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Amir offers Eid prayers, receives well-wishers



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani offered Eid al-Adha prayers along with citizens at Lusail prayer ground yesterday morning.

The prayers were also attended by His Highness Personal Representative of the Amir Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad al-Thani, His Highness Sheikh Abdullah bin Khalifa al-Thani, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Khalifa al-Thani, HE Sheikh Jassim bin Khalifa al-Thani and HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani.

HE the Speaker of the Shura Council Hassan bin Abdullah al-

Ghanem also attended the gathering alongside Their Excellencies ministers, Shura Council members, ambassadors and heads of diplomatic missions accredited to Qatar.

During the Eid sermon, Sheikh Yahya Bati al-Nuaimi highlighted the importance of honouring the rituals of Islam, describing them as a reflection of piety and obedience to God.

He said Eid al-Adha was a significant spiritual occasion that reminded Muslims of devotion, gratitude and worship, while also strengthening family ties and reviving religious traditions in an atmosphere of celebration and communal prayer.

Al-Nuaimi also stressed the im-

portance of Udhya (sacrificial offering), describing it as one of the central rituals of Eid al-Adha and urging Muslims to observe it in accordance with Islamic teachings.

His Highness the Amir received well-wishers offering Eid al-Adha greetings at Lusail Palace following Eid prayers.

Among those received by His Highness were HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani and HE the Shura Council Speaker Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanem. Their Excellencies sheikhs, ministers, undersecretaries of ministries, members of the Shura

تميم بن حمد @TamimBinHamad
"I congratulate the citizens and residents, and all the peoples of our Islamic nation as a whole, on the Blessed Eid al-Adha, may God return it to everyone with goodness, reassurance, and peace"

Council and groups of citizens also gathered to convey their greetings on the occasion.

The reception was attended by His Highness the Personal Representative of the Amir Sheikh

Jassim bin Hamad al-Thani, His Highness Sheikh Abdullah bin Khalifa al-Thani, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Khalifa al-Thani and HE Sheikh Jassim bin Khalifa al-Thani. (QNA) Page 12

Trump: Still have issues to resolve with Iran

Reuters
Washington

President Donald Trump said yesterday the US and Iran still have issues to resolve in peace talks, after Washington dismissed an Iranian state television report of a framework deal to restore shipping through the Strait of Hormuz within a month and to lift a US naval blockade on Iranian ships.

Trump told a cabinet meeting that Iran remained keen to end the war, which has choked global energy supplies through the strategic waterway, but that the terms did not satisfy Washington. "Iran is very much intent, they want very much to make a deal. So far they haven't gotten there... We're not satisfied with it, but we will be. Either that or we'll have to just finish the job," he said, without elaborating.

"The deal has got to be perfect," he later added, insisting that the Strait of Hormuz would be open immediately after a deal is reached and that no single country would have control over the waterway. Iranian state TV reported that it had obtained an unofficial draft of a memorandum of understanding under which the US would lift its blockade and withdraw its forces from Iran's vicinity. It said the issue of US troops in the region needed further discussion, without elaborating. It did not mention Iran's nuclear programme, which the US wants disbanded. In a statement on social media, the White House dismissed the report as a "complete fabrication", while Tehran did not comment. Publicly, the two sides previously have outlined positions starkly at odds.



President Donald Trump speaks during the cabinet meeting yesterday. (Reuters)

Pilgrims perform last Haj ritual

AFP
Mina

Muslims stoned the devil yesterday in the climactic ceremony of a Haj pilgrimage. From dawn, crowds of pilgrims gathered in the valley of Mina, southeast of the holy city of Makkah in Saudi Arabia, to throw pebbles at concrete pillars symbolising the devil. The pilgrims have been contending with searing desert heat as they perform the days-long, mostly outdoor rituals, with temperatures reaching 44C in Makkah and Mina yesterday. Saudi authorities ramped up anti-heat measures including giant fans, mist sprayers, cooled floors and trucks distributing drinking water. More than 1.7mn people are taking part in the Haj this year, slightly up from 2025 despite the Middle East war. Despite the physical challenges,



Pilgrims at the Grand Mosque performed the 'Tawaf al-Ifadah' circumambulation yesterday.

many were overjoyed to complete the pilgrimage, which is one of the five pillars of Islam and must be performed at least once by all Muslims with the means to do so.

"I can't believe I've finished the Haj rituals," Iraqi pilgrim Adnan Hamad, 58, told AFP, as his daughters looked on. "Every step was enjoyable despite the extreme hardship."

Al-Attiah: Qatar mourns architect of its gas era

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

HE Abdullah bin Hamad al-Attiah, a distinguished statesman, former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Energy and Industry, and one of the most influential figures in the country's modern economic transformation, passed away in London yesterday. Al-Attiah 74, devoted nearly five decades of his life to public service, playing a central role in shaping Qatar's energy strategy and laying the foundations for its emergence as a global leader in liquefied natural gas (LNG). Widely regarded as one of the key architects of Qatar's gas industry boom, he earned respect as a visionary who helped transform the nation



from a modest oil producer into one of the world's largest LNG exporters. To Page 4

Funeral prayers for the deceased will be held today after Asr prayer at Nasser bin Abdullah Al Attiyah Mosque in Al Khraitiyat, before burial at Al Attiyah cemetery. Condolences will be received at Al Attiyah Majlis in Al Khraitiyat.

Communities hail Qatar's culture of coexistence

Representatives of Arab and Muslim communities residing in Qatar said Eid al-Adha represents an important annual occasion for promoting the values of generosity, solidarity and compassion that remain deeply rooted in Arab and Islamic societies.

In statements to QNA, they stressed that the holiday goes beyond its religious significance, carrying humanitarian and social meanings that strengthen family ties, co-operation and community cohesion. They also described Doha as a unique model of coexistence among different cultures and communities.

Heritage and Rare Books Adviser in Qatar Foundation (QF), Professor Mohamed Hammam Fikri said Arab and Muslim communities in Qatar, including the Egyptian community, are keen to preserve Eid traditions that combine customs from their home countries with Qatari traditions.

He noted that preparations begin during the first 10 days of Dhul Hijjah, with prayers and Tak-

beer creating a spiritual atmosphere ahead of Eid morning prayers.

Fikri added that traditional Egyptian dishes such as Fattah and liver meals remain closely linked to Eid celebrations and the sacrifice ritual, while charity initiatives and sacrifice donation projects have become increasingly popular in preserving the spirit of giving and social solidarity.

He also highlighted the importance of family visits, children's gifts and social gatherings during the holiday.

Meanwhile, actor and director Mohamed el-Sunni Dafallah, Arts Co-ordinator at the Sudanese Cultural Center in Qatar, described Eid al-Adha as a season of love, family reunions and kindness.

He said Sudanese families celebrate through traditional clothing, festive foods, incense and visits to relatives, neighbours and friends, adding that the Sudanese Cultural Center in Qatar organises cultural and artistic activities reflecting Sudanese heritage during the holiday. To Page 4



A view of Eid festivities in Doha yesterday. PICTURE: Noushad Thekayil



Qatar affirms commitment to UN Charter, calls for ending ongoing breaches

QNA
New York

Qatar has underscored that it is thoroughly committed to the United Nations Charter and called for ending the persistent breaches of this Charter. Qatar pointed out that it will steadfastly continue its efforts, as well as its regional and international partnerships, to reinforce the UN-centric, Charter-based international order.

This was declared in the statement delivered by HE Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the United Nations Sheikhha Alya Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani before the High-level Open Debate: Upholding the UN Charter and

Strengthening the UN-Centred International System, convened at the UN headquarters in New York.

The UN Charter, whose pillars had been established by the end of WWII, has never been merely a legal document on a single day, but rather a moral treaty based on an enduring pledge to keep the scourge of wars at bay, Her Excellency underlined.

She noted that the Charter-based international order is currently facing unprecedented challenges demonstrated in the egregious attacks on the sovereignty of nations and their territorial integrity. These assaults erode the UN's credibility and create a sorely needed credible political will that confirms commitment to this Charter and strengthens plu-



HE Sheikhha Alya Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani

rality through the United Nations, she continued.

Her Excellency further clarified that the current global challenges require a collective internation-

al response that aligns with the purposes of the Charter and the founding objectives of the United Nations. In this regard, Sheikhha Alya stressed the importance of the thorough implementation of the Charter principles, indicating that it is essential to avoid selectivity when it comes to interpreting the Charter's provisions.

In addition, Her Excellency highlighted the principle of equality in sovereignty among nations, emphasizing that the use of force or the threat of using it must be prohibited, especially amid the current conditions that mark flagrant violations of international law and international humanitarian law.

Qatar recognizes that it is critical for the UN to remain the pivotal

framework of the existing international order, the representative underlined, adding that Qatar stresses the need to accelerate the UN system overhaul to have a more inclusive and effective international order that fits the challenges of the 21st century, while strengthening the United Nations financially, in human resources, and institutionally to fulfill its mandate.

She focused on the importance of investing in the conflict-prevention system and addressing the root causes of these conflicts through backing mediation and preventive diplomatic dialogue mechanisms in alignment with the Charter's objectives, as well as the relevant UN resolutions.

The representative recalled that Qatar touts its prominent role in

the areas of mediation and preventive diplomacy as core pillars in its foreign policy. She pointed out that Qatar has distinguished itself as a strategic partner of the UN and a trusted international mediator, whose efforts encompassed the facilitation of ceasefire agreements, prisoner exchanges, conflict resolution, and peace accords across various continents.

In this context, Sheikhha Alya reiterated that Qatar is grateful for the ongoing Pakistan-led mediation between the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Iran and backs these efforts. She confirmed that Qatar fully supports these mediation efforts for de-escalation, which ultimately help boost peace and stability in the region.

Eid celebrated with prayers, community gatherings, festivities

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

Citizens and residents in the country celebrated Eid al-Adha yesterday, beginning with morning prayers, and shared the joy of the occasion with friends and family. The Ministry of Endowment (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs made extensive arrangements for the faithful to perform morning prayers, with 733 mosques and open prayer grounds across the country to ensure everyone can participate at a convenient location.

The ministry had ensured that worshippers had easy access to the prayer grounds, and special arrangements had been made to facilitate crowd movement across all locations. Eid al-Adha, also known as the Festival of Sacrifice, is an occasion for family gatherings and visits to friends and well-wishers. People were seen exchanging greetings after the prayers, and many also visited family and friends to share the joy of the occasion. It was a joyous occasion, with families and friends sharing the festive spirit and offering prayerful wishes.

Meanwhile, many of the residents went out to meet friends and family members who were staying in different parts of the coun-



People exchange Eid greetings: PICTURE: Shaji Kayamkulam

try. Braving the heat, community members gathered at various locations and spent time together. Many of the families gathered at major outing spots such as Al Khor Park, Dukhan, Mesaieed, and several beaches.

As government and private organisations have declared a holiday on the occasion, families and children have had a great time enjoying the occasion, with several programmes taking place at various destinations across the country.

A family that visited Dukhan Community Centre said it was a great time to meet their friends and share a meal after a long time. "During the Eid al-Fitr holidays,

we could not visit most of our friends, especially those who reside outside of Doha, due to the regional turbulences prevalent at that time. However, with the situation greatly improved, we could make it during this Eid and could spend some quality time with our buddies. It was great to catch up with some of our dear friends and have lunch together," said an Indian expatriate.

Similarly, many families had visited Al Khor Park, a favourite destination for families and children. "We went to the Al Khor Park in a group of friends and families. It was a great occasion to share the joy, and the children enjoyed playing a variety of games. Though



Eid al-Adha prayers at Ali Bin Ali Mosque: PICTURE: Shaji Kayamkulam

it was slightly hot, it was a great time, and we managed to spend the daytime under the shade and left the place in the afternoon," said a member of the group.

Furthermore, various entities in the country have organised programmes and festivities to mark the occasion, and most events will run until the weekend. Old Doha Port is hosting four days of Eid al-Adha festivities with traditional performances and family entertainment. Various shopping malls and leisure destinations have also announced a number of Eid-themed entertainment programmes and promotions for visitors.

The Workers Support and Insurance Fund has organised a number of public events under the theme "Eid al-Adha Celebrations 2026" during the first three days of Eid. The celebrations are held at three locations across the country: Asian Town in the



Performances at Old Doha Port: PICTURE: Thajudheen

Doha Industrial Area, Kreeq Sports Stadium behind Barwa Village and opposite Madinatna, and Barwa Workers Recreation Complex in the Al Khor Industrial Area.

Katara Cultural Village is host-

ing a number of Eid festivities, with breathtaking fireworks displays over the waterfront as one of the major attractions. Most of the festivities at these venues will continue till the weekend.

Folk arts foster Eid joy, cultural identity

QNA
Doha

Qatar's enduring folk vocabulary - carried forward despite rapid modern change - remains viscerally ingrained in the nation's collective memory, serving as a living archive of ancestral identity, heritage, and long-held traditions passed from generation to generation.

At the heart of this legacy are Qatar's vibrant folk arts, long considered the cultural heartbeat of Eid celebrations. These traditions have been meticulously preserved through audio-visual recordings archived by the Qatar Media Corporation, as well as through extensive documentation by Qatari heritage scholars, ensuring their survival as a cross-generational cultural inheritance.

Qatar News Agency (QNA) reached a bunch of heritage researchers, cultural critics, and musicians who clarified that these folk arts function as a historical record capturing the joy of Eid, firmly rooted in national identity and carried forward as an integral part of Qatar's cultural DNA.

Music to the ears

Writer, journalist, and music critic Ibrahim al-Mutawa noted that Qatar's and the Gulf's rich folkloric traditions overflow with time-honoured chants and communal songs tied to life's major occasions -- from Eid and weddings to work, seafaring, and pearl-diving voyages -- each with its own artistic signature and expressive style.

He emphasized that the late composer Abdulaziz Nasser played a pivotal, era-defining role in safeguarding this musical heritage, leaving behind iconic works that resonated across the Gulf and the Arab world since the 1970s. Musi-

cians and heritage researchers note that among the traditional songs worked on by Abdulaziz Nasser, one of the most enduring is 'Ya Al-Aido', which was recorded for Qatar Radio in 1970 and quickly became part of the nation's cultural soundscape.

They emphasize that Nasser retained the original text and the folk sensibility of the piece while composing a melody deeply rooted in heritage and local tradition, crafting it to reflect the festive spirit of Eid using the well-known "Al-Daza" rhythm, a pattern familiar across Qatar and the Gulf that is commonly performed at weddings and holiday celebrations.

They add that the song achieved widespread popularity and remains a staple of holiday festivities to this day, alongside other folk works that have been documented as part of the Eid celebration repertoire, such as 'Bajer Al Eid' and 'Al-Aidooh'.

Writer and critic Ibrahim al-Mutawa points out that Nasser drew on his artistic instincts to highlight the most socially and humanistically resonant aspects of traditional heritage, reinforcing shared values and customs while presenting them in an evolved artistic form that complements the nature of these folk arts.

This approach, he says, has helped safeguard these traditions and their distinctive expressions from fading over time.

Faisal al-Tamimi, a heritage researcher and composer, said that folk arts reflect past social life including practices professions functions and community roles, affirming that they are associated with specific seasons occasions professions and social customs.

Folk heritage

Eid is considered one of the most prominent occasions documented

in folk arts. The children's refrain "Eidkum Mubarak ya Ahi al-Bayt" evolved over time into a traditional folk chant still performed today, he noted.

Heritage researcher and composer Faisal al-Tamimi said that some enthusiasts of folk arts have introduced new rhythmic and melodic elements into traditional forms. While some describe this as modernization, he avoids that framing, arguing that it is ultimately a matter of taste and audience perception.

He suggests that the most accurate description is "innovation" rooted in traditional foundations.

Al-Tamimi noted that Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha have long been documented through folk performance traditions, including the women's 'Al-Muradah' chant-dance.

This practice, he says, involves women gathering during Eid in a private setting, performing in two opposing lines, and engaging in unaccompanied call-and-response chanting based on spontaneous, unstructured verses.

Al-Muradah is described as a collective performance combining group movement and vocal chanting without instrumental accompaniment, characterized by synchronized footwork, rhythmic swaying, and alternating vocal exchanges between two facing groups, al-Tamimi recalled.

The performance, he said, unfolds through structured turns of singing and response until both groups converge, concluding in collective chanting. Participants traditionally wear embroidered festive garments and gold jewellery during Eid celebrations.

Al-Tamimi also noted that men mark Eid through the "Al-Ardah" sword dance, performed after afternoon prayers in public gathering spaces such as central squares

and coastal areas, with historical performances also held in various traditional neighbourhoods.

Qatari composer and artist Matar Ali al-Kuwari told QNA that folk arts in Qatar constitute a major pillar of the country's cultural heritage, expressing concern that much of this legacy has not been systematically documented beyond limited individual efforts by writers and musicians.

He stressed that Qatari folk heritage isn't a single genre but a broad cultural ecosystem encompassing emotional songs, maritime music, Ardah performances, Samri traditions, children's songs, social customs, folk games, and traditional crafts that collectively reflect national identity.

Al-Kuwari said he has personally worked on developing and reinterpreting myriad traditional forms, including Samri, vocal traditions, Ardah, and children's songs, such as rain chants, and has contributed to children's folk operettas through the Ministry of Culture's theatre department.

He added that his ambition goes beyond isolated artistic projects, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive national framework to systematically document and preserve folk heritage. Al-Kuwari called for official institutional preservation of Qatari heritage through a dedicated committee to collect and document folk culture, emphasizing that what matters more is transforming heritage into living cultural production through modern Qatari artistic expression rather than static memory.

He stressed that Eid in Qatar is deeply tied to intimacy, simplicity and shared cultural memory, with children's Eid experience being highly anticipatory beginning after Garangao and continuing with excitement until Eid morning.

Haj pilgrims urged to follow preventive health measures

Pilgrims undertaking Haj should prioritise vaccinations, hydration, hygiene, and adequate rest to avoid health complications during the rituals, a senior health official at Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC) has said.

Dr Fahad Mohammed Shaikhan, Senior Community Medicine Consultant in the Preventive Health Department at PHCC, emphasised the importance of pilgrims adhering to health instructions and preventive measures during the Haj.

He pointed out that crowding, high temperatures, and physical exertion can lead to multiple health issues that can be prevented through awareness and adherence to medical instructions.

Dr Fahad explained that maintaining health while performing the rituals begins before travel, with a doctor's consultation. This is particularly crucial for the elderly and those with chronic diseases, who should assess their health status and receive the recommended vaccinations, as vaccinations are among the most significant preventive measures to protect pilgrims from infectious diseases during the rituals.

The most important recommended vaccinations for Haj include meningitis, influenza, and pneumococcal vaccines. These vaccines become even more critical for the elderly, children, pregnant women, and individuals with chronic conditions due to their higher risk of complications. Therefore, it is advisable to receive these vaccinations well before travel to ensure protection and reduce the spread of infection among pilgrims.

Dr Fahad pointed out that some of the most prominent health risks pilgrims may face during Haj are heat exhaustion and heatstroke, resulting from direct



Dr Fahad Shaikhan

exposure to sunlight and soaring temperatures. He urged pilgrims to avoid going out during peak heat hours as much as possible and to use umbrellas or head coverings, and to wear lightweight, light-coloured cotton clothing that improves ventilation and mitigates the impact of the heat.

Dr Fahad Shaikhan stressed the importance of consistently drinking enough water and other fluids, even when not thirsty, to prevent dehydration. He noted that symptoms of heat exhaustion include headache, dizziness, heavy sweating, muscle cramps, and fatigue. If these symptoms appear, pilgrims must immediately head to the nearest health centre or seek medical assistance.

Dr Fahad stated that preventing infectious diseases is one of the most critical aspects of health during Haj due to the massive gatherings. He explained that frequently washing hands with water and soap, using sanitisers, wearing masks in crowded places, and avoiding the sharing of personal items are all effective measures to limit the transmission of respiratory infections and other communicable diseases.

He advised pilgrims to ensure they consume healthy food from trusted sources, verify the safety of food and water, and avoid uncovered or undercooked foods, which can cause foodborne illness and other health issues.

Qatar's personalised cake trend boosts demand for cake artists



Erwin Estor says customers prefer cakes that reflect personal themes, family traditions, or cultural elements.

By Joey Aguilar
Doha

Qatar's growing appetite for designer cakes is driving demand for skilled cake artists, with bakeries and hospitality businesses reporting sharp increases in orders during festive seasons and special occasions, it is learnt. Consumers are increasingly seeking customised creations for weddings, family gatherings, birthdays, and national celebrations, reflecting the rising popularity of personalised desserts in the country's expanding food and hospitality sector. Cake artists Alex Solano of Lebon Hospitality and Erwin Estor of Valinor Bakery told 'Gulf

Times' that bespoke cakes have become an essential feature of celebrations in Qatar, particularly among Qatari families who value exceptional and personalised designs for important occasions. The trend comes as Qatar's broader foodservice and hospitality sectors continue to expand, driven by rising tourism, population growth, and increasing consumer spending, according to a Research and Markets report recently published by Yahoo Finance. The report indicated that Qatar's foodservice market is expected to sustain growth in the coming years due to strong demand for diverse dining and hospitality experiences. According to Solano, the sector's expansion is creating more opportunities for skilled cake artists and pastry specialists like

him. "With the huge demand for designer cakes, the demand for cake artists also rises. This boosts the industry and provides more opportunities for us," Solano said. However, he stressed that cake artistry requires more than technical training alone. He noted that cake artistry is largely driven by talent and creativity, adding that while the craft can be learned and refined through experience and training, it may not suit everyone aspiring to become a cake artist. Solano also expressed



Alex Solano showcases one of his designer cakes.

appreciation for the investments businesses and hospitality establishments are making to develop culinary talent in Qatar. "I'm thankful that Qatar and the industry itself are investing in talent and providing appropriate training to further enhance our skills," he said.

Solano pointed out that the number of businesses catering to customers seeking decorative cakes and dessert concepts has risen significantly in recent years. Rather than viewing the growing competition negatively, he believes it benefits the industry as a whole. "This is good for the industry, for cake artists, and especially for the country, which offers a wide array of food and beverage options that help boost the hospitality sector," he said. For cake artists like Estor, festive

seasons often translate into intense demand.

"The demand for designer or artisan cakes in Qatar is often high during special occasions such as Qatar National Day (QND), Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha holidays, as well as birthdays, anniversaries, and especially weddings," he said. Estor noted that during the recent Eid al-Fitr holidays, orders at their bakery skyrocketed to 10 times the average daily level, highlighting what he described as a huge and steadily growing market for customised cakes. He said many customers prefer cakes that reflect personal themes, family traditions, or cultural elements, making designer cakes a centerpiece of celebrations and social gatherings. "Customers, the majority of whom are Qataris, prefer unique cakes for occasions like parties and family gatherings. It has become part of their culture," he pointed out. Estor added that while bakeries continue to attract new clients, repeat customers remain a

strong pillar of the business. "We receive orders both from regular customers and new ones, but the rate of return customers is high," he said. During QND celebrations, Estor recalled that they sometimes receive more than 50 orders for themed cakes alone, underscoring the scale of demand during major national events. Echoing Solano's observations, Estor also noted a visible increase in the number of specialised cake shops opening across the country in recent years, which he said reflects the growing popularity of designer cakes and desserts in Qatar's food and beverage scene. Industry reports continue to support the strong outlook for Qatar's food and hospitality markets. According to a Mordor Intelligence report, Qatar's foodservice market is projected to grow significantly in the coming years, supported by tourism growth, evolving consumer preferences, and rising demand for dining and catering experiences.

Qatar's retail outlets witness strong Eid shopping turnout

By Ayman Adly
Staff Correspondent

Shopping malls, traditional markets, and commercial centres across the country witnessed a surge in shoppers rushing to complete their Eid purchases, with families buying clothing, sweets, perfumes, gifts, household essentials, and festive supplies ahead of the holidays.

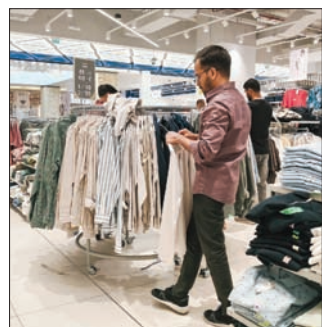
Doha, Al Wakrah, and Al Rayyan experienced heavy traffic congestion and crowded commercial districts as residents moved between malls, souqs, and retail centres late into the night to finalise their shopping.

Retailers nationwide launched extensive promotional campaigns and seasonal discounts to attract customers during what traders described as one of the year's busiest commercial periods. Major shopping destinations, including City Center Doha, Villaggio Mall, Landmark Mall, and Carrefour Qatar, recorded a sharp increase in footfall, driven by discounts on fashion, footwear, perfumes, cosmetics, home decor, electronics, and children's toys.

Retail experts noted that consumer spending traditionally peaks during the final 48 hours before Eid, as many families deliberately postpone shopping until the last minute. Meanwhile, Souq Waqif emerged as one of the busiest destinations for Eid shoppers seeking traditional sweets, nuts, spices, Arabic perfumes, incense, and cultural garments.

Vendors reported brisk sales throughout the day, with customers from various nationalities visiting the historic marketplace to purchase gifts, children's clothing, shoes, and festive treats. Sweet shops ramped up production of traditional Qatari and Gulf desserts, while perfume stores showcased collections of oud, incense, and luxury fragrances closely associated with Eid celebrations.

Shopkeepers said they had stocked large quantities of products across different price ranges to cater to varying customer preferences and budgets. The Eid rush also extended to tailor-



ing shops across Doha, particularly in Souq Al Ali, where tailors worked round the clock to complete orders for traditional Qatari attire. Families crowded tailoring stores to order custom-made Eid thobes, especially for children, many of whom receive multiple outfits for the celebrations. Tailors reported operating at full capacity, hiring additional staff, and extending working hours to meet overwhelming demand. Several stores also introduced same-day delivery services for customers racing to complete their preparations before Eid prayers.

Parents accompanied their children through malls and markets, turning the shopping experience into a festive family outing filled with excitement and anticipation. Consumers said discounts on clothing, footwear, accessories, cosmet-

ics, and household items played a significant role in encouraging purchases amid growing competition among retailers.

Retail managers noted that stores had significantly increased their inventory ahead of Eid to ensure adequate supplies of garments, textiles, food products, beverages, nuts, cooking essentials, and decorative items.

The Eid shopping season continues to play a key role in stimulating Qatar's retail economy, driving higher sales volumes and supporting growth across sectors including fashion, hospitality, food, and luxury goods. Strong consumer purchasing power, aggressive promotional campaigns, and deeply rooted cultural traditions have once again transformed the pre-Eid period into one of the country's most vibrant commercial seasons.

Minaretein hosts Eid prayer at Education City Stadium



The Minaretein Centre at Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU), in collaboration with the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs (Awqaf), organised and hosted Eid al-Adha prayers at the Education City Stadium. The event brought together the University and wider Qatar Foundation community as well as worshippers from across Qatar. Family and children's activities also formed part of the festivities, creating a welcoming and joyful atmosphere that reflected the spirit of Eid and HBKU's role in fostering connection and bringing people together.



Eid banquet demand rises across traditional kitchens

Traditional catering kitchens across the country have completed extensive preparations to meet soaring demand for Eid banquets and family gatherings, with operators reporting that reservations for the first days of Eid are already fully booked.

Kitchen operators said they had finalised operational readiness measures, including stocking large quantities of spices and cooking essentials, upgrading food preparation facilities, and recruiting additional specialised culinary teams to manage the exceptional seasonal demand.

Many managers noted that Eid represents one of the busiest periods for the traditional food sector, driven by the deep-rooted cultural importance of communal feasts, sacrificial meals, and large family gatherings that define the celebration in local society.

Preparations inside the kitchens often begin late at night and continue through the early hours of the morning. Teams start processing ingredients and preparing sacrificial meat before dawn, while large-scale cooking operations commence at sunrise. Orders are then delivered in carefully coordinated stages throughout the morning and early afternoon to ensure efficiency and timely service.

Some customers prefer to collect their orders directly from kitchens on the first day of Eid due to the exceptionally high number of family events and social gath-



erings taking place nationwide. Kitchen managers stressed that traditional dishes such as majboos, mandi, biryani, and other festive meals remain central to Eid celebrations.

Shamsuldeen Suleiman, manager of a traditional kitchen, said all operational arrangements for the Eid season had been completed, noting that staff were working under a continuous operating plan to ensure timely order delivery. He explained that the first day of Eid is primarily dedicated to preparing sacrificial meals and banquet feasts, while kitchens begin offering their regular range of traditional dishes from the second day onward.

Meanwhile, Hafeez Mashhour, manager of traditional kitchens, said operations were running at

full capacity throughout the Eid holiday. He noted that chefs begin work before dawn to prepare large banquet orders according to pre-arranged delivery schedules. He added that chefs' experience and expertise play a vital role in preserving the quality and authenticity of traditional dishes, particularly during periods of exceptionally high demand.

Mohammed Abdulrahman, manager of another kitchen, said kitchens were continuing to accept additional requests despite the main reservations being fully booked. He noted that banquet preparations begin as early as 3am, with the first deliveries dispatched during the early morning hours under tightly organised workflows designed to maintain both speed and service quality.

Qatari Haj Mission's plans to transport pilgrims via Al Mashaer Metro praised



QNA
Makkah Al-Mukarramah

The Communications and Support Unit of Qatari Haj Mission successfully implemented a comprehensive transportation plan for Qatari pilgrims using Al Mashaer Al Mugaddassah Metro. This meticulously planned operation aimed to ensure the safety and smooth movement of Qatari pilgrims between the holy sites during the 1447 AH Haj season. The mission received widespread praise from Haj campaign operators and pilgrims for the high level of organisation and on-site services provided in co-operation and co-ordination with the relevant authorities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The organised pilgrims' movements were part of the comprehensive operational plan prepared by the Qatari Haj Mission within the framework of the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs' strategic plan for Haj. This plan aims to enhance the quality of services provided to Qatari pilgrims and ensure a safe and convenient Haj experience that adheres to the highest organisational and humanitarian standards.

The plan included transporting the pilgrims via the Al Mashaer Al Mugaddassah Metro from Mina to Arafat to perform the most important rite of Haj, followed by the departure after sunset from Arafat to Muzdalifah. This was all carried out amidst meticulous organisational procedures and carefully planned schedules aimed at minimising congestion and facilitating movement, especially given the large crowds and high temperatures.

The Communication and Support Unit worked around the clock to manage and monitor the crowd management plans on the ground, in coordination with the Qatari Haj campaigns and the mission's support units, most notably the Holy Sites Services Unit, the Medical Unit, and the Religious Unit. This was coupled with continuous coordination with the relevant authorities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which contributed to a highly efficient movement of the country's pilgrims between the holy sites.

Field support teams from the unit were deployed to Qatari pilgrims' accommodations, train stations, and the holy sites to provide immediate support and guidance to pilgrims, helping them reach their camps and addressing any emergencies or field inquiries. They also facilitated direct communication with campaign guides to ensure real-time updates and the safety of Qatari pilgrims throughout their journeys.

The mission emphasised that the success of the crowd management plans was a result of the seamless integration between the various support units and Qatari campaigns, as well as the advanced organisational and operational capabilities provided by the relevant authorities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. These capabilities contributed to facilitating the movement of pilgrims and managing crowds with high efficiency, enabling the pilgrims to perform their rituals in an atmosphere of security, tranquillity, and smooth flow.

Mohammed Yousef al-Hammadi, the owner

of Al Hammadi Haj and Umrah Campaign, praised the crowd management plan using Al Mashaer Al Mugaddassah Metro, emphasising that it was a successful step reflecting the significant organisational efforts undertaken by the Qatari Haj Mission this season. He noted that the meticulous planning and organisation of the metro's transportation directly contributed to the comfort of Qatari pilgrims and facilitated their movement between the holy sites.

Al-Hammadi explained that some campaigns initially had concerns about using the metro, but the experience proved highly successful. The transfers from Mina to Arafat, and then to Muzdalifah, were completed smoothly, easily, and in record time, thanks to the flexible and precise plan prepared by the Communication and Support Unit, and the continuous field monitoring by the mission's field teams.

Al-Hammadi also commended the efforts of the Holy Sites Services Unit in preparing the Qatari pilgrims' camps in Muzdalifah. This included furnishing the camps, equipping them with multi-purpose chairs, and providing catering, service facilities, and logistical support. These efforts positively impacted the comfort of the pilgrims after their departure from Arafat.

For his part, Ahmed Yousef al-Mulla, the owner of the Taiba Haj and Umrah campaign, praised what he described as the "tremendous and tireless" efforts exerted by the Communication and Support Unit in serving Qatari pilgrims during this season. He emphasised that the unit presented an outstanding model of fieldwork and continuous communication with the campaigns and Qatari pilgrims around the clock.

He stated that the unit's teams were present on the ground at all stages of the movement, whether during the pilgrims' transfer from Mina to Arafat or during their departure to Muzdalifah. They provided suitable alternatives when needed and updated traffic plans immediately, which contributed to ensuring smooth movement and avoiding any obstacles on the ground.

He added that the Taiba Haj campaign witnessed a smooth flow of movement between the holy sites, thanks to the continuous monitoring by the communication and support teams. He noted that members of the unit were present on the ground at all times to provide assistance and guidance to the pilgrims.

He affirmed that the Qatari pilgrims' camp in Muzdalifah was exceptionally well-equipped upon their arrival, with all services and facilities provided to ensure their comfort after the Day of Arafat, expressing Taiba campaign's gratitude to the Qatari Haj Mission and the Communication and Support Unit for their dedicated efforts in serving the pilgrims.

The Qatari Haj Mission continues to implement its comprehensive operational plan through its various service, technical and field units, within the framework of the State of Qatar's keenness, under the directives of the wise leadership, to provide the highest levels of care and services to the country's pilgrims, ensuring that they perform their rituals with ease and tranquillity, and embodying the commitment of the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs to developing the Haj system and continuously improving the quality of services provided to the pilgrims from the State of Qatar.

Al-Attiyah: Qatar mourns architect of its gas era

From Page 1

His career began in 1972 at the Ministry of Finance and Petroleum, where he steadily rose through positions linked to international relations and energy policy. In the early 1990s, as Minister of Energy and Industry, he spearheaded a pivotal national shift toward the development of the North Field, one of the world's largest natural gas reserves. Under his leadership, Qatar invested heavily in LNG infrastructure, long-term export partnerships, and industrial development.

He was instrumental in the establishment and expansion of major energy enterprises, including Qatargas and RasGas, and played a leading role in the development of Ras Laffan Industrial City, which became one of the world's largest hubs for gas processing and export. These efforts positioned Qatar as a cornerstone of global energy security and a key supplier to both Asian and European markets.

Throughout his tenure, he maintained an active presence in international energy diplomacy, including within Opec and other global forums. He was also a key contributor to the establishment of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum, headquartered in Doha, reinforcing Qatar's leadership role in global gas co-operation.

Beyond his governmental service, he served as a media and institutional figure, contributing to national discourse and development initiatives. After leaving ministerial office in 2011, he continued his work in energy and sustainability through the Abdullah Bin Hamad Al Attiyah International Foundation for Energy and Sustainable Development, advocating for innovation, diversification of energy sources, and the importance of natural gas as a transitional fuel in the global energy mix.

His legacy also extends to sports and community life. He was closely associated with Al Sadd Sports Club, where he served as a guiding figure



and is widely remembered as an early architect of the club's success and identity. His contributions to sports administration reflected the same vision and dedication that defined his national service. Colleagues and contemporaries remember him as a decisive yet humble leader, deeply committed to Qatar's progress and international standing. His work helped shape the foundations of the modern Qatari economy and strengthened the country's reputation as a trusted global energy partner.

He was also the board member and Managing Director of the Gulf Publishing and Printing Company, the publisher of *Gulf Times* and *Arrayah* newspapers.

He is remembered as a policymaker,

JAPAN February 13, 20



strategist, and one of the principal figures behind Qatar's "gas era," whose vision continues to influence the nation's development trajectory.



Awqaf distributes gifts as part of 'Eid Joy' initiative



QNA
Doha

The General Directorate of Endowments and Islamic Affairs (Awqaf) implemented the 'Eid Joy' initiative coinciding with Eid al-Adha. The Directorate distributed 4,000 gifts to children in 19 mosques across the country during Eid prayers, as part of its ongoing efforts to enhance the social impact of endowments and revive the spirit of joy during this occasion.

The initiative was met with widespread participation from families and children, putting a smile on their faces and contributing to a festive atmosphere after the Eid prayers. This reflects the humanitarian and social values that endowments instil in society.

The initiative is part of a series of community programs implemented by the General Directorate of Endowments, which aim to maximise the impact of endowments and strengthen their role in serving various segments of society, particularly during religious occasions that hold profound spiritual and social dimensions.

Director-General of the General Directorate of Endowments Engineer Hassan Abdullah al-Marzouqi stated that the 'Eid Joy' initiative is an extension of the Directorate's community role in promoting the culture of endowments and reinforcing the societal values associated with Eid al-Adha, highlighting their keenness to share the joy of religious occasions with children.

The initiative, he said, reflects the Directorate's commitment to maximising the societal impact of endow-

ments and activating their role in contributing to various humanitarian aspects. It strengthens community cohesion and embodies the image of endowments as a sustainable development tool that serves humanity on various occasions.

While affirming the General Directorate of Endowments' continued commitment to launching impactful initiatives that respond to community needs and contribute to spreading positive values, stemming from its mission to utilise endowments to serve humanity, he expressed his sincere thanks and appreciation to the generous donors, especially those who donated to the Masraf Waqfi for Family and Childhood, for their significant contribution to the success of these initiatives and the achievement of their objectives.

Communities hail Qatar's culture of coexistence

From Page 1

Secretary-General of the Mauritanian Community Office in Qatar Ahmed Taleb Sidi Elemine said Eid al-Adha reflects Mauritania's rich cultural identity, combining Arab traditions with African heritage.

He noted that Mauritanian celebrations focus on hospitality, charity and strengthening social ties, alongside traditional meals such as grilled meat and couscous.

He also pointed to similarities between Mauritanian and Qatari Eid traditions, including traditional dress, hospitality customs and children receiving holiday gifts, stressing that shared values of generosity and togetherness continue to unite both cultures.

Meanwhile, Director of the Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Center in Doha Anwar Gedik, said members of the Turkish community welcome Eid al-Adha with great joy and deep enthusiasm, noting that solidarity, generosity and social co-operation are among the most important values associated with Eid celebrations in Turkey.

He said the holiday is a special occasion during which disputes are set aside, friendships are strengthened

and social bonds become closer.

Gedik added that the Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Center, in co-ordination with the Turkish embassy in Doha, is keen to bring together Turkish citizens, friends and cultural partners in gatherings filled with unity and brotherhood.

He stressed that these celebrations help strengthen cultural interaction between peoples and reinforce the Turkish community's sense of belonging to its cultural identity.

He also praised Qatar's atmosphere of security and stability, saying it allows communities to celebrate their traditions peacefully.

He noted that Turkey and Qatar share common cultural values centered on family ties, hospitality and spiritual traditions, adding that Eid remains one of the strongest symbols of friendship and shared values between the two countries.

Senior Researcher at Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue Sekou Marafa Toure said Eid al-Adha is a unifying occasion celebrated across the Islamic world, including West African countries such as Burkina Faso and Mali.

He noted that celebrations in these countries closely resemble those in Qatar through family gatherings, traditional foods, exchanging visits and greetings,

and dedicating Eid days to compassion, social connection and family unity.

Toure explained that the Burkinabe community in Qatar celebrates Eid with a mix of joy and nostalgia for home, making the occasion both a religious celebration and an opportunity for reunion among community members.

He said the community organises family and social gatherings in co-ordination with embassies and relevant institutions to recreate the atmosphere of Eid back home.

These gatherings feature traditional African clothing, popular dishes and greetings exchanged in multiple African languages and dialects, helping expatriates feel closer to their homeland despite the geographical distance.

He added that families also use the occasion to teach children born abroad about their original cultures, traditions and languages, ensuring they remain connected to their roots while integrating into Qatari society.

Toure stressed that these celebrations reflect Qatar's distinctive model of cultural and human coexistence, where different communities can preserve their identities and traditions in an atmosphere of respect, diversity and social harmony. (QNA)

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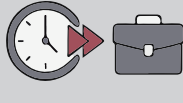
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Moments of joy as Eid al-Adha unites friends, families, communities



Qatar celebrated Eid al-Adha with religious devotion and festive spirit as worshippers gathered at mosques and prayer grounds across the country for special Eid prayers yesterday morning. Families and friends came together to mark the occasion with traditional feasts, charitable acts, and social gatherings, reflecting the values of unity, generosity, and compassion associated with the festival. The Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs (Awqaf) had prepared 733 mosques and open-air prayer grounds nationwide to accommodate worshippers, with Eid prayers beginning at 5am. Across Qatar, the festive atmosphere was unmistakable with shopping malls, public venues, and cultural destinations hosting family-friendly activities and entertainment programmes planned for the holidays. Residents also shared Eid greetings and messages of togetherness across social media platforms. **PICTURES:** Noushad Thekayil





No feasts, no joy: Gazans mark a dark Eid

AFP
Khan Yunis, Palestinian Territories

New clothes for children, sacrificial sheep and Eid biscuits, the hallmarks of Eid al-Adha festivities, are all either unaffordable or unavailable in Gaza, casting a shadow over what is usually a time of celebration and joy. "I go to the market only to look around because I cannot afford to buy anything. Whenever I ask about prices, I return heartbroken," Nadia Abu Shamala, a Palestinian resident of Gaza, told AFP.

"This year, Eid comes with none of the joy we once knew in Gaza because of the effects of the war, the soaring prices, and our inability to provide even the simplest needs for our children," said the 40-year-old woman from Gaza's north displaced to the central Gaza city of Deir al-Balah for over two years.

Despite a US-brokered ceasefire that began in October 2025, Israeli air strikes are still common in Gaza, where 80% of buildings were damaged in the war and most of the population depends on aid for basic needs, according to the UN. Israel controls all entry points to Gaza, and lets trucks



of foreign aid and private sector goods enter in numbers that are too low to bring down war-inflated prices or shortages, NGOs on the ground say.

"The truce is a big lie, but in any case, we are trying to create joy for the children," said Abu Abdullah al-Mosadar, 59, who told AFP he pooled around 13,000 shekels (\$4,570) with his brother to buy a sheep for sacrifice. It is an amount that very few Gazans can afford.

"I know it is very expensive, but I decided to perform the sacrifice this year," said Mosadar, a former property dealer from one of central Gaza's well-established families,



adding that he hopes to start his construction and real estate business when circumstances permit.

Central to Eid al-Adha celebrations, which mark the end of the Haj pilgrimage to Makkah, is the sacrificing of a sheep.

According to Islamic tradition, God asked the Prophet Ibrahim, or Abraham in Jewish and Christian tradition, to sacrifice his son as a test of faith, only to stop him at the last moment and provide an animal to sacrifice instead.

But in tiny Gaza, livestock cannot enter from the outside, and

only one quarter of the pre-war's sheep population remains, or about 15,000 for the coastal territory's 2.1 mn inhabitants, according to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

"Regarding prices this year, sacrificial animals are witnessing an unprecedented increase due to the limited supply and the rising costs of breeding, feed, and transportation, and the shutdown of many farms," said Raafat Asaliya, spokesperson for Gaza's agriculture ministry. As a result, "a sheep or goat that was sold before the war



(From left to right) Palestinian children photographed on Eid al-Adha, in Gaza City yesterday. (Reuters)

for around 1,000 shekels is now priced between 11,000 and 15,000 shekels," Asaliya said.

Gazans say they are shocked by the prices of sheep this year.

"We have never heard of such prices in our lives," Ahmed Abu Salem, a resident of Gaza City, told AFP. "Families like ours, who used to make sacrifices every year, are now unable even to buy one kilogramme of meat for our children," the 50-year-old said.

With gas in short supply, baking and cooking at home becomes an issue as well, Abu Ahmed Wafi, a 42-year-old displaced with his family in south Gaza, told AFP.

"The markets are mostly filled

with kaak, maamoul, and sweets. We used to dream of making them at home as we always did before, but prices have risen sharply and there is no cooking gas available to bake them," Wafi said.

In the south Gaza city of Khan Yunis, one family managed to prepare trays of maamoul, the Eid biscuits, under a makeshift shelter covered in a reused tarp bearing the logo of UN children agency Unicef.

From her tent in Deir el-Balah, an exhausted Shamala hoped for better days. "We are still living in tents with no atmosphere of joy, only worries, fear, and exhaustion, without any of the happiness we once knew," she said.

Lebanon bombed as fighters clash with Israeli forces

AFP
Beirut

Israel launched broad strikes on Lebanon including near the city of Tyre yesterday, as Hezbollah said its fighters clashed with Israeli forces beyond an Israeli-declared "yellow line" in the south despite a ceasefire.

Israel this week vowed to intensify operations in Lebanon and said it was expanding ground operations there, a move that comes ahead of talks on Friday between Lebanese and Israeli military delegations at the Pentagon and a new round of direct negotiations next week aimed at ending the hostilities.

As many Lebanese were celebrating the festival of Eid al-Adha, the state-run National News Agency (NNA) reported Israeli strikes in the country's south and in the eastern Bekaa valley, with Israel's military saying it was hitting "Hezbollah infrastructure sites" in both regions.

Israel's military issued an evacuation warning for the southern city of Nabatieh for a second consecutive day, and another for swathes of the coastal city of Tyre and surrounding areas.

The NNA and an AFP correspondent in Tyre later said strikes hit the city's outskirts, as Israel's army said it was attacking "Hezbollah command centres" in the area.

Earlier, the correspondent reported residents from threatened areas had converged on parts of the city not covered by the evacuation warning.

Authorities, however, warned that shelters were full and urged people to head to Beirut instead.

Iran-backed Hezbollah said its fighters "clashed with the enemy forces at point-blank range" in the town of Zawtar al-Sharqiya, just beyond the Israeli-declared "yel-



Civil defence members remove a body from the rubble of a residential building hit by an Israeli strike on the outskirts of Tyre yesterday. (AFP)

low line" in south Lebanon where its troops have been operating.

Since early Tuesday, the group had said its fighters had confronted Israeli troops seeking to enter the town, strategically located just six kilometres (four miles) from Nabatieh. The Israeli troop movement comes after a military official said Tuesday that soldiers had begun operating beyond the "yellow line", which runs around 10 kilometres deep inside Lebanese territory.

Also on Tuesday, Israel stepped up strikes on south and east Lebanon, issuing evacuation warnings for at least 50 towns and villages and killing at least 31 people.

Lebanon's army said that one of its soldiers was among the dead in the east.

At the site of one of the strikes in south Lebanon's Burj al-Shehali, an AFP correspondent saw rescuers removing debris and carrying a white body bag from the rubble, which was littered with items including rugs and cushions.

The NNA, citing the mayor, said 15 people were killed there.

After Hezbollah drew Lebanon into the Middle East war with

rocket fire at Israel in retaliation for strikes that killed Iran's supreme leader, Israel has repeatedly struck Lebanon's eastern Bekaa valley and warned residents to evacuate.

But strikes have intensified in recent days, focusing on the West Bekaa town of Mashghara, where hundreds of displaced people had been sheltering and which has now largely emptied.

Mayor Iskandar Barakeh told AFP that he was worried that "the West Bekaa region is becoming the scene of rear confrontations" between Israel and Hezbollah.

The area links south Lebanon with Hezbollah strongholds in the northern Bekaa and is a key supply route for the group.

Lebanese military expert Hassan Jouni told AFP that the West Bekaa "is a necessary corridor for Hezbollah members if they want to move between the Bekaa and the south" and could become the focus of further Israeli strikes.

He said Israeli operations might soon expand to "target the north Bekaa intensively or even Beirut's southern suburbs", both areas that have been relatively spared since the ceasefire.



A GlobalEye aircraft, manufactured by Saab Technologies, at Dubai Air Show in Dubai. (Reuters/File Photo)

Canada chooses Saab in defence deal over US rivals

Canada is moving ahead with the Swedish firm Saab on procuring a new fleet of Arctic surveillance aircraft, Prime Minister Mark Carney announced Wednesday, choosing the Stockholm-based company over US competitors.

For Carney, the move addresses two key priorities — improving Canada's defence capabilities in the Arctic and reducing the country's economic integration with the US.

By entering into formal negotiations with Saab on the procurement, Canada has sidelined two US alternatives: the Aeries X by L3Harris and the E-7 Wedgetail by Boeing. "The GlobalEye procurement will help us secure our North and build our economy at once," Carney told a defence industry event in Ottawa.

Saab applauded the news and

noted plans "to transfer knowledge and technology to Canada that will grow the domestic defence industry," a message also shared by Carney.

The Canadian premier has listed the Arctic as a strategic priority, warning Canada needs to rapidly improve its defense posture in the region, where geopolitical competition is rising, notably with Russia.

US has already voiced frustration over Ottawa's decision to reconsider a multi-billion-dollar deal for a new fleet of US-made F-35 fighter jets.

Carney says Canada's historically close relationship with the US has been permanently altered, and Ottawa needs to diversify its economic and security relationships, insisting bilateral ties will not return to a pre-Trump normal. (AFP)

Iraq PM urges armed groups to join state institutions

Iraqi Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi urged armed factions yesterday to join state institutions, as the US mounts pressure on Baghdad to disarm groups backed by Iran.

Zaidi, who only recently took office, has voiced support for the state's monopoly on weapons as Washington calls for groups it designates as terrorist organisations to hand over their weapons to the government. It comes after influential Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr said his own group would do so. Sadr, a cleric with a large popular following who once led a militia against American and Iraqi government forces, has long criticised Tehran-backed armed factions and repeatedly urged them to disarm.

Zaidi called in a statement "on all armed factions to follow the same responsible national path and operate under the umbrella of the state and its official institutions". This would "guarantee the protection of Iraq, preserve its sovereignty, and strengthen security and stability, based on the principle that the state is the sole authority entitled to monopolise arms and enforce the law," Zaidi said. (AFP)

US extends Temporary Protected Status

The Trump administration will extend deportation protections and work permits for thousands of Lebanese nationals in the US for six months, according to a notice posted to the Federal Register yesterday. Some 11,000 people from Lebanon are covered under the Temporary Protected Status designation, according to a 2024 estimate. Under the move, they will be allowed to live and work

legally in the US through November 27, the notice said.

US President Donald Trump's administration has moved to end the vast majority of enrollment in the TPS program, saying allowing those immigrants to remain goes against US interests.

Created by the US Congress in 1990, TPS provides deportation relief and work permits to people already in the US if their home countries experience a natural

disaster, armed conflict or other extraordinary event. Countries must be designated for the status by the homeland security secretary for periods of six to 18 months.

In the notice on yesterday, the US Department of Homeland Security said Secretary Markwayne Mullin had not had adequate time to review Lebanon's designation and that it was allowed to renew automatically. (Reuters)

'From worse to bad': Iranians lukewarm over internet blackout end

AFP
Paris

Iran's move to reconnect the country to the global internet after an almost three-month blackout has left many Iranians unimpressed, with full connectivity far from restored and access seen as a right that shouldn't have been taken away in the first place.

Iranian authorities on Tuesday began lifting the shutdown that started on the first day of the US-Israeli war against the Islamic republic on February 28 — a repeat of January's internet shutdown during mass protests.

Users across Iran contacted by AFP yesterday confirmed the internet was back and they were able to connect to broadband services with wifi at home.

But connectivity remained patchy, with mobile internet still largely disconnected, many sites filtered and access to messaging services difficult.

"I have a feeling now, but it certainly is not a good one. It is not happiness or joy. I feel that it was just a switch from worse to bad," said Bahareh, 32, a nutritionist from Tehran.

"Even before all this happened, we didn't really have free internet," she added.

Access to most social media sites and international news platforms has long been restricted by the authorities, with users employing sometimes costly VPN software to circumvent the filtering.

"There was always the hassle of buying access, the hassle of trying to connect to any site you wanted or get any information you needed, the slowness, being sanctioned, the filtering, the VPN and anti-filter software drama," Bahareh said.

Proton VPN said it has observed a 6,000% increase in Iran signups over its baseline figure, saying the government's loosening of restrictions "has triggered an immediate and overwhelming surge in demand for secure, uncensored access".



An Iranian woman works on a laptop in a cafe, after international internet access returned in Tehran yesterday. (Reuters)

Shiva, 65, a housewife from Tehran, said that even with the VPN installed on her Samsung phone, the Google Play Store was not opening.

"My son who has an iPhone can open the App Store. Some apps don't open for him either, though,"

she said, detailing the mixed situation confirmed by other sources.

Mahtab, 62, a hairdresser from Tehran, was also having trouble.

"I bought a VPN again to connect to WhatsApp so I can keep in touch with my daughter" who lives abroad, she said.

But "the internet hasn't reconnected for me yet", she added.

UK-based freedom of expression monitor Article 19 said there were "conflicting reports" about the extent of internet access, with some estimates saying connectivity is still as low as 39%.

"Many people in Iran — including those with businesses online — report slow speeds and continued inability to access social media sites," it said.

Netblocks, another monitor, which had described the latest 88-day blackout as the longest nationwide internet shutdown in modern history, said "service remains heavily filtered, with new restrictions on messaging and app stores compared to pre-January".

Doug Madory, head of internet analysis at US network monitoring firm Kentik, emphasised that after 24 hours the restoration of connectivity remained partial. "Traffic levels peaked at 41% of what we saw prior to Jan 8th, which is also

below the Jan 27-Feb 28 partial restoration," he wrote on X.

Prominent Iranian rapper Toomaj, who in 2024 was sentenced to death after supporting 2022 protests before being released, said being connected to the internet is "not a favour to us — it is our right. And without filters".

"Like free elections, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom of parties, and many other freedoms, these are our rights and not favours," he wrote on X.

Journalist Elaheh Mohammadi also referred to the heavily filtered internet that existed before the blackouts in a post on X.

"One by one, we're connecting back to the net of the previous situation," she wrote.

"This humiliating life wasn't what we deserved," added Mohammadi, who was arrested for her reporting on the 2022 death of Mahsa Amini while in custody for allegedly breaching the dress code for women, which sparked the 2022 protests.

China issues new rules to keep senior military officials in check

AFP
Beijing

China has issued new measures to enforce discipline for top military officials, state media reported yesterday, the latest push in President Xi Jinping's years-long effort to purge corruption from the armed forces.

Xi's sweeping anti-graft campaign has gutted the top ranks, bringing down two defence ministers in the past three years and reducing the once seven-member Central Military Commission (CMC) — China's top military body — to just Xi and one other general.

The rot at the top and scale of the purge of military officials has left analysts questioning the ability of China's armed forces to fight effectively.

Yesterday, CCTV reported that the CMC — which Xi heads — had published new measures that would “establish iron rules for strict education, strict management, and strict supervision” of senior military cadres.

The measures, which contain 26 articles across seven areas, would “reinforce the supervision and management of key leaders” during their duties and “across all aspects of work and life”, CCTV said.

The exact regulations were not published, but they would establish “explicit rules” on the Communist Party's management of military cadres and personnel selection, as well as political education and “ideological rectification”, according to CCTV.

The rules “focus on strictly enforcing discipline to alert minds and guide actions, tightly regu-

lating principal officers so they lead by example”.

They would “promote the revolutionary forging of the senior officer cadres” and “advance modernisation of national defence”, the state broadcaster added.

China has significantly upgraded its military in recent years, but the armed forces have consistently battled corruption.

On May 7, Wei Fenghe and Li Shangfu, who both served as defence minister between 2018 and 2023, were handed suspended death sentences for taking and offering bribes.

In January, China's defence ministry said it was investigating the country's most powerful general, Zhang Youxia, who also sat on the CMC.

China has the second-largest defence budget in the world, though still well behind the US.

Germany warns on trade imbalance as economy minister visits China

AFP
Beijing

Germany's economy minister began a visit to China yesterday with Berlin saying it wanted to boost co-operation with a key partner while also warning of worsening trade imbalances.

Katherina Reiche arrived in Beijing for the three-day trip, the latest senior German official to head to Berlin's top trading partner as they seek to navigate increasingly complex ties.

China — long a reliable market for German exports, from cars to factory machinery — has in recent years become a fierce competitor in many industries, turning the relationship on its head.

Reiche, accompanied by a business delegation and German MPs, said that China and Ger-



German Economy Minister Katherina Reiche speaks to reporters in Beijing, yesterday. (Reuters)

many “are linked by one of the most significant economic relationships in the world”.

“In times of global uncertainty, we need dialogue, trust and robust partnerships. I will therefore advocate on the ground for modern co-operation — based on openness, competition and mutual benefit,” she said in a statement from her ministry.

She will hold talks with Chinese Vice-Premier He Lifeng and Chinese Commerce Minister Wang Wentao and visit companies. But there are many areas where Beijing and Berlin disagree, from trade practices to human rights, and Reiche will likely broach some of these.

The economy ministry noted that in particular there was now a “clear trade imbalance” between the world's number two and number three economies.

German exports fell by around 10% in 2025, to roughly 80bn euros (\$93bn), while imports from China rose to around 170bn euros, it said. Increasing competition for German businesses in China has been one factor weighing on Europe's top economy, which has stagnated in recent years.

N Korea tests new multi-purpose missile launch system: KCNA



North Korean leader Kim Jong-un oversees test launches of a mix of tactical ballistic missiles, artillery rockets and precision cruise missiles, at an undisclosed location in North Korea. (Reuters)

AFP
Seoul

North Korea said yesterday it had tested a new lightweight multi-purpose missile launching system and a multiple tactical cruise missile weapon system the previous day.

The tests, previously reported by Republic of Korea's military, were overseen by the North's leader, Kim Jong-un, the state-run Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said.

Republic of Korea said on Tuesday the North fired several projectiles, including a ballistic missile, off its west coast, the latest in a flurry of tests this year. Seoul said the missiles flew about 80 kilometres (50 miles).

Analysts have said that by conducting a series of missile tests in recent months, Pyongyang may be trying to take advantage of eroding international norms to cement its nuclear status.

Tuesday's launch “analysed and estimated the power of special mission warhead of tactical ballistic missile, the reliability of 240mm controlled artillery rocket with expanded firing range which employed an ultra-precision autonomous navigation system,” KCNA said in an English dispatch.

North Korean leader Kim noted that the “major weapon systems are a clear signal of upgrading of our military force and an event of showing great technical progress”, KCNA quoted him as saying.

“It is essential condition for our army's operations to have such destructive power as enough to make any encountering force impossible to survive theoretically, apart from for-

ture,” he added, according to the report.

Satisfied with the test results, he said “important ultra-high defence science and technologies were introduced into the practical weapon tests.”

One photo released by KCNA shows a missile blasting off from a mobile launcher, with a bright exhaust flame and a cloud of smoke billowing around the vehicle.

Another photo shows Kim standing next to a mobile launcher flanked by military officials.

North Korea is subject to multiple United Nations sanctions banning its nuclear weapons development and use of ballistic missile technology, restrictions it has repeatedly flouted.

Tuesday's launches were North Korea's first in 37 days and its eighth test this year.

In April, Pyongyang conducted a ballistic missile test to “verify the characteristics and power of a cluster bomb warhead,” its state media said at the time.

With the latest launch, Pyongyang is indicating that it intends to deploy such a weapon system in the event of war, said analyst Hong Min of the Korea Institute for National Unification in Seoul.

The weapon system is “a precision-strike complex that integrates tactical cruise missiles, guided multiple-launch rocket systems, and tactical ballistic missiles”, he said.

“It highlights precise, long-range, automated conventional firepower capable of overwhelming the South even below the nuclear threshold,” Hong added.

Earlier this month, Kim called on top military officials to turn the country's southern border with Republic of Korea into an “impregnable fortress”.

Chinese dissident escapes to Korea by rubber boat: attorney

AFP
Seoul

A Chinese dissident who has long been a thorn in Beijing's side has escaped from China to Republic of Korea on a rubber boat, his lawyer confirmed yesterday.

Dong Guangping, a former policeman who was imprisoned for his activism, was found by Republic of Korean authorities on Monday night drifting off the country's west coast on a 3.3-metre rubber boat with a 9.9-horsepower engine, according to police.

He was taken to shore for questioning on suspicion of violating immigration laws.

The man's lawyer, Kim Joo-

kwang, confirmed his identity to AFP. He declined to say from where Dong launched his boat.

Dong, 68, is known for his opposition to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and his advocacy for political reform and human rights.

He was dismissed from his work as a policeman after signing a petition a decade after Beijing's 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown, according to US-based advocacy group Human Rights in China.

He later spent about three years in prison from 2001 for “inciting subversion of state power”, UN experts said, and was detained again in 2014 over Tiananmen-related activities.

Dong fled to Thailand with his family, who later resettled in Canada as refugees, but Thai authori-

ties handed him over to Chinese police in 2015 despite his UN-recognised refugee status.

Dong's attorney told AFP his client's current situation is “highly likely to be a political asylum case”.

Republic of Korea has granted political asylum to a relatively small number of applicants since it began formally processing refugee claims in 1994, with an overall recognition rate in the low single digits despite tens of thousands of applications.

Critics say the low approval rate reflects strict screening and lengthy procedures, while the government maintains that decisions are made on a case-by-case basis and take security considerations into account.

Seoul's foreign ministry did not respond to a request for comment.

The opposition People Power Party has called on the government to offer Dong “full protection”.

“It should take swift humanitarian measures to ensure that he can safely travel to Canada, where his family is anxiously awaiting him,” party spokesman Choo Hyun-chul said in a statement to AFP.

“This is a matter of a fundamental responsibility as a liberal democratic state.”

In August 2023, Kwon Pyong, a Chinese dissident, fled China on a jet ski to South Korea, where he was later convicted of illegal entry and given a suspended prison sentence.

Cambodia jails 6 Chinese for Korean student's murder

AFP
Phnom Penh

A Cambodian court sentenced six Chinese men, reportedly from a scam-linked crime ring, to life in prison yesterday for the murder of a Republic of Korea student last year.

The torture and killing of the college student in Cambodia sparked a public outcry in Republic of Korea, which dispatched a task force to the Southeast Asian nation in an effort to jointly tackle transnational cyberscam networks.

The multibillion-dollar scam industry ballooned in Cambodia in recent years, with thousands of foreign nationals involved in romance

and cryptocurrency investment cons — some willingly and others coerced by organised criminal groups, according to experts.

The court in Kampong province sentenced the six Chinese men, who ranged in age from 30 to 54, to life imprisonment on charges of murder, cruel acts and fraud via an organised group, according to a court statement.

The six were in Cambodian custody, Information Minister Neth Pheaktra said.

The Republic of Korea student, reportedly kidnapped and tortured by a criminal gang, was found dead in a pickup truck on August 8.

An autopsy revealed he “died as a result of severe torture, with multiple bruises and injuries across his body”, a court statement said.

Many Republic of Korea victims of such

crimes in Cambodia have been lured by fraudulent job offers promising high pay, Seoul has said.

In October, Republic of Korea banned its nationals from travelling to parts of Cambodia, including the Bokor Mountain area of Kampong, after Republic of Korea was shaken by the student's killing in Bokor city.

About 1,000 Koreans were estimated to be working in Cambodian scam operations, targeting potential victims in Republic of Korea, Seoul said that month.

Dozens of Koreans who had been detained in Cambodia for their alleged links to “pig butchering” scams — so called for the method of building trust with victims over time before stealing funds — were repatriated at the time.

Japan to launch new intelligence council

AFP
Tokyo

Japan's parliament passed legislation yesterday to launch a new intelligence council, a key move in Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's push to bolster the nation's security agenda.

Japanese officials have long argued for enhanced intelligence capabilities to deter foreign spies, prevent terrorism, safeguard sensitive technologies and improve national security.

Tokyo has faced criticism that

its existing policies and law enforcement against espionage are too relaxed — with some labelling the nation a “spies' paradise”.

The issue has gained a renewed sense of urgency since a diplomat's row erupted with Beijing, after Takaichi suggested in November that Tokyo might intervene militarily in any Chinese attempt to take Taiwan.

Takaichi on Tuesday told the legislature that the step enables Japan to integrate intelligence activities — currently fragmented across multiple ministries — such

as police, the foreign ministry and the defence ministry.

“To maintain peace and prosperity and pre-empt serious crises, it is of the utmost importance to establish a system in which the intelligence community provides robust support for sound decision-making by policymakers,” Takaichi said.

Under the new law, which was approved by the upper house yesterday and cleared by the lower house last month, the government will upgrade an existing intelligence body to serve as the central command for collecting and ana-

lysing information related to security and public safety.

The newly created National Intelligence Council will be chaired by the prime minister.

But Takaichi's critics have voiced concerns that the upgraded intelligence apparatus might lead to the government's overreach and infringe upon individual freedom and privacy. Opponents have staged rallies across the nation against Takaichi, saying that her campaign to expand Japan's defence capacity might draw Tokyo into international armed conflicts.

Rescue divers find 5 of 7 people trapped in Laos cave alive

AFP
Vientiane

Specialist divers found five of seven people trapped for a week in a flooded cave in Laos alive yesterday, with one rescuer saying their extraction from its terminal chamber was the next challenge.

The seven Laotians entered the cave in central Xaysomboun province, northeast of the capital Vientiane, on May 20, according to state media.

They were searching for gold but got trapped inside the cave after heavy rain triggered flash flooding, blocking their exit, it said.

Five men with their clothes, hands and faces covered in mud huddled in a tight passage of the cave, while two rescuers in dive gear and standing in stomach-deep water filmed them, a video posted by Thai rescuer Chakkit



People trapped in a cave are found alive by rescue workers in Xaisomboun Province, yesterday. (Reuters)

Taengtang showed.

“We found five Laotians. Everybody is safe. We'll continue to provide help,” Thai rescue diver Norrased Palasing said in the video.

Finnish diver Mikko Paasi, also seen in the cave footage, said he and Norrased needed to “dive straight back” and bring the men more supplies to gain strength and prepare to exit the cave.

“This is only a brief relief as the five survivors are still in the terminal chamber, all healthy and in good spirits, but the extraction is still ahead and it ain't going to be easy,” said Paasi in a social media post.

State-run Lao Security News said rescuers would now bring food and medicine to the five survivors and continue searching for the two

others who are missing.

Other Laotian and Thai rescue groups also posted saying five people were found alive.

Paasi said earlier yesterday that rescuers were “racing against time” to extract the seven from the cave, which he called an “abandoned gold mine”.

Rescuers needed to “navigate hundreds of metres (yards) of constant restrictions, flood waters, collapse hazards and high risk of contaminated air quality” inside the cave, he said in a Facebook post.

The terminal chamber, where the five were found, was around 300 metres from the exit, he said.

The seven had entered the cave “with resources to stay sub-terrain for several days”, the diver added.

Norrased and Paasi, who arrived at the Laos cave on Monday, were among the rescuers who aided the dramatic 2018 retrieval of a youth football team from a flooded cave



Members of a rescue team work to save seven people trapped in a cave, at a location given as Xaisomboun Province. (Reuters)

in neighbouring Thailand.

The “Wild Boars” team spent nearly three weeks trapped by flash floods in the Tham Luang cave complex in Thailand's north.

The Laos cave system, located in a remote area, extends deep underground, with multiple levels and narrow passages.

Authorities and villagers have worked to pump water out, but rescue teams had not been able to reach the group earlier this week, according to state media.

By yesterday morning, the water level in the cave had dried up considerably, with rescuers continuing to pump it out, state media said.



Starmer cites Russian threat as UK, Poland seal defence pact

AFP
London

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer hailed yesterday a defence pact with Poland, arguing the European allies faced “no greater challenge” than “Russian aggression” as he welcomed Polish counterpart Donald Tusk to Britain.

The new security treaty signed by the Nato allies aims to allow the two countries to combine their armed forces’ expertise and industrial capability, including developing and manufacturing “next-generation complex weapons”, according to the UK government.

It paves the way for large-scale joint exercises by land forces and for London and Warsaw to boost the use of uncrewed systems to reinforce Nato’s eastern flank, it said.

The agreement’s security elements will also bolster information-sharing and other co-operation to tackle organised crime and aid joint work on cyber, migration and health security.

It follows Britain signing similar defence pacts with Germany and France in recent years.

Poland – an EU and Nato member that shares its eastern border with Russia, Belarus and Ukraine – also recently inked a deal in Paris to ramp up joint defence ties.

“There’s no greater challenge for either of our countries than the challenge of Russian aggression,” Starmer, flanking Tusk, said after signing the treaty at a World War II-era bunker on a former military base in northwest London.

“And we see that not just in Ukraine itself, but beyond Ukraine, impacting on our own countries,” he added, calling the treaty “a generational uplift” in the allies’ security



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer and Poland's Prime Minister Donald Tusk shake hands as they attend a signing ceremony of a UK-Poland defence and security treaty at the Battle of Britain Bunker in Uxbridge, west London yesterday. (AFP)

and defence relationship.

Tusk thanked Starmer for his commitment to defending “shared values” like the rule of law, democracy and human rights, saying they were “important for us and for our nations”.

“That is the foundation of the treaty,” he noted, speaking through an interpreter.

The pair had earlier held bilateral talks at the Royal Air Force’s nearby base at Northolt.

They were expected to discuss the uptick in allegedly Russian-ordered arson attacks in London and elsewhere across Europe, as well as other malign threats, Starmer’s office said in advance.

The signing came on the same day as the head of the UK’s top-secret electronic eavesdropping

agency GCHQ accused Russia of “relentlessly” targeting critical infrastructure, democratic processes, supply chains and public trust in Britain and Europe.

Delivering an inaugural annual lecture, Anne Keast-Butler detailed how Moscow has been increasing its hybrid activity against some European countries, as she urged the public and businesses to make cyber security “10 times more urgent”.

Keast-Butler – appointed GCHQ’s first woman chief in 2023 – noted her agency’s work focused on “disrupting Russia’s efforts to smuggle western tech, fending off cyber attacks, and countering reckless sabotage and assassination attempts”.

UK, allies have narrowing window to stay ahead in tech race, spy chief says

Reuters
London

Britain is at a “moment of consequence” amid hybrid attacks from Russia and other adversaries and a narrowing window to stay ahead in the race to develop AI and other technology to protect itself, a British spy chief said yesterday.

Delivering the first annual lecture for her GCHQ organisation, Anne Keast-Butler warned that the world was in a “new era of radical uncertainty, contested geopolitics and rapidly changing technology”.

“The risk of miscalculation is as high as I’ve ever seen it,” she said. GCHQ, whose role includes eavesdropping on communications and providing national cybersecurity, is one of the three arms of British intelligence, which have for years been warning about the threats posed by Russia and China.

Last month, the head of the National Cyber Security Centre, which is part of GCHQ, warned that Britain should brace for a rise in cyberattacks linked to hostile states.

In her speech at Bletchley Park, the secret home of Britain’s codebreakers in World War Two, Keast-Butler said British intelligence and defence partners were “working tirelessly” to degrade the threat from Russia, from cyberattacks, to countering sabo-

tage and assassination attempts. She said Moscow was “scaling up its daily hybrid activity against the UK and Europe, stretching from the seabed to cyberspace”.

“One area in sharp focus for us is protecting the data and energy flowing through the critical cables and pipelines in and around British waters – we do this by exposing Russia’s intent, motive and underwater capabilities,” she said. Both Moscow and Beijing have routinely denied accusations of cyberattacks or attacks targeting critical infrastructure.

With the speed of technological change, such as the advancements in artificial intelligence, she said the “ground beneath our feet is shifting” and Britain and its allies faced a challenge to stay ahead of the competition, not least from China.

“AI is an unstoppable force with great opportunity. But it’s also a force with risks,” she said. “As AI gains increased autonomy, we all have an intergenerational duty to harness and secure it for good; to protect our national security, our economy and our way of life”.

She said securing and defending space-based technology was critical with both China and Russia investing heavily in space to support both peace and war ambitions.

“When it comes to technology and data, there’s a narrowing window for the UK and our allies to stay ahead,” she said.

India says 10 sailors released by Iran

AFP
Mumbai

Ten Indian sailors, detained in Iran in July 2025 on an oil tanker, have been released after “sustained diplomatic engagement”, India’s shipping authorities said late Tuesday.

The sailors on the MV Harbour Phoenix were “detained, arrested and imprisoned in Iran following the vessel’s interception near Jask Port in July 2025”, the Directorate General of Shipping said in a statement.

“The seafarers have now been released and reunited safely,” the

shipping authority said.

“Necessary arrangements are being co-ordinated for the earliest return of the crew members to India.”

New Delhi and Tehran have long-standing diplomatic and energy ties, but India also balances that with close links to the US and to Israel.

Iranian forces regularly announce the interception of ships it says are illegally transporting fuel in the Gulf.

India has pursued a policy of quiet diplomacy and minimal public comment during negotiations for the release of the sailors.

It did not give further details

on the reason for their arrest or about the vessel, which ship tracking sites list as a Palau-flagged oil products tanker.

India has one of the world’s largest merchant navy workforces, with thousands of Indian sailors operating in Gulf shipping lanes.

Iran has restricted shipping through the Strait of Hormuz – which normally carries about one-fifth of the world’s oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) shipments – since the US and Israel launched attacks on February 28.

India, the world’s third-largest oil buyer, normally sources about half of its crude through the Strait of Hormuz.

Ugandan woman in India tests negative for Ebola

Reuters
Hyderabad/ Bengaluru

A Ugandan woman has tested negative for Ebola infection, India’s health ministry said yesterday, after she was quarantined in the tech hub of Bengaluru on suspicion of having the virus, but it did not say if she would be released from isolation. The news comes a day after a meeting held by Health Minister Jagat Prakash Nadda to review preparations to tackle the disease, which the World Health Organisation has declared a public

health emergency of international concern. “The test result has returned negative for Ebola virus disease,” the health ministry said in a statement on the Bengaluru case, which, if confirmed, would have been the South Asian nation’s first since 2014. The 28-year-old visitor from Uganda did not show symptoms and was quarantined as a precaution, said Dr Anil Kumar Banagar, medical superintendent at the hospital where she was isolated, though the ministry said she suffered mild body ache. She arrived in the southern city from the western industrial city of Ahmedabad

on her journey from Uganda. India has launched screening and surveillance measures at airports and other entry points, issued advisories on precautions, and urged citizens to avoid non-essential travel to Congo, Uganda, and South Sudan. The India-Africa Forum Summit scheduled this week in the capital, New Delhi, was postponed over the public health concerns in Africa. The WHO has confirmed 101 cases among more than 900 globally suspected of the Bundibugyo strain of the virus, for which there is no approved vaccine or treatment.

Nepal’s record-breaking Everest season nears end

AFP
Kathmandu

Nepal is eyeing a record-breaking Everest season with more climbers expected to reach the top than ever before, officials said yesterday, as the climbing window nears its end.

More than 950 climbers have reached the top of the 8,849-metre (29,032-foot) peak this season, said Nepali government official Khim Lal Gautam, speaking at a mountaineering conference in Kathmandu.

“It is truly historic,” Gautam, a mountaineer himself who was assigned by the tourism ministry to help oversee expeditions from base camp, told AFP.

“By Thursday, the number (of climbers) can surpass 1,000”, he said.

The season began with fears of delay after a serac – a block of glacial ice – blocked the way, but Nepali climbers have established an alternative route.

The world’s highest peak, which straddles the Nepal-China border, can be scaled from either Nepal or the northern face in Tibet. But China closed its route this year.

The Guinness World Records says the most ascents of Everest in a single season was 872, achieved in 2019.

Nepal issued a record 494 Everest permits for foreigners this season, with a city of tents up at the foot of



Mountaineers climbing a slope lined up during their ascent from the Hillary Step to summit Mount Everest in Nepal. (AFP)

the mountain for climbers and support staff.

Climbers and officials said that a wide summit window – a period of stable weather that allows safe attempts – contributed to a surge of successful ascents.

Last Thursday alone, an estimated 275 climbers reached the summit, marking the busiest single day on the southern side.

The climbing season will end within a few days.

After that, the final number of those who summited will be tallied after the climbs are verified, which require photographs and statements from the climber’s expedition company and guides.

Five people have died this season – two Indians and three Nepali climbers involved in Everest preparations.

That compares to the 18 people who died in 2023, the deadliest season on the mountain.

“There have been some deaths,” said British climber Kenton Cool, who broke his own record of most summits by a non-Nepali with his 20th climb.

“But I think this year really shows that teams can come together to open the route to Everest, despite the delay, and we still get a pretty good season,” Cool told reporters.

“And I think that should be celebrated.”

Hundreds flee India migrant crackdown towards Bangladesh

AFP
New Delhi

Hundreds of people in India’s border region with Bangladesh have fled to the frontier, police said yesterday, after the government ordered the construction of detention centres for undocumented Bangladeshi migrants and Rohingya refugees.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) swept to power in West Bengal state in early May with a hardline policy to “detect, delete and deport” illegal migrants.

India’s right-wing have long argued that illegal migration is a national security threat, and warned of changing demography in India’s border states.

West Bengal government’s last week ordered the setting up of “holding centres” for “apprehended foreigners”, singling out both Bangladeshis and Rohingya.

The decision has fuelled anxiety among West Bengal’s roughly 35mm Muslims, many of whom share linguistic and cultural ties with neighbouring Bangladesh.

Indian police officer Shirshendu Pati, from the Swarnnagar Police Station about 10 kilometres (six miles) from the Bangladesh border, said streams of people had arrived since Tuesday.

“People who say they are from Bangladesh and want to return home have been coming here since yesterday,” Pati told AFP.

Pati said that the process had “been peaceful and smooth so far”, and they received about 200 people on Tuesday and 40 people early yesterday.

“While we verify their identities and complete the necessary paperwork, all of them are in a holding centre,” he said, noting they will be handed to India’s border security force and sent to Bangladesh.

“The local administration is catering to all their needs including food, water and lodging,” Pati added.

On Tuesday, Home Minister Amit Shah announced the formation of a special committee on demographic change.

“Illegal migration and other reasons for unnatural demography change are a big challenge for any country’s present and future,” Shah said in a speech.

Bangladesh probes hospital deaths of six newborns

AFP
Dhaka

At least six newborn babies died in the same hospital ward in Bangladesh within hours of each other yesterday, said health officials, who launched an investigation.

The newborns, aged between one and three days, were in the post-delivery ward of Ad-Din Hospital, a private facility in the capital Dhaka.

“An investigation is underway, and we need some time to determine the cause of the deaths of

the newborns,” Nahida Yasmin, a director at the hospital, told reporters.

Prabhat Chandra Biswas, head of the government’s health department, noted that air conditioning in the ward was not working in the early hours yesterday, as temperatures in Dhaka were around 32C.

“There is no alternative ventilation once the air conditioner is turned off,” he told reporters, saying the atmosphere inside was suffocating.

One baby fell sick and was taken to an intensive care unit, but was returned to the ward an hour later.

Around dawn, five other babies were feeling unwell. “All were put on ventilators but could not be saved,” Yasmin said.

Health department spokesman Zahid Raihan said initial information did not suggest any mistreatment as the cause of the deaths.

“The Criminal Investigation Department is... testing whether there were any technical faults in the air conditioner or any electrical equipment,” he said.

Janu, a 55-year-old woman whose granddaughter was among the six dead, sat at the entrance of the hospital holding a tiny

body wrapped in a shroud.

“My granddaughter was perfectly okay until last night,” she told AFP.

The babies “turned blue one after another... We took her to the ICU and later received her body,” Janu said.

Others families at the hospital appeared nervous, with some saying they were considering transferring their children elsewhere.

“My grandson has been in the ICU for 19 days in a critical condition – I can’t understand what I should do,” Mohammed Harun told AFP.



Criminal Investigation Department (CID) officials inspect inside the neonatal ward of Ad-Din hospital in Dhaka yesterday, after six newborns died in the facility earlier in the day. (AFP)

Zelensky asks Trump for air defences amid Russian strikes

Ukraine critically depends on US-made interceptors

Reuters
Kyiv

President Volodymyr Zelenskiy urged US President Donald Trump to help Ukraine with air defence systems and interceptors as Russia threatens new strikes, saying that ballistic missiles remain Moscow's "last major advantage on the battlefield".

In a letter to Trump and the US Congress, seen by Reuters, Zelenskiy said: "I ask for your help in protecting Ukraine's skies from Russian missiles. We have already proposed that Ukraine is ready to purchase the number of Patriot systems and interceptor missiles we need." Ukraine's only means to shoot down Russian ballistic missiles is US-made interceptors for the Patriot air defence system.

Throughout the four years of war, Kyiv has been short of interceptors, but the Iran war has threatened to make resources even more scarce.

Since Trump took office, Ukraine has been purchasing Patriot missiles through NATO's Prioritised Ukraine Requirements List (PURL) initiative, financed by its European allies.

"But the current pace of deliveries through the PURL program is no longer keeping up with the real-



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky at the National Chernobyl Museum, heavily damaged by an overnight Russian airstrike, in Kyiv on Sunday. (AFP)

ity of the threat we face," Zelenskiy said in his letter.

"For us – for a nation fighting for its survival – there is hardly anything more painful to see than Patriot batteries with no missiles loaded," he added.

The letter was first reported by Ukrainian media outlet *The Kyiv Independent*. Russia used 30 ballistic missiles against Ukraine in its latest massive strike on Sun-

day, and only 11 of them were shot down, according to Ukraine's air force. Zelenskiy also said that Moscow's troops launched two nuclear-capable intermediate-range ballistic Oreshnik missiles for that strike.

"One struck the Kyiv region, while another, reportedly, fell in temporarily occupied territory in Ukraine's Donetsk region." In the letter, the Ukrainian leader out-

lined Ukraine's success in fending off Russia's full-scale aggression, now well into its fifth year, and expressed gratitude for US support. "But as long as Putin still has even one meaningful advantage in conventional weapons, he will avoid conventional diplomacy. Today, his ballistic missiles remain exactly that – his last major advantage on the battlefield," Zelenskiy added.

Sweden rejects plans for fossil fuel phase-out

AFP
Stockholm

Sweden's government yesterday rejected a government-appointed commission's recommendations on ways to phase out fossil fuels, which included tax hikes on petrol and diesel to meet the country's 2030 climate targets.

Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson's right-wing coalition, backed by the far-right Sweden Democrats, commissioned the expert report in 2024 to find solutions to reduce the use of fossil fuels, in particular in the road transport sector.

Sweden has set a goal of reducing CO2 emissions from transport by 70% by 2030 from 2010 levels, and to achieve net zero emissions by 2045.

The commission yesterday proposed an increase in the required share of biofuels or low-carbon alternatives that petrol suppliers must blend into their products.

The current levels "are too low for Sweden to be able to meet its 2030 commitment without the ESR trading system" of purchasing quotas abroad, the report said.

It also proposed an increase in petrol and diesel taxes to encourage consumers to shift to electric vehicles.

The proposals run counter to the policies the government has pushed since coming to power in 2022, namely cutting petrol taxes and reducing the biofuels

The proposals run counter to the policies the government has pushed since coming to power in 2022, namely cutting petrol taxes and reducing the biofuels obligation.

The report comes as Sweden is just months away from a general election on September 13.

"This commission was set up two years ago, before (US President Donald) Trump (began his second term) and before the war in Iran," Finance Minister Elisabeth Svantesson told public broadcaster SVT.

"In this situation, petrol prices are so high that it makes people's lives more difficult. It would be a bad idea" to raise them further, she said.

The government recently lowered petrol taxes temporarily in response to the energy crisis.

The commission also proposed raising subsidies for electric cars and cutting household electricity taxes.

Several expert reports have concluded in recent years that Sweden is unlikely to be able to meet its climate targets for 2030 and 2040 because of the government's policies.

"The gradual phase-out of fossil fuels must be carried out in a safe and acceptable way, so as to maintain and strengthen the competitiveness of Sweden and its companies," the climate ministry said in a statement yesterday.

Nordic investors urge EU to hold firm on Arctic drilling

Reuters
Copenhagen/Brussels

Financial institutions and investors have urged the European Union to maintain its opposition to new Arctic oil and gas drilling, as the bloc weighs revising its stance to prioritise energy security. The call highlights investor unease that the energy crisis triggered by the US-Israeli war with Iran could be used to justify rolling back climate commitments, as governments focus on securing supplies.

Nordea Asset Management, part of Nordic lender Nordea, and 11 other financial institutions were among signatories urging the European Commission on Wednesday not to weaken its stance, warning it would undermine both climate goals and long-term energy security.

New Arctic fossil fuel developments would take more than a decade to come online, making them ineffective in addressing the current crisis, said the letter, organised by the Nordic Center for Sustainable Finance and Danish pension fund Sampension and also signed by civil society groups and scientists.

"The Arctic is one of the planet's most vulnerable ecosystems and home to unique wildlife.... Further oil and gas expansion would add pressure to these globally significant ecosystems, by increasing the risk of oil spills and leakages," the letter said.

Oil spill simulations suggest more than 90% of spilled oil in certain fields of the Barents Sea would not be recoverable, it added. The war in Iran has disrupted global energy markets and sent European gas prices surging. Norway, Europe's biggest gas supplier but not an EU member, has been pushing Brussels to drop the moratorium.

With many ageing fields, Norwegian production is set to decline in the 2030s unless companies such as Equinor make new discoveries outside mature areas.

Norway's largest pension company, KLP, also signed the letter.

The EU's current policy supports a ban on further Arctic oil and gas development and rejects purchases of such hydrocarbons. However, no formal moratorium is in place.

A Commission spokesperson said the EU was reviewing its Arctic policy "in light of the new geopolitical and economic context" but no conclusions had been reached.

Jacob Ehrlerth Jorgensen, head of ESG at Sampension, said the fund backed Norway's role as an energy supplier but that Arctic drilling was not the answer to Europe's energy security challenge.

"This is about the next steps, where we really open up some risk – both in terms of energy security, climate and biodiversity – or whether there is a smarter way to do it," he told Reuters.

Spain PM backs ex-leader targeted in graft probe

AFP
Rome

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez maintained his support yesterday for his predecessor Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, following the release of new details of the investigation into the ex-leader for influence peddling.

The affair is part of a growing list of graft cases that have raised questions about the viability of Sanchez's minority Socialist government and contributed to a string of heavy regional election defeats.

"I think there is no sufficient reason, there is no reason to change that position," Sanchez told a news conference in Rome after a meeting with Pope Leo XIV at the Vatican.

Sanchez, who came to power in 2018 after using a vote of no-confidence to topple the corruption-mired conservative government, reiterated his respect for the presumption of innocence.

Zapatero, who governed from 2004 to 2011, was placed under official investigation last week for influence peddling and other crimes allegedly committed during the bailout of small airline Plus Ultra in 2021. He has been summoned to testify in court next month.

The case centres on whether Zapatero used his political influence to help airline Plus Ultra secure a 53-million-euro (\$58-billion) bailout in 2021 and whether he and his family financially benefited from it.



Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez greets officials in San Damaso courtyard for a meeting with Pope Leo, in the Vatican yesterday. (AFP)

The investigating judge suspects Zapatero may have been part of an elaborate network involving shell companies and behind-the-scenes lobbying designed to push favourable decisions through the Socialist government's channels.

Authorities are also looking into possible commissions and financial flows connected to the case.

Zapatero, a totem of the Spanish left and ally of Sanchez, has consistently denied wrongdoing or having ever received payments from Plus Ultra.

Authorities recently released new details of the investigation, including the discovery of luxury watches and jewellery of undetermined value in a safe belonging to Zapatero.

The head of the opposition conservative Popular Party (PP), Alberto Nunez Feijoo, on Wednesday repeated his call for snap polls, saying Sanchez's government "stinks" of corruption.

Sanchez's brother, David, is scheduled to stand trial for influence peddling.

His wife, Begona Gomez, is under investigation in a separate corruption case.

Sanchez has dismissed the cases against his family members as baseless and part of a right-wing "smear campaign".

His former right-hand man, ex-transport minister Jose Luis Abalos, is awaiting a verdict in his own corruption trial which ended earlier this month.

Earlier on Wednesday police entered the Madrid headquarters of Sanchez's Socialist party to demand documents as part of a probe into former party member Leire Diez. She is accused by Spain's top criminal court, the National Audience, of participating in what it described as a network aimed at undermining judicial proceedings involving the party or the government.

Sanchez said the Socialist Party "respects the judiciary" and "cooperates" with investigations, adding that it had previously cut ties with Diez after concerns emerged.

"Obviously, if there are irregular behaviours – new ones, I mean – we will act with the same firmness as before," he said, referring to previous internal disciplinary actions within his party.

The next general election is due in 2027.

Latvia to strengthen anti-drone defences along its Russia and Belarus border

Reuters
Selija Military Base, Latvia

Latvia is increasing anti-drone defences on its borders with Russia and Moscow-allied Belarus in response to drones flying into the Nato country, an army official told Reuters. Ukrainian drones have strayed into Nato Baltic countries' airspace in recent weeks, sowing confusion and raising tensions with Russia at a time when US commitment to Nato's collective security is in question. Ukraine, which has been targeting Russia's Baltic oil loading ports, has said Russian jamming of its drones' signals had caused them to veer off course.

Two such drones exploded at an empty oil storage facility in Latvia on May 7. Another exploded into a lake on Saturday after flying into the country undetected, witnessed by a fisherman. An approaching drone forced lawmakers in the Lithuanian capital Vilnius to take shelter underground on May 20, and a Nato military jet shot down



Redwire drones are displayed during the international Drone Summit in Riga, Latvia yesterday. (Reuters)

another drone over Estonia on May 19.

"We plan to deploy (drone) interceptor teams over the next two weeks", Modris Kairiss, head of the Latvian Army Autonomous Systems Competence Centre, told Reuters at a side event of the Drone Summit conference in Latvia.

The teams will consist of up to four soldiers in a rugged terrain vehicle operating killer drones, which can destroy incoming military drones in a 10-km (6-mile) radius, he said.

The number of such teams patrolling the 400-km Latvian border with Russia and its ally Belarus

is classified. "We do need to increase the number of such teams, but we need to balance this against other army needs. If we put them on every kilometer of the border, we will quickly burn all army resources", he said.

Speaking to Reuters at a military testing range where Latvia is trying

out the newest drone technologies in a Nato programme, Kairiss said taking down military drones in peacetime is complicated, because radar data in Nato countries is classified and sharing it with soldiers tasked with destroying drones is cumbersome.

"It's not enough to engage with anything you notice. We need to identify it first," to avoid hitting a civilian airplane, Kairiss said.

Another looming challenge for the Latvian military, and Nato in general, is the growing use of small drones, Kairiss said.

"They are several steps ahead of the anti-drone systems... Detection and interception of the small targets is hard, and it's the big challenge that soon we will all face," he said.

Ukraine is on track to out-produce Russia in number of drones, with both countries producing millions of units per year, Air Marshal Johnny Stringer, the British officer serving as NATO's deputy air commander, told Reuters on the sidelines of the Drone Summit.

Nato cannot match this at the

moment, but it needs to have the industry able to replenish the drones at the same rate as they are consumed, he said, adding: "The answer is not to procure lots of things and then have them in hangars and warehouses... They will be overtaken by the sheer pace and technology."

"To me this comes down to stuff which is good enough, it is cheap enough, it's delivered fast enough and there is enough", he added.

Militaries could look beyond the "traditionally understood defence industrial base" for that, said Stringer.

He said the innovative drone companies in Ukraine are often less than four years old, and were started by people outside the defence industry or military.

"The alliance will need to be able to produce in very large numbers based on the concepts of how we envision fighting", said Scott Boston, senior defence analyst at RAND Corp.

"Partnership with Ukraine is the only short-term way" to increase the production capacity, he added.

‘Catastrophic collision’ of Ebola and war in DRC

Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is complicating efforts to rein in a deadly Ebola outbreak, the World Health Organization (WHO) chief warned yesterday, while Uganda announced it was shutting its border.

The WHO has recorded 10 confirmed and 223 suspected Ebola deaths in the DRC since the outbreak was declared in mid-May, out of more than 1,000 confirmed and suspected cases. Its chief fears insecurity in the eastern DRC, which has been plagued for three decades by conflict involving a litany of armed groups, is making it extremely difficult to contain the outbreak.

“Eastern DRC now faces a catastrophic collision of disease and conflict with the Ebola outbreak in Ituri province outpacing the response,” the UN agency’s chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on X. Neighbouring Uganda, which has recorded seven cases of the Bundibugyo strain of Ebola responsible for the outbreak, announced it was shutting its border with the DRC with immediate effect.

It also said it was imposing a 21-day quarantine on anyone arriving from the DRC, under the supervision of the Ministry of Health and district

surveillance teams. No vaccine or treatment exists for the Bundibugyo strain of Ebola, which is behind the DRC’s 17th recorded outbreak of the disease.

The WHO said the case fatality rate was under 25 percent – much lower than in other recent outbreaks. But it has also said the true spread of the virus was probably much wider than confirmed numbers suggest, with the strain likely circulating for some time before it was detected.

State services in rural areas of Ituri province have been largely absent for decades. Tedros lamented that clashes were “driving mass displacement, pushing exposed contacts into overcrowded camps and severing critical containment corridors”

“Frontline workers are risking everything, while attacks on health facilities make tracking cases and their contacts nearly impossible,” he warned.

“We cannot build community trust or isolate the sick while bombs are falling,” Tedros said, urging “all warring parties to agree to an immediate ceasefire to contain this outbreak”.

The United States plans to open a quarantine centre in Kenya, the *Wall Street Journal* reported on Tuesday, primarily intended for Americans who need to leave the DRC quickly and quarantine. —AFP

Opening notes in Astana



Russia's President Vladimir Putin and Kazakhstan's President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev pose for a picture with young musicians during a welcoming ceremony at an airport in Astana, Kazakhstan. (Reuters)

Critical minerals – the raw materials of great power competition

By Rory Miller

We live in a world where the lines between geopolitics and trade and security and finance are increasingly blurred.



Reports that the US Department of War has established a critical minerals team made up of former bankers, commodity traders and financial wheeler-dealers underscores this point.

This intriguing news story also highlights how the weaponisation of critical minerals and rare earth elements is now central to US-China great power competition.

Beijing has a multi-decade head start over Washington in this race.

Take the case of rare earths. In the 1980s, California was the epicentre of rare earth production and the US dominated the sector globally.

During the 1990s, China captured market share by heavily subsidising the refining process that makes rare earths suitable for industrial production.

The US and other western producers could no longer compete on cost or price and started to import their processed rare earth needs from China.

As recently as 2024, the US only bought around \$170mn of unprocessed rare earth elements. The rest came from companies inside the Chinese-controlled processing supply chain.

This is the outcome of a long-term Chinese global strategy to dominate the entire mineral value chain.

China has invested hundreds of billions of dollars, by some estimates up to \$15bn annually, on this project and the results speak for themselves.

Chinese state-owned companies run mines across Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia. China currently controls approximately 85% of the global rare earth refining process.

Chinese dominance of this sector first came to prominence with the rising importance of clean tech as part of the fourth energy transition.

EV batteries need lithium, cobalt, and nickel; solar panels need copper, gallium and tellurium; offshore wind turbines require large amounts of manganese, nickel, and chromium.

The rise of AI, cloud computing and data centres fuelled further concerns over Chinese dominance of these raw materials. Semi-conductors require 17 different critical minerals and rare earths. The power systems and cooling networks of data centres require copper, gallium and indium.

This situation became even more intolerable once politicians realised that cutting-edge defense technology is also dependant on the China-dominated supply chain.

The US Department of War has listed over 300 supply chain vulnerabilities in its weapons programs and platforms due to reliance on externally sourced raw materials.

Night-vision equipment, radar systems, and precision-guided munitions all need rare earth elements. So do fighter-jets and submarines. Each F-35 fighter, the most costly weapons-system in history, uses around 420 kilos of rare earth materials.

This explains why, after years of neglect, reversing Chinese dominance of the critical mineral/rare earth supply chain now tops the US national security agenda.

The issue can even claim bipartisan support

across the American political divide.

Democrats welcomed President Trump’s January 2025 Executive Order (14156) that declared the “lack of diversified critical minerals an imminent threat to prosperity and national security”.

In response to this threat, the Trump Administration has launched Project Vault to build up a massive strategic reserve of key critical minerals and rare earths.

The Pentagon office of ex-bankers doing financial deals to secure mineral rights is only a very minor part of this project.

The White House has also signed around 30 bilateral agreements with countries across the world to counter Chinese influence on the regional level.

These deals have been with traditional US partners including Australia, Japan, the UK and the Philippines. But they have also been with countries primarily of interest to the US because of their mineral resources.

Loathe to provide humanitarian aid to the developing world, the Trump administration is instead offering high levels of development finance funding for countries in Africa and Latin America willing to partner on critical mineral projects.

In other cases, the US has taken advantage of local conflicts to leverage critical mineral deals.

Ukraine is home to over one hundred types of strategic minerals including Europe’s largest untapped lithium deposits and large amounts of titanium – a key component in defense tech.

In 2025, the US signed a strategic minerals partnership with Ukraine, holding out the hope of protection and even security guarantees in return for long-term access to these precious resources.

For its part, Ukraine attempted to leverage its minerals to bind the Trump administration to its side in its war with Russia.

The Democratic Republic of Congo has taken a similar approach. It holds an estimated \$24tn in mineral wealth, including the world’s largest cobalt reserves. It has offered the US preferential access to its resources to counterbalance Chinese influence and to gain American military assistance and political support in the contested east of the country.

In a move uncharacteristic of the Trump administration more generally, it is also building a series of multilateral frameworks intended to challenge Chinese global dominance of minerals and related products. These include the Minerals Security Partnership made up of 14-members plus the EU, and the Pax Silica Alliance which includes Qatar and the UAE among its 15 members.

Here the US is copying China’s use of multilateralism to secure its critical mineral needs. For years, Beijing has taken advantage of frameworks like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to do mineral deals.

The US also has plans to explore deep sea international waters, which are believed to hold vast reserves of critical minerals including nickel, copper, and cobalt.

These plans pose significant technical and legal challenges. But they also risk opening up a new front of geopolitical tension with China and Russia, who are both also looking to exploit the maritime domain for these resources.

It is too early to tell whether the US can close the gap with China on this vital issue.

If Washington fails to do so, critical minerals and rare earth elements will play a major part in tilting the geopolitical balance of power in favour of Beijing in years to come.

• The writer is Professor of International Politics and Director of the Small States and Energy Studies Programs at Georgetown University in Qatar @RoryDavidMiller

After the Storm: The Gulf’s moment of reinvention



By Jamil K Mroue

The regional order that served the GCC for half a century is buckling. What comes next depends on choices that can no longer be deferred.

There is an old Bedouin saying that the desert teaches patience but punishes hesitation. For the six monarchies of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the present moment demands both at once. Whatever the final shape of the conflict that Netanyahu’s government has imposed on the Middle East, life along the Gulf littoral will continue. The question is not whether the region survives the turbulence, but whether it emerges with the architecture to convert its formidable assets into durable civilisational achievement.

For five decades, GCC governance rested on a sturdy if unspoken compact. The first pillar was tribal continuity – hereditary structures providing social cohesion without coercive bureaucracy. The second was petrodollar abundance: oil revenues funding a developmental sprint without precedent. A protective dome completed the structure. The dependence of Western economies on Gulf energy – the region accounts for roughly a quarter of global crude exports and holds nearly a third of proven reserves – secured diplomatic recognition and security guarantees in exchange for supply reliability and petrodollar recycling into Western markets.

Within that enclosure, the results were extraordinary. In 1970, per capita income across much of the Arabian Peninsula barely exceeded \$1,000 in today’s terms. By 2024, Qatar’s GDP per capita stood at around \$75,000 and the UAE’s at around \$50,000. Riyadh, Dubai, Doha and Abu Dhabi grew from trading towns into skylines that draw more visitors than many European capitals. Saudi Arabia alone has committed hundreds of billions to infrastructure since 2000. The GCC collectively graduates more than 400,000 university students annually. By its velocity it rivals the Chinese miracle – achieved by a combined population one-thousandth the size.

Yet the candid observer must note what the dome obscured.

Annual GCC summits, for all their ceremonial weight, gathered leaders pursuing parallel rather than converging agendas. Coordination on defence, industrial policy, water security and education remained largely aspirational. The GCC Secretariat’s archives in Riyadh hold decades of joint proposals – on monetary union, a common electricity grid, unified visa regimes – drafted with diligence and shelved with equal thoroughness. The distances between city-states encouraged individualistic instincts; so did deference to a broader Arab world whose more ancient and populous societies long served as the Gulf’s imported expertise base.

The intermediary stage – the final two decades of the twentieth century – showed what disciplined oil wealth could accomplish: functional states emerged where nomadic polities had existed within living memory. But the new century arrived with complications the dome could not absorb. The September 2001 attacks plunged the GCC into a storm not of its making. Western military adventurism in Afghanistan and Iraq destabilised the neighbourhood without producing order. Iran’s ambitions, uncontained by the hollowed-out Arab state system, filled the vacuum. And now Netanyahu, exploiting a rupture in the Palestinian question that he spent three decades engineering, has taken the initiative with American acquiescence and an appetite for reordering that serves Israeli interests far more than Gulf ones.

This is the sobering ledger. But pessimism is a luxury the Gulf cannot afford – and the empirical case for optimism is stronger than crisis commentary suggests.

The GCC’s sovereign wealth funds alone manage approximately \$5tn in assets, around 40% of the global total, making it among the most financially capitalised regions for its size. Saudi Arabia’s median age is under 30 – a demographic dividend that ageing Western economies would pass handsomely to possess. Vision 2030, the UAE’s Net Zero by 2050 commitment and Qatar’s post-tournament diversification strategy show that the will for structural transformation is genuine and has moved well beyond rhetorical aspiration.

What, then, must be done? Four imperatives stand out.

First, defence consolidation: the GCC must move from parallel procurement toward interoperable architectures, rationalising a collective annual defence spend of around \$120 billion into systems that communicate. Individual orders with Western suppliers have created a patchwork that

benefits contractors more than coherence. The region’s combined firepower, properly coordinated, would constitute a formidable deterrent. At present it constitutes an expensive catalogue.

Second, educational reinvention for the AI era. The coming decade will see AI reshape every knowledge-intensive profession. GCC institutions must be rebuilt around computational literacy, critical reasoning and adaptive learning – not the credentialing models inherited from twentieth-century Egyptian and Lebanese universities. Here Gulf capital, properly directed, can leapfrog the incremental reform that constrains older economies. The window will not stay open indefinitely.

Third, a Gulf-led Arab stabilisation fund. The overflow risk from collapsed Arab states – Yemen, Sudan, Lebanon, Syria, Gaza – is existential for Gulf social stability. A coordinated architecture, modelled loosely on the Marshall Plan, would cost a fraction of what military responses would demand. At around \$60bn over a decade, it is affordable. What has been missing is political will and institutional design.

Fourth, and most foundational: the Arab League must be resurrected as a functioning multilateral body capable of shouldering these burdens. The alternative – each Gulf state managing regional dysfunction bilaterally – is neither efficient nor sustainable. The League was never designed for irrelevance; it has been allowed to drift there by the very states that stand to gain most from its revival. Pooling GCC think-tank capacity to draft a reform agenda would be a sensible first step.

The fathers of today’s Gulf leaders made a momentous wager: that disciplined use of transient resource wealth could build permanent civilisational capacity. They were right. The wager for this generation is larger still, and the clock less forgiving. Before the oil age closes and AI reshapes the global economy beyond recognition, they must architect a framework worthy of the societies they have inherited. Climate change will not wait for consensus. AI will not pause for committees. And the Gulf’s young populations deserve leaders who understand that honouring tradition means doing what their fathers did: opening new departures when the old roads run out.

The desert teaches patience. It also punishes those who wait for the storm to pass before deciding how to move.

• The writer is a Lebanese writer and former editor of *Al-Hayat* in London and *The Daily Star* in Beirut.

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Traditional Ardah performances set the tone for the celebrations.



The renowned cultural destination came alive with a diverse programme that attracted visitors of all ages and nationalities. **PICTURES:** Shaji Kayamklam

Crowds throng Katara Eid celebrations

Katara Cultural Village transformed into a vibrant hub of celebration on the first day of Eid al-Adha, blending heritage performances, family entertainment, and large-scale cultural shows in an atmosphere filled with joy and national pride.

The renowned cultural destination came alive with a diverse programme that attracted visitors of all ages and nationalities, further reinforcing its status as one of Qatar's premier venues for cultural and recreational experiences during major public holidays.

At the heart of the festivities along Katara Corniche, traditional Ardah performances set the tone for the celebrations. The rhythmic chants and synchronised movements captivated audiences, reviving elements of Qatari heritage and offering visitors a vivid connection to the nation's cultural identity.

One of the most popular highlights of the Eid programme was the distribution of "Katara Eid gifts", a long-standing tradition that brought joy to children and families alike. The initiative created memorable moments for younger visitors, who gathered enthusiastically to receive gifts in a lively and welcoming atmosphere.

Families attending the celebrations praised the organisation and diversity of activities, noting that Katara successfully combined en-



The crowd witnessed fireworks display at Katara, marking Eid al-Adha.

tertainment with cultural authenticity. Many said the Eid gift initiative has become a highly anticipated annual tradition, particularly among children who associate it with excitement and festive celebrations.

Visitors also commended Katara for provid-

ing a safe and family-friendly environment that encourages social interaction while preserving cultural values. The balance between modern event organisation and traditional identity was widely viewed as a key factor behind the strong public turnout. Adding a sense of grandeur to the festivities, a military-style parade featuring coordinated marches and ceremonial music drew significant attention from visitors and photographers, creating a striking visual spectacle along the waterfront.

From the second day of Eid, Katara will continue its celebrations with educational and entertainment programmes at the Al Thuraya Planetarium. The planetarium will host three daily space-themed shows at 5pm, 6pm, and 7pm, taking audiences on immersive journeys through stars, planets, and the mysteries of the universe.

Known for combining science with interactive learning, the planetarium remains one of Katara's major attractions, especially for families and young visitors seeking both education and entertainment in an engaging setting.

The evening concluded with a spectacular fireworks display at 8.30pm, illuminating the Doha skyline with vibrant colours. Families gathered along the Corniche to watch the dazzling show, which provided a dramatic finale to the first day of Eid celebrations.



(Supplied pictures)



The fireworks display serves as a highlight of the Eid celebrations at Katara.



Hungarian Prime Minister Peter Magyar attends a plenary session in the Parliament, in Budapest. (Reuters)

Hungary lawmakers vote to stop ICC exit initiated by Orbán regime

AFP
Budapest

Hungarian lawmakers yesterday voted overwhelmingly to cancel the European country's withdrawal from the International Criminal Court set in motion by former nationalist premier Viktor Orbán last year.

Pro-EU conservative Prime Minister Peter Magyar, who won a landslide electoral victory in April, vowed he would reverse the year-

long exit process before it takes effect on June 2.

The 199-member parliament voted 133 for, 37 against with five abstentions to formally repeal a law on exiting the ICC, just ahead of the deadline.

Magyar submitted the bill on Monday and rushed it through legislature in a fast-track procedure. It is up to President Tamas Sulyok, an Orbán ally, to sign the legislation into law.

The ICC's legislative body hailed an "important decision"

after the government announced last Friday it would discontinue the process of withdrawal.

Orbán announced Hungary's withdrawal last year, decrying the tribunal as a "political court", while hosting his ally, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

In 2024, ICC issued an arrest warrant for Netanyahu over allegations of crimes against humanity and war crimes — including starvation as a method of warfare — in Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza, prompting US sanctions

against top judges and prosecutors.

Magyar had previously indicated that Hungary would execute ICC warrants against anyone, even Netanyahu, despite inviting him to Budapest for later this year.

Only Burundi and the Philippines have withdrawn from the ICC.

Set up in 2002 and backed by 125 member states, the Hague-based tribunal, seeks to prosecute individuals responsible for the world's gravest crimes when countries are

unwilling or unable to do so themselves. Since it was founded, the ICC has opened more than 30 cases for alleged war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and offences against the administration of justice.

But it has been struggling against a lack of recognition and enforcement power.

China, Israel, Russia and the US are among nations that do not recognise the jurisdiction of the ICC, hampering its ability to investigate their nationals.

Putin gifts four Amur tigers to Kazakhstan

Russia has handed Kazakhstan four Amur tigers, two of them cubs, to help the country restore its numbers of the animals, President Vladimir Putin said in an article issued ahead of his visit to the Central Asian nation this week.

Rich in energy resources and critical minerals, Kazakhstan shares a border with Russia and is a close ally of Moscow in a region where China and the US are also expanding their influence.

The four animals captured in Russia's far eastern region of Khabarovsk were flown to Kazakhstan, Putin said on the Kremlin's website on Tuesday, and are soon to be released into the wild.

Putin is no stranger to using animals to advance diplomatic ef-

forts. In 2022, Russia sent 30 grey thoroughbred horses to North Korea, as the nations have boosted ties since Ukraine's invasion that year. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is a keen horseman.

Kazakhstan, which is trying to restore the tiger population in Central Asia, sees the Amur tiger as a close relative of the extinct Caspian tiger. The Russian gesture boosts the country's tally of the animals previously sent by the Netherlands.

During his visit, Putin will oversee the signing of a deal for a nuclear power project in Kazakhstan, which has no nuclear power generation now, and will discuss efforts to boost the transit of Russian oil to China through the country, the Kremlin has said. (Reuters)

Norway under France's nuclear umbrella: Stoere

Reuters
Oslo

Norway will come under France's nuclear umbrella, Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Stoere told news agency NTB yesterday, as concerns grow in Europe over US commitment to the region's security.

The move by Norway is significant as it has long been a so-called Atlanticist nation, one which believed its security was best achieved via close alignment with Washington.

Stoere travelled to Paris yesterday afternoon to meet President Emmanuel Macron and sign a new defence agreement with France, which includes Norway joining a French-led nuclear weapons initiative.

"We are doing this in light of the security policy situation in Europe, including Russia's mas-

sive rearmament, also in the nuclear domain, and that it is waging a full-scale war against another European country," Stoere told Norwegian news agency NTB.

No nuclear weapons will be deployed in Norway in peacetime, he added. The Nordic nation of 5.6 mn inhabitants is a member of Nato, and shares a border with Russia in the Arctic.

In March, France offered to extend the protection of its nuclear umbrella to other European countries which, in practice, means that an attack on Norway could trigger a French nuclear response. Norway becomes the latest country to receive France's nuclear protection, after Poland and Lithuania, which also share borders with Russia.

Rosatom eyes second Kazakhstan nuclear plant

Reuters
Moscow

Russia's state nuclear Corp said it may hold talks on participating in a project to build a second nuclear power plant in Kazakhstan, Rosatom head Alexei Likhachev said yesterday.

Kazakhstan has approved construction of the plant, with state-run China National Nuclear Corp (CNNC) selected as the main constructor.

"We have not yet been officially informed of the Kazakh side's decision regarding the second plant, either in terms of configuration or location. As soon as we receive such information officially — possibly in the next few days — we will proceed immediately to practical negotiations", Likhachev said.

Likhachev added that Russia and Kazakhstan are set to sign an intergovernmental agreement and a preliminary contract covering timelines and pricing for the country's first nuclear power plant, Balkhash NPP, during Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to Kazakhstan starting on Wednesday.

Speaking about the Balkhash project, Likhachev said Kazakhstan had held talks with companies from South Korea, China and France on possible participation, adding Rosatom had no objections.

However, the plant's technical design, specifications and supply of key heavy engineering equipment will ultimately be handled by Rosatom, he said.

Likhachev said Rosatom plans to begin active construction at the site in 2027 and expects completion in the mid-2030s.

Amir offers Eid al-Adha prayers



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani offered Eid al-Adha prayers along with citizens at Lusail prayer ground yesterday morning. During the Eid sermon, Sheikh Dr Yahya Bati al-Nuaimi highlighted the importance of honouring the rituals of Islam, describing them as a reflection of piety and obedience to God. He said Eid al-Adha was a significant spiritual occasion that reminded Muslims of devotion, gratitude and worship, while also strengthening family ties and reviving religious traditions in an atmosphere of celebration and communal prayer. **(QNA)**

Amir meets Eid al-Adha well-wishers at Lusail Palace

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani received well-wishers offering Eid al-Adha greetings at Lusail Palace yesterday morning following Eid prayers. Among those received by His Highness were HE Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani and HE Shura Council Speaker Hassan bin Abdullah al Ghanim. Their Excellencies sheikhs, ministers, undersecretaries of ministries, members of the Shura Council and groups of citizens also gathered to convey their congratulations on the occasion. The reception was attended by His Highness Personal Representative of the Amir, Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad al-Thani, His Highness Sheikh Abdullah bin Khalifa al-Thani, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Khalifa al-Thani and HE Sheikh Jassim bin Khalifa al-Thani. Eid al-Adha (Festival of Sacrifice) is the second major holiday in the Islamic calendar and is traditionally marked by prayers, family visits and official gatherings. **(QNA)**



Fireworks spectacle mesmerises visitors

By Shaima Sheriff
Staff Reporter

Families, residents and visitors gathered at Katara Cultural Village to celebrate Eid al-Adha with fireworks, parades and community festivities, transforming the waterfront destination into a vibrant hub of joy and togetherness. For Maissane, a young resident who recently moved to Doha, this Eid carried special meaning as she celebrated with her parents for the first time since relocating to Qatar four months ago.

"For the first time, my parents are here to celebrate Eid with me. Alhamdulillah, they're here, and I'm really happy," she said. Earlier in the day, the family attended Eid prayers at Education City Stadium before heading to Katara for the evening festivities. "Eid prayer, Eid nap and Eid brunch, mandatory," Maissane said.

Reflecting on her experience in Qatar so far, Maissane lauded the country's welcoming atmosphere. "The people, the food, everything is so nice here," she said, while eagerly waiting for the fireworks display she had heard was "one of the best in the world".

Her father, Alain, who travelled from Paris to visit his daughter, described Doha as both impressive and welcoming despite the summer heat. "I love it," he said.

"But it's too hot for me. Next time I come in winter, inshallah." The evening also highlighted how Eid celebrations in Qatar often extend beyond religious boundaries, bringing together people from different cultures and backgrounds. Among the crowd were Ashok and Swastika, a Nepalese couple who said Qatar had become "a second home" for them after years of living in the country. "Even though we are not Muslim, living in Qatar feels so safe and so good," Swastika said. "The culture here, the people and their traditions are very beautiful."

The couple explained how they have gradually embraced Eid traditions over the years, despite not growing up celebrating the occasion themselves. "We cooked food, we ate together, we greeted people and said 'Eid Mubarak!'" she said. "It feels so good."

Swastika added that Qatar's hospitality and multicultural environment made it easy for expatriates to feel included in community celebrations. "The people are very hospitable and kind," she said. "We adapted ourselves to this culture and environment." As fireworks illuminated the night sky above Katara, the celebrations reflected more than festive entertainment; they showcased how Eid in Qatar continues to bring communities together through shared experiences, hospitality and human connection.



Families gather at Katara Cultural Village to enjoy a dazzling fireworks display celebrating Eid al-Adha, as vibrant colours light up the Doha night sky in a festive atmosphere of joy and togetherness. **PICTURE:** Shaji Kayamkulam



PICTURE: Ram Chand



Swatika and Ashok



Fireworks wow crowds at Katara. **PICTURE:** Shaji Kayamkulam



Maissane, Alain, and her mother.