Myanmar's "genuine commitment to national reconciliation".

# South Korea ex-PM's martial law sentence cut to 15 years on appeal

AFP  
Seoul

A South Korean appeals court reduced the sentence of former prime minister Han Duck-soo yesterday by eight years for crimes relating to ex-president Yoon Suk-yeol's martial law declaration.

Yoon's decree in December 2024 briefly suspended civilian rule and plunged South Korea into chaos, but only lasted around six hours as opposition lawmakers moved quickly to overturn it in a vote.

A lower court had sentenced Han in January to a heavier-than-expected jail term of 23 years for engaging in the declaration.

An appeals court in the capital Seoul cut that by eight years yesterday, with the presiding judge announcing: "We sentence the defendant to 15 years in prison."

The court still maintained most of Han's convictions, but lessened the penalties after taking into account his "more than 50 years as a public official prior to the martial law declaration".

"The records also make it difficult to find evidence showing that the defendant participated more actively in the insurrection, such as by conspiring in advance or systematically leading the operation," the judge said.



Han Duck-soo (centre) arrives at the Seoul Central District Court for his first sentencing trial. (AFP/File photo)

However, he said Han had "abandoned the grave responsibilities arising from the authority and position entrusted to him and instead sided with those participating in the acts of insurrection".

After MPs passed the motion to lift martial law, Han convened and presided over a cabinet meeting on Yoon's behalf to rescind it, the court said.

Han, wearing a white shirt and a dark suit with no tie, listened to the verdict without showing much emotion.

The judge chided Han for failing to oppose Yoon despite having witnessed illegal suspensions of civilian rule in the 1970s and '80s while serving as a government official during South Korea's authoritarian era.

"He had experienced uncon-

titutional and unlawful martial law measures and insurrectionary situations himself, and was therefore well aware of the extensive damage and chaos such events could cause, as well as their seriousness and gravity," he said.

Han, 76, has been imprisoned since his original sentence in January.

The career technocrat formerly served in various other government roles, including finance minister, and the court noted his "multiple" awards for services to the South Korean state.

The verdict marked the conclusion of the latest in a string of appeal trials involving people close to Yoon.

Last week, a court hiked Yoon's sentence for obstructing justice to seven years, up from five.

The former leader is already serving a life sentence for the much more serious crime of leading an insurrection.

Yoon's wife, former first lady Kim Keon-hee, has also had her corruption sentence increased to four years, up from 20 months.

Her crimes are not related to the martial law decree and involve bribery and stock manipulation.

A lower court initially acquitted her of the latter charge, but an appeals court overturned that decision last week, resulting in the heavier penalty.

The ban has been in place since early April and applies to new projects

— with some leeway granted to projects that have already advanced, an EU official said. The policy applies to inverters coming from China,

notably from firms such as Huawei and Sungrow, but also from Russia, Iran and North Korea, the official said.

"Among the most pressing threats is the risk of disruption of the EU's critical infrastructure by foreign actors," said EU spokeswoman Siobhan McGarry.

The Chinese commerce ministry statement said the ban will harm trade relations between China and the European Union. (AFP)

## Beijing slams EU funding ban for certain Chinese solar tech

Beijing slammed the European Union (EU) yesterday for cutting public funding to clean tech projects using certain Chinese technology that could pose risks for the bloc's power grid.

Brussels announced on Monday it was banning EU funding for Chinese-made inverters. Described as a "brain" for solar energy systems, inverters help connect renewable sources to the electricity grid.

The European Union has in recent

years viewed China's dominance of the green tech sector with increasing suspicion and fears that the 27-country bloc's reliance on Chinese supply is a growing vulnerability. "China urges the EU to immediately stop stigmatising China by designating it as a 'high-risk country' and to end its unfair and discriminatory practices against Chinese products," a Chinese commerce ministry spokesperson said in a statement.

# Japan fires missiles during military drills, drawing China rebuke

AFP  
Paoay, Philippines

Japan fired surface-to-ship missiles and sank an old warship in waters between the Philippines and Taiwan as part of major military exercises that include US forces, angering China.

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi has accelerated Japan's shift towards a more muscular defence policy, further casting off — with US encouragement — Tokyo's pacifist stance in place since the end of World War II.

The firing on Wednesday of two Type-88 missiles formed part of exercises in the Philippines between US, Australian, Filipino and Japanese troops as well as contingents from France,

New Zealand and Canada.

Japanese and Philippine defence ministers observed the launch in the northern province of Ilocos Norte, some 400km (250 miles) from Taiwan, an AFP reporter at the scene said.

The two projectiles hit the target, a retired Philippines navy corvette, around 75 kilometres offshore in the South China Sea, causing it to sink, officials said.

The 19-day Balikatan exercises, meaning "shoulder-to-shoulder" and which wrap up today, have involved some 17,000 military personnel including Japanese combat troops for the first time.

Japan in recent years has moved to obtain "counterstrike" capabilities while hiking military spending and deepening security cooperation with regional allies



Japanese soldiers stand beside a Japan's Type 88 surface-to-ship missile system launch (left) during the maritime strike of Balikatan exercises between US, Australian, Filipino and Japanese troops in Paoay, Ilocos Norte on Wednesday. (AFP)

including the Philippines.

Last month Takaichi's government relaxed the country's self-imposed rules to allow exports of lethal military hardware, seeking to grab a larger slice of the boom-

ing global market.

Last year Japan's Mitsubishi Heavy Industries won a landmark order from the Australian navy — Takaichi was in Canberra this week — to supply 11 warships.

Long-frosty China-Japan ties have worsened after Takaichi, seen as an arch-conservative and security hawk, suggested in November that Japan might intervene militarily in any Chinese attempt to take Taiwan.

China, which regards the democratic island as part of its territory and has not ruled out force to annex it, was furious over the comments, advising its citizens to avoid Japan and imposing trade restrictions.

On Wednesday Beijing lashed out at the missile test, calling it "another example of the Japanese right-wing forces' push for accelerated remilitarisation of Japan."

Foreign ministry spokesperson Lin Jian told a regular briefing that "not only has Japan, the aggressor, failed to deeply reflect on its historical crimes, it has even sent

military forces overseas and fired offensive missiles under the pretext of security cooperation."

Yee Kuang Heng, a professor in international security at the University of Tokyo, said that the missile test to sink a ship was "particularly significant as island defence is a shared concern of both Japan and the Philippines."

Another important component was the participation of Japan's Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade (ARDB) in counter-landing drills with US, Philippine and Canadian forces, Heng added.

"Balikatan 2026 also saw the maiden deployment of Japan's ShinMaywa US-2 amphibious aircraft for air-sea rescue and medical procedures, especially important given the long sea lanes in the region," Heng told AFP.

## Myanmar military claims recapture of trade artery towards China after 15-month battle

Myanmar's military claimed yesterday to have recaptured a key northern transport corridor towards China after a 15-month battle, touting a counter-blow to rebels in the civil war.

The southeast Asian nation's armed forces have been battling an array of opposition factions since a 2021 military coup that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

Pro-democracy guerrillas fighting alongside ethnic minority armies have won significant victories, but in recent months have become increasingly fractured and suffered setbacks.

The military said it crushed "terrorist insurgent groups" along a route linking the central and second largest city of Mandalay to the northern hub of Myitkyina, about 50 kilometres (31 miles) from China's border.

AFP was not immediately able to verify the claim. "The operations lasted for over one year and three months, during which a total of 322 major and minor

engagements were fought," the Myanmar commander-in-chief's office said in a statement.

It said the bodies of 138 rebels were seized and some military members "also made the ultimate sacrifice" — without confirming the number of military fatalities. A combined offensive starting in late 2023 once saw rebel groups surge out of Myanmar's fringes towards areas outside Mandalay, the ancient royal capital.

Analysts say that offensive had the backing of China as it sought to shore up influence along its border, but Beijing reined in rebels as it feared Myanmar collapsing into a failed state.

In recent months, two of the trio of ethnic minority armies leading that attack signed Beijing-brokered truces, leaving allied, lesser-trained pro-democracy forces exposed and increasingly backfooted.

At the same time, China has enthusiastically backed Myanmar's elections, which this year delivered a walkover win for the military's allies in civilian politics. (AFP)

## North Korea says not bound by nuclear non-proliferation treaty

AFP  
Seoul

North Korea's UN envoy said his country was not bound by the Non-Proliferation Treaty on nuclear weapons and external pressure would not change its status as a nuclear-armed state, official media reported yesterday.

Pyongyang threatened to withdraw from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1993 and formally did so in 2003.

It has since conducted six nuclear tests — prompting a raft of international sanctions — and is believed to possess dozens of nuclear warheads.

Signatories of the NPT have been holding a review meeting of the landmark pact at the UN.

There, "the US and certain countries following its lead are groundlessly calling into question the current status and exercise of sovereign rights" of North Korea, Pyongyang's top UN envoy Kim Song said in a statement carried by the official Korean

Central News Agency.

"The status of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea as a nuclear-armed state will not change based on external rhetorical claims or unilateral desires," he added, using North Korea's official name.

"To make it clear once again, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea will not be bound by the Non-Proliferation Treaty under any circumstances whatsoever."

He continued that the country's status as a nuclear-armed state has been "enshrined in the constitution, transparently declaring the principles of nuclear weapons use".

North Korea has insisted that it will not give up its nuclear arsenal, describing its path as "irreversible" and vowing to strengthen its capabilities.

The NPT, which went into force in 1970 and is signed by almost all countries on the planet — with notable exceptions including North Korea, Israel, India and Pakistan — aims to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, promote complete disarmament and

encourage cooperation on civilian nuclear projects.

But the spirit of the treaty has been "eroding", UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in his opening remarks at the review session last week.

"Commitments remain unfulfilled. Trust and credibility are wearing thin. The drivers of proliferation are accelerating," he said.

The nine nuclear-armed states — Russia, the US, France, the United Kingdom, China, India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea — possessed 12,241 nuclear warheads in January 2025, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) reported.

The US and Russia hold nearly 90% of nuclear weapons globally and have carried out major programmes to modernise them in recent years, according to SIPRI.

Pyongyang has sent ground troops and artillery shells to support Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and observers say Pyongyang is receiving military, economic and technical assistance from Moscow in return.

# Britons set to punish Labour in local polls

AFP  
London

UK polling stations opened yesterday in local elections set to heap more pressure on beleaguered Labour Prime Minister Keir Starmer and showcase the rise of hard-right and left-wing populists.

Polls opened at 7:00am (0600 GMT) across Scotland, England and Wales in the ballot that is Starmer's biggest electoral test since his July 2024 general election landslide victory ended 14 years of Conservative rule.

Opinion polls predict grim results for Labour, which could amplify calls for Starmer, 63, to resign or face a long-rumoured party leadership challenge.

The prime minister and his wife voted at a polling station near parliament in Westminster.

Nigel Farage's anti-immigrant Reform UK and the left-wing Greens, led by self-described ecopopulist Zack Polanski, are expected to be the main beneficiaries of widespread disillusionment.

Melanie Garson, associate professor of politics at University College London, said the vote was a "huge barometer for how the country is feeling about this political establishment".

"We've got, for the first time, significant pressure on the main



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer and his wife Victoria Starmer leave after casting their votes at a polling station in Westminster Chapel, central London, yesterday. (AFP)

political parties across every single council? Polls will close at 10:00pm. Some results are expected overnight, but most will not come until later on Friday.

Around 5,000 local council seats, out of 16,000, are up for grabs across England, while in Wales and Scotland voters will elect new devolved parliaments.

Starmer swept to power following 14 years of largely chaotic Conservative rule defined by austerity, Brexit and the tanking of the economy under former prime minister Liz Truss. But critics say he has swerved from one policy misstep to another, and he has been embroiled in a scandal over Peter Mandelson, who was sacked

as ambassador to Washington over his links to US offender Jeffrey Epstein. Starmer has also failed to fulfil his main promise of spurring economic growth, with impatient Britons still suffering a cost-of-living crisis, including from high energy prices. "The change hasn't been delivered, or change that has been delivered has been negative," Garson told AFP.

Starmer said Wednesday there was a "clear choice" at the ballot box. "Unity or division. Progress versus the politics of anger."

Labour has also fought back, unearthing racist remarks by some Reform candidates and antisemitic comments by certain Green hopefuls.

But Starmer is now one of the most unpopular prime ministers ever, and surveys suggest Labour will lose control of the devolved Welsh government in Cardiff for the first time since Wales got its own parliament 27 years ago.

A More in Common poll published Tuesday projected Reform is neck-and-neck with the pro-independence Plaid Cymru in Labour's former heartland.

Labour is also fearful of a drubbing in Scotland, where the Scottish National Party is expected to extend its 19-year control of the devolved parliament in Edinburgh.

YouGov has predicted Reform could force Labour into third place there. "The message is clear: if you want real change, you'd better vote for it, and we go into tomorrow feeling pretty optimistic about our prospects," Farage said.

Labour also looks set for big losses in London as the Greens pick up disaffected left-wingers in urban areas with a pro-Gaza message. Pollster Robert Hayward has predicted the UK's ruling party could lose about 1,850 of the roughly 2,550 local authority seats it is defending.

Hayward has tipped Reform to take 1,550 seats from Labour and Kemi Badenoch's right-wing Conservatives – mostly in white, working-class areas. The Conservatives are also bracing for the loss of traditional strongholds.

## Two men convicted in dissident spying case

AFP  
London

A retired Hong Kong policeman and a former UK Border Force official were convicted by a London jury yesterday of conducting "shadow policing" on British soil on behalf of China.

Ex-police superintendent Bill Yuen, 65, and Peter Wai, 38 – both dual Chinese-British nationals – were found guilty of assisting a foreign intelligence service under Britain's national security laws following a weeks-long trial.

Wai, who worked for the UK's Border Force immigration and customs enforcement agency after previously serving in the British police and the Royal Navy, was also convicted of misconduct in a public office.

He had searched the interior ministry's computer system for people of interest to Hong Kong authorities.

The jury at London's Old Bailey court, which deliberated for nearly 24 hours, was discharged after failing to reach verdicts on a further foreign interference charge against each defendant.

Prosecutors promptly announced they would not seek a retrial and the duo were demanded into custody ahead of sentencing on a date to be set on May 15.

The court had heard how Wai had gathered intelligence on the orders of Yuen, who was a senior manager at the Hong Kong Economic Trade Office (HKETO),

which represents Hong Kong's government in London.

The pair targeted Hong Kong dissidents and pro-democracy protesters living in Britain, with "special attention" also paid to politicians, including senior Conservative Iain Duncan Smith.

They undertook information gathering, surveillance and acts of deception, with one operation capturing photographs of prominent campaigner Nathan Law.

Their activities coincided with Hong Kong authorities publishing bounties of around £100,000 (\$136,000) for information helping to identify several UK-based activists, including Law, jurors heard.

Another protester told the jury of how Wai had threatened him with arrest for confronting a Hong Kong diplomat in London.

Messages on Yuen's phone showed surveillance of Law began as early as 2021, the prosecution said as it gave evidence.

The defendants' activities were exposed in May 2024 when police foiled an alleged bid to snatch a former Hong Kong resident from her flat in the northern county of Yorkshire, the court heard.

Wai, of Staines-upon-Thames, southwest of the capital – who was known to associates as Fatboy – and Yuen, of Hackney in east London, had both denied wrongdoing.

The case comes in the wake of tens of thousands of people, including democracy activists wanted by Chinese authorities, moving to Britain since Hong Kong enacted a draconian National Security Law in mid-2020.

## Aide to India's ruling BJP killed by gunmen

AFP  
Kolkata

Gunmen on motorbikes in India's West Bengal ambushed and killed a political aide from the ruling Hindu nationalist party days after it swept state elections, police said yesterday.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won a resounding victory on Monday in the eastern state of more than 100mn people, taking 207 of the 294 assembly seats, for its first-ever state victory in West Bengal.

Chandranath Rath, 41, a close aide of West Bengal's BJP chief Suwendu Adhikari was shot dead late on Wednesday near his home in Kolkata.

Adhikari, the leader of the opposition in the state assembly, now tipped to become the state chief minister, called it "cold-blooded murder".

Motorbikes blocked Rath's vehicle, before the attackers opened fire in a barrage of around a dozen shots, hitting Rath multiple times in the heart.

"The shooting happened at about 11pm on Wednesday – the bikes that stopped Rath's car have been seized," West Bengal police chief Siddh Nath Gupta told AFP.

"The bikes had fake registration numbers, and we are looking for the assailants."



A hearse leaves a hospital morgue carrying the body of late Chandranath Rath, who was shot dead on Wednesday, days after the BJP secured a majority in the state assembly elections, in Kolkata, yesterday. (Reuters)

Pritam Sengupta, a doctor at Apollo Hospital told AFP, that Rath was "brought dead with multiple bullet injuries in his chest."

The killing brings the total killed since the results were announced on Monday to at least five.

West Bengal had been ruled by Modi's fierce critic and adversary, Mamata Banerjee, as chief minister since 2011.

Banerjee, leader of the regional All India Trinamool Congress (TMC), also lost her seat in the polls and has rejected the results.

Analysts say the BJP's victory in the largely Bengali-speaking state is one of its most significant since Modi was first elected prime minister in 2014, expanding its dominance beyond the Hindi-speaking heartland of north and central India.

The killing has added to political tensions in the state, with the BJP and TMC trading accusations over the deaths since the results.

"It was a planned murder," BJP's West Bengal president Samik Bhattacharya said.

"This is expected from Trinamool Congress," he alleged. "They are responsible for this death."

The TMC rejected any role in the shooting, but accused the BJP of targeting their supporters.

"We strongly condemn the brutal murder of Chandranath Rath," the party said in a statement, adding that it also condemned attacks on TMC members "allegedly carried out by BJP-backed miscreants".

The BJP said it will swear in its leader as chief minister tomorrow.

## Indian seafarers' Iran war ordeal

Reuters  
Mumbai

Nightly explosions of drones and missiles terrified Indian sailor Tithi Chiranjeevi after his ship was stranded in Iran for more than a month by the Strait of Hormuz blockade caused by the Middle East conflict.

"Around 10 to 20 missiles struck every night. No one could sleep," he told Reuters, describing conditions outside Iran's port of Khorramshahr on his return home last week, after an arduous 15-day journey through Iraq, Armenia, and Dubai.

The 28-year-old had spent the previous six months working on the Iranian ship Ilda, carrying construction material to Dubai.

The vessel was one of 2,000 trapped in the vicinity of the 104-mile (17-km) waterway that normally carries a fifth of the world's supplies of oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG).

Violence in the region has killed at least three Indian seafarers so far. Before the conflict began in February, about 138 ships passed through the Strait each day, the Joint Maritime Information Centre says.

As food ran out and communication links snapped, Chiranjeevi lost contact with his widowed mother at home in the



A man looks at a container ship in the Arabian Sea off the coast of Mumbai, yesterday. (Reuters)

southern port city of Visakhapatnam.

"They (our families) were very concerned," he said.

A colleague, Anant Singh Chauhan, also worried whether he would be reunited with his parents, living in the town of Dewaria in India's northern state of Uttar Pradesh.

"Sometimes, we used to feel we won't be able to make it back home," said Chauhan, who returned along with Chiranjeevi.

The South Asian nation is among the top three global suppliers of seafarers, government figures show, with a workforce 300,000-strong by September last year.

The Indian government says

it has helped bring safely home about 3,000 sailors from the Gulf region, and at least 23 this week.

Both men said they borrowed money at exorbitant rates from relatives and moneylenders to pay fees of 450,000 rupees (\$4,800) each to secure jobs on international shipping routes.

Despite running out of savings and facing mounting debt, Chauhan said he felt only relief on returning.

"It is like a rebirth for us," he told Reuters in the financial capital of Mumbai, as he gazed at the city's Gateway of India monument and the Taj Mahal luxury hotel standing by the water's edge.

## Sri Lanka arrests 261 foreigners over cybercams

AFP  
Colombo

Sri Lankan authorities arrested 30 Chinese and Vietnamese nationals yesterday in the latest crackdown on cybercams, raising the number detained since the weekend to 261, police said.

The latest arrests were made in Werahera, a suburb of the capital, police said, adding that 74 Vietnamese nationals arrested elsewhere in the capital on Wednesday were remanded in custody until May 14.

Crime groups around the world have carried out online scams, defrauding victims of tens of billions of dollars annually, often through cryptocurrency fraud and fake romantic relationships.

In Sri Lanka, authorities cracked down on two suspected cybercam centres on Sunday, arresting a total of 157 people.

"They had entered the country on tourist visas and were illegally employed, while some had overstayed their visas," police spokesman Frederick Wootler said.

A Colombo magistrate ordered a forensic examination of computers and mobile phones seized from the alleged scam centre in Colombo's Kollupitiya area, where the 74 Vietnamese nationals were arrested on Wednesday.

The suspects were aged between 19 and 39, police said, adding that most had overstayed their visas.

The arrests came a month after 152 foreign



Prison guards escort foreign nationals to a court in Kaduwela, a suburb of Colombo, yesterday, following their arrest on suspicion of running cybercam centres. (AFP)

nationals, mostly Chinese, were detained for allegedly running a cybercam operation from a hotel in the island's northwest.

Immigration authorities arrested 135 Chinese men and women in March for allegedly operating a similar scam. They have since been deported.

Beijing's embassy in Colombo said at the time that it was working closely with local authorities to prevent Chinese nationals from

engaging in scam operations in Sri Lanka. The embassy said Sri Lanka's telecommunications infrastructure, favourable geographical location and relatively lenient visa policies had encouraged fraud gangs to move to the South Asian nation.

In 2024, Sri Lankan authorities detained 230 Chinese nationals and 200 Indians accused of operating cybercrime centres in various parts of the island.

## Indonesian flood victims file lawsuit

Reuters  
Jakarta

Victims of last year's deadly floods in Indonesia's Sumatra filed a lawsuit to the state court yesterday, urging the government to grant national disaster status to three affected provinces and suspend approvals for new forest use permits.

Following are the key details of the lawsuit:

The state administrative court received the lawsuit documents yesterday, the court's website showed.

Seven residents of Aceh, North Sumatra and West Sumatra filed the suit against Indonesia's president, its environment, forestry and agriculture ministers as well as the head of the country's disaster mitigation agency, said Diki Rafiqi, one of the petitioners.

They demanded that the government immediately grants national disaster status to the three affected provinces, with the existing reconstruction process now stalled because of the limited budget allocated by the provincial governments,

Diki told Reuters.

If national disaster status is granted, the central government must use the state budget to pay for the reconstruction process, which includes the building of temporary accommodation or permanent new housing for the people affected.

"Many residents still do not have temporary houses... This is the most basic thing and it's due to the local government's limited financial capacity," Diki said.

The petitioners also demanded the government to impose a moratorium on the issuing of new forest use, mining and plantation permits until land in the three provinces has been completely rehabilitated, Diki said.

The petitioners also asked the government to review existing mining, forest use and plantation permits, he added.

At least 1,200 people were killed and 300,000 homes damaged from the cyclone-induced floods and landslides last year.

Environmental groups said that the impact of the storms was exacerbated by rapid deforestation in Sumatra.



# The meaning of Haj

Verily all praise and thanks is due to Allah, we thank and praise Him and we seek His aid and depend upon Him and we ask Him for forgiveness and seek refuge in Him from the evils of ourselves and the wickedness of our deeds. Whoever Allah guides there is no one who can lead him astray, and whoever Allah leads astray there is none who can guide him. I testify that there is nothing deserving of worship in truth except Allah Who is Alone and without any partner and I bear witness that Muhammad is the slave servant and final Prophet and Messenger of Allah. Verily the most truthful and correct speech is the Book of Allah and best of guidance is the guidance of Muhammad (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam). The worst of all matters in religion are those newly invented matters and each invented matter is a forbidden innovation and every forbidden innovation is a straying and every straying is in the fire.

Haj is a journey massive in scope that millions upon millions of people undertake year after year from each and every corner of the world. It is also a tremendous display of true devotion to Allah that is unmatched anywhere else in the world. There quite simply is no other journey like it because it leads to the most unique place in the world, Baitullahi Al-Haram, The Holy House of Allah in Makkah. It is an answer to a most ancient call and invitation from Ar-Rahmaan, the Most Merciful Himself. You as a visitor will be His guest and the reward you may reap for your trek will be like that which none can provide except Him, Most High is He above all imperfection! Your journey to Makkah is to perform the rites as shown to us by the last of the Messengers of Allah, Muhammad Ibn Abdullah (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam). These rites began from the time of the father of all prophets and messengers to come after him, Ibrahim ('alaihi salaam). It was he who made the call to us in fulfilment of the command of Allah to him, namely to establish the Haj to the Holy House for all human beings.

It is however, only the true believers who answer the call and perform the rites correctly in letter and in spirit and truly benefit from this journey. It is our hope to assist you in fulfilling your noble intention of Hajj in the best manner possible according to the most authentic and reliable



manner as proven in the life of the Prophet (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) and his noble companions (radiiallahu 'anhum). It is your duty to find out all that you can in order to perform this religious duty and it is our duty to do our best to help. Take advantage of those around you among the knowledgeable and righteous people to ask about whatever you may need assistance with and they will undoubtedly assist you.

**Haj: Its Meaning and Merits**  
Verily the first House appointed for mankind was that at Bakka, full of blessing, and a guidance for Al-'Aalameen. In it are manifest signs, the Maqaam of Ibrahim; whosoever enters it he attains security. And Haj to the House is a duty that mankind owes to Allah, those who can afford the expenses. [Ale-Imran 96-97]

And proclaim to mankind the Haj. They

will come to you on foot and on every lean camel; they will come from every deep and distant mountain highway. That they may witness things that are of benefit to them, and mention the Name of Allah on appointed days. [Hajj 27-28]

Haj is the fifth pillar of Islam. Allah has made it compulsory on those who are able from among His worshippers. He said: And Hajj (pilgrimage to Makkah) to the House (Ka'aba) is a duty that mankind owes to Allah, those who can afford the expenses (for one's conveyance, provision and residence). Haj is not obligatory more than once in a lifetime according to the statement of the Prophet (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) in an authentic report: Haj is once and whoever performs it more it is an additional good. Allah has also said: And complete Haj and Umrah as a duty owed to Allah. (2:196)

The practice of delaying the Haj to the

latter part of one's life is unfortunate and an error. It is a clear lack of understanding for a person to live their youth in an irreligious manner or as they believe "enjoying life" only to leave religion for their old age. This strips the meaning of this major rite away as it does the other rites of Islam. The Prophet Muhammad (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) said, Hasten to perform the duty of Haj for verily none of you knows what will happen to him.

**The Merits of Haj**  
Haj is a journey not made for any purely personal end or to fulfil any base desire. It is intended solely for Allah and a fulfilment of a duty prescribed by Him. No one can prepare himself for it unless he has a true love of Allah in his heart as well as a fear of Him and he feels strongly that Haj is a religious rite ordained by Allah and an obligation. Leaving everything behind is a demonstration of the love for

Allah that a servant has. He will have a willingness to sacrifice and face hardships and forego the comforts of home for the sake of Allah. Haj combines the physical and the monetary aspects of worship so it develops both spiritual and moral goals in a person such as sincerity, piety, humility, obedience, sacrifice, and submission to the will of Allah.

The self-control, humility, and obedience produced by prayer and fasting are all present in the Hajj as well as is the cleansing of greed from the heart as is done by giving Zakat. The pilgrim spends in the way of Allah and enjoys the privilege of offering many prayers in the great Masjid wherein prayers are far superior to that of those given anywhere else in the world. The Prophet (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) has stated that a single prayer in Al-Masjid Al-Haram is worth 100,000 prayers performed elsewhere. The greatest merits of Haj however are the purification of sins and a guaranteed place in Al-Jannah. The Prophet (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) has said: The person who makes pilgrimage to Allah's House without committing any acts of indecency or disobedience to Allah will return home as he was on the day his mother bore him and the reward for a Haj Mabroor (accepted Haj) is nothing less than Paradise (Al-Jannah).

Haj is not always easy, but the rewards for outweigh the sacrifices and the effort. A pilgrim's pure belief and sincere seeking the reward of Allah is the only way he can avoid negative actions and reaction that may spoil their Haj. One is thrown in the middle of the world's largest melting pot with little or no time to adjust. Hot weather, contrasting customs, foreign languages, intense crowds, meeting those with dishonourable intentions are all bound to lead to misunderstandings, bruised feelings and the like. It is precisely through this process that one may be elevated and attain the spiritual heights of an accepted Haj and one that will have a lasting effect on one's life.

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



# This is Makkah

Honourable Makkah, the Secure City; Allah has distinguished it from among all places and made it sacred from the day He created the heavens and the earth.

Allah commanded Prophet Ibrahim, may Allah exalt his mention, to build the first House on earth for Allah to be worshipped in at this spot and sent down the Black Stone from Paradise as a manifest sign of the sanctity of His Sacred House.

In Makkah springs the finest water on the surface of the earth, the water of Zamzam, which is food that suffices the hungry and a cure for the sick. It is the water with which the chest and heart of the chosen Prophet Muhammad (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) was cleansed in order to prepare him for his mission.

Allah has made Makkah eternally sacred and secure; He says (what means): "Have they not seen that We made [Makkah] a safe sanctuary, while people are being taken away (i.e. killed and taken captive) all around them?" [Qur'an 29:67]

Allah has sent down blessings and mercy upon Makkah, the likes of which have not been bestowed upon any other place or person on earth.

In order to make the matter clear, lest people confuse what is virtuous with what is not and what is sacred with what is not, the Lord sent down the angel Jibreel (Gabriel), may Allah exalt his mention, to point out the boundaries of the Sacred City, and Prophet Ibrahim, may Allah exalt his mention, placed signs marking its boundaries. Furthermore, Allah commanded His messenger, Muhammad (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam), to rebuild the structure of the House. This, indeed, is a clear sign and evidence manifesting the sanctity and holiness of this Secure City.

It was with the command of Allah that Prophet Ibrahim, may Allah exalt his mention, proclaimed to the people the Haj (pilgrimage) and Allah took it upon Himself to convey the sound of the call all around the world. Thereafter, the caravan of the honourable prophets, the righteous and those who followed them began to respond and come forth to the Sacred City. Prophet Moosaa (Moses), may Allah exalt his mention, the one who was honoured by the miracle of Allah speaking to him, came forth, as came Prophet Yoonus (Jonah), may Allah exalt his mention, the one who was swallowed by the whale, as well as a multitude of other prophets.

Makkah is the land where the Prophet Muhammad (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) was born and where his prophethood began. It is where he first received revelation; on the peak of one of its lofty mountains lies the famous Cave Hira' in which the Qur'an was revealed to him.

The honouring and sanctity of Makkah continued with the prophet-



hood of Muhammad (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) and he conveyed to us that the Ka'aba was to be the direction which the Muslims should face during their prayers, and that a single prayer in the Sacred Mosque was to be equivalent to a hundred thousand in any other mosque.

He (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) guided the people to know that shedding blood (i.e., killing) in Makkah is prohibited as is felling trees and hunting, and that picking up lost items from its streets is prohibited, unless certain strict conditions are fulfilled.

The last and final Prophet (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) openly announced his love of Makkah and its lofty status in the sight of Allah when he said, addressing it: "I swear by Allah! You are the best of the lands of Allah and you are the most beloved land to Allah." [At-Tirmithi and Ahmad]

How could we not glorify Makkah when it is a land that Allah Almighty has designated and singled out with the qualities of sanctity and of being glorified magnificently? How could we not glorify it when Allah has made it sacred, magnified the reward of performing good deeds in it, and has made its mention eternal by mentioning it in the Qur'aan? Allah says: (what means): "That [has been commanded], and whoever honours the sacred ordinances of Allah - it is best for him in the sight of his Lord" [Qur'an 22:30]

Allah also says (what means): "That

[is so]. And whoever honours the symbols [i.e. rites] of Allah - indeed, it is from the piety of hearts" [Qur'an 22: 32]

The sacred ordinances and symbols (rites) of Allah refers to the Sacred City, the Sacred House of Allah, and sacred places within them, and it is due to their special qualities that Allah has distinguished them from all other cities and lands.

Honouring and glorifying the rites of Allah is accomplished by respecting this city, by realising its status and virtues, and by continually expressing gratitude upon seeing it, as well as by holding the matter of worshipping Allah within it in high esteem. This is so because the first House of worship ever to be built was in Makkah, and it is towards it that the hearts of the Muslims are directed from all places on earth. How can worship in it not then have such a high status and value?

Allah made the reward of performing acts of worship in it multiples of that performed elsewhere and made the reward of a single prayer in the sacred mosque equivalent to a hundred thousand prayers in any other mosque. Additionally, fasting, spending in charity and all other acts of virtue in Makkah have a much higher reward than anywhere else in the world, higher than any other act of worship could reach in value.

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

# Facts about the Zamzam water

Zamzam water is a familiar drink in a Muslim household. The distinctive refreshing water has miraculous origins and spiritual value.

The Messenger of Allah, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), said: "The water of Zamzam is for whatever purpose it is drunk for."

As much as it is a matter of belief, science actually backs up Zamzam's healing and nutritional benefits. Below are some of the scientifically recognised facts about the Zamzam water:

**Best Water:** The Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said that best water on the earth is Zamzam water. According to the Prophet, it is just like as food and has the power to cure sickness.

**Enhances Energy in Human Cells:** The German scientist Dr Knut Pfeiffer, the head of the largest medical centre in Munich, has said that Zamzam water amazingly increased the energy levels in the cell systems of the body.

**Free of Germs and Bacteria:** Hardly any water body present in the world is free of germs and bacteria, except Zamzam. Dr Yahya Koshak, an expert on Zamzam, says that the water doesn't contain any contaminants. In fact, researches conducted on the water suggest that it is impossible to find bacteria in this revered water.

**Highest Purity:** It is the purest form of water on the Earth because of its containing of adequate amount of bicarbonates (366mg/l), which is higher than what is found in the water on French Alps (bicarbonates-357mg/l).

**Abundant with Minerals:** Zamzam has healing characteristics. It is abundant in minerals like Calcium and Magnesium and also contains trace amounts of fluoride, which gives it its germicidal properties. It is also rich in iodine which makes it a cure for thyroid issues.

**Increases Blood Platelets:** Zamzam water helps to increase blood platelets, increases the immunity of the body, increases White Blood Cells, Red Blood Cells and detoxifies the body. This makes it a great tonic for people suffering from anemia.

**Weight Loss:** Drinking Zamzam water gives the feeling of satiety and fulfilment, thus reducing the appetite. This leads to weight loss and since the water is rich in minerals, it prevents weakness.

**Helps with Weight Gain:** This may sound contradictory to the previous point but it is not. Remember, "Zamzam is for



whatever purpose it is drunk for." Zamzam is a nourishing drink. Regular intake of this amazing liquid helps to nourish the body and may also increase your body weight. When Abu Dhar Ghifari (radihallah 'anhu) first came to visit the Prophet (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam), he wanted to remain hidden to avoid persecution of the Quraysh. During that time he didn't have anything to eat so he only drank Zamzam water; he actually gained weight.

**Increases Eyesight:** Applying Zamzam water over your eyes and washing your eyes with it helps to brighten the eyesight, as well as treat eye-related ailments.

**Reduces Acidity and Heartburn:** The water is alkaline in nature which neutralises the excess acid formed in the stomach thus beneficial for hyperacidity and heartburn. Not only that, it can help prevent and heal stomach ulcers and other stomach disorders such as gastroparesis.

These are just some of the scientifically proven facts about Zamzam.

It is a wondrous drink. Here are some additional things we know about Zamzam.

The Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, used to sprinkle Zamzam water over the sick and ill.

It helps to correct pronunciation of words therefore it is good for students, those who have speech impediments, and delayed speech.

It is cure of many diseases and disorders by the order of Allah, said Jabir bin Abdullah al-Ansari.

## Zamzam Water Nutritional Facts

**The nutritional value of the water in mg/L is as follows:**  
sodium (133), calcium (96), magnesium (38.88), potassium (43.3), bicarbonate (195.4), chloride (163.3), fluoride (0.72), nitrate (124.8), sulfate (124) and total dissolved alkanity (835)



**CHAIRMAN**

Abdullah bin Khalifa al-Attiyah

**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

Faisal Abdulhameed al-Mudahka

**Deputy Managing Editor**

Kamran Rehmat

- ✉ P.O.Box 2888, Doha, Qatar
- ✉ editor@gulf-times.com
- ☎ 44350478 (News),
- ☎ 44466404 (Sport),
- ☎ 44466636 (Home delivery)
- ☎ 44350474
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# Can Trump pull thousands of US troops out of Germany?

President Donald Trump announced that he will withdraw 5,000 US troops from Germany as a rift over the Iran war widens between the Republican's administration and Nato allies and other partners in Europe. Can the US president decide on his own to downsize the decades-long US presence in Germany?

The US Department of Defense announced its plans for the troop withdrawal on May 1. A senior Pentagon official told Reuters Trump was reacting to German Chancellor Friedrich Merz saying Iran was humiliating the US in the two-month-long war and that he did not see what exit strategy Washington was pursuing.

The Pentagon said the withdrawal was expected to be completed over the next six to 12 months. Germany is home to some 35,000 active-duty US military personnel, more than anywhere else in Europe.

The official said the drawdown would bring US troop levels in Europe back to roughly pre-2022 levels, before Russia's invasion of Ukraine triggered a buildup by then-president Joe Biden, a Democrat and frequent target of Trump's criticism. The US president, as commander-in-chief, has extensive power over the armed forces. However, Congress controls the military budget and thus can set priorities of its own.

Alarmed by Trump's criticism of Nato, lawmakers from both parties last year backed a provision in the National Defense Authorization Act, or NDAA, barring troop levels in Europe from

## The Pentagon said the withdrawal was expected to be completed over the next six to 12 months

falling below 76,000. Trump signed the measure into law in December. However, the administration has some leeway. The NDAA provision allows the president to cut troop levels below 76,000 if he certifies that he has consulted with Nato allies and provides independent assessments of how it would affect US security, the alliance and deterrence of Russian aggression.

"There's a lot of flexibility baked in here. There's ways

you can see the Trump administration moving around troops within these constraints," said Scott Anderson, a senior fellow in governance studies at the Brookings Institution. Late last year, there were about 85,000 US troops in Europe, meaning Trump could withdraw as many as 9,000 before reaching the 76,000 limit.

Opposition Democrats spoke out against removing the troops. Representative Adam Smith, the top Democrat on the House of Representatives Armed Services Committee, said it "is not grounded in any coherent US national security policy, strategy or even analysis," and would embolden Russia.

Congress has leverage. Trump announced his plans to cut the troop levels shortly after his administration asked lawmakers to approve a huge increase in the military budget, to \$1.5tn from about \$1tn this year. The Pentagon is also expected to soon ask Congress for \$80 to \$200bn more to pay for the Iran war Trump started alongside Israel on February 28. "Having a very annoyed Congress, in particular annoying the armed services committees in both houses, is not a path to getting what it wants on defence," said Kristine Berzina, a senior fellow at the German Marshall Fund. "Congress has made very clear that this is a priority, and a priority in a bipartisan way," Berzina said.

Trump has long been a critic of US allies in Europe, accusing them of relying too much on US taxpayer funds for their defence rather than paying for their own forces. Ironically, Germany is one of the countries that has increased its military spending the most. In 2020, near the end of his first term as president, the Trump administration announced that it would withdraw about 12,000 of 36,000 troops then in Germany, in fallout from what was then Trump's long-simmering feud with Berlin over military spending.

However, Trump lost the election that year and the plan was never carried out. This time, Trump has nearly three more years in the White House, and he has hinted that more troop withdrawals from Europe could be in the works. Last week, he said "probably," when asked whether he would consider pulling US troops out of Italy and Spain, two other allies whose leaders have not embraced the Iran war. — Reuters

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## ROUND 12 STRATEGIC DE-ESCALATION



# Media City Qatar: A global platform for content, technology and creativity

Many institutions have chosen Doha as a base for their regional operations, further reinforcing Qatar's position as a preferred destination for media, tech investments

QNA  
Doha

Amid the rapid transformations reshaping the global media landscape — driven by an unprecedented digital revolution and the growing role of advanced technologies in content production and distribution — Qatar is emerging as a key player in redefining the media and creative industries at both regional and international levels.

At the heart of this transformation is Media City Qatar (MCQ), which is advancing steadily toward cementing its position as a comprehensive platform that brings together media, technology, and creativity. This progress is underpinned by a flexible business environment, high-value investment incentives, and advanced digital infrastructure aligned with the latest global trends.

This growing presence is supported by a strategic vision aimed at building a diversified, knowledge-based economy driven by innovation, while strengthening Qatar's standing as a regional hub for future industries in media production, excellence, and creativity. In this context, these advantages have contributed to attracting a wide range of companies from across the globe, reflecting increasing confidence in the Qatari market and its ability to provide a supportive environment for growth and innovation.

In its latest statement, Media City Qatar announced that the number of licensed companies has surpassed 500 since the beginning of 2026, marking a record growth rate of 60% and a five-fold increase compared to 2024. This milestone clearly signals the accelerating pace of growth in the media and creative industries and underscores the success of policies aimed at supporting this vital sector and enhancing its competitiveness.

This notable expansion reflects strong momentum in the media and creative sectors, driven by a flexible and integrated business environment that has attracted numerous local and international firms. Many global institutions have chosen Doha as a base for their regional operations, further reinforcing Qatar's position as a preferred destination for media and technology investment.

**Fast-growing sectors**

According to MCQ, the activities of licensed companies span a wide range of fast-growing sectors, including video gaming, interactive digital content, visual, audio, and music production, as well as digital technologies and social media platforms. The ecosystem also includes media agencies and technical and creative support services, highlighting the diversity of the creative economy.

Indicators from the MCQ point to a qualitative shift in the nature of media investment, with digital innovation and advanced technologies taking center stage. This shift is driven by growing demand for digital content and the expansion of global markets, enhancing opportunities for startups, which account for approximately 60% of licensed companies — underscoring the vibrancy of the entrepreneurial environment within the city.

Moreover, the strong international presence — where companies from outside the Middle East account for around 70% — reflects the success of the city's open policies focused on attracting global talent and investment, fostering knowledge exchange, and facilitating technology transfer. Incentives offered by Media City Qatar — including 100% foreign ownership, tax and customs exemptions, and streamlined licensing procedures — have further supported business growth and accelerated expansion in line with rapid developments in the global media sector.

The impact of this growth extends beyond the economic sphere to the labour market, contributing to the creation of approximately

Surpassing 500 licensed companies is an unprecedented achievement in Qatar. This success represents a gateway to global engagement and media diversity

Opening the door to international media companies as an economic force contributes to diversifying the country's income sources and supports overall economic growth

Having specialized media outlets that broadcast to the world contributes to enhancing Qatar's image and strengthening its media and economic reputation

The Media City experience has had a positive impact by creating new job opportunities and emerging fields that enhance individual skills within Qatar



**Dr. Taleb Al Atba**

Professor in the Department of Mass Communication at Qatar University

**Education City Data:**

**60%**

The growth rate of the licensed companies

**70%**

Percentage of the companies from outside the Middle East



المدينة الإعلامية  
Media City  
قطر

**+500**

The number of licensed companies

**60%**

Startups companies' percentage

**1250**

Job opportunities



1,250 jobs, according to the city's statement. This strengthens the role of the creative sector in the national economy by developing qualified and specialized talent, supporting economic diversification in line with the objectives of Qatar National Vision 2030.

As part of efforts to enhance media presence and highlight success stories, Media City Qatar launched a series of short documentary films titled 'Behind the Scenes', showcasing the experiences of licensed companies. This initiative marks a shift from earlier efforts limited to articles and social media posts, reflecting a growing emphasis on visual content production that mirrors the sector's evolution.

Commenting on this growth, Dr Taleb al-Atba, Professor in the Department of Mass Communication at Qatar University, told Qatar News Agency (QNA) that surpassing 500 licensed companies is an unprecedented achievement in Qatar. He described this success as a gateway to global engagement and media diversity, effectively positioning Media City Qatar as a "global village for media."

He added that this progress, along with continued collaboration, represents only a starting point, noting the city's ongoing recognition through major awards, including Google's AI award and public relations accolades.

Dr al-Atba further explained that opening the door to international media companies as an economic force contributes to diversifying the country's income sources and supports overall economic growth.

He emphasized that Qatar has become a significant media hub in the Middle East, thanks to its experience in conflict coverage, hosting major global events, and maintaining a diverse domestic media landscape in terms of editorial approaches, languages, and content.

He added that supporting and integrating these companies within the Qatari ecosystem contributes to knowledge growth and expands the knowledge-based economy, a key pillar of Qatar National Vision 2030.

From an economic perspective, Dr al-Atba

highlighted the contribution of the media and creative industries to Qatar's GDP, driven by the Media City Qatar model.

Dr al-Atba added that the Media City experience has had a positive impact by creating new job opportunities and emerging fields that enhance individual skills within Qatar. These roles combine local integration with global exposure through international companies, resulting in a workforce equipped with both domestic understanding and international expertise in media markets and investment.

Such roles, he noted, diversify career opportunities and open new avenues of knowledge, potentially transforming traditional employment into innovative investment ventures. This is largely due to the diversity of Media City Qatar's ecosystem, enriched by global best practices and specialized expertise.

**Regulatory environment**

He also pointed out that the city's regulatory environment, coupled with logistical incentives, represents an important step toward keeping pace with technological advancements and the rapid growth of digital media. Looking ahead, he suggested that developing national technologies capable of producing and exporting data to global markets — such as advanced social media platforms and large-scale cloud servers managing big data — could become a future challenge and opportunity for Media City Qatar.

Concluding his remarks, Dr al-Atba discussed potential scenarios for the city's development over the next five years. He noted a growing trend toward producing specialised content for global audiences, citing examples such as Al Jazeera's news output and beIN Sports' coverage, as well as Qatar's recent launch of QBC, a channel focused on economic content with ambitions to become an international economic publisher.

Such initiatives, he said, contribute to enhancing Qatar's image and strengthening its reputation in economic media. He expects Media City Qatar to continue focusing on diversifying media investment and integrating advanced technologies into content production — an approach highlighted in its published reports. He also emphasized that the prestigious awards the city has received, including Google's AI recognition, demonstrate that the project is forward-looking, incorporating artificial intelligence into modern media production.

## Cloud kitchens drive Qatar delivery boom

From Page 1

“More importantly, the model removes the need for costly fit-outs and large teams, enabling SMEs to focus on what matters most: product quality, brand building, and customer experience. As a result, startups are better positioned to survive, grow, and contribute to a more dynamic and competitive F&B landscape,” he further explained.

The sector received a further

boost in July 2025, when the Ministry of Commerce and Industry established clear procedures and guidelines for obtaining commercial licences for cloud kitchens – a move, according to Malik, “has strengthened investor confidence and consumer trust.”

“Clear regulatory frameworks from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry mark a significant milestone for the sector, giving investors the clarity needed for long-term planning,” Malik emphasised.

## Mortar attack on Pakistan market kills six, say police

AFP  
Peshawar

Six people, including two children, were killed when mortar shells hit a market in a turbulent area of northwestern Pakistan, a police official said yesterday.

The attack took place in the Thall area of Hangu district in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which borders Afghanistan and also lies adjacent to Pakistan’s formerly self-governed tribal areas.

The blast also wounded 13 people, three of whom were in critical condition, and there were fears the death toll could rise, local police officer Tariq Habib said.

“As efforts were underway to evacuate the wounded, the attackers targeted the same location again,” Habib said.

Security forces cordoned off the

area while rescue teams transported the wounded to nearby hospitals.

Officials said security had been tightened as authorities worked to prevent further attacks.

No group has yet claimed responsibility for the attack.

Hangu has long experienced sporadic violence by militant groups such as Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which is active in the region.

There has been an increase in militant attacks in Pakistan by such groups since the Afghan Taliban took over in Kabul in 2021, according to analysts and Pakistan government officials.

Islamabad has accused neighbouring Afghanistan of failing to root out militants sheltering on Afghan soil as they prepare to stage assaults on Pakistan, a charge the Taliban government in Kabul denies.

## Italy and Libya discuss strengthening energy ties

Reuters  
Rome

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and Libyan counterpart Abdulhamid Dbeibah discussed yesterday strengthening energy co-operation at a time when Italy is looking to diversify energy supplies due to the turmoil in the Gulf.

Italy, highly dependent on imported energy, is particularly exposed to the surge in global fuel prices triggered by the US-Israeli war on Iran.

“(The leaders) discussed ways to further strengthen the already solid bilateral co-operation, with particular reference to economic relations and investment in the energy sector,” Meloni’s office said after the talks in Rome.

“The two leaders then reaffirmed their shared commitment to managing migration.”

Libya is Rome’s biggest supplier of crude oil, accounting for nearly a fifth of Rome’s total crude oil imports. However, Libya’s gas exports to Italy dropped to around 1bn cubic metres in 2025, from 1.4 bcm in 2024.

The drop was largely the result of supply-side constraints in Libya – including rising domestic demand, repeated disruptions to in-



Italian PM Giorgia Meloni welcomes Libyan PM Abdul Hamid Mohammed Dbeibeh, prior to their meeting at Palazzo Chigi in Rome yesterday. (AFP)

frastructure and political instability – which kept the Greenstream pipeline to Italy running well below capacity.

Members of Italy’s influential parliamentary security committee visited Libya in late April, and discussed with Dbeibah the importance of “increased investment to allow a significant rise in Libyan gas production and, consequently, exports to Italy”, according to a statement.

Italian state-controlled Eni has been present in Libya since 1959 and is the country’s leading international operator, with an equity production of approximately 162,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day in 2025 and three development projects currently in execution, two of which will start up in 2026.

## Tensions rise amid new US attacks on Iran

From Page 1

US military vessels were forced to retreat after sustaining damage from Iranian missile strikes, it added. It was unclear when the incident happened.

Iran’s semi-official news agency Tasnim reported that three US destroyers near the Strait of Hormuz were targeted in an attack by the Iranian navy. The Pentagon did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

On Wednesday, the US military said it had disabled an Iranian-flagged oil tanker that was trying to sail towards an Iranian port. The US military said that US forces hit the tanker’s rudder with an F-18 fighter jet. Earlier sources and officials said yesterday the United States and Iran were edging toward a temporary agreement to halt their war with Tehran reviewing a proposal that would stop the fighting but leave the most contentious issues unresolved.

Iran’s foreign ministry spokesperson said Tehran had not yet reached a conclusion on the emerging plan, which according to the sources centres on a short-term memorandum rather than a comprehensive peace deal, underscoring deep divisions between the two

sides. Hopes that even a partial deal could lead to the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz have already moved markets, with oil prices sliding again on bets that supply disruptions could ease and global stocks largely holding onto record highs.

Tehran and Washington have scaled back ambitions for a sweeping settlement as differences persist, particularly over Iran’s nuclear programme – including the fate of its highly enriched uranium stockpiles and how long Tehran would halt nuclear work.

Instead, they are working toward a temporary arrangement set out in a one-page memo aimed at preventing a return to conflict and stabilising shipping through the strait, the sources and officials said.

“Our priority is that they announce a permanent end to war and the rest of the issues could be thrashed out once they get back to direct talks,” a senior Pakistani official involved in mediation between the two sides told Reuters.

The proposed framework would unfold in three stages: formally ending the war, resolving the crisis in the Strait of Hormuz and launching a 30-day window for negotiations on a broader agreement, according to the sources and officials.

Tehran said Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi held a phone call yesterday with Ishaq Dar, his counterpart in Pakistan, which has taken a leading role in mediation efforts.

“We remain optimistic,” Pakistan’s foreign ministry spokesperson Tahir Andrabi told a briefing in Islamabad when asked how quickly a deal could come.

“A simple answer would be that we expect an agreement sooner rather than later.” US President Donald Trump – who has repeatedly played up the prospect of a breakthrough since the war began on February 28 with US-Israeli strikes on Iran – has also struck an optimistic tone.

“They want to make a deal... It’s very possible,” he told reporters at the White House on Wednesday, adding later that “it’ll be over quickly”. The proposal would formally end the conflict in which full-scale warfare was paused by a ceasefire announced on April 7. But it leaves unresolved key US demands that Iran suspend its nuclear work and reopen the Strait of Hormuz, the sources said.

In a sign of the US keeping up pressure, it imposed sanctions yesterday on Iraq’s deputy oil minister and three militia leaders over what it said was their support for Iran. – Reuters, AFP

## Hantavirus outbreak ‘limited’ but more cases likely: WHO

AFP  
Geneva

The World Health Organisation said yesterday that more hantavirus cases could emerge after the disease killed three passengers from a cruise ship but it expected the outbreak to be limited if precautions were taken.

Another sick passenger from the MV Hondius landed in Europe earlier in the day, as the vessel headed to the Spanish Canary Islands and health officials scrambled to map the outbreak of the potentially deadly human-to-human strain.

The fate of the Hondius sparked international alarm after three people travelling on it died, though health officials have played down fears of a wider global outbreak from the rat-borne virus, which is less contagious than Covid-19.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told journalists in Geneva that five confirmed and three suspected cases had been reported overall, including the three deaths.

“Given the incubation period of the Andes virus, which can be up to six weeks, it’s possible that more cases may be reported,” he said, referring to the rare strain detected aboard the Hondius,



The second plane believed to be carrying a sick passenger from the hantavirus-hit cruise ship MV Hondius arrives at the Schiphol airport, near Amsterdam yesterday. (AFP)

which can be transmitted between humans.

The Leiden University Medical Centre in the Netherlands later announced another patient had tested positive.

But the WHO’s emergency alert and response director Abdi Rahman Mahamud insisted: “We believe this will be a limited outbreak if the public health meas-

ures are implemented and solidarity shown across all countries.”

People thought to have contracted the virus are being treated or isolating in Britain, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland and South Africa.

Hantavirus is a rare respiratory disease that is usually spread from infected rodents and can cause respiratory and cardiac distress

as well as haemorrhagic fevers. There are no vaccines and no known cure for it.

A passenger is thought to have contracted the virus before boarding the ship in Argentina and eventually infected others on board as it sailed across the Atlantic.

Three evacuees were whisked away from the ship on Wednesday when it anchored off Cape Verde and a fourth landed yesterday in Amsterdam, said the vessel’s operator, Netherlands-based Oceanwide Expeditions.

“No symptomatic individuals are present on board” the ship at the moment, as it sails toward the Spanish island of Tenerife, it said in a statement.

The ship is scheduled to arrive there on Sunday and those on board evacuated.

The ship’s Dutch operator Oceanwide Expeditions said there were 149 people on the ship, including 88 passengers.

Two people who returned to the UK from the ship have been advised to self-isolate, the UK Health Security Agency said, adding they were asymptomatic and insisting the risk to the public was “very low”.

Officials in Argentina said they planned to test rodents in the coastal city of Ushuaia, from where the ship had set sail on April 1.

## Spain confirms 30-tonne cocaine haul after Atlantic seizure

AFP  
Madrid

Spanish authorities said yesterday that a massive cocaine shipment intercepted in the Atlantic Ocean weighs 30 tonnes, clarifying the scale of a record haul initially estimated at up to 40 tonnes.

The confirmed total has an estimated value of 812m euros (\$956m), Spain’s top criminal court, the Audiencia Nacional, said in a judicial order.

The 23 crew members aboard the vessel when it was intercepted by the Civil Guard on May 1 in international waters off Spain’s Canary Islands have been placed in pre-trial detention, it added.

They include 17 Filipinos, five Dutch nationals, and one person from Suriname.

The Civil Guard’s main AUGC union first announced the operation on Monday, saying “between 35 and 40 tonnes of cocaine” had been seized in what is believed to be a national record haul of the drug.

Interior Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska has called the seizure “one of the largest, not only nationally but also internationally,” without providing further details.

He is scheduled to hold a news conference today about the operation.

The latest confirmed total surpasses recent major busts, including 13 tonnes of cocaine seized in 2024 at the port of Algeciras from a container ship arriving from Ecuador, then the largest seizure of its kind in the country.

The latest ship to be intercepted had departed from Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, and was sailing towards Benghazi in Libya.

Investigators believe the vessel likely intended to transfer its cargo to smaller boats for onward trafficking into Europe.

Spain remains a key entry point for drugs into Europe owing to its close ties with Latin America, a major source of cocaine, and its proximity to North Africa, including Morocco, a major cannabis producer.

## Radev, vowing anti-graft reforms, named Bulgarian PM

AFP  
Sofia

Rumen Radev, who won Bulgaria’s elections last month on promises to fight graft, was named prime minister yesterday, raising hopes of a stable government in the EU member after eight votes in five years.

Radev, an EU critic who wants renewed dialogue with Russia and who resigned as president earlier this year to run in the election, has vowed to dismantle the “oligarchic model”.

Through the vote, Bulgarians “confirmed their desire for stable institutions and for the defence of freedom, democracy and justice,” Radev said after receiving the mandate from President Iliana Iotova.

The 62-year-old former general and fighter pilot also presented his Cabinet line-up.

Radev inherits a series of urgent issues, including drafting a 2026 budget, addressing rising inflation and reforming a paralysed judicial system.

He must also tackle a series of reforms, particularly against corruption, to unlock

nearly 400m euros in funds from Brussels.

Parliament today is to confirm Radev and his ministers.

The April 19 vote, where Radev’s centre-left coalition Progressive Bulgaria won 131 of 240 seats, delivered the first outright parliamentary majority for a single formation in Bulgaria since 1997.

The Balkan nation of 6.5m people – the EU’s poorest country – has been mired in political crisis since anti-corruption rallies in 2021 brought down the conservative administration of long-time pro-European leader Boyko Borissov.

The latest conservative-backed government resigned last year after fresh anti-graft demonstrations, which Radev supported.

Radev’s ministers are largely former presidential advisers and others close to him, including a former air force colleague as defence minister.

Since the elections, Radev has not made any public statements except for at parliament’s inaugural session last month, and the composition of his cabinet was kept secret until the last moment.

“Radev has zero tolerance for leaks. He’s



Bulgaria’s President Iliana Iotova (right) hands a mandate to form a new government to PM-designate and former president Rumen Radev in Sofia yesterday. (AFP)

a classic military man,” one of his close associates told AFP.

A critic of the European Union’s energy policies and advocating “pragmatic” relations with Moscow, Radev has drawn the support of Russophile Bulgarians and is described as pro-Russian by his detractors – a label he vigorously rejects.

Before the vote, he had said that he would not veto EU aid destined for Ukraine, but that Bulgaria would not participate in its financing.

“In terms of foreign policy, I want to reassure people: there will be no radical or extreme shift, nothing of the sort,” Petar Vitanov, the head of his parliamentary group, declared on Tuesday.

Vitanov asserted that the government’s position would be close to that of “most European leaders”.

On the economic front, Radev has warned about the deterioration of public finances, with a budget deficit that is expected to substantially exceed three % of GDP.

Annual inflation stood at 7.1% in April, three points higher than the 4.1% recorded the previous month, mainly due to rising fuel prices. Last month’s inflation was the highest in the eurozone.



## Sheikha Moza graces QU Health Sector graduation



PICTURE: AR Al-Baker



PICTURE: AR Al-Baker



PICTURE: AR Al-Baker



PICTURE: Asma Alabdulla

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The moment marked not only the completion of their academic journey, but also their commitment to ethical and professional standards in patient care.

The oath further reflected the Health Sector's role at QU as a national leader in health professional education, preparing graduates for practice across medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, nursing, biomedical sciences, public health, nutrition, and physiotherapy. It also highlighted the sector's emphasis on interprofessional education, where students learn with, from, and about one another within a shared commitment to improving health and serving communities.

After the ceremony, Her Highness met with a group of high-achieving graduates from across the Health Sector colleges, engaging in a conversation on their academic journeys and future aspirations.

In her remarks, the Guest of Honour, Founding Dean of the College of Nursing at QU, Dr Nabila al-Meer, said: "At the outset, I extend my sincere appreciation to Qatar University's leadership for this invitation to a meaningful occasion, one that carries decades of memories and culminates today in the graduation of the first cohort of the College of Nursing."

"For many years, I envisioned a College of Nursing at our national university, one that prepares qualified national

cadres to serve the country and strengthen the healthcare system in line with the Qatar National Vision 2030. That vision came to life shortly before my retirement, when Qatar University invited me to take on the role as Founding Dean. This step reflected a forward-looking approach to strengthening the link between academia and society," she added.

She stressed: "This was evident in how the University shaped the identity of the College, bringing in leadership that combines professional expertise, policy development, and academic practice. This approach reflects a clear understanding of today's healthcare challenges and the need to prepare a new generation of nurses

capable of contributing to an integrated healthcare system."

The graduates' address was delivered by Mohammed al-Hor, a graduate of the College of Medicine, who said: "Today, we step into professional life with our focus on a nation that has only grown stronger through challenges. Qatar stands as a model of resilience and progress and a place of knowledge, stability, and care. We take pride in belonging to this country and in a leadership that has strengthened its standing."

Addressing the Health Sector graduates, he said: "Today, we carry a shared responsibility, different roles, but one purpose. Among us are physicians, dentists, pharmacists, nurses, and health specialists, each contrib-

uting to the well-being of individuals and communities. Together, we form a unified system, working side by side to support Qatar's healthcare sector."

Graduate Johara Saleh al-Jarmoozi, from the College of Health Sciences, delivered remarks as the master of ceremonies, saying: "Determination is the foundation of achievement, and reaching this moment, where effort gives way to results, is a milestone we take pride in. We celebrate those who placed people at the centre of their purpose. In closing, we congratulate ourselves on reaching what we set out to achieve. We also congratulate our nation, and we will continue striving to be the best it deserves." (QNA)

## Hamad al-Mansouri wins 3 medals at European Yo-Yo Championship

By Joey Aguilar  
Staff Reporter

Qatar's Hamad al-Mansouri achieved a landmark success for the country in professional yo-yoing after securing three podium finishes at the European Yo-Yo Championship (EYYC) 2026, held from May 2-3 in Bratislava, Slovakia.

The championship, hosted at Kamel klub - Karloveské centrum kultúry, brought together around 250 competitors from across the world, with al-Mansouri competing in three separate divisions and reaching the podium in all of them.

Al-Mansouri captured the title in the Royal division, an elite category reserved for players with at least 15 years of experience. Having started playing yo-yo in 2008, the Qatari competitor qualified with 18 years in the sport and emerged victorious against some of the most experienced players in the competition.

He also delivered a strong performance in the 4A division, known as the off-string category, in which the string is detached from the yo-yo during routines. Al-Mansouri finished second with a score of 84.9 out of 100, narrowly missing the top spot by just 0.5 points.

In the International division – an open category for non-European players competing for the European open title – al-Mansouri secured third place, completing a remarkable clean sweep of podium finishes across all three events he entered.

Describing the achievement as "the beginning," al-Mansouri told Gulf Times that the victory carries significance not only for him personally but also for Qatar and the wider Arab region.

"Now the first title of Qatar in yo-yo is back with me. It will in-



Hamad al-Mansouri (centre, seated) bags the first place in the Royal division of the European Yo-Yo Championship 2026. He secured three podium finishes at the competition.

spire me and others to bring home more medals and trophies in the name of Qatar," he said.

Al-Mansouri said the achievement represented the culmination of nearly two decades of dedication to the sport.

"After playing yo-yo for 18 years, I am finally reaping the rewards of my hard work. It gives me confidence to continue competing and putting Qatar's name on the map," he said.

He added that the accomplishment demonstrates Qatari youth's ability to excel in various fields when supported by the country's vision of empowering young people and promoting sports internationally.

"I am proud to be the first person from Qatar to represent and win in the sport of yo-yo," he said,

adding that he now aims to compete successfully at Asian and world championship levels.

Al-Mansouri noted that he has represented Qatar and the Arab world professionally since 2023 and has participated in three world championships, experiences he said helped him better understand the international competitive scene and further develop his skills.

He also described himself as a "pioneer and ambassador of professional Arab yo-yoing," saying he draws inspiration from fellow competitors around the world while sharing his own experiences with the regional community.

"I inspire them, and they inspire me. I learn from their multicultural experiences and bring those benefits back to our homeland and community," he said.

## Palestinian HBKU graduate transforms engineering path into leadership mission

By Shaima Sherif  
Staff Reporter

For Palestinian computer engineering graduate Dana Abu-Hassanain, university life was more than academics, it became a journey of leadership, resilience and learning how to turn opportunities into lasting personal growth.

The Palestinian graduate from Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU), who majored in computer engineering, balanced academic excellence with leadership roles, engineering competitions and student engagement across multiple institutions in Qatar.

From serving as president of the Maroon MUN Club at Texas A&M University at Qatar to competing in engineering and programming contests such as QCPC, Shell Eco Marathon and Chem-E-Car, Abu-Hassanain believes the experiences outside the classroom were just as transformative as those within it.

"If it wasn't for the extracurricular activities, I would not have been able to make a clear connection between my degree and the real world," she said. "These competitions, especially Shell Eco Marathon, helped me truly understand how to apply my knowledge and watch it come to life."

While laboratory courses provided technical foundations, she described practical competitions as a different level of learning entirely, one that demanded collaboration, creativity and adaptability. Her leadership journey also played a defining role. As president and previously vice president of the Maroon MUN Club, she helped organise conferences for both high school and university students.

For AbuHassanain, platforms centred on dialogue and debate are essential in shaping future leaders.

**"As a Palestinian, I wanted to represent my people in the best way possible. You'd see me wearing my kufiya all the time. I wanted it to be a sign of the weight I carry as a Palestinian"**

"I believe platforms of dialogue and debate help form leaders who can communicate efficiently with others," she explained. "It's small opportunities one after the other that help shape the person into young leaders."

Behind the achievements, however, was a demanding balancing act. "This is a bit of a hard one," she said when reflecting on balancing leadership and engineering challenges. "It takes a while to get your footing and get your balance."

She credits much of her perseverance to the people around her, especially her mother and close friends. "My biggest support was my mum," AbuHassanain said. "She was the reason I was able to stay afloat this entire period."

Academically, consistency became her strategy. Having been named to the President's List multiple times at HBKU, she said discipline mattered more than motivation.

"I forced myself to study rather than wait until I felt good enough to study," she said. "Sometimes I would only be able to study for 30 minutes, but that is always better than zero."

She also experimented with different study methods, including pomodoro timers, active recall and practice-based learning, eventually discovering what



Dana AbuHassanain

worked best for her personally.

Alongside academic and leadership growth, AbuHassanain's Palestinian identity remained central to how she carried herself throughout university life.

"As a Palestinian, I wanted to represent my people in the best way possible," she said. "You'd see me wearing my kufiya all the time. I wanted it to be a sign of the weight I carry as a Palestinian."

Though born and raised in Qatar, she said she always wanted to remain "a voice" for her people, even in quiet ways.

Asked to describe her university journey in one word, she paused before answering honestly: "challenging."

Yet for AbuHassanain, challenge was never something to avoid. "What is a person if they stay inside their comfort zone?" she reflected.

Now preparing for the next chapter, she hopes her background in engineering and leadership will allow her to give back to the country that helped shape her journey, while continuing to grow beyond the boundaries she once thought possible.