

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

qic-group.com

GULF TIMES

0 668039 136499


SATURDAY Vol. XXXXVI No. 13735

May 9, 2026
Dhul-Qi'dah 22, 1447 AH

www.gulf-times.com 2 Riyals

Built for Qatar. Built for you.

A network as strong as the community we connect



What connects us, unites us

QATAR'S BEST PRODUCT

ORIXYS POLYDEX

Durable waterproofing-performance for roof protection

NATIONAL PAINTS FACTORIES CO., Doha - Qatar
44601602/3

THE PERFECT GIFT?

THE ONE THEY CHOOSE

Family فاميل

عروض الصيف SUMMER DEALS

PROMOTION PERIOD: 22/04/2026 - 30/05/2026

Ready to GUAC AND ROLL?

Only on talabat

6THSTREET.COM


1200+

Top Fashion Brands

DELIVERY IN

90

MINUTES



SCAN TO SHOP

Al Sadd, Al Gharafa set for Amir Cup final showdown

By A Sport Reporter
Doha

Qatar Stars League champions Al Sadd will take on holders Al Gharafa in the final of the 54th Amir Cup today at Khalifa International Stadium, with Qatar's most prestigious football title at stake. Having already secured qualification for next season's AFC Champions League Elite by winning the league title, Al Sadd are aiming to complete a domestic double, while Al Gharafa hope to retain the trophy and secure a direct place in Asia's premier club competition. Al Sadd are appearing in their 30th Amir Cup final and hold a record 19 titles, 10 more than nearest rivals Al Arabi.

However, Al Gharafa have won both previous Amir Cup finals between the two sides – a 4-1 victory in 2002 and a 4-3 penalty shootout win after a goalless draw in 2012. Al Sadd have enjoyed an impressive run to the final. They defeated second division side Al Markhiya 2-1 in the Round of 16, overcame league runners-up Al Shamal 6-4 in the quarter-finals and then cruised past Al Duhail 4-1 in the semi-finals. Al Gharafa, seeking a ninth Amir Cup title, began with a 2-0 victory over Al Kharaitiyat before edging Umm Salal 2-1 in the quarter-finals. They booked their place in the final after beating Al Wakrah 3-2 on penalties following a goalless semi-final draw. **Sport Page 1**



PM, Vance discuss ties, regional developments

Both sides deliberate on Pakistani mediation efforts aimed at de-escalating tensions in the US-Iran war

QNA
Washington

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassem al-Thani met in Washington yesterday with Vice-President of the friendly United States of America, JD Vance. Discussion during the meeting focused on the close strategic co-operation between the State of Qatar and the United States of America, and ways to support and strengthen it in various fields. The two sides also discussed the latest developments in the region and the Pakistani mediation efforts aimed at de-escalating tensions in a way that contributes to enhancing security and stability in the region.



During the meeting, HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs stressed the need for all parties to engage with the ongoing mediation efforts, to pave the way for addressing the root causes of the crisis through peaceful means and dialogue, leading to a comprehensive agreement that achieves lasting peace in the region.

Khalifa Stadium turns 50



The iconic venue marks five decades of glory and sporting legacy as it hosts the Amir Cup final today

By A Staff Reporter
Doha

Aspire Zone Foundation is celebrating the 50th anniversary of Khalifa International Stadium, one of Qatar's most iconic sporting landmarks and a symbol of the nation's growing sports journey. Today the iconic stadium will host the final of the Amir Cup between Al Sadd and Al Gharafa. Over the decades, the stadium has played a pivotal role in the development of national sports and served as a premier venue for major regional and international events.

Since its inauguration in 1976, the stadium has contributed significantly to strengthening Qatar's position as a global sports destination. Its pitch and stands have witnessed countless historic moments that reflected the evolution of the country's sports infrastructure and reinforced its international presence. The stadium was named after the late His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad al-Thani (may he rest in peace) and was officially inaugurated during the hosting of the 4th Arabian Gulf Cup in 1976. Since then, the stadium has embodied an ambitious vision, undergoing several phases of development and modernisation – from a modest-capacity venue to a world-class sporting facility that welcomed more than 45,000 fans during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. **To Page 12**

US fire on Iran tankers sparks reprisals

AFP
Teheran

A US fighter jet disabled two Iranian-flagged tankers to enforce a port blockade yesterday, prompting retaliatory attacks and rattling a shaky truce. A parallel ceasefire in Lebanon was also under strain yesterday, as Hezbollah launched missiles at a military base in Israel in response to a Beirut strike that killed a top commander and

other attacks in the south. The US Central Command said an F/A-18 Super Hornet used precision munitions yesterday against two ships in the Gulf of Oman – gateway to the vital Strait of Hormuz – to prevent them from continuing to Iran. An Iranian military official told local media the country's navy had "responded to the violation of the ceasefire and to American terrorism with strikes", adding that after the "exchanges of fire, the clashes have now ceased".

The latest incident came after another flare-up overnight in the strait, control of which an adviser to Iran's supreme leader compared to having "an atomic bomb". US Secretary of State Marco Rubio reiterated yesterday that it was "unacceptable" for Tehran to control the strait, adding that Washington was expecting Iran's response to its latest proposal later in the day. "I hope it's a serious offer, I really do," he told reporters during a trip to Rome.

UAE says air defences intercept Iranian missiles and drones

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) said its air defence systems intercepted two ballistic missiles and three drones launched from Iran yesterday, as regional tensions continued to escalate. In a statement carried by the Emirates News Agency, the UAE Ministry of Defence said the latest attack resulted in three people sustaining moderate injuries. The ministry added that the country's air defences had intercepted 551 ballistic missiles, 29 cruise missiles and 2,263 drones since the beginning of the Iranian attacks on the UAE. According to the statement, the total number of injuries linked to the attacks has now risen to 230, including Emirati nationals as well as Arab and foreign residents. The UAE armed forces said they remained on "full alert" and were prepared to respond to any threats targeting the country's security and stability. **(QNA)**

Qatar condemns Iran's attacks on UAE

Qatar has strongly condemned the Iranian attacks on the United Arab Emirates, involving two ballistic missiles and three drones, which resulted in injuries to three people. Qatar considered the attacks a blatant violation of the UAE's sovereignty and a serious threat to the security and stability of the region. In a statement yesterday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs affirmed Qatar's full solidarity with the UAE and its support for all measures taken by the UAE to preserve its sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity. The ministry also expressed Qatar's wishes for a speedy recovery for those injured. **(QNA)**

Trump announces 3-day ceasefire between Ukraine and Russia

US President Donald Trump yesterday announced on social media that there would be a three-day ceasefire in the war between Russia and Ukraine from May 9-11 to mark the end of World War II for the Russians. Trump had said after a phone call with Putin on April 29 that a temporary ceasefire was in the works. Putin announced a similar truce last year that lasted three days but was not agreed with Kyiv. Trump said that the pause will include a suspension of all kinetic activity, and a swap of 1,000 prisoners. **(Reuters)**

Qatar steps up diabetes fight focusing on prevention, lifestyle change

By Shaima Sheriff
Staff Reporter

Qatar is strengthening efforts to combat diabetes through national strategies, community programmes and lifestyle interventions, as experts warn that awareness alone is not enough to curb rising health risks. The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) is intensifying its efforts to combat diabetes, combining national strategies, community initiatives and lifestyle interventions as experts stress the need to translate awareness into sustained behavioural change. According to MoPH's STEPwise survey (2023), diabetes prevalence in Qatar stands at approximately

15.35% among adults aged 18-69, marking a slight decline from 16.7% in 2012. While this indicates progress, significant challenges remain, particularly in addressing lifestyle-related risk factors and awareness gaps. Dr Abdulla Alhamaq, Executive Director of the Qatar Diabetes Association (QDA), said national strategies have played a key role in tackling the issue. "The National Diabetes Strategy and the ongoing National Health Strategy prioritise screening, early detection, and public awareness campaigns focused on diet, physical activity and smoking cessation," he explained. He noted that while public health messaging has contributed to declines in obesity and smoking rates, behavioural change remains



Dr Abdulla Alhamaq

uneven. "Reduced physical activity levels and persistently low fruit and vegetable consumption indicate that awareness has not yet fully translated into healthier lifestyle behaviours," he added. At the community level, QDA has adopted a proactive approach, integrating education, screen-

ing and lifestyle support across schools, workplaces and public spaces. "Our goal is to normalise early detection and empower individuals to take proactive steps toward prevention," Dr Alhamaq said. Experts emphasise that dietary habits remain one of the most significant contributing factors. Katie El-Nahas highlighted that common unhealthy patterns include "frequent consumption of highly processed foods rich in refined carbohydrates and fats, frequent snacking, late evening meals, and regular intake of sugar-sweetened beverages." "These behaviours can worsen insulin resistance and accelerate the onset of type 2 diabetes," she said, noting that managing caloric intake and seeking personalised dietary guidance are essential first steps. However, she stressed that healthier choices do not require abandoning cultural identity. "Traditional foods can still be part of a healthy diet, but portion control, reducing fat, choosing whole grains, and adding vegetables can significantly improve nutritional value," she explained. El-Nahas also underscored the importance of reducing refined carbohydrates and high glycaemic index foods. "Replacing processed foods with fruits, vegetables and homemade meals can significantly lower diabetes risk," she said, adding that early intervention is particularly crucial for individuals with a family history of the condition. **To Page 12**

Fun ride at Souq Waqif



Families filled Souq Waqif on a Friday as a children's train rolled through the bustling market. A balloon vendor adds vibrant colour and charm to Doha's popular weekend destination, where visitors gather to enjoy the weekend and pleasant weather in the evening. **PICTURE: Shaji Kayamkulam Page 12**

OFFICIAL

Amir sends cables of congratulations to Pope Leo

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani has sent a cable of congratulations to Pope Leo XIV on the occasion of the National Day of the Vatican City State.

His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani also sent a cable of congratulations to the Pope on the occasion.

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani similarly sent a cable of congratulations to Pope Leo on the occasion. - **QNA**

Amir congratulates Canada's incoming governor-general

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani has sent a cable of congratulations to Louise Arbour following her appointment as Governor-General of Canada.

His Highness the Amir wished Arbour success in carrying out her new duties and expressed hopes for continued growth and prosperity in bilateral relations between Qatar and Canada.

His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani also sent a cable of congratulations to Arbour on her appointment. - **QNA**



Shura Council takes part in 20th PAM Assembly in Montenegro

The Shura Council has participated in the 20th General Assembly of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM), held in the Montenegrin city of Budva.

The delegation was led by HE Abdullah bin Nasser bin Turki al-Subaie, vice-president of PAM and member of the organisation's bureau, alongside several members of the Shura Council and the council's secretary-general.

The assembly discussed a range of key regional and international issues, including migration, children in armed conflict, and environmental sustainability.

During discussions on migration, Mubarak bin Mohammed al-Kuwari said that Qatar views

migration as a complex humanitarian and developmental issue that required stronger international co-operation and balanced approaches respecting both human dignity and state sovereignty.

He stressed the importance of addressing the root causes of irregular migration and supporting international efforts in relief, development, education and healthcare, while also strengthening measures to combat human trafficking and protect vulnerable groups, particularly women and children.

The Shura Council member also called for fair and sustainable migration policies based on shared responsibility and multilateral co-operation to promote stability

and safeguard human dignity.

Speaking on the issue of children in conflict zones, Issa bin Ahmed al-Nasser highlighted the need for stronger international efforts to protect children affected by war.

He noted that Qatar hosts the United Nations' Analysis and Outreach Hub on Children and Armed Conflict and supports educational and development initiatives through organisations including Education Above All (EAA) and the Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD).

Al-Nasser emphasised the importance of rehabilitating children affected by conflict, reuniting them with their families, and ensuring that the principle of the

child's best interests remained central to international peace and security efforts.

On climate and sustainability issues, Mohammed bin Mahdi al-Ahbbabi said Qatar considers environmental and sustainability challenges to be closely linked to human, economic, food and water security.

He pointed to ongoing national initiatives in clean energy, water desalination, sustainable infrastructure and low-emission technologies, in line with Qatar National Vision 2030 and the country's broader sustainable development plans.

Al-Ahbbabi also called for balanced international approaches that support developing coun-

tries through climate financing, technology transfer and capacity-building, while strengthening co-operation to protect marine environments, biodiversity, water security and energy stability.

This year's assembly coincided with the 20th anniversary of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean.

Separately, HE the Shura Council Speaker Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanim headed Qatar's delegation at the first summit of parliamentary speakers held on the sidelines of the assembly, which focused on parliamentary diplomacy, inter-parliamentary dialogue and support for democratic institutions in the face of current global challenges. - **QNA**

Doha Forum initiative in Milan highlights EU-GCC co-operation

Senior officials, policymakers and experts from Europe and the Gulf gathered in Milan yesterday for a high-level initiative focused on strengthening co-operation between the European Union and the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) amid growing regional instability.

The event, held at Palazzo Clerici, was organised by the Doha Forum and MED Dialogues in partnership with the Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI) and the Centre for International Policy Research (CIPR).

Held under the title "Bridging Stability: EU-GCC Co-operation in an Era of Fragmentation", the initiative examined co-ordinated responses to a rapidly evolving post-conflict regional landscape.

Discussions centred on the impact of the ongoing Iran war and its wider regional consequences, including implications for regional stability, global energy markets and economic security.

Participants also explored opportunities to deepen EU-GCC co-operation in areas such as security, crisis management, energy resilience and trade, with particular attention given to the Gulf region, the Levant and strategic maritime corridors.

The plenary session featured Adviser to the Prime Minister and Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Majed bin Mohammed al-Ansari



alongside Luigi Di Maio, the European Union's Special Representative for the Gulf.

Speaking during the session, Dr al-Ansari said that the Gulf represented "a stable partner for Europe in security and energy", adding that the current regional crisis demonstrated the depth of shared interests between both sides.

"Moving forward requires sustained and structured co-operation capable of withstanding periods of instability," he said.

Di Maio said that Gulf and European

security were "closely interconnected and inseparable", stressing the importance of building a partnership capable of confronting shared challenges.

"The question today is no longer whether co-operation is necessary, but whether we are building the frameworks and levels of trust required to act decisively," he said.

Closed-door discussions during the initiative focused on the future shape of the regional order after the conflict, defence co-operation, and energy and industrial policy, with participants un-

derlining the need to translate dialogue into co-ordinated action.

The programme concluded with a reception hosted by the Consulate-General of Qatar in Milan.

Organisers also confirmed that the 24th edition of the Doha Forum will be held in Doha on December 5-6, under the theme *Redefining Global Trust*, bringing together world leaders and policymakers to discuss international co-operation and confidence-building in a rapidly changing global environment. - **QNA**

Qatar urges diplomacy, collective security at forum on EU-GCC ties

Adviser to the Prime Minister and Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Majed Mohammed al-Ansari has called for greater international co-operation and renewed diplomatic engagement to address growing regional and global instability.

Speaking at a session in Milan titled "Bridging Stability: EU-GCC Co-operation in an Era of Fragmentation", Dr al-Ansari said ongoing conflicts and geopolitical crises were placing increasing pressure on global stability and decision-making processes.

He warned that some actors were seeking to promote political narratives and approaches aimed at advancing their strategic interests amid intensifying competition for influence and shifting global power balances.

Dr al-Ansari stressed that political and military pressure did not necessarily lead to sustainable solutions or long-term stability, underlining the importance of mediation and diplomacy in resolving conflicts.

Questioning the effectiveness of diplomacy, he said, reflected "a growing need for it rather than the opposite".

The official also urged countries to continue working through dialogue and diplomatic channels to prevent further escalation and avoid deeper cycles of conflict.

He said the current war had affected international relations, including ties between Europe, the United States and countries in the Middle East, with wider consequences for energy security, the global economy, supply chains and international alliances.

Dr al-Ansari added that security and stability could no longer be achieved by individual states acting alone, but instead required collective co-operation and broader international co-ordination. - **QNA**

Sheikha Alya meets top UN humanitarian affairs official

HE the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations Sheikha Alya Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani met yesterday with the UN Under-Secretary-General of the UN for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Co-ordinator, Tom Fletcher, at the Permanent Mission headquarters in New York.

During the meeting, both sides discussed ways to strengthen the vital partnership between Qatar and the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

- **QNA**



Ministry handled over 20,000 insect control requests last month

The Ministry of Municipality handled 20,867 requests to fight insects across all municipalities in the country during April.

These were 4,905 requests within Doha Municipality, 5,527 in Al Rayyan, 3,189 in Al Daayan, 2,919 in Umm Slala, 2,867 in Al Wakara, 798 in Al Khor and Al Thakhira, 433 in Al Sheehaniya and 229 in Al Shamal Municipality.

Of these, 13,667 applications were submitted through the municipality's smart app, Oun. A total of 9,774 were submitted through the Unified Call Centre, and 426 through the ministry website.

The municipalities are continuing their preventative insecticide spraying and public awareness campaigns to inform the public on how to help reduce the spread of insects, along with related efforts.



SJC launches Smart Execution Court Building project

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

The Supreme Judiciary Council (SJC) has unveiled the Smart Building Project for the Execution Court as part of the ongoing judicial digital transformation strategy that reflects the Council's commitment to enhancing institutional performance, modernising court infrastructure, and adopting the latest technological practices to improve the quality and efficiency of judicial services.

The project, launched by the SJC Information Systems Department, integrates advanced technological solutions and intelligent opera-

tional systems designed to create a more secure, efficient, and user-friendly judicial environment.

The Smart Execution Court Building features advanced access control solutions based on facial recognition technology, high-precision surveillance and monitoring systems, and comprehensive cybersecurity and data protection mechanisms designed to safeguard sensitive judicial information.

The building also features smart energy management systems that help reduce energy consumption and support sustainability objectives, alongside automated lighting and climate control systems that adapt dynamically to occupancy levels and operational requirements.

In addition, the project includes intelligent parking management systems that provide safe, seamless experiences for visitors, as well as a comprehensive digital infrastructure that supports electronic judicial services and interactive platforms to simplify procedures and enhance the user experience for litigants and visitors.

The building further integrates a sophisticated customer satisfaction and feedback system based on biometric analytics and facial recognition technologies.

The Smart Execution Court Building project covers a gross floor area of 14,000sq metres and consists of five floors and two basement levels.

The facility has a total parking capacity of 171 spaces.



EU, Qatar share a commitment to diplomacy, dialogue and co-operation

By Noor al-Rawi
Doha

Interview with Belgium's ambassador to Qatar Eugene Crijns

Q: As Europe Day is marked on May 9, what does this occasion represent and why does it remain relevant today?

A: Europe Day commemorates the Schuman Declaration of May 9, 1950, delivered by French statesman Robert Schuman in the aftermath of World War II.

At a time when Europe was deeply divided and recovering from severe hardship, the initiative sought to unite European countries through economic co-operation as a foundation for lasting peace.

This led to the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community, designed to pool resources, reduce rivalry, and strengthen co-operation.

This vision continues to underpin the European Union today.

For Belgium, this milestone is particularly significant.

Belgian statesman Paul-Henri Spaak,

a former prime minister, played a key role as one of the founding fathers of the European project.

The European Union, therefore, remains central to Belgium's foreign policy identity.

Q: How do you view the development of relations between Europe and Qatar in recent years?

A: Relations between Qatar and European countries have consistently been strong and constructive, both at the bilateral level and within the broader European Union-Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) framework.

We are now moving towards negotiations on a Strategic Partnership Agreement between the European Union and Qatar, an important step announced last year.

This reflects the growing depth and maturity of our relationship.

At the EU-GCC level, co-operation



Eugene Crijns

continues through regular summits and ministerial meetings, providing an important platform to address shared challenges and strengthen co-ordination.

In the current regional context, dialogue is more essential than ever.

We have seen increased engagement, including visits by senior European officials to Doha, reflecting a shared com-

mitment to enhancing co-operation in security, trade, and people-to-people relations.

Q: What core values define the European Union in today's global environment?

A: The European Union is founded on shared values, including the rule of law, multilateral dialogue, human rights, and international humanitarian law.

We firmly believe that diplomacy must always prevail.

While differences between nations are natural, they should be addressed through dialogue rather than force.

This principle is particularly important in today's global context.

Belgium, together with its European partners, remains committed to this approach.

We also recognise Qatar's consistent position that conflicts must be resolved through negotiation and peaceful means, reflecting a shared understand-

ing of the importance of dialogue.

Q: What message would you like to convey to the people of Qatar on the occasion of Europe Day?

A: On this occasion, we extend a message of solidarity to Qatar and its people, particularly in light of recent challenges affecting regional stability and sovereignty.

At the same time, we remain cautiously optimistic about the future.

There is significant potential to further strengthen relations between Belgium, the European Union, and Qatar.

Through continued dialogue and co-operation, we are confident that progress can be made towards sustainable peace and long-term solutions.

While this process requires time, it is supported by committed leadership and diplomacy on all sides.

Belgium and the European Union stand alongside Qatar in its efforts to promote stability, understanding, and peaceful resolution of conflicts.

Prominent Tunisian journalist sentenced to a year in jail

AFP/Reuters
Tunis

A Tunisian court sentenced a prominent journalist to one year in prison on Thursday, according to his supporters, after he criticised judges that he said had wrongly convicted other journalists.

The verdict came on the same day that the United Nations' rights chief urged Tunisian authorities to end widening repression targeting civil society organisations, journalists, rights defenders and opposition figures.

Zied el-Heni, a vocal critic of President Kais Saied, was arrested on April 24 after an investigation was opened into remarks he made earlier that month.

At the time, he had decried journalists being "unjustly" convicted by judges he called "criminals", according to his lawyer.

Heni was prosecuted under a law that sets a penalty of up to two years in prison for "anyone who knowingly harms others or disturbs their peace through public telecommunications networks", including social media.

Heni's lawyer Nafaa Laaribi said the ruling "is harsh, and it reinforces restrictions on free speech".

In a statement announcing the verdict, Heni's support committee quoted him as saying the trial was "illegitimate" and that he would "not recognise it nor any outcomes resulting from it, and I will not appeal the verdict".

In 2024, he was given a suspended six-month sentence on the same charge after calling for the dismissal of a former trade minister on a radio programme.

Rights groups warn of growing attempts to stifle remaining independent voices since President Kais Saied dissolved the elected parliament in 2021 and began ruling by decree.

In 2022, he dissolved the Supreme Judicial Council and dismissed dozens of judges, a move the opposition said undermined judicial independence and turned it into a body receiving direct instructions.

Saied denies the accusations, saying he fought corruption in the judiciary and that the courts are now independent.

Dozens of Saied's critics are currently behind bars.

UN rights chief Volker Turk on Thursday pointed to the "continued repression and restrictions on civic space by the Tunisian authorities", and demanded they "release immediately and unconditionally all those detained or imprisoned for having expressed their views".

Iran creates agency to collect Strait of Hormuz tolls: shipping journal

AFP
London

Iran has created an authority to approve transit through the Strait of Hormuz and to collect tolls from vessels, a shipping journal said yesterday, even as Washington pushed for a deal to reopen the strategic waterway that Tehran has closed.

"The Persian Gulf Strait Authority has already introduced a new framework requiring ships to obtain transit authorisation and pay tolls before sailing," said Lloyd's List, the industry journal which provides news and intelligence on shipping and maritime trade.

It added that "ships are required to submit detailed records of ownership, insurance, crew

details and intended transit route", citing a form sent by the authority.

On Tuesday, Iranian English-speaking broadcaster Press TV said Iran had built a "system to exercise sovereignty over the Strait of Hormuz" and that ships passing through the strait were sent "regulations" from the e-mail info@PGSA.ir

The new mechanism comes as US President Donald Trump paused a short-lived operation seeking to force open the Strait of Hormuz to merchant ships, citing hopes that a deal with Iran was imminent.

Tehran has choked the vital waterway, through which a fifth of the world's oil normally passes, since the start of the Middle East war in late February.

Iran has repeatedly indicated that it seeks to impose a new re-

ality in the Strait of Hormuz, exacting tolls on transiting ships and sharing the revenues with Oman.

The United States has imposed its own blockade on Iranian ports in the Gulf, and flare-ups in the waterway have dampened hopes for a quick deal to permanently end the war.

Overnight clashes in the Gulf saw Iranian forces launch missiles, drones and small boats at three US warships, the US Central Command said, adding that none were hit.

American forces destroyed the incoming threat and retaliated against land bases in Iran.

Iran's own central military command countered that the clash had erupted when US vessels targeted an Iranian civilian tanker heading towards the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran supreme leader's aide compares control of strait to having 'atomic bomb'

An adviser to Iran's supreme leader has compared control over the Strait of Hormuz to having an "atomic bomb", and vowed not to relinquish it.

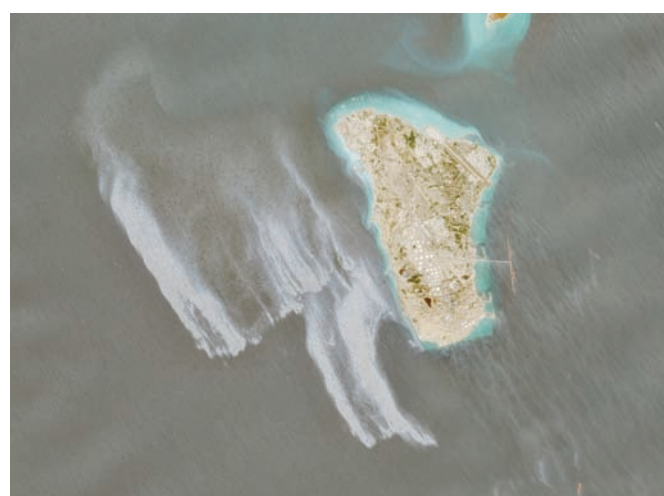
Adviser Mohammad Mokhber said Iran had long "neglected" its privileged position along the strait, a vital conduit for oil and gas shipments that Tehran shut early in the Middle East war, throwing markets into turmoil and stranding hundreds of vessels.

"The Strait of Hormuz represents an opportunity as precious as an atomic bomb," he said in a video published by the Mehr news agency. "Indeed, having in one's hands a position that allows you to influence the global economy with a single decision is a major opportunity."

Pledging not to "forfeit the gains of this war", he went on to say Iran would "change the (legal) regime of this strait", through international law if possible, and unilaterally if not.

Mokhber did not specifically mention charging vessels to use the waterway, but the shipping journal Lloyd's List reported yesterday that Iran had created an authority to approve transit through the strait and to collect tolls (see report above).

The strait has become a major bargaining chip in negotiations to end the war, with Iran currently weighing a US proposal to extend the current truce in the Gulf to allow talks on a final settlement of the conflict. - AFP



A satellite image shows a likely oil spill covering dozens of square kilometres near Iran's Kharg Island. - Reuters

Suspected oil spill detected near Iran's Kharg Island

A suspected oil spill covering dozens of square kilometres of sea near Iran's main oil hub of Kharg Island has been seen on satellite imagery this week.

The likely spill - appearing on images as a grey and white slick - covered waters to the west of the 8km (5-mile) long island, pictures from Copernicus's Sentinel-1, Sentinel-2 and Sentinel-3 satellites showed on May 6-8.

"The slick appears visually consistent with oil," said Leon Moreland, researcher at the Conflict and Environment Observatory, who estimated that it was covering an area of approximately 45sq km.

Louis Goddard, co-founder of consultancy Data Desk, which focuses on climate and commodities, agreed that the images likely showed an oil slick, which he said was potentially the largest to occur since the start of the US-Israel war against Iran 70 days ago.

The US military and Iran's mission to the United Nations in Geneva did not immediately respond to requests for comment on the images.

The cause of the possible spill and the point of origin are currently unknown, Moreland added, noting that images from May 8 showed no evidence of additional active spills.

Kharg Island, where US forces said they had destroyed military targets earlier in the war, is the hub for 90% of Iran's oil exports, much of which is bound for China.

The US Navy has been blockading Iran's ports in an attempt to stop Tehran's tankers from entering and exiting, while US and Iranian forces have clashed in the Gulf.

The war has also trapped hundreds of ships in the Gulf and caused the world's biggest disruption to crude oil supply, as well as hitting global supplies of oil products and liquefied natural gas. - Reuters

Libya launches 'crackdown on crime in major oil city

Authorities in western Libya's city of Zawiya, which houses a major oil terminal and a large refinery, said yesterday that they had launched a "large-scale operation" against criminal groups, as clashes and explosions were heard.

Security forces and military units carried out raids and arrests from dawn across the city west of the capital, Tripoli, by just some 45km (28 miles), an official statement said.

The operation went after "criminal hideouts and wanted individuals" who were "involved in serious acts", the authorities said, citing "murder and attempted murder, kidnapping and extortion, drug, arms and human trafficking, and illegal migration".

The city of some 250,000 people has experienced repeated fights between armed groups.

In addition to housing important oil infrastructure, Zawiya has been notorious for smuggling networks involved in fuel and other smuggling across the nearby Tunisian border.

It is also a key departure point for irregular migrants seeking to reach Europe by crossing the Mediterranean. - AFP

Syria arrests Assad-era general over chemical attack

AFP
Damascus

Syria's interior ministry has announced the arrest of a general from ousted president Bashar al-Assad's era, accusing him of involvement in a 2013 chemical attack on a suburb of the capital, Damascus.

In August 2013, the army under Assad's rule was accused of using chemical weapons to target areas then under rebel control, killing more than 1,400 men, women and children, according to US intelligence and rights groups.

With Syria at the height of its civil war, the Assad government denied responsibility, but agreed to hand over its chemical arsenal in order to avert US strikes.

Assad went on to remain in power for more than a decade, only to be ousted in 2024 by Islamist-led rebels led by now President Ahmed al-Sharaa.

The ministry said yesterday that it arrested "Khardal Ahmed Dayoub, a former brigadier-general in the forces of the ousted regime and former head of the Air Force Intelligence branch in Daraa, for his direct involvement in systematic violations against civilians".

The ministry accused Dayoub of being "implicated in chemical attacks during his service in the Damascus branch and his presence in the Harasta area" where "he oversaw repressive operations and contributed to the logistical co-ordination for the bombing of Eastern Ghouta with internationally prohibited chemical weapons".

Dayoub, the latest in a string of Assad-era officials detained in recent months, is also accused of extrajudicial killings and co-ordination with Iran and its Lebanese proxy Hezbollah, both of which were backing the ousted government.

Survivors of the attacks, including medics, at the time risked their lives by posting videos online, and spoke to journalists including AFP reporters about the horror they had witnessed.

Syria's civil war had begun in 2011, with a brutal crackdown on dissent that yielded an armed rebellion.

More than half a million people ended up being killed, and millions more forced into exile.

Last month, Interior Minister Anas Khattab announced the arrest of Adnan Abboud Hilweh, one of the Syrian generals internationally sanctioned over involvement in the Ghouta attack.

Hezbollah targets north Israel base

AFP
Beirut

Hezbollah launched missiles at a military base in Israel yesterday in response to Israeli attacks that killed a top commander, while Lebanese authorities reported five people including a rescuer killed in fresh Israeli strikes.

In a statement, the group said the missiles targeted a base south of the Israeli city of Nahariya "in response to the Israeli enemy's violation of the ceasefire, the targeting of Beirut's southern suburbs and the attacks that affected villages and civilians in southern Lebanon".

Air raid sirens had sounded earlier in several cities in northern Israel, according to the Israeli military.

The military said it "intercepted one launch, and the additional launches fell in open areas".

The Lebanese health ministry meanwhile said in a statement that "the Israeli enemy's raid on the town of Taura" in the southern Tyre district killed four people, including two women, and wounded eight others.

Lebanon's civil defence said earlier that one of its members was killed in an Israeli attack on the south.

Despite a truce in the war between Israel and Hezbollah in place since April 17, fighting has not stopped in south Lebanon.

The terms of the ceasefire announced by the US state department on April 16 allow Israel to act against "planned, imminent or ongoing attacks" by Hezbollah.

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency reported a series of strikes across the south yesterday, as well as near Nabi Sheeth in the east.

Hezbollah also claimed responsibility for attacks on Israeli troops in southern Lebanon.

Israel struck Beirut's southern suburbs on Wednesday, the first attack on the Hezbollah stronghold in a month.

The Israeli military said it targeted the commander of Hezbollah's elite Radwan Force.

Hezbollah has not yet announced a commander's death, but a source close to the group confirmed the killing to AFP the killing of Malek Ballout.

The latest attacks came as Lebanon and Israel, officially

More than half of Lebanon population depends on aid: EU

More than half of Lebanon's population depends on humanitarian aid, a European Union official said yesterday, as Israel continues its attacks on the country despite a ceasefire in the two-month-long war with Hezbollah.

"At present, more than 3mn people, meaning more than half of the population here in Lebanon, depend on humanitarian aid to survive," EU crisis management chief Hadja Lahbib told reporters after meeting Lebanese President Joseph Aoun in Beirut.

Lahbib said that since the start of the war on March 2 the 27-member bloc has provided €100mn in aid and sent six planes carrying humanitarian aid, with a seventh expected today.

The UN launched an emergency appeal in March for \$308mn in humanitarian aid for Lebanon, but in two months it has raised just \$126mn, according to UN agencies.

Lahbib, who said that the ceasefire has opened "a narrow window of hope", called for Hezbollah "to cease its attacks and be disarmed" and said that "Israel must put an end to its bombardments".

"For a ceasefire to lead to peace, courage is needed - political courage to address the root causes of this conflict." - AFP

at war since 1948, were set to conduct direct negotiations in Washington next week.

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun met delegation chief Simon Karam yesterday ahead of his departure to the US, giving him "directives outlining Lebanon's firm positions regarding the negotiations".

Lebanon and Israel's US ambassadors had previously met twice in Washington over the past weeks, in an attempt to end the war that started when Hezbollah drew Lebanon into the Middle East conflict on March 2.

Hezbollah is strongly opposed to the direct talks, urging Beirut to withdraw from them.

Israeli strikes have killed more than 2,750 people in Lebanon since March 2, including dozens since the ceasefire was announced.



IEI, KIMS and IDC health awareness session marks International Labour Day



A health awareness session was organised at Olive International School recently to mark International Labour Day, bringing together medical professionals, engineers and community members to promote preventive healthcare.

The initiative was led by The Institution of Engineers India (IEI) in collaboration with the Indian Doctors Club (IDC) and KIMS Health Medical Centre. The programme aimed to raise awareness about lifestyle-related illnesses and encourage regular health check-ups.

The session was introduced by engineer Sajeet George, followed by a presidential address by Er Abdul Sathar, chairman of IEI. Dr Riny K Showkath, president of IDC, opened the medical session, setting the tone for discussions on health and well-being.

The event was attended by Jacob Thomas, principal of Olive International School, along with members of the IEI executive committee and other invited guests. Around 70 participants took part in the programme. A panel of medical experts, including specialists in family medicine, dermatology and nephrology, delivered presentations on key health topics such as lifestyle diseases, skin care, preventive medi-

cine and general wellness.

The session concluded with an interactive discussion, allowing participants to seek advice directly from the Dr Anwar Mohammed, vice-president, IMA Kairali; Dr Soni Das, joint secretary, IDC; Dr Shaeef Thappy, Nephrologist, Hamad Medical Corporation and Social Welfare Secretary, IDC.

As part of the session, attendees were offered basic health screenings, including blood pressure and blood sugar checks. Representatives from KIMS Health Medical Centre supported the camp by facilitating these services.

Organisers expressed appreciation to the school management for hosting the event and acknowledged the contributions of IDC and KIMS Health Medical Centre in making the initiative a success. The programme also featured a felicitation ceremony led by the school's headmistress, followed by closing remarks from the principal.

The organisers said the initiative reflects IEI's ongoing commitment to community engagement and corporate social responsibility, with a focus on building a healthier and more informed society. The event concluded with a token of appreciation for participants and a group photograph.



MES Kindergarten celebrates Colours Day

MES Indian School (Evening Shift), Doha celebrated Colours Day with great enthusiasm in the Kindergarten section, creating a vibrant and joyful learning experience for its young learners. The event aimed to help children recognise and appreciate colours through engaging and hands-on activities.

KG1 students participated in a delightful thumbprint activity, exploring creativity while enhancing their fine motor skills. KG2 students showcased their artistic abilities by making collages, using a variety of materials to create colourful compositions.

A special assembly conducted by KG2 added meaning to the celebration, highlighting the importance of colours in our daily lives. Adding to the excitement, both KG1 and KG2 students confidently



expressed themselves during the Show and Tell activity, speaking about objects related to their assigned colours.

The campus came alive as students arrived dressed in the colours assigned to their classes, spreading brightness, enthusiasm, and positivity all around. The event was conducted under the continuous support and en-

couragement of senior vice principal Shihabudeen Pulath and Headmistress Sameena Ashfaq, whose guidance inspired both students and teachers. The celebration reflected the school's strong commitment to fostering joyful learning environments that nurture creativity, confidence, and holistic development among its students.



MES dominates Tamil Literary Competition with record win

MES Indian School has recorded a commendable triumph at the recently concluded Tamil Literary Competition 2026, organised by Mahakavi Mandram, securing the highest number of prizes across multiple categories and bringing significant laurels to the institution. The prestigious event witnessed the participation of 126 students from various Indian schools across Qatar. Among them, 28 students from MES Indian School exhibited exceptional talent, determination, and academic excellence. Of these, an impressive 11 students emerged as prize winners.

Among the achievers, Mohamed Arfan of Class 7 and Jayasree of Class 3 secured first place in their respective categories. Ibrahim Jainullabdeen of Class 4 and Ankitha Sumesh Kumar of Class 5 earned second place honours, while Abijith Venkatesh of Class 6 secured third place. In the Class 8 category, Udaya Sumesh Kumar attained first place, followed by Karunya Krithi in second place and Hafsa Begam in third place. In the Class 9 category, Atheequr Rahman secured first place, with Kaviya Velmurugan and Rakshan

Jeyabalan achieving second and third places respectively. Dr Hameeda Kadar, principal lauded the winners saying: "This outstanding accomplishment marks a significant milestone in the continued pursuit of excellence by MES Indian School and highlights the institution's dedication to nurturing linguistic proficiency and cultural awareness among its students". Jeyanthi Suresh, coordinator, along with Skylab Rani and Kirthika C, trained and mentored the participants toward this notable success.



FOK Qatar organises blood donation camp



FOK Qatar (Friends of Kozhikode) recently organised a blood donation camp, in association with Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) at the HMC Blood Donation Centre. The camp witnessed an overwhelming response, with more than 200 donors participated in the noble initiative. According to HMC records, FOK Qatar secured the fourth position among Indian organisations for the highest single-day participation in a blood donation drive, marking a significant achievement for the organisation. The event was inaugurated by Indian ambassador Vipul, in the presence of Eng Khalid Ahmed Fakhroo from Qatar Charity, who attended as the chief guest. FOK President KK Usman presided over the function. General secretary Renjith Chaili delivered the welcome address, and treasurer



Mansoor expressed the vote of thanks. In his remarks, the envoy commended FOK Qatar for its commendable social initiatives. Fakhroo highlighted the strong India-Qatar relationship and lauded the Indian community's continued commitment to social responsibility. Indian Cultural Centre (ICC) president AP Manikandan delivered the felicitation speech. Organising secretary MV Musthafa was

honoured with a memento in recognition of his leadership in making the event a grand success. Certificates were also awarded to Ramla Bashir and Ramla Samad for mobilising the highest number of participants. Other Apex body heads, community leaders, organisation representatives, business personalities, office-bearers and family members of FOK Qatar also participated in the event.

DPS-MIS felicitates students for attendance, RoboSpace



Excellence is not an act but a habit, shaped by punctuality and sustained effort. With this guiding thought, DPS-Modern Indian School (DPS-MIS) conducted the Award Ceremony (2025-26) on May 5 in the school auditorium.

The event honoured students in Grades VI-VIII and X for achieving 100% attendance and celebrated those in Grades VI-VIII who successfully completed the RoboSpace Course.

The chief guest, Gopi Varadhan, vice-president, DPS Modern Indian School, congratulated students with 100% attendance and the first batch of RoboSpace Certification, appreciating their discipline and commitment. He highlighted the school's specialised facilities and future plans for the RoboSpace Lab, including a micro-satellite and humanoid ro-



bots, while acknowledging teachers' efforts.

Principal Asna Nafees emphasised the school's focus on quality education and progressive practices. She noted the establishment of the RoboSpace Lab as a step toward future-ready learning, appreciated the achievers, and encouraged students to use technology responsibly for a better world.

The felicitation segment honoured 145 students who maintained 100% attendance throughout the academic year. A video presentation showcased the RoboSpace Lab's structured, hands-on learning approach, followed by the presentation of certificates to 79 students who successfully completed the RoboSpace course.

Qatar-based expat selected as volunteer at FIFA World Cup 2026

From a small school field in a remote village to the grandest stage of international football, Abjol Ahmed's journey has now become an inspiring reality. The Qatar-based expatriate has been selected as a volunteer for the FIFA World Cup 2026, marking a significant milestone in his life.

Ahmed will serve as a hospitality volunteer at the iconic MetLife Stadium in the United States. The stadium is scheduled to host several key matches, including the final, making his role even more prestigious and memorable.

This will be his second FIFA World Cup volunteering experience, having previously served successfully in an earlier edition of the tournament.

His passion and long-standing commitment to volunteering have played a crucial role in reaching this remarkable stage.

The upcoming World Cup will be jointly hosted by the United States, Canada, and Mexico, featuring an expanded format with 48 teams. Out of nearly 1m applicants worldwide, only around 65,000 volunteers have been selected - placing Abjol Ahmed among a highly competitive and elite group.

His journey, however, was not easy. From the initial application and selection process to interviews, shift assignments, and visa procedures, he navigated a long and challenging path.

After successfully completing all stages, he is now fully prepared for his new mission.

If all goes as planned, Ahmed is expected to travel to the United States in the first week of June. His achievement is not only a personal success but also a proud moment for his home country.



Abjol Ahmed



A new dawn of leadership - Rajagiri Investiture 2026

Rajagiri Public School organised the Investiture Ceremony for the academic year 2026-27, a proud occasion celebrating leadership, responsibility, and student empowerment. The highlight of the event was the presence of the chief guest, Lt Husain Qassim Askar, awareness officer, Juvenile Police Department. The board of directors and school officials were also present for the ceremony.

The formal proceedings included the investiture of student leaders across various levels, beginning with the class prefects from grades 1-12, junior and senior student council members, house leaders and ceremonial heads, symbolising the entrustment of duties and responsibilities.

The major student officials are Master Ahsan Manathat Anees (Head Boy), Miss Ayesha Ven-gasseri (Head Girl), Master Aarav

Dhaval Shah (Deputy Head Boy), Miss Ann Mariya KA (Deputy Head Girl), Miss Bian Angie Bijou (Cultural Secretary), Master Leeneshwar Reddy (Sports Captain), Miss Shreegeeta Kaabi, Master Adithyakrishnan Haridas, Master Ayaan Shameer and Miss Alice Jijo (House Captains), MasterJwalin Akash and Miss Daksha Deepak were appointed as the Junior Head Boy and Head Girl respectively.

The ceremony also featured an oath-taking led by the principal, Joshy Abraham, during which the newly appointed leaders pledged to serve with sincerity and commitment. The speeches of the Head Boy and Head Girl reflected gratitude and determination. The ceremony stood as a testament to the school's commitment to nurturing responsible future leaders and fostering a culture of excellence.

ICC's 'Nriyanjali' showcases vibrant cultural performances



Indian Cultural Centre presented Nriyanjali - 'Wednesday Fiesta' Celebration of Indian Arts and Culture on May 6 at ICC Ashoka Hall. The event featured an array of vibrant dance performances reflecting the rich cultural heritage and diverse artistic traditions of India, presented by various community organisations. Sumesh Kumar and Sreejiv C K, presidents of ICC-affiliated organisations Onattukara Pravasi Association and Payyanur Souhruda Vedi Qatar, respectively, were honoured for their significant contributions to the community.



Anwar Sadat's art exhibition at Art Gallery concludes

Renowned artist Anwar Sadat's art exhibition, which featured diverse artworks, concluded on May 7 at the Art Factory in Lusail, attracting art lovers and social activists in Qatar. The event, inaugurated by Dr Sultan al-Darwish, also featured social activist Mashhood VC, renowned calligraphy artist Karim Graphi, Art Gallery general manager Ijaz Hamza, and artists Dr Sreekumar and Basit Khan (Vazhayur Service Forum - Qatar president). Sadat, who has lived in Qatar for a long time, is a notable figure who has produced distinctive works in the field of art despite his busy life. He was honoured at the "Snehadaram" programme organised by VSF Qatar on Thursday.



Shantiniketan shines at SOP Athletic Meet 2026



The grand finale of the SOP Athletic Meet, held on May 5 at Aspire Dome, brought together talented young athletes from schools across Qatar in a vibrant display of energy, sportsmanship, and excellence. The event featured remarkable performances across various track and field events, celebrating the true spirit of athletics. Making Shantiniketan Indian School immensely proud, Mohammed Irfan of Grade 9 delivered an outstanding performance by securing two gold medals. He showcased exceptional speed and agility, clinching first place in the 60-m hurdles,

and further impressed with a remarkable leap to win gold in the long jump. Competing against participants from numerous schools, Irfan's achievement reflects his dedication, discipline, and athletic talent. His success is a proud moment for the school, teachers, and peers, and it inspires fellow students to pursue sports with passion and commitment. The SOP Athletic Meet continues to provide a dynamic platform for young athletes to shine and achieve memorable milestones in their sporting journey.



Top court revives Ramaphosa cash-heist scandal in S Africa

AFP
Johannesburg

South Africa's top court yesterday overturned a vote in parliament that quashed the opening of impeachment proceedings against President Cyril Ramaphosa over a \$4-million cash-heist scandal.

Ramaphosa is accused of hiding from police and tax authorities a 2020 break-in and theft of large sums of foreign currency allegedly stashed in furniture at his luxury Phala Phala farmhouse in the northern Limpopo province.

An independent panel later said he "may have committed" serious violations and misconduct.

But parliament, then controlled by his African National Congress (ANC) party, declined in 2022 to open impeachment proceedings that could have forced him out of the office.

"It is declared that the vote of the National Assembly taken on 13 December 2022... is inconsistent with the Constitution, invalid, and it is set aside," the Constitutional Court's Chief Justice Mandisa Maya said.

It ordered that the independent panel's report be referred to an impeachment committee.

The court decision followed a complaint lodged by the radical left-wing Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) party.

The ruling is likely to heap fresh pressure on Ramaphosa and the ANC, which has been shedding support over unmet policy pledges and persistent accusations of corruption and weak governance,



Judges take their seat at the Constitutional Court yesterday ahead of the ruling on the "Farmgate" scandal. (Reuters)

ahead of municipal elections on November 4.

The presidency said it "noted the judgement" and that Ramaphosa respected it.

"President Ramaphosa maintains that no person is above the law and that any allegations should be subjected to due process without fear, favour or prejudice," it said in a statement.

The public prosecutor dropped money laundering and corruption charges against Ramaphosa in 2024.

EFF leader Julius Malema hailed yesterday's ruling, saying: "We are happy our Constitution has won."

"The ANC itself has to take a decision whether it wants to be led by a president with this dark cloud hanging over him," Malema said outside the court in the fi-

nanial capital Johannesburg.

Ramaphosa would face "very rough and thorough questions" if impeachment proceedings were opened, he added.

Unlike in 2022, the ANC no longer commands a majority in parliament.

Reduced to 40% of seats after a drubbing in the 2024 general election, Nelson Mandela's former liberation movement has been forced into an often-uneasy coalition with nine other parties.

The Democratic Alliance (DA), the second-largest party in the coalition, said it "will participate fully and constructively in the impeachment committee".

"We will be guided by the facts, by the evidence placed before the committee, and by our constitutional duty. We will not prejudge



A supporter of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) holds a placard outside Constitutional Court. (Reuters)

the outcome. But nor will we allow any person, no matter how high their office, to be placed above accountability," DA leader Geordin Hill-Lewis said in a statement.

The scandal erupted in 2022 when the country's former spy boss filed a complaint with the police alleging that Ramaphosa had concealed the theft from beneath sofa cushions at his ranch.

Ramaphosa, who has so far denied any wrongdoing, allegedly arranged for the burglars to be kidnapped and bribed into silence when he should have reported the robbery to police.

The 73-year-old president has disputed the amount of money involved and said the amount \$580,000 from the sale of 20 buffaloes to a Sudanese businessman had been stolen.

Zimbabwe to return land to white farmers

AFP
Bulawayo

Zimbabwe will return dozens of foreign-owned farms seized more than two decades ago during a land reform drive, but is not reversing the contested policy, the agriculture minister yesterday.

The land grab was launched by longtime ruler Robert Mugabe in 2000, with thousands of white farmers evicted, often violently, and their land redistributed to black Zimbabweans to address colonial-era injustices.

The policy triggered sanctions, deepening the country's economic isolation by limiting its access to the international banking system.

The government will return 67 farms covered by bilateral investment pacts "but which remained un-occupied" to the investors, Agriculture Minister Anxious Masuka said in a statement.

The investors are from Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland.

More than 400 white farmers would now be allowed to buy back all or part of their farms, Masuka said.

A further 840 farms belonging to black Zimbabweans will be restored to their owners, he said.

"Land was a core grievance against the heinous and minority settler oppressive regime.

This drove thousands of blacks to wage an armed struggle to liberate ourselves from the shackles of oppression," the minister said.

"Now the people are with their land and the land with its masters. Land reform is, therefore, irreversible."

Critics have dismissed the announcement — first made in parliament earlier this week — as government flip-flopping.

Social justice activist Tendai Mbofana told AFP that Zimbabwe's land policy has been driven by political expediency, "characterised by a jarring disconnect between its revolutionary rhetoric and its pragmatic concessions".

In 2020, Mugabe's successor, President Emmerson Mnangagwa, struck a deal to pay compensation of \$3.5 bn to about 3,500 commercial farmers evicted in the botched land reform.

But saddled by a debt of more than \$21 bn, Zimbabwe has struggled to honour the commitment to its people.

In 2023, it changed the offer to one% in cash with the remainder in US-dollar-denominated Zimbabwean treasury bonds with two percent interest.

Zimbabwe is seeking to repair relations with Western creditors through an arrears clearance and debt resolution process.

Once renowned as a breadbasket, the southern African country now suffers from chronic food shortages.

Somalis face acute hunger, WFP warns

Somalia faces a severe malnutrition crisis and urgently needs more aid funding to avert a catastrophe, the UN World Food Programme said yesterday, warning it may be forced to halt humanitarian support from July without additional financing. A combination of multiple failed rain seasons, which have wiped out crops and livestock, and on-going conflict and insecurity is pushing people in Somalia into dangerous levels of hunger at a time of radical cuts in foreign aid and aid shortages sparked by the war on Iran, the WFP said.

Some 6 mn people in Somalia, or almost one in three, are facing acute hunger, while 1.9 mn children are acutely malnourished, according to the WFP.

"Somalia faces a really severe malnutrition crisis and is one of the biggest malnutrition hotspots in the world," Matthew Hollingworth, WFP assistant executive director for programme operations, told reporters in Geneva. He spoke via video link from Rome. Somalia faces several overlapping conflicts, including a long-running Islamist insurgency by the Al-Shabaab militant group against the federal government as well as political disputes between Mogadishu and regional states over power and security.

The situation in the country bears similar warning signs to 2022, when Somalia was on the brink of famine following a prolonged drought, but the difference this time is that aid agencies do not have the funding to respond at a massive scale, the WFP said. (Reuters)

Macron seeks to cement Africa legacy with Kenya summit

AFP
Paris

President Emmanuel Macron today embarks on a visit to Africa aimed at renewing France's engagement with the continent after years of strained ties with former French-speaking colonies.

In English-speaking Kenya, Macron will co-host a summit on Monday and Tuesday bringing together African leaders and business executives, as he seeks to cement his legacy one year before the end of his term.

He will also travel to Egypt and Ethiopia as part of his Africa tour.

"The Africa Forward summit marks a major milestone in relations between France and the African continent," the Elysee Palace said.

The meeting will focus on economic development and cross-border investment, among other themes, the French presidency said, stressing that it will be the first such forum held in an English-speaking country.

Macron hopes to highlight France's renewed relationship with the African continent as a "report card on his Africa policy", said one diplomat.

Anti-French sentiment runs high in some former African colonies as the continent becomes a renewed diplomatic battleground, with Russian and Chinese influence growing.

Once master of vast expanses of northern, central and western Africa, France has played a crucial role in the continent's post-colonial



President Emmanuel Macron arrives to speak with media during the 2025 G20 Leaders' Summit in Johannesburg. (Reuters/File Photo)

history, repeatedly intervening militarily since the early 1960s.

France has vowed to abandon the so-called "Francafrique" strategy, under which Paris sought to keep francophone Africa under its thumb through political collusion, exclusive access for French businesses and oblique financial deals including graft.

Macron has gone further than his predecessors in admitting France's colonial-era abuses in countries including Rwanda, Cameroon and Senegal. But he has ruled out any official apology for torture and other abuses carried out by French troops in Algeria.

Ahead of his trip, French parliament definitively adopted legislation to simplify the return of artworks looted during the colonial era.

But under his watch, French forces deployed in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger withdrew follow-

ing successive coups, as the juntas in those countries drew closer to Russia. The unravelling of those ties came after Macron in 2020 summoned leaders of Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mauritania to the southwestern French town of Pau, threatening to pull out French troops.

The meeting was widely seen as a throwback to the colonial era and accelerated France's crisis in ties with the countries in the Sahel.

Amaka Anku, head of the Africa section at Eurasia Group, a risk analysis firm, said Macron should not be blamed for France's loss of influence in the Sahel.

"That was a long time coming, it's inherited," she told AFP.

"The best thing Macron did was to try to expand France's relations with anglophone Africa."

The military leaders of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger will not attend the summit.

Africa expert Niagale Bagayoko expressed skepticism about what Macron might be able to achieve.

"Nothing particularly new can happen in Franco-African relations before the end of Emmanuel Macron's term," she said.

"There is too much baggage."

She said Macron was perceived by many in Africa as a leader who had "failed to grasp" the evolution of public opinion and was seen as "arrogant and paternalistic".

Some still remember how Macron in 2017 nearly sparked a diplomatic incident with Burkina Faso's then-president Roch Marc Christian Kabore as he spoke to students in Ouagadougou.

Some complained of persistent electricity cuts, and when Kabore briefly left the room, Macron joked that he had gone to fix the air conditioning.

Critics also pointed out that the overhaul of the CFA franc, a France-backed currency used by some African countries and seen as a relic of the colonial past, did not amount to much.

Former French ambassador Nicolas Normand said the reform was "homeopathic", accusing Macron of failing to grasp the symbolic weight of a colonial-era legacy.

Before travelling to Kenya, Macron will unveil the new campus of a university in Alexandria in northern Egypt alongside President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

On Wednesday, the French president will travel to Addis Ababa where he will hold talks with Mahmoud Ali Youssouf, chairperson of the African Union Commission, and UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres.

Botswana former president Mogae dead at 86



Botswana's Festus Mogae. (Reuters/File Photo)

Botswana's former president Festus Mogae, who led the southern African country for a decade from 1998, winning praise for the fight against HIV/AIDS, has died at the age of 86, the presidency said yesterday.

An economist who studied in Britain, he oversaw strong economic growth during his two five-year terms in office. "As a nation, we grieve the loss of a remarkable leader and servant of the people whose commitment to Botswana remained unwavering throughout his life," current President Duma Boko said. The government declared three days of national mourning, with flags to be flown at half-mast.

Mogae came to power as the country's third president after Ketumile Masire stepped down, having previously served as his vice president. He was succeeded by Ian Khama in 2008, a former military chief and son of Botswana's first president.

Mogae is credited with tackling HIV/AIDS openly at a time when Botswana faced one of the world's highest infection rates. In 2008, he won the prestigious Ibrahim Prize for his leadership in sustaining the country's stability and prosperity during the crisis. (AFP)

Mali government refuses dialogue with rebels

AFP
Bamako

Mali's government refuses to talk to armed groups, the foreign minister has said, days after militants and allied separatists mounted unprecedented attacks against the junta.

The coordinated deadly offensive by Al-Qaeda-linked militants and Tuareg separatists on April 25 and 26 targeted strategic towns and killed the country's influential defence minister.

"The government of Mali does not envisage any dialogue with the lawless terrorist armed groups that bear responsibility for the tragic events our people have been experiencing for years," Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop said, while meeting the country's diplomats on Thursday.

The junta-led west African country has grappled with more than a decade of violence and last month's attacks were reminiscent of a crisis that rocked Mali in 2012.

Under a new alliance forged a year ago, Tuareg rebels of the Azawad Liberation Front (FLA) teamed up with the Al-Qaeda-linked Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM) to launch the latest assaults.

"The FLA has freely chosen to take up the cause of an extremist group," the minister said, referring to the JNIM.

The key town of Kidal and other



Fighters from the National Front for the Liberation of Azawad (FLA) patrol the streets of Kidal yesterday. (AFP)

towns and villages in the north were captured and are now controlled by the FLA, who have since imposed a blockade on the capital, Bamako.

On Wednesday, security, legal and family sources told AFP that several opposition figures and military personnel had been detained or abducted following the attacks.

Verification of the number and identity of those involved is difficult. Since 2012, Mali has faced a deep security crisis fuelled in particular by violence from fighters affiliated with Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State group, as well as local criminal gangs and pro-independence groups.

The unrest fed a political crisis, leading to two military coups in 2020 and 2021.

30 killed in twin attacks in Mali

Two attacks in central Mali claimed by Al-Qaeda-linked militants have killed more than 30 people, local security and administrative sources told AFP. The two strikes came less than a fortnight after a large-scale, coordinated offensive by 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. (AFP)

US releases previously classified UFO records

Reuters
Washington

President Donald Trump and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth yesterday released dozens of previously classified files on alleged UFO sightings and alien life to provide what they called “unprecedented transparency” to the American people. The disclosure of the long-sought documents and photos of “unidentified anomalous phenomena” will be followed by future releases as more materials are declassified, the US Defence Department said in a statement.

Trump was the latest US president to release reports on UFOs that date back to the 1940s and were first disclosed in the late 1970s. Experts said the batch of around 160 files released on Friday contained new videos of known sightings but gave no conclusive evidence of extraterrestrial life. The files include a 1947 report of “flying discs” as well as a photo of “unidentified phenomena” taken from the moon’s surface during the Apollo 12 lunar mission in 1969 and a transcript of the Apollo 17 crew describing unidentified objects seen from the moon in 1972.

Apollo 17 mission pilot Ronald Evans reported “a few very bright particles or fragments or something that go drifting by as we maneuver,” based on the transcript.

“Roger. Understand,” mission control replied.

“These files, hidden behind classifications, have long fueled



An unidentified object (black dot) captured over the Western United States in December 2025 is seen in this infrared still image. (Reuters)



A handout composite sketch depicts eyewitness reports in September 2023 of an ellipsoid metallic object. (Reuters)

justified speculation — and it’s time the American people see it for themselves,” Hegseth said in a statement.

The records release is likely to fuel fresh debate over government secrecy and the possible existence of life in the cosmos.

“Whereas previous Administrations have failed to be trans-

parent on this subject, with these new Documents and Videos, the people can decide for themselves, “WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON?” Trump said in a statement. “Have fun and enjoy!”

The move was welcomed by US Representatives Tim Burchett and Anna Paulina Luna, both proponents of declassifying

UFO files. Luna said an additional tranche of material was expected in around 30 days.

“The files show that UAP are not simply a matter of speculation or public curiosity,” Harvard University astrophysicist Avi Loeb said in an email to Reuters. “The government has collected records.”

The images from Apollo 12 and 17 were fascinating but could be the result of asteroid impacts on the lunar surface, Loeb said. He added that more interesting material was likely still to come but would take longer to declassify.

Some critics cast the UFO disclosures as a distraction from Trump’s political woes, including the unpopular US military campaign against Iran and public pressure to release further files tied to convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. “I really don’t care about the UFO files. I just don’t. I’m so sick of the ‘look at the shiny object’ propaganda,” former Republican US Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene wrote on X.

UAP investigator Mick West said the administration of former President Joe Biden disclosed much of the same information as Friday’s release. West, who produces software to analyze UAP videos, said the files provided no new evidence on the possible existence of alien life.

“They’re evidence of us not being able to identify a small white dot that’s a long distance away,” said the Sacramento, California-based analyst, adding that shapes in UAP videos were often camera lens diffraction from bright light.



President Laura Fernandez arrives for her inauguration ceremony at the Estadio Nacional in San Jose yesterday. (Reuters)

Costa Rica’s newly elected president vows to fight crime

AFP
San José

Costa Rican political scientist Laura Fernandez inaugurated as president yesterday, the latest right-winger to win power in Latin America on a promise to combat drug-related violence.

Fernandez, 39, is the political heir of outgoing president Rodrigo Chaves, who survived two impeachment attempts by Congress over corruption allegations.

She has appointed him as a super-minister in charge of the political and economic agenda of her so-called “government of continuity.”

Fernandez won the election on February 1 outright at the first round, largely thanks to Chaves’s popularity.

He was barred by the constitution from seeking a second consecutive term.

A former minister of the presidency under Chaves, Fernandez has vowed to crack down on ris-

ing violence linked to the cocaine trade in the small Central American country.

The country of 5.2 million people, famous for its white-sand beaches, has long been seen as an oasis of stability and democracy in Central America.

But in recent years, it has gone from a transit point to logistics hub in the global drug trade, fueling local turf wars that have caused the murder rate to soar.

“I want to walk down the street without fearing a shootout,” Nancy Gutierrez, a 50-year-old housewife, told AFP.

Fernandez cites iron-fisted Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele, who has locked up thousands of suspected gang members without charge, as an inspiration on how to tamp down crime.

Like Chaves, she is an ally of US President Donald Trump.

Her election marked another win for the Latin American right, which has unseated a host of left-wing administrations in recent months, including in Chile, Bolivia, and Honduras.

Apple, Meta warn Canadian bill could force them to weaken encryption

Reuters
San Francisco

Apple and Meta have publicly opposed a Canadian bill that the companies say could require them to break the encryption of their devices and services if passed. Bill C-22 was proposed by Canada’s ruling Liberal Party, which gained a parliamentary majority last month and is currently being debated in the House of Commons. Canadian law enforcement officials say the bill would help them investigate security threats earlier and act more quickly.

It is part of a broader push by governments to expand lawful access to encrypted data, a move tech companies say risks weakening user security. The Canadian bill contains provisions that, depending on how they are implemented, could be similar to a UK data access provision order sent to Apple last year. That order prompted Apple to withdraw a feature allowing users to store data in its cloud with end-to-end encryption. US officials later said Britain had dropped the request after the US director of national intelligence, Tulsi Gabbard, raised concerns it could violate a cloud data treaty.

End-to-end encryption



The Apple Store in the Eaton Centre in Toronto. (Reuters/File Photo)

means that only the user — not even Apple, Meta or law enforcement — can access the data without a key. The technology is widely used in services such as Meta Platforms’ WhatsApp and Apple’s iMessage, and security experts say it provides powerful protections against spying and cybercrime.

“At a time of rising and pervasive threats from malicious actors seeking access to user information, Bill C-22, as drafted, would undermine our ability to offer the powerful privacy and security features users expect from Apple,” Apple said in a statement. “This legislation could allow the Canadian government to force companies to break encryption

by inserting backdoors into their products — something Apple will never do.”

In prepared testimony, Meta’s head of public policy for Canada, Rachel Curran, and Privacy and Public Policy Director Robyn Greene said the bill’s “sweeping powers, minimal oversight, and lack of clear safeguards” could make Canadians less safe, rather than more.

“As drafted, the bill could require companies like Meta to build or maintain capabilities that break, weaken, or circumvent encryption or other zero-knowledge security architectures, and force providers to install government spyware directly on their systems,” the two wrote.

US imposes sanctions on Cuban military conglomerate, mining joint venture

Reuters
Washington/Havana

The US on Thursday imposed financial sanctions on a sprawling business conglomerate run by Cuba’s military and a Cuban-Canadian mining joint venture, as the Trump administration ramps up pressure on the island’s communist leaders by targeting sources of foreign investment. After the military raid to seize the leader of longtime Cuban ally Venezuela in January, US President Donald Trump has said that “Cuba is next,” and blocked most oil shipments to the country, laying siege to the island’s government and dramatically worsening blackouts.

Trump last week signed an executive order broadening US sanctions against Cuba, a move President Miguel Diaz-Canel decried as “coercive.” Under that order, Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the Trump administration was targeting Grupo de Administracion Empresarial SA (GAESA), the military conglomerate that US officials say controls at least 40% of Cuba’s economy, and its Executive President Ania Guillermina Lastres Morera.

Rubio accused Cuba’s government of providing a platform for the intelligence operations of na-



The building of GAESA in Havana. (AFP)

tions hostile to the US, allegations Cuba denies. The measures also targeted Moa Nickel SA, a joint venture between Toronto-based Sherritt International Corp and Cuba’s state-owned nickel company, which mines nickel and cobalt, Rubio said in a statement, undercutting one of Cuba’s key sources of foreign exchange.

The Trump administration has also sharply restricted US travel and remittances to the island and moved to dissuade regional allies from contracting Cuban doctors, a long-standing program that Cuba promotes in the name of solidarity but that is also a top source of hard currency.

“With Sherritt suspending operations, the US has now effectively targeted all of Cuba’s main

sources of hard currency,” said Paolo Spadoni, an expert on the Cuban economy at Augusta University. Sherritt — among the last companies to operate on a large scale in Cuba despite punishing US sanctions — said in a statement on its website on Thursday that it had suspended its direct participation in joint venture activities in Cuba, effective immediately. Cuba’s Foreign Ministry called the fresh US sanctions “an act of ruthless economic aggression” and said they violated international law.

“We urge the international community to confront this... dangerous escalation in the United States’ desire to exert domination and control over Cuba’s destiny,” the foreign ministry said in a statement.

Residents lose environmental challenge against Amazon’s data centre in Chile

Reuters
Santiago

Patricio Hernandez lives on the northern outskirts of Chile’s capital Santiago, a hilly area below the Andes mountains which he and other residents fear could be devastated by a major Amazon data centre complex. “This hill is very important to the community; it is a green space, a place for recreation and for community,” he said, while strolling dirt paths near a flowing stream.

He and other residents tried to block the data centre complex, arguing the permit did not take into account the potential construction of a high-voltage power line that they said would be needed to feed the site.

They lost their case. Environmental authorities in early April ruled the data centre could move ahead, saying that any plans for a power line should be assessed separately.

Amazon Web Services said it aims for the data centre to consume minimal energy and water and that its plan had met the environmental requirements.

Data centre construction has taken off worldwide as demand grows for the physical backbone for data storage, computer processing and artificial intelligence. So too has opposition over fears that the energy and water consumption required by data centres could drain resources, and that data centres could generate heat, cause noise pollution and rely on fossil fuels.

“Our approach has been to design this infrastructure with a strong emphasis on resource efficiency, incorporating technologies that minimise both energy and water consumption,” AWS Southern Cone technology chief Rafael Matije said, speaking from New Zealand. The branch of Jeff Bezos’ tech giant responsible for data centres last year announced a major plan to expand in Santiago.



A drone view shows the El Carmen water channel near the site of a planned Amazon data center in Santiago. (Reuters)

In Chile overall, AWS has said it will invest more than \$4 bn over the next 15 years to build, operate and maintain infrastructure in what is set to become its third ma-

ior hub in Latin America after Brazil’s Sao Paulo and central Mexico. A positive stance from Chile’s new President Jose Antonio Kast, who has pledged to reduce red tape, as

well as high connectivity through fiber optic cables, could make Santiago increasingly popular for data centre developers.

“Chile is a magnet for this industry,” said Sebastian Diaz, a sustainable city specialist and former advisor to Chile’s national data centre plan. He also warned that Chile and the wider region must balance attracting investment with protecting people and environment from negative consequences.

AWS expects its complex in Santiago, some 8 km (5 miles) north of the city centre, to last some 30 years. The centre will join dozens of AWS data centres around the Americas and over 900 worldwide. For Hernandez, the construction of the data centre and any related infrastructure could dramatically change the daily lives of residents.

“We wake up every day to a green hill that brings us a little joy amid the gray of the city,” he said.

AI on agenda at US-China summit, WSJ reports

Washington and Beijing are weighing the launch of official discussions on artificial intelligence, the Wall Street Journal reported, citing people familiar with the matter.

The two sides are considering putting AI on the agenda for a summit next week in Beijing between President Trump and Chinese leader Xi Jinping, the Journal said.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent is leading the American side for the proposed AI discussions, while Beijing has not yet designated its counterpart, the report added.

Trump said earlier this week he will remind Xi that the US is leading in artificial intelligence as the two sides navigate tensions over trade and technology. (Reuters)



Southeast Asian leaders seek strategy to ease impacts of Iran war

Reuters
Cebu, Philippines

Southeast Asian leaders at a summit yesterday stressed an urgent need to co-ordinate their response to the impacts of the Middle East crisis, as they aim to ease pressure from an energy shock that has rattled their oil import-reliant economies.

Meeting on the Philippine island of Cebu, leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) called for a harmonised strategy to ensure energy and food security and head off future crises in a region particularly exposed to a nearly 70-day blockade of the critical Strait of Hormuz.

The chair of Asean, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr, said the fallout from the war in Iran had created a domino effect of disruption and highlighted the need for "foresight, coordination, and concrete and collective action".

"The recent crisis is a stark reminder of how vulnerable our economies remain to sudden shifts in the international order and consequently, the global economy," he

said at a retreat of the leaders.

"A few weeks worth of disruptions will take years to be corrected."

Asean economic ministers on Thursday "identified practical, concrete response measures" to ensure energy and food security, according to a statement, but the proposals lacked specific details.

They included diversifying suppliers and routes and developing a crisis communication protocol, but it was unclear what, if any, action might be taken.

The region, with a population of nearly 700mn people and economies worth a combined \$3.8tn, faces significant risks from the Iran war, and the Philippines — among the first countries in the world to declare an energy emergency — has pushed for approval of a voluntary, commercial-based Asean oil-sharing framework agreement.

But coordination remains a big challenge for Asean. Despite rapid growth of its individual economies, integration has been slow, with vast differences between its 11 members and no central authority to ensure compliance with Asean agreements and initiatives.

Asean leaders stressed the need



Myanmar's Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs U Hau Khan Sum, Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, Thailand's Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul, East Timor's Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao, Vietnam's Prime Minister Le Minh Hung, Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos Jr, Singapore's Prime Minister Lawrence Wong, Brunei's Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, Indonesia's President Prabowo Subianto, Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Manet, and Laos' Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone pose for a group photo during the opening ceremony of the 48th Asean Summit and Related Meetings, in Cebu, Philippines, yesterday. (Reuters)

to create mechanisms to withstand future crises, with Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto, saying energy supply pressures were very high and would not ease anytime soon.

"Asean must be ready for a long-term disruption. Our resilience must be built proactively with a clear forward-looking approach. This means we must be ready for

any eventualities," he said.

In a reference to the South China Sea and the 900km (550-mile) long Malacca Strait, the world's busiest waterway for international trade, Prabowo said it was vital Asean prevent trade route disruptions in its own backyard.

His remarks came just two weeks after his own finance minister made waves by openly mus-

ing about ways countries could impose tolls on ships as a way to monetise the strait, before noting it would not be possible.

The Asean leaders are expected to call for a negotiated settlement between the US and Iran as well as a reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, a conduit for about 130 vessels a day and a fifth of the world's oil and gas supplies prior to the conflict.

Leaders will urge Asean members to complete the domestic processes required to approve a fuel-sharing pact, ensuring its "earliest possible entry into force", according to a working draft of a statement seen by Reuters on Thursday.

Though the war has dominated talks in Cebu so far, progress was made in other areas on Thursday, with Marcos calling a meeting of the leaders of Thailand and Cambodia amid a fragile ceasefire, resulting in an agreement to restart engagement after two rounds of deadly border conflict last year.

Foreign ministers also agreed to hold a virtual meeting with their counterpart from Myanmar, which is eager to normalise ties with Asean and allow its leadership to participate in its summits following a ban imposed after a 2021 military coup led to nationwide demonstrations that spiralled into civil war.

The crisis in Myanmar has long divided the bloc, with some members seeking engagement with a new, nominally civilian government led by former junta chief Min Aung Hlaing, who became president recently after a one-sided election swept by a pro-military party.

Massive 11,000-carat ruby discovered, Myanmar says



An 11,000-carat ruby in Naypyidaw, after it was found at a gem tract in Mogok in Mandalay Region, Myanmar. (AFP)

A huge 11,000-carat ruby has been discovered in Myanmar, state media reported yesterday, one of the largest ever found in the country renowned for its precious gemstones.

Coup leader turned president Min Aung Hlaing was pictured on the front page of the state-run Global New Light of Myanmar newspaper, examining the 2.2kg (4.8-pound) rock at his office.

Unearthed in the Mogok area, the ruby was "exceptionally large, rare, and difficult to find," the new military-backed government said in a statement.

"The giant ruby has a purplish-red colour with yellowish undertones and is considered

to have a high-quality colour grade," it added.

While smaller than a similar 21,450-carat ruby found in the same area in 1996, the recently discovered stone is more valuable "due to its superior colour, clarity, and overall quality," the government said without giving a precise value.

Emperors, kings and warlords have long fought over the valley of Mogok in Mandalay region, where the unique "pigeon-blood" stones lie hidden.

The Mogok rubies are the most expensive in the world, with the highest-quality jewels fetching multi-million-dollar prices in an industry notoriously bereft of regulation. (AFP)

Taiwan welcomes Paraguay leader

China urges Paraguay to 'sever' Taiwan ties

AFP
Taipei

Taiwan rolled out the red carpet for Paraguay President Santiago Pena yesterday to shore up relations with its only South American ally, as Beijing urged Asuncion to sever ties with Taipei.

Taipei has only 12 diplomatic allies after Beijing, which claims Taiwan is part of its territory, systematically poached the others in a bid to isolate the self-governed island.

Pena is leading a delegation of government officials and business representatives on a four-day visit, and has described the island as a "fundamental partner" for the South American country.

President Lai Ching-te officially welcomed Pena yesterday with military honours, including cannon salutes and red carpet, ahead of a sit-down meeting.

Addressing the military parade under grey skies, Lai thanked Pena and his government "for long speaking up for Taiwan on the international stage".

"Taiwan and Paraguay are partners firmly committed to the values of democracy, freedom and human rights," Lai said.

Pena said: "Paraguay deeply values this relationship and reaffirms its commitment to continue supporting Taiwan in a strategic alliance based on shared values."

China's foreign ministry called on Paraguay to "make the right choice" by cutting ties with Taiwan.

Since arriving on Thursday, Pena has met with Taiwan's vice president and other senior government ministers.

He also received an honorary doctorate from the National Taiwan University of Science and Technology, which he hailed as a reflection of the "solid alliance" between Taiwan and Paraguay.

During his meeting with Lai, Pena condemned Chinese military and economic pressure on Taiwan, and insisted Taipei has a "sovereign right to engage freely with other countries".

Paraguay and Taiwan were to sign agreements on mutual legal assistance in criminal matters, cooperation in cybersecurity, as well as an AI and computing infrastructure investment project.

Taiwan's other allies in the Americas are Guatemala, Belize and Haiti. It also has formal dip-



Paraguay President Santiago Pena attends a welcoming ceremony with Taiwan President Lai Ching-te in Taipei, Taiwan, yesterday. (Reuters)

omatic ties with several Caribbean islands.

Pena's visit comes days after Lai returned from an official trip to Eswatini, Taiwan's only ally in Africa.

Taiwan has accused China of trying to stop Lai's visit to Eswatini by applying "intense pressure" to the Seychelles, Mauritius and Madagascar to revoke overflight permits for his original trip, which had been scheduled for April 22-26 and was cancelled at the last minute.

Lai end up using the Eswatini

king's plane to make the journey.

Lai's last official overseas trip was in November 2024, when he visited Taiwan's Pacific allies and transited through the US territory of Guam.

Pena had announced in July 2025 that Lai would visit Paraguay the following month. But the administration of US President Donald Trump reportedly denied Lai permission to transit through New York as part of the official trip to Latin America.

Taiwan's foreign ministry denied that Lai was blocked.

N Korea to deploy new artillery along border with South

AFP
Seoul

North Korea plans to deploy a new type of artillery along its southern border, state media said yesterday, potentially putting Seoul within striking range as Pyongyang deepens its hostility towards South Korea.

Despite peace overtures from the South Korean government, the North has repeatedly cast Seoul as its main adversary, and recently removed longstanding

references to Korean unification from its constitution.

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un visited a munitions factory this week to review production of a "new-type 155mm self-propelled gun-howitzer", the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported.

The weapon has a range exceeding 60km (37 miles) and will be deployed this year to a long-range artillery unit along the border with South Korea, according to KCNA.

Central Seoul lies around 50-

60km from the frontier, and much of Gyeonggi province — South Korea's most populous, home to key industrial hubs — would also fall within range.

The howitzer will "provide significant changes and advantages to our military's ground operations", KCNA reported Kim as saying.

North and South Korea remain technically at war because their 1950-53 conflict ended in an armistice, not a peace treaty.

In recent years, Pyongyang has blown up roads and railways linking it with the South, and purportedly built barriers near the border.

In another sign of its hardening stance, North Korea deleted all references to uniting the divided peninsula from its constitution, an AFP review of the latest version this week showed.

The document no longer contains a clause saying Pyongyang seeks "the reunification of the homeland", and includes a new one defining North Korea's territory as extending northwards to China and Russia, and southwards to the "Republic of Korea",

the South's official name.

South Korea's presidential office said on Thursday that it would continue to pursue peace efforts with the North.

In a separate report, KCNA said Kim visited the 5,000-tonne destroyer Choe Hyon on Thursday to oversee handling tests ahead of its formal deployment.

Images carried by state media showed his daughter, Ju-ae, accompanying him on his visit to the Yellow Sea, where he boarded the warship and examined its capabilities.

Another photo showed a grinning Kim sitting with Ju-ae at a table in the ship's mess hall, surrounded by uniformed marines eating instant rice meals.

North Korea has recently staged strategic cruise missile launches from the Choe Hyon, which analysts believe could be equipped to carry nuclear warheads.

Kim voiced satisfaction with the vessel's progress and instructed officials to hand it over to the navy by mid-June as planned, KCNA said.

S Korean spies to boost intel sharing over drone threats

AFP
Seoul

South Korea's spy agency said yesterday it would boost drone-related data sharing with the army to strengthen responses to "evolving" threats.

The country shares its border with nuclear-armed North Korea, with which it remains technically at war.

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un ordered the mass production of attack drones in 2024, and Russia has reportedly used North Korean submunitions on drones to attack Ukraine.

South Korea's spy agency said yesterday that it had signed an

agreement with the army "to strengthen (our) drone security capabilities and jointly respond to evolving drone threats".

"As drones have emerged as a key military asset in modern warfare, including in the war in Ukraine, demand has been rising for data on the latest drone models used on overseas battlefields in order to bolster the operational capabilities of our military," it said.

The deal includes sharing domestic and overseas drone security information, improving regulations on the use of the latest drones and conducting joint drills against drone threats targeting national security facilities, the agency said.

Experts say Pyongyang may have received technical help from Russia to develop its drone programme, in return for sending thousands of North Korean soldiers to help Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

North Korea said last year its new strategic reconnaissance drone was capable of "tracking and monitoring different strategic targets and enemy troops' activities on the ground and the sea", in a reference to South Korean forces.

The North has also said Kim has praised the performance of "suicide attack drones" that use artificial intelligence.

In 2022, five North Korean drones crossed into the South,

prompting Seoul's military to fire warning shots and deploy fighter jets.

But the planes were unable to shoot down any drones — one of which breached the no-fly zone around the presidential office — because the devices were "too small".

And last year, two Chinese nationals were arrested for illegally flying drones to film a South Korean naval base and a visiting US aircraft carrier docked in the port city of Busan.

The illegally obtained materials reportedly included 172 photos and 22 video files, some of which were shared without authorisation on social media platforms including TikTok.

3 hikers dead in Indonesian volcanic eruption: official



Smoke rising from the eruption of Mount Dukono as seen from Tobelo, North Maluku. Three hikers — two Singaporeans and a local — died in an eruption yesterday of Indonesia's Mount Dukono volcano where they found themselves in a no-go zone, officials said.

The eruption on Halmahera island sent an ash cloud about 10km (6.2 miles) into the air, with no towns or villages near enough to face any immediate threat. Twenty hikers were on the slopes when disaster struck, North Halmahera police chief Erlichson Pasaribu told reporters at a volcano monitoring station in Mamuya village. He said nine were from Singapore and the rest Indonesian. As of last evening, 17 climbers — seven of them foreigners — have been found alive, according to the head of local rescue agency Iwan Ramdani. Rescue efforts have been paused and will resume on Saturday, he said. (AFP)

Starmer 'takes responsibility' for Labour election drubbing

AFP
London

UK leader Keir Starmer said yesterday he took responsibility for "very tough" local election results that saw the hard-right make big gains, but vowed to carry on as prime minister.

"I'm not going to walk away and plunge the country into chaos," Starmer said, after his ruling Labour party lost hundreds of council seats in England.

Labour was also braced for humiliating results in voting for devolved parliaments in Scotland and Wales due to be announced later.

"The results are tough, they are very tough, and there's no sugar-coating it," Starmer said.

"We have lost brilliant Labour representatives across the country, these are people who put so much into their communities, so much into our party.

"And that hurts, and it should hurt, and I take responsibility," he added.

The ballot was the biggest electoral test for Starmer since Labour ousted the Conservatives following 14 years in power in a landslide election victory in 2024.

The grim predictions made by opinion polls were borne out in results.

Nigel Farage's anti-immigrant Reform UK party had gained 478 seats while Labour had lost 322 across 57 of the 136 English councils to announce results by mid-Friday.

Reform had taken control of three councils – the counties of Suffolk and Essex in eastern England and the central town of Newcastle-under-Lyme.



Staff count ballots the morning after local elections at a vote-counting centre inside the count centre for Hackney, north east London yesterday. (AFP)

Farage said the local election results had demonstrated a "truly historic shift in British politics", adding that Reform was now "the most national of all the parties. We are here to stay".

Big losses for Labour could amplify calls for Starmer, 63, to resign or face a long-rumoured party leadership challenge. Starmer is now one of the most unpopular prime ministers ever, according to polls.

He insisted however that "days like this don't weaken my resolve to deliver the change that I promised".

Pollster John Curtice, of Glasgow's University of Strathclyde, said the results illustrated a new fragmentation of British politics with Labour being hit from its right by Reform and its left by the Greens.

Those backing Reform were "broadly people with a relatively

socially conservative outlook" who had "lost confidence in the traditional mainstream parties" and were sympathetic to the party's views on issues such as immigration and Brexit, he said.

The ballot decided around 5,000 local council seats, out of 16,000, across England, while in Wales and Scotland voters elected new devolved parliaments.

Reform and the left-wing Greens, led by self-described ecopopulist Zack Polanski, benefited from widespread disillusionment with Starmer's government and policy missteps.

He has also failed to fulfil his main election promise of spurring economic growth. Impatient Britons are still suffering a cost-of-living crisis, including from high energy prices.

London finance worker Ian Tanner said he disliked Starmer's "dreadful policies" but was fearful

any replacement might be "even more left-wing".

"It's a case of you've got to be careful what you wish for," he said.

Another finance worker, Dayo Foster, 60, said she believed Labour was doing "all the right things" and that Starmer just needed more time. "I don't want him to resign, no, I think we need a bit of stability".

Surveys suggest Labour will lose control of the devolved Welsh government for the first time since Wales got its own parliament 27 years ago.

Reform or the pro-independence Plaid Cymru are expected to become the biggest party.

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

In London, the Greens picked up disaffected left-wingers with a pro-Gaza message.

Kemi Badenoch's right-wing Conservatives was also bracing for the loss of traditional strongholds.

Early results in the capital included a mayoral win for the Greens in the east London borough of Hackney.

Hailing the election of Zoe Gabbard in one of the party's target areas, Polanski said "two party politics is not just dying, it is dead and it is buried".

Britain's media has been full of rumours that ex-deputy prime minister Angela Rayner or Health Secretary Wes Streeting could try to oust Starmer after the results.

Neither is universally popular within Labour, however, and would need the backing of 20% of the party's MPs to launch a contest.

British MPs to visit China for first time in seven years

Reuters
Beijing

A cross-party delegation of British lawmakers will visit China this month for the first time since 2019, two sources familiar with the preparations said, in a sign of warming ties since a visit in January by Prime Minister Keir Starmer.

The five-day trip by 12 Labour and Conservative MPs in mid-May is organised by the Great Britain-China Centre, an NGO funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to promote ties with China.

Reuters could not determine the full list of participating MPs or details of their itinerary. The sources spoke on condition of anonymity as preparations for the visit are still underway.

The Centre and the Foreign Office did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

In contrast, British lawmakers have made nine visits since 2022 to Taiwan, the democratically governed island that China claims as its own territory, although Taiwan rejects the claim.

In 2021, China imposed sanctions on nine Britons, including Iain Duncan Smith, the former leader of the Conservative Party, accusing them of spreading "lies and disinformation" about alleged human rights abuses in its western region of Xinjiang.

Beijing then lifted sanctions on six serving lawmakers in January after Starmer met President Xi Jinping on his China trip, which both sides hailed as a "reset" in ties.

Until then, relations had soured by tension during the coronavirus pandemic over human rights and spying accusations.

However, China has retained its Xinjiang-related sanctions on two British academics and lawyers, as well as four organisations based in Britain.

The British MPs' visit follows one in March by nine European lawmakers, the first in eight years after China lifted sanctions on certain MEPs in 2025.

The resumption in parliamentary exchanges marks a tentative reopening of diplomatic dialogue after years of frosty ties between China and Europe.

However, issues around alleged Chinese spying and the controversial mega-embassy China plans to build in London continue to swirl.

This week, a London court held two men guilty of spying on behalf of Hong Kong and China, targeting prominent pro-democracy dissidents now based in Britain.

The men, both dual Chinese and British nationals, denied the accusations, while the Chinese embassy in London has accused Britain of fabricating the charges against them.

SriLankan ex-CEO linked to Airbus bribes found dead

AFP
Colombo

The former chief of Sri Lanka's state-owned airline, who was charged with corruption over the purchase of 10 Airbus aircraft, was found dead yesterday, police said.

Kapila Chandrasena, the former chief executive of Sri Lankan Airlines, was found at the Colombo home of a relative, said police.

"We are investigating the cause of death and circumstances," a police officer told AFP.

Chandrasena was remanded in March on charges of conspiring to accept a \$16m bribe from Airbus in connection with a \$2.3bn aircraft purchase deal.

Shortly after his arrest, he reportedly told investigators that part of the money had been paid to the country's then president, Mahinda Rajapaksa, and then aviation minister Piyankara Jayaratne.

Rajapaksa, who served as president from 2005 to 2015, and his once-powerful family have been the subject of several high-profile corruption allegations, which they deny and describe as politically motivated.

Chandrasena was released from remand custody on Tuesday.

But a court on Thursday ordered his re-arrest, after prosecutors accused him of bribing two men to post bail.

The bribery commission told

the court in March that Chandrasena had admitted to paying Rajapaksa 60mn rupees in 2013, worth around \$480,000 at the time, while heading the airline.

The alleged transactions took place as the airline sought to finalise a \$2.3bn deal with Airbus for 10 aircraft, which required approval from Rajapaksa's cabinet.

Chandrasena disclosed the alleged kickbacks in a statement to the commission after his arrest in March.

A spokesman for Rajapaksa denied the allegations.

SriLankan Airlines is saddled with debt, with estimated accumulated losses of 596bn rupees at the end of March last year. Attempts to sell the airline have so far failed to attract a buyer.

Chandrasena was previously arrested and released on bail in a separate case in 2020.

At the time, the US, Britain and France named him in a joint investigation into Airbus business deals.

Earlier that year, a French court approved a \$4bn fine to be paid by the European aircraft manufacturer to France, Britain and the US to settle the probes.

Investigators in Britain accused Airbus of failing to prevent people associated with the company from bribing directors or employees of Sri Lankan Airlines to "obtain or retain business or advantage".

The US government in December 2024 sanctioned Chandrasena for accepting a bribe from Airbus.

BJP names chief minister in West Bengal after sweeping win

AFP
Kolkata

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party named a chief minister in West Bengal state yesterday, cementing its thumping win in key elections in the bastion long held by its adversary.

Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) claimed a landmark 207 out of 294 seats in the legislative assembly in Monday's results, marking its first electoral victory in the largely Bengali-speaking state of more than 100 mn.

The results should put Modi on a stronger footing while he battles a series of economic and foreign policy challenges, including high unemployment rates and a pending US trade deal, ahead of a general election in 2029.

The BJP named Suwendu Adhikari as chief minister of West Bengal, the party's leader and Indian interior minister Amit Shah said yesterday.

"It was decided unanimously," Shah told reporters after a meeting of BJP's elected members in the eastern state.

Adhikari will be sworn in today, the BJP's West Bengal president Samik Bhattacharya said.

Votes were counted under tight security in West Bengal – one of five states and territories across India that held elections in April and May and where results were also announced on Monday.

The BJP's campaign in West Bengal was marked by protests over the purge of millions of names from voter rolls, billed as removing ineligible voters but which critics said was skewed against marginalised and minority communities.

Violence that erupted after the election results killed at least five people, including Adhikari's close aide who was shot dead near



India's Home Minister Amit Shah (left) greets Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader and newly selected Chief Minister of West Bengal Suwendu Adhikari during a party meeting in Kolkata yesterday. (AFP)

his home in Kolkata as supporters of the rival parties clashed.

The BJP had waged an aggressive campaign to dislodge the powerful regional party of firebrand leader and three-time chief minister Mamata Banerjee, who held power in West Bengal since 2011.

Analysts say the ruling party's victory West Bengal is one of its most significant since Modi was elected prime minister in 2014, expanding its dominance beyond the Hindi-speaking heartland of north and central India.

The BJP also returned to power in the north-eastern state of Assam for a third time in a row, and in the small coastal territory of Puduch-

erry, where it was a part of the ruling coalition.

But in the southern state of Kerala, the opposition Congress party-led coalition triumphed and Indian film superstar C Joseph Vijay's two-year-old Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) emerged as the single largest party in Tamil Nadu.

At 108 seats, TVK fell short of a majority in the 234-member state legislature.

Local media reported yesterday that the former film star had secured the support of two communist parties and the opposition Congress party to cross the majority mark.

Popularly known as Vijay, the 51-year-old is now almost sure to lead the state.

Nepal watchdog charges ex-minister over China-backed airport project

AFP
Kathmandu

Nepal's anti-graft watchdog has filed charges against 13 people, including a former finance minister, and a Chinese firm in a case alleging multi-million-dollar corruption in a major airport project, officials said yesterday.

The charges are the latest in a slew of graft allegations involving the China-backed airport construction project in the tourist hub of Pokhara, nestled in the foothills of the Himalayas.

"We have registered a case against 13 people and a company for giving tax exemption, which allowed double benefit to the contractor company," Suresh Neupane, spokesman for the Commission for Investigation of Abuse

of Authority (CIAA), told AFP.

Nepal's former finance minister Gyanendra Bahadur Karki and former finance secretary Shankar Prasad Adhikari were among those charged, along with China CAMC Engineering and two company bosses, the CIAA said in a statement on Thursday.

The case involves around \$24mn which was "embezzled, damaged and misused" through unlawful waivers on taxes, duties and fees, the CIAA said.

"The payment was made including taxes, duties and other fees within the contract price, but the tax and duties included in the payment amount were not deposited in the state treasury," it added.

Contacted by AFP, Karki said: "I do not have anything to comment right now. I trust the judiciary."

Adhikari and China CAMC En-

gineering could not immediately be reached for comment.

The flagship project has been hit by a wave of corruption allegations since it began in 2023.

The CIAA filed cases against 55 people in December 2025, including five former ministers, accusing them of inflating project costs by about \$75mn. The CIAA's Neupane said court proceedings in that case was ongoing.

The latest action follows a period of political upheaval in Nepal after youth-led anti-corruption protests in September 2025 toppled the government, paving the way for a new parliament in March.

Nepal ranks 109th out of 182 countries on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, reflecting persistent concerns about governance and accountability.

Vietnam seeks deeper trade ties with Sri Lanka

AFP
Colombo

Vietnam's top leader To Lam called for deeper defence and trade ties with Sri Lanka yesterday, noting the South Asian island's strategic position in the Indian Ocean.

To Lam said in an address to Sri Lanka's parliament that the nations could work together in logistics, ports and maritime trade, while strengthening defence and security co-operation.

"We are better positioned to deepen political, defence and security... co-operation," he said, adding that Sri Lanka was an "important hub for international maritime routes".

The main east-west international shipping lanes run just south of Sri Lanka's southern coast.

Vietnam's Communist Party chief arrived in Sri Lanka with



Vietnam's President To Lam (centre), along with Sri Lanka's parliament speaker Jagath Wickramaratne (right), arrives to address Sri Lankan Parliament during his official visit in Colombo yesterday. (AFP)

a large trade delegation after a visit to India, where both nations pledged to increase bilateral trade to \$25bn by 2030.

Lam – the first foreign dignitary to address Sri Lanka's parliament in 11 years after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi – also said Hanoi and Colombo could boost trade.

"It is our hope to work together with Sri Lanka to open up a new chapter of co-operation that is deeper, more substantive, and more effective," he said.

Lam added that he was "delighted" to announce that the countries had upgraded relations to a "comprehensive partnership".



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
- 📘 facebook.com/gulftimes
- 🐦 twitter.com/gulftimes_Qatar
- 📷 instagram.com/gulftimes
- 📺 youtube.com/GulftimesVideos



Tesla faces EU scepticism over automated-driving technology

Tesla CEO Elon Musk has projected confidence that the European Union will soon green-light the carmaker's "Full Self-Driving" (FSD) system, but emails from some European regulators show marked scepticism toward the technology and its stated safety benefits. Tesla's "FSD (Supervised)" technology got the nod from Dutch road regulator RDW in April.

RDW is now seeking EU approval for FSD. "We expect to be approved in a lot of other countries," Musk told analysts on an April 22 conference call, adding that Tesla would then seek approval for driverless robotaxis in Europe. Tesla has a lot riding on FSD approval in Europe, where it is trying to regain market share it has lost over the last two years. The EV maker charges a monthly subscription for FSD, which can drive itself under certain circumstances but requires the driver to be fully attentive at all times.

But in previously unreported email correspondence, regulators in the Netherlands, Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Norway -- who could prove critical to Musk's approval push -- have raised a number of concerns over the technology. Those include the system's tendency to speed, whether it is safe to use on icy roads and drivers' ability to circumvent features designed to prevent cell-phone use, according to the emails, which were seen by Reuters through public records requests. They also expressed frustration with Tesla's strategy of publicly encouraging vehicle owners to pressure regulators to approve FSD.

Tesla has a lot riding on FSD approval in Europe, where it is trying to regain market share it has lost over the last two years

For FSD to be approved, committee members representing 55% of EU member states and 65% of the bloc's population must vote "yes". Tesla also approached Estonia and Finland and asked the countries to recognize the Dutch approval, the countries said and the e-mails showed.

Regulators for Sweden, Finland and Estonia told Reuters they would review the material presented at committee meeting before making any decisions. Some Wall Street analysts have projected a widespread rollout of FSD across Europe within months. Tesla has said FSD approval in Europe is crucial to increasing sales in the region, which fell 27% in 2025 amid protests over Musk's political activities.

In a confidential presentation included in the correspondence with regulators, Tesla said it expected "EU-wide" approval in the second or third quarter of this year. Michael Ashley Schulman, a partner at Cerity Partners, which manages investments in Tesla, said European approval of FSD could boost profit and help fend off competition from Chinese automakers.

Hans Nordin, a Swedish Transport Agency investigator, wrote in an April 15 email that he was "quite surprised" to learn Tesla allowed FSD to speed, and said that should not be permitted.

Jukka Juhola, an official in Finland's transportation agency, wrote to other regulators in January questioning Tesla's demos of FSD in wintry conditions. "Are they really introducing a system that allows hands-free driving also on icy 80 km/h roads?" Juhola asked. The Nordic regulators also questioned how the system would handle moose on the roads.

Regulators also discussed whether Tesla's "Full Self-Driving (Supervised)" branding could mislead drivers into thinking the car drives itself. Nordin, the Swedish Transport Agency investigator, asked in a January email whether the name "risks giving consumers a misleading impression" of FSD's abilities.

Some regulators were also complimentary of the software. A Danish regulator, Frank Schack Rasmussen, said in an October email that the vehicles "did perform very well in the complex traffic" of rush hour in Copenhagen. A Dutch regulator recounted how well the system performed around the Arc de Triomphe in Paris.

Anders Eriksson, a Swedish Transport Agency investigator, told Reuters that the country is "generally positive" on automated driving technology, as long as it follows regulations.

Regulators also discussed being inundated with emails from Tesla enthusiasts pushing for approval.

Musk has long criticized European regulators for what he calls unnecessary delays.

During Tesla's November annual shareholder meeting, Musk said, "we obviously need to get it approved in Europe," and encouraged customers to pressure regulators. Tesla owners obliged. — Reuters

Memories of another time



A Mongolian military representative lays flowers alongside a boy dressed in a military uniform during a wreath-laying ceremony to commemorate the 81st anniversary of the victory in World War II at the memorial to Soviet and Mongolian soldiers in Zhangjiakou, Hebei province, China, yesterday. (Reuters)

A decade on, healthcare remains under fire in conflict zones: report

Attacks on healthcare facilities and personnel have intensified in recent years, raising serious questions about the effectiveness of international legal protections

QNA
Doha

Ten years after the adoption of a landmark UN resolution aimed at protecting healthcare during armed conflicts, hospitals, medical workers, ambulances, and patients continue to face relentless attacks across global conflict zones.

Senior international officials and major health organizations warned that commitments made under international law have yet to translate into meaningful protection on the ground, stressing that healthcare must never become a casualty of war. The warning comes amid continued assaults on medical infrastructure through bombardment, sieges, and deliberate destruction, leaving hospitals in many conflict areas unsafe and depriving civilians of critical medical care in what rights groups describe as grave violations of international humanitarian law.

The World Health Organization (WHO), the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Medecins Sans Frontieres said attacks on healthcare facilities and personnel have intensified in recent years, raising serious questions about the effectiveness of international legal protections.

UN Security Council Resolution 2286, adopted in May 2016, condemned attacks on medical facilities and personnel and called on warring parties to respect international humanitarian law, ensure safe access for medical teams, and investigate violations. Speaking to Qatar News Agency (QNA), Assistant Professor of

International Affairs at Qatar University Dr Abdullah Bandar al-Otaibi said structural flaws have prevented the resolution from becoming an enforceable reality.

International law

Legally, he said, the resolution lacks an independent enforcement mechanism and relies on states and conflict parties to ensure compliance without imposing automatic penalties on violators. Al-Otaibi added that political divisions within the UN Security Council, particularly the use of veto power, have further weakened accountability efforts, turning the protection of healthcare into a bargaining tool rather than an unconditional obligation.

He stressed that the principle that healthcare is not a target remains fully binding under international law, citing the Fourth Geneva Convention and customary international law.

What the world is witnessing in Gaza as well as in Ukraine, Syria, Yemen, and Sudan, he stressed, shows that the problem is not the law itself, but the absence of real consequences for violations.

When hospitals are attacked without legal or political accountability, he continued, the principle risks being reduced from a deterrent into a moral slogan. On the effectiveness of international accountability mechanisms in deterring attacks on healthcare infrastructure and medical personnel, Assistant Professor of International Affairs at Qatar University Dr Abdullah Bandar al-Otaibi said existing international accountability mechanisms have largely failed to deter attacks on healthcare infrastructure and medical

personnel in conflict zones.

Speaking to QNA, al-Otaibi said institutions such as the International Criminal Court, UN investigative bodies, and targeted sanctions retain symbolic and legal importance, but remain hindered by limited jurisdiction, slow procedures, and political pressure from major powers.

He added that current accountability mechanisms deliver delayed and partial deterrence rather than preventive deterrence, stressing that meaningful effectiveness requires independence from geopolitical calculations.

Al-Otaibi described preventive diplomacy as the missing link between international legal texts and real-world enforcement, calling for explicit protections for healthcare facilities in all ceasefire agreements and peace negotiations. He also urged the activation of early-warning systems enabling the United Nations and the World Health Organization to monitor violations in real time and intervene before escalation.

Generational scars

According to al-Otaibi, genuine political leadership requires states to move beyond rhetoric by linking military and economic assistance to respect for healthcare infrastructure and applying collective diplomatic pressure on violators regardless of alliances. He highlighted Qatar's mediation role as a notable example of humanitarian diplomacy aimed at safeguarding medical neutrality during conflicts, suggesting that such efforts could form the basis of a broader coalition advocating for the protection of healthcare systems.

On whether new legal instruments are needed, al-Otaibi said the core problem lies primarily in weak political will rather than a lack of legislation, noting that existing international laws already criminalise attacks on hospitals, medical staff, and patients. However, he said, updated legal frameworks could address emerging threats, including cyberattacks targeting hospital systems, the use of artificial intelligence and drones near medical facilities, and the misuse of dual-use claims to justify strikes on hospitals.

Al-Otaibi warned that the continued absence of accountability carries profound legal and humanitarian consequences, eroding the principle of distinction between civilians and combatants, a cornerstone of international humanitarian law. When violations become normalised, he underlined, what was once considered a war crime risks being redefined as collateral damage, and eventually viewed as a legitimate tactic.

He added that the collapse of healthcare systems leaves generational scars, reviving preventable diseases, depriving communities of medical care for decades, and deepening public distrust in international institutions and global justice systems.

The real challenge facing the international community, he concluded, is not only saving hospitals in today's wars, but preserving the very principle that war must have moral and legal limits. If healthcare loses its protected status, what remains untouchable after that?



Healthcare facilities are not a target remains fully binding under international law.

To Advertise

✉ gtadv@gulf-times.com

Display

☎ 44466621
☎ 44418811

Classified

☎ 44466609 ☎ 44418811
✉ gtcad@gulf-times.com

Subscription

✉ circulation@gulf-times.com

New suspected hantavirus cases found in Spain, Tristan da Cunha

Reuters/AFP
Amsterdam/Santa Cruz de Tenerife

Two new suspected cases of hantavirus were reported yesterday, one in Spain and the other on the remote South Atlantic island of Tristan da Cunha, as experts race to contain an outbreak that began on a luxury cruise ship.

The announcements in locations thousands of miles apart will fuel concern about a cluster of cases so far associated with three deaths — though the World Health Organisation has repeatedly said the risk to the wider public is low and the virus does not transmit easily.

A 32-year-old woman in the southeastern Spanish province of Alicante has symptoms consistent with a hantavirus infection and is being tested, Spanish health authorities said.

She was briefly sitting on a plane behind a Dutch woman who had contracted the virus on the MV Hondius, Secretary of State for Health Javier Padilla told reporters. That Dutch woman left the flight in Johannesburg feeling ill before it took off on April 25 and later died in hospital.

A British man was also suspected of having the disease on Tristan da Cunha, the UK Health Security

Agency said. Officials there said he was a passenger on the Dutch-flagged ship which made a stop on the island on April 13 to 15.

“Based on the dynamics of this outbreak, based on how it is spreading and not spreading amongst the people on the ship, the people who have disembarked, as well, we continue to consider the risk as low for the general population,” Anais Legand, WHO technical officer for viral threats, said in an online briefing.

Both new suspected cases have links to the original cluster of cases, officials said.

Those WHO figures do not include the suspected cases on Tristan da Cunha or in Spain. The UN health body said it would provide an update later yesterday.

The ship, with around 150 passengers and crew on board, is currently heading to the Canary Islands where they will be screened and disembarked, under new guidelines still being finalised by WHO and other health officials.

Cruise operator Oceanwide on Thursday said there were no people with symptoms of a possible infection remaining on board the ship, which was expected to dock in Tenerife early tomorrow.

The cruise ship stopped at Tristan da Cunha between April 13 and 15, with passengers disembarking



Cruise ship MV Hondius docks off Cape Verde port, as passengers were not allowed off the ship, while health authorities investigated suspected cases of hantavirus aboard the vessel, in Praia Port, Cape Verde. (ReutersFile Photo)

to go on nature tours and visit the local shop and pub, online footage of the tour showed.

The UK Health Security Agency did not go into further detail on the British passenger with suspected symptoms.

The UK Minister for the Overseas Territories, Stephen Doughty, said in a statement posted earlier on Tristan da Cunha’s local government website that an islander had been hospitalised and his wife was self-isolating.

It was not immediately clear if he was referring to the same person.

Tristan da Cunha, home to only

around 200 people, is halfway between South Africa and South America and the world’s remotest inhabited island, more than 1,500 miles and a six-day boat ride from St Helena, its nearest inhabited neighbour.

The Spanish woman has “mild respiratory symptoms” and had been to a hospital where she will be tested for the virus, with results expected 24 to 48 hours later, according to a statement on the regional health department’s website.

Padilla said the woman was sitting two rows behind the cruise ship passenger, but the contact be-

tween them “was brief” since the passenger had only been “on board for a short time”.

Padilla added that Valencia’s regional health authorities were tracing the people the woman has been in contact with over the past few days.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has classified the hantavirus outbreak as a ‘level 3’ emergency response, the lowest level of emergency activation.

Other experts have also stressed the low probability of a widespread contagion, but the outbreak has put authorities on high alert as they urge all who have been in contact with passengers who left the Hondius to watch out for possible symptoms.

Several US states have said they are monitoring asymptomatic residents who had returned home after disembarking from the cruise ship.

Singapore on Thursday isolated and tested two residents who had been aboard the ship.

The evacuation of a hantavirus-hit cruise ship in the Canary Islands must take place between tomorrow and Monday because adverse weather conditions will force it to leave, the Spanish archipelago’s regional government said.

“The only window of opportunity we have to carry out this oper-

ation is around 12 o’clock on Sunday morning and until conditions change from Monday,” regional government spokesman Alfonso Cabello told reporters yesterday.

“Otherwise, the ship must leave and no operation could be carried out again in theory... until the end of May,” he said, citing wind and swell.

“If the operation is not completed on Monday, the ship must continue its journey because navigation conditions around the port will change significantly,” Cabello added.

It is due to arrive at Granadilla on Tenerife early tomorrow after Spain accepted to receive it despite opposition from the Canaries government.

Cabello said the ship is expected to reach the port “between three and five o’clock on Sunday morning”, earlier than previously forecast.

“The ship is making such good time that the possible time of arrival is being brought forward,” the head of emergency services and civil protection, Virginia Barcones, said earlier.

The ship will anchor offshore and not dock in Granadilla port. Passengers will be taken on smaller boats and transferred by bus to the airport for their repatriation flights.

Russia, Ukraine trade attacks ahead of WWII celebrations

AFP
Kyiv

Russia and Ukraine traded attacks yesterday, with a two-day unilateral ceasefire that Moscow had declared around its World War II commemorations appearing to be in tatters.

Ukraine had never said it would abide by Moscow’s call to halt strikes, lambasting Russian leader Vladimir Putin for only wanting to pause fighting so he could stage today’s grand parade on Red Square.

Kyiv said Moscow had ignored a Ukrainian proposal to halt fighting earlier this week — a counter-offer for a short-term ceasefire. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had cast it as a test of whether the Kremlin was serious about providing a brief respite in the four-year war.

Russia has threatened a massive strike on the heart of Kyiv if Ukraine disrupts its Victory Day parade today, repeatedly urging foreign diplomats to leave the Ukrainian capital ahead of time.

On the streets of Kyiv, some brushed off the Russian threats.

“Nothing new will happen,” Vasyly Kobzar, a 40-year-old bank employee, told AFP. “I’m worried, but it’s become routine, unfortunately.”

Engineer Viktoriya Dorofeeva, 30, said she had no plans to leave the city.

“I’ll just go to a shelter; that’s the most I’ll do. If we don’t strike, they’ll strike anyway.”

Ukrainian officials told AFP there had been no orders for additional security measures to be taken so far.



Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky talks to a Ukrainian service member as he visits a hospital, amid Russia’s attack on Ukraine, in Dnipro, yesterday. (Reuters)

“We’re just giving (the Russians) the finger,” said one lawmaker, speaking anonymously.

Ukraine’s air force said Russia had fired 67 drones overnight — the lowest number in almost a month.

“Despite the declared ceasefire, the enemy has not reduced the intensity of assault operations,” Zelensky said, adding that Ukraine was responding in kind.

Russia said it had downed more than 400 Ukrainian drones — 100 of them targeting Moscow — since midnight, and that its troops were “responding symmetrically”.

A Ukrainian drone killed a 41-year-old man and his 15-year-old daughter in the Russian-occupied part of Ukraine’s Kherson region, said the Moscow-backed administration.

Zelensky hailed a Ukrainian strike on an oil depot in the Yaroslavl region, around 200 kilometres (about 125 miles) northeast of Moscow.

Kyiv’s SBU security service said it had struck a refinery in Russia’s Perm region, some 1,500 kilometres (930 miles) from the border, for the third time in the last few weeks.

Some 13 airports in southern Russia were closed Friday after a Ukrainian drone hit an air navigation centre in the southern city of Rostov-on-Don, Moscow’s transport ministry said. It later said that flights had been partially restored.

Putin convened a security council meeting over the strike, calling it an “act of a terrorist nature” that could endanger civil aviation.

Ukraine had dismissed Russia’s temporary truce as a propaganda measure to protect the victory parade on May 9 — one of the most important patriotic events for Russian leader Vladimir Putin.

Hours before Russia’s ceasefire began, Zelensky warned Moscow’s allies against attending the parade.

Russia has twice this week vowed a huge strike on Kyiv if the

Red Square parade is attacked today. Putin is set to deliver a defiant address there linking Soviet victory over Nazi Germany with his invasion of Ukraine.

Zelensky will stay in Kyiv over the weekend, a senior source close to the Ukrainian president told AFP on condition of anonymity.

The EU, Britain and Germany were among the foreign missions in the Ukrainian capital that rejected and condemned the Russian threat.

Russia’s ally Iran meanwhile advised its citizens to “stay away from government and military locations” on May 8 and 9, its embassy in Kyiv said on Telegram.

Hundreds of thousands of soldiers from both sides and tens of thousands of civilians, most in Ukraine, have been killed since Putin ordered the invasion in February 2022.

Putin has made memory of the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany a central narrative of his 25-year rule, staging massive parades in central Moscow on May 9 and invoking it to justify his invasion of Ukraine.

But the Kremlin is on edge after a spate of Ukrainian long-range attacks on energy facilities in recent weeks.

Military hardware will be absent from the parade for the first time in almost two decades and only a handful of foreign guests will attend.

Moscow has also been intermittently shutting off mobile internet ahead of the celebrations.

Talks on ending what has spiralled into Europe’s worst conflict since World War II have shown little progress and have been sidelined by the Iran conflict.

Forest fire burns near Chernobyl nuclear plant after drone crash



Smoke billows from a forest fire in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone in northern Ukraine yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Kyiv

A large forest fire burned through the Chernobyl exclusion zone yesterday following a drone crash near the disaster-tainted nuclear plant the previous day, Ukrainian authorities said.

Radiation levels at the site were within “normal limits”, authorities reported, adding that firefighters were working to contain the blaze.

Images showed columns of white smoke billowing from the area, parts of which are closed off to the public due to high levels of radioactivity.

The site surrounding the Chernobyl nuclear plant has been largely deserted since the plant suffered a catastrophic meltdown in 1986. It has since been converted into a nature reserve.

“As of 3:00pm (1200 GMT) the estimated area of the fire, which broke out after two drones crashed within the Chernobyl nature reserve, is about 1,180 hectares (12 square kilometres, five square miles); the reserve’s director Denis Nesterov said in a post on Facebook. He did not say the origin of the drones.

The governor of the neighbouring Chernigiv region gave a

higher estimate, suggesting the fire had spread across an area spanning 40 square kilometres (15 square miles). “The aggressor is preventing the fire from being extinguished. Their drones are constantly hovering over the area,” Chernigiv governor Vyacheslav Chaus added.

Kyiv has repeatedly accused Moscow of recklessly attacking its nuclear sites, including the Chernobyl complex.

A Russian drone last year punctured a hole in one of the radiation shells covering the reactor unit that exploded on April 26, 1986.

Rescuers were working to prevent the further spread of the fire, Ukraine’s state emergency service said.

“Due to strong gusts of wind, the fire is rapidly spreading across the territory, covering new sections of the forest,” it said.

“The situation is complicated by dry weather, strong winds and mine danger in certain areas of the territory, which significantly limits the possibility of extinguishing work.”

The exclusion zone suffered wildfires in 2020, which lasted several weeks and caused a spike in background radiation.

Ukraine only last month marked 40 years since the disaster.

Bank robber on the run after hostage scare

AFP
Frankfurt

At least one bank robber was on the run in Germany yesterday after sparking an hours-long standoff in which police initially feared that multiple hostages were being held inside the bank’s vault room.

The situation ended when heavily armed commandos entered the bank and freed the two locked-up employees unharmed — only to realise that one or more perpetrators had likely fled the scene many hours earlier.

After questioning witnesses, police described a male suspect as about 1.80 metres (six feet) tall and wearing a white jumpsuit “similar to a beekeeper’s suit”, while not ruling out that there were multiple robbers involved.

They said the male attacker “ambushed an employee of a cash transport company at around 9:00am (0700 GMT) and stole a container of cash from him” in the small western town of Sinzig near Bonn in Rhineland-Palatinate state.

“Subsequently, the perpetrator (s) locked two people, including the transport company employee, in a separate room within



Members of the German special police forces operate in front of a savings bank branch amid response to a hostage-taking situation in Sinzig, near Bonn, yesterday. (Reuters)

the bank branch,” police said in a statement.

Officers, alerted by the bank’s alarm system, rushed to the scene and surrounded the bank, among them commandos in helmets and ballistic vests carrying automatic weapons, as a helicopter circled above.

Police later conceded that “the perpetrator(s) likely left the premises before the first police officers arrived”.

They added that, given the initially unclear situation, “the area was cordoned off and special forc-

es were called in, in part to protect any potential witnesses inside the building”.

A police spokesman told AFP at the scene that a search of the surrounding area had so far drawn a blank.

He added that the hunt for the suspects remained active, and the two people freed from inside the bank were receiving care.

Forensic technicians secured evidence, and more witnesses were being questioned. No information was released on the amount of money stolen.

Rubio questions allies’ support on Iran

Reuters
Rome

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio met Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni yesterday and afterwards questioned why allies including Italy were not backing Washington’s efforts to confront Iran and re-open the Strait of Hormuz.

“I don’t understand why anybody would not be supportive,” Rubio told reporters, adding that countries needed “something more than just strongly worded statements” if they opposed Iran’s actions.

Rubio was wrapping up a two-day trip aimed at easing ties with Pope Leo after attacks on the pontiff by President Donald Trump, while also addressing Washington’s frustration over Italy’s refusal to support the US-Israeli war on Iran.

Meloni had been one of Trump’s firmest allies in Europe, cultivating close ties with him and presenting herself as a natural bridge between Washington and other EU states that had no natural political affinity with the Republican US leader.

But that alignment has come under increasing strain in recent months, as the Iran war has forced her to balance loyalty to the US against Italian public animosity to the war and the growing economic cost of the conflict.

Meloni and Rubio met for 1-1/2 hours, in what she later described to reporters in Milan as a “certainly frank” discussion between countries willing to defend their national interest while valuing the transatlantic partnership.

An Italian official, who asked not to be named, said talks focused on issues including the Middle East, the situation in Libya and also in Lebanon, where Rome has soldiers deployed



Italian PM Giorgia Meloni welcomes US Secretary of State Marco Rubio during their meeting at Palazzo Chigi in Rome, yesterday. (Reuters)

as part of the Unifil peacekeeping mission.

The official added Meloni was “very direct and clear” during her talks with Rubio, as Italy — highly dependent on energy imports — grapples with the surge in global fuel prices triggered by the Iran conflict.

Rubio declined to give full details. However, he warned that Tehran’s claim to control access to Hormuz risked setting a dangerous precedent.

“The fundamental question every country, not just Italy... needs to ask themselves is, are you going to normalise a country claiming to control an international waterway? Because if you normalise that, you’ve set a precedent that’s going to get repeated in a dozen other places,” he said.

Khalifa Stadium turns Golden



From Page 1

Over the past five decades, Khalifa International Stadium has hosted an exceptional lineup of regional and international events, cementing its status as one of the world's leading sports landmarks. Among its most memorable milestones were Qatar's first Gulf Cup title in 1992 and the hosting of the Doha 2006 Asian Games, where the stadium played a key role in shaping the country's sporting identity. The comprehensive redevelopment project between 2014 and 2017 also marked a major turning point, as the stadium became the first FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 venue to be completed.

The stadium's legacy of major events began in 1976 with its official inauguration and the hosting of the opening match of the 4th Arabian Gulf Cup. It later welcomed the 11th Arabian Gulf Cup in 1992, where Qatar secured its first title, followed by the Arab Cup in 1998. The venue also played a central role during the



Doha 2006 Asian Games before hosting both the AFC Asian Cup and the Arab Games in 2011. Between 2014 and 2017, the stadium underwent extensive redevelopment to become the first FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 stadium to be completed.

In 2019, it hosted the World

Athletics Championships – the first edition held in the Middle East – as well as the Doha Diamond League. The stadium then staged the FIFA Arab Cup Final in 2021 and hosted eight matches during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. It continued its run of major tournaments by hosting the

AFC Asian Cup in 2023 and is set to stage the FIFA U-17 World Cup.

Abdullah Nasser al-Naemi, acting CEO of Aspire Zone Foundation, said: "For five decades, Khalifa International Stadium has been more than just a sporting venue; it has been a gathering place for the community, a platform for local talent, and a symbol of national pride. It has reflected Qatar's journey and ambition to unite people through sport. As we celebrate this historic milestone, we look forward to continuing our commitment to preserving this iconic venue and its rich legacy, while further strengthening its position as a global hub that inspires athletes and brings the world together under one roof."

As Khalifa International Stadium celebrates its golden jubilee, it remains a witness to the glories of the past and a beacon for the future, ready to host the next generation of sporting events that will continue shaping history in the State of Qatar.

Qatar steps up diabetes fight with emphasis on prevention, lifestyle change

From Page 1

Physical activity is another cornerstone of prevention and management. Fitness experts at QDA, Ahmed Ali and Fatma Zohra, highlighted that regular movement improves insulin sensitivity, supports blood sugar control and reduces cardiovascular risks. "The most effective approach combines aerobic exercise, strength training and simple daily habits," Ahmed Ali noted, recommending activities such as walking, cycling and resistance training.

Zohra cautioned against common mistakes, including over-training, poor technique and unrealistic goals, which can discourage long-term adherence. Instead, they emphasised practical habits such as walking after meals, taking the stairs and incorporating short movement breaks throughout the day.

Looking ahead, experts point to the need for stronger policy measures, including expanded screening programmes, stricter regulation of sugary products, and increased health education in schools. As Qatar advances its national health agenda, the message



Fatma Zohra



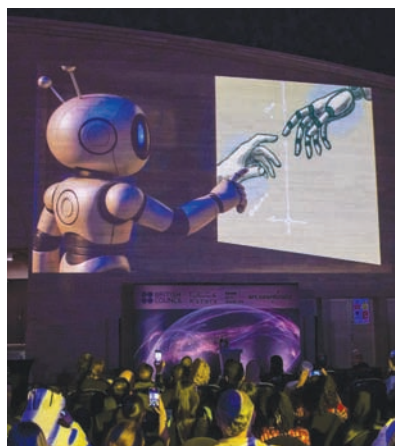
Katie El-Nahas

from experts remains clear: while progress has been made, lasting impact will depend on individuals adopting healthier daily habits, turning awareness into action.



Ahmed Ali

Katara hosts global Teen Art Awards showcase



Katara Cultural Village hosted the digital showcase of the Teen Art Awards, an international initiative empowering young artists aged 13-17 from more than 60 countries.

Director of the British Council in Qatar Dr Wasim Qutub said the initiative strengthens cultural dialogue and nurtures a new generation of creative leaders through art and digital innovation.

Founder and CEO of Art Foundation Daria Kalina described the programme as a global platform connecting emerging talents through shared creativity beyond borders.

This season's theme, "Belonging", explores identity, heritage, and memory, reflecting Qatar's multicultural landscape and its growing status as a hub for emerging artistic talent. (QNA)

Qatar Anti-Doping Agency workshop prepares officials for Gulf Games 2026

Qatar's Anti-Doping Agency, in co-operation with the organising committee of the GCC Games Doha 2026, has held a specialised training workshop aimed at strengthening technical and organisational readiness ahead of the regional event.

The session brought together 100 officials involved in anti-doping operations, including sample collectors, inspectors and support staff.

The workshop formed part of wider preparations for the fourth Gulf Games, which Qatar will host in 2026, and focused on ensuring compliance with international standards set by the World Anti-Doping Agency.

Training covered registration procedures for doping control personnel, their responsibilities during competitions, and the latest updates to international anti-doping regulations and protocols. Participants also reviewed methods for identifying and addressing procedural errors, as well as awareness programs and knowledge-sharing practices.

A key feature of the session was the introduction of the official mascot of the Gulf Games, which was presented to participants as part of efforts to strengthen the event's identity and public engagement.

Officials said the workshop is designed to ensure that all testing and monitoring activities during the Games are conducted with high standards of integrity and transparency, promoting fair



competition and athlete protection.

Qatar Anti-Doping Agency representatives said the initiative reflects broader efforts to build a

drug-free sporting environment through regulation, education and enforcement in line with global anti-doping frameworks. (QNA)

Weekend adventure at Souq Waqif



Souq Waqif continues to attract weekend crowds, offering families carousel rides and pony attractions against the backdrop of Doha's iconic Fanar mosque. Birds circled above the bustling marketplace as residents and tourists explored the historic destination, highlighting the lively atmosphere that has made the souq one of the capital's most popular gathering spots. PICTURES: Shaji Kayamkulam