



Qatar Airways ups operations to Dubai with target of five daily flights

Qatar Airways is expanding the frequency of its flights between Hamad International Airport (DOH) and Dubai International Airport (DXB) from two to five daily services.

The additional frequencies will be introduced in phases to meet growing demand and provide greater flexibility for passengers travelling between the two cities.

The existing two daily flights was increased to three daily flights yesterday, to be followed by the introduction of a fourth daily flight from June 15, and a fifth daily flight during the summer season.

The flights will be operated on Boeing 777 and Airbus A350 aircraft.

This expansion reinforces Qatar Airways' commitment to enhancing connectivity within the region and supporting both business and leisure travel between Qatar and the UAE with up to 35 weekly flights.

Qatar Airways has been steadily restoring its network across the Middle East and is currently operating to over 20 destinations in the region.

The airline resumed operations to Dubai (DXB) and Sharjah (SHJ) in April, and restarted flights to Abu Dhabi (AUH) last month. - **QNA**

Qatar reiterates commitment to promoting social dialogue, international co-operation

Qatar has reaffirmed its commitment to continuing support for the efforts of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), strengthening international co-operation, and working towards a work environment that is more equitable and sustainable, where technological progress goes hand in hand with social progress.

This was stated in the address delivered on behalf of Qatar by HE the Minister of Labour Dr Ali bin Samikh al-Marri (pictured) before the plenary session of the 114th session of the ILO in Geneva.

He voiced Qatar's appreciation for the important report presented by the ILO director-general entitled "Harnessing Artificial Intelligence for Decent Work" as well as the report concerning the conditions of workers in the occupied Arab territories.

HE Dr al-Marri indicated that the real challenge posed by artificial intelligence (AI) does not lie in the technology itself, but rather in the choices made by governments and social partners regarding how it is utilised.

He noted that the future will not be determined by algorithms alone, but by policies, institutions, and their ability to direct

technological transformation towards social justice and decent work.

The minister noted that the Qatar believes the success of digital transformation should be measured by its ability to achieve three interconnected objectives: increasing productivity, expanding opportunities for decent work, and strengthening social protection and skills development so that its gains are reflected fairly and equitably for workers and societies.

HE Dr al-Marri said that this vision is based on the conviction that the sustainability of any economic or technological transformation depends on the strength of labour market institutions and their ability to adapt to change, noting that experience has shown that the most successful reforms are those accompanied by social dialogue and trust-building between governments, employers, and workers.

He affirmed that Qatar will continue developing its policies and institutions in ways that strengthen labour market resilience and reinforce the principles of protection, fairness, and partnership among production stakeholders.

The minister stressed that Qatar is close-

ly following ongoing discussions regarding the establishment of an international standard for the platform economy.

HE Dr al-Marri indicated that this process represents an important opportunity to develop an international framework that balances encouraging innovation with safeguarding workers' fundamental rights while promoting legal clarity, fairness, and sustainability in emerging forms of work.

He further noted that while the world discusses the future of work amid accelerating technological transformation, the challenges facing labour markets today are not limited to technology alone, as conflicts, crises, and escalating tensions are leaving profound impacts on economies and societies and directly affecting employment opportunities, living standards, and social stability.

HE Dr al-Marri emphasised the importance of strengthening international co-operation, consolidating dialogue, and prioritising peaceful solutions as fundamental pillars for achieving sustainable development and ensuring an enabling environment for decent work.

The minister added that while discuss-



ing the jobs of the future, the conditions of workers deprived of the most basic requirements for decent work and dignified living due to conflicts and occupation cannot be overlooked.

He underscored Qatar's position on the necessity of protecting the rights of Palestinian workers in the occupied Arab territories, particularly in the Gaza Strip, given the destruction and complete collapse of labour markets and livelihoods witnessed there.

HE Dr al-Marri further highlighted the importance of supporting recovery and reconstruction efforts to address the urgent humanitarian crisis, restore economic activity, and enable workers and their families to live with dignity and hope for the future. - **QNA**



Ministry undersecretary meets top officials

HE the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Labour Sheikhha Najwa bint Abdulrahman al-Thani held a series of bilateral meetings yesterday with officials at the International Labour Organisation (ILO), on the

sidelines of the 114th session of the International Labour Conference in Geneva.

She met with the ILO's Director of the Social Protection Department Shahra Razavi, Director of the Multilateral Partnerships and

Development Cooperation Department Frank Hagemann, and Chief of the Occupational Safety and Health and Working Environment Branch Joaquim Pintado Nunes.

Discussions during the meet-



ings dealt with progress in the field of social protection and ways to enhance co-operation between Qatar and the ILO.

HE Sheikhha Najwa also reviewed key initiatives and procedures implemented to protect workers and enhance their safety in the workplace.

HE Sheikhha Najwa also met yesterday with the Philippines' Undersecretary of Labour Jainal T Rasul Jr and the head of the Mena (Middle East and North Africa) Region at the World Economic Forum Kelsey Goodman.

The meetings addressed topics of mutual interest. - **QNA**

LIC joins the UN's Sports for Climate Action Framework

The Lusail International Circuit (LIC) has become a signatory of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)'s Sports for Climate Action Framework, formalising its long term commitment to sustainability and climate action on World Environment Day.

The framework aligns closely with Qatar's broader national sustainability goals and the LIC's own environmental agenda.

As a signatory, the LIC commits to five core principles: promoting

environmental responsibility, reducing its climate impact, educating for climate action, encouraging sustainable consumption, and using its communications platforms to advocate for change.

For the Lusail International Circuit, the move builds on work already underway.

In 2025, the circuit was awarded the FIA (Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile)'s highest environmental recognition, the Three Star Environmental Accreditation, reflecting a broad range of sustain-

ability initiatives implemented across its operations and events.

From renewable energy initiatives and electric mobility solutions to advanced waste management, accessibility, wellbeing, and community engagement programmes, the LIC continues to strengthen and expand its commitment to environmental sustainability.

Joining the Sports for Climate Action Framework now provides a structured pathway to take that work further.

As part of its commitment, the LIC is developing a comprehensive multi-year climate transition plan aligned with the initiative's targets, including reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 50% by 2030 and reaching net zero by 2040.

The plan includes defining emissions boundaries, measuring impact across operations, and implementing reduction strategies across events, infrastructure and supply chains.

"Joining the UNFCCC Sports for Climate Action Framework is



an important step for Lusail International Circuit and reflects the direction we have been working towards," said LIC chief executive Abdulaziz Ali al-Mohannadi. "We recognise the role sport can play in bringing people together and influencing positive change, and we are committed to using our platform to contribute to a more sustainable future, supporting Qatar

National Vision 2030."

As a signatory, the LIC will measure and report its greenhouse gas emissions, implement reduction initiatives, and engage with fans, partners and stakeholders to support wider climate action efforts.

The circuit will also report annually on its progress in line with UNFCCC requirements. - **QNA**



QC distributes food baskets to Somalia's Arab communities

Qatar Charity (QC) distributed food baskets to families from Yemeni, Syrian, and Sudanese communities in Somalia, as well as to Somali families displaced from Yemen.

The initiative - implemented under the "The Greatest Days" campaign and supported by donors in Qatar - benefited 1,854 people, aiming to ease their difficult living conditions.

Abdulfatah Adam, country director of the QC's Somalia branch, said that the initiative reflects the organisation's ongoing efforts to support the most vulnerable groups, especially during the blessed days of Dhul-Hijjah.

Adam added that the QC continues to expand its humanitarian work to support refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and those affected by

crises, in line with its broader relief efforts in Somalia, where food assistance helps families facing hardship due to conflict and drought.

Somalia's Minister of Interior, Federal Affairs, and Reconciliation Ali Yusuf Ali Hosh lauded the QC's humanitarian role and the continued support provided by Qatar to the Somali people.

The "Greatest Days" campaign cov-

ers a range of food and water projects.

It focused on providing food baskets for people affected by ongoing crises, while also supporting longer-term solutions such as agriculture and small livestock projects to enhance food security.

The water projects include well drilling to help address water shortages and drought.

Qatar's Venice Biennale pavilion reimaged as a tent where all things positive intersect

By Joey Aguilar
Doha

Inspired by the traditional role of the tent as a place for gathering, conversation and shared experiences, Qatar's debut pavilion at the 61st International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia brings together art, film, music and food in a public space designed to foster connection and cultural exchange, according to co-curator Tom Eccles.

The pavilion unveils an immersive exhibition, *Untitled 2026 (a gathering of remarkable people)*, bringing together contemporary art, film, music and culinary experiences in the heart of Venice.

Eccles, who co-curated Qatar's presentation with Ruba Katrib, said the exhibition draws on the tent's significance as a place for dialogue, hospitality and community interaction.

He is also the executive director of the Centre for Curatorial Studies and the Hessel Museum of Art at Bard College.

In a video shared by Qatar Museums (QM) on Facebook, Eccles said the curatorial team began

with a question: "What belongs inside a tent?"

"The tent structure itself is something familiar to many people as a gathering space, a space for discourse, perhaps music, food, and definitely a place where one intersects positively with others," he said.

That idea shaped a multidisciplinary programme that brings together newly commissioned artworks, live performances and public activities.

Eccles said that commissioning new works was central to the project.

At the heart of the pavilion is *Damar TV (2026)*, a newly commissioned experimental narrative film by Qatari-American artist Sophia al-Maria, whom Eccles described as one of Qatar's leading contemporary artists.

"It was important that we commission new works, and the major part of this project is this new film by Sophia al-Maria," he said.

The pavilion also features *Ferricane (2022-26)*, a sculptural installation by Kuwaiti-Puerto Rican artist Alia Farid.

Eccles said Farid's inclusion reflects the pavilion's commitment

to supporting artists from across the region and showcasing a new generation of influential women artists.

Complementing the visual artworks is a live music programme curated by Lebanese artist Tarek Atoui.

The programme will evolve throughout the Biennale, with different musicians invited to perform each month.

Food also plays a central role in the visitor experience.

Palestinian chef Fadi Kattan leads a culinary programme featuring Palestinian cuisine alongside contributions from guest chefs from across the region.

Eccles said the pavilion's food and music programmes are intended to remain open and free to the public.

Designed by renowned artist Rirkrit Tiravanija, the pavilion's gathering space serves as its social and conceptual centre, encouraging visitors to meet, converse and engage with the artistic programme.

Qatar's official contribution to the Biennale was unveiled last month at the future site of the country's permanent pavilion in



the Giardini della Biennale.

The pavilion was inaugurated by QM Chairperson HE Sheikhha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani.

The exhibition includes a contribution by Pakistani architect Yasmeen Lari, whose installation embodies inclusivity and belong-

ing and aligns with this year's theme, *My Home Is Your Home*.

Organised by the QM and presented by Rubaiya Qatar, a nationwide multidisciplinary contemporary art quadrennial set to debut in November, the pavilion occupies a prominent location in the Biennale gardens near the



Eccles: The tent structure itself is something familiar to many people as a gathering space, a space for discourse, perhaps music, food, and definitely a place where one intersects positively with others.

Left: The pavilion unveils an immersive exhibition, *Untitled 2026 (a gathering of remarkable people)*, that brings together contemporary art, film, music, and culinary experiences in the heart of Venice.

historic Book Pavilion.

Alongside *Untitled 2026 (a gathering of remarkable people)*, Qatar is presenting the Beyti Beytak exhibition, exploring how contemporary architecture can respond to community needs while reimagining concepts of home, hospitality and belonging.



JUST LEAP



LARSEN & TOUBRO

INDIA TAKES THE LEAP

L&T advances with clarity and conviction – navigating a volatile world, delivering on promises, and building a stronger tomorrow.

Dear Shareholders,

I am addressing you at a time when the world is recalibrating. Geopolitical realignments, shifting trade regimes, the accelerating march of artificial intelligence, and a lingering and enduring conflict in West Asia have created an environment that demands both steadiness and boldness.

As a company that has weathered the ups and downs of nearly nine decades, L&T does not flinch in the face of complexity. We lean in – guided by our enduring mantra: *Can do. Will do. Will get it done.*

81st Annual General Meeting | June 5, 2026

Address by

Mr. S. N. Subrahmanyan
Chairman & Managing Director

The year under review, FY 2025-26, was one of steady, purposeful progress. Record order inflows, a robust order book, improved profitability, and a deliberate strengthening of our technology backbone have reinforced the Company's position as a globally respected engineering and technology enterprise. Even as external headwinds tested our resolve, your Company delivered – across geographies, verticals, and stakeholder expectations.

We have commenced our next five-year strategic journey, Lakshya 2031, with a clear mandate: to make L&T more agile, more digitally driven, more profitable, and more future-ready. This is not merely a growth target – it is a declaration of intent.

Group Performance Overview FY 2025-26

	Order Inflow ₹ 4,35,590 crore (up 22%)
	Order Book ₹ 7,40,327 crore (up 28%)
	Revenue ₹ 2,85,874 crore (up 12%)
	Recurring PAT ₹ 17,238 crore (up 18%)
	Net Debt : Equity ratio 0.35 : 1 (improved from 0.6 : 1)

I am pleased to inform you that the Board of Directors has recommended a final dividend of ₹ 38/- per share for FY 2025-26.

Growth Amidst a Global Reset

Multiple forces were at play that influenced the operating environment in FY 2025-26. Tariffs and countermeasures disrupted trade flows. Supply chain dislocations rippled across industries from agriculture to semiconductors. Geopolitical tensions in West Asia created near-term uncertainty in a region that accounts for nearly one-third of your Company's annual revenues. Meanwhile, the rapid rise of AI has opened vast new frontiers – redefining what industries can build, how they operate, and who leads.

Through it all, your Company remained anchored. Our GCC operations continued without material disruption – over 100 project sites operated normally, with invoicing, collections on schedule, and most importantly, people and assets safe. This is the dividend of decades of trust built with clients, governments, and communities.

Domestically, India's infrastructure-led growth story remains compelling. Early signs of renewed private investment in energy transition, data centers, electronics and semiconductors are expanding the horizon of opportunity. The passage of the SHANTI Act promises to unlock significant interest in small modular reactors – an area where L&T's engineering expertise in nuclear-grade pressure vessels gives it a meaningful advantage.

Leadership in uncertain times is not the absence of challenge. It is the quality of the response. Your Company has responded with discipline – conserving cash, sharpening working capital management, adopting selective project bidding, and continuing to invest in the capabilities that will define tomorrow.



Varanasi Cricket Stadium, Gajari, Uttar Pradesh

Group Businesses

1. Infrastructure

Your Company's capacity to deliver large-scale, complex EPC projects with precision and punctuality remains its greatest differentiator.

Milestones this year:

- Kartavya Bhavan 1, 2 & 3 and Seva Teerth in Delhi, inaugurated by the Prime Minister
- Phase 1 of Navi Mumbai International Airport, inaugurated by the Prime Minister
- Patna Medical College and Hospital Phase 1

- inaugurated – set to become the world's second-largest hospital upon completion
- Gateway of Guwahati – India's first modern river ferry terminal – inaugurated on the Brahmaputra
- Inauguration of the 112.5 MW Goaltore solar power plant in West Bengal – one of the largest renewable power projects in eastern India



Residue Upgradation Facility (RUF), HPCL Vizag Refinery, Andhra Pradesh

2. Energy

Pursuing a comprehensive energy transition strategy through four verticals – Hydrocarbon Onshore, Hydrocarbon Offshore, Offshore Wind and CarbonLite Solutions – your Company is powering both the present and the future.

Milestones this year:

- Commissioning of Jafurah Gas Compression Project Phase-1 for Saudi Aramco, KSA
- Commissioning of the 3.55 MMTPA Residue Upgradation Facility for HPCL at Visakhapatnam
- Completion of India's first full-scale offshore decommissioning – the BGEPIL Tapti project
- Commercial Operation Declaration (COD) achieved for Unit-1 at SJVN's 2x660 MW thermal plant in Bihar

3. Hi-Tech Manufacturing

A pioneer in import substitution, the Heavy Engineering vertical leads globally in engineered-to-order equipment. The Company's Precision Engineering and Systems division is well positioned to capitalise on India's *Aatmanirbharta* thrust across defence, aeronautics and space.



Close-in Weapon System (CIWS) – indigenous air defence solution for countering aircraft & drones

Milestones this year:

- Manufactured one of the heaviest Cr-Mo-V Hydrocracking Reactors for ExxonMobil's Baytown Refinery in Texas
- L&T and HAL jointly produced India's first industry-manufactured PSLV rocket
- Unveiling of Zorawar Light Tank, jointly developed with DRDO
- Delivery of India's first Anti-Submarine Warfare Shallow Water Craft, co-developed with GRSE
- Execution of one of the most complex and time-critical refinery turnarounds for Saudi Arabia's PRC HOFCC Converter Unit
- Formation of L&T Electronic Products & Systems, a dedicated business unit for creating IP-driven, design-led electronics product platforms for energy, mobility, defence and other verticals and a 40-acre integrated campus in Coimbatore positioned as a large-scale, future-ready electronics manufacturing hub

4. Services (IT, Engineering and Financial)

Your Company's listed services businesses remain focused on long-term value creation.

- LTM (formerly LTIMindtree)**, India's 6th largest IT services company was rebranded as LTM Limited and repositioned as an AI-centric 'Business Creativity Partner'. The company has recorded its largest-ever deal wins during the year, including a landmark contribution to the PAN 2.0 Project for India's Income Tax Department. New service offerings like its BlueVerse ecosystem enable clients to scale AI responsibly, enhancing their growth.

- L&T Technology Services (LITS)** is a global leader in Engineering R&D across 25 countries. Across the year, the company launched proprietary agentic AI platforms, inaugurated a new ITAR-compliant Engineering Design Center in Texas, and now holds a portfolio of 1,706 patents, including 673 own filings and 273 in the AI/GenAI domain.

- L&T Finance** is a technology-driven NBFC, with a domestic 'AAA' rating and a 98% retailised loan book. The company, which has been assigned debut Investment Grade Credit Rating by international rating agencies, acquired the gold loan business of Paul Merchants Finance Private Limited along with 130 branches and a gold loan portfolio of ₹ 1,350 crore. New initiatives like 'Project Cyclops', a proprietary AI-driven 3D digital credit engine and 'Project Nostradamus' – an automated real-time cross-sell, risk and portfolio management system are helping boost profitability through technology.

- Green Energy:** The Company's entry into the green energy sector is supported by an integrated business model spanning the full industry value chain, structured around two core segments, i.e. Asset Development for Green Hydrogen and its derivatives, and Hi-Tech Manufacturing for Electrolysers. This approach is best showcased in an upcoming 10 KTPA green hydrogen plant in Panipat, Haryana and the successful indigenisation of a 4 MW electrolyser stack featuring next-generation zero-gap technology in Hazira, Gujarat. It has also entered into a joint development arrangement with ITOCHU Corporation, Japan, for green ammonia production in Kandla, Gujarat.



Elara Celestia, Bengaluru, Karnataka

- L&T Realty:** One of India's most trusted premium real estate developers, the company has a strong presence in Mumbai (MMR), Bengaluru, Chennai and Delhi (NCR), with a total portfolio of 71 million sq.ft. of development potential across residential, commercial and retail segments.

New-Age Businesses

Long-term global and national priorities continue to define your Company's foray into emerging sectors, particularly those where technology is poised to play a key role.

- Larsen & Toubro Vyoma (formerly L&T-Cloudfiniti):** The business, in its new avatar, is looking to expand its bouquet of services through integration of advanced AI capabilities, cloud-native architectures and low-carbon operations to ensure scalability, security, sovereignty and sustainability. Towards this end, the company has entered into a partnership with NVIDIA, to develop high-performance, green AI data centers and sovereign AI infrastructure in India.



Data Center in Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu

- L&T Semiconductor Technologies (LTPCT):** As India's first fabless semiconductor firm focused on global smart device design across mobility, energy, industrial sectors and data center, LTPCT strengthened its capabilities through the acquisition of the Power Module Design Assets of Fujitsu General Electronics Ltd., Japan. The agreement includes the transfer of the power semiconductor R&D team, design patents, specialised equipment and core IP.

- L&T-SuFin:** The B2B digital marketplace streamlines procurement, supply chains, logistics and financing for industrial and construction sectors. To provide focus and scale to the e-commerce platform, the business has been carved out into a wholly-owned subsidiary of L&T, namely SuFin Limited, to house the business effective from April 1, 2026.

- L&T EduTech:** Crossed a milestone of 4,00,000 learners enrolled, launched an 'EV & Emerging Tech Experience Hub' in Chennai, and introduced dedicated AI prompt engineering modules for L&T employees.

Value Unlocking and Collaborations

While the Company unlocked value worth more than ₹ 8,300 crore by divesting its stake in non-core businesses, namely Hyderabad Metro Rail and Nabha Power, it has also entered into a number of collaborations aimed at exploring emerging opportunities. L&T strengthened its strategic partnerships across energy, defence, AI and technology by collaborating with Hitachi Energy on major North Sea HVDC projects, joining forces with Bharat Electronics Limited and General Atomics Aeronautical Systems Inc. for advanced defence and drone manufacturing initiatives, announcing a proposed venture under the IndiaAI Mission to build sovereign, scalable GW-scale NVIDIA AI factory infrastructure, and signing a technology agreement with CP PLUS to advance indigenous Vision AI surveillance systems.

Tech-cellence – The Way Forward

With digitalisation as an accelerator, your Company is leveraging its engineering prowess to reposition itself as a technology-driven solutions provider. Digitally connecting over 17,000 assets across global projects and manufacturing bases, bespoke Small Language Models are put to use to extract maximum value from the data generated. More than 100 algorithms have been developed – 34 fully functional – enabling predictive asset management and resource optimisation.

AI is emerging as a force multiplier with GenAI being embedded across the entire project life-cycle – from tendering and contract risk identification to design, execution, operations and maintenance.

ESG – Building Responsibly

Your Company, as a responsible corporate citizen, has embedded ESG (environment, social and governance) principles into its core business strategy.

- Our Green Business now constitutes 51% of standalone revenues
- We have launched India's first listed Sustainability-Linked Bond worth ₹ 500 crore and a USD 700 million Sustainability-Linked Trade Facility with Standard Chartered
- We are aiming for Water Neutrality by 2035, Carbon Neutrality by 2040, and currently source 19% of our electricity from renewable energy sources
- We have planted over 1 million saplings and raised the water table by almost 10 metres across 44,856 hectares in three states
- Our CSR initiatives have positively impacted over 1.9 million lives, including STEM education for 51,741 students across 341 schools



STEM session in progress at Project Jyoti

The Human Edge

Technology can compute, analyse and provide insights. Only people can take the judgement call and lead. Your Company's greatest asset remains its people – their ingenuity, integrity and courage to take the leap. In FY 2025-26, employees clocked nearly 40 lakh learning hours, reflecting an organisation ethos of nurturing future-ready talent. L&T's women workforce now constitutes close to 10% of total employees – a meaningful step towards achieving the Company's DEI goals.

L&T has been recognised as a 'Great Place to Work' – for the third consecutive year. This is not a certification. It is a reflection of the culture your Company has built: one that rewards performance, nurtures potential, and treats every employee as a stakeholder in a larger mission.

Looking Ahead

As we embark on Lakshya 2031, we do so with confidence – rooted in a diversified business portfolio, a strong balance sheet, a proven execution culture, and a team that has demonstrated time and again that no challenge is too complex to solve. The near term may hold more volatility. The long arc, however, bends decisively in L&T's direction.

I express my sincere gratitude to our customers, employees, vendor-partners, supply chain allies, and the Government for their continued trust and support. To my fellow Board members – thank you for your guidance and counsel as we chart the path forward. And to you, our shareholders – your enduring confidence is the bedrock on which we build.

We look forward to your continued partnership as L&T pursues tech-cellence – and a better tomorrow for all.

JAI HIND

Note: This does not purport to be a record of the proceedings of the Annual General Meeting of Larsen & Toubro Limited held on June 5, 2026.

For the Chairman's Statement, please visit investors.larsentoubro.com

MES pupils win laurels for academic excellence

MES Indian School, Evening Shift, organised PHL Laurels 2025-26 at the Conference Hall on May 24 to honour students for their outstanding academic excellence, discipline, and dedication.

The event was graced by the chief guest, Najeeb M A (director, MES Governing Board), who appreciated the students for their hard work and encouraged them to

continue striving for excellence.

The programme featured prayer, a welcome speech, cultural performances, and a video presentation, creating a vibrant and inspiring atmosphere. Students who secured the Principal's Honour List for academic excellence, along with students who achieved 100% attendance, were honoured during the award ceremony. The principal, Dr Hameeda Kadar, highlighted

the importance of determination, consistency, and values in shaping successful learners and future leaders. Senior vice principal Shihabudeen Pulath and headmistress Sameena Ashfaq congratulated the awardees and appreciated the support of parents and teachers. The event reflected the school's commitment to nurturing excellence, discipline, and holistic development among students.



Qatar Chess Federation fetes winners in school competition

The Qatar Chess Federation concluded the Qatar Foundation (QF) Primary Schools Championship 2026, organised in co-operation with the QF for Education, Science and Community Development. The tournament featured 47 male and female players representing six schools.

In the boys' category, Nasser Faisal al-Thani of My Academy and Ibrahim Tutojji of Qatar Academy Doha shared first place with 5.5 points each.

Abdulrahman al-Saifi of My Academy secured second place with 5 points, while Arman Ramjan finished third with 4.5 points, tied with Ahmed al-Hawaj of Qatar Academy Msheireb.

In the girls' category, students from Qatar Academy Doha Primary School claimed the top three positions. Sofia Zubertska won first place, Aisha Abdulaziz al-Khalifa finished second, and Munira al-Muhannadi took third place. In the team competition, Qatar Academy Doha Primary School secured first place.

Hamad al-Tamimi, executive director of the Qatar Chess Federation, presented a commemorative shield to Sarah al-Hajri, director of Student Affairs and Community



Service at QF, in recognition of her efforts in supporting the successful partnership between the two organisations.

The championship was held under the co-operation agreement between the Qatar Chess Federation and QF, which aims to introduce chess into schools and academies under the QF umbrella, expand participation among young players in local competitions, and increase the number of registered and internationally rated players.

Al-Tamimi lauded the collaboration between the federation and QF, noting that the tournament showcased promising talent among students and helped advance key objectives, foremost among them promoting chess culture in QF's primary schools.



Embassy honours Filipino graduates of GU-Q



The Philippine embassy in Doha honoured three Filipino graduates of Georgetown University in Qatar Class of 2026 during a special gathering held at Sentro Rizal Doha, the Philippines' cultural centre in Qatar, on May 24. Philippine ambassador Mardomel Celso D Melicor congratulated the graduates on successfully completing their academic journey and commended them for staying connected to their Filipino heritage while pursuing opportunities on the global stage. In his remarks, Melicor shared stories from the life of Dr Jose P Rizal, the Philippines' national hero and renowned scholar, who, like the graduates, pursued higher education abroad. He noted that Rizal's legacy underscores the importance of embracing and celebrating Filipino identity and heritage, regardless of where young Filipinos may live or study.

MES pupils felicitated for CBSE performance

Thirteen high-achieving students of Classes X and XII from MES Indian School were honoured at the Success Meet organised by Qatar Tamizhar Sangam to felicitate Qatar toppers of the CBSE examinations. The event witnessed participation from 20 schools across Qatar, with MES students making a commendable mark. Demonstrating exceptional academic excellence, four students received special recognition for their outstanding performance. Deepika Palani, Tharun Prakash, and Noorul Aafina secured third place in Tamil, while Deepika Palani also achieved third place in the Class X Toppers List. Aafreen Farheen earned first place in the Commerce Stream among Class XII toppers, bringing significant laurels to the institution. The principal, Dr Hameeda Kadar, congratulated the students on their exemplary achievements and appreciated the teaching faculty's dedicated efforts, continuous guidance and support.



DPS Modern Indian School hosts 12th edition of Encuesta 2026

DPS Modern Indian School marked another milestone in academic excellence with the 12th edition of Encuesta, its flagship inter-school quiz competition for students in Grades VI-VIII.

Held on June 4, this year's edition was themed Peace and Harmony, reflecting the Sustainable Development Goals and Qatar National Vision 2030. Twenty-one schools from across Qatar participated, bringing enthusiasm, curiosity, and healthy competition to the event.

Following the preliminary round, five schools advanced to the finals: DPS Monarch International School, Al Khor International School, Shantiniketan Indian School (Morning Shift), Ideal Indian School, and DPS

Modern Indian School. Each team comprised three students and competed across six rounds: Noor Qatar, Decode the Digital World, Reverse Engineering, Visual Voyage, Mind Benders, and the rapid-fire finale.

After a closely contested competition, DPS Monarch International School, represented by Janaki Dhole, Aaron Sam Mathew, and Siddharth Sushil Krishna, emerged as champions. Shantiniketan Indian School (Morning Shift), represented by Yahvi Udayakumar, Rayyan Abdul Raheem Thakor, and Aman Anoop, secured first runner-up, while Ideal Indian School, represented by Humaira Nabil Datey, Muhammad Umar Baig, and Zikra Sabreen Muhammad Fayaz, finished as second runner-up.

Chief guest Manzoor Moideen, managing director of Genius International and founder of Master Mentor, highlighted the transformative power of curiosity, noting that thoughtful questions can unlock opportunities and develop skills for lifelong success.

Guest of honour Sonny Varghese, vice-president of DPS Modern Indian School, emphasised that the world's greatest achievements stem from the courage to question and explore new ideas.

Senior principal Asna Nafees announced the results, congratulated the winners and participants, and thanked the management, principals, and teachers of all participating schools for their support.



Africa Ebola outbreak response plan to cost over \$500mn

AFP
Geneva

The WHO and the African Union's public health agency said yesterday that \$518mn was needed across the next six months to combat the deadly Ebola outbreak in the DR Congo and its neighbours.

The World Health Organization and the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention said their continental preparedness and response plan would last from June to November.

The outbreak was declared on May 15 in northeastern DR Congo, but the rare Bundibugyo species of the Ebola virus is believed to have spread for some time beforehand.

According to the WHO's latest figures, there are 381 confirmed cases in the DRC, including 64 deaths.

The outbreak has hit three provinces, with the epicentre in Ituri, which the Africa CDC says accounts for 90% of confirmed cases and 76% of confirmed deaths.

Across the northeastern border in Uganda, there have been 16 confirmed cases, including one death.

Seven Ebola patients in the DRC and two in Uganda have recovered. "The plan focuses on core areas: emergency coordination, surveillance, laboratory testing, infection prevention and control, clinical care, and community engagement," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in a video press conference. "This is a practical plan. It sets out what we need to do now, together, to contain the current outbreak and reduce the risk of further spread," he added.



Director-General of the WHO Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus tours the Evangelical Medical Center (CEM) in Bunia, Ituri province, Democratic Republic of Congo. (Reuters/File Photo)

He said it would last until November and would cost \$518mn. "The objective is straightforward: we need to stop the outbreak where it is, support countries that are responding today, and ensure

that neighbouring countries are ready to detect and act quickly if cases appear."

Besides the WHO and Africa CDC, the \$518mn would also help the UN children's, food and refugee agencies and the Red Cross.

The current Ebola battle is bigger than the two previous recorded outbreaks of the Bundibugyo strain, in 2007 and 2012, according to the Africa CDC.

"This outbreak is very serious," the organisation's chief Jean Kaseya said.

He said there were still more than 250 suspected fatalities which needed to be tested.

Kaseya said financial pledges had been made for nearly all of the response plan – but stressed that pledges did not yet equal money in the bank. He also said more than 200 tonnes of equipment had been supplied so far to the DRC and Uganda.

Ebola, which is spread through close contact and bodily fluids, has killed more than 15,000 people in Africa over the past 50 years.

There are no approved vaccines or treatments for the Bundibugyo strain. "This leaves us relying mainly on early detection, isolation, contracted tracing and supportive care," said the WHO's Africa regional director Mohamed Yakub Janabi.

"The level of risk we face today is not just shaped by the virus but the context in which it spreads," Janabi said.

"The outbreak is expanding faster than before.

"This outbreak has moved across the borders almost immediately," he said, unlike previous outbreaks, and "with movement comes risk of regional amplification".

'No deal without peace in Lebanon'

Reuters
Dubai

Iran has reaffirmed support for its Lebanese ally Hezbollah and demanded that Israel withdraw from southern Lebanon, underscoring complications facing an interim deal to end the broader conflict between the US and Iran. Tehran has specifically made a ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah a condition for any peace deal with Washington to resolve the regional war, now in its fourth month, and restart shipping through the Strait of Hormuz.

The latest round of fighting between Hezbollah and Israel erupted at the start of March, two days after the US and Israel launched strikes against Iran. Hezbollah said its actions were in support of Tehran. "This war will end only when it ends in Lebanon as well," Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Arachi told Lebanese TV station Al Mayadeen late on Thursday.

"The end of the war on Lebanon must be accompanied by the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the territories they have occupied," he said. The comments came after Hezbollah leader Naim Qassem rejected a US-brokered pact between Israel and the Lebanese government to halt the fighting.

The deal did not provide for an Israeli withdrawal and Hezbollah had not been party to the negotiations. Israel has kept up strikes in southern Lebanon, and has said its forces would not withdraw or halt operations in the country amid increasing friction with the US.

Hezbollah said on Friday it had carried out two attacks on Israeli troops in south Lebanon, including near the recently captured Beaufort Castle, while Lebanese security services said Israeli airstrikes hit towns across southern Lebanon.

Mohsen Rezaei, an adviser to Iran's supreme leader, said Hezbollah had "made great sacrifices in the recent war and it is our ally. Therefore, we support Hezbollah and remain firmly committed to our obligations toward it"



Smoke billows at a strike scene following an Israeli strike on a car as seen from Nabatieh, Lebanon yesterday. (Reuters)

In comments reported by the semi-official Mehr news agency, Rezaei cautioned Israel against following through on threats to resume strikes against Beirut, the Lebanese capital.

"Today we again warn this sinister regime to leave Lebanon. They should know that Lebanon will be an inseparable part of any agreement and any ceasefire," he said.

Lebanon's parliament speaker and Hezbollah ally Nabih Berri said yesterday he would agree to the withdrawal of the Iran-backed group from southern Lebanon if Israeli troops simultaneously left territory they occupy.

Lebanon's President Joseph Aoun on Friday accused Iran's Revolutionary Guards of using Lebanon as a "bargaining chip" in negotiations with the US, telling CNN this was "unacceptable".

Along with Lebanon, residents of Gaza, northern Israel and Kuwait have all been under fire this week, despite US-arranged ceasefires that President Donald Trump said involved "shooting in a more moderate manner", rather than a total halt to fighting.

Yesterday, Iran's navy announced it had fired warning shots at US destroyers in the Gulf of Oman to counter "maritime mischief and harassment and the hijacking of commercial vessels and oil tankers".

Earlier, US forces said they had boarded an oil tanker in the Indian Ocean and that they would continue to block "vessels providing material support to Iran".

The US Central Command denied Iran's claims. "Iranian forces did NOT attack or fire at US Navy warships. Doing so would be a gross violation of the ceasefire," Central Command said in a statement on X. While, in Oman, an alleged drone attack forced the suspension of oil loading at the Mina Al Fahal terminal after an explosion, sources said, before resumption of normal operations.

After the US and Israel launched the war against Iran on February 28, Tehran fired missiles and drones against Gulf states hosting US bases and largely stopped shipping through the Strait of Hormuz.

Trade remains at a fraction of its former levels through the waterway, which previously carried about a fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas supplies. The conflict has driven up oil prices and disrupted supply chains for other products.

The UN World Food Programme said on Friday that it was pushing millions of people closer to hunger due to rising fuel and transport costs. The US and Iran have been engaged in largely indirect negotiations to secure an interim deal to halt the war that would leave issues including Iran's nuclear programme to further negotiations.

As part of any agreement, Tehran wants access to billions of dollars in oil revenue, waivers on sanctions on crude exports, the lifting of a US blockade on its ports and leverage over the strait. Trump, who faces domestic pressure over an unpopular war, has said his top priority is to stop Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

Iranian parliament deputy speaker Hamid-Reza Haji Babaei said yesterday that uranium enrichment was Iran's right, and that Trump had failed to understand that Iran's "most powerful atomic bomb" was the Strait of Hormuz.

UAE nuclear plant attack 'serious compromise of nuclear safety': IAEA

AFP
Vienna

Last month's drone attack on the UAE's Barakah nuclear plant was a "serious compromise of nuclear safety," the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said yesterday, adding any such attack "is unacceptable, a no-go, taboo."

The United Arab Emirates blamed pro-Iran militants in Iraq for the incident, which followed weeks of attacks by Iranian drones and missiles during the Middle East war.

The May 17 attack hit an electricity facility at the plant, risking potentially shutting it down, and IAEA chief Rafael Grossi warned that "attacks on nuclear facilities devoted to peaceful purposes are unacceptable".

"The strike caused a fire in an electrical generator located outside the inner site perimeter of the NPP (nuclear power plant), prompting the need for emergency generators to provide power," Grossi told an IAEA board meeting in Vienna.

The meeting was held at the request of Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Saudi Arabia.

During a visit to the plant last Tuesday Grossi said the attack could have interrupted the external power supply.

Yesterday he hailed the "professionalism and alertness" of the IAEA-trained on-duty team at the site who he said were able to "respond promptly and effectively to the unthinkable: a direct impact caused by a drone with an explosive payload."

He said the IAEA would closely support the plant to ensure its safety, having during his visit said that the plant had been the victim of a "very carefully targeted operation" by attackers seeking to cause a major incident.

In any case, "the incident was a serious compromise of nuclear safety and undermined several of the IAEA's seven indispensable pillars for ensuring nuclear safety and security during an armed conflict," Grossi said.

Even if radiation levels at the plant remained normal and no injuries were reported he stressed that such attacks could lead to a high release of radioactivity.

He added he had spoken immediately after the attack to UAE leaders to assure them of the agency's support and "given the general concerns caused by these developments, I have been in close and frequent touch with leaders throughout the Gulf region" to discuss nuclear safety and security in the region at a "perilous" time.

The Barakah plant, built by a South Korean consortium led by energy supplier Kepco and which came online in 2020, meets up to a quarter of the UAE's electricity needs.

In a statement yesterday to the IAEA board, Iran said the United States and Israel had carried out "17 waves of attacks against Iranian safeguarded nuclear facilities", including near its Bushehr nuclear power plant.

Ahead of the board of governors' meeting, Iran, and its allies China and Russia, held a meeting with Grossi.

The IAEA chief later told a news conference the three countries had asked for the meeting to underline that "it's very difficult for Iran to comply with its obligations (to the IAEA) in the current circumstances".

Grossi also said that the IAEA needed to be allowed to verify the amount of enriched uranium Iran has.

Iran's mission to the IAEA released a statement afterwards saying the meeting "because it's been a long time and without a clear baseline".

Without such verification, any agreement over Iran's nuclear programme "might be less... I would say probable".

In dire straits: How fishermen in Gaza are keeping their heads above water

Reuters
Gaza

In a Gaza workshop, a group of men patch up pleasure dinghies with reclaimed fibreglass, wood and door frames pulled from the rubble, racing to get the boats ready for a tougher line of work. The small vessels, which were used by families and swimmers before the war, have become a lifeline for the enclave's fishing industry which has been struggling to keep up its fleet.

Israeli restrictions on new fibreglass and other materials entering Gaza have made it increasingly difficult and expensive to repair the larger, purpose-built boats, fishermen said.

"A kilo of fibreglass in the era before the war was 50 or 60 shekels (approximately \$17 or \$21)," fisherman Mohammad al-Hissi told Reuters. The cost today was around 800 shekels, he added.

COGAT, the Israeli military agency that controls access to Gaza, told Reuters the bans cover items that could have a military as well as a civilian use. It did not directly comment on restrictions on fibreglass.

Even before the war, Gaza's fishermen faced strict Israeli restrictions on how far they could go out to sea. Now, they say they keep even closer to shore to avoid shooting that they report has continued since the ceasefire.



Skiffs used by Palestinians are docked on the beach in Gaza. (Reuters)

Israel's military did not immediately respond to questions about the reported shooting and its impact on fishermen.

More than 900 Palestinians have been killed in Israeli strikes since the truce began, according to figures from Gaza health officials that do not distinguish between combatants and civilians. Four Israeli soldiers have been killed during the same period, Israel's military has said.

The Gaza fishing industry's total catch has shrunk to less than 15 tons a month – the amount they used to take every day before the war, Gaza Fishermen Syndicate member Zakaria Baker said.

Fishing was an important source of food before the conflict.

The hunger crisis in Gaza has eased since famine was declared in parts of the tiny, crowded territory before the ceasefire last year. But aid agencies say most children still don't get a diverse enough diet and the UN reported that 3,500 children were admitted for malnutrition treatment in the month of April.

"We repair and maintain boats, and serve fishermen in any way we can," worker Musab Baker said at the repair shop. "But we are unable to do anything apart from the small boats."

Israeli forces kill a youth in West Bank

AFP
Ramallah, Palestinian Territories

Israeli forces shot dead an 18-year-old Palestinian man in the occupied West Bank, the Palestinian health ministry said yesterday, while the military said it had killed someone who threw firebombs at vehicles.

In the early hours, the health ministry said it had been informed of "the martyrdom of the young man Haitham Ezzedine Omar Hmeida, 18, by occupation gunfire in the village of Beitin," north east of Ramallah.

It added that the man's body was being withheld.

In a statement, the Israeli military said its forces had "identified several fighters throwing Molotov cocktails at Israeli vehicles traveling on a major roadway" near the village of Beitin.

"The soldiers opened fire at the fighters and eliminated one of them," the military said, adding that its forces were "currently pursuing the remaining suspects."

Since the war in Gaza broke out after Hamas's storming of Israel, near-daily violence has rocked the West Bank, which Israel has occupied since 1967.

Palestinians call on Trump to stop Israeli annexation

The Palestinian ambassador to the UN, surrounded by his coun-



An armed Israeli settler looks on as Israeli security forces take position in the Palestinian village of Idna, west of Hebron in the occupied West Bank, yesterday. (AFP)

terparts from Arab and Muslim countries, called on the US on Thursday to stop Israel's annexation of its territories.

"I know that President (Donald) Trump is capable, and he has the tools to stop Netanyahu in his tracks, in order not to keep the whole region in turmoil...and to move in the direction of peace and justice, that is why the majority of us are working with them," Riyad Mansour told press.

"We know that he told (Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin) Netanyahu, including recently, stop the nonsense in Lebanon, stop the craziness. You know you are not allowed to annex the land."

The UN's geopolitical bloc Arab Group joined the ambassador to express "deep alarm" and regional solidarity against "rapidly escalating" Israeli settler aggression and military violence against Palestinians.

"Israel continues to implement policies that amount to accelerated annexation and a systematic dismantling of Palestinian rights," Saudi ambassador Abdulaziz Alwasil said on behalf of the bloc.

EBOLA AID

US says it will give \$38mn more for Ebola response

The United States will give nearly \$38 million in additional funding toward its Ebola response efforts, bringing the total so far to more than \$200 million in direct funding, the State Department said in a statement yesterday. The department, which did not detail how the money would be spent, said it was working closely with the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as well as the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda to “mount a rapid and comprehensive response” to the Ebola outbreak. The outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo has 60 deaths, according to the WHO. **(Reuters)**

ARMS SALE

US approves \$1.5bn sale of helicopters to New Zealand

The US yesterday announced the approval of a \$1.5 bn sale of MH-60R helicopters and related equipment to New Zealand. “The proposed sale will improve New Zealand’s capability to meet current and future warfare threats by providing greater security for its critical infrastructure,” the US State Department said. “New Zealand will use the enhanced capability to strengthen its homeland defense,” it added. The State Department said in a separate statement that it had approved a \$69 mn sale of MK 54 torpedoes to New Zealand. The State Department has notified Congress about the proposed sales, which still need to be approved. **(AFP)**

ANTITRUST ENFORCEMENT

US states preparing lawsuit to block Paramount’s acquisition

A group of US states including California and New York are preparing a lawsuit to block Paramount Skydance’s \$110bn acquisition of Warner Bros, sources familiar with the matter told Reuters yesterday. The lawsuit is expected to be filed in the coming weeks, the sources said. The case would mark the boldest move yet by the states towards US antitrust enforcement. Analysts have also viewed Paramount as facing an easier road to regulatory clearance due to its political connections. Paramount CEO David Ellison’s father, billionaire Oracle co-founder Larry Ellison, has cultivated ties with President Donald Trump. **(Reuters)**

BRIEF LABEL

US deportees to DR Congo sent back to home countries

More than half of a group of South American migrants deported by the United States to Kinshasa have now left the DR Congo for their countries of origin, the Congolese government said yesterday. As part of a US immigration crackdown, 15 men and women from Colombia, Ecuador and Peru arrived by plane in Kinshasa on April 17. They were the first deportees to arrive in the central African country under a controversial US migration scheme to deport undocumented foreign nationals to third countries. The DRC is one of the world’s poorest countries and thousands of kilometres from the Americas. **(AFP)**

US Senate blocks spy program renewal

AFP
Washington

US senators blocked legislation renewing a major foreign surveillance authority yesterday after President Donald Trump’s choice of a loyalist housing official as acting intelligence chief upended a bipartisan deal.

The protest was led by Democrats objecting that Bill Pulte had no relevant experience and had weaponized government records against Trump’s opponents — raising the prospect that one of Washington’s most important national security tools could lapse within days.

Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) allows US intelligence agencies to collect communications of foreign targets overseas, including when they communicate with people in the US.

Officials describe it as a vital counterterrorism and espionage tool, but civil liberties groups and privacy-minded lawmakers argue it allows warrantless access to Americans’ communications.

The authority is due to expire on June 12 unless Congress acts, although the program has a legal safety net that could allow some operations to continue under existing court certifications.

Senate Intelligence Committee leaders had been close to a bipartisan deal after months of negotiations to extend Section 702 for three years.

But Democrats said Pulte’s appointment made it impossible to back expanded surveillance powers without assurances over how



A view of the dome of the US Capitol building. **(Reuters/File Photo)**

intelligence would be used.

Mark Warner, the panel’s top Democrat, said the underlying bill had been sound but that Pulte was “grossly unqualified” for the role.

“Giving him the keys to the 18 intelligence agencies that the Director of National Intelligence oversees would be a disaster,” Warner said on the Senate floor ahead of the FISA renewal vote.

“Mr. Pulte has no national security expertise — none. We’re not even sure if he’s got a basic security clearance... This role is too important to be filled by a part-time, unqualified individual.”

Democrats have also accused Pulte, the Federal Housing Finance Agency director, of weaponizing his office in support of Trump’s campaign of retribution against political opponents.

Pulte has used mortgage records to support investigations of Trump adversaries including Federal Reserve governor Lisa Cook, New York Attorney General Letitia James and Democratic Senator Adam Schiff.

Republican leaders accused Democrats of endangering national security by blocking the bill. But several of the party’s rank-and-file lawmakers also opposed moving forward, arguing that Section 702 needs major changes to prevent warrantless searches involving Americans.

Civil liberties group Demand Progress said the vote showed there was “no path forward for FISA without a warrant requirement,” arguing that Congress should not renew surveillance powers without stronger privacy protections.



Citizen candidates attend a US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) naturalization ceremony at the Brooklyn Cyclones Maimonides Park in the Brooklyn, NY. **(Reuters/File Photo)**

US judge invalidates Trump policies targeting immigrants from 39 countries

Reuters
New York

President Donald Trump’s administration unlawfully barred applicants from 39 travel-ban countries from receiving decisions on asylum, work permits, green cards and citizenship, a US federal judge ruled yesterday.

Chief US District Judge John McConnell in Providence, Rhode Island, ruled that the US Citizenship and Immigration Services had adopted a series of unlawful policies targeting people from 39 African, Asian, Latin American and Middle Eastern countries.

His ruling came in a lawsuit filed in March by a coalition of immigrant service organisations and labour unions challenging a suite of policies adopted starting in November by USCIS, which is part of the US Department of Homeland Security.

Chief US District Judge John McConnell in Providence, Rhode Island, who was appointed by Democratic President Barack Obama, said those policies “threw the lives of countless immigrants living in the US into indeterminate legal limbo.”

Those measures placed a hold on processing immigration benefit applications from people in the 39 countries subject to Trump’s full or partial travel bans, which he has justified on vetting and security grounds. Green cards grant foreign nationals permanent resident status.

DHS did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

McConnell, who was appointed by Democratic President Barack Obama, said those policies “threw the lives of countless immigrants living in the US into

indeterminate legal limbo.”

The judge wrote: “USCIS’s hold on adjudications cannot be attributed to anything that these individuals did wrong; rather, it arises solely by the happenstance of their birth.”

He said the immigrants at issue had adhered to the legal processes that Congress had enacted and USCIS had adopted by regulation, yet had been “stuck waiting, for months on end, for benefit requests that USCIS refuses to adjudicate.”

“But the rule of law has to apply to everyone equally and, as evident here, USCIS has neither ‘followed the law’ nor ‘done things the right way,’” McConnell wrote.

“Indeed, the agency has violated the very immigration laws that Congress has charged it with administering, as well as the administrative laws that govern the agency’s actions.”

US working on resolution to condemn Iran at IAEA

The US is preparing a draft resolution condemning Iran ahead of next week’s meeting of the UN nuclear watchdog’s Board of Governors, diplomats said yesterday, a step that could complicate wider talks between the US and Iran.

Washington and Tehran are negotiating an extension of their ceasefire that would pave the way for talks on issues including Iran’s nuclear programme, with US President Donald Trump insisting Iran must never develop a nuclear weapon. Iran says it never would.

Israeli and US military strikes last June destroyed or badly damaged the three uranium-enrichment plants known to have been operating in Iran at the time. Much of its highly enriched uranium, however, is thought to have survived, though the UN nuclear watchdog has not had access to check.

With a quarterly meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency’s 35-nation board taking place next week, Washington is preparing a text, though it has

yet to circulate it and details are therefore unclear, diplomats accredited to the IAEA said.

Iran has bristled at previous resolutions the board has passed against it, often retaliating by escalating its nuclear activities or scaling back co-operation with the agency. A more imminent concern this time are the talks with the US

“I believe it may antagonise the Iranian side,” Russia’s ambassador to the IAEA, Mikhail Ulyanov, told reporters.

Russia and China are the two countries that have opposed all recent resolutions against Iran at the IAEA board, which were submitted jointly by the United States, Britain, France and Germany, and have passed by a clear margin. “As far as I know, they are going to call upon Iran to provide access to the agency’s personnel to nuclear facilities on the territory of Iran,” said Ulyanov, while adding he did not believe the US would actually submit the draft.

The last time the IAEA passed a resolution against Iran was in November. **(Reuters)**

Vance blames UK student murder on ‘migrants’ invasion’

Reuters
London

US Vice President JD Vance on Friday waded into a British dispute that has erupted over the murder of a student, blaming his death on what he said was civilisational decline and the failure to stop the “mass invasion of migrants”.

Last year, Henry Nowak, an 18-year-old white man, was handcuffed by police as he lay dying from stab wounds after his killer falsely alleged a racist attack. The killer, a Sikh man, was sentenced on Monday to life in prison. Video footage showed officers ignoring Nowak’s pleas as he lay dying, sparking questions over why the police had believed the allegation of racism and not Nowak who said repeatedly that he had been stabbed.

“Henry Nowak died the same way a civilisation dies: abandoned, handcuffed by authorities who neither trusted nor cared for him, and accused of hate crimes he did not commit,” Vance said on X. “Each



US Vice President JD Vance. **(Reuters/File Photo)**

time a life like his is lost, the proper response — the only response — is righteous anger.”

Vance said Nowak would be alive today “if the last few generations of European elites had stood their ground against the politics of self-hatred and the mass invasion of migrants, many of whom despise the West and the people who love it.”

A spokesperson for Prime Minister Keir Starmer, responding to Vance’s comments, said the Nowak

family did not want his death to be used to create further division or hatred. “We should respect their wishes,” the spokesperson said. “Even in the most terrible circumstances, our politics should bring people together. That is who we are as a country.”

The case has sparked widespread anger in Britain, with populist political leader Nigel Farage and tech billionaire Elon Musk amplifying right-wing talking points that the country has “two-tier policing” where fears of being called racist have led to ethnic minorities being given greater protections than others.

Starmer has said police had serious questions to answer about their handling of the incident, including how accusations of racism informed police thinking, and an investigation is taking place. But he condemned a violent and disorderly protest that took place on Tuesday night and said it was “unforgivable” to exploit the death to stir tension. He also told Musk to stop interfering in British politics on Thursday after the tech boss posted repeatedly about the

case and said that the police were biased against white people in Britain.

The local police force has rejected accusations of any bias, but police chiefs have said they would review guidelines that were drawn up in response to decades of well-documented incidents of racism in policing on how officers should treat ethnicities differently.

Vance has previously accused European leaders of censoring free speech and failing to control immigration, and the US State Department on Thursday condemned what it called “ideological conditioning and two-tiered policing” in Nowak’s treatment.

A spokesperson for Starmer said on Friday that Britain’s relationship with the US remained “incredibly strong” but rejected the State Department comments.

Deputy Prime Minister David Lammy told Sky News yesterday that he welcomed the fact that the US government had extended its condolences to the Nowak family but said he did not recognise “this caricature of Britain having a two-tier criminal justice system”.

US appeals court hears challenge to Trump’s White House ballroom

Reuters
Washington

US President Donald Trump’s administration asked an appeals court yesterday to allow construction of a \$400 mn ballroom on the site of the White House’s demolished East Wing, pitting Trump against preservationists in a case testing the limits of presidential authority.

A lawyer for the administration, Yaakov Roth, told a three-judge panel of the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit that the challengers seeking to block the project do not have legal standing to pursue their lawsuit.

“It’s an architectural preference

on one hand and the safety and security of the President of the US on the other hand,” Roth said. “We have evidence here that the old East Wing was not adequate to protect the safety and security of the President and others in the White House leadership of the executive branch.”

Judge Patricia Millett suggested the government’s argument amounted to “move fast and break things and nobody has standing.”

The National Trust for Historic Preservation, a nonprofit group that campaigns to protect significant American sites, sued last year after the Trump administration tore down the East Wing in October 2025 and began building a 90,000-square-foot

The panel could issue a more significant ruling in the next few weeks, which could be appealed to the US Supreme Court.

(8,360-square-meter) ballroom without seeking authorisation from Congress.

The East Wing, part of the White House complex in Washington, traditionally housed the offices of the first lady and her staff.

Trump’s ballroom plan is part of a broader push by the Republican leader to reshape central Washington’s landscape of government buildings and national monuments. US District Judge Richard Leon, appointed by Republican former President George W Bush,

twice blocked above-ground construction on Trump’s ballroom while allowing underground work to continue.

Leon said no federal statute even “comes close to giving the President” the required authority to construct the ballroom without approval by Congress. The administration’s appeal is being heard by Democratic-appointed DC Circuit judges Millett and Bradley Garcia alongside Trump-appointed Judge Neomi Rao. In an order last month, the appeals court allowed construction to continue during the legal battle without ruling on the merits of the case.

The panel could issue a more significant ruling in the next few weeks, which could be appealed to

the US Supreme Court.

The administration has framed the ballroom project as a national security necessity, citing recent assassination attempts against Trump.

“The East Wing Project answers that critical security need, and ensures that the President can fulfill his constitutional duties in a safe and heavily secured facility,” the Justice Department told the appeals court in May.

Preservationists reject that argument. The National Trust for Historic Preservation contends that the DC Circuit and US Supreme Court have never allowed a president to “usurp powers vested in Congress by the Constitution based on nothing more than his

claim of necessity.”

The organisation said in a filing that “the public has a strong interest in pausing a project that will irreparably damage what is perhaps the most significant historic site in the country.”

Trump also intends to erect a 250-foot (76-meter) arch near the National Mall, the tree-lined strip between the US Capitol and the Lincoln Memorial, and renovate the Kennedy Center performing arts complex. A federal judge last week ordered Trump to remove his name from the iconic Kennedy Center building and blocked his plans to close it for renovations.

Trump has said his planned ballroom is scheduled to open around September 2028.

Pele’s Mexico City hideaway preserved as World Cup returns for third time

In a modest room tucked inside a historic Mexico City conference complex, visitors can step into football history: the preserved quarters where Pele slept before leading Brazil to their third World Cup title in 1970.

As Mexico prepares to kick off the tournament for a record third time on Thursday against South Africa at the Estadio Azteca, the exhibition at the Inter-American Conference on Social Security (CISS) headquarters offers a nostalgic link to one of the World Cup’s most celebrated moments.

The room has taken on renewed significance as the tournament returns to Mexico, reconnecting the country with Brazil’s iconic 4-1 victory over Italy in the 1970 final that cemented Pele’s legendary status.

“Brazil spent most of the tournament in Guadalajara and only came to Mexico City for the final against Italy,” Pedro Kumamoto, secretary general of the CISS, told Reuters.

“The question was where to put the Brazilian team. Everyone wanted a photo, a greeting, an autograph, a handshake from Pele. The king himself slept here.”

Built in 1963 for diplomatic gatherings, the complex was chosen as a secure refuge from the crowds drawn by Pele’s global fame. The exhibition now features period furniture, 1970 World Cup memorabilia and a working television showing footage from Brazil’s triumph. Local memories of the football icon’s stay remain vivid more than five decades later.

“I recently met a neighbour who was six or seven years old when Pele came here and is now close to 70,” Kumamoto said. “He remembered him as very approachable, very warm. He said Pele signed autographs until he simply couldn’t anymore and spent a long time with fans outside.”

The balcony where Pele greeted supporters still overlooks the grounds unchanged.

“There is also a beautiful story about the balcony where Pele came out to greet supporters,” Kumamoto said. “It’s still the same balcony, the same place, with the echo of history in its walls.”

More than half a century after Brazil’s triumph, the transformed museum preserves a chapter of World Cup history as football’s biggest event returns to Mexico once again. (Reuters)



Roberto Sanchez, Peru’s presidential candidate for the Juntos por el Peru party, greets supporters during his closing campaign rally in Lima on Thursday. (AFP)

Peru candidates make final pitch in tight race

AFP
Lima

Peru’s dueling presidential hopefuls made a final pitch to voters day before yesterday, capping a bruising and razor-tight race dominated by anger over rising crime and political instability.

Conservative Keiko Fujimori and leftist Roberto Sanchez staged rival events in Lima ahead of tomorrow’s vote, with ardent flag-waving supporters arguing their “communist” or “dictator” opponents would bring the country to ruin.

“We cannot let them win with communism and terrorism,” said bandana-wearing 65-year-old Merida Delgado Perez, a Fujimori supporter, expressing fears that the left could lead Peru down a path seen in Venezuela and Cuba.

Each candidate has framed the election as a turning point for a country that has burned through eight presidents in a decade.

Polls show them separated by only a few points, with roughly a fifth of voters still undecided in the last week of the campaign.

An inconclusive first round with dozens of candidates reflected widespread frustration with Peru’s political class.

Fujimori, seeking the presidency in her fourth attempt, has campaigned on a hardline security platform, promising military deployments and tougher prisons to confront rising extortion and violent crime.

At her closing rally, she urged voters to back her to “avoid chaos and regression.”

“We want a government that brings peace, that restores order. I will not let you down,” she said.

Fujimori has invoked the legacy of her father, Alberto Fujimori – who led Peru from 1990 to 2000 – portraying herself as the candidate capable of restoring order at a time when insecurity dominates daily life for many Peruvians.

“It,” said Jeanette Carlos Cordon, a 32-year-old nurse who will vote for Fujimori.

“Recently there has been a lot of extortion, and every day people are dying because of it,” she said.

Alberto Fujimori’s legacy still defines his daughter’s political identity – and is both an asset and a liability.

He was hailed by supporters for defeating leftist insurgents and stabilizing the economy but was later jailed for corruption and rights abuses before his death in 2024.

Left-wing candidate Sanchez has positioned himself as the voice of poorer and rural voters, pledging “radical change” and blaming entrenched elites and congressional gridlock for years of instability.

At his own rally, he promised a break with the past.

“This will be the end of chaos, the end of Mrs K, the end of killings, corruption and impunity,” he told cheering supporters.

“Our country needs real change, not more of the same,” he added.

Sanchez supporters blame Fujimori for weakening institutions and allowing criminal networks to expand amid repeated presidential crises.

“Keiko represents the continuation of dictatorship inherited from her father,” said 63-year-old Cristina Sotomayor.

“I lived during her father’s era, which was marked by total corruption,” she said.

In Lima’s crime-hit areas, voters say safety is their main concern, with extortion and violence shaping daily routines and amplifying demands for decisive leadership.

“Daily life in Peru can be frightening – there is so much crime and so many killings,” said 52-year-old farmer Raul Porras.

“Extortion, murders, protection payments – all of this is happening.”

Despite the turmoil, Peru’s economy has remained relatively stable, leaving the next president to navigate a divided Congress and deep public distrust in government. Around 27 mn Peruvians are eligible to vote in Sunday’s runoff.



Peru’s presidential candidate for the Fuerza Popular party, Keiko Fujimori, poses for a selfie with a supporter during her closing campaign rally in Lima on Thursday. (AFP)

US allying with Colombian ‘narco-traffickers’: Petro

AFP
Bogotá

Colombia’s outgoing President Gustavo Petro tore into his US counterpart Donald Trump for supporting a hard-right candidate to succeed him, accusing Washington of allying itself with the “narco-traffickers” it professes to combat.

The famously outspoken Petro was reacting to Trump’s full-throated endorsement of tough-talking lawyer Abelardo de la Escriella over a leftist senator in Colombia’s presidential election.

De la Escriella, 47, made a fortune representing drug-trafficking paramilitaries, fraudsters and soccer stars.

He generated surprise by defeating leftist Senator Ivan Cepeda, an ally of Petro, in the first round of voting in Sunday’s presidential election. The two will face off again in a June 21 runoff.

Trump on Tuesday backed De la Escriella, citing his “tremendous accomplishments in life,” and for “his political support” for the US President.

Petro, Colombia’s first left-wing leader, has criticised Trump’s meddling in the campaign.

“Their (US) allies in Colombia come from the narco-paramilitary regime; they are genocidal and drug traffickers,” he told AFP in an interview at the presidential



Colombia’s President Gustavo Petro during a recent interview. (AFP)

palace.

Trump has sought to influence several recent elections in Latin America by backing right-wingers who talk tough on crime and migration against leftists he dismisses as Marxists.

Escriella has promised to deepen US-Colombian relations “like never before” if elected.

He has the backing of hardline former president Alvaro Uribe, who is accused of colluding with paramilitaries behind the massacres of thousands of civilians during the worst years of Colombia’s more-than-six-decade conflict.

Both Petro and Cepeda accuse the paramilitaries of committing a “genocide” of leftist political activists and politicians, includ-

ing Cepeda’s father, a communist senator, who was assassinated in 1994.

The Colombian right and Trump administration, for their part, accuse Petro of being soft on left-wing guerrilla groups, some of whom continue to fight the state and live off cocaine trafficking.

Petro expressed “regret” that “figures and governments who want to fight drug trafficking are actually helping to bring crime to political power in Colombia.”

He accused Trump of reneging on an agreement the pair struck in February not to interfere in Colombia’s election.

“What they (the US) are implementing is an ideological policy that divides the world between those who think like them and

those of us who don’t,” Petro said as he munched on a chocolate bar made by farmers who replaced their coca plants – which produces the main ingredient in cocaine – with cocoa trees.

Last year, Trump imposed sanctions on Petro, calling him a “drug leader” for failing to rein in soaring cocaine production and trafficking. Colombia is the world’s biggest producer of the drug.

Trump and Petro also clashed over the US leader’s migrant deportations and campaign of deadly strikes on suspected Latin American drug boats.

But they smoothed over the tensions during Petro’s visit to the White House in February.

The Colombian presidential election has been dominated by the worst wave of violence in the decade since the Marxist rebel army FARC agreed to a landmark peace deal with the state in 2016. While Colombia has thrived in the years since, pockets of the country remain gripped by armed groups vying for control of cocaine routes, illegal gold mining and extortion.

De la Escriella has rejected Petro’s policy of trying to negotiate with the guerrillas, and vowed instead to crush them militarily.

Cepeda, who helped negotiate the 2016 peace deal and design Petro’s “total peace” strategy, has vowed to prioritise dialogue and social upliftment in rebel-held areas.

Turmoil in Bolivia



A woman walks past security forces guarding a road following its reopening after protests demanding the resignation of Bolivia’s President Rodrigo Paz in Carreras, La Paz department, Bolivia yesterday. (AFP)

US imposes sanctions on Cuban president, Castro family members

AFP
Havana

The US announced new sanctions day before yesterday on Cuba’s president and some of his immediate family, alongside members of the Castro family, in Washington’s latest ramping up of pressure on its communist-led neighbour.

Among those targeted were the son and a grandson of former president Raul Castro, who no longer holds an official position but remains a key power-broker on the island.

President Miguel Diaz-Canel, his wife and stepson were also hit by the latest flurry of US sanctions, as was the Ministry of the Revolutionary Armed Forces and several other entities.

While Cuba has been under a US trade embargo since 1962, President Donald Trump has drastically ramped up pressure in recent months, cutting off its fuel sup-

plies and threatening to take over the island.

Washington claims that Cuba’s communist regime threatens the security of Americans.

Trump has repeatedly stated it could be next to fall, after the January overthrow of Venezuela’s socialist leader Nicolas Maduro and the US campaign against Iran.

“We’ll take care of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and as soon as that’s done, on our way back, we’ll just make a little brief stop over,” Trump said this week, alluding to Cuba.

He denied that the new sanctions, which follow a US murder indictment against Raul Castro and sanctions on a military conglomerate that controls much of Cuba’s economy, were aimed at accelerating the island’s collapse.

Washington had already taken aim at Diaz-Canel last year, banning him and his family from entering the US.

Writing on X, Diaz-Canel accused Trump of trying to



A man rides a tricycle with a US flag past a weathered doorway displaying a photo of Cuba’s former president Raul Castro in Havana yesterday. (AFP)

“strengthen the blockade and scenario of conflict between Cuba and the United States” and vowed that Cubans would “resist the imperi-

alist onslaught.”

Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez in response said the “vile” sanctions would be met with

to be “a nicely run country that can feed its people.”

“But the country is starving, and it’s got no energy, it’s got no oil, it’s got no money, it’s got nothing.”

He noted however that Cuba has “a beautiful piece of land,” musing: “You could have beautiful resorts.”

The fuel embargo in place since January has left Cuba without diesel for generators used to bolster its crumbling power supply, resulting in power outages of up to 22 hours a day and shortages of tap water.

With transport virtually at a standstill, the island is also running short on food and medicine, making it reliant on aid shipments from Mexico and China.

The UN representative on the island warned Thursday that the humanitarian emergency, coupled with the onset of the Caribbean hurricane season, made for an “explosive cocktail.”

The east of the island is still recovering from Hurricane Melissa, which caused major destruction in October last year.



Xi set to visit N Korea in push for deeper ties

Reuters
Beijing/Seoul

China said yesterday President Xi Jinping would visit North Korea on a two-day trip from June 8, his first in nearly seven years as Beijing looks to re-assert ties with Pyongyang, its only formal treaty ally. Xi will meet North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and exchange views on bilateral relations and issues of common concern, China's foreign ministry said.

"Both sides will use the visit as an opportunity to promote greater development of China-North Korea relations in keeping with the times," spokesperson Mao Ning told a press briefing.

Beijing has worked to draw Pyongyang back into its fold after the Covid-19 pandemic froze exchanges and Kim deepened ties

with Moscow by sending troops and weapons to support Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The two countries signed a co-operation and mutual assistance treaty 65 years ago, legally binding each to provide the other with military support if they came under attack.

"The message implicit from the Chinese side is... we are still the principal actor when it comes to North Korea," said John Delury, a senior fellow of the Asia Society. "One of the audiences is Russia."

Yesterday's announcement by the international department of the ruling Chinese Communist Party follows Xi's summits in Beijing last month with US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin. Kim was a guest at a massive military parade in Beijing last September, travelling to the Chinese capital on his signature green armoured train. Passenger train services be-

tween the capitals resumed in March, after a six-year suspension ushered in by the pandemic, while Air China later restarted flights between them.

Bookings, however, have been limited to some business travellers and exchange students, with Chinese tourists still excluded.

Xi's visit to Pyongyang will be his first overseas this year. The 72-year-old, who makes fewer trips abroad, last travelled internationally in late October to Republic of Korea, where he also met Trump.

Trump met Kim three times in his first term and has previously said he would be open to meeting the North Korean leader again.

"At the symbolic level it is important for Xi to keep tabs on what's going on in Pyongyang," said Delury, who said Xi visiting both Koreas within a year would be a "big win" for the peninsula.



North Korean leader Kim Jong-un shaking hands with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing. (AFP/File Photo)

"There's a kind of symmetry that the Chinese like to keep up" regarding the two Koreas, he added. Republic of Korea views the trip

solely as high-level bilateral exchanges unaligned to Moscow, an official from the presidential Blue House said.

"We do not interpret this as a co-ordinated move by the three countries, nor are we sure how it would be linked to the US-China summit," the official said.

Seoul expects Beijing to continue its constructive role on peninsula issues, the Blue House said.

Since Xi became China's top leader in 2012, he has visited North Korea once, and its southern neighbour twice. He also visited Pyongyang in 2008 as vice-president, meeting its then leader Kim Jong-il, the father of the current leader. Kim called for an "expansive" expansion of Pyongyang's atomic arsenal this week when he visited a new factory to make nuclear material, KCNA said.

Experts have linked Kim's site visit to the impending meeting with Xi. Before his September visit to Beijing, Kim inspected plans for a new intercontinental ballistic missile, the "Hwasong-20".

China's military says it tracked Dutch frigate in Taiwan Strait

Reuters
Beijing

China's military said yesterday it dispatched naval and air assets to track and monitor Dutch frigate HNLMS De Ruyter transiting the Taiwan Strait and handled the situation "effectively."

Beijing last week said the same frigate illegally intruded into the Paracel Islands archipelago in the disputed South China Sea. The Netherlands said at the time the warship was sailing through the South China Sea for diplomatic, security and economic reasons and was operating in accordance with international law.

The People's Liberation Army

Eastern Theatre Command (ETC) said the Dutch naval vessel's passage through Taiwan Strait came after its activities in the Paracel Islands since May 27.

"Forces of the PLA ETC will stay on high alert at all times and resolutely safeguard China's sovereignty and security, as well as regional peace and stability," Xu Chenghua, spokesperson of

the PLA Eastern Theatre Command, said in a yesterday statement.

A spokesperson for the Dutch navy could not be immediately reached for comment.

In addition to claiming sovereignty over democratically governed Taiwan, Beijing views the narrow, highly strategic strait as Chinese territorial waters.

New Zealand to raise lawmakers' travel ban directly with China:PM

Reuters
Wellington

New Zealand will directly raise China's "entirely inappropriate" ban on four lawmakers who visited Taiwan with Beijing, Prime Minister Christopher Luxon said yesterday.

Three backbenchers from New Zealand's centre-right coalition, Laura McClure, David Wilson and Maureen Pugh, along with Duncan Webb from the Labour party, visited Taipei last month for five days.

The Chinese embassy informed lawmakers the group had been banned from entering China, Hong Kong and Macau for a year, according to an email from the Office of the Clerk, which administers New Zealand's parliament.

Luxon said the backbenchers did not represent the executive government in Taiwan and should be "free to see who they want to see".

"We think it's entirely inappropriate, the reaction that we've seen from the Chinese. We will raise that with them ourselves," he told reporters during a visit to Australia, where he will meet his

counterpart Anthony Albanese.

New Zealand and China have maintained a largely stable relationship in recent years, with China remaining New Zealand's largest trading partner, even as Wellington has grown more outspoken about Beijing's expanding influence in the Pacific.

Senior politicians from both countries have exchanged a number of visits over the past three years, with Luxon visiting China in 2025.

China views Taiwan as its own territory, and has not ruled out the use of force to take control of the island. Taiwan's government rejects Beijing's sovereignty claims.

A New Zealand parliament official on Thursday confirmed a meeting with Chinese embassy representatives but did not disclose details. Foreign Minister Winston Peters instructed New Zealand foreign ministry officials in Beijing and Wellington to discuss the matter with Chinese authorities.

Australia has also said it would raise concerns with the Chinese embassy in Canberra as well as in Beijing.

Luxon welcomed Australia's support but said the matter was a "nation-to-nation" issue between New Zealand and China.

Korea election chief quits after ballot shortage sparks blockade

AFP
Seoul

The head of Republic of Korea's election commission resigned yesterday, hours after riot police cleared protesters from a Seoul polling station following a near two-day blockade sparked by a ballot shortage during local elections.

Wednesday's election was the first nationwide vote since President Lee Jae-myung took office following the ouster of Yoon Suk-yeol over his short-lived martial law declaration.

Lee's ruling Democratic Party swept most races but failed to flip the crucial Seoul mayoral seat.

Fourteen polling stations in Seoul ran short of ballot papers, and the National Election Commission (NEC) apologised, blaming a failure to anticipate turnout.

The agency's chairperson, Rho Tae-ak, resigned over the furore yesterday, saying there is "no excuse for the occurrence of an unacceptable incident" that "infringed upon the people's precious right to vote".

He did not, however, mention the possibility of a re-election.

Some polling stations stayed open until 10pm (1300 GMT) on Wednesday to accommodate voters, but the move did little to quell criticism of the commission's handling of the election.

Protesters holding signs that read "Stop the vote count" and "Invalidate the election" blocked authorities in Seoul's Jamsil 7-dong district from removing two ballot boxes.

A gathering of several dozen people on election night swelled to more than 1,000 protesters by Thursday, Yonhap reported.

Polling station staff were forced to remain inside until yesterday morning, according to KBS.

The boxes, containing about 2,000 ballots, were secured and transported to a counting centre after the riot police intervened yesterday



Protesters call for the suspension of ballot counting due to a shortage of ballot papers outside a counting station in Seoul yesterday. (AFP)

morning, an official from the Korean National Police Agency told AFP.

Livestream footage of the morning incident showed police physically removing demonstrators blocking entrances to the polling station, with some protesters shouting and resisting.

Heated exchanges followed, with one man shouting, "Is this really a country governed by the rule of law?" as officers repeatedly ordered demonstrators to clear the way.

President Lee on Thursday ordered an investigation into the ballot shortage, condemning "a flaw that is difficult to accept".

People Power Party (PPP) leader Jang Dong-hyeok, whose party suffered a heavy local election defeat after Yoon's martial law declaration, said the election should be rerun.

After declaring martial law, former president Yoon — now jailed and on trial for insurrection — claimed the NEC had ignored warnings about North Korean threats to voter data and failed to co-operate fully with intelligence agency inspections.

Yoon's claims resonated with right-wing YouTubers and supporters, who went on to spread unverified election fraud theories online and question the commission's credibility.

Korean social media was flooded with unverified claims about the police intervention yesterday, including a post alleging a young man who tried to block the transfer of ballot boxes was assaulted by officers and left in a coma, accompanied by a photograph claiming to show him.

The Korean National Police Agency told AFP that claims the man pictured was in a coma were untrue.

The election commission is a constitutional body with limited external oversight, and problems related to "internal discipline, oversight and investigations have long existed in a kind of blind spot", political commentator Park Sang-byung told AFP.

"Worse, it has effectively handed ammunition to election-fraud conspiracy theorists, who will likely exploit the controversy for months," Park said.

Brunei's prince named FM in cabinet reshuffle

AFP
Bandar Seri Begawan

Brunei's Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah has named one of his youngest sons as foreign minister in a major cabinet reshuffle — largely seen as a move to prepare for the next generation of leaders in the oil-rich kingdom.

As the 10th child and fourth son of the sultan, Prince Abdul Mateen is down the line of succession, but his matinee idol looks have earned him more than three mn followers on Instagram, providing a modern face to the royal family.

Another younger son, Prince Abdul Malik, was also appointed to the cabinet in the changes announced by the 79-year-old ruler, who has had a number of health issues recently including knee replacement surgery in January and has made fewer public appearances this year.

Last year, he was admitted to hospital due to extreme fatigue during an Asean summit in the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur.

The sultan's eldest son, Crown Prince Prince Al-Muhtadee Billah, 52, is the next in line to succeed his father, the world's longest-ruling living monarch and once the richest man on the planet due to Brunei's oil and gas riches.

The crown prince, who has two sons in the line of succession, remained as senior minister at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

Sultan Hassanal said in the televised announcement also posted on the government's official website, that he would continue to hold the key roles of prime minister, defence minister and finance minister.

The recent appointments bring four royals in the cabinet in the Southeast Asian absolute monarchy.



Brunei's Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah and his son Prince Abdul Mateen pose for photos ahead of the gala dinner at the Asean summit in Cebu, Philippines. (AFP/File Photo)

Prince Abdul Malik, 42, the sultan's second eldest son and the fourth in line to succession, takes on his first cabinet role as a minister in the Prime Minister's Office. He holds an education degree from a local university.

In appointing his younger sons, the sultan said he took "into account their inclinations and early exposure in the government's administrative system".

Prince Abdul Mateen is a polo-loving British-trained military officer in Brunei's armed forces and a helicopter pilot. He often accom-

panies his father on official trips abroad, including diplomatic summits.

He will continue his career in the military while serving as foreign minister, the sultan said. He married in January 2024 in a fairytale wedding in the Brunei capital Bandar Seri Begawan.

A sliver of land on the northern edge of Borneo island in Southeast Asia, Brunei was influenced by Buddhism and Hinduism before its rulers converted to Islam in the 14th century.

It fell under British rule in the 19th century and gained independence in 1984.

Thailand to appoint conciliators for UN-backed mediation with Cambodia

Thailand will appoint two conciliators and join a little-used UN arbitration process that Cambodia has invoked to help resolve a long-running maritime boundary dispute between the neighbours. Thai Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow said yesterday. Cambodia said on Tuesday it had launched a compulsory conciliation process under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (Unclos), following Bangkok's decision last month to unilaterally terminate a 2001 bilateral agreement that provided a framework for talks over a disputed maritime belt. For more than 25 years, Cambodia and Thailand have

both laid claim to about 26,000 square km (10,039 square miles) of sea in the Gulf of Thailand, an area estimated to hold nearly 12tn cubic feet of natural gas and large quantities of oil, together valued at about \$300bn.

"Both side should have spoken bilaterally first," Sihasak told reporters in Bangkok, expressing dismay at Cambodia's move to utilise the mediation mechanism and use it to also address resource sharing. "If we had talked and there was no progress, then we could go to Unclos."

A spokesperson for the Cambodian government did not immediately respond to a request for comment. (Reuters)

Starmmer says Russia could attack Nato within four years

AFP
London

Russia could attack a Nato country within four years according to western intelligence assessments, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer warned yesterday.

He made the comments as he pledged his government would publish a long-delayed defence investment plan before next month's Nato summit.

"It is our intelligence assessment and the assessment of other countries in Nato that there could be an attack by Russia on Nato as soon as 2030," Starmer said.

"So you can see the urgency and the priority that we're putting behind this now," he added during a visit to a drone manufacturer in southwest England.

It echoes similar timeframes expressed by other European leaders and Nato chief Mark Rutte who warned in December that Russia "could be ready to use military force against Nato within five years".

Starmer has pledged to raise defence spending to 2.5% of gross domestic product from next year, increasing to three % in the next parliament.

A 10-year defence investment plan following a review of the UK's defence capabilities was meant to be published late last year but has



British Prime Minister Keir Starmer speaks as he visits STARK, a leading defence tech company in Swindon, yesterday. (Reuters)

not yet been produced.

Starmer announced it would be published before the Nato summit in Turkiye, beginning on July 7.

UK media has reported that the plan has been delayed due to disagreement between the finance ministry and other departments over the cost.

Starmer insisted to reporters it would be "fully funded".

Earlier yesterday, Britain's military chief warned that Britain must boost its defences in response to threats posed by Russia, which invaded Ukraine more

than four years ago.

"In my 35-year career, this is the most dangerous period that I have known," Air Chief Marshal Richard Knighton told the BBC.

"And as a consequence, it is important that we enhance the capability and the readiness of our armed forces alongside our allies to deter our adversaries from doing something daft."

US President Donald Trump has repeatedly urged Nato countries to spend more on defence and become less reliant on Washington for security.

Macron, Merz, Starmer, Zelensky to meet in London

AFP
Paris

The leaders of France, Germany and Britain will meet Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in London tomorrow to discuss putting pressure on Russia as it suffers military setbacks in the invasion of its neighbour, the French presidency said yesterday.

French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz and UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer will discuss with Zelensky the way forward at a time when "Russia, in a state of mili-

tary, economic and strategic failure, is persisting unsuccessfully with a deadly war", the Elysee said.

Ukraine recaptured more territory than it lost to Russian forces in May for the second straight month, AFP analysis of data from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) showed earlier this month.

Russia's offensive has meanwhile led to rising prices, tax hikes, two-decade-high borrowing costs, business shutdowns and labour shortages, putting the economy in its trickiest spot since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

The meeting, which will get underway at Downing Street from

around 1730 GMT tomorrow, will also "take stock of the work undertaken in favour of a just and lasting peace in Ukraine and on the European continent", the French presidency said.

Zelensky proposed a face-to-face meeting with Vladimir Putin in an open letter to the Russian leader on Thursday, saying he was also ready for a "full ceasefire".

Putin, speaking at Russia's flagship economic forum yesterday, rejected suggestions the Russian economy had collapsed, saying "we have descended to the same level at which Eurozone countries have been experiencing growth for the past few years."

Data centre operator AirTrunk to invest in India

AFP
Mumbai

Australian data centre operator AirTrunk will invest around US\$30bn in India by 2030, the company said yesterday, the latest promised major tech investment into the country.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the company planned to develop five gigawatts of data centre capacity and will "strengthen India's position as a global hub for cloud computing and AI, while generating employment opportunities".

AirTrunk said its investment will "support digital infrastructure capacity" in "multiple" sites countrywide.

"India's digital infrastructure journey is gathering remarkable momentum," Modi said in a statement on social media.

"This is among the largest proposed investments in the country's digital infrastructure ecosystem."

With more than a bn Internet users, India has seen a surge of investment as generative AI players seek inroads to the world's most populous country.

There has been a flurry of billion-dollar data centre announcements from tech giants like Google, as well as domestic firms such as Reliance Industries.

AirTrunk chief executive Robin Khuda, who met Modi this week, said the company was

looking to "double down" on its existing commitments to India.

"India is taking a top-down approach to AI with clear government-led initiatives, a world-class talent pool and massive availability of renewable energy," he said in a statement.

Further details of AirTrunk's investment were not announced yesterday.

"Digital infrastructure is becoming as important to economic growth as roads, ports and power networks were in previous generations," the company said.

But Devendra Fadnavis, chief minister of India's richest state Maharashtra, gave details of proposed plans for a 3GW data centre at Raigad Pen Growth Centre, near financial capital Mumbai.

Ireland bans two Israeli ministers from entering country

AFP
Dublin

Ireland announced yesterday it has banned Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir and finance minister Bezalel Smotrich from entering the country, slamming their behaviour towards pro-Palestinian activists.

Justice Minister Jim O'Callaghan "has instructed immigration officers to refuse entry to Itamar Ben Gvir — Minister for National Security of Israel, and Bezalel Smotrich, Minister of Finance of Israel — should they seek to enter the state," a justice ministry statement sent to AFP said.

After the far-right minister Ben Gvir mocked

activists seized by Israeli soldiers on a Gaza-bound aid flotilla last month, Irish taoiseach (prime minister) Micheal Martin said Ireland would act to bar entry of Israeli officials seen as fomenting conflict in Gaza.

Firebrand Ben Gvir became a minister in 2022, after an alliance with the far-right Religious Zionist party of Bezalel Smotrich came third in legislative elections.

Together, Ben Gvir and Smotrich form a cornerstone of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's right-wing coalition government.

The two ministers' behaviour "not just in the context of the flotilla, but their consistent statements... essentially amount to a desire to see the elimination of Palestinians from Palestine", Martin told reporters during a summit in

Montenegro yesterday.

"In my view, their behaviour justifies sanctions at the EU level as well," he said.

Last month, France also banned Ben Gvir from entry over his conduct. Britain barred the two from entry in June 2025 and other countries have followed, including Spain and Slovenia.

Ireland has been among the most outspoken critics of Israel's bombardment of Gaza in the wake of the deadly October 2023 Hamas militant attack on Israel, and recognised the Palestinian state in 2024.

Soon after, Israel's Foreign Minister Gideon Saar ordered the closure of its Dublin embassy, blaming Ireland's "extreme anti-Israel policies".

Bhutan to give cash incentives to families for more babies

Reuters
Kathmandu

The tiny Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan is worried about its declining population and has announced cash incentives to families to produce more children.

Nestled between China and India in the eastern Himalayas, Bhutan, a country of fewer than 800,000 people, is offering families monthly incentives of 10,000 ngultrums (about \$105) for every third and subsequent children born on or after June 4, 2026 until the child reaches three, the government said in a statement on Thursday.

It will also cover eligible third and more children who were born before but have not yet attained three years of age as of the above date.

Cabinet Secretary Kesang Deki said the incentive would be given to



A general view of housing in the capital city of Thimphu. (Reuters/File Photo)

families for any number of children after the second child. "They can have three, four, five, six or seven children," she told Reuters yesterday. Bhutan's total annual births have fallen from 11,001 in 2015 to 8,153 in 2024, a decline about 26%, and the total fertility rate — chil-

dren per woman — has declined to almost the replacement level of 2.1 in the period, official data show.

A declining and ageing population, together with outward migration, has long-term implications for Bhutan's workforce, communities, and socio-economic develop-

ment, the statement said.

Young Bhutanese people are increasingly seeking opportunities abroad mainly in Australia amid growing economic unhappiness in the landlocked Buddhist kingdom.

The new policy reflects the government's "commitment to the welfare of mothers, children, and families, and to the long-term sustainability of Bhutan's population", it added.

The neighbouring Indian state of Sikkim also announced in 2023 incentives such as year-long maternity leave for women, month-long paternity leave for men, and financial support for those seeking pregnancy through in-vitro fertilisation.

Bhutan is known for its pioneering Gross National Happiness index, an alternative economic gauge that takes into account factors normally ignored by gross domestic product measures, such as recreation and emotional well-being.

Indonesia volcano erupts, forcing airport to close

AFP
Jakarta

A highly active volcano in eastern Indonesia erupted several times yesterday, spewing towering ash columns into the sky and forcing a local airport to close, authorities said.

Mount Lewotobi Laki-Laki on Flores Island erupted at 11:15am (0315 GMT), sending volcanic material 2.5 kilometres (1.6 miles) into the air, the national volcanology agency said in a statement.

It came after several other eruptions earlier on Friday.

Lewotobi Laki-Laki falls under Indonesia's second-highest alert level for volcanic activity, with a five-kilometre exclusion zone in force around its crater.

The volcanology agency said residents near rivers should also remain on alert for hazard-

ous floods of volcanic material, known as lahar, if heavy rain occurs.

Authorities have suspended operations at a local airport in the town of Maumere, about 60 kilometres west of Lewotobi Laki-Laki, affecting five domestic flights, airport head Parta-hian Panjaitan told AFP.

Laki-Laki means "man" in Indonesian, and the 1,584-metre (5,197-foot) volcano is twinned with a calmer 1,703-metre one named Perempuan after the Indonesian word for "woman".

Last July, Lewotobi Laki-Laki spewed a colossal 18-kilometre tower of ash, forcing the cancellation of 24 flights at the international airport on the resort island of Bali.

Indonesia, a vast archipelago nation, experiences frequent seismic and volcanic activity due to its position on the Pacific "Ring of Fire".

Indonesian hotel chain exits from Cuba

Indonesian hotel chain Archipelago International has confirmed its exit from Cuba citing US sanctions, with the group telling AFP yesterday it may resume operations "if the situation improves".

Foreign businesses including several international hotel chains have ended or vastly reduced their presence in Cuba ahead of a Friday deadline from US President Donald Trump to sever ties with military conglomerate GAESA, which controls much of the island's economy and is sanctioned by Washington.

Archipelago International announced in a statement dated Wednesday and shared with AFP yesterday the "conclusion of management arrangement" for its six hotels in Cuba, operated under the Aston brand.

Sources close to the sector told AFP this week that Archipelago International had ended its

operations in Cuba.

The decision follows similar moves by Canadian chain Blue Diamond and Spain's Melia and Iberostar, which have severed ties with a total of 89 properties between them, most of them associated with GAESA.

The disinvestments mark another blow to an already crumbling tourism industry, as the island creaks under the weight of a US energy blockade imposed in January.

Foreign hotel chains, which arrived in Cuba in the 1990s, operate under one of two models: they either manage properties in partnership with the tourism ministry or through agreements with Gaviota, GAESA's tourism entity.

Archipelago International said in its statement that it would fully transfer management of the six hotels to their owner "due to US sanctions requirements". (AFP)

Family of 'miracle' Everest survivor demands probe of rescue efforts

AFP
Kathmandu

The family of a Nepali climber who dragged himself off Mount Everest six days after being abandoned called for an investigation into rescue efforts, as doctors said yesterday he is in a stable condition and recovering in hospital.

Mountaineer Dawa Sherpa, 57, vanished in bitter conditions on the upper reaches of the world's highest mountain early on May 30.

His family thought he was dead, and had even begun ritual mourning prayers.

He was found crawling towards Base Camp on Thursday morning by the Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee (SPCC), a Nepali team that helps set routes on Everest and clean up waste left behind.

Dawa Sherpa, also known as "Hil-



Mountaineer Dawa Sherpa's wife Damu Sherpa (right) and daughter Mendo Lhamu Sherpa wait outside the intensive care unit at HAMS Hospital in Kathmandu yesterday. (AFP)

lary" after the famed climber Edmund Hillary, was flown to the capital Kathmandu, where he is being treated for frostbite on his fingers, a fractured thigh bone and severe dehydration, doctors said.

"His clinical condition remains stable, and his dehydration is showing significant improvement," said

Jyotindra Sharma, director of the HAMS Hospital in Kathmandu. He said Dawa Sherpa had survived "extremely challenging conditions" on Everest. "He will remain in the ICU (intensive care unit) for a few more days for ongoing care and observation," Sharma said in a statement.

Mingmar Tendi Sherpa, who

spoke to him soon after his rescue, said Dawa Sherpa told him he had fallen into a crevasse, from which he was unable to escape until an avalanche filled it in.

"He said that he spent two-and-a-half days in the crevasse. Having lost his gear, he was unable to get out and survived on ice and biscuits he had in his suit," he told AFP.

His remarkable survival was greeted with jubilation by his family, who also said they were angry at what they described as the failure of rescue teams to locate him earlier.

His wife, Damu Sherpa, told AFP of her joy when she was sent a photograph as he was flown to the capital. "I do not remember how this week went — we thought he was no more, and had already begun his last rites," she said as she waited to meet him at the hospital. "I was so surprised when I saw the photos and recognised him — he was still wearing a cap I knitted for him."

India's red-hot initial public offering market may look irresistible as foreign firms line up for listings, but the rush is not about raising funds to expand in a fast-growing market; it's about sending billions of dollars back to headquarters.

Just one of six foreign-based companies that listed their Indian units in Mumbai since 2024 raised new funds, with all others structured purely as secondary offerings — or offer for sale (OFS), where existing shareholders sell their holdings to the public without raising any new funds, according to data from Prime Database, an Indian market research firm.

Foreign-based parents of companies that have long invested in India pocketed nearly \$5bn through such secondary-offering IPOs, with Hyundai Motor and LG Electronics accounting for more than 80% of those payouts, the data

showed. Simply put, for each dollar raised in these IPOs taken together, more than \$59 went out.

And the trend is continuing: the planned \$1bn IPO of Walmart's Indian payments arm and Modern Times Group's \$335mn IPO of its local gaming unit will both take the OFS route. This week, Coca-Cola said the planned listing of its Indian bottler will have the American firm sell a portion of its stake. Banking sources said Carlsberg's planned Indian IPO will also have no new funds raised — it will also be an OFS.

The trend, which bankers and economists say is a result of sky-high stock valuations in India in recent years, shows that the prospect of a lucrative partial exit from Indian investments has become more attractive to many

foreign companies than raising new funds to expand.

Global companies are pursuing "India listings as this provides them liquidity as well as a positive impact on the market cap for their parent," said Prashant Gupta, a partner at law firm Shardul Amarchand, which advised both Hyundai and LG on their OFS-structured IPOs. Modern Times declined to comment, while Carlsberg said it is "exploring different options for increasing shareholder value which may potentially include an" Indian IPO.

Walmart's Indian unit, PhonePe, Hyundai, LG and other companies did not respond to Reuters requests for comment.

The OFS trend comes at a troubling time for the Indian rupee, which has fallen 13% against the

US dollar since 2024 and 6% so far this year. That has raised concerns that the IPO-linked repatriations are compounding already heavy foreign capital outflows.

In January, MUFG Bank wrote that its analysis "shows one important contributor to Indian rupee weakness has been the strong IPO market in India." So far this year, foreign portfolio investors have sold more than \$23bn of their holdings, surpassing 2025's record outflows of \$18.9bn. IPO-linked capital outflows are "exerting a steady, though not abrupt, depreciation bias on the rupee," said Tanay Dalal, a senior vice president of business and economics research at Axis Bank. Government officials and regulators have not indicated

Zelenskiy's letter for other ears

By Daniel Flynn
Reuters

President Volodymyr Zelenskiy's open letter offering face-to-face peace talks to end the war in Ukraine was addressed to Russian President Vladimir Putin but meant to echo through the corridors of this week's St Petersburg investment forum, and beyond. Zelenskiy published the letter on Thursday evening as Putin briefed foreign news editors at Russia's premier business event. The previous day, Ukrainian drones had hit an oil terminal in St Petersburg, sending clouds of smoke billowing into the sky near the venue.

Ukraine believes sections of Russia's elite — "officials, businessmen, and Russia's partners" — want to see an end to a conflict that has left its \$3tn economy stagnant, according to one Ukrainian official familiar with the letter.

The glitzy gathering has highlighted rival visions within Russia over the four-year-old conflict. While some participants have said Russia should fight on and girl for long-term confrontation with the West, others have emphasized the economic advantages of

ending a war coming closer by the week.

Zelenskiy has for months been repeating his call for a ceasefire and offer to meet Putin, only for Putin to dismiss them, as he did again on Friday. The Ukrainian official, speaking on condition of anonymity, insisted Zelenskiy was serious about reviving negotiations.

But Dmytro Iarovy, associate professor at the Kyiv School of Economics specialising in political psychology, said the drone strike and "performative" letter had been a concerted attempt to shape the conference's narrative.

He said the letter was intended to tell Russian society and Western governments — particularly US President Donald Trump — that recent territorial gains and painful long-range strikes on Russia had put Kyiv in a much stronger position in any negotiations.

"Trump always says 'Ukraine doesn't have any cards'" said Kurt Volker, a former US ambassador to Nato, and Ukraine envoy during Trump's first administration. "Well, Ukraine is now showing that it's in a stronger position."

Months of US-backed peace talks have resulted in deadlock, with both sides sticking to their positions.

Anger in Tunis



Demonstrators hold placards and shout slogans during a protest against Tunisia's President Kais Saied and the ruling government, in Tunis, yesterday, demanding the immediate release of the jailed opposition parties' members and journalists. Rights groups have denounced a regression in freedoms in Tunisia. (AFP)

Tiny Guyana poised for big oil gains, growth strains

By Sheila Dang and Kemol King
Reuters

Guyana was already the world's fastest growing economy before the US-Israeli war on Iran drove up oil prices. Now, the tiny Caribbean nation of nearly 1mn people will reap an even bigger bonanza as the conflict reshapes global energy markets.

The war that caused one of the largest energy disruptions in history highlights the growing importance of countries including Guyana that offer political stability and geographically unrestricted access to their estimated 11bn barrels of oil reserves. This growing windfall from crude brings pressure from business owners and locals on the government to use its billions of dollars to boost other parts of the economy. "The world has seen too many energy booms that left behind ghost towns, depleted forests and bitter populations. Guyana will not be that story," President Irfaan Ali said in an address at Rice University's Baker Institute this month.

Rapid development by an Exxon Mobil-led oil consortium, which controls all of Guyana's oil production, grew output to over 900,000 barrels per day in just seven years, a pace without recent precedent as offshore projects can typically take twice as long just to produce the first drop of oil.

Guyana's GDP more than quadrupled to \$27.5bn between the time the taps started flowing in 2019 to 2024, according to World Bank data. Guyana was previously one of the poorest countries in South America and oil-fueled growth can be seen across the capital of Georgetown, where construction is taking place on new modern office buildings, upscale hotels and rows of single-family homes that resemble those that could be found in US suburbs. Exxon billboards and ads for other petroleum companies play on the radio, serving as reminders for the industry that helped enable the growth.

- Guyana's 2026 oil earnings could rise 67% from last year
- President Ali cautions windfall likely offset by higher import costs
- Government faces pressure to develop non-oil economy



Cars are parked at the Amazonia Mall in front of the Bharrat Jagdeo Demerara River Bridge, which was inaugurated in 2025, as Guyana's fast-growing economy is set to benefit from a reshaped global energy market due to the US-Israeli war on Iran. (PICTURES: Reuters)



A tanker truck is stopped outside the Vreed en Hoop Shorebase Inc facility, part of Guyana's oil and gas infrastructure.

MORE MONEY, MORE PROBLEMS?

The government's long-term challenge is to fortify the country against an implicit pitfall — the economic cycle of boom and bust oil prices. Guyana needs to look no further than its neighbor Venezuela for an example of how political dysfunction and overreliance on oil money can cripple an economy despite having one of the largest estimated oil reserves in the world.

One of Guyana's strategies is



People attend an Independence Day event celebrating 60 years of independence from the UK in Georgetown.

its 2019 sovereign wealth fund holding all oil revenue which allows the government to draw funds for development projects at a steady rate. Crude prices, up 30% since the start of the Iran war in late February, could further swell Guyana's oil revenue. Assuming an oil price of \$100 per barrel through the rest of the year at current production volumes, Guyana's share of oil revenue could be worth roughly \$4.3bn, 67% higher than last year, according to Reuters calculations.

More importantly, Guyana is poised to start receiving a significantly larger share of oil production earlier than expected. The Exxon consortium currently takes 75% of the oil to recoup its initial exploration and development costs. And now, the consortium could recover the costs this year, Exxon has said. When that happens, the country's share of the profit oil will climb from 12.5% to 50%. Ali cautioned that expectations needed to be managed, as any windfall due to higher oil prices would be offset by higher import costs for nearly all goods including fuel and fertilizer. "This is the complexity of the messaging when people wake up every morning and see the headlines that you're flush with money, it drives a certain expectation," he said in his Baker Institute address. Some local infrastructure has not improved at the same pace that the oil industry has developed. Open sewage drains line the streets of Georgetown and electricity outages remain a common occurrence.

A 'CHANGED WORLD'

Guyana sits at the centre of a region that includes the established oil and gas economies of Venezuela and Trinidad and Tobago, as well as Suriname, where the sector is emerging. The area benefits from direct, unrestricted access to the Atlantic, without maritime chokepoints vulnerable to blockades like the Strait of Hormuz.

Guyana's low break-even prices in the \$25 to \$35 per barrel range, and proximity to US markets that are supportive of fossil fuel development, further compound long-term advantages, said Tarron Khemraj, a professor of economics and international studies at the New College of Florida, who has studied Caribbean countries including Guyana. Spot prices for Guyana's four crude grades — valued for their light to medium sweet quality — have surged over the past three months, with the Liza benchmark reaching a high of \$120 per barrel from \$68.98 on February 27 before the conflict in the Middle East began.

Even if traffic through the Strait of Hormuz resumes soon and oil prices return to pre-war levels, experts say Guyana's track record as a geopolitically stable source of oil will further solidify. "The war may end next month, but it will be a changed world," Khemraj said. Still, numbers that look like a boom may belie the full reality of the broader economy.

While Guyana has recorded double-digit percentage GDP growth each year since oil production began, most of that expansion has been concentrated in the petroleum sector, rather than broad-based activity. Oil and gas and support services accounted for more than 75% of the country's GDP last year, according to government data.

SHARING THE WEALTH

As part of its effort to make sure more of the oil revenue trickles down, the government is also moving to expand its local content law, originally passed in 2021,

that requires oil and gas firms to contract with Guyanese-owned suppliers and vendors in a number of specific areas, such as janitorial, food or transportation.

The regulation requires petroleum companies to procure a certain percentage of services from Guyanese businesses, for example, 25% of medical services and 90% of catering services. The government is considering amendments to add more service areas and increase the percentage requirements for some existing ones, Michael Munroe, director of the local content secretariat, said in an interview.

Business owners say that expanding the requirements will help support more jobs and the development of skilled labour. "We're able to provide all of the same medical services as an international company," said Ayesha Wilburg, founder and CEO of a Georgetown-based health clinic.

Rising oil activity has also led to a similar explosion in demand for private transportation services in Georgetown, where residents often travel by cab. Nazim Baksh, general manager of Sean's Transportation Services, said the company expanded from seven employees to about 20 and also upgraded its fleet from sedans to add more SUVs.

Challenges remain, however, including complaints from Guyanese business owners about so-called fronting. Panelists at the Guyana Energy Conference in February acknowledged the problem, where foreign companies use local entities but retain actual control of the business.

Vanita Ally, medical director and founder of Phoenix Clinicare, a Guyanese-owned medical center, said that receiving a certificate to provide services to oil firms has not resulted in much additional revenue and inflation is also increasing her operating costs. "International companies are benefiting a lot more than local people (from the oil industry)," Ally said. Drivers are now paying more at the pump, like other countries, adding to cost of living concerns. Guyana lacks a refinery and must import gasoline, diesel and other refined products.

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Participants of the EU-Western Balkans Summit pose for family photo in Tivat, yesterday. (Reuters)

Leaders push for faster EU expansion at Balkan summit

AFP
Tivat

European leaders used a summit in Montenegro yesterday to dangle the carrot of a quicker path into the EU for Balkan countries, some of which have been waiting to join for decades.

During the EU-Western Balkans Summit, senior bloc figures repeatedly pushed the need to speed up the accession process for candidate countries – including six Balkan nations.

“We must make the enlargement process faster and more credible,” European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said in the small town of Tivat, best known for its superyacht-lined port.

“Enlargement is for us a geostrategic imperative, as well as a long-term investment in our peace, our stability and our security,” von der Leyen said, acknowledging that the accession process had to “become more dynamic”.

After decades of back-and-forth over the future membership of Balkan candidates, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022 reinvigorated Brussels’s interest in expansion.

Since the war began, both Ukraine and Moldova have joined

the queue of countries seeking accession alongside the Balkan hopefuls: Albania, Bosnia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia.

France and Germany seized on the Tivat meeting to push the idea of “gradual integration” into the bloc, which currently has 27 member nations.

“Together with Germany we have proposed a strengthened gradual integration process,” French President Emmanuel Macron told journalists as he arrived at the summit.

He said that the proposal could mean that a country that aligns itself with the EU on certain criteria would be allowed to join certain bloc formats, for example, attending European Council meetings.

“A merit-based process does not mean a slow process; it means that, on the side of the EU institutions as well as on the side of the candidate states, everyone must work faster and harder, and that is our commitment,” European Council President Antonio Costa said during the final press conference.

Among the Balkan countries needing to better align with EU policies is Serbia, which remains close to Moscow and has never

imposed sanctions on Russia since the start of the war in Ukraine in 2022.

“Serbia has an open path towards the European Union. However, Serbia must also decide where it stands. A policy of hesitation between Russia, China and Europe is not possible,” German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said.

Serbia is among the most eurosceptic countries in the region, with less than half of the population supporting membership.

But its leader assured from the summit that his country is on “the path to the EU”.

“This is our strategic objective,” said Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic, who conceded that many reforms were still needed.

Although Brussels has long said all the remaining Balkan nations would be accepted together, Montenegro and Albania are increasingly emerging as the frontrunners to join the bloc first, pulling ahead of countries like Serbia and Bosnia, which lag on the required reforms.

“Montenegro’s accession as the 28th member state by 2028 is within reach,” said von der Leyen.

“We hope that Albania will follow quickly and that the entire region will continue to move closer to our union.”

Putin rules out Zelensky meeting any time soon

AFP
St Petersburg

Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday ruled out meeting his Ukrainian counterpart any time soon, a day after Volodymyr Zelensky called for a sit-down between the leaders to end the four-year war.

Speaking at an economic forum in his home city of Saint Petersburg, Putin said he saw “no point” in meeting Zelensky until the terms of a possible peace deal had been agreed – triggering Kyiv to say the Russian leader was “weak” and “choosing war again”.

Putin also vowed to press on with Russia’s military offensive until its war goals had been achieved in full.

Russia has demanded control of Ukraine’s eastern Donbas region as well as sweeping political and military restrictions on its neighbour.

Kyiv and its allies have ruled them out as tantamount to capitulation.

US-brokered peace talks have failed to bring the sides closer to a deal.

Zelensky had on Thursday issued a rare direct appeal to the Russian leader.

“Ukraine proposes ending this war through direct engagement between us – and you. I am proposing a meeting,” Zelensky said in the letter.

“I propose to set a clear date for such a meeting,” he said.

Putin yesterday refused.

“I see no point in meeting. It only makes sense for the Ukrainian side to stop the advance of our armed forces. That’s it. And we need agreements,” Putin told Russia’s flagship economic forum in Saint Petersburg. “Let the experts work, develop some solutions, and then we can meet,” Putin added.

Hundreds of thousands have been killed since Putin launched his full-scale offensive – which he calls a “special military operation” – in February 2022.

Swathes of eastern and southern Ukraine have been destroyed and millions forced from their



Russian President Vladimir Putin gestures as he delivers a speech during the plenary session of the St Petersburg International Economic Forum yesterday. (AFP)

homes in a four-year campaign Moscow hoped would have toppled Kyiv within a matter of days.

Zelensky says a meeting between the two men is needed to hash out the key issues of a peace deal. “Unfortunately, the Russian side is choosing war again – everyone heard today’s response. A weak response. He simply doesn’t want to end the war,” he said after Putin rejected the call to meet.

His proposal had won support from key allies, including US President Donald Trump and French President Emmanuel Macron.

Zelensky is set to meet Macron, Britain’s Keir Starmer and Germany’s Friedrich Merz in London tomorrow in a bid to inject fresh momentum into efforts to end the war.

Putin said the conflict would only stop when Russia’s goals are met.

“Military actions will end some day, we assume. Without a doubt, they will end once we have achieved the goals we have set for ourselves,” Putin told the audience of business leaders and visiting dignitaries from Russia’s allies.

The ex-KGB spy also rejected claims that the Russian economy was falling apart under the high costs of the war.

The Kremlin’s offensive against Ukraine has put Russia’s finances under immense strain, with rising prices, tax

hikes and two-decade-high borrowing costs hitting many citizens hard.

“We, of course, hear criticism from all sides that everything has collapsed,” Putin said. “We have descended to the same level at which eurozone countries have been living through for the past few years,” the Russian leader said, adding that Russia was pursuing a “sovereign” economy.

Asked by AFP about Russia’s economic woes, Putin had on Thursday channelled the US writer Mark Twain.

“Rumours of my death have been greatly exaggerated,” he said, rejecting the idea that Russia was on the brink of a full-blown crisis.

Putin was speaking just two days after the opening of SPIEF – once dubbed the “Russian Davos” – was overshadowed by brazen Ukrainian drone strikes on Saint Petersburg.

Kyiv has intensified its attacks on Russia’s vital energy infrastructure – oil depots, refineries, exporting hubs – which are threatening to dent Moscow’s most important income stream.

In the early years of Putin’s rule, Western investors keen to make a buck in Russia’s chaotic and fast-growing economy would gather at the SPIEF to strike deals and hobnob with the Russian elite.

Now drones and machine guns are out on display.

Ukraine blames Russia for sea drone blast near Romania

Reuters
Bucharest

A sea drone self-destructed near an oil terminal in Romania’s Black Sea port of Constanta yesterday, without causing casualties, as Ukraine said Russia jammed the vessel causing it to drift off course.

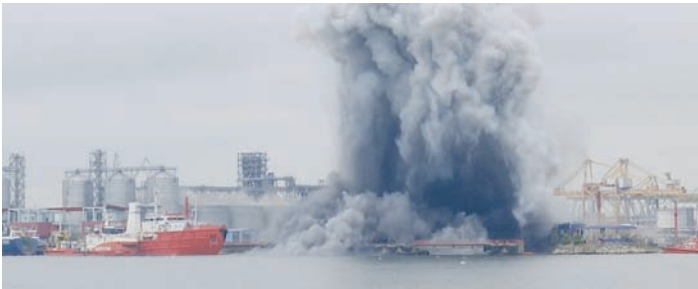
The explosion was the second major incident in a populated area in Romania on Nato’s eastern flank within a week as the spillover threat from the war in Ukraine increases.

Ukraine’s navy said one of its drones lost control in the Black Sea as a result of Russian electronic warfare. It contacted Romania to warn them and prevent casualties, it said.

Romanian Defence Minister Radu Miruta said that warning allowed a timely evacuation.

President Nicusor Dan pinned the blame on Russia and said another three drones that Ukraine lost control of had also detonated off the coast and there was no longer any danger.

“The entry of this drone into Romanian sovereign space is a direct



Smoke rises after an explosion as a marine drone self-detonated in Romania’s Black Sea port of Constanta near an oil terminal, without causing any casualties, according to the defence ministry, in Constanta, yesterday. (Reuters)

consequence of the war waged by Russia against Ukraine,” the Romanian leader said on social media accounts. The explosion took place a week after authorities said a Russian drone crashed into an apartment building in the southeastern Romanian city of Galati, near the border with Ukraine, injuring two people – the first time in the war that a drone has struck a densely populated area in a Nato state.

Following the latest incident, Russia’s embassy in Romania said yesterday it was not involved and the drones were not Russian.

The Black Sea is crucial for shipments of grain, oil and oil products and is shared by Bulgaria, Romania, Georgia and Turkey, as well as Ukraine and Russia.

The Constanta port is Romania’s largest, with 156 berths and 32km (19 miles) of quays. Ukraine has been using it as an alternative grain export route, as well as for fuel imports. Romania’s defence ministry said the drone exploded at 10:30am (0730 GMT), around four hours after it was alerted to its presence. It detonated 500 metres away from an oil terminal.

The port was evacuated and over 1,000 people were removed from beaches on the Black Sea and the nearby Danube Delta as a precaution, while ships and two helicopters surveyed the area for additional drones, deputy Interior Minister Raed Arafat told a briefing.

Restrictions were lifted later in the day after no other risks were detected.

European Union member Romania shares a 650km (400 miles) land border with Ukraine and has seen Russian drones repeatedly breach its airspace as well as mines float across key trade and energy routes since Moscow’s full-scale invasion four years ago.

Earlier this week, Romania’s navy detonated a Russian YaRM-type anti-landing mine that had drifted to shore.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said on X that Russia’s war was increasingly becoming a direct threat to countries on Europe’s eastern border.

“This incident shows once again that Russia’s ongoing full-scale aggression poses a threat not only to Ukraine, but to the entire region,” a spokesperson for Ukraine’s foreign ministry said on X.

Italy appeals for release of Flotilla activists in Libya

Reuters
Rome

Italy appealed yesterday for the release of two Italian pro-Palestinian campaigners detained in eastern Libya who, along with eight other activists, had been refusing food and water for four days.

Israeli forces arrested 430 people on board 50 ships in international waters in May, to halt a flotilla of “Global Sumud Flotilla” volunteers trying to bring aid supplies to the Gaza Strip.

The people held in Libya are part of a separate group of Flotilla activists who tried to reach the Palestinian enclave by land.

Authorities in the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi were not immediately available for comment.

Italian Consul Filippo Colombo has appealed to those authorities for the release of the two Italian nationals and requested permission to visit them, the foreign ministry said.

Ten detainees are now in their fifth day of hunger strike

in protest at their detention and mistreatment, Global Sumud Flotilla said in a statement on Thursday, adding that their health was rapidly deteriorating.

“A dry hunger strike (refusing to drink as well as eat) is rapidly fatal; without immediate intervention, this humanitarian crisis will turn into a tragedy,” the Flotilla said.

The organisation said the volunteers were being held in isolated, non-civilian prison complexes operated by the Libyan Interior Ministry, and were being given contradictory information and false promises of release.

Global Sumud Flotilla demanded immediate access for independent medical monitors and foreign consular staff and the immediate, unconditional release of all volunteers.

They have been held since May 24, when the delegation approached the city of Sirte to negotiate the safe passage of a humanitarian convoy heading for Gaza with Libyan authorities.

Instead, the group of 10 were arrested for immigration violations.

Four people suspected in subsea cable breach: Finland

Reuters
Helsinki

Finnish police investigating last year’s damage to two subsea telecommunication cables in the Baltic Sea said yesterday that four people are suspected of a crime, and that prosecutors will decide on any charges.

Finland seized the Fitburg cargo ship on December 31 while en route from Russia to Israel on suspicion of damaging cables running from Helsinki across the Gulf of Finland to Estonia, one of a string of such incidents in recent years.

Police yesterday said they

had investigated suspected aggravated criminal damage, attempted aggravated criminal damage and aggravated interference with telecommunications, and that the case was being referred to prosecutors for possible charges.

“The investigation concluded with four suspects, three of whom remain subject to a travel ban,” the police said in a statement.

The Baltic Sea region is on high alert after a string of power cable, telecom link and gas pipeline outages since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, and Nato has boosted its military presence with frigates, aircraft and naval drones.

Norway crown princess put on waitlist for lung transplant

AFP
Oslo

Norway’s Crown Princess Mette-Marit, who suffers from an incurable lung disease, has been placed on a waiting list for a lung transplant, ushering in a period of great uncertainty regarding her health.

Mette-Marit (pictured), 52, was diagnosed in 2018 with a rare form of pulmonary fibrosis that causes breathing difficulties, which has repeatedly forced her to take sick leave or scale back her official duties.

Her condition has deteriorated significantly over the past six months, Are Holm, a lung specialist at the Oslo University Hospital Rikshospitalet, told a press conference yesterday afternoon.

“We can see that there has been a significant increase in scar tissue



in her lungs over the past year. And lung function tests show that her lung function has declined considerably in the last three months alone,” Holm told reporters.

Scarring of the lungs, known as pulmonary fibrosis, occurs when the alveoli (tiny air sacs) and the tissue between them become damaged and thickened, stiffening the lung and thereby hindering the passage of oxygen into the blood.

“This is dangerous,” Holm said. This is why she was “being

placed on the waiting list for a lung transplant,” he added.

To be placed on the list, one must be sick enough – it is reserved for patients who are believed to have only about a year to live without a transplant – but still in sufficiently good condition to handle such a major procedure and recover.

For an operation to go ahead, a compatible donor must first be found, meaning a lung of the right size and blood type to avoid organ rejection, and the patient must be the sickest one on the list.

There is therefore no guarantee that Mette-Marit will be given priority, the doctor noted, but added that the waiting time for a lung transplant had become significantly shorter in recent months.

While awaiting the operation, the crown princess will not be able to carry out her official duties, the palace said in a statement, adding

that her ailing health would also affect the duties and activities of the crown prince and the rest of her family.

The palace announced already in December that the crown princess might need a lung transplant.

The couple’s silver wedding anniversary celebration, which was to take place in August 2026, will be postponed, and the couple will not be able to attend the Swedish royal couple’s golden wedding anniversary in Stockholm on June 13, the palace said.

The princess’s husband, Crown Prince Haakon, recently cut short a trip to Japan to be with his wife.

Their daughter, Princess Ingrid Alexandra, also decided to interrupt her social sciences studies at the University of Sydney to join her mother in Norway and plans to continue her studies in Oslo throughout the autumn.



Strong winds whip trees along the Doha Corniche as temperatures soar and dusty conditions affect outdoor activities across Qatar. **PICTURE:** Shaji Kayamkulam

Left: A cat rests outside an air-conditioned shop in Doha to escape the heat, showing how both people and animals are coping with Qatar's harsh summer weather. **PICTURE:** Joey Aguilar



Activities move indoors as Qatar residents act to weather the heat

By Joey Aguilar
Doha

Weekend plans across Qatar shifted indoors as strong winds, blowing dust and rising temperatures prompted residents to postpone outdoor activities in favour of air-conditioned venues.

The Qatar Meteorology Department (MET) warned of strong northwesterly winds, reduced visibility due to dust, and rough sea conditions as temperatures climbed to around 42° Celsius on Thursday and were forecast to reach 44C yesterday.

The weather, typical of June, the first month of summer and one of Qatar's hottest and windiest periods, is influencing daily life, health, transport and leisure activities across the country.

For many residents and visitors, particularly families, shopping malls and commercial centres have become pre-

ferred weekend destinations.

These climate-controlled spaces offer relief from the heat while providing opportunities to shop, dine, and socialise.

Outdoor activities, including cricket matches, jogging sessions, picnics and family gatherings have largely been put on hold as people seek shelter from the harsh conditions.

Instead, indoor sports and recreation facilities are attracting more visitors, with enthusiasts turning to bowling, table tennis, badminton and padel to stay active during the summer months.

Gyms and fitness centres, especially in Doha, are also seeing increased activity as outdoor exercise becomes more difficult.

"As temperatures climb above 40C, outdoor exercise becomes less practical for much of the day," a gym trainer told *Gulf Times*. "Many runners, walkers, cyclists and recreational athletes shift to air-conditioned gyms, indoor sports halls, swimming pools and fitness studios."

He noted, however, that the trend is not



universal, as some fitness centres experience a temporary decline in memberships when residents travel abroad during school holidays and the summer vacation season.

The weather is also affecting working conditions, particularly for people whose jobs require them to remain outdoors.

Delivery riders and other outdoor workers continue to adapt to the heat and dusty conditions while observing the annual midday work ban.

Industry sources said that delivery activity typically slows during the hottest hours of the day.

However, many riders offset this by extending their working hours into the evening when temperatures become more

manageable and customer demand increases.

Meanwhile, air-conditioning service providers are entering one of their busiest periods of the year.

Maintenance companies report an increase in bookings from households and businesses seeking to inspect and service cooling systems before peak summer conditions set in.

The retail and hospitality sectors are also feeling the effects.

Cafés with outdoor seating, food trucks, parks and open-air markets often experience lower daytime footfall during periods of intense heat, prompting consumers to favour indoor venues.

Summer conditions also pose challenges for animals.

Animal welfare advocates note that extreme temperatures place additional stress on stray cats, birds and other animals, and often urge the public to provide water and shelter whenever possible.

According to the MET's climate summary, June is typically dry and very hot, with prevailing northwesterly winds, rising sea temperatures and the longest daylight hours of the year.

It is also considered Qatar's windiest month, bringing increased solar radiation and weather conditions that can significantly influence daily routines and business activity across multiple sectors.

Professionals embrace training in AI to prepare for future of work

By Shaima Sheriff
Staff Reporter

Participants in Qatar's first Generative AI for Sports Leaders programme highlighted the growing importance of artificial intelligence (AI) literacy, saying that organisations must equip professionals with the skills to use emerging technologies responsibly and effectively.

Launched by the Qatar Olympic Academy (QOA) in partnership with Google Cloud, the pioneering programme introduced sports leaders, researchers and professionals to the applications of generative AI across strategic planning, communications, fan engagement, event management and data-driven decision-making.

For many attendees, the course represented more than a technical training programme; it provided an opportunity to better understand both the benefits and potential risks associated with AI.

Basil Pathrose, who works at the Qatar Olympic Committee, said that the workshop offered insight into a technology that is rapidly shaping the future.

"I think this workshop is very important for the future because AI is what's running the future," he said.



Basil Pathrose

"It is good to understand how AI works," Pathrose continued. "It's how we should remain safe around it. It's not just about knowing AI, we should also know how we behave around it so that AI doesn't control us."

He noted that many users adopt AI tools without fully understanding their implications, making awareness and education increasingly important.

"Most people do not know how to use AI very well," Pathrose pointed out. "It's important to raise awareness about the

benefits of AI and also the dangers of AI. We are still like small children when it comes to AI."

Balsam Mustafa is a researcher at Qatar University with a master's degree in business analytics.

She said that the course helped deepen her understanding of generative AI models and their growing role in research and data analysis.

"It was an amazing experience that gave me the chance to learn about generative AI models and the advancement of these technologies," Mustafa said.

She highlighted the importance of AI tools in accelerating analytical work and supporting decision-making across industries.

Mustafa lauded the partnership with Google Cloud, noting that advanced tools such as Gemini are becoming increasingly relevant in research environments.

"Data is needed in every field," she said. "Organisations need to develop their employees' skills and build capacity through such advanced technology."

One of the programme's highlights, Mustafa added, is the practical component, where participants explored Gemini's capabilities in voice, video and image generation.

For entrepreneur and research assistant Fatma Siddiq, the course offered both



theoretical and practical insights into how AI can support innovation and business growth.

"The entire course was very enlightening in terms of the usage of AI and how it works in real life, while also understanding the foundation behind it," she said.

Siddiq said that AI already plays a role in her business, from market research and

customer analysis to product development and marketing strategies.

However, she stressed the importance of using the technology responsibly.

"Privacy is a major concern for everyone," she said. "The thing is, how do you use it? What information do you feed the AI? That's what decides if it's going to be beneficial or if it's going to harm you."