

Qatar Insurance
Financial Results (Q1 2026)

Gross Written Premiums (GWP)

13% ▲
QAR 3.2B

Net Profit

6% ▲
QAR 217M

Investment Income:

10% ▲
QAR 238M

Insurance Service Results:

70% ▲
QAR 130M

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Qatari medal haul at GCC Games



Qatar's shooters Reem al-Sharshani, Hajar Mohammed and Sarah Mohammed celebrate after winning gold in the women's skeet team event at the 4th GCC Games Doha 2026 yesterday. The hosts enjoyed successful day at the Lusail shooting range, collecting nine medals - including three gold, one silver and five bronze. Qatar continue to top the standings with 82 medals overall - including 30 gold, 26 silver and 26 bronze. Saudi Arabia remained in second place with 51 medals (20 gold, 15 silver and 16 bronze), while Bahrain occupied third with 41 medals, made up of 16 gold, 17 silver and 8 bronze. **Sport Page 1**

Amir receives phone call from Saudi crown prince




His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani received a phone call yesterday from Crown Prince and Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud. The two sides discussed the strong fraternal relations between the two countries and ways to further enhance and develop them in a manner that serves mutual interests and the aspirations of the two peoples. They also addressed the latest regional and international developments, particularly efforts aimed at strengthening security and stability in the region, and exchanged views on a number of issues of mutual concern. Both sides stressed the importance of continued co-ordination and consultation on various issues in a way that supports regional and international peace and security. **(QNA)**

Trump says losing patience with Iran

US President Donald Trump said yesterday his patience with Iran was running out and that Chinese President Xi Jinping had agreed Tehran must reopen the Strait of Hormuz, but China gave no indication it would weigh in. His comments shed no light on whether Beijing might use its influence with Tehran to end a conflict it said should never have started. "I'm not asking for any favours because, when you ask for favours, you have to do favours in return," Trump said, when asked by a reporter on board his plane whether Xi had made a firm commitment to put pressure on the Iranians to reopen the strait, a key waterway for oil shipments. Xi did not comment on his discussions with Trump about Iran, although China's foreign ministry issued a blunt statement outlining Beijing's frustration with the Iran war. "This conflict, which should never have happened, has no reason to continue," the ministry said. Trump has threatened to attack Iran again if it does not agree to a deal. "We don't want them to have a nuclear weapon, we want the straits open," Trump had said in Beijing, sitting alongside Xi. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said Tehran had received messages from the US indicating Washington was willing to continue talks. **(Reuters)**

Qatar deplores Israeli incursion of Al-Aqsa



وزارة الخارجية
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
مجلس الوزراء - دولة قطر

estonian people, based on ending the occupation and enabling the Palestinian people to exercise their legitimate rights, foremost among them the establishment of an independent state on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Meanwhile, the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation (OIC) has strongly condemned a visit by Israel's far-right National Security Minister to the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in occupied East Jerusalem.

In a statement issued from its headquarters in Makkah, the OIC described the visit, which took place under Israeli police protection, as a "blatant assault" and a deliberate provocation to Muslims worldwide.

The organisation also criticised the raising of the Israeli flag and what it described as provocative religious practices carried out within the compound's courtyards. The OIC reiterated its long-standing position that Israel, as an occupying power, holds no sovereignty over the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem and its Islamic and Christian holy sites. **(QNA)**

and Christian holy sites. The ministry stressed that Al-Aqsa Mosque is a place of worship exclusively for Muslims, affirming that all unilateral measures aimed at changing the historical and legal status of Jerusalem and its holy sites are null and void under international law.

It warned that continued violations and provocations would further fuel violence and instability in the region and undermine efforts to restore calm and stability. The ministry renewed Qatar's call on the international community to take urgent action to compel Israel, as the occupying power, to halt its ongoing violations against the Palestinian people and their holy sites, and to comply with relevant international resolutions.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also reiterated Qatar's firm support for the Palestinian cause and the steadfastness of the Pal-

Govt service centres accomplish over 44,000 transactions in April

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

The Civil Service and Government Development Bureau has reported strong performance indicators for government service centres nationwide in April, with a total of 44,663 services completed across various sectors, underscoring the country's ongoing efforts to modernise public services and enhance transaction efficiency.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) topped the list of government entities for services delivered, completing 15,525 transactions during the month. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) ranked second with 10,712 completed services, followed by the Ministry of Labour (MoL) in third place with 8,143 services.

Other ministries and institutions also recorded notable performance levels. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) completed 5,099 services, while Qatar Civil Service and Government Development Bureau itself processed 1,286 services. The Ministry of Social Development and Family delivered around 990 services, and Qatar General Electricity & Water Corporation completed 988 services during the same period.

The Ministry of Municipality processed 945 services, while Qatar Central Securities Depository completed 518 services. The Supreme Judiciary Council recorded 376 services, and the General Retirement and Social Insurance Authority finalised 81 services.

Strong performance indicators reported nationwide with MoFA topping the list and MoJ in second place

The report further highlighted the growing public engagement through customer satisfaction surveys designed to evaluate government services. MoFA again led in this category with 1,689 submitted surveys, followed by the Ministry of Justice with 1,427 surveys. MoCI recorded 872 surveys, while the Ministry of Labour received 666 responses. Such indicators demonstrate the commitment of government entities to improving service quality and enhancing the customer experience by developing operational mechanisms, boosting institutional efficiency, and adopting faster, more flexible solutions for processing transactions. **To Page 2**

Interactive exhibits and art spark interest in reading at DIBF

By Joey Aguilar
Doha

Interactive activities, bilingual publications and art-inspired literary programmes are helping Qatar Reads cultivate a stronger reading culture in Qatar as the initiative continues to expand its reach at this year's Doha International Book Fair (DIBF).

"So far, every year, what we find is that we are able to reach a wider audience full of people who actually enjoy reading. It's nice to interact with people one-on-one and show them rather than just letting them read about it," Marwah Rida of Qatar Reads told *Gulf Times* on the sidelines of the 35th edition of the fair.

She cited initiatives such as the family reading programme for children and the "One Book One



The 35th Doha International Book Fair at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre continues to attract a large number of visitors, including young children. **PICTURE:** Ram Chand

Doha" project, which caters to readers of all ages. Rida noted that Qatar Reads has been participating in the annual event for more than five years, using the platform to highlight its programmes for children, teenagers and adults.

"Every year we try to bring light to all the different programmes that we have," she said, adding that Qatar Reads seeks to promote Arabic literature by publishing books in both Arabic and English to ensure wider accessibility.

Selected titles are released in three versions - one for children, another for teenagers and a special edition based on the original text with added features, she said.

According to Rida, the organisation's booth at the fair is divided into sections that reflect the goals and identity of each initiative. Interactive spaces for children, informative corners for adults and

are encouraged to read at least two books every month as part of the programme, which aims to build reading habits from an early age.

"A lot of people don't read a lot, so the idea is to encourage people to read from a young age," she said. "That's why we start from two years old." Qatar Reads also combines literature and art to attract a broader audience.

She highlighted the "Fables in Fashion" exhibition, where artists are invited to read a featured book and create artwork inspired by their interpretation of the story.

The exhibition welcomes students from primary schools to universities, as well as members of the public, to explore the artworks and discover the featured book in a gallery-style experience. "Art is always a fun way to express your opinion, and it grabs people's attention," Rida said, adding that

the initiative encourages visitors to engage with literature in a creative and accessible way.

Qatar Reads, an initiative under the auspices of Qatar National Library, aims to promote reading and foster knowledge, critical thinking and social development through its programmes and activities.

Organised by the Ministry of Culture, this year's DIBF has brought together 520 publishing houses from 37 Arab and foreign countries across 910 booths featuring more than 1.85mn books and around 231,000 titles.

The fair, which opened on May 14 and runs until May 23 at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre, also features 143 book launches, 46 panel discussions, 69 workshops and 46 seminars, attracting authors, researchers, educators, students and visitors from across Qatar and beyond. **Page 12**

Amir congratulates Paraguay president

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani sent a cable of congratulations to Paraguay's President Santiago Pena on the occasion of his country's Independence Day. His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani and HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani also sent similar cables of congratulations to Pena. - QNA

Government service centres complete more than 44,000 transactions in April

From Page 1

Government entities also encouraged the public to participate in service evaluations through the "Sharek" platform, which supports continuous improvement by collecting feedback and suggestions to raise the quality of public services.

The statistics issued by the Civil Service and Government Development Bureau showed that Al Hilal Service Centre ranked first among government service centres in April, completing 20,376 services and receiving 1,480 customer evaluation surveys.

Al Rayyan Service Centre came second with 12,733 completed services and 1,378 surveys, while Al Wakrah Service Centre processed 3,833 services and received 529 evaluations.

Lusail Pearl Service Centre completed 3,779 services alongside 446 customer surveys.

Meanwhile, Rawdat Al Hamama Service Centre handled 2,287 services and received 380 surveys.

Al Khor Service Centre completed 1,381 services and received 218 surveys, while Al Shamal Service Centre processed 202 services alongside 23 evaluations.

Canada's defence minister reiterates support for Qatar's peace efforts

Canada has expressed deep concern over escalating tensions in the Middle East, warning of global consequences for security, trade, and economic stability, according to remarks made by Defence Minister David McGuinty.

Speaking to the Qatar News Agency (QNA) in Doha yesterday, McGuinty said that Canada is "very concerned about the safety and security of the citizens and the residents of Qatar and of the entire Gulf region".

He described the current situation as "a difficult moment", voicing hopes for a resolution.

"We continue to call for a de-escalation of the situation, and hopefully we find a sustainable and durable cessation of hostilities," McGuinty said.

He added that if a stable cessation of hostilities is achieved, Canada would join international partners exploring ways to keep the Strait of Hormuz open as an international waterway.

McGuinty emphasised that the crisis has become a global issue rather than a regional one.

"It's having an effect on oil supply, on shipping, on insurance, on stability on the global markets," he said, warning of wider economic disruption, including food production and fertiliser supply chains affected by restrictions in maritime transport.

"This is having a significant impact on the global economy and global stability, so we have to come together multinationally, many countries, to try and bring this to a successful outcome," he added.

He said that Canada is engaging with international partners



on possible support mechanisms across three areas - maritime expertise including sending vessels to monitor the situation, demining the waterway and providing assistance in the areas of intelligence and space capabilities.

McGuinty added that Canada is not leading negotiations but supports diplomatic efforts involving regional and global actors.

"Qatar has always played an important role in brokering relationships and negotiations," he said, adding that broader dialogue involving multiple countries remains essential.

On his visit to Doha, he said it reflects growing bilateral ties.

"The relationship we have with Qatar is a very important one," McGuinty said. "It was very important to come here to demonstrate the closeness of the relationship and to try to deepen the relationship."

He also highlighted potential co-operation in defence and

technology, including artificial intelligence (AI), quantum computing, cryptography, and engineering research.

McGuinty warned that the crisis is already affecting global systems.

"We're seeing air travel pulled back around the world," he said. "We're seeing countries facing very high increases in prices and inflation. We're seeing the price of food continue to rise."

He added that fertiliser supply chains are also being disrupted.

"It's no longer just an issue between the US and Iran," McGuinty stated. "It's a global issue, and we believe the way to resolve this is globally."

He also noted international efforts led by France and the UK, involving around 50 countries, to support stability and maritime security.

"We're very supportive of the Qatari people," the minister said. "We are re-engaging in a very direct way in this region." - QNA

Qatar wraps up National Scientific Research and Innovation Exhibition

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) has concluded the National Scientific Research and Innovation Exhibition 2026 in co-operation with the Qatar Research, Development and Innovation (QRDI) Council.

The 18th edition of the event was held at the Qatar National Convention Centre (QNCC) in downtown Doha under the theme

of Promising researchers for Qatar.

It brought together thousands of students and educators from schools across the country, highlighting growing interest in scientific research and innovation within Qatar's education system.

According to organisers, 2,971 students participated this year, presenting 1,467 research projects from 249 schools.

In addition, 672 teachers sub-



mitted 616 action research projects aimed at improving educational practices.

At the closing ceremony, senior MoEHE and QRDI officials honoured the winning students,

teachers and partners for their contributions across multiple research competitions covering primary, preparatory and secondary levels.

The event also recognised 10

student research projects conducted in collaboration with the Young Scientists Centre at Qatar University.

Officials praised the level of participation and the quality of

research presented, saying that it reflects growing scientific awareness and innovation skills among young people in Qatar, in line with national development and education goals. - QNA

Qatar's Haj mission delegation leaves for Saudi Arabia ahead of pilgrimage season

Qatar's official Haj mission delegation departed for Saudi Arabia yesterday as part of preparations for this year's pilgrimage season, the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs (Awqaf) said.

The ministry stated that the delegation's departure follows ongoing field preparations by supporting teams already stationed in Saudi Arabia to ensure all services are in place for pilgrims from Qatar.

Ali bin Sultan al-Misfiri, the director of the Department of Haj and Umrah Affairs and deputy head of the Qatari Haj Mission, said that the mission would operate from its headquarters in the Al Naseem district of Makkah, co-ordinating with Haj campaigns from Qatar and the Saudi authorities to provide organised and efficient services.

He added that specialised units covering religious guidance, medical care, logistics, inspection, communications and technical



support would work together to assist pilgrims throughout their journey.

The ministry said the mission aims to ensure pilgrims from Qa-

tar can perform Haj safely and smoothly, in line with the ministry's 2025-30 strategy to improve services for pilgrims and enhance their overall experience. - QNA

HMC reports major advances in 2025

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

The Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) recorded significant progress in healthcare development and patient services during 2025, according to its latest annual achievements report.

The report highlighted major advances in clinical care, digital transformation, operational efficiency, and public access to medical services across Qatar.

Introducing the report, HMC director-general Mohamed bin Khalifa al-Suwaidi described 2025 as a milestone year for the institution, stressing its continued role as Qatar's leading provider of specialised healthcare services.

He said that the HMC remained focused on expanding access to care, improving operational efficiency, and delivering patient-centred healthcare that meets society's evolving needs.

The report outlines achievements in institutional performance, clinical development, digital innovation, and sustainability initiatives aligned with the Third National Development Strategy and the National Health Strategy.

It also revealed strong growth in most healthcare indicators in 2025 compared to the previous year, reflecting rising demand for medical services and continued expansion in the healthcare sector.

According to the report, inpatient admissions rose by 4% in 2025, reaching 159,109 cases, up from 152,741 in 2024.

Surgical operations recorded even stronger growth, increasing by 11% to 80,218 procedures, up from 72,485 operations the previous year.

Birth rates within HMC facilities also increased by 2%, with 28,464 deliveries recorded in 2025 compared to 27,822 in 2024.

Emergency services experienced substantial growth as well.

Adult emergency departments registered a 12% increase in visits, receiving 974,268 patients in 2025 compared to 869,230 the year before.

In contrast, paediatric emergency centres saw a 7% decline in visits, with a total of 583,864 patients, down from 627,586 in 2024.

Outpatient clinics across all specialties handled more than 3mn patient visits in 2025, marking an 8% increase from 2.86mn visits in 2024.

Therapeutic procedures conducted in outpatient clinics also climbed by 11%, reaching 257,968 procedures.

Telemedicine consultations declined by 14%, with 220,278 remote consultations recorded in 2025 compared to 256,277 during 2024, reflecting a broader return to in-person healthcare services.

The report highlighted major increases in clinical support services.

Laboratory testing rose by 8%, surpassing 26.4mn tests in 2025, while medical imaging procedures increased by 6% to more than 1.05mn scans.

Pharmaceutical services also expanded, with nearly 9mn prescriptions dispensed during the year, a 5% increase compared to 2024.

Ambulance transport operations recorded a 2% rise, reaching 210,676 cases in 2025, while emergency call volumes climbed to 310,101 calls compared to 287,838 calls the previous year.

Birth rates within HMC facilities increased by 2%, with 28,464 deliveries last year compared with 27,822 in 2024

Telemedicine consultations dropped by 14%, with 220,278 remote consultations recorded last year, reflecting a return to in-person services

Ambulance transport operations saw a 2% increase, while emergency call volumes reached 310,101 calls last year



The helicopter ambulance missions remained relatively stable, recording 2,057 cases.

One of the report's key findings was the significant improvement in patient access to outpatient services. Among the top 20 medical specialties, 75% of Qatari patients were able to secure appointments within two weeks, with an average waiting period of 15 days.

This represented a 32% improvement compared to 2024 in the number of patients seen within the targeted timeframe.

The improvements were achieved through more efficient use of workforce resources and clinic spaces, expanded evening clinic operations in selected specialties, and targeted efforts to reduce missed appointments.

The introduction of automatic cancellation policies for repeated no-shows and the adoption of strategic overbooking practices helped improve appointment availability and maximise clinic efficiency.

The no-show rate stood at 13% in 2025, while controlled overbooking averaged 16%.

These measures contributed to a dramatic reduction in waiting lists for Qatari patients, with pending appointments dropping from 16,654 in 2024 to just 849 in 2025.

The report further showcased groundbreaking medical achievements that marked firsts for Qatar's healthcare sector.

Among the most notable milestones was the country's first-ever heart transplant surgery, successfully performed at Heart Hospital.

The operation represented a major advancement in cardiac care and was carried out by a multidisciplinary team involving specialists in surgery, cardiology, anaesthesia, intensive care, nursing, infectious diseases, nephrology, pathology, rehabilitation, psychiatry, and social services.

The HMC performed Qatar's first total ankle replacement surgery, representing a major development in orthopaedic medicine and offering renewed mobility for patients suffering from severe joint damage.

Officials said that the achievement reflected the adoption of advanced surgical technologies and the continuous development of specialised medical expertise.

Accordingly, during 2025, the HMC received several prestigious international awards and recognitions.

The National Diabetes, Obesity and Metabolic Diseases Institute received a global leadership award for combating obesity during the 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly.

The corporation's Extracorporeal Life Support Programme was honoured with an excellence award from Extracorporeal Life Support

Organisation for Southwest Asia and Africa, while the HMC secured a prestigious Digital Innovation Award at the Google Cloud Summit.

In addition, the World Health Organisation (WHO) renewed accreditation for the HMC's Smoking Cessation Centre, and the corporation won an international Healthy Workplace Award, further cementing its growing reputation as a regional leader in healthcare excellence and innovation.

Oral health awareness event for diabetic pilgrims



As part of efforts to strengthen collaboration between the Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC) and the Qatar Diabetes Association (QDA), the PHCC's Oral Health Promotion and Prevention section participated, through its dental medical team, in an awareness event dubbed "Safe Haj with Diabetes" for people with diabetes travelling to perform the Haj rituals.

Dr Najat Alyafei, manager of Oral Health Promotion and Prevention at the PHCC, stated that the event is aimed at highlighting the importance of oral and dental health care as an essential component of overall prevention, particularly for people with diabetes.

Practical guidance was provided on proper tooth cleaning, infection prevention, and emergency case management during the Haj period.

The importance of undergoing a dental check-up prior to travel to avoid any health complications was also emphasised, in addition to offering consultations and direct examinations through the mobile clinic.

CDC Africa announces new Ebola outbreak

Reuters/AFP
Bunia, DR Congo

A new outbreak of the deadly Ebola virus has been declared in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, African health officials said yesterday, voicing concern of the risk it could further spread.

Some 246 suspected cases, including 65 deaths, have been reported, the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC Africa) said.

The latest outbreak in the vast central African country of more than 100m inhabitants is in northeastern Ituri province, which borders Uganda and South Sudan, CDC Africa said.

Mining in the gold-rich province creates an intense movement of people on a daily basis.

CDC Africa said in a statement that it was convening an urgent meeting with the Congo, Uganda, South Sudan and global partners to reinforce cross-border surveillance, preparedness and response efforts.

It said that the deaths and suspected cases had been reported mainly in the Mongwala and Rwampara health zones, while four deaths had been reported among laboratory-confirmed cases.



This picture taken in 2018 shows medical workers leading a girl with suspected Ebola into the unconfirmed Ebola patients ward run by The Alliance for International Medical Action (ALIMA) in Beni, northeastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. - AFP

Suspected cases have also been reported in Bunia, the provincial capital.

The agency said initial findings suggested the presence of a non-Zaire strain of the virus, with sequencing ongoing to further characterise it.

Jean-Jacques Muyembe, the Congolese

virologist who co-discovered Ebola and heads the National Institute for Biomedical Research in Kinshasa, told Reuters that all but one of the Congo's 16 previous outbreaks had been caused by the Zaire strain.

The identification of a different variant will complicate the response, he said, as

existing treatments and vaccines were developed against the Zaire strain.

"CDC Africa is concerned about the risk of further spread due to the urban context of Bunia and Rwampara" as well as "intense population movement" and mobility related to mining in the affected areas, which are close to Uganda and South Sudan, the agency added.

"Given the high population movement between affected areas and neighbouring countries, rapid regional coordination is essential," Africa CDC Director-General Jean Kaseya said in the statement.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) learned of suspected cases on May 5 and dispatched a team to Ituri to help investigate, but samples collected in the field initially tested negative, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told a press briefing yesterday.

A laboratory in Kinshasa confirmed positive cases on Thursday, and the total number of confirmed positive cases is now 13, Tedros said.

The WHO has released \$500,000 from its contingency fund for emergencies to support the response, including surveillance, contact tracing, laboratory testing and clinical care, he said.

The new outbreak is unfolding against the backdrop of a deepening security crisis

in Ituri, where clashes between rival militia groups have killed scores of civilians in recent weeks.

The violence has worsened an already dire humanitarian situation, leaving health facilities overwhelmed or non-functional in parts of the province, Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) said earlier this month.

The charity warned of catastrophic hygiene conditions in displacement sites, raising the risk of disease outbreaks.

"With the insecurity, people are crowded together in the city, and since there are so many people in the city, an epidemic like this would be very serious," Anne-Marie Dive, a resident of Bunia, the main city in Ituri, said by telephone.

The outbreak is the 17th in the Congo since Ebola was first identified there in 1976.

The country's most recent outbreak, in Kasai province, was declared over on December 1 after three months.

Out of a total of 64 cases, 45 died and 19 others recovered.

Ebola virus disease is a severe and often fatal illness that is endemic to the Congo's vast tropical forests.

It spreads through direct contact with the bodily fluids of infected persons, contaminated materials or persons who have died from the disease, the CDC Africa said.

Cote d'Ivoire's Gbagbo stays as party chief

Ivory Coast (Cote d'Ivoire)'s former president and opposition figure Laurent Gbagbo, who soon turns 81, was reappointed yesterday as head of his party, after saying last year that he planned to retire.

Gbagbo was prevented from standing in October presidential elections, won by his longtime rival Alassane Ouattara, because of a criminal conviction.

His PPA-CI party boycotted the legislative election in December and now has no MPs and just a handful of mayors.

At the close of its party congress in the main city of Abidjan yesterday, the party reappointed Gbagbo as its head, AFP journalists saw.

Gbagbo said in October that he no longer wished to be a candidate to lead his party and would "refrain from holding political office".

His future political career will likely depend on him being allowed back onto the electoral roll. - AFP

Gunmen kidnap pupils in rare attack on schools in south Nigeria

AFP
Lagos

Armed kidnapers attacked three schools in southern Nigeria yesterday, killing an assistant headmaster and abducting an unknown number of students, authorities said, in a rare attack in the country's south.

Gunmen simultaneously raided Baptist Nursery and Primary in Yawota, and two other schools in Eseele, in the southwestern state

of Oyo, police spokesman Olayinka Alayande said.

Police called it a "co-ordinated attack".

Nigeria is battling a scourge of criminal gangs known as bandits who kidnap for ransom and target rural areas.

However, most attacks, including school kidnappings, have mostly happened in the north and centre of the country, where the conflict is most prominent.

It was unclear who was responsible for the Oyo attacks, with the

police referring to the gunmen as "armed hoodlums".

The attackers seized "some pupils, students and staff members" from the schools, "including the vice-principal", Alayande said, adding that the authorities have launched a manhunt.

A commercial motorcyclist was also killed after refusing to give his bike to the attackers.

The Oyo State Universal Basic Education Board said the "accurate number of pupils kidnapped is yet to be ascertained".

The agency directed the temporary closure of surrounding schools yesterday to "prevent any secondary incidents and to allow security agencies to thoroughly stabilise the area".

It later lifted the order, saying that schools should reopen on Monday.

"No pupil or student has been confirmed killed during the incident," police said.

Oyo is one of Nigeria's most populous states. Its capital Ibadan is a major educational hub.

Five forest guards were killed at a game reserve in the state in January, in an attack the police said was carried out by an "armed banditry syndicate".

School kidnappings are rare in the state.

Such attacks however had made international headlines in the past, including a mass abduction in Niger state by Boko Haram religious militants last year - and, most infamously, the kidnapping of hundreds of girls from Chibok in 2014.

Several injured in clashes after football match in Libya

Clashes that erupted after a football match in a western Libyan town left several people injured, authorities said yesterday, while a government building was set on fire in capital Tripoli.

Fights began in the town of Tarhuna, some 80km (49 miles) south of the capital, after a match between Tripoli's Al-Ittihad SCSC and Misrata's Asswehly SC on Thursday.

The game, which was held behind closed

doors, was suspended after Al-Ittihad's players protested over a penalty kick that they believe should have been awarded, Libyan news agency LANA reported.

The incident led to fights between supporters and security forces outside the stadium, LANA said.

Pictures on social media showed guards with wounds on their heads, legs and hands being rushed to a hospital in Tarhuna.

The Libyan Presidential Council said people targeted the council of ministers' headquarters in capital Tripoli "with acts of sabotage and arson".

The fire was quickly contained, LANA said.

The council called for an investigation into the "unfortunate events", saying that feelings of injustice must be addressed legally and "not through violence". - AFP/Reuters

Israel launches strikes in Lebanon as talks in US enter second day

AFP
Beirut

Israel carried out new strikes in southern Lebanon yesterday that it said targeted Hezbollah, wounding 37 people as the two countries' envoys started a second day of peace talks in Washington.

United Nations humanitarian co-ordinator for Lebanon Imran Riza condemned the "unacceptable" toll from continued attacks, saying that "diplomatic efforts now offer a critical opportunity to stop the violence".

A truce in the war between Israel and Iran-backed Hezbollah has been in place since April 17, but it has not stopped the fighting, with hundreds killed in strikes since then and both sides accusing the other of violations.

"The IDF has begun striking Hezbollah infrastructure sites in the area of Tyre in southern Lebanon," the Israeli military said in a statement.

An AFP correspondent reported a series of strikes, two of them near the city of Tyre, while state media said another targeted a centre run by a local non-governmental organisation (NGO) near a hospital.

Lebanon's health ministry said the strikes on the Tyre district wounded at least 37 people, including six hospital personnel, nine women and four children.

Hafez Ramadan, a resident near the building targeted by the

airstrike, said it had housed people who had fled their towns due to the war, and was adjacent to a hotel where more displaced were staying.

"There are only women, children and the elderly here," he said. "Because of this strike, people have been displaced again."

The Israeli army had earlier issued evacuation warnings for five towns and villages in and around the southern coastal city.

It later issued a new evacuation warning for five other towns across the south.

In a separate statement, the military said an Israeli soldier was killed in southern Lebanon, bringing the number of Israeli soldiers killed in clashes with Hezbollah since early March to 19.

A civilian contractor was also killed.

It said it killed more than 220 Hezbollah fighters over the past week and struck hundreds of targets.

Lebanon's official National News Agency (NNA) reported other strikes on locations in the south not included in the Israeli evacuation warnings.

Hezbollah meanwhile claimed several attacks on Israeli troops in several southern Lebanese towns.

It also claimed a drone attack on the headquarters of the Israeli army's 300th brigade, one of the units operating in Lebanon.

Riza said "the reality on the ground in Lebanon has been deeply alarming", adding that



Smoke rises behind buildings following an Israeli airstrike in the southern city of Tyre yesterday. - AFP

"airstrikes and demolitions continue daily, with an unacceptable toll on civilians and civilian infrastructure".

However, he expressed his hope that the Lebanon-Israeli talks "will pave the way toward a political solution".

Representatives from Lebanon and Israel, officially at war for decades, resumed talks at the State Department in Washington shortly after 9am (1300 GMT), one diplomat said.

The United States described the first day of talks in Washington on Thursday as positive, but neither Lebanon or Israel have commented.

Lebanon hopes that the round of negotiations in Washington will end with an extension of the ceasefire and an agreement from Israel to halt its attacks.

If an extension is not agreed, the truce will expire tomorrow.

Lebanon was dragged into the Middle East war on March 2 when Hezbollah fired rockets at Israel in retaliation for the killing of Iran's supreme leader Ali Khamenei.

Israeli attacks since then have killed more than 2,900 people in Lebanon, including more than 400 since the truce took effect, according to Lebanese authorities.

Lebanon is under US and Israeli

pressure to disarm Hezbollah.

Israeli troops have invaded parts of southern Lebanon since the start of the war, carrying out widespread demolitions of villages over the past weeks.

Hezbollah, meanwhile, rejects outright any direct engagement between the two countries.

Senior Hezbollah official Mahmud Qamati said yesterday that Beirut "going to direct, humiliating negotiations with the Israeli enemy is not a separate issue from a comprehensive conspiracy against the nation, its sovereignty and its resistance" at a time when "the south is being destroyed and martyrs are being killed daily".

'Happiest day of our lives': Gazans hold mass wedding among ruins

Wearing traditional Palestinian dresses, the white fabric intricately embroidered in a rainbow of colours, dozens of smiling brides clutched red bouquets as they walked through their grooms past the tents and ruined buildings of Gaza City.

To the tune of popular songs played from loudspeakers in a city square, the couples whose marriages had been long-delayed by war and displacement, sat on stage with joy written across their faces.

Thousands turned out to watch the mass wedding against the backdrop of buildings gutted by Israeli strikes over the course of the devastating two-year war.

Attendees clapped and smiled as a troupe performed the dabke, an Arabic folk dance,

while women's ululations echoed through the crowd.

"I can't quite believe that I'm finally getting married," Ali Mosbeh told AFP at the start of the ceremony.

"I was sitting in the tent when my phone rang... I couldn't believe it. I'm still in shock," he said, recounting the moment he received the call informing him that he was among the 50 young men selected.

The mass wedding is one of many to have been organised since a ceasefire took effect in Gaza in October.

This particular event was organised and funded by the Turkish humanitarian organisation IHH.

The smartly-dressed grooms wore traditional Palestinian kaffiyeh scarves adorned

with the Turkish organisation's logo, while the brides' bouquets were dotted with small Turkish flags.

For Mosbeh and his bride Huda al-Kahlout, the high cost of weddings had also posed an obstacle to tying the knot.

"I never imagined I'd get married in such circumstances," he said.

Most of Gaza's population was displaced at least once during the war between Israel and Hamas, with hundreds of thousands still living in tents or makeshift shelters.

Mosbeh said he would now share a tent with his wife while hoping to find a job - something that has become near impossible in Gaza.

"Our future is uncertain; we depend on aid to survive," admitted Kahlout, but said

that despite "war, loss and death... Marriage remains a beautiful milestone for us young people".

"Most of the buildings around the venue have been destroyed and reduced to rubble, with the martyrs buried beneath them," said fellow bride, Fayqa Abu Zeid.

However, she added: "We are trying, despite everything, to find joy and carry on living".

Before the war, "the newlyweds would move into a flat with new furniture. Today, we move into a tent, if there is one", Abu Zeid said.

Despite the devastation, her husband Mohammed al-Ghossain was smiling.

"We are very happy," he said. "It is the happiest day of our lives." - AFP

Somalia declares 'transition period'

AFP
Mogadishu

Somalia's government said it was in a "transition period" after President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's term ended yesterday without an agreement with the opposition on holding elections.

Mohamud has been attempting to move Somalia towards democratic elections, replacing a system based around clan elders.

However, with the country deeply divided between rival clans, and much of it under the control of Al-Shabaab, an insurgent group, there has been little progress on organising elections beyond a few localised pockets.

Opposition and regional leaders have strongly opposed Mohamud's plan, seeing it as an attempt to centralise power.

Talks between the opposition and government were held in recent days and continued yesterday, encouraged by foreign diplomats led by teams from Britain and the United States, but failed to lead to a compromise.

The government "declares that the country has entered a transition period toward an inclusive democratic system based on the principle of universal suffrage", it said in a statement.

"Over the past three days, the government has also engaged in discussions with certain opposition figures who presented positions that, according to the government, contradict the fundamental right of citizens to vote and to stand for election," it added.

The opposition parties may now organise their own "parallel political process", appointing new members of parliament to put pressure on the president, said Abdirahman Dahir Osman, spokesman for the Movement for Change party.

"It is also possible that tensions could escalate into armed confrontation," he told AFP.

Mohamud argues that he was given an extra year in the presidency when a new constitution was passed by parliament in March that set the framework for elections.

However, opposition parties boycotted that vote and have rejected the changes.

Previous presidents have also stayed in office beyond their mandates.



ICBF celebrates Rang Tarang 2026

The Indian Community Benevolent Forum (ICBF), functioning under the aegis of the Embassy of India, Qatar, organised a memorable International Labour Day celebration titled 'Rang Tarang 2026' on May 8 at ICC Ashoka Hall.

The event was dedicated to the hardworking labour community—the unsung heroes who contribute immensely to nation-building and societal growth. The programme also recognised the self-less efforts of volunteers and community service enthusiasts who continuously support humanitarian activities within the Indian community in Qatar.

The evening began with vibrant cultural performances, colourful dance presentations, and soulful musical renditions by talented artists from the Indian community, creating a festive and lively atmosphere for the audience.

ICBF general secretary Deepak Shetty greeted the dignitaries, guests, sponsors, volunteers, and community members. In his remarks, ICBF president Shanavas Bava highlighted the importance of celebrating and recognising workers' contributions, especially during the current challenging situation in the region.



He reiterated ICBF's continued commitment towards humanitarian and welfare activities for the underprivileged sections of the Indian expatriate community.

The chief guest, Indian ambassador Vipul, appreciated the labour community for their sincere hard work and invaluable contribution towards the development of Qatar. He also commended ICBF for its dedicated humanitarian initiatives, including

free medical camps, health awareness programs, labour camp visits, welfare assistance, and other community support activities carried out over several decades.

Dr Eish Singhal, first secretary at the Embassy of India and coordinating officer of ICBF, was also present during the event. The celebration was further honoured by the presence of distinguished guests, including Khalid Fakhroo from the Ministry of Labour, Major Naif al-Mutairi,



Abdelrehman Abdelhamied, Francesco d'Ovidio, director of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), and Hanan Fuad al-Hedaya from Hamad Medical Corporation, under the Ministry of Public Health.

The dignitaries acknowledged and appreciated the immense contribution of the Indian community towards Qatar's growth and development. During the function, an informative booklet containing important guidelines, dos and don'ts for first-time visitors to Qatar was officially released by Vipul.

multiple Indian languages, including Hindi, English, Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, and Kannada, to benefit newly arriving expatriates.

The event was attended by Apex Body leaders, including AP Manikandan, president of ICC; EP Abdurahiman, president of ISC; Thaha Mohammed, president of IBPC; ICC Advisory Council chairman PN Baburajan; former ICBF presidents; office bearers of apex bodies; associated organisation leaders; and prominent community members.

The programme was hosted by ICBF Advisory Council Member

RJ Nazia while head of Jail Visits Neelambari Sushant delivered the vote of thanks. Also present on the occasion were ICBF vice-president Rasheed Ahmed, secretary Jaffer Thayyil, Managing Committee members Khaja Nizamudheen, Shankar Goud, Mini Siby, Amarvir Singh, Manibharathi, and Advisory Council Members Zareena Ahad and Sathees Vilavil.

The event concluded on a high note with appreciation for all performers, volunteers, sponsors, and supporters who contributed towards making Rang Tarang 2026 a grand success.

MES wins laurels as overall champs at CBSE cluster handball tournament

The handball team of MES has brought laurels to the institution with a stellar performance at the CBSE Qatar Cluster Handball Tournament 2026, securing the overall championship title.

The tournament, held from May 6 to 10 at Shantiniketan Indian School, witnessed spirited participation from leading CBSE schools across the country.

The highly competitive event featured 12 teams in the Under-19 category, 13 teams in the Under-17 category, and 11 teams in the Under-14 category. Demonstrating exceptional teamwork, the boys' handball team of MES Indian School delivered consistently outstanding performances across all divisions, culminating in a well-deserved overall victory.

The Under-14 team emerged as champions with an extraordinary display of skill, strategy, and dominance. The school's remarkable achievements in the



tournament include the Under-14 boys emerging as champions, while the Under-17 boys and Under-19 boys secured the positions of first runner-up in their respective categories.

By virtue of this commendable achievement, the winning team has qualified to represent the cluster at the National Level, marking yet another significant

milestone in the school's sporting journey.

Dr Hameeda Kadar, the principal, extended her heartfelt congratulations to the players and expressed appreciation for the relentless efforts and dedication of the coaches, Mohamed Navas and Steeson K Mathew, whose guidance and commitment were instrumental in this grand success.



BPS girls triumph at CBSE Qatar cluster handball championship

Birla Public School (BPS) has once again solidified its status as a powerhouse in regional sports, emerging as the overall champions in the girls' category at the CBSE Qatar Cluster Handball Tournament for the fourth consecutive year. The tournament, held at Shantiniketan Indian School from May 6 to 10, saw the BPS teams showcase a masterclass in skill, strategy, and sportsmanship. This continued dominance underscores a sustained legacy of athletic excellence and a rigorous training culture that has become a hallmark of the institution. The BPS team rose to glory, outrunning the 17 teams from various CBSE schools across Qatar.

The school's girls' handball teams were the primary architects of this year's success, delivering high-energy performances that captivated spectators throughout the competition.

exceptional teamwork and tactical brilliance, remaining undefeated and proudly securing the gold medal. Not to be outdone, the Under-19 girls team exhibited remarkable resilience and a fierce competitive spirit across a series of high-stakes matches, ultimately earning a well-deserved silver medal.

The school management, principal, and staff have expressed immense pride in the team's achievements, noting that this four-year winning streak is a direct result of the players' unwavering grit and commitment. Special recognition was accorded to the coaches, Sreekanth and Neha Khas, whose tireless efforts, expert technical guidance, and constant encouragement were pivotal to the team's outstanding podium finishes. This remarkable achievement reflects Birla Public School's dedication to fostering a spirit of excellence that extends far beyond the classroom and onto the sports field.



RPS Doha achieves outstanding result in Grade XII Board Exam



Shreya Sara Aju



Eshan Marwan



Jeel Vijaykumar Patel



Michelle Antony



Bilal Ibrahim



Natasha Ropafadzo

Rajagiri Public School has once again etched its name in the annals of academic excellence with a phenomenal performance in the Grade XII Board Examinations this year. Of the 80 students who appeared for the examinations, 75 secured distinction, reflecting the

institution's unwavering commitment to academic excellence. A total of 36 students secured centum in various subjects; nine each in Mathematics and Biology, six in English, four in Computer Science, two each in Psychology, Physical Activity Trainer and

Economics and one each in Business Studies and Informatics Practices. From the Science stream, Shreya Sara Aju emerged as the school topper with an impressive 97.2%. Eshan Marwan secured the second position with 96%, while Jeel Vijayku-

mar Patel stood third with 95.2%. From the Commerce stream, Michelle Antony topped with a remarkable 97.2%. Bilal Ibrahim secured the second position with 97.6%, and Natasha Ropafadzo achieved the third position with 93.2%. The school management, principal and

staff extended their heartfelt congratulations to all the students for their stupendous achievement. They also appreciated the relentless efforts and dedication of the teachers and parents whose support and guidance played a vital role in this outstanding success.



MES felicitates future leaders at Investiture

The Investiture Ceremony of MES Indian School was solemnly conducted with grandeur and fervour on May 6 at the KG Hall, marking a significant occasion in the school's calendar of leadership and excellence.

The ceremony unfolded in an atmosphere of discipline and inspiration, in the presence of the chief guest, Ashraf Sharafudheen PT, director, Academics, MES Governing Board.

The ceremony witnessed the formal induction of the newly elected student leaders, including the school appointees, prefects, club secretaries, scouts and guides, campus correspondents, representatives of Campus Care Force, house captains, head marshal, sports admiral, house general, wing commanders, head green ambassador and student editors.

It was a grand and solemn occasion, where each elected member was prepared to don the mantle of leadership and vowed to fulfil the responsibilities entrusted to them. The major student officials include Master Ishan Bin Thasneef (Senior Head



Boy), Miss Evelyn Johnly (Senior Head Girl), and Afthab Basheer Abdulla and Amina Shahal, as Head Prefects of their respective sections.

The highlight of the event was the distribution of badges and sashes to the Main Office Bearers and the distribution of badges

to the prefects of both boys' and girls' sections.

This was followed by the distribution of badges to the club secretaries, recognising their roles in co-curricular leadership. The Flag Handing Over Ceremony added a sense of tradition and pride, symbolising the transfer of responsi-

bilities to the new leaders.

The oath-taking ceremony was led by the Head Boy, Master Ishan Bin Thasneef, where the newly appointed leaders pledged to uphold the values and responsibilities entrusted to them.

Addressing the newly appointed student leaders, Princi-



pal Dr Hameeda Kadar urged the appointees to uphold the values and traditions of the institution with sincerity, humility, and dedication. She reminded them that leadership is a responsibility that demands commitment, discipline, and service to the school community.

Earlier, Fiona Mary, from the Department of English, welcomed the gathering, highlighting the significance of leader-

ship. The programme concluded with a vote of thanks by the Head Girl, Miss Evelyn Johnly, expressing gratitude to all those who contributed to the success of the event.

The event was coordinated by the teachers in charge: Akbar Ali, Shahanas, Manasul Ansari, and Shani GR. The ceremony was compered by the faculty members, Rema Devi, Fiona Mary and Davidson T.



DMIS celebrates stellar success in CBSE Class XII board results

Doha Modern Indian School, Qatar, has once again etched its name in academic distinction with a stellar and resplendent performance in the CBSE Class XII Board Examinations 2025-26. The students delivered exceptional and outstanding results across the Science and Commerce streams, reinforcing the institution's well-established legacy of scholastic excellence and competitive success.

In the Commerce stream, Vivana Kathamuchickal Anil emerged as the topper with an outstanding 95.6%, followed by Jessica Laverine with 93.8% and Amna Khan with 92.2%. In the Science stream, Numa Wasimkhan Pathan

secured the top position with an impressive 94%, followed by Alice Anne Dominic with 93.4% and Jia Verma with 93%.

Across a range of disciplines, several students distinguished themselves as subject toppers, reflecting the school's strong academic culture. In English, Alice Anne Dominic, Lakshmi Nandana Pramod, and Mohammad Ehtasham secured the top position with 99 marks. In Physics, Jia Verma achieved 86 marks, while Sera Roni Veticad led Chemistry with an impressive 97 marks. In Biology, Adrina Susan Sunil, Alice Anne Dominic, Numa Wasimkhan Pathan, Olivia Justin Arakkal, and Sampoorva Naidu

achieved a perfect 100 marks, while Jia Verma secured 99 marks in Mathematics.

In Computer Science and IT, Informatics Practices was topped by Adrina Susan Sunil and Numa Wasimkhan Pathan, both securing 99 marks, while Riona Dsouza excelled in Computer Science with an equally impressive 99 marks. In the Commerce stream, Amna Khan and Vivana Kathamuchickal Anil obtained 97 marks in Business Studies. Economics was led by Anika Prashant Prabhakaran and Vivana Kathamuchickal Anil with 98 marks, while Vivana Kathamuchickal Anil also topped Accountancy with 98 marks.

School Toppers – Commerce

FIRST	SECOND	THIRD
VIVANA KATHAMUCHICKAL ANIL 95.6%	JESSICA LAVERINE 93.8%	AMNA KHAN 92.2%

School Toppers – Science

FIRST	SECOND	THIRD
NUMA WASIMKHAN PATHAN 94 %	ALICE ANNE DOMINIC 93.4%	JIA VERMA 93 %

SIS excels at CBSE Qatar Cluster Handball tourney

The girls' and boys' teams of Shantiniketan Indian School (SIS) delivered an outstanding performance in the CBSE Qatar Cluster Handball Tournament 2026-27, hosted by the school from May 6-10.

The tournament witnessed enthusiastic participation from 15 CBSE-affiliated schools across Qatar, making it a grand celebration of sportsmanship and teamwork.

The SIS girls' Under-17 team emerged champions and qualified for the CBSE National Handball Tournament to be held in India. The team was ably led by Nihaa of Class X.

The SIS boys' teams also performed exceptionally well, securing 3rd position in the Under-14, Under-17, and Under-19



categories. The Under-14 boys' team was captained by Usaid of Class VIII, the Under-17 boys' team by Irfan of Class IX, and

the Under-19 boys' team by Azeem of Class XI.

All the teams displayed remarkable determination, skill,

teamwork, and sporting spirit throughout the tournament. The management, principal, staff members, and the Department



of Physical Education congratulated all the players, coach, and HOD of Physical Education, Tanveer Mehdi, for this excel-

lent achievement and wished the Girls' Under-17 team success at the upcoming CBSE National Handball Tournament in India.

MES cricketers crowned champions at School Olympic Programme Cricket Tournament

In a remarkable display of sporting excellence and competitive spirit, the cricket teams of MES Indian School delivered an outstanding performance at the School Olympic Programme (SOP) Cricket Tournament for Boys, organised by the Qatar Cricket Association at West End Park International Stadium. Competing in all three divisions – Primary, Preparatory, and Secondary – MES teams showcased extraordinary talent, discipline, teamwork, and determination throughout the prestigious tournament, which witnessed the

participation of 20 leading public and private schools from across Qatar. Culminating their inspiring campaign with resounding success, the Preparatory and Secondary category teams emerged as champions, securing top honours through their exceptional performances and unwavering spirit of sportsmanship. Adding further glory to the institution, the Primary category team achieved the runner-up position, reflecting the school's consistent excellence across all levels of competition. The grand prize

distribution ceremony was held on May 5 at the Aspire Dome, where the awards were presented by Khaled al-Suwaidi, CEO of the Qatar Cricket Association. Expressing immense pride and appreciation, the principal of MES Indian School, Dr Hameeda Kadar, congratulated the victorious teams and commended their remarkable achievements. She also lauded the dedicated efforts of the coach, Afsal, whose tireless guidance, commitment, and mentorship played a pivotal role in the team's exceptional success.





Cuba mulls US offer of \$100mn in aid but wary of Trump's motives, blockade

Reuters
Havana

Cuba on Thursday said it would entertain a US offer of \$100mn in humanitarian aid but expressed scepticism over President Donald Trump's intentions at a time when a US oil blockade on the island has crippled public services.

Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez said the island's communist-run government was willing to consider the offer, but said no strings should be attached.

"We hope it will be free of political manoeuvring and attempts to exploit the hardships and suffering of a people under siege," Rodriguez said on social media.

Last week, the US State Department said it had privately offered the \$100mn in aid to Cuba, in addition to "free and fast sat-

ellite internet" on the condition that the island government agree to "meaningful reforms".

Rodriguez denied the Trump administration had made such an offer, calling it a "fable." The Trump administration then repeated the offer in a statement on Wednesday.

Living conditions in Cuba have dramatically worsened after Trump in January threatened tariffs on any nation supplying the island with fuel. Top allies Mexico and Venezuela have since cut off oil shipments to Cuba, leading to dire shortages of fuel and electricity.

Last week, the UN called Trump's fuel blockade unlawful, saying it had obstructed the "Cuban people's right to development while undermining their rights to food, education, health, and water and sanitation."

Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel said his government would

accept the aid if it complied with international norms on humanitarian assistance.

But the Cuban leader called the offer "inconsistent and paradoxical," adding that Washington could do more to aid Cuba by simply lifting sanctions.

Diaz-Canel said Cuban priorities for use of the funds would be fuel, food and medicine.

The Trump administration has called the current communist-run government corrupt and incompetent and is seeking to replace it, despite ongoing talks.

Negotiations appeared to have stalled in recent weeks, though on Thursday the Cuban government confirmed it had met with CIA chief John Ratcliffe.

Ratcliffe told intelligence officials in Cuba that the US was prepared to engage on economic security issues if Cuba makes "fundamental changes," a CIA official said.

Deal reached with protesting miners: Bolivia

The Bolivian government said yesterday it had struck a deal with thousands of protesting miners who had clashed with police the previous day in La Paz.

Since early May, protests against the policies of centre-right President Rodrigo Paz have convulsed the Andean nation.

A demonstration of miners on Thursday demanded the resignation of the centre-right leader, arguing that he has not addressed their demands, which include the provision of fuel and work equipment.

Police used tear gas to block protesters from entering the capital's main square, where government buildings are located, while miners hurled stones and explosives with slingshots, an AFP reporter observed.

Early Friday morning, the government reached a deal with the protesters following "almost 12 hours of talks," Economy Minister Jose Gabriel Espinoza told reporters.

He said the negotiated agreement would be announced in due course, without providing further details.

President Paz won elections last year that marked a shift to the right after two decades of socialist rule.

He promised to end Bolivia's worst economic crisis in four decades, marked by an acute shortage of foreign currency and fuel.

Paz scrapped the two-decade-old fuel subsidies that had drained the Treasury's international dollar reserves, but so far has failed to stabilise fuel supplies. Now he is under pressure from all sides.

Schoolteachers, transportation workers, Indig-



A miner kicks a tear gas can as clashes erupted with miners during a march to demand the resignation of Bolivian President Rodrigo Paz, in La Paz, on Thursday. (AFP)

enous people and other Bolivians have taken to the streets, calling for wage increases, economic stability and an end to the privatisation of state-owned companies.

The country's largest trade union, the Bolivian Workers' Center (COB), on Thursday called for the president to resign.

The state's road authority yesterday warned that roadblocks on routes leading into La Paz were preventing food supplies from entering the capital.

Prices of food products including meat, chicken and some vegetables skyrocketed in some supermarkets this past week, after year-on-year inflation hit 14% in April. (AFP)

Head of FDA drug centre expected to leave after commissioner's exit

Reuters
Washington

The acting head of the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA)'s drug centre, Tracey Beth Hoeg, is expected to leave the agency just days after Commissioner Marty Makary resigned, according to three people familiar with internal planning.

Hoeg, an epidemiologist and sports physician who cast doubt on Covid vaccines during the pandemic, helped lead the effort to overhaul the US childhood vaccination schedule by reducing the number of recommended shots from 17-11 in January.

Those childhood vaccine schedule changes were put on hold as part of a lawsuit addressing the overhaul of vaccine policies under Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy.

"HHS and FDA do not comment on personnel matters," HHS spokeswoman Emily Hilliard said in a statement.

The decision, while expected, has not yet been finalised. Hoeg was not immediately available for comment.

Hoeg's departure would come amid a broader shake-up of the health department. The White House has exerted more control over the department in recent months as polls show Kennedy's efforts to rewrite US vaccine policy could prove costly with voters in November's midterm elections that will decide whether Republicans retain control of Congress.

The White House installed Chris Klomp as Kennedy's No 2, and Klomp has since helped bring in a slate of more conventional nominees for top health positions, such as director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Surgeon General.

Since Makary's resignation on Tuesday, Klomp has been pushing to rid the FDA of controversial appointees and replace them with more traditional picks, according to two of the sources.

A number of lower-level FDA



Signage is seen outside of the Food and Drug Administration headquarters in White Oak, Maryland, US. (Reuters/File Photo)

officials — most of whom were brought in by Makary — are also expected to depart, including chief of staff Jim Traficant; deputy chief of staff Samuel Doran; and associate director of policy and research strategy Sanjula Jain-Nagpal, the sources said.

Traficant, Doran and Jain-Nagpal were not immediately available for comment.

Makary's leadership of the FDA was marked by tumult and con-

trovercy. Thousands of experienced career employees left the agency last year as part of Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency purge, and top leaders were forced out.

Hoeg, the fifth person to run the Center for Drug Evaluation and Research in the 15 months of President Donald Trump's second term, was in the job for five months.

She considered a plan to change the label of Covid-19 vaccines to say the risks outweighed the benefits for men ages 12-24 because of the risk of a relatively rare heart-related side effect, a move that was strongly objected to by experts.

She initiated safety questions over approved protective RSV treatments for infants from Merck, Sanofi and AstraZeneca.

She also disagreed with FDA scientists who recommended approving a Type 1 diabetes drug from Sanofi, prompting the company to ask the FDA to remove the medication, teplizumab, from a pilot program aimed at speeding drug approvals.

'US seeks to indict Cuba's ex-president Raul Castro'

The United States is seeking to indict Raul Castro, the 94-year-old brother of late Cuban leader Fidel Castro, as Washington ramps up pressure on the communist-run island, US media reported on Thursday. An indictment of Castro would be a stunning twist in the deepening crisis in US-Cuba relations, with the island enduring constant power outages prompted by President Donald Trump's fuel blockade. Trump has repeatedly signalled that he wants to topple the communist government in Cuba. Raul Castro, who succeeded his brother as president of Cuba, oversaw a historic 2015 rapprochement with the United States under Barack Obama that Trump later reversed. CBS News reported that the possible indictment would focus on the 1996 downing of two civilian planes manned by anti-Castro pilots, citing US officials familiar with the matter. (AFP)

Peru's leftist Sanchez to face Fujimori in June presidential runoff

Reuters
Lima

Peru's leftist presidential candidate Roberto Sanchez will face Keiko Fujimori in the June runoff after narrowly securing second place in April's first-round vote, official results showed yesterday, with 100% of votes tallied.

The month-long count led to allegations of fraud in the politically turbulent South American nation, notably from right-wing candidate Rafael Lopez Aliaga, who narrowly trailed Sanchez for much of the counting process.

Fujimori, the daughter of late former President Alberto Fujimori, is seeking the presidency for a fourth time after topping the fragmented field.

Sanchez, a congressman who is running with the backing of jailed former leftist President Pedro Castillo, stood at 12.03%, narrowly ahead of Lopez Aliaga, the ultra-conservative former mayor of Lima, with 11.90%.

Sanchez had a near 21,210-vote

lead over Lopez Aliaga.

The prolonged count since the April 12 first-round prompted the resignation of the country's top electoral official, who is now under investigation by the public prosecutor. European Union observers have said they found no concrete evidence of fraud.

Running for the left-leaning Together for Peru party, Sanchez, 57, emerged as a surprise contender in a crowded first-round race, calling for a new constitution to establish a "plurinational" state and courting disaffected rural and Indigenous voters.

An April 26 Ipsos opinion poll put Fujimori and Sanchez in a tie for the runoff, with each projected to win 38% of the vote. Analysts pointed to the high level of rejection both candidates face.

"The second round may be bitterly polarising," said Eileen Gavin at risk intelligence company Verisk Maplecroft. "Peruvians are actually crying out for more of a moderate, national unity government after a decade of political and social strife."

Fire hits Venezuela gas facility, at least 6 workers hurt, sources say

Reuters
Maracaibo

A fire hit a gas processing facility in Venezuela's Lake Maracaibo yesterday, according to five sources, incident reports and videos seen by Reuters, leaving at least six workers injured.

Fires and power outages are frequent at Venezuela's ageing oil and gas facilities, especially in the western region, as a longstanding lack of foreign invest-

ment and US sanctions have hindered maintenance.

Two workers had to jump into the water and suffered large burns. They were taken to a nearby hospital in the western city of Maracaibo, while four others were reported with less serious injuries, according to the reports and videos, which showed workers using a water hose to control tall flames emerging from the plant.

The fire had not been extinguished at noon, local time. State-run oil company PDVSA

did not immediately reply to a request for comment.

The fire erupted during a gas depressuring manoeuvre at the Lamargas compression plant in Lake Maracaibo, according to PDVSA's internal reports of the incident, seen by Reuters.

The gas facility is part of the Lago Cinco project, operated by China Concord Resources Corp under a contract extended by PDVSA to produce crude in the lake's shallow waters.

The facility was damaged, one

of the reports said without elaborating.

Since capturing Venezuela's deposed President Nicolas Maduro in January, the US is encouraging foreign investment for Venezuela's energy industry as part of an ambitious \$100bn reconstruction plan.

However, the frequent accidents and the deep deterioration of PDVSA's facilities, from power plants to oilfields and refineries, continue casting doubts on what is really achievable, analysts and potential investors have warned.

Families of disappeared migrants urge Mexico to investigate

Families of migrants who have gone missing in Mexico gathered in the capital's Zocalo plaza on Thursday to urge the government to help them find their loved ones.

Mexico is facing a crisis of disappearances tied to drug war violence — one that has also affected migrants travelling through the country. The gathering was organised by a group of Hondurans, Cubans, Colombians, and Ecuadorians who travelled to Mexico to search for those who went missing while in the southern border state of Chiapas and in Mexico City. In April, a UN report deemed the disappearance crisis so grave that it labelled it a "crime against humanity."

On Monday, a report by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights denounced a potential undercount in the number of disappeared people. Officially, the Mexican government has recognised 130,000 disappeared people since 2006. "I seriously doubt just that," Alicia Santos Torres, a Cuban whose son Jorge Alejandro Lozada Santos went missing in Chiapas in 2024, told the crowd, referring to the count.

"If (Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum) really cared about what the mothers of Latin America had to say, she would listen and know that all of us here have children who disappeared in Mexico," Santos Torres said. "The southern border has become a corridor of death for many migrants." Many of their family members had gone missing on a boat that departed from Chiapas carrying more than 40 migrants headed north on December 21, 2024, never to be seen again.

The families say local residents are afraid to give police tips about the missing, fearing they could be targeted by criminal gangs.

"We've realised that the population feels afraid... for fear of reprisal," Oscar Enrique Hernandez, a Honduran searching for his brother Ricardo Hernandez Barahona, who disappeared on the boat, told AFP.

"What we don't understand as families is the uselessness of prosecutors — they turn a deaf ear, they don't want to act and investigate," he said. The worst thing, Hernandez said, "would be to return to my country with my hands empty." (AFP)

US govt planning dramatic Colorado River water cuts due to drought, overuse

By Andrew Hay
Reuters

The US government has proposed a new water-sharing plan for the drought-stricken Colorado River that could cut up to 40% of current supplies to Arizona, California and Nevada, according to a senior Arizona official. With a 20-year-old plan expiring this year, and talks between seven states that share the river at an impasse, the federal government late last week intervened with a strategy to deal with severe water shortages, according to Tom Buschatzke, director of the

Arizona Department of Water Resources.

The US Bureau of Reclamation proposed a 10-year plan in which Arizona, California and Nevada would potentially cut water use by up to 3mn acre-feet per year to maintain water levels in Lake Mead and Lake Powell, the river's severely depleted reservoirs, Buschatzke told a meeting of Arizona water stakeholders on Wednesday. Three million acre-feet of water is enough to supply 6-9 mn households for one year, more than the number of homes in Arizona and Nevada.

The maximum possible federal cuts, which would be reviewed every two years based on water



Tourists look at the Colorado River from Glen Canyon Dam near Page, Arizona, US. (Reuters/File Photo)

levels, are nearly twice as large as a May 1 offer by those three lower-basin states to reduce their water

use by 1.6mn acre-feet per year.

"Given the risk and uncertainty facing the Basin, these elements

are designed to provide stability while allowing flexibility to incorporate consensus-based recommendations as they develop," the Bureau of Reclamation said in a statement on its proposal, without providing further details.

Buschatzke said the federal plan would be either implemented under existing Colorado River law or through agreements among the states. He said federal officials had indicated that water cuts across the three lower-basin states would be based on the "priority of the law of the river." That law, the 1922 Colorado River Compact, gives California the highest priority for water use.

Buschatzke described the proposed federal cuts as "sobering."

"That's us, that's Arizona, and potentially CAP going to zero," said Buschatzke, referring to water flows on the Central Arizona Project, a canal that transports Colorado River water to central and southern Arizona.

Water releases from Powell and Mead, which serve seven states, would range from 5-12mn acre-feet per year under the federal plan.

"I think we all know that unless Mother Nature starts doing her job, it's going to be closer to the bottom end of this range," said Buschatzke.



This combination of pictures shows Peru's presidential candidates Keiko Fujimori (left) and Roberto Sanchez. (AFP)

Trump leaves Beijing with few wins but warm words for Xi

Reuters
Beijing

US President Donald Trump left China yesterday with no major breakthroughs on trade or tangible help from Beijing to end the Iran war, despite two days spent heaping praise on his host, Xi Jinping. Trump's visit to America's main strategic and economic rival, the first by a US president since his last trip in 2017, had aimed for tangible results to lift his sagging approval ratings before midterm elections in November. Xi will visit the US in the fall at Trump's invitation, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi said. The summit was filled with pageantry, from goose-stepping soldiers to tours of a secret garden. But behind closed doors, Xi issued a stark warning to Trump that any mishandling of China's top concern, Taiwan, could spiral into conflict.

During a huddle with reporters on the way back to the US, Trump said Xi told him he opposed Taiwan's independence.

"I heard him out. I didn't make a comment... I made no commitment either way," said Trump. He added that he will decide on a pending arms sale to Taiwan shortly, after speaking to "the person that right

now is... running Taiwan."

It was unclear if Trump was referring to Taiwan's president, Lai Ching-te.

A direct conversation between a sitting US president and Taiwan's leader would be unprecedented in the period since Washington shifted diplomatic recognition to Beijing from Taipei in 1979, and would likely anger China, which sees the democratically governed island as its own territory.

These were the first freewheeling remarks after two days in Beijing during which Trump stayed unusually restrained, with his off-the-cuff comments mainly focused on feting Xi's warmth and stature.

"It's been an incredible visit. I think a lot of good has come of it," Trump told Xi at their final meeting at the Zhongnanhai complex, a former imperial garden. While Trump searched for immediate business wins, such as a deal to sell Boeing jets that did not impress investors, Xi talked up a long-term reset and pact to maintain stable trade ties with Washington, underscoring their differing priorities.

Xi pushed a new term by describing the relationship as "constructive strategic stability" — a sharp departure from the framing of "strategic competition" used by former US President Joe Biden, which Beijing disliked.



US President Donald Trump speaks with China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi as he prepares to board Air Force One at Beijing Capital International Airport, in Beijing, China, yesterday. (Reuters)

"Until now, China hasn't proposed an alternative — now they have — if the US side agrees, that is progress," said Da Wei, director of the Center for International Security and Strategy at Tsinghua University in Beijing.

But just before the leaders met for tea yesterday, China's foreign ministry issued a blunt statement outlining its frustration with the war.

"This conflict, which should never have happened, has no reason to continue," the ministry said, adding that China supported efforts to reach a peace deal in a

war that had disrupted energy supplies and the global economy.

At Zhongnanhai, Trump said the leaders had discussed Iran and felt "very similar", though Xi did not comment. On the flight back home, Trump added that he wasn't "asking for any favors" on Iran. Still, US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent had urged Beijing to use its leverage with Tehran to make a deal. But analysts doubt Xi will be willing to push Tehran hard or end support for its military, given Iran's value to Beijing as a strategic counterweight to the US



Donald Trump gestures as he departs Beijing Capital International Airport aboard Air Force One, in Beijing, China, yesterday. (Reuters)

"What's notable is that there's no Chinese commitment to do anything specific with regards to Iran," said Patricia Kim, a foreign policy fellow at the Brookings Institution.

In another sign of a diminished scale of the summit, Trump's readout did not mention the broad structural reforms on which previous presidents pressed Xi.

Unlike his previous trip in 2017, Trump did not discuss "structural reforms," "global economic governance" or the "international trading system" with Xi, according to the readout. Even the deal touted as the biggest single deliverable from the meetings underwhelmed. Boeing stock fell 4% when Trump said on Thursday that China would buy 200 Boeing (BA.N) jets, significantly fewer than the roughly 500 that sources told Reuters had been under discussion.

He later added that the order could go up to 750 planes "if they do a good job with the 200." US officials said they had agreed deals to sell farm goods and made progress on mechanisms to man-

age future trade, with both sides expected to identify \$30bn of non-sensitive goods. There were scant details of the deals, however, and no signs of a breakthrough on selling Nvidia's advanced H200 AI chips to China, despite CEO Jensen Huang's dramatic last-minute addition to the trip.

Trump also left without official resolution to the rare earths supply problem that has dogged ties since China imposed export controls on the vital minerals in response to Trump's tariff barrage in April 2025. While the leaders struck a truce last October for Washington to lower tariffs in exchange for China keeping rare earths flowing, Beijing's controls have caused shortages for US chipmakers and aerospace companies.

When asked if the two sides extended the truce beyond later this year, Trump said he and Xi "did not discuss tariffs."

Such an extension would be "the most basic benchmark" for the success of the summit, said Brookings' Kim.

Taiwan says it will deepen US ties after Trump-Xi meeting

Reuters
Taipei

Taiwan will deepen ties with the US following talks between President Donald Trump and Chinese leader Xi Jinping in Beijing, its foreign minister said yesterday, adding that it was China that was increasing regional "risks".

Trump said earlier yesterday on his way home from Beijing that he had discussed US arms sales to Taiwan with President Xi and said he would soon make a decision on the matter, highlighting a flashpoint in US-China relations.

The US is Taiwan's most important international backer, while China, which claims the democratically governed island as its own, has demanded that such arms sales stop.

In a post on his Facebook page which did not directly reference Trump's remarks, Taiwanese Foreign Minister Lin Chia-lung

said many Taiwanese had been "concerned" by the US president's meeting with Xi.

"I want to report to everyone that my diplomatic team and I have continued to closely monitor the situation, and have maintained good communication with the US," Lin said.

"Taiwan occupies a key geostrategic position and is a responsible and trustworthy partner of the international community. Looking ahead, we will continue to deepen co-operation with the US and like-minded countries in the Indo-Pacific," he added.

Lin pointed to comments by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Thursday that US policy towards the island remains unchanged. Trump reiterated that stance in his comments to reporters on board his plane yesterday.

Last December the US approved an \$11bn arms sales package for Taiwan, the largest ever, and a second one worth some \$14bn is awaiting Trump's

approval, Reuters has previously reported.

China has never renounced the use of force to bring Taiwan under its control. The US is bound by law to provide Taiwan, whose government rejects Beijing's sovereignty claims, with the means to defend itself.

Lin said Taiwan has always been a contributor to, and guardian of, peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait.

"The party that has truly continued to heighten regional risks is China, with its expanding military activities and authoritarian oppression in recent years," Lin said. "China, which is attempting to change the international order and the status quo of regional peace and stability, is the main source of threat that is widely concerning the international community."

Xi told Trump on Thursday that mishandling the countries' disagreements over Taiwan could push China-US relations to a "dangerous place".

Japan campaigners urge review of tougher business visa rules

AFP
Tokyo

Tens of thousands of people have signed a petition calling for a review of newly tightened Japanese business visa requirements, as a video of an emotional speech by an Indian restaurant owner spread widely online.

The rule was revised late last year, requiring applicants to have 30mn yen (\$190,000) in capital, up from 5mn yen, due to concerns that the system was being abused.

However, campaigners say the new rule could force out long-time residents, and the petition highlighted the plight of foreign restaurant owners in particular.

"My children only speak Japanese... and we're told to go back to India," Manish Kumar, who has lived in Japan for 30 years, said at a gathering about the visa issue

on Wednesday.

His business manager visa was not renewed last year, according to the *Asahi Shimbun* daily.

"I've worked hard to get this far thanks to the support" from fellow chefs and customers, Kumar said.

"I've done nothing wrong. It's cruel to tell people to return to their home country just because the rules have suddenly changed."

It was unclear whether Kumar's curry restaurant in Saitama, near Tokyo, is still operating.

The clip showing his tearful speech was viewed millions of times.

The number of signatures on the Change.org petition calling for the government to scrap the 30mn-yen requirement had reached nearly 60,000 by yesterday.

It was submitted to the Immigration Services Agency of Japan this week.

The number of applications for business manager visas has dropped 96% since the tightening of the rule, according to the *Yomiuri Shimbun* daily.

Economic security minister Kimi Onoda welcomed the change, telling a news conference on Tuesday that "concerns that (the requirement) might be misused for the purpose of migration have been largely allayed".

Concerns about the system had grown in recent years, with Chinese social media posts claiming it was easy to get a visa in Japan.

The number of business manager visa holders jumped to 45,000 by June last year, half of them Chinese and 2.7 times the number a decade ago, according to public broadcaster NHK.

Investigations by regional immigration services bureaus have also revealed numerous shell companies.

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi has promised to tighten immigration rules, even though Asia's number two economy is struggling with labour shortages and a falling population.

South Korea to investigate cargo ship debris from Hormuz attack

AFP
Seoul

Debris from a fire-damaged cargo ship said to have been attacked by unidentified aircraft in the Strait of Hormuz arrived in South Korea yesterday for investigation, the foreign ministry said.

Iran has largely blocked shipping through the vital strait since conflict broke out with the United States and Israel on February 28 and Washington blockaded Tehran's ports.

HMM Namu was struck by "two unidentified aircraft" on May 4, hitting the outer plate of the vessel's port-side ballast tank near the stern and causing a fire in the engine room, Seoul, a US ally, said at

a press briefing on Sunday.

The Panama-flagged cargo vessel, operated by South Korean shipping firm HMM Co., had arrived in Dubai last week for investigation.

Its debris "arrived in South Korea by air following consultations with the UAE government" on Friday, Seoul's foreign ministry said in a statement.

The vessel debris is "scheduled to undergo detailed analysis by a specialised institution", it added without providing further detail.

Seoul said the aircrafts involved in the attack "were captured on CCTV footage, but there are limitations in identifying the exact type, launch origin and physical size of the objects".

A senior government official told local media this week that the "likelihood that the (attack-

ing) entity was someone other than Iran is low".

Tehran has denied responsibility, with its embassy in Seoul posting a statement on its website in the days following the attack, saying it "firmly rejects and categorically denies any allegations regarding the involvement" of its forces.

Seoul strongly condemned the attack and said it hopes to identify those behind it through a thorough investigation.

South Korea, Asia's fourth-largest economy, relies heavily on Middle Eastern fuel imports, most of which transited through the Strait of Hormuz during peacetime.

As a major petrochemicals producer and refiner, the closure has forced South Korea to impose a fuel price cap for the first time in nearly 30 years.

AFP
Seremban

Malaysia will not oppose a bid by a fugitive businessman involved in the massive IMDB corruption scandal to seek a pardon from US President Donald Trump, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said yesterday.

Speaking to reporters during a visit to Seremban district, south of Kuala Lumpur, Anwar described the plea by Low Taek Jho as a "non-issue".

The businessman, better known as Jho Low, is formally seeking a "pardon after completion of sentence", according to the US Department of Justice website.

Whistleblowers allege that Jho Low, a well-connected Malaysian financier with no official role, helped set up the IMDB state investment fund and made key financial decisions before disappearing about a decade ago.

Low, who has been indicted in the United States, has denied wrongdoing but remains at large.

"As far as we are concerned, we are not going in that route," Anwar said when asked if the government will formally oppose Jho Low's plea.

"Even if he has submitted, it is not an issue that we should discuss because he is still undergoing this process in courts."

Malaysia's Trade Minister Johari Abdul Ghani, who chairs a task force seeking to recover assets linked to IMDB worldwide, said Wednesday the plea should be rejected and Low returned for trial.

The IMDB fund was launched by former prime minister Najib Razak in 2009, shortly after he became premier.

It is alleged that more than \$4.5 billion was diverted from IMDB between 2009 and 2015 by fund officials and associates, including Low.

Najib, who has been convicted in multiple cases, has been jailed

and fined \$2.8 billion for his role in the plunder.

Najib's defence lawyers blamed Low and dubbed him the mastermind of the scheme.

Malaysia unsuccessfully sought the return of Low through extradition, and it was widely speculated in media that he was hiding in China.

The scandal shook Malaysian politics, contributing to the 2018 downfall of the ruling coalition that had governed since independence in 1957, and led to the convictions of two former Goldman Sachs bankers.

Investigators said top officials used their ill-gotten gains to splurge on assets worldwide, including a luxury yacht, high-end real estate, Monet as well as Van Gogh paintings, and even to fund the Hollywood blockbuster "The Wolf of Wall Street".

Actor Leonardo DiCaprio testified in court about Low's wild spending sprees and lavish parties.



An activist displays a sign with a slogan calling for the arrest of Philippine Senator Ronald "Bato" dela Rosa, during a protest outside the Philippine Senate in Pasay City, Metro Manila, Philippines. (Reuters/File photo)

Senator wanted by ICC warned against fleeing the Philippines

AFP
Manila

The Philippines vowed yesterday to stop the chief enforcer of ex-president Rodrigo Duterte's drug war from fleeing the country to evade an International Criminal Court (ICC) arrest warrant.

Fugitive Senator Ronald "Bato" dela Rosa barely escaped arrest on Monday when he sought refuge in the Senate building, but left unannounced for an unknown location on Thursday.

Justice Secretary Frederick Vida confirmed Manila has received the arrest warrant for Dela Rosa from the ICC, but was waiting for the Philippine Supreme Court to resolve the senator's petition challenging its legality.

"The Department of Justice will treat any attempt of Senator Bato dela Rosa to leave the country as a mockery of justice," Vida told a news conference.

Law enforcers and border officials were instructed "that if Senator Bato dela Rosa would try to leave the country, that the appropriate arrest should be made".

The ICC on Monday unsealed an arrest warrant against Dela Rosa, 64, accusing him along with Duterte and other "co-perpetrators" of the "crime against humanity of murder".

Senate president Alan Peter Cayetano prevented government agents from arresting his political ally Dela Rosa on Monday, giving him refuge in the building.

Dela Rosa served as national police chief from 2016 to 2018 during the early phase of Duterte's anti-drug campaign and was elected to two successive six-year terms in the Senate in 2019

after retiring from the force.

The crackdown left thousands dead, many of them drug users and low-level narcotics peddlers, according to human rights monitors.

Dela Rosa has asked the Supreme Court to stop the government from enforcing the ICC arrest warrant and expressing preference to stand trial in a Philippine court if he were charged.

His boss Duterte was arrested in March last year, flown to the Netherlands on the same day, and is detained in The Hague awaiting trial.



India deepens defence, energy ties with UAE

Reuters
New Delhi/Dubai

India and the United Arab Emirates agreed the framework for a strategic defence partnership yesterday, the Indian foreign ministry said, as they seek to deepen ties amid the Iran war.

The two countries also signed pacts on strategic petroleum reserves and supply of liquefied petroleum gas during a visit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the UAE, it added.

"The two sides have agreed on deepening defence industrial collaboration and co-operation on innovation and advanced technology, training, exercises, maritime security, cyber defence, secure communications and information exchange," the ministry said in a statement. Ahead of the visit, Indian sources told Reuters that Modi was likely to discuss long-term energy supply deals and also seek support to expand New Delhi's strategic oil reserves. The UAE's decision last month to leave Opec is expected to boost its output and help im-



President of the United Arab Emirates Mohamed bin Zayed al-Nahyan and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi inspect the UAE Armed Forces honour guards during an official visit at the Presidential Airport, in Abu Dhabi, yesterday. (Reuters)

porters such as India.

The Iran war has roiled global energy markets with the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, disrupting transportation and business across the region as Iranian strikes hit Gulf states, including the UAE, before a fragile ceasefire last month.

The oil pact announced on Friday includes a potential increase of Adnoc's crude oil storage in India for up to 30 mn barrels, Abu Dhabi's state oil firm said in a separate statement, adding the deal also explores potential crude storage in the UAE's Fujairah as part of India's strategic reserve.

Adnoc said that it would explore expanded LPG supply and trading opportunities with Indian Oil Corp.

"India's scale and growth trajectory make it one of the defining energy markets of our time. As demand accelerates alongside a rapidly expanding population, the strength of the UAE India energy partnership becomes ever more critical," Adnoc managing director and CEO Sultan Ahmed al-Jaber said.

New Delhi and Abu Dhabi signed a \$3bn deal for India to buy LNG from the UAE, its third-largest trading partner, in January, as well as a letter of intent to work towards forming a strategic defence partnership. That followed a mutual defence accord that Pakistan, India's arch-rival neighbour, signed with Saudi Arabia last year.

The Indian ministry also announced UAE investments worth \$5bn yesterday, pointing to past deals including Emirates NBD's acquisition of a 60% stake in RBL Bank last year for \$3bn, and Abu Dhabi's IHC \$1bn Sammaan investment.

Adani agrees to penalty in US civil court case

AFP
New Delhi

Indian billionaire industrialist Gautam Adani has agreed to pay a multi-million-dollar settlement in a US civil court case linked to corruption without admitting guilt, his company said yesterday.

The November 2024 indictment in New York accused the industrialist and multiple subordinates of deliberately misleading international investors as part of a vast bribery scheme.

Adani was accused of having participated in an estimated \$250 million scheme to bribe Indian officials for lucrative solar energy supply contracts.

Adani, along with his nephew Sagar Adani, agreed to the "payment of a civil penalty" totalling \$18 million, while noting that it came "without admitting or denying the allegations made in the civil complaint", a letter from Adani Green Energy to the Mumbai stock exchange read.

The penalty payment comes as US prosecutors are reported to be set to drop charges against Adani, *The New York Times* reported on Thursday.

The Adani letter, which noted that the final judgement of

the US court is still awaited, stressed that the "company is not a party to this proceeding, and no charges have been brought against it".

The New York Times said the move to abandon the charges, brought under US president Joe Biden's administration, came after Adani hired a new legal team led by Robert Giuffra, one of President Donald Trump's personal lawyers.

With a business empire spanning coal, airports, cement and media, the chairman of Adani Group has been rocked in recent years by corporate fraud allegations and a stock crash.

Adani, a close ally of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, was born in Ahmedabad in Gujarat state to a middle-class family but dropped out of school at 16.

He moved to India's financial capital, Mumbai, to find work in the city's lucrative gem trade.

After a short stint in his brother's plastics business, he launched the flagship family conglomerate that bears his name in 1988 by branching out into the export trade.

His big break came seven years later with a contract to build and operate a commercial shipping port in Gujarat.

Leadership hopeful but Burnham faces tricky test to return to parliament

Reuters
Ashton-in-Makerfield

For many in Labour, Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham is their best hope to turn around the governing party's fortunes. But before he can challenge British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, he must return to parliament, and that's not straightforward.

Burnham will try to run in and win a so-called by-election in Makerfield, in the northwestern region where he has been a popular mayor since 2017 — a bid Nigel Farage's populist Reform UK will do its best to thwart.

Hoping his local appeal will boost his attempt to clear the first hurdle to any bid to challenge Starmer for the leadership, Burnham will try to buck a trend felt across the country when voters rejected Labour in local elections last week.

On the streets of Ashton-in-Makerfield, a former mining town in the constituency where many struggled after the closure of the coal pits, voters were split between Burnham and Reform.

Anthony McCormack, a

former miner who retrained as a welder and is now retired, said he would back Burnham because he is "right man for the job" and would "100%" make a better prime minister than Starmer.

"The man is not a politician, he's middle management," he said about the British prime minister.

Labour voter Alan Birch, who is retired, said he would also rather "get Andy in and see what goes from there," adding that under Starmer things were "going downhill".

Starmer is under pressure from dozens of his own lawmakers to set a timetable for his departure after the election losses, and the by-election is yet another twist to a political drama that has sent markets spiralling.

Burnham was a member of parliament before becoming Manchester mayor, serving as a minister in Gordon Brown's government and running unsuccessfully for the party leadership in 2010 and 2015.

He is not yet formally Labour's candidate for the Makerfield seat but, unlike a previous bid for a parliamentary return earlier this year, the Labour leadership is not



Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham sits in a car outside his home, in Greater Manchester, yesterday. (Reuters)

expected to block him from entering the race.

Reform has yet to name a candidate.

Labour has represented the area in parliament since 1906, but with the party in crisis and Reform winning all the council seats that were contested in the constituency last week, Burnham's return is far from a foregone conclusion.

Polls show Starmer is deeply unpopular after a series of U-turns as he has struggled to deliver the growth and stability he promised, while Reform leader Farage told broadcaster GB News he would "throw absolutely everything" at the by-election in a bid to defeat Labour.

Rachael Hulse, an aesthetics nurse, said her family had always voted Labour "but now, that's completely changed".

"Labour don't really have that much of a good rep (reputation) any more," she said, adding she hoped Reform would win the seat. "It just needs a change, because we seem to be just stuck in the same rut."

Burnham's pitch to voters is that he can lift Labour out of that rut, saying people in Makerfield "have long supported our party but lost faith in recent times".

"We will change Labour for the better and make it a party you can believe in again," he said when he announced his intention to stand in the seat on Thursday.

But pensioner Ann Garner questioned whether it was the right time for a leadership contest.

"I think Keir Starmer should be given a chance," she said. "We really need to get the country sorted."

India hikes fuel prices as ME war strains supplies

India's state-run oil companies raised petrol and diesel prices by more than three % yesterday as disruption to energy supplies due to the Iran war mounts pressure on the economy.

The increase marks the first hike in automobile fuel prices in India since the war broke out in February, prompting Iran's near-total blockade of the Strait of Hormuz.

India, the world's third-largest oil buyer, normally sources about half of its crude through the vital waterway.

In Delhi, petrol prices rose to 97.77 rupees (\$1.02) per litre from 94.77 rupees, while diesel climbed to 90.67 rupees from 87.67, according to data from the Indian Oil Corp. Rates vary across the country depending on local taxes. Oil companies say they have been incurring losses due to higher global crude oil prices. The government had earlier raised prices of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), a primary cooking fuel for millions of households. The latest move comes as authorities ramp up austerity measures to curb fuel consumption and conserve foreign exchange.

Delhi's chief minister on

Thursday said government offices will have two work-from-home days a week for those able to and urged residents to cut back on private vehicle use.

The steps came after Prime Minister Narendra Modi said restrictions on fuel use were necessary to save foreign currency spent on fuel imports.

India has ramped up imports of Russian crude to plug gaps in supplies from the Middle East, ship-tracking and import data show, following a temporary US waiver on sanctions.

But with the waiver set to end on Saturday, Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyan Jaishankar criticised "unilateral coercive measures", without naming any country.

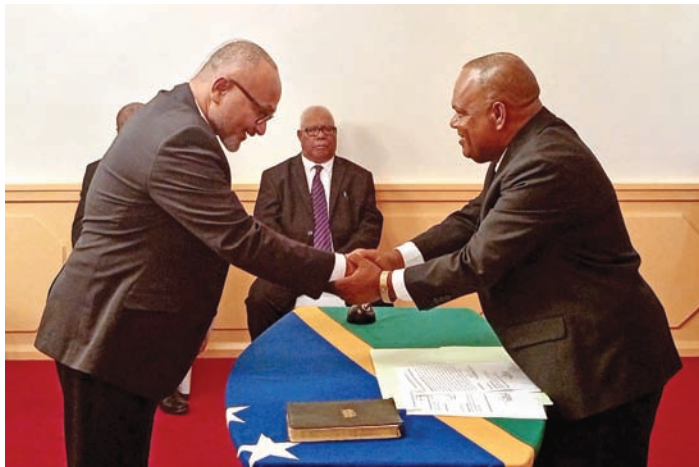
"Such measures disproportionately affect developing countries," he said on Thursday as he met foreign ministers from Brics nations, including Iran's Abbas Araghchi and Russia's Sergey Lavrov — representing two of the countries most heavily sanctioned by the US. "These unjustifiable measures cannot substitute dialogue, nor can pressure replace diplomacy."

Solomon Islands elects opposition leader as PM

Reuters
Sydney

Solomon Islands' parliament yesterday elected opposition leader Matthew Wale as prime minister, in a decision welcomed by neighbouring Australia that has been battling China for influence in the country. Wale defeated Peter Shanel Agovaka by 26 votes to 22 in a ballot of the country's members of parliament, after incumbent Jeremiah Manele was ousted from power last week in a no-confidence vote. "We take government at a difficult time, given what is happening throughout the world," a visibly emotional Wale said after his election.

"We are not immune from the impacts of these geopolitical events." Located 1,600km (1,000 miles) northeast of Australia, the strategic importance of Solomon Islands has been in focus in recent years after it strengthened ties with China. In 2022, it signed a security pact with Beijing that prompted concern from the United States and South Pacific neighbours. Wale was highly critical of the deal, saying it would affect regional security and could jeopardise relationships with existing partners, but in recent years his approach to China has softened. In 2025, he led a delegation to Beijing, where he praised China's econom-



Solomon Islands' new Prime Minister Matthew Wale (left) is sworn in by Governor-General David Kapu at Government House yesterday. (AFP)

ic development and said his party supported the one-China principle, according to a readout of the visit provided by China's ruling Communist Party.

Yesterday, Wale told Australia's public broadcaster ABC he would "look at" the China pact first and then "decide what to do with it". Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese yesterday congratulated Wale in a post on X.

"I look forward to working together to continue strengthening our economic, development and security partnership," he said.

In 2024, Australia provided more than \$100 million for Solo-

mon Islands' police force, showing Canberra was its "security partner of choice", Albanese said at the time. Australia has a long-standing security agreement with Solomon Islands.

"Matthew Wale's victory is a win for Canberra's preferred partners, but the 2022 security pact and Chinese infrastructure are going nowhere," said Connor Graham, a researcher specialising in the Pacific at Sydney-based think tank the Lowy Institute.

Wale was likely to be more open to traditional ally Australia as well as the US, but China remained critical to Solomon Islands' economy, he added.

Maldives rescuers search for four drowned Italian divers

AFP
Malé

Rescue teams in the Indian Ocean archipelago of the Maldives searched for a second day yesterday for the bodies of four missing Italians following the country's deadliest diving accident, officials said.

Italy's foreign ministry said on Thursday night that five citizens had died while diving, with Maldivian authorities recovering one body.

Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu said searching for the remaining four Italians "remains our highest priority".

"We are deeply saddened by this tragedy, and our thoughts and prayers are with the families of the deceased Italian, the missing four Italians and everyone affected," Muizzu said in a statement on social media.

Maldives Minister of Tourism Mohamed Ameen said coastguard officers and security forces were scouring remote seas around a deep cave where the divers were reported missing on Thursday afternoon. A dive by rescuers ended yesterday without any trace of the missing Italians.

Government spokesman Mohamed Hussain Shareef said the authorities had marked out the



A tourist, along with guides, returns after an open-water diving session near Rasfannu Beach in Malé yesterday. (AFP)

search area and would resume when weather improves.

He said the victims were believed to be trapped inside a cave at a depth of about 60 metres (196 feet). "The weather is not ideal for diving, and we are facing very rough seas. We have deployed our largest Coast Guard vessel to the area, and Italian diplomats are also on site," Shareef told AFP.

He said tourists were not supposed to dive below 30 metres.

"There will be a separate investigation into how these divers went below the permitted depth, but our focus right now is on the search and rescue," Shareef said.

The University of Genoa said the victims included a marine biology professor, her daughter, and two young researchers.

They were diving in Vaavu Atoll, about a 90-minute speedboat ride from the capital, Malé.

Police said the weather was rough in Vaavu Atoll on Thursday when they vanished, and that there was a warning for passenger boats and fishermen.

The low-lying Maldives, a nation of 1,192 tiny coral islands scattered some 800 kilometres (500 miles) across the equator in the Indian Ocean, is a luxury holiday destination popular with divers, who often stay at secluded resorts or on liveaboard dive boats.

The Italian diver whose body was recovered on Thursday has not been publicly identified.

The Maldivian National Defence Force (MNDF), which is coordinating the operation, said the body was found in a cave at a depth of 60 metres.

The Italians were on a liveaboard dive boat, and the alarm was raised when they failed to return as scheduled, police said.

Kyiv in mourning as POWs return home



President Volodymyr Zelensky meets with Ukrainian rescuers at the site of an air attack in Kyiv. (AFP)

AFP
Kyiv

Ukraine's capital Kyiv was in mourning yesterday after a Russian attack killed 24 people a day earlier, with President Volodymyr Zelensky denouncing Moscow's "brutal terror" and the two sides going ahead with an exchange of hundreds of captured soldiers.

Retaliatory overnight strikes by Kyiv's army, launched as bodies were still being pulled from the rubble in Kyiv, killed four, including a child, in the Russian city of Ryazan, Russian officials said.

Zelensky visited the site of the building ripped apart by a Russian missile, where all the victims were killed.

"Here, Russia took the lives of 24 people, including three children," Zelensky said, after walking through a courtyard littered with rubble.

The three children killed were all girls -- aged 12, 15 and 17.

The youngest -- named as Liubava Yakovleva -- had already seen her father killed fighting the Russian invasion, Prime Minister Yulia Svyrydenko said.

"Rescue operations lasted more than 28 hours, 30 people were thankfully saved due to the tireless efforts of our emergency workers," she said on social media. Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said 24 people were still in hospital. The scenes in Kyiv contrasted with elation to the north, where

205 Ukrainian soldiers were freed in the latest POW exchange with Moscow.

AFP reporters saw the released fighters -- with shaven-heads and draped in Ukrainian flags -- cheering, crying, embracing one another and waiting to be reunited with their families.

Kyiv freed the same number of Russian soldiers. Moscow said its 205 released troops were brought to its ally Belarus, where they were receiving "psychological and medical assistance."

The exchanges remain one of the few remaining areas of cooperation between the two sides, at war since Russia ordered troops into its neighbour in February 2022. Zelensky said the release was the "first stage of the 1,000 for 1,000 exchange" that had been brokered and previously announced by US President Donald Trump.

Most of the freed Ukrainian troops had been in Russian captivity since 2022, including those who fought for Mariupol's steelworks Azovstal at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, which briefly fell to Moscow at the start of its invasion.

Thursday's devastating attack on Kyiv -- the deadliest on the Ukrainian capital for months -- further hit already slim prospects for a breakthrough in stalled talks on ending the war.

Kyiv's allies accused Russia of mocking diplomatic efforts to end the conflict.

Moscow has shown no sign of

backing down from its maximalist aims in Ukraine, demanding Kyiv give up four eastern and southern regions that Russia claimed in 2022 to have annexed.

Fresh Russian attacks yesterday killed one person in the southern Zaporizhzhia region.

The head of the northern Chernigiv region, Vyacheslav Chaus, said a Russian missile struck a village, setting a house on fire.

"A mother and daughter were wounded. The woman is 45 and the girl is 13. Both are in hospital," he said.

In Russia, officials said Ukrainian overnight drone strikes on an apartment block in the city of Ryazan -- south-west of Moscow -- killed four people, including a child. "Today at night, the territory of the Ryazan region was attacked by 99 enemy drones," Ryazan Governor Pavel Malkov said on social media.

"The number of dead, unfortunately, rose to four people, including a child," Moscow said Ukraine had targeted two residential buildings and industrial facilities.

Unverified social media videos showed plumes of smoke rising over Ryazan -- a city of around 500,000 -- and a high-rise apartment block with several blackened floors.

Kyiv has hit Russia with retaliatory drone strikes throughout Moscow's offensive, but deadly attacks -- especially close to Moscow -- are rare.



Army Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Christopher LaNeve. (AFP)

US scraps deployment of 4,000 troops to Poland

AFP
Washington, US

The US has canceled the planned deployment of 4,000 soldiers to Poland, US officials said yesterday, as Washington reorganises its forces in Europe after announcing it would withdraw thousands of troops from Germany.

The head of US European Command "received the instructions on the force reduction," General Christopher LaNeve, the acting chief of staff of the US Army, said during a congressional hearing when asked about the canceled deployment. "I've worked with him in close consultation on what that force unit would be, and it... made the most sense for that brigade to not do its deployment in theater," LaNeve said, referring to the 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team.

Some elements of the unit had already been sent overseas and its equipment was in transit, according to the general, who said the order to cancel the deployment came from Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth's office. Secretary of the Army Dan Driscoll, testifying alongside LaNeve, said the deployment was scrapped "a couple days ago."

Republican Representative Don Bacon said Poland had not been informed in advance. "They called me yesterday. They did not know, they were blindsided," Bacon said during the hearing, describing the canceled deployment as "repulsive" and "an embarrassment to our country."

Representative Marilyn Strickland, a Democrat, also criticised the move, saying that "when we take that many troops away, it says that we are not reliable ally."

At the beginning of this month,

the Pentagon announced that Washington would pull 5,000 troops from Germany, with spokesman Sean Parnell saying the withdrawal was expected "to be completed over the next six to twelve months."

That announcement came during a heated dispute between Donald Trump and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz over the US-Israeli war against Iran, and the US president subsequently said the troop reduction would be "a lot further than 5,000," without providing details. Poland's defence minister, Wladyslaw Kosiniak-Kamysz, suggested Friday that the cancellation of the deployment to his country could be related to the removal of troops from Germany.

"If a brigade other than the one originally planned is sent to Poland -- maybe the one from Germany -- and 5,000 soldiers leave Germany for Poland... there is no change to the security guarantees," Kosiniak-Kamysz told reporters.

Trump has threatened to slash US troop numbers in Germany and other European allies during both his White House terms, saying he wants Europe to take on greater responsibility for its defense rather than depending on Washington.

He now appears determined to punish allies who have failed to back the Middle East war or contribute to a peacekeeping force in the crucial Strait of Hormuz waterway, which Tehran's forces have effectively closed.

A Nato official said yesterday that "we know that the US is working to adjust its posture in Europe."

"A focus on rotational forces would not impact Nato's deterrence and defense plans. And we're already seeing increasing presence on the eastern flank from Canada and Germany -- all of which contributes to a stronger Nato overall," the official added.

In brief

CALL FOR PEACE

Creation of special tribunal for Ukraine

Thirty-four Council of Europe member states, along with Australia, Costa Rica and the EU as an institution, said yesterday they would join a future special tribunal for Ukraine tasked with prosecuting Russia over its invasion of the country. "The time for Russia to be held to account for its aggression is fast approaching," said Alain Berset, the secretary general of the Council of Europe, which acts as a guardian of human rights and democracy across the continent. Russia was expelled from the Council of Europe -- which is separate from the European Union -- in 2022, following its invasion of Ukraine. (AFP)

ASSAULT

Russia strikes at Ukrainian port

A Russian attack struck a grain terminal at a Ukrainian port, injuring seven people, Ukraine's development ministry said. A grain warehouse with cargo, trucks and handling equipment were damaged, the ministry said in a post on X without specifying which port was attacked. (Reuters)

FUEL

Russia in touch with Cuba on energy crisis

Russia is in contact with the leadership in Cuba regarding energy supplies amid what the Kremlin said was a "difficult situation" on the Caribbean island. For two straight weeks fuel has all but disappeared from state-run gas stations in the Cuban capital Havana as the US blockade has largely strangled supply and led to strict rationing. (Reuters)

EXPANSION

Russia occupies two Ukrainian villages

Russian troops have pushed Ukrainian forces out of two more villages, the RIA state news agency reported on Friday, citing the Defence Ministry. RIA named the villages as Chaikivka in Ukraine's northern Kharkiv region and Charivne in the southeastern Zaporizhzhia region. Reuters could not independently verify the battlefield reports. (Reuters)

Poland to adopt crypto regulation amid fraud probe

Polish lawmakers adopted a bill on yesterday regulating cryptocurrencies, as a scandal involving the collapse of the country's biggest exchange deepened and amid a row over how much to supervise the growing sector. The bill implements the European Union's Markets in Crypto-Assets Regulation (MiCA), which Poland must approve by July.

Polish prosecutors have launched a multi-million dollar fraud probe into the Zondacrypto exchange, amid allegations -- including from Prime Minister Donald Tusk -- of malign Russian influence, intensifying calls for action on regulation.

Thousands of users of the Zondacrypto exchange have been unable to withdraw their funds. Prosecutors put their total losses



A representation of virtual cryptocurrency Bitcoin (Reuters/File Photo)

at more than 350 million zlotys (\$95.93 million). The government has said the implications are much wider, with Tusk suggesting there is Russian money behind the firm and that its previous sponsorship of events attended by figures from Poland's nationalist opposition raises questions over foreign political interference.

The firm's founder, Sylwester Suszek, disappeared in 2022, and Polish media have reported that his successor, Przemyslaw Kral, is now in Israel, where he holds citizenship, complicating extradition.

"We were dealing with a company whose origins are particularly shady," Tusk told a government meeting earlier this month, citing

Polish security services.

"It's the Russian mafia and its money involved in organising the Zondacrypto exchange," he said, without elaborating. Warsaw has said Russia uses cryptocurrencies to pay saboteurs in Poland. Moscow has repeatedly denied responsibility for sabotage in Poland and elsewhere in Europe.

The government has already tried twice to pass legislation implementing the EU rules, but it was vetoed by President Karol Nawrocki, who is backed by Poland's nationalist opposition. Nawrocki had argued the government bill would drive crypto firms away due to excessive burdens. He submitted his own bill to parliament, which proposed lower penalties for violations than the government's. (Reuters)

Ukrainian drone strikes kill four near Moscow

Ukrainian drone strikes killed four people, including a child, hitting an apartment block and industrial facilities in the city of Ryazan, southwest of Moscow, Russian officials said yesterday. The attacks on the city, some 200 kilometres (125 miles) from Moscow, hit the night after large-scale Russian strikes on Ukraine killed 24 people in Kyiv.

"Today at night, the territory of the Ryazan region was attacked by 99 enemy drones," Ryazan Governor Pavel Malkov.

"The number of dead, unfor-

tunately, rose to four people, including a child." Seven people, he said, were hospitalised. Malkov said authorities were assessing the extent of the damage. Russia's Investigative Committee said it had opened a terrorism probe after the strikes, saying they had targeted "residential and civilian infrastructure." "Two residential multi-story buildings and an industrial facility were damaged," he said. Unverified social media videos showed plumes of smoke rising over Ryazan and a high-rise apartment block with several blackened floors. (AFP)

Sci-fi or battlefield reality: Ukraine's bet on drone swarms

AFP
Lviv, Ukraine

Hundreds of AI-controlled robots operating in unison, talking to each other to autonomously attack targets -- a dystopian vision of the future of war that Ukraine's defence industry wants to make a reality.

Four years into the Russian invasion, the idea -- known as drone swarms -- is one of the hottest topics in military tech in a country that describes itself as the world-leader in drone warfare.

"There is a huge interest," military expert Yury Fedorenko told a recent Drone Autonomy conference, held in an undisclosed location in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv.

"No matter who you speak to, they always say: show them to us. Where are they, we want to see!" he added.

The conference was organised by Iron Cluster, a coalition of defence groups operating out of Lviv.

The prospect of drone swarms, groups of drones that can act together and fulfil set tasks without human intervention, has triggered both anxiety and excitement.

"We've been talking about swarm technology for a very long time, and we in the military have been waiting for it even longer," said Volodymyr "Colt", the head of civil-military cooperation at Ukraine's 412th brigade.

"The only question is when it will happen," he added.

Ukrainian military and defence industry figures told AFP Kyiv had made progress in getting the much-hyped technology off the ground.

Others cautioned it remains some way off and that drone swarms were just one part -- albeit an eye-catching one -- of the much broader race toward autonomous warfare. The appeal is clear.

The swarms would allow a few operators to deploy dozens or hundreds of attack craft simultaneously -- overwhelming enemy defences and helping Ukraine's



Ukraine's FPV drone. (AFP)

army offset Russia's manpower advantage.

"The main purpose is to save the lives of our servicemen," Andrii Lebedenko, the Ukraine armed forces deputy commander-in-chief, told AFP.

"Today we have such projects. They're not large-scale, but they're growing... mass deploy-

ment is possible in the coming years," Lebedenko said.

Defence Minister Mykhailo Fedorov has championed the use of advanced technology to fend off Russian attacks, including launching the Defense AI Center A1.

Its head, Danylo Tsvok, told AFP "drone swarms are currently in the testing phase... there are a lot of

things that we can't say".

Swarmer, a Ukrainian-US company, has emerged as a leader in the field, listing on the US Nasdaq exchange earlier this year.

US CEO Alex Fink told AFP the company had been deploying early swarm technology in combat since April 2024.

Its systems can autonomously deploy multiple drones to an area, when human pilots step in to manually engage a target, or operators select targets and the drones carry out the strikes autonomously.

"It's definitely not at the point where we can trust technology to make strategic decisions or even make tactical decisions about what's a valid target," Fink said in a telephone interview.

"We don't want our systems to make that decision. We want the humans to be in charge."

At the AI defence conference in Lviv, there was some scepticism.

"Drone swarms are totally overhyped... because they make for a good sci-fi story and a visual image," said Yaroslav Azhnyuk, head

of the Fourth Law, which specialises in drone autonomy.

Autonomy, he argued, was about more than just drone swarms. It covered everything from navigation, target selection and attack execution -- and could apply to all kinds of drones. We're focusing on massively scalable full autonomy," he said.

"This is the Manhattan Project of our era," he added -- a reference to the US WWII initiative that produced the first nuclear weapon. Russia has set AI and drones as its top military priorities.

It has "likely fielded a fully autonomous unmanned system in combat", according to an April 2026 report by Kateryna Bondar, an expert with the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Anton Melnyk, co-founder of MITS Capital, set up to fund Ukraine's defence industry, was blunt about the stakes involved.

"Either we will achieve this -- the Armed Forces of Ukraine, together with various Nato partners -- or the enemy will."

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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)
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GULF TIMES

Why India's higher tariffs are unlikely to dent gold, silver demand

India, the world's second-largest gold consumer, has raised tariffs on gold and silver to 15% from 6% in a bid to curb imports and ease pressure on its foreign exchange reserves, as the Iran war strains New Delhi's balance of payments.

The Indian Rupee (INR) has dropped to a fresh historic low, depreciating to over 95.86 against the US Dollar (USD) over the last week.

India meets nearly all of its domestic gold demand through imports and has repeatedly sought to curb consumption. Gold is deeply woven into India's weddings, festivals and cultural traditions, making purchases more essential than discretionary.

India's current account deficit is under pressure from precious metals imports, which New Delhi views as non-essential. While gold and silver import volumes have remained broadly steady, soaring prices have sharply increased the bill, widened external outflows and weighed on the rupee.

India spent a record \$84bn on gold and silver imports in the fiscal year to March, from \$35.5bn a decade earlier. India, which is also the world's largest consumer of silver, uses it in jewellery, coins, bars and industrial applications ranging from solar energy to electronics. Over the past year, demand has been driven more by investment than traditional jewellery and silverware, with inflows into silver ETFs rising to a record high.

India meets nearly all of its domestic gold demand through imports and has repeatedly sought to curb consumption

Indian buyers are price-sensitive, and sharp price rises often prompt them to delay purchases. Yet despite local gold prices rising by 443% over the past decade, annual demand has remained broadly steady at 666-803 metric tonnes, averaging about 718 tonnes.

Demand was also resilient when India raised gold import tariffs to 10% from 2% between 2012 and 2013. After already absorbing a 76.5% rise in gold prices in 2025, buyers are unlikely to stop purchasing because of a 9% tariff hike.

Indian households buy gold for long-term value and a hedge against inflation and currency

weakness, while in rural areas farmers often use it as a financial buffer during emergencies.

Gold-backed loans are also among the quickest ways for millions of Indians to access funds, with banks and finance companies offering credit within minutes. Jewellery demand has traditionally accounted for nearly 75% of India's total gold consumption, while investment demand — in the form of coins, bars and gold exchange-traded funds (ETFs) — makes up the rest.

Domestic jewellery retail stocks have experienced sharp sell-offs and heavy selling pressure. The sudden hike of the precious metal import duty from 6% to 15% has triggered investor anxiety regarding short-term demand contractions and margin compression. Titan Company (Tanishq) — the market leader, saw its stock price drop sharply under pressure. Analysts fear that escalating retail pricing could lead to a temporary 10% volume sales dip ahead of the traditional festive seasons.

Demand for jewellery was already weakening because of high prices, and further gains are likely to hit purchases in the short term and push buyers towards lower-carat items. Investors buy gold in anticipation of price gains, while Indian consumers traditionally view the metal as a safe-haven asset and a hedge against inflation.

Higher tariffs raise local prices, reinforcing gold's appeal as an appreciating asset. Rising prices can also draw in new investors worried about missing further gains. Investment demand for gold surpassed jewellery consumption for the first time in the March quarter as investors turned to the metal amid weak equity returns. Inflows into local gold ETFs have been rising and are likely to remain strong.

Rising gold prices had already widened the margins for so-called grey market operators and the latest duty hike has pushed them to about 18%, from around 9%. Unofficial gold imports remained above 100 tonnes until 2023 but fell sharply after New Delhi cut tariffs in 2024. They dropped to 69.2 tonnes in 2024 from 156.1 tonnes in 2023, and declined further to 20.4 tonnes in 2025. The margin on smuggling a kilogram of gold has climbed to a record 3mn rupees, creating a stronger incentive for grey market operators. — Reuters

In the ring



Humanoid robots demonstrate their boxing skills in front of visitors during an event to open a robot themed park in Seoul. (AFP)

The Qatar model: investing for an age of abundance

By Nicole Junkermann
Doha

Artificial intelligence is changing the economics of the digital world faster than most observers can follow. Content that once required expertise, time and cost can now be produced instantly and at scale. Text, images, video, software: the marginal cost of all of it is collapsing toward zero.

For most of the past two decades, digital value was driven by volume. More content meant more visibility, more engagement, more revenue. But when supply becomes effectively unlimited, that model breaks. The challenge is no longer production. It's attention.

This shift is already influencing how capital is being deployed globally. And Qatar, more clearly than almost anywhere else, has positioned itself on the right side of it.

The 2022 FIFA World Cup is the obvious starting point, but the obvious reading undersells it. Hosting the tournament wasn't a prestige project. It was a proof of concept for a sovereign strategy: that a small state, correctly capitalised and correctly patient, can permanently alter its position in the global economy by building assets that can't be replicated. A World Cup doesn't come back quickly. But the infrastructure, the relationships, the institutional credibility that came with it: they compound.

Qatar Sports Investments understood this before the tournament was won. The acquisition of Paris Saint-Germain in 2011 wasn't a vanity purchase. It was an early bet on the thesis that live sport would become one of the most defensible categories of media in an era of digital fragmentation.



A calm evening at the famous Souq Waqif.



A view of the iconic National Museum of Qatar.

A Champions League match can't be generated by a language model. Its value is inseparable from the moment it occurs in, the uncertainty it carries, and the shared attention it commands.

QSI has since extended that logic to SC Braga and other properties, building a portfolio that treats football clubs not as trophies but as nodes in a global content and commerce network.

beIN Media Group makes the same argument from a different direction. Building a sports broadcasting platform from scratch, in a region where rights infrastructure was underdeveloped, required the kind of capital patience that short-term markets can't sustain. The result is a platform that now holds rights in over 40 countries

— not because the asset was cheap but because Qatar was willing to invest at a horizon that most commercial broadcasters couldn't match. In an age when streaming platforms are fighting over synthetic entertainment, beIN holds something harder to manufacture: live rights to events that people really care about.

The cultural dimension matters too. Institutions such as the Museum of Islamic Art, the National Museum of Qatar, and the broader Qatar Foundation ecosystem represent a deliberate investment in experiences that resist digitalisation. You can't stream the feeling of Souq Waqif. You can't algorithmically replicate the indescribable gravity of being in the presence of an original artefact. These investments

operate on the same logic as the sporting ones: scarcity, in an age of abundance, is the moat.

What makes Qatar's position distinctive isn't just the assets. It's the capital model behind them. The Qatar Investment Authority operates on a multi-decade timeframe that most Western institutional investors structurally struggle to match.

Short-term performance pressures constrain the kind of patient, infrastructure-layer investing that Qatar has been doing for decades. The value of that approach isn't always visible in normal conditions. It becomes legible under pressure — and the region is currently absorbing the most serious stress test in a generation. The assets that hold their structural logic through that kind of disruption are the ones worth paying attention to.

Despite the fears many have, AI isn't destroying value. It's redistributing it, rapidly and in ways that favour the holders of scarce, irreplaceable experience assets over the producers of abundant, interchangeable content. The institutions and markets best positioned for that transition are the ones that understood, before everyone else, that the real competition was never about content volume.

Qatar understood that. The assets it has spent two decades building — in sport, in culture, in media infrastructure — aren't just impressive. They were built to last longer than any single crisis, serving generations to come.

• Nicole Junkermann is an international investor focused on technology, sports and media. She leads NJF Holdings, a global investment group, and its sports platform Gameday by NJF Holdings, which invests in sports leagues, media rights and technology-driven fan engagement.



A pre-match view of the 2022 FIFA World Cup Qatar semi-final between France and Morocco at the Al Bayt Stadium, Al Khor. (Reuters file photo)

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Nantes reels from teen killing in drug-linked gun violence

AFP
Nantes, France

France's Interior Minister Laurent Nunez yesterday pledged to stamp out drug crime after shooters killed a 15-year-old in the western city of Nantes in a suspected settling of scores linked to dealing.

France is battling drug-fuelled violence in several cities, with dealing spots near residential buildings and gangs ensnaring teenagers into the trade.

The shooting on Thursday evening, which also wounded a 13-year-old and a 14-year-old, is the latest deadly incident that could be linked to trafficking in France in a week.

The 15-year-old was shot dead in the hall of a tower block in the working-class neighbourhood of Port-Boyer, the city's prosecutor and a police source said.

"We will not lose this war" against drugs, Nunez said at the scene on yesterday morning.

He told the press that the shooting was obviously linked to drug peddling, as it occurred on a "very sought-after" dealing spot.

But only the investigation could determine whether the teens hit had any link to the trade, he added.

"These dealing spots are set up in places where people live," Nunez said.

"There are young people passing through, who sometimes wait in a building's hall because it's raining. And then you have people who show up and open fire to intimidate, to scare, and now to kill. Obviously this is unacceptable," he said.

On Thursday night, residents were in shock in the northern



France's Interior Minister Laurent Nunez (C) and Mayor of Nantes Johanna Rolland (R) arrive in the Port-Boyer neighbourhood in Nantes yesterday. (AFP)

neighbourhood of Port-Boyer.

"I'm so fed up," said Paola, presenting herself as an aunt of the teen who was killed, urging the authorities to improve security.

"It's not normal for young people to lose their lives like this. It's unacceptable, just unacceptable. They're children," she said.

Stella, a 35-year-old who declined to give her surname, gripped the hand of her three-year-old son, whose trousers were dotted with blood.

She said her 14-year-old nephew – who was wounded in the thigh – and young son had been on the way to see their grandmother without her when the shooting broke out.

"I'm living a nightmare and fu-

rious that I almost lost my son," she said.

Angeline, an 18-year-old nail technician who did not give her surname for fear of reprisal, said she had been coming back from grocery shopping with her mother and dog when the shooting occurred. "We heard gunshots – about 10, twice – and I yanked my mother by the collar to get back into our building," she said. "I just saw a lot of people – people in balaclavas and dressed all in black – running through the grass."

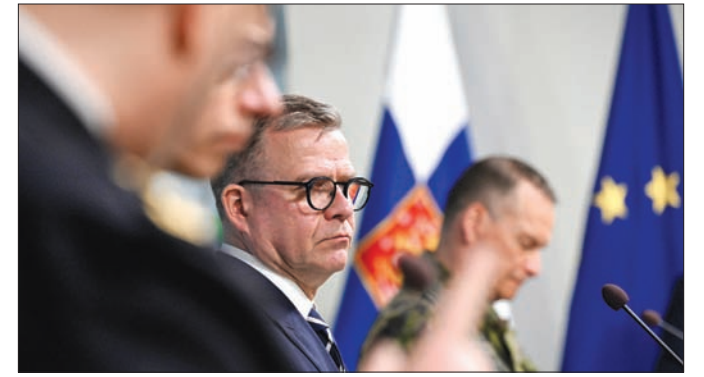
The young adult said the neighbourhood felt increasingly insecure. "Things have been constantly getting worse here. People are afraid, shootings are frequent," she

said. "In the afternoons, the children's playgrounds are deserted because parents are too scared," she added.

Nunez said police would continue to dismantle drug rings, but he would soon urge parliament to help increase fines against drug consumers. "At some point, consumers need to come to their senses," he said.

"When people use narcotics for recreational purposes, the end result is that one day we end up here... with a 15-year-old who has lost his life."

He said the plan would increase the fine for drug consumption from 200 to 500 euros, and even suspend or remove an offender's driving licence in some cases.



Finnish PM Petteri Orpo (Reuters)

No drones detected in Finnish airspace

AFP
Helsinki

No drones were confirmed in Finland's airspace yesterday, Finnish authorities said, after an early-morning emergency alert led to jets being scrambled and air traffic suspended over Helsinki for several hours. Safety authorities issued an alert for the Uusimaa region in southern Finland, which includes the capital and is home to 1.8 million inhabitants.

They urged the public to remain indoors due to reports of potential stray drones linked to Ukraine's operations in the early hours of Friday.

"The Finnish defence forces received information about drones that may be straying into Finland," the military's deputy chief of staff and operations Kari Nisula told a press conference.

The drones were "related to Ukraine's drone operations in its defensive battle against the Russian invasion," he said.

"We have no information or observations that drones entered Finnish territory this time," Nisula stressed. "There was no violation of our airspace... The

drones weren't heading this way," added Finnish air force commander Timo Herranen.

Fighter jets were scrambled and air traffic at Helsinki airport was suspended for few hours due to the drone warning. Since late March, several stray Ukrainian drones have crashed in Finland.

The incidents have raised debate about Finland's ability to tackle drone threats and warn its population, and has speeded up the country's investments in drone defence capability. Finland's government has been in contact with Ukraine after the earlier drones strayed into the country. Finnish Prime Minister Petteri Orpo reiterated yesterday it was "not acceptable" that Ukrainian drones crossed into Finnish territory but warned they could "continue to stray" there. "There is no direct military threat against Finland," he said, adding the drones were not "intentionally headed for Finland".

Helsinki airport said in a statement flights were operating again, "but the disruption will cause delays and cancellations on Friday, May 15. Morning delays may also affect departing and arriving flights later in the afternoon."

Spain's PM faces key Andalusia vote after defeats

AFP
Madrid

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's Socialists seek to avoid a drubbing in the key region of Andalusia on Sunday, following a string of electoral losses ahead of next year's national vote.

While Sanchez's international profile has risen amid clashes with US President Donald Trump and criticism of Israel's war in Gaza, graft scandals involving relatives and former close political allies have eroded his standing at home.

Andalusia, known for its white-washed villages and Costa del Sol beach resorts, is Spain's most populous region with about 8.7 mn inhabitants, roughly 18% of the country's total.

For nearly four decades, the southern region was governed by the Socialists before they ceded power to the mainstream conservative Popular Party (PP) in 2019.

Polls suggest the PP is close to retaining its absolute majority in Andalusia's 109-seat parliament,



Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez delivers a speech at a rally ahead of the Andalusian regional elections in Seville yesterday. (Reuters)

while the Socialists are set to finish second with what could be their worst-ever result in the region.

The Socialists' candidate is Maria Jesus Montero, who stepped down as Sanchez's finance minister and deputy prime minister to contest the regional election.

Sanchez is "taking a big risk because the person who would be

defeated is precisely someone who until very recently was his right hand in government and in the party", political scientist Cristina Monge told AFP. "Symbolically, it would be a very hard defeat."

The PP has won regional elections in Extremadura, Aragon and Castile and Leon in recent months, though short of outright

majorities. That has forced it to form coalition governments with the far-right Vox party in Extremadura and Aragon, with talks underway for a similar pact in Castile and Leon.

In exchange, Vox has pushed for access to state benefits to be based on a principle of "national priority", which would give preference to those with a "real" link to a territory. Sanchez has said the policy promotes "xenophobia, racism, segregation and confrontation".

Andalusia's PP leader, Juan Manuel Moreno, has said he would like to renew his absolute majority to govern without Vox.

He has framed the election as a choice between "harmony or discord", accusing Montero of turning Andalusia into a "fiscal hell" due to her tax policies as finance minister.

Montero, in turn, has attacked Moreno over a healthcare scandal that emerged last year involving delays in follow-up screenings for hundreds of women who later developed breast cancer. She has accused his administration of failing to provide transparency on the number of affected patients.

Orban's media empire crumbles after Hungary election defeat

Reuters
Budapest

The media empire built by former Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's government, a key pillar of the nationalist leader's 16 years in power, is swiftly unravelling following an election last month that abruptly ended his rule.

Within weeks of the vote, which the centre-right opposition led by Peter Magyar won with a landslide, senior figures at some of the most prominent pro-Orban outlets have been pushed out and a flagship news programme was scrapped.

The tone of public service media changed overnight, with more opposition voices appearing even before Magyar formally took power, while pro-Orban influencers have practically disappeared from social media.

These are the first cracks in Orban's tightly controlled media system that is set to undergo a shake-up under the new government, sworn in earlier this week.

Magyar, who called public service media a "factory of lies", has pledged to restore press freedom, create a new media law and a new media authority.

Veteran nationalist Orban was

celebrated by conservatives in Europe and the US as the mastermind of an "illiberal democracy", however seemingly his voters grew weary of several allegations of corruption and more so, of economic stagnation.

In the April 12 election, Magyar's centre-right Tisza party ended Orban's 16-year rule and gained a two-thirds majority in parliament needed to undo Orban's constitutional overhaul.

Leaders of the European Union are closely watching Hungary as a test case for restoring democratic checks and balances – media freedom was one of the key rule-of-law issues over which Orban's government often clashed with Brussels.

Under Orban, state media came under increasing government control as new media laws were enacted, and several private outlets were either shut down or taken over by pro-government businessmen.

Hungary fell to 74th place in 2026 from 23rd in 2010 in Reporters Without Borders' press freedom index. Orban's government denied exerting pressure on the media and said it met EU standards on media freedom.

Hungary's most popular TV channel, TV2, fired its news director after the election and took its



Former Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban (Reuters/File Photo)

flagship news broadcast off the air. Its owner, pro-Orban businessman Miklos Vaszily told news site 444.hu last week that the news programme was scrapped due to the "erosion of its brand".

TV2's news anchors had endorsed Orban before the election.

Last week, the editor-in-chief of pro-Orban news site Index was removed after the site admitted that a document it published purporting to reveal Magyar's secret programme of tax hikes was "not the economic plan of the Tisza party."

The fake document was a key element in Orban's campaign against

Magyar. Index did not comment on who created it.

Meanwhile online, a group of young pro-Orban influencers called Megafon have drastically cut back the number of their short videos published on Facebook, according to a tally by fact-checking site Lakmusz.hu.

In a podcast hosted by right-wing rapper Dopeman, Orban distanced himself from "centre-right media that formerly supported us" such as TV2 and Index.

After the election, state TV M1's evening news quickly showed signs of change. A study by think-tank Republikon found that its coverage

overwhelmingly favoured Orbán, with opposition figures portrayed negatively, but the week after the election more diverse voices appeared and reporting became more balanced.

The shift was most visible when Magyar was invited on to state radio and TV and clashed with reporters as he questioned them on why he was not invited there earlier.

"We would like a truly balanced, objective news service... we would like its leaders to be selected in a parity-based, negotiated manner," Magyar said after the inaugural meeting of his cabinet on Wednesday this week.

In one of his first decrees as prime minister, Magyar on Thursday ordered a "comprehensive and immediate" review of public service media and its financing.

However, creating a genuinely balanced public service media will be a major challenge, analysts say. Krisztina Balogh, a news reporter at the public service television between 2016 and 2018, detailed in a Facebook post how she said editors demanded that news fitted the government's narrative.

"Once I was asked to find a doctor who would say in front of the camera that migrants were dangerous because they spread disease," she wrote.

An anti-immigrant campaign had boosted Orban's popularity which helped him win three elections in a row after 2010.

Gabor Polyak, the head of Eotvos Lorand University's media department, warned that success in reshaping the media would depend as much on political will as legal reforms.

"If the political elite accepts that the job of journalism is to criticise and to keep a distance from politics, then almost any public service media can work well," Polyak said.

Another pillar of Orbán's media system was KESMA, a conglomerate of nearly 500 outlets, including all regional newspapers, set up by allies in 2018.

Magyar said he would halt the large flow of state advertising to the group and review its creation, which was exempted from competition scrutiny.

Such a move would hit KESMA hard, as major outlets like TV2 and Index could survive thanks to big audiences, but regional print papers, for example, might face closure, media expert Polyak said. The shift could also restore market competition and boost independent media revenues.

KESMA did not respond to Reuters' requests for comment.



Visitors explore books, cultural pavilions and interactive activities during the first two days of the 35th Doha International Book Fair, taking place at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre. Families, students, academics and book lovers gathered for the region's largest edition of the annual literary event. **PICTURES:** Ram Chand



DIBF draws crowds with books, culture, family activities

By Joey Aguilar
Doha

Packed halls, lively talks and family-friendly activities marked the first two days of the 35th Doha International Book Fair (DIBF), as thousands of visitors gathered at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre to explore books, culture and interactive experiences celebrating literature and heritage.

The fair, organised by Qatar's Ministry of Culture and running until May 23, is the largest edition in the event's history. It has attracted dignitaries, ambassadors, diplomats, university professors, researchers, students and book lovers from Qatar and abroad, reflecting the growing regional and international standing of the annual event.

Visitors filled the exhibition halls browsing Arabic and international titles ranging from literature and history to science, arts and children's books. Long queues and crowded aisles were seen at many publishing booths as readers searched for new releases and special collections.

One of the key attractions at the fair is the Ministry of Culture's large central pavilion, which showcases Qatar's heritage and history through books, artworks and interactive displays. Visitors can explore traditional



Qatari culture through experiences such as creating their own Sadu patterns and using a digital map highlighting different parts of Qatar. Families and children were

among the biggest groups attending the fair during its first two days. The "Children's Doha 2026" section drew large crowds with drawing activities, educational games and immersive experiences de-



signed to introduce young visitors to Qatari culture and heritage in a fun and engaging way.

Children were seen taking part in colouring workshops and digital interactive spaces, while mascots and cultural characters added to the venue's lively atmosphere. Parents described the fair as both educational and entertaining, offering activities suitable for all age groups.

The event also features strong international participation, with embassies and cultural institutions from across the Arab world and beyond showcasing their cultures through books, artworks and displays. Participating countries include Azerbaijan, France, Saudi Arabia, the United States, Japan and Morocco, among others.

A panel discussion on media in the age of artificial intelligence also attracted attention from visitors and professionals interested in the future of journalism and communication technologies.

In addition to publishers and cultural institutions, Qatar Museums is presenting a curated collection of award-winning publications, exhibition catalogues and new releases that highlight the role of books in connecting audiences with art, culture and heritage.

To complement the reading experience, several coffee shops



have been set up across the venue, allowing visitors to relax, meet friends and continue browsing books throughout the day.

This year's edition features 910 exhibition booths and more than

1.85mn books covering around 231,000 titles. Organisers said the fair will also see the launch of 143 new books, alongside 46 panel discussions, 69 workshops and 46 seminars hosted on the main stage.

UDC brings 'Torba Market' to The Pearl Island

Reinforcing its commitment to creating vibrant, lifestyle-driven destinations, United Development Company (UDC), master developer of The Pearl and Gewan Islands, has introduced the popular "Torba Market" to a new waterfront setting in Qanat Quartier at The Pearl Island.

The market will take place from on Saturdays, May 16 and 23, from 5pm to 9pm, and will continue throughout the Eid al-Adha weekend from May 28 to 30. This activation marks the beginning of a broader seasonal market programme, with an extended edition planned from November 2026 through May 2027.

Set against the picturesque canals and colourful facades of Qanat Quartier, Torba Market introduces a charming open-air souq experience that blends seamlessly with the district's Venetian-inspired architecture. The market offers a refreshing outdoor setting where visitors can stroll, explore, and engage, creating a distinctive lifestyle experience that complements the destination's unique character. More than a marketplace, Torba



Market serves as a dynamic platform connecting farmers, artisans, home-based businesses, and local entrepreneurs with a community seeking authentic, mindful experiences beyond traditional retail. Featuring locally sourced organic produce, artisanal foods, and handcrafted goods, the market celebrates sustainability while supporting local talent and entrepreneurship.

Hosted along the Qanat Quartier bridge, the market transforms the space into a pedestrian-friendly environment, with road closures

implemented during activation hours to ensure a safe, welcoming, and immersive visitor experience.

Through this initiative, UDC further reinforces Qanat Quartier as a distinctive lifestyle destination, where architectural charm is complemented by curated experiences that enrich community life and champion local entrepreneurship.

The activation reflects UDC's continued focus on shaping integrated, experience-led environments that enhance liveability and create meaningful connections between people, culture, and place.

Embassy of Moldova hosts cultural diplomacy exhibition

The Embassy of Moldova in Doha recently hosted an 'Art, Fashion and Cultural Diplomacy (AFCD)' exhibition, featuring around 100 artworks to mark Europe Day and World Hat Walk 2026. The exhibition was attended by Moldovan ambassador Iulian Grigorita, ambassadors of Romania, Kazakhstan, Vietnam, Ukraine, and Central Africa, AFCD founder and patron Farhan al-Sheikh al-Sayed, and its secretary-general, Rodica Grigorita. Heads of Mission of Albania and Honduras also attended the opening.

A fashion show was held, with models and guests wearing handmade hats by AFCD members, commemorating the World Hat Walk 2026. Live music concert was performed by renowned celebrities Georgio Martin



(From left) Ambassador Iulian Grigorita and spouse Rodica Grigorita, Anca Martin, Georgio Martin, ambassador of Romania Daniel Tanase, and Farhan al-Sheikh al-Sayed.

and Anca Martin. The AFCD group has around 50 members, comprising

ambassadors, spouses of ambassadors, diplomats and their children.

Russia-Islamic World Summit kicks off in Kazan

By Amjad Vanimal
Kazan, Russia

The 17th International Economic Forum "Russia - Islamic World: Kazan Forum" has commenced in the capital of Tatarstan on May 12, drawing record international participation and highlighting Russia's growing engagement with the Islamic world.

Organisers said this year's edition is the largest in the forum's history, with representatives from more than 100 countries taking part. Head of the Tatarstan Investment Development Agency Taliya Minullina told reporters that del-



Taliya Minullina addresses the media at the Tatarstan government headquarters in Kazan, Russia.

egates from 103 countries are participating, marking an all-time high for the forum.

"We have 103 countries registered. This is a record for us; we've never had such representation,"

Minullina said during a briefing at the Tatarstan government headquarters.

She noted that the forum's business programme features 149 events, including sessions, round-

tables, and exhibitions covering sectors such as Islamic finance, international trade, the halal industry, construction, digitalisation, artificial intelligence, culture, education, and media.

Russian President Vladimir Putin also welcomed participants in a message published on the forum's official website, reaffirming Russia's commitment to strengthening ties with Islamic nations.

"Representatives of various religions and peoples have lived in our country for centuries, each preserving its uniqueness and identity. It is symbolic that the forum is being held in the Republic of Tatarstan - a dynamically developing Russian region where tradi-



tions of interethnic harmony are carefully preserved," Putin said in his address.

The forum attracted more than 22,000 participants from 96 countries and 82 Russian regions last year.

Held from May 12 to 17, the forum serves as a platform to enhance trade, economic, scientific, technical, social, and cultural co-operation between Russia and member states of the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation.