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US, Iran agree on 60-day extension of ceasefire: report

Plan pending Trump's approval; Tehran says it's still not finalised

Reuters
Washington

The United States and Iran reached an agreement yesterday to extend their ceasefire pending the approval of President Donald Trump, after Iran had targeted a US air base in Kuwait following US strikes on what Washington called an Iranian drone operation.

According to four sources familiar with the matter, the two sides agreed a memorandum-of-understanding to extend the truce for 60 days but the plan still needed Trump's sign-off.

The agreement will state how to address Iran's stockpile of highly enriched uranium, which will be among the first issues discussed during the 60-day window, according to an earlier report by Axios, which broke the news.

The White House declined to comment. The reports prompted oil prices to reverse course and trade lower on hopes of a potential reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, a key transit route for roughly a fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas supply.

But Iran's Tasnim news agency, citing a source close to Tehran's negotiating team, said the text had not been finalised and Iran would

inform mediator Pakistan if and when it had been agreed.

Iranian sources cited by local media also said a deal would only be complete when announced by Tehran, not unilaterally by Trump.

Trump has repeatedly said the end of the war is close but told media at a cabinet meeting on Wednesday he was not yet satisfied by the negotiations and that the US was not discussing easing sanctions, one of Tehran's demands.

The latest attacks, while limited, highlighted the fragility of negotiations to turn the tenuous early-April ceasefire into a lasting agreement to end the three-month-old war - which has killed thousands - and reopen the vital Strait of Hormuz.

US Central Command said US forces had shot down five Iranian attack drones and struck a ground control station in the port city of Bandar Abbas that was about to launch a sixth. Kuwaiti forces had then intercepted a ballistic missile fired towards the country, which hosts a large US base.

"These actions were measured, purely defensive and intended to maintain the ceasefire," a US official, who requested anonymity to speak candidly about military operations, told Reuters earlier.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps said it had targeted the US base responsible for an early-morning attack near Bandar Abbas airport and that any repeat would lead to a "more decisive response", Tasnim news agency reported. **To Page 11**



A drone view shows vessels anchored at the Strait of Hormuz, as seen from Musandam, Oman. (Reuters)

Expired-visa grace period ends on June 7

The Ministry of Interior (MoI) announced the suspension of a decision to extend all types of expired or nearly expired entry visas, effective Sunday, June 7. In a post on its official X platform, the MoI said that standard procedures and guidelines approved for all types of entry visas - including validity periods and applicable fees -

would resume from that date. The ministry urged all residents, visitors and stakeholders to regularise their status by renewing their visas, paying the prescribed fees within the specified periods, or leaving the country upon the expiration of their visas to avoid legal penalties linked to overstaying. **(QNA)**

Amir, Trump discuss latest security developments

US president hails Qatar's support for Pak mediation



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani received a phone call from US President Donald Trump. They discussed the latest updates in the Middle East, in light of the political and security developments taking place in the region, along with the regional and international efforts aimed at reducing escalation and enhancing stability. The Amir stressed the need to prioritise political and diplomatic solutions and dialogue between all parties in order to consolidate regional security and stability and spare the region further tension and escalation. The US president voiced his appreciation for Qatar's role in supporting Pakistani mediation efforts and strengthening communication channels between the various parties. He also commended Qatar's endeavour

aimed at bringing viewpoints closer and advancing de-escalation efforts in the region. Yesterday's call was the latest in a series of direct contacts between the two leaders in recent weeks, reflecting the growing importance Washington attaches to Doha's mediation role at a critical juncture for regional security. Qatar has consistently maintained that dialogue and diplomacy represent the only viable path to resolving the region's overlapping crises, a position His Highness the Amir has reaffirmed

in successive engagements with world leaders. Doha has played a central back-channel role in ongoing efforts to broker a diplomatic resolution to tensions over Iran's nuclear programme, leveraging its long-standing ties with all parties to keep lines of communication open. The call also addressed the close strategic relations between Qatar and the US, along with ways to enhance bilateral co-operation in various fields, in order to serve the common interests of the two friendly nations. **(QNA)**

HIA gears up for pilgrim influx as Haj season winds down

By A Staff Reporter
Doha

Hamad International Airport (HIA) has activated a range of operational measures to ensure a smooth arrivals experience as residents and visitors return to Qatar following the Eid al-Adha holidays and the Haj season.

In a statement, the airport set out several tips to help passengers move through quickly, chief among them the use of E-gates in the arrivals immigration hall, alongside an array of transport options linking the airport to destinations across Doha.

The airport urged arriving passengers to keep their travel documents and Hayya cards within easy reach and to follow signage towards the appropriate immigration channels. Families with young children, elderly travellers and people of determination can use dedicated assistance counters and priority lanes.

The post-Haj and Eid window traditionally brings a spike in arrivals as pilgrims head home and families reunite. HIA said it had co-ordinated with immigration au-



thorities, ground-handling teams and transport operators to guarantee sufficient staffing and resources throughout the busy period, reinforcing Qatar's standing as an efficient and welcoming gateway.

Qatar's official Haj mission, run by the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs, deployed specialised field units to Makkah's Al Naseem district ahead of the first arrivals on 4 Dhu al-Hijjah, working round the clock alongside Saudi authorities to streamline procedures. The mission's medical unit reached Makkah early to deliver integrated healthcare from arrival through to the pilgrims' safe return home.

This year's quota was set at 4,400 pilgrims, with eligibility hinging on medical fitness. The first groups began landing in the kingdom yesterday, flying out of HIA aboard Qatar Airways and Saudia flights drawn from 18 approved campaigns, with arrivals through Jeddah completing by 7 Dhu al-Hijjah. The Haj Affairs Department credited early co-ordination, streamlined airport procedures and pre-arranged baggage handling for the smooth send-off, with mission teams stationed at Saudi airports around the clock to manage transport to Makkah accommodation and deliver luggage directly to hotels.

Doha soaks up Eid festivities



A circus show at 974 Beach entertained holiday-goers seeking family-friendly activities during the second day of the Eid al-Adha break. **PICTURE:** Thajudheen. **Page 12**

Two books, two worlds: A schoolgirl's double debut

By Shaima Sheriff
Staff Reporter

At a time when digital distractions dominate the lives of young people, one student in Qatar is turning the page in a different direction, quite literally. Ayesha Shakeel Shaikh, a Grade 8 student at Al-Arqam Academy, has achieved a remarkable milestone with the simultaneous release of two books spanning entirely different genres, a fantasy novel and a spiritual guide, reflecting both creative imagination and deep-rooted faith.

Her books, *Lost Souls of Aurenwood* and *Be the Ideal Muslimah*, have already earned recognition, with both titles now catalogued in the Qatar National Library, an

achievement she describes as deeply meaningful.

"Seeing my work housed in the Qatar National Library... is an absolute dream come true," she said. "It validated every late-night writing sessions and sacrificed hour."

The young author's dual approach to writing sets her apart. While *Lost Souls of Aurenwood* immerses readers in a world of magic and mystery, her second book offers practical spiritual guidance rooted in Islamic values.

"Writing became the perfect bridge to unite these two worlds," she explained. "One allows me to explore high-stakes fantasy, while the other helps me honour my faith and share guidance with others."

Despite its fictional setting, Ayesha's fantasy work draws heavily from real-life experiences. **To Page 11**



Ayesha Shakeel Shaikh with her literary works.



Eid's all fun and games at 974 Beach

Holiday-goers flocked to 974 Beach in Doha on the second day of Eid al-Adha, turning the popular seaside destination into a lively hub of sports, entertainment and family activities against the backdrop of the capital's illuminated skyline. Children and teenagers took part in friendly beach volleyball matches, while families gathered to enjoy live performances and interactive shows staged along the beachfront. Entertainers, including clowns and stage performers, kept young audiences engaged with games, comedy acts and playful interactions throughout the evening, adding to the festive atmosphere.

PICTURES: Thajudheen



Amir congratulates Azerbaijan president

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani sent yesterday a cable of congratulations to Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev on the occasion of the country's Republic Day. His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani also sent a cable of congratulations to Aliyev on the occasion. Meanwhile, HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani sent a cable of congratulations to Azerbaijan's Prime Minister Ali Asadov on the occasion. - QNA



Qatari pilgrims continue Haj rituals under extensive govt support

Qatari pilgrims continued performing Haj rituals in Mina and the stoning of the Jamarat amid extensive medical and logistical support provided by the Qatari Haj Mission. Dr Khalid Abdulhadi, head of the mission's medical unit, said clinics in Mina were operating around the clock with specialist teams of doctors, nurses and paramedics working in shifts to provide immediate care.

facilities for men and women, are equipped with pharmacies, emergency medical equipment and isolation rooms for suspected infectious cases. Medical teams are also using rapid-response scooters and mobile emergency kits to reach pilgrims in crowded areas between Mina camps and the Jamarat site.

He said that around 600 medical cases had been treated since the start of the Haj rituals, with most involving minor to moderate conditions such as respiratory infections, exhaustion and muscle pain. The clinics, with separate

Medical teams are also using rapid-response scooters and mobile emergency kits to reach pilgrims in crowded areas between Mina camps and the Jamarat site.

The medical unit urged pilgrims to stay hydrated, avoid prolonged exposure to the sun and follow preventive health measures during the pilgrimage.

Qatar's Haj Mission said medical services would remain fully operational until the end of the season as part of efforts to ensure the safety and wellbeing of pilgrims. - QNA

Dugongs flourish in Qatar's waters

By Ayman Adly Staff Reporter

Qatar continues to strengthen its position as one of the world's most important habitats for dugongs, hosting the second-largest population of the marine mammals globally.

The country's coastal waters provide an ideal environment for dugongs to feed and reproduce, supported by extensive seagrass beds that are essential to their survival.

On the occasion of World Dugongs Day, celebrated annually on May 28, the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC) reaffirmed its commitment to protecting the species through ongoing monitoring and conservation programmes.

Dugongs, often referred to as "sea cows", play a vital role in maintaining the balance of marine ecosystems by grazing on seagrass and supporting healthy coastal habitats.

The relevant environmental specialists are

using advanced monitoring techniques to track dugongs, including identifying unique markings on their tail fins.

These natural patterns help researchers distinguish between individual animals and monitor mothers and calves over time, providing valuable data on breeding, movement, and population health.

Accordingly, Qatar's marine ecosystem has become a regional centre for dugong conservation due to its biodiversity and protected coastal zones.

Conservation teams regularly conduct field surveys and awareness campaigns to preserve the species and reduce environmental threats.

The ministry stressed that protecting dugongs is part of Qatar's broader environmental sustainability strategy, which focuses on safeguarding marine biodiversity and enhancing climate resilience.

Further, the ministry highlighted the importance of community awareness and scientific co-operation in ensuring the long-term survival of dugongs in the Arabian Gulf.



Dugongs are classified as globally vulnerable to extinction, making the conservation efforts in Qatar increasingly significant to regional and international marine protection initiatives.

Current research indicates that Qatar supports one of the largest dugong populations in the world outside Australia.

However, exact numbers vary due to seasonal movement and aggregation behaviour.

Some estimates suggest that the largest seasonal aggregations of dugongs amounted to more than 1,000 individuals.



Beach clean-up campaign

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC)'s Natural Reserves Department carried out an extensive beach clean-up campaign across the Sealine Beach, Khor Al Adaid Reserve, and Al Thakhira Reserve during the first and second days of Eid al-Adha.

The initiative forms part of the MoECC's ongoing efforts to protect Qatar's coastal environment and promote public awareness of the importance of preserving natural sites and marine resources.

The campaign removed significant quantities of various types of waste from beaches and surrounding areas, helping to reduce pollution and maintain the aesthetic and environmental integrity of the country's coastal and natural destinations.

The ministry teams also conducted an awareness campaign highlighting the importance of maintaining cleanliness and adhering to environmentally responsible behaviour when visiting beaches and protected natural reserves.

Doha-based author launches poetry collection

Harshavarsham, a Malayalam poetry collection by Doha-based author Dr Sabu K C, explores human emotions, expatriate life, and the rapidly changing realities of contemporary society.

The poems emerge from the spontaneous and unrestricted movements of the human mind, reflecting experiences ranging from love, friendship, migration, and parental care to technology, festivals, environment, and the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

Written in a reader-friendly style, the book connects traditional and modern lifestyles while also reminding younger generations about ethical and moral values.

Dr Munjinad Padmakumar, in his introduction, observed that contemporary life provides a difficult backdrop for modern Malayalam poetry and noted that Sabu's poems communicate directly with readers while offering deep emotional experiences.

Reviewer Thankamani Teacher stated that Harshavarsham successfully bridges traditional and modern life and reflects the author's strong creative potential.

One of the poems introduces the new Malayalam term "ottu" for counting the number nine and its multiples, which is aimed at sim-



Doha-based Indian author Dr Sabu K C during the launch of his new book Harshavarsham.

plifying the learning of mathematics for Malayalee students.

Sabu has dedicated the book to his wife Lipsy and daughters Arunima, Ananya and Arya.

Published by Thiruvananthapuram-based Aesthetics, Harshavarsham was released in Qatar during the cultural conference of DLF Literature Fest organised by the Qatar Indian Authors Forum.

The book was released by Dr Ashok M D'Cruz, assistant professor of Malayalam University in Kerala, and received by Geetha Suryan, head of the Department of Malayalam at Loyola International School, Doha.

Several prominent literary and cultural personalities attended the event, including KEN Kunjahammad, Prof K T Sooppy, Sharaf P Hameed, Hussain Kadammamma, Thanseem Kuttyadi, Mini Sibi, Ashraf Madiyari, Ansara Areembra and Lipsy Sabu.

Earlier, Harshavarsham was released in Kerala at Kerala Sahitya Academy, Thrissur, by poet and lyricist Rajeev Alumkal and received by poet and film lyricist Engandiyur Chandrashekharam.

Other books by Sabu include Kendran (Malayalam novel, Na-



tional Book Stall, Kottayam), Kendran (English novel, Don Books, Kottayam), and Education and Modernity (research publication, Concept Publishing, New Delhi).

Sabu hails from Kangarapady, near Thrikkakara in Ernakulam district of the Indian state of Kerala.

He holds a Masters in Sociology, Masters and Doctorate in Education as well as a postgraduate diploma in human resource management.

He has worked as lecturer in In-

dia and as assistant professor of education in Eritrea.

Sabu was the principal of a school in Doha.

He also served in research and social development projects in different states of India.

Sabu was also a sub-editor at the Central Chronicle newspaper in India.

He is currently working with Gulf Times in Doha.

Family members include wife Lipsy, daughters Arunim, Ananya, Arya, and son-in-law Ron George.

Israel is breaking all contact with United Nations chief Antonio Guterres, the country's ambassador announced yesterday, saying that it was "outrageous" Israel is being blacklisted over alleged sexual violence in conflict zones.

"We are done with this secretary-general," Ambassador Danny Danon said in a video posted on X.

"The decision to blacklist Israel and accuse us of using sexual violence as a

Israel breaks all contact with UN chief Guterres

weapon of war is an outrageous decision," he said, referring to an upcoming report from Guterres's office. "The secretary-general and his team continue to spread lies against Israel. To put us and Hamas... on the same list, that's unacceptable."

The Israeli mission to the UN said in a statement it will have no contact with the

secretary-general's office as long as Guterres serves as head of the organisation.

Guterres's spokesman said they were aware of Danon's remarks.

"For our part, the secretary-general's door remains open," Stéphane Dujarric said.

The UN secretary-general's annual re-

port on conflict-related sexual violence is customarily presented to relevant states ahead of publication.

Last August, the report warned that Israel could be added to the list of parties suspected of, or responsible for, sexual violence in situations of armed conflict. Hamas appears on the list.

At the time, the UN cited "credible information" regarding sexual violence allegedly committed by Israeli security forces against Palestinian detainees in prisons and other detention centres, and saying UN inspectors had been denied access to the facilities.

Relations between the UN and Israel are fraught and have reached an all-time low since the events of October 7, 2023, which triggered Israel's war on Gaza. - AFP

Yemen's former president Hadi dies in Saudi Arabia

Yemen's former president Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi, who fled house arrest by Houthis rebels and spent his final years in Saudi Arabia, has died, the Yemeni presidency said yesterday.

Three days of mourning, with lowered flags and condolence books, was declared to commemorate Hadi, who oversaw a tumultuous period when the Houthis seized large swathes of Yemen, triggering a devastating civil war.

The presidency's statement praised his "wise leadership", saying that he "led the Yemeni state through one of the most complex phases the country has ever experienced, amid war, coup, and unprecedented humanitarian and economic crises".

Hadi, who was in his eighties, "died in the Saudi capital following a sudden health crisis", a source in the presidency told AFP separately, requesting anonymity.

Hadi fled to Saudi Arabia in 2015 as war erupted between the Iran-backed Houthis, who had forced the government from the capital Sanaa, and a Saudi-led coalition.

He handed over his powers to the newly formed Presidential Leadership Council (PLC) in April 2022, as Yemen entered a United Nations-brokered ceasefire.

Yemen remains divided between the Houthi-controlled north and the government-run south, which includes a patchwork of factions.

Although the ceasefire is largely holding, the war left hundreds of thousands dead through direct and indirect causes.

Last year 19.5mn people needed aid, the United Nations said.

Hadi took office in 2012 after a long stint as vice-president to Ali Abdullah Saleh, who reluctantly ended his 33 years in power during Arab Spring protests.

Hadi, a career military officer, was waved through as the sole candidate in an election in which he won 99.8% of the vote.

After the Houthis overran the capital in 2014, they placed Hadi under house arrest in early 2015.

He escaped in February that year.

In 2022, he made the surprise announcement that he was transferring his powers to the eight-member PLC, headed by Rashad al-Alimi. - AFP

Israel PM orders army to take control of 70% of Gaza Strip

Reuters/AFP
Jerusalem

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said yesterday that he had directed Israel's military to take more of Gaza, initially by seizing 70% of the Palestinian territory, where the population is already penned into a tiny strip of land along the coast.

Israel effectively controls an estimated 64% of the tiny coastal Strip, bombarded to ruins by Israel's two-year military assault that followed the 2023 Hamas attack on southern Israel.

Under an October US-brokered truce that has failed to halt Israeli attacks or secure Hamas' disarmament, Israeli troops were meant to withdraw to a "Yellow Line" demarcating the extent of their control.

Marked on military maps, that line put Israel in control of some 53% of Gaza, with Hamas ruling the rest.

Reuters has reported that Israel has unilaterally moved the concrete blocks marking the Yellow Line on the ground deeper into Hamas-controlled territory.

Maps issued by the military in March showed an even bigger restricted area that analysts say cordons off around 64% of Gaza's territory in total.

Netanyahu has repeatedly said in public remarks that the military controls more than 60% of Gaza.

Speaking to a conference in a settlement in the occupied West Bank, the Israeli leader said even more of Gaza would be taken.

"We were at fifty, we moved to sixty. My directive is to move to... let's go step by step," Netanyahu said yesterday. "First of all, seventy. Let's start with that. We're pressing them (Hamas) from all sides. We'll deal with the remnants."

He describes the territory Israel has seized in Gaza, Syria and Lebanon as "buffer zones" that can stave off potential attacks following the events of October 7, 2023 that set off the Gaza war.

Palestinians view Israel's widening Gaza buffer zone as a part of a strategy to permanently displace them, pointing to remarks from senior ministers, including defence chief Israel Katz, saying they want to encourage "voluntary migration" from Gaza.



A girl walks through the site of an overnight Israeli military strike on structures and tents housing displaced families, killing ten Palestinians, in Gaza City. - AFP

Netanyahu's directive comes as Israel escalates its attacks in Gaza that it says target senior Hamas leaders who were involved in the 2023 attacks.

On Tuesday, Israel killed Hamas's armed wing chief, ten days after killing his predecessor.

Mohammed Odeh is the fourth head of the Ezzedine Al-Qassam Brigades that Israel says it has killed since the start of the Gaza war.

On Wednesday, Israeli Defence Minister Katz repeated Israel's goal of ending Hamas's rule over the Palestinian territory and alluded to a plan for the forced displacement of its residents.

"The plan for voluntary migration from Gaza will also be implemented - everything will be done at the right time and in the right way," he said.

Gaza health officials say an additional strike on Wednesday night that Israel said targeted two Hamas leaders had killed at least 10 people, including five children, and wounded 18 others.

That strike came as Palestinians were marking Eid al-Adha, which many in Gaza celebrated

by gathering together in tent encampments and in bombed-out buildings.

Etidal Al-Za'im said she was with her family inside their tent marking the holiday when suddenly rubble from the strike targeting the building next to them fell on top of them.

"We came out to the sound of a bang, we sat for an hour before we could come out through the (rubble) and find a way out of the tent," she said.

Israeli strikes have killed more than 900 people since the truce, health officials say, while Israel says four soldiers were killed by militants during the same period.

Israel and Hamas remain deadlocked in talks to advance a US plan for Gaza that would see Israeli troops withdraw and Hamas disarm.

Another man who witnessed Wednesday's Israeli strike, who identified himself as Abu Azam, said a "person in Gaza has no safety at all".

"He could be hit in the street, he could be hit in the house, he could be hit in the hospital, he could be hit on his way to the market," he said.

CPJ: Senegal president pardons journalist over 2018 massacre

The president of Senegal has pardoned a journalist convicted to life in prison over a 2018 massacre in the southern Casamance region, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) watchdog said in a statement.

Journalist Rene Capain Bassene was convicted over the rounding up and killing of 14 loggers in January 2018 by armed individuals in the Bayottes forest in Casamance.

The region is almost entirely separated from the rest of Senegal by The Gambia, and is home to an independence rebellion that has simmered for 43 years.

"The Senegalese president has sought to correct a grave miscarriage of justice against a journalist who has devoted his entire career to the resolution of the separatist conflict in Casamance," Moussa Ngom, CPJ's francophone Africa representative, said in a statement.

The organisation said President Bassirou Diomaye Faye on Tuesday granted pardon to Bassene, who was freed from prison the following day.

Following the massacre of the loggers in 2018 in a protected forest, a separatist group, the Casamance Movement of Democratic Forces (MFDC), was blamed but the organisation denied all involvement.

Two members of the MFDC as well as journalist Bassene were sentenced to life in prison over the killing.

One of the MFDC members was tried in absentia while the other was acquitted in August 2024.

The court in the region's main city of Ziguinchor had additionally handed down six-month suspended sentences to two other defendants and acquitted 11 others.

Bassene had spent most of his career covering the conflict between the MFDC and Senegalese government, and has written several books on the topic. - AFP

S Africa police seize drugs worth \$61mn

South Africa's border police stopped a truck from Malawi that was driving into the country with drugs worth nearly 1bn rand (\$61mn), authorities said yesterday.

The bust at the border with Zimbabwe on Wednesday underscores concerns that the region is emerging as a key player in the international drugs trade.

In an eight-hour search, security forces uncovered more than 700kg (1,540 pounds) of methaqualone, which is used to make the highly addictive

drug Mandrax, the border authority said.

The estimated street value of the haul was almost 1bn rand, it said in a statement.

Two Malawi nationals and one Zambian were arrested, a spokeswoman told AFP.

While South Africa has a strong market for mandrax, the statement said investigations were underway to determine "the intended destination of the substance and whether the syndicate forms part of a broader transnational criminal network operating within the region or globally". - AFP

Madagascar top court rejects bid to remove president

Madagascar's top court has dismissed an opposition lawmaker's attempt to oust the country's military ruler, ruling that the challenge fell outside the constitution.

Prominent MP Antoine Rajerison had asked the High Constitutional Court to remove army Colonel Michael Randrianirina, who has led the country since October.

Rajerison accused him of treason for "serious and repeated violations of the constitution", including in making appointments.

However, the court said the request was "inadmissible" because it did not meet the constitutional requirements for removing a head of state.

"It is therefore irregular, and must be declared inadmissible," the court said.

Randrianirina came to power after his predecessor Andry Rajoelina fled as youth-led protests over lack of water and energy escalated.

However, the early sense of hope has since ebbed, and young Madagascans have mounted scattered protests in recent weeks over what they describe as the slow pace of reforms.

Rights groups say authorities have arrested demonstrators and used heavy-handed tactics.

A transition roadmap has promised a new constitution and a presidential election by the end of 2027.

The Indian Ocean island has endured repeated political upheavals and is the latest former French colony in Africa to come under military rule since 2020, following coups in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger.

It is one of the world's poorest countries, despite being the biggest vanilla producer and having a wealth of biodiversity. - AFP

Israel targets Beirut suburbs

AFP/Reuters
Beirut

Israel's military said it launched an airstrike in the Beirut area yesterday as a Lebanese source said an apartment was hit, the second such raid since an April ceasefire announcement.

The escalation comes as Lebanon and Israel prepare for talks between military delegations at the Pentagon today, and for US-brokered talks early next week - the fourth round since the latest Israel-Hezbollah war erupted on March 2.

After heavy strikes that Lebanese authorities said killed at least 14 people including three children, Israel's military said it "precisely struck in Beirut", without identifying the target.

A Lebanese military source, requesting anonymity, told AFP that "an Israeli strike targeted an apartment in the Choueifat area".

AFPTV footage showed smoke rising from the area on the edge of Beirut's southern suburbs, a Hezbollah stronghold.

Two Israeli security sources said the target was Ali al-Husseini, whom they described as head of the missile division within the Imam Hussein Division, a militia that Israeli officials say is aligned with Hezbollah and Iran.

There was no immediate comment from Hezbollah or Iran on the attack.

An AFP correspondent said the first two floors of a residential building were damaged, and saw residents packing cars and leaving.

It was the second Israeli strike on south Beirut since a ceasefire between Israel and the Iran-backed Hezbollah that was supposed to have taken effect on April 17 but has never been observed.

Both sides accuse each other of violating

it and justify their attacks by the other's alleged truce breaches.

Yesterday Hezbollah claimed several attacks with rockets and drones on Israeli troops in south Lebanon.

Spokesperson for the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) peacekeepers Kandice Ardiel told AFP that last month's agreement "had a positive effect in lessening the violence, but (we) have seen an escalation in recent weeks, and an intense escalation in recent days".

The force said in a statement that "Wednesday saw around 670 projectiles fired - the highest level since April 17".

On Wednesday, Israel's military declared all areas south of Lebanon's Zahrani River - around 40km (25 miles) from the border and including the cities of Tyre and Nabatieh - to be "combat zones" and told residents to evacuate.

This week, Israel vowed to ramp up operations in Lebanon and said it was expanding ground operations there.

Yesterday afternoon Israel's military issued another evacuation warning for swathes of Tyre and surrounding areas.

Israeli airstrikes hit Tyre and Sidon, both southern cities, early yesterday, AFP correspondents said.

AFP footage showed a fireball followed by smoke as a strike hit a building in Tyre's archaeological district.

Resident Ghazouane Halawani told AFP that he believed Israel wanted to attack the ancient city's "history and its civilisation".

"We're staying here. This is our country, our land, our life," he added.

Lebanese Foreign Minister Youssef Raggi said on X that he had begun "intensive diplomatic contacts" after Israeli attacks on Tyre struck "its historic old neighbourhoods, churches, mosques, and cultural landmarks that have stood resilient for thousands of years".



Rescue workers and local residents inspect the damage to a building following an Israeli air strike in the Choueifat area, south of Beirut on the outskirts of the capital's southern suburbs. - AFP

Lebanon's health ministry said a strike in Tyre killed two Syrians including a child, and another in Sidon killed five people, including two women.

An AFP correspondent said the Sidon raid destroyed the first two floors of a residential building.

Taghrida Ramadan, a woman living in Sidon, told Reuters that she had been sleeping at home when she was jolted awake by the strike, which hit a building across from hers.

"We looked around and found the rubble on us - stones from the strike, because it was nearby and directly facing us," she said. While her house was damaged, her relatives were not seriously injured.

The health ministry said another strike hit a vehicle in south Lebanon's Adloun, killing six people "including two children,

their mother and their father". Lebanon's military said another strike killed a soldier "while he was driving" in the Nabatieh region.

The state-run National News Agency (NNA) also reported Israeli strikes in other areas of south Lebanon.

Israel's military said a soldier was killed on Wednesday by a Hezbollah drone near the border.

Lebanon was drawn into the Middle East war when Hezbollah launched rockets at Israel over the killing of Iran's supreme leader in US-Israeli attacks, prompting Israeli strikes and a ground invasion.

Iran has insisted any agreement to end the broader conflict must apply to Lebanon.

Yesterday the United States and Iran accused each other of violating their ongoing truce following an exchange of fire.



Fire in Kenya school dorm kills at least 16

Reuters/AFP
Nairobi/Gilgil, Kenya

A fire tore through a dormitory at a girls' secondary school in a town in Kenya's Rift Valley overnight, killing at least 16 students, the government said yesterday.

The fire broke out just after midnight at the Utumishi Girls' Academy Senior School in Gilgil in west-central Kenya and burned for more than two hours, Education Minister Julius Migos told reporters.

He said that 79 other students were injured, although 71 of them had already been discharged from hospital.

Students at the school are aged between 15 and 18 years.

"Investigations are ongoing, but the... cause of the fire is not yet identified," Migos said.

Speaking to reporters at the school, Interior Minister Kipchumba Murkomen urged people not to speculate on the cause of the fire.

However multiple survivors told first responders that a student had lit a mattress with a match, said one first responder, who asked not to be named because they were not authorised to speak to the media.

They did not know what the student's motive might have been.

Authorities say they are still investigating the cause of the fire.

"Our hearts and prayers are with the families who have lost their beloved daughters," President William Ruto said on X, describing it as an "unimaginable tragedy".

Fires are common at Kenyan schools, with more than 100 recorded in 2024, according to the government.



Many fires are set by students protesting harsh discipline and poor conditions, researchers have found.

Doors on the second floor where the fire started were initially locked and some students died while jumping out of the windows, the first responder said.

The fire broke window panes and left the walls of the school stained with smoke.

Outside the school yesterday, hundreds of family members gathered to seek news of their loved ones.

Injured students could be seen, some limping with bandaged limbs, others carried by police officers.

Local resident Wambui Nderitu said she had rushed to the school at around 4am to look for her aunt's daughter.

"Fortunately, I found her child, but she was slightly injured. She told me she was on a lower dormitory, which is how she managed to get out," Nderitu told local broadcaster Asulab TV. "Many of

A parent reacts at the Utumishi Girls' Academy following an overnight fire at a dormitory. - Reuters

Right: Kenya Red Cross workers retrieve one of the bodies at the Utumishi Girls' Academy. - AFP



those who were upstairs jumped from the balcony."

Another local resident Leah Wanjiru told Asulab TV: "I heard children screaming... so I went outside to check and saw that the school was on fire. We started fetching water, trying to help put out the fire and rescue people."

A distraught mother, Leila Matura, 52, said her 18-year-old daughter was still missing.

"We went to the hospital to see if she is there, she is not there. So they are telling us, she is not around, she is among the

missing," she told AFP. "Whether she is dead or alive, we do not know. I'm hopeless."

Another mother, who did not wish to be named, said her 17-year-old daughter was in hospital.

"She broke both her legs jumping from the window. Thank God she is strong. It is every mother's nightmare," she said.

The school is linked to the National Police Service and most pupils are the children of officers.

"When we arrived, the fire was still blazing. It was so big... it took about 45

minutes to extinguish the flames because of the mattresses inside," a firefighter, who identified himself only as Fred because he was not authorised to speak to the press, told AFP.

A fire in 2024 at a primary boarding school in nearby Nyeri County killed 21 students. Its cause was never conclusively established.

In the worst school fire of recent times, 67 schoolboys were killed in 2001 at Kyanguli Secondary School outside Nairobi, an incident the authorities attributed to arson.



'You are not alone' in Ebola fight, WHO chief assures DR Congo

AFP/Reuters
Geneva/Kinshasa

The World Health Organisation (WHO) chief has pledged to do "everything in my power" to help conquer a deadly Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo), as he headed to the African nation yesterday.

In lengthy message to the Congolese people, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus insisted that "together, we will overcome this outbreak".

According to its latest figures, up to May 24, the WHO has re-

corded 10 confirmed and 223 suspected Ebola deaths in the DR Congo since the outbreak was declared on May 15, out of more than 1,000 confirmed and suspected cases.

The WHO has warned that the true spread of the outbreak, thought to have circulated under the radar for some time, is likely much wider.

"I want to be with you in these moments. And I want you to know that you are not alone," Tedros said in the message posted on X, having earlier said he was on his way to the DR Congo.

"Ebola is now back. This time, the outbreak is hitting Ituri province the hardest," he said, with more than 90% of cases in the conflict-torn northeastern province. "I know how frightening that is."

Tedros said he would be going to Ituri's capital Bunia, "and doing everything in my power to help you. I will not be managing this from a comfortable office far away".

The UN health agency chief said the affected areas were already dealing with malaria, hunger, insecurity and now Ebola.

"It is not fair, and I will not pretend otherwise," he said.

According to Tedros, the Ebola response would be built on Ituri's in-built resilience.

"We do not come to Ituri with only medicine and expertise. We come to join a community that already knows how to fight for its survival," he said.

Tedros fears insecurity in the eastern DR Congo, which has been plagued by conflict for three decades, is making it harder to contain the outbreak.

The WHO secretary-general urged the factions to give health

workers the space to save lives.

"Conflict and displacement make everything harder," he said. "I am making a direct appeal to all warring parties in this region: please, declare a ceasefire."

"People are dying from Ebola who do not have to die. Children are sick. Families are suffering," Tedros said. "No cause, no conflict, no grievance is worth condemning innocent people to death from a preventable disease."

No vaccine or treatment exists for the Bundibugyo strain of Ebola, which is behind the current outbreak.

However, Tedros said the spread of the virus could still be prevented by early care in treatment centres.

And he vowed that the authorities would help ensure loved ones are buried in dignity and safety.

He urged young people to help break "the fear and the silence that allow this virus to spread".

Tedros said that he was no stranger to Ebola outbreaks in the DR Congo, recalling that from 2018-2020, he visited North Kivu province - the epicentre of that outbreak - 14 times.

In that crisis, "trust grew slowly, then more quickly. People came forward. And together, we managed to contain the outbreak", he said.

This is the 17th recorded Ebola outbreak in the vast central African country of more than 100mn people.

"Together, you have overcome every single one before," said Tedros. "We will get through this one too."

"16 times, this country has defeated Ebola," he stated. "The 17th will be no different. But we must act now, together."

Already facing a shortage of supplies, doctors there are also



Unicef staff and airport workers handle aid from the Unicef and the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) at Bunia National Airport in Bunia, Ituri province, Democratic Republic of the Congo. - Reuters

tackling attacks on their facilities caused by denial of the disease among some in the DR Congo.

The WHO said yesterday that it was scaling up testing in the DR Congo in partnership with the country's national medical research organisation.

MONUSCO, the UN peacekeeping mission in the DR Congo said it had shipped just under five tonnes of medical cargo to Ituri yesterday, the latest in a series of flights to deliver supplies.

However, three humanitarian officials involved in the Ebola response in the DR Congo said that continued restrictions on flights in and out of Bunia, the capital of Ituri province, were hampering operations.

One humanitarian official said that despite promising to grant ad hoc exemptions for aid workers,

the ministry of transport was not processing them.

The Congolese government did not immediately respond to a request for comment on flight restrictions.

In a bid to curb the spread, countries across the world have rolled out travel-related containment measures.

The United States has temporarily banned the entry of green card holders who have been in the DR Congo, Uganda or South Sudan in the previous 21 days.

The US government, which has said that it "cannot and will not allow" any cases of Ebola to enter the country, is hoping Kenya will host a facility there to quarantine American citizens who become exposed to the disease.

It was not clear yesterday if Kenya would agree to the request.

Funding pledges for Ebola outbreak almost halved since Monday: Africa CDC

Funding pledges to contain the fast-growing Ebola outbreak in Africa have almost halved since Monday, the continent's main health body said yesterday.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has declared the outbreak of the rare Bundibugyo strain of Ebola in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo) and Uganda a public health emergency of international concern.

In the DR Congo, there have been 1,077 suspected cases and 246 suspected deaths, according to the latest data from the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC).

It also showed that the number of confirmed cases in Uganda has risen to eight from seven.

Africa CDC Director-General Jean Kaseya told a virtual press conference that the organisation's partners on Monday had pledged almost \$500mn to support the fight against the outbreak.

Since then, the figure has decreased to around \$290mn after a number of donors changed their minds, he said, without naming them.

"People are dying! How can we come and say: we commit X million dollars, and the next day they are calling me to say no, it was a mistake?" Kaseya said.

"We know some big global health institutions are sitting with billions of dollars... How can you come to say: I want you to focus on this development programme, and I have money for that, but I don't have money for Ebola?"

As he was talking to reporters, Kaseya also praised the World Bank and African Development Bank (AfDB) for agreeing to repurpose funds in order to support the response.

Health authorities are racing to contain the fast-growing outbreak on the African continent but they often encounter problems such as lack of basic supplies as well as mistrust from a community scarred by previous outbreaks.

The outbreak has prompted governments to step up travel-related containment measures.

The United States imposed temporary entry restrictions on travellers who have been in the DR Congo, Uganda or South Sudan in the past 21 days, including green card holders.

Kaseya said he couldn't understand why South Sudan, a country without Ebola-related cases or deaths, was placed under travel restrictions.

"We cannot afford to stop this outbreak without resources... and more importantly, we cannot afford to stop this outbreak with travel restrictions that Western countries start to impose to African countries," he said.

Ebola is a severe and often fatal disease transmitted through direct contact with infected bodily fluids or contaminated objects.

Kaseya said that a vaccine against the Bundibugyo strain of the Ebola virus will be ready by the end of the year, adding that there were already "some candidates" for a vaccine.

"What we can tell you for sure, by the end of this year, 2026, Africa CDC will make sure that we have a vaccine and medicine against Bundibugyo," he told reporters in the online briefing. "Our leaders are ready to invest. We are investing at technical level, at a strategic level, to make sure that (the vaccine) will happen."

Kaseya said he had received a message the previous day from the Russian ministry of health claiming to have already developed a vaccine against the strain.

A member of his team clarified that the proposed vaccine targets the Zaire strain of Ebola, and that upcoming discussions with Moscow's Gamaleya National Research Centre would indicate why it may be effective against the Bundibugyo strain. - Reuters/AFP

Flooding in north and east Syria as Euphrates level rises

AFP
Damascus

Syria's energy ministry warned yesterday of rising water levels on the Euphrates River after flooding in the north and east following increased flows from neighbouring Türkiye and recent rains.

The ministry said it was monitoring the situation on the Euphrates "in light of the significant and unprecedented increase in water flows from the Turkish side".

It said the increase was due to "the abundance of the current rainy season and the opening of floodgates at dams located along the river in Turkish territory".

A statement said government water authorities in Deir Ezzor, Raqa and Aleppo provinces had announced a "state of emergency" and were taking precautionary measures.

State news agency SANA reported flooding in urban and rural areas of Deir Ezzor province yesterday, where an earthen bridge was submerged.

It had said several bridges in the province were out of service on Wednesday because of flooding which also affected farmland and homes, and had also reported flooding in neighbouring Raqa province.

Turkish local media, quoting the regional water authority, reported "controlled water releases" from the Ataturk Dam after a rise in water levels due to heavy rainfall in recent months, with the spillway gates opened for the first time in seven years.

The Ataturk facility is one of Türkiye's three major dams and was built to generate electricity and irrigate the region along the border with Syria.

The energy ministry in Damascus said that according to authorities managing the country's Euphrates Dam, Syria's dam storage capacities were almost full, "necessitating the continued release of large quantities of water".

Late on Wednesday the ministry posted an image showing the opening of the Euphrates Dam floodgates, saying they had not been used for around 40 years, and warned people to exercise caution.



This handout picture released by the official Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) shows an inundated area in Syria's Deir Ezzor province following recent flooding as water levels rise from the Euphrates river. - AFP



BPS hosts BPSMUN 2026

The Birla Public School Model United Nations (BPSMUN) 2026 was held on May 23 at the Basant Kumar Auditorium, providing a vibrant platform for young minds to engage in meaningful discussions on global issues, diplomacy, and international cooperation.

Themed “Enhancing Multilateral Cooperation for Sustainable Development through Inclusivity,” the conference witnessed the participation of 125 delegates, along with 35 organising committee members and volunteers and brought together 160 students from Grades VII-XII.

The event was inaugurated by the chief guest, Sakib Mahmoud, Thimun event specialist, who emphasised the importance of diplomacy, collaboration, and inclusive dialogue in addressing global challenges. He encouraged the delegates to actively participate in debates and uphold the values and principles of the United Nations (UN).

BPS principal Dr Anand R Nair highlighted the institution’s commitment to nurturing socially responsible and globally aware students through platforms such as Model United Nations.

The MUN director, Dr Smitha Kodale highlighted the significance of BPSMUN in developing leadership, communication, and negotiation skills among students.



Abel Saji, secretary-general of BPSMUN 2026, officially declared the conference open and expressed gratitude to the management, faculty coordinators, organising committee members, and participants for their dedication and support in making the event a success.

Throughout the conference, the atmosphere was marked by intellectual exchange, collaboration, and learning, inspiring students to become thoughtful and responsible global citizens. The significant and relevant theme led to a healthy simulation of dialogue, negotiation and critical thinking. Awards for Best Delegate and Outstanding Diplomacy were presented to

deserving participants in recognition of their exceptional performance during the committee sessions.

The official newsletter of BPSMUN 2026 was released, highlighting the major events, committee proceedings, and achievements of the conference.

During the closing ceremony, Raaghav A M, deputy general secretary of BPSMUN 2026, delivered the vote of thanks and expressed heartfelt gratitude to the management, faculty coordinators, organising committee, and participants for their dedication and support in making the conference a grand success.

BPS marks World Mental Health Awareness Week

Birla Public School (BPS) marked World Mental Health Awareness Week from May 10 to 14, with the Primary Section organising a range of engaging activities to promote emotional well-being, positivity, and self-awareness among students.

Aligning with this year’s global theme, “Action,” the week began with a special awareness assembly highlighting the importance of mental health, emotional resilience, kindness, and self-care. Students participated in activities such as Mirror Self-Talk, Flower/Badge of Positive Affirmations, and Fill Your Cup with Feelings, encouraging confidence, self-expression, and positivity.

A highlight of the programme was the Fill Your Cup with Feelings activity, which helped students and teachers identify and understand the emotions and feelings children experience in their daily lives, fostering emotional awareness and open communication.

Adding creativity and calm to the programme, the Dance

and Music Department conducted special sessions featuring positive-affirmation songs, belly-breathing exercises, and guided relaxation. These activities helped students understand healthy ways to manage emotions and maintain inner balance.

This range of meaningful activities fostered a nurturing environment in which students were encouraged to communicate openly, appreciate individuality, and support one another with empathy and compassion. The observance reflected the school’s continued commitment towards holistic development by prioritising both academic excellence and emotional well-being.

There were activities conducted for the teachers and the Senior Leadership Team, too. The successful observance of World Mental Health Awareness Week reinforced the importance of mental health awareness from an early age and empowered students with positive coping strategies to grow into confident, resilient, and compassionate individuals.



BPS hosts Qur’an exhibition to celebrate Eid al-Adha



Birla Public School (BPS) organised a special Qur’an Exhibition titled ‘One Message, Many Languages’ from May 18 to 21 at the school library as part of the Eid al-Adha celebrations.

The exhibition featured copies of the Holy Qur’an in more than 24 languages from around the world, reflecting the universal message of peace, compassion, unity, and understanding. Students from Grades I to VIII were given the opportunity to explore diverse scripts, languages, and cultures through thoughtfully curated displays, interactive activities, storytelling sessions, and reflection-based learning experiences.

Designed to promote cultural awareness and global understanding, the exhibition encouraged students to appreciate diversity while recognising the shared values that unite humanity. Engaging



activities such as ‘Look and Learn’, ‘Find the Language’, and ‘Global Qur’an Exploration’ were specially organised to make the experience meaningful and enjoyable for students across different age groups.

The initiative reflected the school’s continued commitment to holistic education, intercultural

respect, and value-based learning. Through this unique exhibition, students were inspired to discover, understand, and connect beyond the boundaries of language and culture.

The event received enthusiastic appreciation from both students and staff and stood as a meaningful celebration of



knowledge, heritage, and unity during the festive occasion of Eid al-Adha.

BPS creates sporting history at cluster athletics tourney

Birla Public School (BPS) delivered a spectacular performance at the CBSE Cluster Athletics Championship 2026-27, achieving remarkable success and bringing immense pride to the school community through its outstanding accomplishments in athletics.

Demonstrating exceptional talent, determination, and sportsmanship, the school secured a total of 36 medals, including 16 gold, 12 silver, and 8 bronze medals across various track and field events. The athletes displayed extraordinary dedication, discipline, and competitive spirit

throughout the championship, earning widespread appreciation for their stellar performances.

One of the most memorable highlights of the tournament was the phenomenal achievement of Abdullah Wahedy, who created history by breaking the previous years’ CBSE National Record in the 200m sprint. This outstanding feat marked a proud milestone for both the athlete and the school, further strengthening BPS’ reputation for sporting excellence.

Adding to its glorious achievements, the school was honoured with the prestigious Overall

Runner-Up Trophy and emerged champions in the Under-17 Girls category, recognising the team’s exceptional collective performance and consistency throughout the competition.

BPS also secured remarkable runner-up finishes across multiple categories, including the Under-14 Boys, Under-14 Girls, Under-17 Boys, Under-19 Boys, and Under-19 Girls divisions. The school management and the senior leadership team, along with the school community, extended their heartfelt congratulations to all participating athletes and the coach for their exemplary



performances. Their achievements stand as a testament to the school’s ongoing efforts to promote sports excellence, discipline, teamwork, resilience, and holistic development among students.





MES secures consecutive overall championship at cluster volleyball

Showing its sporting excellence, MES Indian School has once again clinched the overall championship title at the prestigious CBSE Qatar Cluster Volleyball Tournament, marking an extraordinary 14th consecutive year of dominance in the competition.

Adding to this remarkable achievement, MES Indian School also emerged as the champions in the Boys' Category, further highlighting the school's dominance in volleyball. The tournament witnessed enthusiastic participation from leading Indian schools across Qatar, with high levels of competition in multiple categories.

MES Indian School delivered outstanding performances across divisions, reflecting consistent training, teamwork, and determination. The school's volleyball teams displayed exceptional skill and sportsmanship throughout



In the Boys' Category, the school securing the championship titles in both the Under-14 and Under-17 divisions, while the Under-19 team finished first runner-up.
In the Girls' Category with the Under-14 and Under-17 teams earning second-runner-up positions and the Under-19 team securing first-runner-up finish.

pressive first-runner-up finish. The Principal, Dr Hameeda Kadar, congratulated the winners and the staff on their outstanding accomplishment and commended them for their commitment to upholding a legacy in volleyball tournaments. This continued success is a testament to the dedication of the players and the guidance of the coaching staff, Salim J Nadaf, Shami G R, and Nazamin S Nadaf, along with the unwavering support of the school management.



the tournament, contributing to this historic achievement.

In the Boys' Category, the school delivered an outstanding and dominant performance, securing the championship titles in both the Under-14 and Under-17 divisions, while the Under-19

team finished a commendable first runner-up.

In the Girls' Category, the teams demonstrated remarkable skill and determination, with the Under-14 and Under-17 teams earning second-runner-up positions and the Under-19 team securing an im-

NIARC official visits Doha for official engagements



Nest International Academy and Research Centre (NIARC) Global general secretary, Abdul Khalikh from Kuwait, arrived in Doha for a short visit. The NIARC Qatar Chapter warmly welcomed him at Ramada by Wyndham Doha. During the occasion, NIARC Global chairman Ashraf K P, NIARC Qatar Chapter chairman Shanahas Edodi, Global vice chairman Hameed MT, Qatar Chapter general secretary Jafar Munafar, along with officials Rasik KV and Thaha Bhargava, were present. The NIARC team also held discussions regarding future programmes and activities.

Bhavan's students shine in CBSE Class XII

The CBSE Class XII Examination Results 2025-26 reflected a commendable academic performance by Bhavan's Public School, with students achieving notable success across both Science and Commerce streams. The Science stream recorded a very good result with Saad Ahmad securing an impressive 97.2%, followed by Alan Byju with 92.4% and Snigdha Sanish with 91.6%.

In the Commerce stream, Farah Mousa Issa Ramadan emerged as the topper with 94.2%, followed by Athul Vyas with 90% and Aleena Jomon with 88.2%.

The subject-wise analysis highlighted strong performances in several areas.

The school management congratulated the students, teachers, and parents for their dedication and collective effort in achieving these results.



Saad Ahmad



Alan Byju



Snigdha Sanish



Farah Mousa Issa Ramadan



Athul Vyas



Aleena Jomon

MES honours academic excellence

MES Indian School celebrated the exceptional academic accomplishments of its students during a grand felicitation ceremony held on May 21. The event was organised to honour those distinguished students who earned a place in the esteemed Principal's Roll of Honour, marking a significant milestone in their academic journey.

In recognition of outstanding scholastic achievement, meritorious students were awarded Scholar Badges for exemplary academic performance, while Class Topper Badges were conferred on the highest achievers in each class. These accolades symbolised academic brilliance, perseverance, and commitment demonstrated by the students throughout the academic year.

The ceremony was graced by the esteemed presence of the chief guest, Saad Mustafa,

director, MES Governing Board. The occasion was further honoured by the presence of Faisal Mayin, director of the MES Governing Board, whose participation added prestige and significance to the event.

Addressing the gathering, principal Dr Hameeda Kadar extended heartfelt congratulations to the award recipients, commending their diligence and steadfast pursuit of excellence.

She emphasised that true achievers are those who not only excel individually but also inspire others through their discipline, determination, and exemplary conduct. The ceremony concluded on a proud and celebratory note, applauding the remarkable accomplishments of the students while reaffirming the school's enduring commitment to fostering academic excellence and holistic development.



China to send military scholars to defence summit in Singapore

AFP
Beijing

China said yesterday it will send a delegation of experts and scholars from its army's study institutions to attend Asia's premier security forum in Singapore.

The Shangri-La Dialogue, Asia's top international defence summit, kicks off in the city-state today.

The meeting has historically offered rare opportunities for senior officials to hold face-to-face talks, and will be attended by US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth this year.

But Hegseth's Chinese counterpart, Dong Jun, will not be in attendance, with Beijing's defence

ministry saying at a yesterday news conference it would send a delegation of "experts and scholars" instead.

Major General Meng Xiangqing of the National Defence University will lead the delegation, and other members will include experts and scholars from the National Defence University, the Academy of Military Sciences and the Navy, ministry spokesman Jiang Bin told reporters yesterday.

"China attaches great importance to defence and security cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region," Jiang said.

Beijing "consistently upholds the principles of openness and inclusiveness, and actively participates in various constructive

dialogues", he added.

"The experts and scholars dispatched for this visit will comprehensively articulate China's concepts and initiatives, striving to enhance mutual trust, dispel doubts, build consensus, and deepen cooperation."

This will be the second year Dong will skip the summit.

Dong's absence from the forum last year came after reports in 2024 said he had been placed under investigation for corruption, something Chinese authorities have dismissed as "pure fabrications".

Beijing organises its own defence summit, the Xiangshan Forum, considered China's answer to the Shangri-La meeting.

Taiwan should not 'interfere' in its air force missions around island: China

Reuters
Beijing

Taiwan should not "interfere" in Chinese air force missions around the island which are taking place in China's airspace, the defence ministry in Beijing said yesterday, responding to a week of manoeuvres that Taipei has complained about.

China views democratically governed Taiwan as its own territory — over the objections of Taipei's government — and its warplanes and warships operate around the island almost daily.

On Monday of this week and Tuesday last week, Taiwan said China had carried out "joint combat readiness patrols" and

published pictures of Chinese warships, as well as of Chinese fighters taken by Taiwanese jets.

"Taiwan is a part of China," Chinese Defence Ministry spokesperson Jiang Bin said in Beijing when asked to comment on the patrols. "Our aircraft conduct military activities within Chinese airspace."

"The 'Taiwan independence' armed forces had better refrain from interference and provocation," he added.

China calls Taiwan President Lai Ching-te a "separatist" and has rebuffed his calls for talks. Lai says only Taiwan's people can decide their future.

Jiang said China's military will continue to strengthen its training and combat readiness, take

actions to safeguard sovereignty and territorial integrity and "resolutely defeat any separatist activities and external interference."

Taipei is on high alert for further Chinese actions after President Xi Jinping discussed Taiwan with US President Donald Trump in Beijing this month.

Taiwan has also reported that China has deployed more than 100 ships up and down the first island chain, an area that stretches from Japan down to Taiwan and into the Philippines.

Over the weekend, Taiwan said its coast guard had faced off with a Chinese coast guard ship near the Taiwan-controlled Pratas Islands, which are located at the top end of the South China Sea.

Japan, Philippines to discuss intelligence sharing: Takaichi

AFP
Tokyo

The Philippines and Japan agreed yesterday to negotiate an intelligence sharing agreement, as the two nations draw closer under the increasing shadow of China's naval ambitions.

Visiting Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos and Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi also said they would upgrade their ties to bolster security and economic co-operation.

"At today's meeting, regarding national security, we agreed to begin formal negotiations on the General Security of Military Information Agreement," Takaichi told a news conference following talks with Marcos.

Japan already has such an agreement with its partners the US, Australia and Srepublic of Korea to protect shared military secrets.

Takaichi said she had agreed with Marcos to "elevate our bilateral relationship to a comprehensive strategic partnership."

"This reflects our shared determination to continue strengthen-



Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr and Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi take part in a joint press conference at the Akasaka Palace State Guest House in Tokyo yesterday. (AFP)

ing our ties as like-minded nations... that will continue even in the changing international environment," she said.

Marcos hailed "very important steps to further strengthen our defence cooperation and to uphold a rules-based maritime order".

The two countries' shared grievances over Chinese maritime territorial claims have seen them draw increasingly close in recent years,

with Tokyo supplying coast guard ships and radar systems.

Japan and China are in territorial and economic disputes in the East China Sea, where coastguard ships from both sides routinely stage dangerous standoffs.

In the South China Sea, Beijing has deployed navy and coast guard vessels in a bid to bar the Philippines from strategically important reefs and islands, leading to a

string of confrontations.

This year, Japan participated for the first time in annual US-Philippines military exercises.

Tokyo and Manila have also signed a reciprocal access deal allowing for the deployment of troops on each other's territory, and this month Japan's Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi said he was aiming for the "early transfer" of Abukuma-class destroyers to the Philippines.

Before his meeting with Takaichi, Marcos addressed the Japanese parliament and stressed that Manila and Tokyo "are committed to strengthening maritime security and ensuring that our seas remain open, secure, and governed by rules, not by force".

His visit comes just weeks after Tokyo eased decades-old arms export rules in a major policy shift.

Ahead of his four-day trip, Marcos told Japanese media that the Philippines was "very grateful for Japan's continuing help and support in terms of our modernisation of our military".

"Japan and the Philippines have experienced the same difficulties in terms of coercive acts," he said.

N Korea not keen to engage with US, Korea: Singapore FM

Reuters
Seoul

North Korea does not seem keen to engage with the US, Republic of Korea or Japan and is focused on building up its self-reliance and military deterrence, Singapore's foreign minister said following a trip to the reclusive state.

According to a transcript shared by the foreign ministry, Vivian Balakrishnan spoke to Singaporean media yesterday after a visit to both Koreas respectively on May 26 and 27. His last trip to North Korea was in 2018.

"What's clear is that they're certainly in a closer relationship now with Russia. China remains indispensable to it, but they are not yet ready to open up significant channels of communication with the US or with ROK and Japan at this point in time," he added.



Jo Yong-won, chairman of the Standing Committee of North Korea's Supreme People's Assembly meets Singapore's Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan, in Pyongyang. (Reuters)

US President Donald Trump and Republic of Korea President Lee Jae-myung have repeatedly expressed interest in holding talks with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un.

Pyongyang's ties with Moscow deepened in recent years after North Korea sent thousands of troops to fight with Russian forces in Kursk. Beijing has also been working to

draw Pyongyang back into its orbit, with passenger train services and flights between the two neighbours resuming in past months.

Balakrishnan also mentioned North Korea's "outright, categorical rejection of reunification" with Republic of Korea — a shift from his last trip to the nation — and noted how Pyongyang, the capital, has de-

veloped despite the country's deepening isolation.

"It's a city which would fit in with any modern city throughout Southeast Asia, or even Northeast Asia, for that matter," he said.

North Korea has revised its constitution to define its territory as bordering Republic of Korea and remove references to reunification, according to a draft of the text reviewed by Reuters this month, codifying leader Kim Jong-un's push to treat the two Koreas as separate states.

Yesterday, Republic of Korea's foreign ministry said Foreign Minister Cho Hyun asked Balakrishnan for Singapore and Asean's support for efforts to reopen dialogue with North Korea.

Balakrishnan said he invited North Korean Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui to the Asean Regional Forum and had encouraged them to look for appropriate opportunities to continue to engage the larger world.

Thai court dismisses royal insult case against ex-leader

AFP
Bangkok

A Thai court yesterday dismissed a royal defamation case against a former opposition leader over comments he made during the Covid-19 pandemic, in a rare ruling in favour of a prominent government critic.

Thailand's strict lese majeste law protects the royal family from criticism and carries jail terms of up to 15 years per offence.

Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, former leader of the now-defunct Future Forward Party, was charged over a Facebook live broadcast in 2021 criticising the government's procure-

ment of Covid-19 vaccines, linked to a company owned by the king.

Bangkok's Criminal Court ruled the comments were aimed at then-prime minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha's vaccine administration and did not amount to royal defamation, according to Thai Lawyers for Human Rights.

"The evidence brought by the plaintiff was not sufficient," the group wrote on social media.

The verdict is a rare success for a major opposition figure, many of whom rights advocates say have been targeted by judicial processes because they are perceived as challenging to the nation's conservative establishment.

At least three former MPs from the opposition Move Forward Party, a successor of Future For-

ward, have previously been sentenced under the lese majeste law over their political activities.

Another 10 MPs, including the current opposition leader, Natthaphong Ruengpanyawut, are under court investigation over their support to reform the strict law.

If found guilty, they could face lifetime bans on holding political office and be stripped of their right to vote for 10 years.

The 47-year-old heir to one of Thailand's largest auto parts manufacturers, Thanathorn was banned from holding office in a separate case in 2020. But he remains active in politics and helped campaign for the People's Party, the latest iteration of Future Forward, in the last election in February.

Taiwan-Japan ferry service debuts on ship with war evacuation role

A new ferry service to serve booming tourism between Taiwan and Japan began yesterday on a ship that could be pressed into service to evacuate people on southern Japanese islands in the event of a war in the region.

The Yaima Maru is one of the ships that Japan's government this year put on a list of vessels to be used

to evacuate island residents to mainland Japan in case of a crisis. China, which views democratically governed Taiwan as its own territory, has ramped up its military pressure against Taipei over the past five years, including holding war games covering areas that have been close to Japanese waters. For now, the ship will be linking Taiwan's northern

port city of Keelung with Japan's Ishigaki, which lies to the east of Taiwan at the bottom end of the Ryukyu islands, shuttling tourists back and forth once a week on an overnight journey.

"This regular route is not merely transportation infrastructure," Ishigaki Mayor Yoshitaka Nakayama said at Keelung port. "It serves as a

new bridge that supports tourism, logistics, economic activity, cultural exchange, and education." The US has a major military base in Okinawa in the Ryukyu islands and Japan has been strengthening its defences in the area, including on Yonaguni, the Japanese island which sits closest to Taiwan. (Reuters)

Chinese dissident to be moved to Korean immigration detention

AFP
Seoul

A Chinese dissident who fled to Republic of Korea this week in a rubber boat will be transferred to an immigration detention centre, police told AFP yesterday.

Dong Guangping, a 68-year-old former policeman, has been a thorn in Beijing's side for advocating political reform and human rights and served multiple prison stints over the years.

The longtime critic of China's ruling Communist Party made several failed attempts to flee the country, including a 2019 bid to swim to the Taiwanese territory of Kinmen and a 2020 trip to Vietnam where he was detained by local police.

He was found by Republic of Korea authorities on Monday night drifting off the country's west coast on a 3.3-metre (11-foot) rubber boat with a 9.9-horsepower engine, and was questioned on suspicion of violating immigration laws.

Prosecutors asked the court to detain him, but the Daejeon District Court determined that "detention is not necessary" for the authorities' investigation, a court spokesperson told AFP yesterday.

The court spokesperson said Dong had two options: "If he is deemed an illegal immigrant, it would be appropriate to transfer him to an immigration detention centre. However, if he applies for refugee status, he can stay in the country in accordance with the Refugee Act."

Rescuers race to drain flooded cave in Laos

AFP
Vientiane

Rescuers rushed yesterday to pump water from a flooded cave in Laos, where seven Laotians have been trapped for more than a week, with the fate of two of them unknown.

Specialist divers found five men alive and huddled in a narrow passage around 300 metres (984 feet) from the exit of the cave on Wednesday, but they have yet to be pulled out due to flooding, collapse risks and other hazards underground.

The seven have been stuck inside the cave in central Xaysomboun province, northeast of the capital Vientiane, since May 20, according to state media.

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

With more rainfall expected, Thai rescuer Kengkad Bongkavong said yesterday that teams were racing to remove water from the cave.

"If we are able to pump out a lot of water tonight, we will begin the extraction tonight!" he wrote on social media.

"But if it is deemed too risky after an assessment, we will reconsider."

Foreign rescuers — including two divers involved in the dramatic 2018 retrieval of a youth football team from a flooded cave in Thailand — joined Laotian volunteers this week after local groups requested specialist

personnel and equipment to aid efforts.

Kengkad said a Malaysian cave diver was one of the latest foreigners to join the rescue operation.

Additional divers from Japan, France, Indonesia and Thailand were expected to arrive today "to prevent emergencies, including the risk from additional rainwater expected to flow in tomorrow".

Finnish diver Mikko Paasi, part of the team that saved the "Wild Boars" football team in Thailand, said on Wednesday that rescuers were "racing against time" inside the cave, which he called an "abandoned gold mine".

The cave system, located in a remote mountainous area, extends deep underground, with multiple levels and tight tunnels.

Yesterday morning, rain sent more soil and water into the cave, according to a Laotian logistics staffer for a firm supplying vehicles to support the rescue operation.

"If there isn't too much more rain, they may be able to bring them out today. But if heavier rain comes, it could take a few more days," said the man, who requested anonymity due to fears of reprisal from his employer.

Local villagers, rescue groups and logistics workers were also supporting the operation, with more than 20 people standing by at the cave entrance, he said.

"Morale improved yesterday. People are happy and hopeful today after the five people were found."



Starmer defends his govt against Blair's criticism

Reuters
London

Prime Minister Keir Starmer defended his government yesterday against criticism from Labour's longest-serving premier, Tony Blair, saying his ministers had adopted the right policies to start stabilising Britain after a period of flux. Blair, who led Labour to victory in three British elections between 1997 and 2007, took aim at Starmer and two potential rivals this week, in a more than 5,000 word essay calling on the governing party to focus on better policy decisions rather than personalities or knee-jerk responses to its declining fortunes.

Starmer, who is battling some of the worst popularity ratings of any leader, said while he welcomed debate on "policy and ideas", he disagreed with Blair's assessment of the government's record almost two years into power.

"I don't agree that the policy choices of this government weren't the right policy choices, given what we inherited," he told reporters.

"(It's a) very different situation in 2024 to 1997; and dealing with what we had to turn around, the



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer visits Acton Works, a training facility in Chiswick, west London, yesterday. (Reuters)

policy choices were vindicated by them, because those changes have happened," Starmer said.

He listed better relations with the European Union, stabilising the economy and reducing waiting times for the country's public health service as his government's achievements, pressing home his oft-repeated message that he is not planning to step down despite calls from some in the party. Blair's comments have done little to settle

emotions in Labour, with the two potential contenders to replace Starmer — Greater Manchester mayor Andy Burnham and former health minister Wes Streeting — also rejecting his critique.

On Wednesday, Burnham and Streeting both said Blair had failed to grasp how inequality in Britain was driving new voting habits, such as the rising popularity of the populist Reform UK party and the left-leaning Green

Party. Since suffering large defeats in local elections and votes to the Scottish and Welsh assemblies earlier this month, Starmer has faced the biggest challenge yet to his authority, with dozens of Labour lawmakers calling on him to step aside.

He has pledged to fight on and prove his critics wrong by delivering the "change" he promised when Labour won a landslide election victory in 2024.

Myanmar leader to visit India for first trip abroad

AFP
Yangon

Myanmar's putschist-turned-president Min Aung Hlaing will travel to India tomorrow for a five-day visit, New Delhi said, his first trip abroad since becoming civilian leader.

The Myanmar foreign ministry, which announced yesterday an official visit to India "in the near future", said Min Aung Hlaing would be accompanied by a delegation of ministers and other officials.

India's foreign ministry said in a statement that the visit would last from Saturday to Wednesday.

The former military chief will hold talks with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi and meet with business representatives, according to both governments. Myanmar also said a meeting with Indian President Droupadi Murmu was planned.

The visit "is expected to fur-

ther strengthen and deepen the multi-faceted relations between the two countries", New Delhi said.

Ex-junta chief Min Aung Hlaing was sworn in as Myanmar's president in April, continuing his rule from a civilian post five years after snatching power in a military coup.

As the nation's armed forces chief, he ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in 2021, detaining the popular democratic figurehead and triggering an ongoing civil war.

After five years of ruling by diktat, Min Aung Hlaing organised an election ending in January that excluded Suu Kyi's party and large swaths of the country under rebel control.

The vote also secured a walkover win for Min Aung Hlaing and military allies in parliament who backed him into the top office.

His swearing-in ceremony was attended by representatives from the neighbouring nations of China, India and Thailand as well as 20 other countries, according to parliamentary officials.

US climber smashes Everest speed record

AFP
Kathmandu

US climber Tyler Andrews set a new speed record using supplementary oxygen on Mount Everest yesterday, his team told AFP, summing the world's highest peak an hour quicker than anyone before.

Andrews, 36, climbed the 8,849-metre (29,032-foot) peak in just 9 hours and 55 minutes, smashing the record of 10 hours and 56 minutes held since 2003 by Nepali climber Lhakpa Gelu Sherpa.

The time requires formal verification by Nepal's mountain authorities.

Andrews summited Everest just before dawn yesterday, according to posts on his Instagram, which included live GPS

tracking of his route.

"He reached Everest's peak in just 9 hours 55 minutes," team leader Dawa Steven Sherpa of Asian Trekking told AFP.

The Asian Trekking team said that Andrews completed a solo climb, during which guides provided supplementary oxygen, food and water while tracking his ascent.

He had initially tried to break the 22 hours and 29 minutes speed record to climb Everest without supplementary oxygen earlier in May, but had to turn back.

Andrews, who said he is a cancer survivor, is raising funds to support youth athletes who lack access to coaching and equipment in Ecuador and Nepal.

More than 950 climbers have reached the top of Everest this season, with the weather window rapidly coming to a close.

UK risks a 'lost generation' of jobless young people

AFP
London

Britain risks creating a "lost generation" as the number of young people out of work and education surges, a government-commissioned review warned yesterday.

The number of 16- to 24-year-olds not in employment, education or training — so-called "NEETs" — topped one mn in the first quarter of the year for the first time since 2013, separate official data showed.

Without action, that figure could rise to 1.25mn, or one in six young people, within five years, the report said.

"We are at risk of a lost generation," said Alan Milburn, a former Labour cabinet minister who led the review and is due to propose

solutions later this year.

"It's a warning that far too many young people are reaching adulthood only to find the door to opportunity closed," he told a press conference.

Calling the report "sobering" but vowing he would not allow a generation to be lost, Prime Minister Keir Starmer pledged to work with Milburn "on what more needs to be done".

For Shana Fatahali, 23, who has spent the past two years searching for work in England's West Midlands, "young people do want to get out there and have a job".

"A lot of the older generation are stuck in the mindset that you fill your CV out, hand it in and you've got a job just like that. But times have moved on since then," she told AFP.

Fatahali, who has a four-year-

old child and holds a health and social care diploma, noted there were few jobs "that fit around my responsibilities as a parent".

She described feeling trapped, like many young people, in a cycle of being rejected for lacking experience while unable to gain it without an opportunity.

Starmer commissioned the review last year to understand the causes of rising youth unemployment.

While 84% of NEETs want to be employed or in training, the report found that many young people are struggling to reach "the first rung of the career ladder".

It blamed a "sharp decline" in entry-level roles such as hospital jobs, weekend jobs and apprenticeships.

"There is no shortage of effort on the part of young people. The

shortage is of opportunity and of support," Milburn said.

Faith, a 22-year-old in southwest England, told AFP that she struggled to find even part-time work as she neared the end of her master's degree in criminology.

"I was applying everywhere in town, coffee shops, but they just ignore you," she said, adding that the process made her feel "very anxious" about the future.

"A lot of people go to university because it's meant to help you get a job, but I haven't seen that personally."

About a decade ago, Britain had a similar NEET rate to the European Union average. By last year, only Romania recorded a higher rate.

The report found rising mental health problems played a key role in the increase in NEETs in Britain.

Australia charges woman with terrorism over IS links

AFP
Sydney

Australian police charged yesterday a woman linked to the Islamic State group with membership of a terrorist organisation and entering a known conflict zone.

Hundreds of women from Western nations were lured to the Middle East as IS gained prominence in the early 2010s, in many cases following husbands who had signed up as jihadist fighters.

A joint counter-terror police team said they will allege that the woman, 34, travelled to Syria between 2013 and 2014 with a man to join Islamic State.

The man is now believed to be imprisoned in the Middle East, they added.

The woman was then detained by Kurdish forces in 2019 and held in the Al-Hawl Inter-

nally Displaced Persons camp until returning to Australia in September last year, they said.

She will face court on Thursday, police said.

Both charges carry a maximum penalty of up to 10 years in prison.

Her arrest follows the return to Australia this month of a number of women and children linked to suspected Islamic State fighters.

Two women, a mother and a daughter, were arrested on arrival in Melbourne.

Police accused them of having kept a woman as a slave after travelling to Syria in 2014 to support the Islamic State group.

A third woman was also arrested on arrival in Sydney and charged with entering a restricted area and joining a terrorist organisation.

This week, 13 more IS-linked Australians — four women and their nine children — flew home from Syria.

In a statement following their landing, Australia's federal police said none of the cohort

had been charged with an offence.

"It is important to note that a period of time without charges being laid is not an indicator that investigations have ceased," Australian Federal Police Deputy Commissioner National Security Investigations Hilda Sirec said yesterday.

"Investigations are continuing into all the recent adult female returnees from Syrian camps," she added.

Widely known as the "ISIS brides", the case has stirred strong debate in Australia.

Australia's Human Rights Commission urged the government in March to help repatriate those still there.

But others have accused the women of turning their back on Australia and believe they should be left to face the consequences.

Once in control of swathes of Syria and Iraq, IS was territorially defeated in 2019 in a battle spearheaded by Kurdish-led forces with support from a US-led international coalition.

Fund for climate-exposed Pacific nation invests in fossil fuels

AFP
Sydney

A trust fund set up to help a South Pacific nation gravely threatened by climate change has invested in coal mining, gas exploration and the world's largest crude oil refinery, an AFP investigation has revealed.

Low-lying Pacific island nation Tuvalu said it was reviewing the "fossil fuel exposure" of the \$200mn fund after it was presented with AFP's findings.

Few countries are more exposed to climate change than Tuvalu, a chain of coral atolls reckoning with acidifying oceans, tropical disease and rising seas.

Land is already so scarce across the archipelago halfway between Australia and Hawaii that the international airport runway doubles as a makeshift sports field.

With a fragile economy and few natural resources, Tuvalu relies on a government trust fund to help foot the spiralling costs of the climate crisis.

Tuvalu has entrusted management of its single-largest financial

asset to advisory firm Mercer, which has invested in funds holding stakes in major fossil fuel companies, according to financial records and government reports reviewed by AFP.

Tuvalu climate activist Richard Gokrun said it was "really shocking" to see the nation tied up with fossil fuel companies.

"We stand strong for the phase-out of fossil fuels, because we see the impacts to our country," the former weather forecaster told AFP from the capital of Fumafuti.

"The major changes that we are seeing are sea-level rise. We are starting to see new places are getting flooded or inundated."

The Tuvalu Trust Fund was established in 1987 with help from Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, providing crucial revenue to a nation reliant on foreign aid. Mercer took over management in 2022. Tuvalu's expectations are laid out in the fund's "investment objectives".

"Tuvalu is particularly susceptible to the adverse impacts of climate change and it is appropriate to reflect this in the investment strategy," the document states.

The fund must minimise its expo-

sure to "fossil fuel reserves and carbon emissions" where possible, the document adds.

Mercer invested Tuvalu's money in funds specialising in sectors like "Australian shares", "international shares" and "emerging markets", according to a quarterly report dated September 2025.

Mercer is not required to list each of the dozens of companies in these funds, but does publish the 10 biggest holdings.

AFP analysed this data for 14 Mercer funds held by Tuvalu.

Mercer's "emerging markets" fund invested in Indian multinational Reliance Industries, according to holdings data from December 2025. Reliance Industries owns the Jamnagar petrochemical complex in western India, a sprawling industrial facility described as the largest single-site crude oil refinery in the world. It pumped out nearly 20mn tonnes of planet-heating carbon dioxide in 2022, making it the world's highest-emitting oil refinery, according to non-profit Climate Trace.

Tuvalu is also invested in a Mercer fund that holds American utilities The Southern Company and



A general view shows the coastline of Fumafuti Atoll, Tuvalu. (AFP/File Photo)

Duke Energy, the second and third-largest greenhouse gas emitters in the US, according to the Political Economy Research Institute.

The Southern Company paid \$60mn to "groups and firms involved in climate disinformation campaigns between 1993 and 2004", the US-based Energy and Policy Institute found in a 2024 report.

And Mercer put Tuvalu's money into funds invested in mining be-

hemoth Rio Tinto and Australian oil-and-gas giant Woodside Energy, which government data says are among Australia's 10 largest greenhouse gas emitters.

Investments in Woodside are particularly awkward for Tuvalu, which was scathing when Australia approved a 40-year extension for Woodside's North West Shelf gas project in 2025.

Climate Minister Maina Talia

warned then that the project's emissions threatened Tuvalu's very "survival", urging Australia to reject the extension.

About 12% of the Tuvalu Trust Fund — or \$25mn — is invested in Mercer's "Australian shares fund", which has its largest holding in mining and metals firm BHP, one of Australia's most valuable companies and the world's biggest miner.

The Islamic ruling on lost and found (Al-Luqatah)

Linguistically, 'Al-Luqatah' refers to anything that is found and picked up from the ground. Technically, as Imam Ibn Qudamah, a Muslim scholar, may Allah have mercy upon him, defined it as: 'Property that the owner loses and a person finds and takes away (to preserve it in trust).'

Legal Validity
Muslim scholars vary about the ruling. The Hanafi and Shafi'i jurists maintain that it is better to pick up a lost property because a Muslim is duty-bound to preserve his Muslim brother's property, as evidenced by the saying of the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam (may Allah exalt his mention), when he was asked about Al-Luqatah: "Remember the description of its container and the string with which it is tied. Make a public announcement of it for one year. If nobody comes and claims it, then utilise the money but keep it as a trust with you. And if its owner comes back one day seeking it, then return it to him." [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

According to the Maliki and Hanbali jurists, it is a Makrooh (disliked) act to take away such property. This is also the opinion of Ibn 'Umar and Ibn 'Abbas, may Allah be pleased with them. They argued that by taking away such lost items, one is bound to use something that is deemed unlawful. They also argued that one may not be able to undertake his duty efficiently regarding it, in terms of advertising it, returning it to its lawful owner and preserving it.

Its Ruling in Terms of Liability
Al-Luqatah remains a trust with the person who finds it and keeps it, and he is deemed liable for it only if he abuses it. He is also deemed liable for it if he gives it to somebody else without the permission of a judge. If it is damaged while still in the finder's possession, after publicly announcing that he has found it and asking people to refer its rightful owner to him, then he is not deemed liable for such damage because he volunteered to preserve it in trust. The Ahaadith (prophetic statements) on this issue are very clear. The Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said in the above-quoted Hadeeth: "...But keep it as a trust with you?"

Types of Al-Luqatah

1. If it is an animal, the finder should see if it is able to protect itself or not. If it is able to, then he is not allowed to take it away. When the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, was asked about the Islamic ruling concerning a lost camel, he replied: "It is none of your concern. Leave it, for it has its feet and a water-container (reservoir), and it will reach water and eat from the trees until its owner finds it." [Al-Bukhari]

However, if the lost animal is not able to protect itself, such as a sheep, a sick camel or a horse with a broken leg, the finder is allowed to take it away. When the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, was asked about the ruling concerning a lost sheep, he replied: "Take it, for it is either for you, or for your brother (i.e., its owner), or for the wolf." [Al-Bukhari]

2. As for lost property that is not an animal, such as money of an unknown owner, one should consider the following rulings:

The Ruling Concerning Trivial Fallen Items

For trivial items such as a loaf of bread, a whip, a date or anything that people generally do not claim when they lose, according to the predominant custom, the person who finds such an item is allowed to claim it as his own without publicly announcing it. He is also allowed to utilise it. Jabir bin 'Abdullah, may Allah be pleased with him, who was one of the Prophet's companions, said: "The Messenger of Allah, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, allowed us to utilise (such trivial objects as) a rod, a whip and a rope if we found it." [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

Announcing Lost Property Publicly

a) If someone finds an object, he should acquaint himself with the features that distinguish it from all similar objects. This will allow him to identify the right owner if he comes to claim it and asks him about its distinguishing features.

b) If he knows its distinguishing features, he should advertise it in public places, markets and outside mosques, but not inside the mosques, as this is deemed a Makrooh act. He should then wait for a year.

How should the finder be compensated for announcing, publicising or maintenance expenditure?

Hanafi and Hanbali jurists maintain that the finder should incur such



expenses. Imam Malik, may Allah have mercy upon him, maintained: "The owner is to be given two options: either to reclaim it from the person who has found it, by paying him back for what he has spent on it, or to give it to him in return for the expenses incurred." Shafi'i jurists say that the judge takes the money from the public treasury of the Muslim state and gives it to the finder of the lost property to use it for advertising purposes, or the finder may borrow this money and would consider it as a loan to the owner.

Returning Lost Property to the Person Who Claims It

If someone comes and claims that the lost property is his, its finder should ask him about its distinguishing characteristics. If the claimant adequately describes it and distinguishes it from similar items, or if he proves to him with clear evidence that it belongs to him - by describing its container or the string with which it is tied, for instance - then the finder should return it to him, as the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said by way of example: "If its owner shows up and satisfactorily describes its container, the string with which it is tied and the amount of money in it, then return it to him." [Muslim]

A question arises here: After the claimant provides a satisfactory description of the lost property, should the finder return the property to him or should he take him to a judge to establish the evidence and act upon the judge's decision? According to the Hanafi and Shafi'i schools of Fiqh (jurisprudence), the finder of the lost property is not obliged to return it. The followers of the Maliki and Hanbali schools of Fiqh have stated that he is obliged to return it to its owner if the latter gives a satisfactory description of it, in accordance with the dictates of the prophetic tradition mentioned above.

Claiming Lost Property as One's Own

The finder of the lost property can claim such property as his own if he still has it, or he can claim its price as his own in case he sold it after advertising it for the required period of time. In such a case, he should give it or give its value to the owner should the latter come forward to claim it, as the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said in this regard: "Advertise it for a year. If nobody claims it, then utilise it, and keep it with you as a trust." One is not allowed to claim it as his own without advertising it for a full year.

Some scholars argue that it is not permissible to consider lost property as one's own, and whoever finds it should, after advertising, give it in charity to the poor because it is considered other people's property, and it is not permissible to use it without its owner's consent, in accordance with prophetic textual evidence: the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "A Muslim's property is not lawful (for another Muslim) without the former's own free will." He, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, also said: "Lost property is not lawful. Whoever finds it should advertise it for a year. If its owner shows up and claims it, he (the finder) must return it to him; if he does not show up, he should give it in charity." [Al-Bazzar and Ad-Daraqutni]

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



The believer in times of crises

In determining the way in which a Muslim should deal with a time of crisis, it is important to analyse exactly what, essentially, a crisis is in the context of Islamic understanding; particularly as this relates to the Qadar (predestination) of Allah.

A crisis, by definition, indicates a pivotal period of time in which a situation or condition seems unstable, chaotic, and liable to sudden, drastic, and most often, dangerous change. It implies the precipice that gives way to disaster; when every move is crucial, either facilitating a healthy and progressive resolution or initiating the descent into catastrophe.

Now, Islamically, such a situation does not exist. Life does not proceed so haphazardly; but rather all things occur, can only occur, according to the Decree of Allah. We understand, therefore, that a "crisis" basically means that circumstances seem to be other than we would like them to be. That is, our own personal vision of how our lives and situations should be developing finds itself opposed in one way or another with what Allah has decreed for us.

We therefore reject the validity of external crisis, insofar as this is understood to mean a random and volatile unfolding of events; and rather understand the conflict that arises between our own private will and the will of Allah as an internal crisis of belief.

Allah Says (what means): "No disaster strikes except by permission of Allah. And whoever believes in Allah - He will guide his heart. And Allah is Knowing of all things..." [Qur'an 64: 11]

Muhammad Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, may Allah have mercy upon him, cites in his Kitaab At-Tawheed (The Book of Oneness of Allah) that 'Alqamah, may Allah be pleased with him, said: "He (i.e., the person referred to in the above verse) is the one who, when calamity strikes, knows that it is from his Lord and accepts it with equanimity and submits (himself to Allah's Will)"

In other words, the contradiction between what we desire for ourselves with what Allah Almighty desires for us, produces an inner crisis, a pivotal moment in our hearts when we can either decide to bemoan our situation and succumb to anxiety and dissatisfaction, or when we can acknowledge the superiority of Allah's Will, and persevere with the assurances that Allah knows best.

Not only has Allah informed us that we will face circumstances that we will regard as hardships, but He, Almighty, has shown us how to face them. He, Almighty, Says (what means): "O you who have believed, seek help through patience and

prayer. Indeed, Allah is with the patient." [Qur'an 2: 153]

And Allah told us (what means): "And be patient, [O Muhammad, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam], and your patience is not but through Allah. And do not grieve over them and do not be in distress over what they conspire. Indeed, Allah is with those who fear Him and those who are doers of good." [Qur'an 16: 127-128]

Furthermore, the believer understands that undergoing external crises, experiencing the oftentimes sharp contrast between our expectations and the manner in which our circumstances actually develop, or when our circumstances appear dire beyond conceivable resolution, it is an indication, in fact, of Allah's favour. Abu Hurairah, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Whenever Allah wills good for a person, He subjects him to adversity." [Al-Bukhari]

Indeed, for the one who accepts what Allah has decreed, and endures his or her trials patiently, there is only good to come from external crises, the greater the crisis, the greater the good, if the believer engages their circumstance with Imaan (faith).

Imaam At-Tirmithi, may Allah have mercy upon him, stated that the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Verily, the greatness of the reward is tied to the greatness of the trial: When Allah loves a people, He (Allah) puts them to trial. Whoever accepts it, will enjoy Allah's pressure and whoever is displeased with it, will incur Allah's displeasure." [At-Tirmithi]

Crises, therefore, present the believer with an opportunity to more fully realise his or her submission to Allah; in essence, to prove oneself and thereby gain Allah's reward, and have some sins forgiven. The Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "No calamity befalls a Muslim nor any weariness, illness, anxiety, grief, harm or harassment - even a thorn which pricks him - but that Allah expiates with it some of his sins." [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

Thus, we find that Imaan is the crucial equaliser in all circumstances, making all external conditions ultimately beneficial to the believer who submits to Allah's decree. As the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Indeed amazing are the affairs of a believer! They are all for his benefit; if he is granted ease of living he is thankful; and this is best for him. And if he is afflicted with a hardship, he perseveres; and this is best for him." [Muslim]

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

Ways we can cope with our own illness

Always keep in mind that trials are inevitable and people deal with trials in a variety of ways. Allah Says (what means): "And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits, but give good tidings to the patient, who, when disaster strikes them, say, 'Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return.' Those are the ones upon whom are blessings from their Lord and mercy. And it is those who are the [rightly] guided." [Qur'an 2:155-157]

Commenting on this verse, Ash-Sharabaasi, may Allah have mercy upon him, said: "You all are going to be tried with some kind of these trials. But you will be different in your attitude and responsibility towards these trials."

Some people have patience and others have none. Some recover and others do not. Trials teach all of us, but only one group is deserving of the reward. "And give good tidings to the patient." This suggests that since man must be subjected to trials, and since he is going to be afflicted by one form of a trial or another, it is then better for him not to become anxious.

Man is going to be tried whether he accepts this fact or not. Since he is going to receive a reward for the trial if he is patient, it is then better for him to be considered from this good group "And give good tidings to the patient."

Don't become pessimistic: Don't shut your eyes only seeing the darkness of grief and worry. It will lead you into depression and isolation waiting for death to arrive, and that is a bleak existence for anyone, especially for someone who is faced with illness. Try not to allow grief and sadness overcome your heart or over burden your mind. Don't give an opportunity for the devil to whisper to you and try to cause you mental distress that will only add to your pain and suffering. Al-Sa'adee said: "Don't you know that weakness of the heart and its delusions are truly the incurable illness?"

The strength of the heart and its reliance upon Allah are the examples of strong men. How many hospitals are filled with patients suffering from delusions and paranoia? These delusions and anxieties affect even healthy people and will sometimes cause madness and mental problems.

Therefore, the health of the heart is the basis for the health of the body, and the disease of the heart is the true disease. Man may go through psychological instability where he finds the world a narrow place of distress. But, if the sick allow these thoughts to control their mind, it will add to their distress and their wish for death - possibly to the extent of contemplating suicide.

One may wish to die because of pressure and pain, but we must realise that an early end results in punishment within the grave. So, by living they are afforded more time to repent and turn back towards Allah, and that is surely better. The Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "No one among you should wish to die because of distress. But if he must do so, then he should say, 'O Allah give me life as long as life is better for me, and cause me to die as long as death is better for me.'" [Al-Bukhari]

Look within yourself for the cause of your illness and treat it with lawful medical treatments. Don't ignore your illness - seek medical attention right away. Doctors have only been able to make as many strides in medicine thus far because Allah has allowed them to do so. Every disease has a cure except death. Try to search out and find a righteous Muslim physician if possible.

You should question yourself and be fair, do not deceive yourself: If you are afflicted with a distress hardship, look first for the reasons and reprimand yourself. Allah Says (what means): "What comes to you of good is from Allah, what comes to you of evil (O Man) is from yourself..." [Qur'an 4:79]

"And whatever strikes you of disaster, it is what your hands have earned." [Qur'an 42:30]

When you are grieving and don't know the reason behind it, then do not let grief find a way into your heart. Learn that Allah decrees everything and nothing that strikes you should have missed you; and nothing that has missed you, should have struck you. Beware of saying anything that may indicate irritation and dissatisfaction with Allah's Decree, such as saying: "O Lord, why have you afflicted me with this?"

Be confident that Allah knows what is best for you: You should place your trust in Allah and must remember that you do not know the wisdom behind this trial, perhaps it will make you stronger and lead you on a path to a better life. We should never

limit Allah's wisdom to our comprehension level, because we will never be able to comprehend it - it is above our capability to understand. We should, however, know for a certainty that Allah does not intend harm because it is harmful. Harm with Allah is not intended for itself but for other things that may bring good.

Ibn Uthaymeen, may Allah have mercy upon him, said: "Allah doesn't particularly intend harm for a person when He causes him to become ill. Allah intends for the disease to take place and the disease is what may harm man. But He did not intend harm for man. He intends for him only the good from it. Sometimes, the Divine Wisdom may be apparent to the sick, and sometimes it may not. As Allah has said (what means): "And fear a trial which will not strike those who have wronged among you exclusively, and know that Allah is severe in penalty." [Qur'an 8:25]

Remember Allah and ask Him for forgiveness much: Ali, may Allah be pleased with him, said: "When Allah guides His servants to ask for forgiveness, He helps them to achieve what they request." Allah has said (what means): "But Allah would not punish them while they are amongst them. And Allah would not punish them while they seek forgiveness." [Qur'an 8:33]

Allah has told us that He would not punish someone who seeks forgiveness, because sincere forgiveness removes the sin that is the reason for the punishment. The Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "He who is constant in seeking forgiveness, Allah will make for him a way out of any distress, release from grief, and provide for him from where he does not expect it." [Abu Daawood and Ibn Maajah]

So whoever believes in Allah alone and seeks forgiveness from Him, He will provide for him an appointed term, and whoever does good after that, He will increase him from His Grace.

Supplicate with a humble heart and a crying eye asking Allah to cure you: Try to take advantage of the time when supplications are more likely to be answered, praising Allah and calling upon Him with His Beautiful Names. It is also recommended to give something in charity from the best of your possessions before making your supplications. Understand and realise that illness is not the end of your life. If Allah has taken something from you, think of all the things that He has given you and all of the things that you still have.

A believer always strives for the pleasure of his Lord and does not stop because of disease or a trial. The best example is the example the scholar of this nation; Ibn 'Abbaas, may Allah be pleased with him, when he lost his vision and said: "If Allah has taken from my eyes their light, it is in my tongue and heart that I will find the light. My heart is bright and my mind has no defects. And in my mouth there is a sharp, authentic sword."

Guard the mandatory acts of worship (Faraa'id): do not neglect them to the best of your ability. If you have any questions, ask people of knowledge. Perform many good and righteous deeds as possible. If someone else can do them for you on your behalf, this is also acceptable. Beware of any practice that is not lawful, especially those against our faith, such as slaughtering animals to anything other than Allah, hanging charms, seeking refuge with jinn or going to sorcerers.

When you are physically able, try to occupy your time with beneficial things like reading. Find activities that you enjoy and that will distract you from your disease and worries.

Always remember that your faith can and does make miracles: Do not underestimate the effect of reliance upon Allah. There are many incidents that have been witnessed where the impossible becomes possible by the power of faith.

Although the cure for illness is out of our hands and is up to Allah alone, we can still do something to make a difference to those who are suffering. It is unfortunate that often times we belittle the impact we can have on others, especially to those who are ill. Just a smile or a funny story to make someone laugh and forget their worries for a moment is something that can be remembered for years - because it made an impact and it made a difference. How many times have we experienced the impact ourselves in our own lives when someone visited us or gave us a call - just at the time when we were at our lowest moment? Most of us will never forget that person who took the time to think about us, and we always remember them fondly because they - without realising it - helped to shine some light on our dark days.

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

India's ethanol push drives big rise in land farmed to make fuel

India's drive to blend more ethanol into petrol and shield itself from global energy price shocks has increased the amount of farmland tied to fuel production more than eight-fold in four years, according to new research.

India depends on imports for some 85% of its oil, so using more ethanol, made from crops such as sugarcane, rice and maize, is central to its plans to boost its energy security and reduce planet-heating emissions. State-run oil companies currently mix 20% ethanol in each litre of petrol before it reaches the pumps. The area of land linked to ethanol feedstocks, especially maize and rice, has risen from 0.7mn hectares in 2020-21, to 5.7mn hectares in 2024-25, reflecting a rapid expansion in grain-based ethanol production, data presented by Delhi-based research organisation Arcus Policy Research

this month showed. While India's ethanol programme was initially driven by surplus sugar supplies, by 2024-25 only 32% of ethanol supplied to public fuel retailers came from sugarcane, while grain-based ethanol accounted for 68%, according to Arcus Policy Research.

The shift is reshaping crop choices, increasing maize use for fuel and relying heavily on government rice stocks to meet blending targets, said researchers and industry executives at a policy discussion this month where the data was presented.

In just over a decade, India increased the amount of ethanol blended into petrol more than 13-fold, from 1.5% in 2014 to 20% in 2025, reaching its E20 target five years ahead of schedule despite a backlash from some drivers over reduced fuel efficiency and concerns about engine wear.

The government says the shift to

biofuel saved Rs1.06tn (\$12bn) in crude oil imports and avoided 54.4mn tonnes of carbon emissions in a decade, equivalent to emissions from 12mn petrol cars a year. It also describes the reduction in fuel efficiency as marginal. The gains, however, come with trade-offs. The diversion of food crops toward fuel has raised concerns over grain availability, as well as land and water use. Scientists continue to debate whether crop-based ethanol significantly lowers emissions once the land and water needed to grow the crops are factored into the equation. "The rapid expansion reflects a major shift in India's ethanol programme away from sugarcane and toward grains such as maize and rice," said Shweta Saini, CEO of Arcus Policy Research.

Nearly 29% of India's maize production was diverted toward ethanol in 2024-25, while maize cultivation expanded from

9.9mn hectares in 2020-21, to 13.7mn hectares, the data showed. Researchers said the shift was beginning to ripple through agricultural supply chains, affecting feed markets, crop choices and land use patterns.

Saini said the market for soybeans, a major ingredient of animal feed in India, had already been hit by farmers growing maize for ethanol production, which generates a byproduct that is also used to feed livestock. Researchers and former policymakers also raised concerns over the growing diversion of government rice stocks toward ethanol production. Former agriculture secretary Siraj Hussain said much of the broken rice being supplied for ethanol was still suitable for human consumption and would previously have entered India's subsidised public food distribution system. India allocated a record 5.2mn metric tonnes of rice from state

stockpiles for ethanol production in 2024-25, according to Reuters. Saini said the issue reflected wider contradictions in Indian agriculture policy, where governments continue incentivising paddy cultivation despite repeated calls to diversify toward pulses and less water-intensive crops.

She warned that while food grain supplies may remain stable, shifting more land and incentives toward fuel-linked crops could increasingly affect India's "nutrition security", especially as the country remains heavily dependent on imports of edible oils and pulses. The concerns come as PM Narendra Modi has urged citizens to reduce edible oil consumption as part of austerity measures announced after rising energy prices linked to the ME conflict increased pressure on India's foreign exchange reserves. — Thomson Reuters

'Breakneck' Ebola epidemic in DRC outpaces world's response

- Teams struggle to trace thousands potentially exposed
- Experts warn outbreak spread undetected for weeks
- Community mistrust, attacks on health workers hinder response

By Jennifer Rigby, Aaron Ross and Emma Farge
Reuters

In an Ebola outbreak, hours matter. Yet the response to the deadly and fast-spreading epidemic in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is weeks if not months behind — and missing thousands of people who may be at risk.

Interviews with global health officials and documents from a meeting led by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention show how behind the curve authorities are in fighting the latest outbreak. Caused by a strain of the virus known as Bundibugyo for which there is no vaccine or treatment, the outbreak has already caused a suspected 220 deaths and 900 cases, according to the WHO. It has spread to Uganda, where there are seven cases.

Health teams are racing to find thousands of people who may have been exposed to the virus while also grappling with myriad challenges that make it difficult to contain. Problems at a local level include lack of basic supplies as well as mistrust from a community scarred by previous outbreaks. Globally, the response is hampered by the withdrawal of the US from the WHO and wider funding cuts, many health sources said.

Documents from last week's virtual co-ordination meeting show that, as of last week, only 7% of the 1,261 people identified as contacts of suspected Ebola patients had been found and followed up. The WHO put the number at more than 2,000 on Wednesday.

OUT OF CONTROL

The outbreak is "outpacing the response", WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus posted on Wednesday. "Attacks on health facilities make tracking cases and their contacts nearly impossible."

In eastern Congo, the worst-hit area, hospitals have been attacked

and isolation tents burned by angry mobs reclaiming bodies of loved ones, apparently unaware of risks from infectious corpses. That is hindering the operation to stop the spread of the virus and track those at risk in an area already wracked with conflict and with poor health infrastructure, three experts said.

In a document summary of the meeting last week, the partners agreed that reaching more contacts is now the key priority as funding and emergency response personnel trickle in.

"Bottom line: No vaccine exists. No therapy exists. The virus circulated undetected for six weeks. Cross-border spread is confirmed. Healthcare workers are dying. Every day without a fully resourced response is a day the outbreak gains ground," a presentation by the WHO Africa team from the meeting reads.

Professor Salim Abdool Karim, a leading South African epidemiologist and one of the key figures advising Africa CDC, said the outbreak was moving at "breakneck speed". "If you had to choose a bad place for this to happen, it would be Ituri," he added of the province at its epicentre.

While Congolese officials are well-versed in fighting Ebola — this is the 17th outbreak since 1976 — shortages remain a problem, including of the right tests to detect Bundibugyo rather than other Ebola viruses. This was also a factor delaying initial detection.

"There are very few people on the ground — and there are other problems as well, like getting fuel for the vehicles. It goes on and on," Karim said.

US MISSING

Several sources, including one US official briefed on the Ebola response and another working with WHO, said problems would have been solved more easily and quickly in the past, when the US worked with WHO and often co-led the international response to outbreaks.

The US left the organization in January and has cut international aid

funding more broadly, alongside a number of other wealthy countries. "The organisations that would have been able to do this work are not there anymore," said one US official briefed on the response.

Amadou Bocoum, CARE's country director, said his emergency response team had been cut by a third. With the scale and origins of the outbreak unclear, it was a "hell of a job" to find all potential cases and contacts, said Marion Koopmans, a Dutch virologist on the WHO's emergency committee.

Ebola spreads through direct contact with the bodily fluids of infected people once they have symptoms, contaminated materials, and bodies of those who have died with the illness. The contacts of Ebola patients need to be found and then watched over for 21 days, the incubation period of the virus. If they get symptoms, they can isolate, stopping further spread.

"We're going back to the basics of Ebola outbreak responses when we didn't have the means to contain it like we did before vaccines and therapeutics," said Dr Alan Gonzalez, deputy director of operations for Medecins Sans Frontieres, which has asked staff worldwide to apply to reinforce the workforce in Congo.

There is also a major psychological obstacle.

"People are afraid," said Mamadou Kaba Barry, head of mission in Congo for the Alliance for International Medical Action, which has run 60 health centres in Ituri for several years. He said some cases are disappearing and other suspected cases are not being reported because of the mistrust.

He and many others fear a repeat of the worst-ever Ebola outbreak, which spread across West Africa in 2014-2016 and caused more than 28,000 cases and 11,000 deaths. "In West Africa, people hid, thinking, 'What's the point of dying and having my family unable to recover my body?'" he said, adding that a decade on, some lessons still need to be learned.

"We never get used to Ebola. It's always frightening."

Economy matters



Canadian PM Mark Carney approaches the podium before speaking at the Economic Club in New York yesterday. AFP

Canada turns from US to Europe as war propels aluminium higher

By Pratima Desai and Polina Devitt
Reuters

Canada is pushing more of its aluminium towards Europe to make the most of higher premiums on offer, after its neighbour the United States imposed a 50% tariff on the metal last year. A loss of Middle East volumes due to the Iran war has hit Europe hardest and intensified competition with the US for low-carbon supply, driving prices to extreme levels, with policy and prices determining where scarce aluminium is shipped, analysts, traders and aluminium industry sources said.

Disruption in the Middle East, which accounts for 9% of global aluminium smelting capacity, has upended trade flows far beyond the Gulf, industry sources told Reuters. An ensuing tug-of-war is playing out in regional physical market premiums US and European buyers pay above the London Metal Exchange benchmark for aluminium, which is used in everything from cars and cans to building materials.

"We are in a situation where the Europeans and the Americans are competing for limited aluminium units," said Bank of America analyst Michael Widmer. Duty-paid aluminium premiums in Europe have surged 73% since the start of the Iran war to a record \$621 a metric tonne earlier this month, while the US Midwest premium last week hit an all-time high of \$1.16 per lb, or \$2,557 a tonne.

Gregory Wittbecker, president at Wittsend Commodity Advisors, estimates the US Midwest premium needs to rise to at least \$1.20 a lb or \$2,645 a tonne for Canadian producers to divert supply back from Europe. With LME prices around \$3,670 a tonne, US consumers are paying \$6,200 a tonne for their aluminium while in Europe the cost has jumped to \$4,300 a tonne. "The European premium is an incentive for Canadians to push metal east," said Wittbecker.

The US was traditionally the default destination for aluminium from Canada, which exported a total of nearly 2.6mn tonnes of unwrought aluminium metal and alloys last year, Trade Data Monitor figures showed. But after US President Donald Trump imposed tariffs on imports, Canadian producers began to divert metal to Europe.

TDM data shows Canadian aluminium accounted for 54% of US imports in the first quarter of this year, down from 63% in the same period last year and 75% in the first three months of 2024.

One reason for this is the so-called netback to

producers, which refers to how much profit is actually made after deducting transport, tariffs and other costs from the selling price. "When comparing US and EU prices from an export perspective one has to shave off the portion going to the U.S. Treasury in tariffs to get to comparable netbacks," Jean Simard, president of the Aluminium Association of Canada, told Reuters.

"This is why the EU option remains attractive to Canada, adding pressure on the US market," Simard added.

Canadian aluminium exports to the European Union ranged between 6% and 40% of the monthly totals between April 2025 and March 2026, compared with near zero in the first quarter of last year, TDM data showed. Data for Canada's April aluminium exports is not yet available, but industry sources expect it to confirm the trend of rising exports to Europe and falling shipments to the US.

EUROPE'S ALUMINIUM DEFICIT

Bank of America's Widmer estimates Europe faces a 5.6mn-tonne aluminium deficit in 2026, versus a global shortfall of 2.2mn tonnes and a 3.8mn-tonne US deficit. Last year, Europe imported around 1.3mn tonnes or 21% of its primary and alloyed aluminium from the Middle East. TDM data shows, and its loss comes in addition to the phasing out of Russian aluminium by the EU and the mothballing of South32's Mozal smelter in Mozambique.

Even before the Iran war began with US-Israeli strikes on February 28, Canadian shipments to Europe jumped 276% from 2024 levels to more than 590,000 tons last year, while deliveries to the U.S. fell 25% to around 2mn tonnes. TDM data shows.



Aluminium cans leave the production line. (Reuters)



A faithful arrives to attend prayers marking the holiday of Eid al-Adha, as authorities intensify efforts to contain a new Ebola outbreak caused by the Bundibugyo virus strain, at the Central Mosque in Bunia town, Ituri province, DRC. (Reuters)

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Won't be 'neutral mediator' between Ukraine, Russia: EU

AFP
Limassol

The EU's top diplomat yesterday ruled out Europe acting as a "neutral mediator" between Ukraine and Russia, after foreign ministers from the bloc's 27 countries debated their terms for possible talks with Moscow.

Discussions on re-engaging with Moscow have become louder amid deadlocked US efforts to halt the war in Ukraine while US President Donald Trump's attention has been consumed by Iran.

Ukraine has pushed for Europe – sidelined until now by Washington – to play a bigger role and suggested nominating a representative for talks.

"Europe will never be a neutral mediator between Russia and Ukraine, because we are on Ukraine's side and we are defending our own core security interests," EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas told journalists in Cyprus.

"We can't be neutral treating them equally."

Earlier Kallas warned that focusing on who would talk for Europe was a Russian "trap" – as she pushed for the bloc to concentrate on setting clear red lines.

Speculation over potential envoys has picked up, with Russian President Vladimir Putin suggesting former German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, his long-time ally, could fit the bill. The idea has been roundly rejected in Europe.

Some ministers in Cyprus pushed to designate a representative – including Austria's Foreign Minister Beate Meisl-Reisinger, who argued that "this is very much



EU High Representative of Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Kaja Kallas attends a press conference during an informal EU Foreign Ministers meeting in Limassol, yesterday. (Reuters)

what Ukraine expects: that the EU should now get ready?"

Finland's foreign minister Elina Valtonen said her country's president Alexander Stubb could be a good option, while Luxembourg's top diplomat Xavier Bettel said he would float the name of ex-EU chief Jean-Claude Juncker.

Kallas said after the meeting that the "broad consensus" among the ministers was to work through the EU's institutions.

But she said the focus should be fixed on setting the demands for concessions from Russia in any talks and continuing to ratchet up pressure on Moscow through sanctions.

The hawkish former prime minister of Estonia has pushed for months to set a series of red lines, seeking to bind countries together and avoid Moscow exploiting any gaps.

Those include insisting Russia must cease fire before any talks, demanding curbs on Russia's military and refusing to recognise the Kremlin's control over seized territories.

"Europe has valid demands to ensure that any peace is lasting,

and the ministers asked me to take this work forward," Kallas said.

European officials say Putin appears weakened as Russia's economy sags, casualties climb and a long-range drone campaign by Ukraine takes its toll.

But there is widespread scepticism that he is serious about negotiating in good faith, with the Kremlin unleashing its nuclear-capable Oreshnik missile at Kyiv in recent days and menacing foreign diplomats.

After giving the Kremlin leader the cold shoulder since his invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Europe is extremely wary about the prospect of talking to Putin.

"This is not a time when we are discussing who is going to have the negotiations," said Lithuania's foreign minister Kestutis Budrys.

"We have to discuss what we are doing to put additional pressure on Russia and also give more assistance to Ukraine."

EU countries are currently discussing a fresh package of sanctions on Russia – which would be the 21st round since the all-out invasion began.

Two books, two worlds: A schoolgirl's double debut

From Page 1

"The emotional core of the story is entirely real," she said, noting that themes of resilience, trust and personal growth are inspired by her own journey.

Her spiritual writing, meanwhile, is deeply influenced by her connection to the Quran. Having memorised 13 chapters, she describes it as central to her worldview. "It is the lens through which I see the world... it helps me analyse modern challenges while grounding my perspective in faith," she said.

This ability to balance creative expression with purpose is reflected in her broader ambitions.

Writing, she says, is not merely a passion but a form of Sadaqah Jariyah, a continuous act of charity through knowledge and guidance.

Yet her aspirations extend beyond literature. She hopes to pursue a career in medicine as a surgeon, combining intellectual discipline with a commitment to community service, a reflection of the same dedication evident in her writing.

Time management, she notes, has been key to balancing these pursuits. "When you are truly passionate about something, you don't search for time, you make it," she said. "My advice is simple: don't wait for the perfect moment. Start now."

Her message resonates not only with fellow students but with a wider community increasingly aware of the importance of nurturing young talent.

In a city where innovation and ambition are encouraged, Ayesha's journey stands as a testament to what can be achieved through determination, discipline and a clear sense of purpose.

As she continues to develop new titles and expand her literary footprint, her story reflects a broader narrative, one where youth are not only consumers of content, but creators shaping conversations across cultures, ideas and generations.

US, Iran 'agree on 60-day extension of ceasefire'

From Page 1

Kuwait condemned the attack and demanded that Iran immediately halt what it called a serious escalation. The violence, the second flare-up this week, coincided with Eid al-Adha celebrated across the region, where multiple countries have been caught up in the conflict triggered by US and Israeli attacks on Iran on February 28.

Mediator Pakistan said its foreign minister, Ishaq Dar, would meet US Secretary of State Marco Rubio in Washington today, al-

though the significance of his visit was unclear.

The US warned Oman yesterday not to get involved in any effort to impose a toll in the Strait of Hormuz, saying it will penalise any partners involved in such a system.

"Oman, in particular, should know that the US Treasury will aggressively target any actors involved – directly or indirectly – in facilitating tolls for the Strait and any willing partners will be penalised," Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said on X. Trump said that no single country would

have control over the waterway, and appeared to threaten Oman, with which the US has decades-long military and economic ties.

"It's international waters, and Oman will behave just like everybody else or we'll have to blow them up. They understand that, they'll be fine," he said on Wednesday.

Oman has not mentioned the idea of joint control of the strait with Iran, with which it says it has discussed freedom of navigation. Tehran expressed solidarity with Oman after what it called "US officials' threats".

PM Carney backs 'fortress North America' ahead of US trade talks

AFP
New York

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney stressed his country's importance to the US economy yesterday, urging closer co-operation as talks on revising the North American free trade agreement face roadblocks.

Carney's address to financial leaders in New York comes amid persistent acrimony between his government and US President Donald Trump's administration.

Carney has been one of the most prominent critics of Trump's leadership, but yesterday sought to emphasise the benefit of regional economic integration ahead of a July 1 deadline to revise the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA).

"Canada Strong will help Make America Great Again,"

Carney told the Economic Club of New York, referencing both his and Trump's campaign slogans.

"While Canada and the US have had our differences over the centuries, we have always worked and eventually worked through them because we share values and our common interests run deep."

He reminded the room packed with US financial leaders that "Canada is America's largest customer," buying more US goods "than China, Japan and Germany combined."

Mexican officials on Wednesday announced the start of direct talks with the US on revising the USMCA.

Trump's top trade officials have made clear that progress with Canada has been slower and bristled at what they see as Carney's anti-Trump grandstanding on the global stage, including the prime minister's widely praised speech at Janu-

ary's World Economic Forum where Carney declared a "rupture" in the US-led world order.

Deputy US Trade Representative Rick Switzer in a speech last month called Carney "superior" and suggested his "ego" was driving decisions.

He drew a contrast with Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum, who Switzer said was focused on having a positive economic relationship with the US.

Since taking office last year, Carney has warned Canadians that their economic dependence on the US had become a vulnerability and yesterday reiterated his goal to double non-US exports over the coming decade.

But his government has maintained it wants as much free trade with the US as possible.

"A fortress North America," he said, "is in everyone's interest."

Trump's face could appear on US\$250 bill

AFP
Washington

President Donald Trump could soon appear on a new \$250 bill, in the Republican's latest move to shatter US traditions by putting his personal stamp on national institutions.

A proposal for the new bill, featuring a glaring Trump, was first reported yesterday by the *Washington Post*.

If carried out, it would be the first time the image of a living person – let alone a president – had appeared on US currency in a century and a half.

"Right now there is proposed legislation – front of the House, in front of the Senate – to change the first requirement so that a living person, Donald J. Trump, could be on a \$250 bill," US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent told a media briefing yesterday.

"I don't think that there's anything untoward about having the President of the US, the person who's president of the US, on the 250th anniversary bill," Bessent said.

He said the Treasury Department has made advance preparations if legislation were passed, but "will stick to the law."

A design mock-up obtained by the *Washington Post* showed the words "America 250 anniversary," a nod to the US declaring its independence on July 4, 1776.

According to the *Post*, two Trump appointees at the Treasury Department last year began urging staff at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing to prepare prototypes.

Employees there, speaking on



US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent holds up a *Washington Post* article about a possible 250 dollar bill with the portrait of US President Donald Trump during a press briefing in the James S. Brady Press Briefing Room at the White House in Washington, DC, yesterday. (Reuters)

condition of anonymity, told the *Post* that the plan raised concerns because it would violate a federal law banning the depiction of living presidents on US money.

A Treasury spokeswoman told AFP that the Bureau of Engraving and Printing is "conducting appropriate planning and due diligence" in response to the proposal.

She added that US Treasurer Brandon Beach had not asked staff to print the note before congressional action occurred.

Printing bureau director Patricia Solimene had pushed back, warning officials including Beach of legal and procedural obstacles, the employees told the *Post*.

Solimene was abruptly reassigned from her role, the paper reported.

Such worries have not stopped the Trump administration from pressing ahead with its effort to slap his likeness or name on cultural institutions and other items – sparking accusations of a cult of personality around the 79-year-old leader.

Earlier this year the US Commission of Fine Arts, whose members were appointed by Trump, unanimously approved the minting of a commemorative "Semiquincentennial Gold Coin" made of 24-carat gold.

In recent months both the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and the US Institute of Peace have been rebranded to include Trump's name.

His likeness also stares down from banners draping the Department of Justice and Department of Agriculture – and it will soon appear in some US passports, according to the State Department.

Legislation to allow Trump to appear on a \$250 bill was introduced in Congress last year but has sat idle.

Reaction among Democrats was critical, with Senator Mark Warner, a member of the Senate's banking committee, saying the unprecedented proposal amounted to the White House blatantly "stoking the president's ego."

Brazil moves toward five-day workweek

AFP
Brasilia

Brazil's Chamber of Deputies advanced a reform on Wednesday that would shorten the workweek and give workers two days of rest, a pre-election victory for leftist President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

Latin America's biggest economy currently has workers hustling six days a week.

Backed by labour unions and opposed by trade organisations, the draft constitutional reform now heads to a vote in the Senate to reduce the workweek from 44 to

40 hours, without pay cuts.

"The people will work five days and be able to rest for two," Lula said Tuesday at an event in the northern state of Amazonas.

If approved by Congress, it would be the first reduction on Brazil's workweek since the Constitution was enacted in 1988.

Unions and left-wing advocates have pushed for the change to improve quality of life and mental health for workers in Brazil, where unemployment is at record lows.

The six-day schedule "is inhuman, it robs people of hope and dignity," said lawmaker and reform sponsor Erika Hilton ahead of the proposal's advancement.

Figures cited in the proposal say it will change the workweek for more than 35 million Brazilians, in a country of 213 million people.

Business leaders oppose the change, warning it could harm their bottom lines and result in job losses.

Lula, a former union leader, is seeking his fourth non-consecutive term in office. His main rival is Senator Flavio Bolsonaro, the son of far-right former president Jair Bolsonaro who was jailed for an attempted coup.

Across Latin America, a 40-hour workweek has been enshrined in law in Chile, Ecuador, Venezuela and, more recently, Mexico.



Cuba's Deputy Foreign Minister, Josefina de la Caridad Vidal Ferreiro, speaks at the National Capitol yesterday. (AFP)

can try to control Cuba's destiny through pressure, coercion and the threat of military aggression," Vidal added.

Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez appealed to the international community for urgent assistance to prevent a disaster on the island during a speech before the UN Security Council on Tuesday.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio last week said Washington's preference was "always a diplomatic solution" but warned that Trump had other options at

his disposal.

Rubio, a Cuban American and staunch adversary of Havana's communist government, added that Cuba had tentatively accepted an offer of \$100m in US aid in exchange for reforms.

CIA Director John Ratcliffe held an exceptional meeting in Havana with senior Cuban officials earlier this month.

The encounter followed high-level diplomatic talks in Havana on April 10 – the first time a US government plane had landed on the island since 2016.



Katara blends culture, science and family fun during Eid festivities

Cultural performances, astronomy shows, and family-friendly entertainment continued to attract visitors to Katara Cultural Village during the second day of Eid al-Adha celebrations, as the venue offered a wide-ranging programme blending heritage, recreation and education.

The festivities, held across Katara's facilities and beachfront areas, created a vibrant atmosphere that combined festive joy with cultural identity, offering visitors an integrated experience spanning traditional performances, recreational activities and scientific exploration at the Al Thuraya Planetarium.

Katara's Eid programme stood out for its diversity, catering to visitors of all ages and interests through a mix of heritage activities, entertainment events and interactive experiences within a single destination.



From astronomy-themed shows at the Al Thuraya Planetarium to lively beach activities and folkloric performances that reflect Qatari heritage, Katara created an Eid atmosphere rich in culture, entertainment, and family warmth. The celebrations were

carefully designed to create memorable experiences for residents and visitors alike.

A major highlight of the programme was the Al Thuraya Planetarium, which welcomed astronomy enthusiasts and families with immersive shows exploring space,



planets and the mysteries of the universe. On Thursday, visitors enjoyed screenings of 'The Great Solar System Adventure' followed by 'Space Guardians Zola' and the 3D film 'Polaris'.

The planetarium programme continues on Friday with 'The Stars' at 5pm, followed by 'The Great Solar System Adventure' at 6pm and the 3D film 'Astronaut' at 7pm. The activities will conclude on Saturday with 'The Great Solar System Adventure' at 5pm, followed by 'Little Perfect Planet' at 6pm.

Along the Katara Corniche, festive activities continued in a lively family-friendly environment,

with Qatari folk troupes performing traditional dances and chants that reflected the authenticity of local heritage and enriched the celebrations with cultural rhythm and nostalgia.

The "Katara Eidiyah" initiative also contributed to the festive spirit by bringing joy to children and families. Evening festivities were further highlighted by daily military parades held at 5:45pm and 6:45pm along the Corniche, while fireworks displays illuminated the night sky at 8:30pm, transforming the waterfront into a colourful visual spectacle enjoyed by crowds gathered along the beach.

Meanwhile, Building 12 hosted a

marketplace for productive families showcasing a variety of local goods, including handmade crafts, clothing, perfumes, traditional sweets and heritage-inspired gifts.

The exhibition highlighted local creativity and craftsmanship while supporting home-based businesses and offering visitors a shopping experience that blended tradition with modernity. Katara's beaches, walkways and public spaces remained filled with visitors from diverse backgrounds throughout the Eid celebrations, reinforcing its status as a leading cultural destination where Eid is celebrated as a shared cultural and community experience.



Al Wakrah Central Slaughterhouse handled high Eid demand efficiently

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

Thousands flocked to Al Wakrah Central Slaughterhouse on the first morning of Eid al-Adha, as the facility witnessed a sharp surge in demand from residents seeking to perform the ritual sacrifice in a highly organised and efficient environment.

A steady stream of customers was seen at the Wakrah Central Market selecting sacrificial animals before handing them over to porters, who swiftly transported them along designated routes into the slaughterhouse complex. Inside the facility, slaughtering, skinning, and meat-cutting operations proceeded seamlessly with advanced machinery.

Workers and butchers adhered strictly to health and safety regulations, wearing gloves, masks, and protective head coverings throughout the process.

Operations at the slaughterhouse were marked by speed, cleanliness, and efficiency within a fully sanitised environment. Veterinary doctors were stationed on-site to inspect animals before and after slaughter, ensuring compliance with approved health and safety standards and verifying the quality and suitability of the meat before delivery to customers.

Traffic patrols from the General Directorate of Traffic also played a key role in regulating vehicle movement around the market and slaughterhouse, helping maintain smooth traffic flow through clearly designated entry and exit routes.

Mousa Ahmed al-Othman, Director of Public Relations at Widam Food Company, said Al-Wakrah Central Slaughterhouse has a daily production capacity exceeding 4,000 heads of livestock, including sheep, goats, cattle, and camels. He noted that slaughtering operations at all state slaughterhouses began immediately after Eid prayers, with customers arriving from the early hours of the morning.

He explained that many worshippers prefer to arrive early to complete the sacrifice and receive their meat in a remarkably short time. "The entire process, from slaughtering and skinning to cutting and delivery, takes no more than five minutes per animal," he said.

Al-Othman added that Widam coordinated closely with the Ministry of Municipality to increase the number of veterinary doctors supervising inspections before and after slaughter to ensure the highest standards of food safety. He further revealed that the company had deployed refrigerated, fully equipped delivery vehicles to transport sacrificial animals booked through its

electronic application directly to customers' homes on the first and second days of Eid.

Meanwhile, electronic bookings for sacrificial animals exceeded 2,000, while the third and fourth days of Eid have been designated for charitable organisations and associations. Al-Othman stressed that livestock supplies at Al-Wakrah Central Market remain abundant, noting that current prices are reasonable compared to previous seasons.

He also highlighted that the government-backed subsidised sacrifice initiative for Qatari citizens helped stabilise prices and ensure product availability during the Eid season. He explained that deliveries are being managed through an electronic numbering system designed to guarantee fairness, transparency, and smooth organisation for all customers.

Al-Othman described Al-Wakrah Central Slaughterhouse as the newest and largest facility of its kind in the country, and the only central slaughterhouse capable of receiving all types of sacrificial livestock.

The facility features advanced infrastructure, modern meat preparation and storage rooms, and an integrated distribution centre designed to efficiently meet the local market's daily needs throughout the Eid period.

Torba Market brings sustainability, community spirit to Qanat Quartier

By Shaima Sheriff
Staff Reporter

The colourful walkways and canals of Qanat Quartier came alive this week as Torba Market brought its signature artisan atmosphere to a new waterfront setting at The Pearl Island. Known as Qatar's first artisan, plastic-free farmers' market, Torba has built a strong reputation for promoting sustainability, organic agriculture and locally made products while creating a supportive platform for small businesses and creatives.

The latest activation, launched in collaboration with United Development Company, marked the beginning of a broader seasonal market programme at The Pearl and Gewan Islands, blending lifestyle, culture and community engagement in an open-air setting overlooking the waterfront.

As families strolled through handmade craft stalls, organic food vendors and artisan displays, the atmosphere reflected the growing popularity of local markets in Qatar that prioritise sustainability and support homegrown talent.

Among the participating vendors was Smita Mukherjee, an India-based entrepreneur living in Qatar, who showcased her handmade organic candles made from natural soy wax and essential oils. "I run a handmade, natural, organic candle business, which is made from 100% natural soy wax with essential oils," she said.

Mukherjee pointed out that Torba's sustainability-focused concept motivated her to join the market for a second consecutive season. "Torba promotes businesses like ours, which are sustainable, natural and handmade," she said. "This motivates small business owners to join because they genuinely promote us."

She also lauded visitors' response, noting that audiences appreciated not only food vendors but also local art and handmade products. "They are enjoying every bit of it," she said. "They are appreciating the artwork as well, so as an art business, I am enjoying being here."

Another vendor, Turkish entrepreneur Filiz, owner of Needle and Hook, described Torba as an important stepping stone in her journey from a home business owner to opening her own crochet concept store in Qatar. "I started a home business on crochet sustainable toys," she said. "Now I have my own shop — thanks to Torba. They supported me a lot."

Filiz, who participated in the market for three years, said the events helped her understand customer interests and grow her business organically. "I was able to check how the market reacts to my business," she said, adding that she now runs crochet and embroidery classes at her store at Tawar Mall.

Despite the warmer weather, she said, visitors continued to show strong interest in sustainable handmade products. "It makes me very happy to see people enjoying what I create," she said. Beyond shopping, vendors highlighted the welcoming community atmosphere that has become central to Torba's identity.

"They always create a really nice community and environment for people to have fun with their kids," Filiz said. "It's suitable for both children and adults."



Filiz, owner of Needle and Hook.
PICTURES: Shaima Sheriff



Smita Mukherjee showcases her products at the Torba Market.



Holiday-goers thronged the Torba Market.