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## Qatar and Canada sign accord on public safety



HE the Minister of Interior and Commander of the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya) Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani met with Canada's Minister of Public Safety Gary Anandasangaree. They discussed bilateral co-operation and ways to strengthen it, particularly in security, in addition to other topics of mutual interest. A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was also signed between the Ministry of Interior and Canada's Ministry of Public Safety to enhance co-operation in public safety. **(QNA) Page 2**

## OpenAI new model in US only

OpenAI yesterday launched a US-only preview of its latest powerful AI model series to a limited group of partners at the request of the US government, the company said. The release comes two weeks after the White House took Silicon Valley by surprise by ordering OpenAI's rival Anthropic to ban all foreign nationals from accessing its Fable 5 and Mythos 5 models, citing national security concerns. Anthropic

swiftly shut down all access to those models, saying it could not reliably comply with the restriction on foreign nationals. The latest models from leading AI companies, such as Anthropic's Mythos series and now OpenAI's GPT-5.6, have drawn major concerns over their reportedly unprecedented ability to identify software vulnerabilities – weaknesses in code that hackers can exploit. **(AFP)**

# Strait of Hormuz must remain open, secure by international law: Qatar

Maritime security requires global cooperation, says Qatar minister at Dubrovnik Forum

QNA  
Dubrovnik

HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz al-Khulaifi has said maritime security can no longer be the responsibility of any single country, warning that growing geopolitical rivalry, cyberattacks and threats to critical infrastructure require greater international cooperation.

Speaking at the Dubrovnik Forum in Croatia yesterday, HE Dr al-Khulaifi said recent developments in the Middle East had demonstrated how disruption to a narrow maritime passage could have far-reaching consequences for the global economy, energy



HE Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz al-Khulaifi speaking at Dubrovnik Forum yesterday.

markets and international supply chains.

He said freedom of navigation was not only a commercial interest but a cornerstone of in-

### Trump accuses Iran of violating ceasefire

US President Donald Trump has accused Iran of violating a ceasefire agreement, saying Tehran launched a drone attack on a commercial vessel transiting the Strait of Hormuz. In a post on his Truth Social platform, Trump said one of the drones struck the ship's upper deck, causing minor damage, but that the vessel was able to continue its voyage. He also said US forces shot down three other drones involved in the attack. The accusation comes days after the United States and Iran signed an electronic memorandum of understanding on June 17 aimed at ending a conflict that began on February 28 following months of escalating tensions. The agreement has been widely seen as a step towards reducing tensions in the region. **(QNA)**

### US strikes Iran missile sites

US forces struck Iranian missile and drone storage sites and coastal radar positions late last night after Washington accused Tehran of attacking a cargo ship, jolting a fragile ceasefire as diplomats struggled to contain the Middle East war. US Central Command said the strikes were a response to "unwarranted aggression against commercial shipping by Iranian forces" that "clearly violated the ceasefire." It described the operation as "a powerful response to yesterday's attack on a commercial ship

that was transiting the Strait of Hormuz." Iranian state television, citing a reporter in Sirik, said an explosion was heard late Friday at Taherouyeh pier in the southern port city. It quoted an informed military source as saying the blast was caused by a projectile impact in the area. Iran has warned vessels not to enter or leave the Gulf through the Strait of Hormuz without permission, but ships have continued to move, some using a route not authorized by Tehran. **(AFP)**

ternational law, adding that open sea lanes were a strategic necessity for Qatar and the Gulf states, whose economies depend on a rules-based international trading system.

It is not believed the world is moving towards a system based on exclusive or politically controlled corridors, he said, warning that such an approach would lead to greater fragmentation and instability. **To Page 2**

## Parties hail Washington deal on Lebanon

AFP  
Washington

Israel and Lebanon hailed an agreement signed yesterday with the United States to pave a way towards peace on their front in the Middle East war, while Hezbollah warned the deal would thwart plans to resolve the broader conflict. At the signing ceremony in Washington, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio – flanked by envoys from Israel and Lebanon – said the trilateral

agreement "begins to put in place a framework for lasting peace and security." "It's the beginning of the beginning. There's a lot of work ahead," he said. Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu welcomed the framework document as a victory against Iran. Tehran argues that the Israeli conflict in Lebanon against its ally Hezbollah is inseparable from the broader war and should be part of the final settlement being negotiated by Washington and Tehran. "Iran has been trying

to force us to withdraw from southern Lebanon through pressure, but in effect Israel, Lebanon, and the United States are telling them: this is none of your business," Netanyahu said. He added that, under the agreement, the Lebanese army would be allowed to return to two "pilot areas" to begin taking charge of parts of southern Lebanon, but that Israeli forces would remain in the security zone it has seized until Hezbollah is disarmed and displaced civilians not allowed to return. **Page 3**

## Qatar rushes urgent relief to Venezuela



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani has ordered an emergency humanitarian airlift to Venezuela after two earthquakes struck the capital, Caracas, the Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD) said yesterday. The operation includes six aircraft delivering emergency assistance to those affected by the disaster. The aid effort is being coordinated by QFFD in cooperation with the Qatar International Search and Rescue Group of the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya) and the Qatar Red Crescent Society. According to QFFD, the relief supplies include family tents, field hospitals and shelter materials aimed at providing emergency accommodation for displaced families and meeting urgent humanitarian needs in the aftermath of the earthquakes. **(QNA) Page 2**

# Qatar study highlights AI's great potential for diagnostic precision in women's health

By Joseph Varghese  
Staff Reporter

Artificial Intelligence (AI) demonstrates significant potential to enhance diagnostic precision, personalised treatment, and support clinical decision-making in women's health, a study and comparative analysis by a group of researchers from Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) has highlighted.

"The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Women's Healthcare: A Systematic Review" by Saheed Akinola Shittu, Hanan Mrabet, Sufia Athar, Mohamed Ezzeldin Gaber, Tamara Alshdafat, Salwa Alrawaili, Parwaneh Shibani, Lolwa Alansari and Moayyad

Younis from HMC conducted a systematic analysis of various literature in the field through database searches and have detailed the impact of AI on women's health.

The analysis noted that AI holds transformative potential for obstetric and gynaecologic care, with demonstrated capabilities to enhance diagnostic accuracy in obstetrics, gynaecology, and reproductive medicine. AI applications have expanded dramatically over the past two decades, spanning diverse domains from prenatal imaging to gynaecological oncology and reproductive medicine.

The study has critically evaluated the current landscape of AI applications in women's healthcare, focusing on established use

cases, methodological approaches, validation experiences, and implementation challenges. It provides a comprehensive assessment of AI's influence across the breadth of women's healthcare, with particular attention to the translational gap between algorithm development and clinical integration.

Furthermore, the analysis has observed the growing publication trend and increasing interest in AI's potential to address complex challenges in women's health, with applications ranging from the automated classification of foetal brain ultrasound images as normal or abnormal to predictive models for obstetric complications and diagnostic support for gynaecologic cancers.

The details and findings of

the study have been published in the latest edition of *Qatar Medical Journal* and featured on QScience.com. The researchers note that AI is rapidly transforming healthcare delivery with substantial implications for women's health. The study has synthesised current evidence on AI applications in women's healthcare, evaluated the contributions and limitations of these applications and identified key challenges for clinical implementation.

According to the researchers, a systematic analysis of peer-reviewed literature was conducted through database searches in PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and the Cochrane Library, focusing on AI applications in the Obstetrics and Gynaecology do-

main. The analysis has revealed extensive AI development across obstetrics and gynaecology sub-fields, particularly in obstetric imaging, foetal monitoring, gynaecologic oncology, and predictive models for delivery outcomes.

Both machine learning (59% of studies) and knowledge-based systems (38% of studies) were represented in the analysis. Most publications (82%) present preliminary work such as proof-of-concept algorithms or methods, with clinical validation largely unreported.

However, the researchers noted that key implementation challenges include limited external validation, ethical concerns, and the need for specialised clinician competencies.



## Minister meets US acting attorney-general Blanche



HE the Minister of Interior and Commander of the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya) Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani met in Washington DC with the US Acting Attorney-General Todd Blanche. They discussed Qatar-US cooperation, relations and means to boost bilateral coordination, in addition to topics of mutual interest. - QNA

## Strait of Hormuz must remain open, secure by international law: Qatar

From Page 1

HE Dr al-Khulaifi said sustainable maritime security rests on three pillars: adherence to international law, freedom of navigation without discrimination, and diplomacy and the peaceful settlement of disputes.

While military capabilities could deter threats, he said, they could not replace trust.

Drawing on Qatar's mediation experience, he said deterrence alone rarely delivers lasting security.

Regarding the United States, HE Dr al-Khulaifi said Washington remains an indispensable player in maritime security because of its naval capabilities

and strategic presence.

However, recent regional events had shown military superiority does not necessarily translate into political stability.

He highlighted the importance of the Strait of Hormuz, through which a major share of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas supplies pass each day, stressing that it must remain open, secure and governed by international law.

Dr al-Khulaifi renewed Qatar's call for respect for international law, protection of critical maritime infrastructure, freedom of navigation and the peaceful resolution of disputes, saying diplomacy and dialogue remain the best guarantee of lasting maritime security.

## Shura Council takes part in Arab Parliament Conference

The Shura Council is participating in the 8th Conference of the Arab Parliament and Speakers of Arab Councils and Parliaments, which will be held in Cairo today.

HE the Shura Council Speaker Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanim will lead the council's delegation to the conference.

The conference will discuss three important topics: formulating a unified Arab position to

preserve the security, stability, and sovereignty of Arab states against any external aggression; developments in the occupied Palestinian territories; and the issue of strengthening Arab digital sovereignty and protecting national privacy in the era of digital transformation.

Participants will present their perspectives as parliamentarians

on these topics and discuss the related challenges.

Shura Council member Nasser bin Mohammed al-Nuaimi, who is also member of the Arab Parliament, participated in the preparatory committee meeting for the conference, which addressed draft resolutions related to the topics under discussion, in preparation for their presentation at the conference tomorrow. - QNA

## Latest online judicial auction generates over QR83mn

The Judicial Evictions and Auctions Department at the Supreme Judiciary Council conducted a number of online auctions on June 21, which generated proceeds amounting to QR83,220,185.

The proceeds were allocated to settle 516 related cases, and a total of 1,204 bids were submitted throughout the process.

Accordingly, the real estate auction offered 36 units, and six were sold for a total price of QR82,359,385,

which was used to settle four related cases.

The vehicle auction offered 31 vehicles, and 18 were sold for a total price of QR258,200, which was used to settle 144 related cases.

The equipment auction offered nine pieces of equipment at a total price of QR592,120, which were used to settle 221 related cases.

The scrap auction offered 73 damaged vehicles, and 23 were sold for a total price of QR10,450, which was used to settle 147 related cases.

## Minister holds meetings on sidelines of Dubrovnik Forum

HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz al-Khulaifi held a series of bilateral meetings with senior foreign officials on the sidelines of the Dubrovnik Forum in Croatia.

HE Dr al-Khulaifi met separately with Croatia's Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Gordan Grlic Radman, Somalia's Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Abdisalam Abdi Ali, Slovenia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Tanja Fajon, Uzbekistan's Minister of Foreign Affairs Bakhtiyor Saidov, Türkiye's

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Director for European Affairs Mehmet Kemal Bozay, and Indonesia's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Muhammad Anis Matta.

The meetings, which focused on bilateral relations and ways to strengthen cooperation, also covered the latest regional developments, as well as issues of mutual interest.

The Dubrovnik Forum is an annual international conference that brings together political leaders, diplomats and policymakers to discuss global and regional challenges. - QNA



# Qatar launches aid airlift to Venezuela following quakes



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani has ordered an emergency humanitarian airlift to Venezuela after two earthquakes struck the capital, Caracas, the Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD) said yesterday.

The operation includes six aircraft delivering emergency assistance to those affected by the disaster.

The aid effort is being coordinated by the QFFD in cooperation with the Qatar International Search and Rescue Group of the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya) and the Qatar Red Crescent Society.

According to the QFFD, the relief supplies include family tents, field hospitals and shelter materials aimed at providing emergency accommodation for displaced families and meeting urgent humanitarian needs in the aftermath of the earthquakes.

The organisation said the airlift is intended to strengthen relief and humanitarian response efforts in the affected areas, help mitigate the impact of the disaster and support immediate shelter and recovery needs.

The QFFD said that the operation reflects Qatar's continued commitment to providing humanitarian assistance to people affected by crises and natural disasters, and to supporting international relief efforts during emergencies. - QNA



## Book on legal concept of witness protection launched

Katara Cultural Village hosted the launch of the book *Protection of Witnesses in International Agreements: A Comparative Study in Light of Qatari Legislation* by lawyer Ahmed Mohamed Mohsen al-Dosari at Building 15 on Thursday, attended by a select group of legal and cultural figures.

Published by Dar Khuttut wa Zilal (Jordan), the book examines the legal concept of witness protection as a key component of criminal justice.

It reviews the evolution of witness protection in international conventions and analyses Qatar's legislative framework and legal and procedural safeguards.

Al-Dosari highlighted that the work addresses a pressing legal challenge, particularly in complex transnational crimes such as terrorism, money laundering, and corruption, where witnesses often represent the primary source of critical evidence.

The Qatari author emphasised that protecting witnesses is essential to ensuring judicial integrity and strengthening trust in the justice system.



The study provides a comparative analytical approach that explores the role of witnesses in uncovering the truth, the challenges of securing their protection, and ways to enhance legal systems to reinforce the rule of law.

The publication contributes to legal scholarship by bridging international agreements and national legislation, enriching criminal justice and witness protection studies within Qatar's legal literature.

Al-Dosari holds a Bachelor of Laws from Jordan's Mutah University (2018), and a Master's in International Criminal Justice from Lusail University (2025).

He is a certified legal trainer in Qatar, a member of the Qatari Lawyers Association, and has authored several research papers on witness protection and comparative legal frameworks.

## Qatar Police Academy highlights importance of institutional cooperation in crime prevention



The Police Academy has hosted a seminar on institutional integration in crime prevention, bringing together security, social, educational and religious stakeholders to discuss ways of strengthening community safety.

Organised by the Academy's Centre for Security Research and Studies in cooperation with Al Rayyan Security Department, the event focused on enhancing coordination among national institutions to support crime prevention efforts and promote social stability.

Participants presented six papers examining the roles of government agencies, families, educational institutions, the media and religious organisations in raising awareness and preventing criminal behaviour.

The speakers emphasised that crime prevention is a shared responsibility requiring sustained cooperation between security, social, educational and community partners.

The seminar concluded with calls for stronger institutional partnerships and expanded awareness programmes to reinforce public safety and social responsibility. - QNA

## Qatar stresses role of international humanitarian law in pathways to peace

Qatar has highlighted the importance of international humanitarian law (IHL) in preserving pathways to peace, during the fifth consultations among states on international humanitarian law and peace held at the headquarters of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Geneva.

Qatar was represented at the meeting by HE the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations Office in Geneva Dr Hind Abdulrahman al-Muftah, who also

spoke on behalf of Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh, Colombia, and Ethiopia as co-chairs of the third track of the Global Initiative on International Humanitarian Law, which focuses on IHL and peace.

HE Dr al-Muftah said that while international humanitarian law does not in itself create peace, its respect can help preserve the conditions that make peace possible.

She noted that adherence to IHL can reduce human suffering, limit destruction, maintain trust between parties, protect es-

sentia societal systems, and keep space open for dialogue.

HE Dr al-Muftah She emphasised that the revised outcome document of the initiative represents a practical tool combining measures that support stronger implementation of humanitarian law, encourage humanitarian dialogue, enrich mediation efforts and peace processes, and guide post-conflict transition phases.

She praised the constructive engagement of participating states, saying that their con-

tributions had helped shape and strengthen the draft document.

HE Dr al-Muftah also noted that the co-chairs and the ICRC would work towards finalising the document, with publication in all official languages of the Global Initiative on International Humanitarian Law expected in late September 2026.

She added that Switzerland and the ICRC will host the global dialogue on International Humanitarian Law in Geneva on November 3-4. - QNA

## Qatar's Permanent Mission to the UN Office in Geneva organises football tournament

Qatar's Permanent Mission to the United Nations Office in Geneva, in co-operation with the UN Office in Geneva, organised the fifth edition of the Diplomatic Community Football Tournament under the theme *Sport for Peace, Hu-*

*man Rights and Development.*

The tournament was sponsored by Qatar's National Human Rights Committee (NHRC), the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC), Qatar National Bank (QNB), and the International Centre for Sport Secu-

rity, with the aim of promoting shared values of co-operation and solidarity and highlighting football's role as a tool for dialogue and partnership.

Eight teams representing the regional groups of Africa, Asia-Pacific, Europe, North and Central America and the Caribbean, South America, the Arab Group, the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC), and the UN Office in Geneva participated in the tournament.

Team Europe won first place, followed by North and Central America and the Caribbean in second, and Asia-Pacific in third.

HE the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the UN Office in Geneva Dr Hind Abdulrahman al-Muftah said that the tournament reflects the link between sport and multilateral co-operation, providing a platform that brings together representatives of countries and international organisations through values of commitment, teamwork, and mutual respect.

She added that a women's friendly match was organised for the first time, in line with Qatar's resolution on empowering women and girls in and through sport.

At a time when the world is placing increasing emphasis on empowering women



and girls in sport, HE the NHRC Secretary-General Sultan bin Hassan al-Jamali said, this tournament confirms that sport can build bridges of understanding between peoples and promote the values of equality, inclusion, and equal opportunities for all without discrimination.

He added that it also reflects the role sport can play in supporting peace and development and strengthening mutual respect among different cultures and societies.

HE al-Jamali expressed appreciation to Qatar's Permanent Mission in Geneva and the tournament partners for ensuring the continuity of the initiative.

QNB chief executive Ghadir Abu Hajleh stressed that QNB recognises that its role extends beyond providing banking services. She said they are committed to support-

ing initiatives that contribute to the sustainable development of the communities in which they operate.

This year's tournament is particularly significant, Hajleh said, as it focuses on empowering women and girls through sport as a key pillar for inclusion, equal opportunities, and participation in advancing development.

The event also featured a special women's sports activity marking one year since the UN Human Rights Council unanimously adopted Resolution 59/17, "Empowering Women and Girls in and through Sport", submitted by Qatar in partnership with Indonesia and Morocco.

At the closing ceremony, HE Dr al-Muftah honoured the winning teams and congratulated the players on their outstanding sportsmanship. - QNA

## Lebanon, Israel, US ink trilateral pact

Reuters/AFP  
Jerusalem/Beirut/Washington

Israel and Lebanon signed a framework agreement in Washington yesterday following several days of talks to secure an end to fighting between Israel and Iran-backed Hezbollah.

Lebanon's ambassador to the US Nada Moawad and her Israeli counterpart Yechiel Leiter signed the trilateral document with the US at the State Department in Washington.

"Today we've taken the first step in what will be a difficult journey, without a doubt, but an important and an essential and a necessary one," US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said before the agreement was inked.

The agreement "begins to put in place a framework for lasting peace and security," he added.

Moawad said the accord "is a first step on the road to restoring Lebanese sovereignty and territorial integrity, securing a permanent and final cessation of hostilities (and) enabling our people to go back to their land".

Leiter said that under the deal, "Iran is out, Hezbollah is out, and the road to peace between Israel and Lebanon is in".

The conflict between Israel and Hezbollah broke out when



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio is seen as Israel's ambassador to the US Yechiel Leiter (seated, left), US State Department Chief of Staff Daniel Holler, and Lebanon's ambassador to the US Nada Moawad (seated, right) sign a framework agreement at the US Department of State in Washington, DC. - AFP

the armed group fired at Israel on March 2, days after the US and Israel attacked Iran.

The Hezbollah attacks triggered Israeli air and ground attacks that have killed more than 4,000 people in Lebanon and displaced more than a million.

The officials did not provide details of the framework deal and did not say how its terms would differ from those included in an April 16 ceasefire deal that pre-

ceded several rounds of US-brokered Israel-Lebanon talks.

Israel's death toll from this round of hostilities with Hezbollah includes at least 32 soldiers and four Israeli civilians.

Hezbollah does not release figures on its war dead.

Reuters reported on May 4 that several thousand Hezbollah fighters had been killed in the war.

The talks in Washington have included discussions on a propos-

al for Israeli forces to hand some of the territory they occupied in southern Lebanon to Lebanon's military.

A State Department official told Reuters on Thursday that Israel had agreed to pull back from some of that territory, something Israeli and Lebanese officials denied.

Before the talks resumed this week, Israel and Hezbollah agreed to halt fire even as Israel kept troops in occupied southern

Lebanon - territory that it describes as a "buffer zone" aimed at thwarting Hezbollah attacks.

Violence has persisted since the ceasefire, with Israel saying yesterday that its troops had struck and killed what the military described as seven Hezbollah members who were operating near the territory it is occupying.

Reuters could not confirm this.

Israeli forces dropped leaflets over the southern Lebanese town of Mansouri yesterday, ordering residents to leave, Lebanese state media reported, the first such order issued since the latest ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah took effect.

A senior Lebanese military official said Israel had recently added Mansouri to its occupation zone.

The official said Lebanese farmers had continued to enter and leave the town, but had not been living there.

An Israeli military spokesperson said the military issued what it described as a "reminder" to the civilian population that "the area is within the security zone in which (Israeli) soldiers operate. It's a reminder not to be in the area so they won't be harmed".

Lebanese officials say Israeli troops are enforcing the zone's northern boundary by firing at anyone approaching it, including civilians and Lebanese soldiers.

## Six settlers charged with 'terror offences' after attack in West Bank

Israeli prosecutors filed charges against six people, including for "acts of terrorism" after a settler attack on a Palestinian village in the occupied West Bank that included the torching of a mosque, police said yesterday.

Palestinians frequently complain that violent acts by settlers in the West Bank often go unpunished.

Indictments have become more commonplace along with the rising frequency of settler attacks, but rights groups say this has not led to greater safety for Palestinians.

"Six indictments were filed for acts of terrorism, arson, sabotage, and violent rioting in the village of Deir Dibwan out of a nationalistic motive," police said in a statement, referring to a village in the central West Bank.

On June 14, Israeli settlers attacked two West Bank villages including Deir Dibwan, with the military saying at the time that security forces had been dispatched to several locations "following reports of arson and violent riots carried out by Israeli civilians".

Police said the investigation revealed that settlers had co-ordinated to enter the village together, masked and carrying flammable substances, tear gas and a knife.

"Upon entering the village, they carried out a series of terrorist acts, which included setting fire to vegetation, torching vehicles, damaging the local mosque, attacking residents' homes, and throwing stones at vehicles and inhabited houses," the statement read.

The police said the latest move by the Jerusalem District Attorney's Office marked the 51st indictment this year "against individuals involved in extreme violence".

More than 500,000 Israelis live in the West Bank - excluding annexed east Jerusalem - in settlements and outposts illegal under international law.

Three million Palestinians also live there.

Israel has occupied the Palestinian territory since 1967 and violence has escalated there since the start of the Gaza war in October 2023. - AFP

## Gazans nourish dreams at twice-bombed culinary school

AFP  
Gaza City

Inside a Gaza City culinary academy that has been bombed and rebuilt twice during the war, students chop, whisk, and plate dishes with quiet determination, committed to mastering their craft despite the hardships that surround them.

At Smile Kitchen Culinary Academy, men and women receive training that brings a semblance of normal life in the otherwise devastated Palestinian territory, as well as valuable skills in an economy battered by years of war.

Huda Zamo, 34, told AFP that she owned an online clothing business before the war, but decided to launch her own food services after being displaced by the war and seeing people's need for food.

"When the war came, everything was destroyed. We went through famine and displacement," she said, adding she learned about the academy via Facebook and figured the classes would be good for her to develop her new business.

According to the UN, at least 1.6mn of Gaza's 2.1mn residents are facing high levels of acute food insecurity mainly due to Israeli restrictions on goods entering the territory.

Ahmed Abu Taha, the school's director, said keeping the school open in Gaza required a lot of logistics that one would not expect elsewhere.

"Smile Kitchen Academy was established in 2016 and was bombed twice (by Israel), in 2021 and 2023," Abu Taha told AFP.

After the latest bombing at the beginning of

the war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, the academy closed for three years, until it finally reopened earlier this year, with new equipment.

"There is strong engagement from students in the Gaza Strip under these difficult circumstances," Abu Taha said, adding that students hope to use their new skillsets in more promising markets.

"Students also aim to obtain an international certificate from the World Chefs organisation in Paris, which qualifies them to work in tourism establishments outside Gaza," he added.

In the kitchen, students wearing white chef's toques and jackets emblazoned with a Palestinian flag on the sleeves labour under the supervision of teacher Nabil al-Shawaf.

Shawaf, a towering man whose jacket is lined with the traditional chequered black-and-white pattern of the Palestinian keffiyeh scarf, said that he had to improvise a lot of aspects of his course because of shortages in the Gaza Strip.

"We are facing difficulties due to the political and economic situation in Gaza and the brutal aggression on the Gaza Strip. There is a shortage of raw materials, and the cost for electricity and fuel is very high," he said.

Trucks of aid and private sector goods have entered Gaza more easily since an October 2025 ceasefire, but international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the UN warn the situation remains volatile, with regular goods still too expensive for Gazans to purchase.

Israel controls all entry points into Gaza, and denies entry to certain goods, including those it says could be repurposed by Palestinian Islamist group Hamas to make weapons.



Palestinian youth learn the basics of cooking at the Smile Kitchen Academy, in the Rimal neighbourhood of Gaza City. - AFP

Gaza does not produce enough food to sustain its population, with 75% of fields once used to grow crops either destroyed or damaged since the start of the war in October 2023, according to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the UN's food agency.

Despite the ceasefire, Israeli attacks have killed people almost daily in Gaza, leaving the students' professional future uncertain.

However, with her new skills, student Zamo feels confident she will be able to bring her new business forward.

"I want to expand it, introduce new dishes, and offer styles that are different from local restaurants," she said.

Prosecutors accused Bensedrine, 75, of falsifying the commission's final report.

Human Rights Watch said in a statement that "Bensedrine has for decades been harassed, jailed, and pushed into exile for her human rights work. Her sentence would keep her in prison until she's 100 years old".

The Paris-headquartered International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) has said the charges against Bensedrine were "groundless".

The commission's final report, published in 2020, called for "dismantling a system of corruption, repression and dictatorship" within state institutions. - AFP

## Tunisian rights activist sentenced to 25 years in prison

Prominent Tunisian rights activist Sihem Bensedrine told AFP yesterday that she had been sentenced to 25 years in prison on charges including falsifying part of a transitional justice commission's final report.

"Of course, this is a decision that has nothing to do with justice. It has to do with a totalitarian re-

gime that wants to erase the legacy of the IVD," she said, referring to the Truth and Dignity Commission of which she was president.

The now-defunct IVD, set up after the 2011 revolution ousted longtime ruler Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, heard testimony from thousands of his victims and those of his predecessor Habib Bourguiba.

COMMUNITY



# GBC brings together Sri Lankans in Qatar

By Joey Aguilar  
Doha

What started as a simple effort to bring Sri Lankans together through sport has evolved into one of the community's most anticipated annual gatherings in Qatar.

The Mahanama College Old Boys' Association (OBA) Qatar Chapter recently staged the third season of the Golden Bowling Championship (GBC) in Doha, drawing strong participation from players, families, and supporters.

Held on June 19 at the Qatar Bowling Federation, the tournament drew strong participation from Sri Lankan expatriates and their families, underscoring its reputation as a key community sporting event in Qatar.

This year's edition featured both team and individual competitions, with 30 OBA and alumni teams battling for honours across the Cup, Plate, Bowl, and Shield categories. The event also included ladies' and mixed-team competitions, alongside more than 40 individual contestants.

Around 250 attendees, including players, family members, community representatives, and sponsors, filled the venue, creating an atmosphere marked by friendly rivalry, enthusiasm, and community spirit.

Imran Anver, general secretary of Mahanama College OBA Qatar Chapter, told Gulf Times that the championship was launched with a simple objective: to bring the Sri Lankan community together through healthy competition and fellowship.

"Over three seasons, we've grown in participation, structure, and inclusivity, opening the floor to men, women, and children," Anver said.

He noted that bowling has provided an inclusive platform that differs from traditionally male-dominated sports such as cricket and football, with women actively



Golden Bowling Championship winners.

participating and earning recognition through the years.

The tournament's growing popularity was evident this season, with registrations closing ahead of schedule because of strong community interest, according to Anver.

He attributed the growth to increasing awareness of the benefits of sport and recreation, stronger community engagement, and the emergence of a wider bowling culture among expatriate groups in Qatar.

"It's become a meaningful community touchpoint. GBC has evolved into a family reunion where children and relatives come to cheer on competing parents and family members," Anver added.

He pointed out that consistent efforts to maintain high standards in organisation and communication have also contributed to the tournament's expanding reach and participation.

More than just a sporting event, Anver said the championship stresses the community's growing appreciation for sports, recreation, and social engagement in Qatar.

"Compared to just a few years ago, the number of sports and recreational events within the com-



Imran Anver, Mahanama College OBA Qatar Chapter general secretary, speaks to the media.

munity has multiplied," he said. "These activities do more than entertain; they support mental wellbeing and bring people together."

He credited community organisations, volunteers, and sponsors for helping sustain such initiatives, noting that they require considerable planning and support.

For organisers, however, the tournament's success is measured by more than trophies and medals. "We told participants from day

one that GBC isn't just about collecting trophies, but about collecting memories and getting to know your community better," Anver said.

He hopes that the championship will inspire other community organisations to launch similar initiatives, creating lasting benefits that extend beyond a single sporting event.

"As part of Qatar's workforce, it's our way of actively contributing to the country we call our second home, supporting its vi-



Mahanama College OBA organising team.



sion and helping position Qatar as a great place to live and work," he added.

The evening concluded with an awards ceremony recognising

outstanding performers across all categories, while celebrating the camaraderie, sportsmanship, and sense of belonging that have become hallmarks of GBC.

## New Parai music track launched in Doha to celebrate Tamil heritage



In a tribute to Tamil cultural heritage, a new Parai music track produced by 'Kaviragam' was officially launched on June 19 at the Indian Cultural Centre (ICC) in Doha.

The event, which celebrated the revival of Parai—an ancient and traditional percussion instrument—was presided over by Professor Muthu from the Manavalakkalai Yoga Centre, who officially unveiled the song.

Representatives from the Muthamil Mandram, including Guru, poet Siva, and poet Mano, participated in the ceremony by releasing the track's QR code, wishing the team success in their cultural endeavour.

Poet Rajamanickam, the creative force behind the project, shared insights into the seven years of intensive research and training that went into the production. He highlighted the instrument's historical significance and the need to preserve it for future generations. The track was formally dedicated to the Doha-based Parai instructor, Nirmal.

The project brings together a talented creative team, with lyrics by poet Rajamanickam, vocals by Karnaprabakaran, music composed by Sadik, cinematography by Vinoth, and production by Kavitha under the 'Kaviragam' banner.

The performance featured collaborative choreography by the Thiruvallur Shakthi Parai and Silambam



troupe, alongside the Thiruvannamalai Ezhuchi Art Group. The production was further bolstered by the support of artists including Inbakalil, Murasu Murugan, and Kalidharan.

The event was compered by Tamil teacher Selvam. Notable attendees included Ibrahim (OTP), Dr Vasuki (Maha Kavi Mandram), Mohan Kumar (Indian Cultural Centre), and prominent businessmen Sakthivel and Rajkumar. The launch concluded with a captivating live Parai performance by the troupe, followed by a dinner. As a gesture of appreciation, books were presented to all the attendees. The effort by 'Kaviragam' to promote Tamil folk traditions on a global stage was highly lauded by the local Tamil community.



## Area 15 Confluence inspires members and welcomes new Toastmasters

Area 15 of District 116 Toastmasters hosted its Area Confluence Meeting on June 14, bringing together members from across the Area for an evening of inspiration, learning, and celebration.

The event attracted more than 30 members and four guests, reflecting the enthusiasm and engagement that continue to define the Toastmasters experience.

Inspired by the warmth, professionalism, and powerful storytelling on display, two guests chose to join Toastmasters on the spot, underscoring the organisation's ability to transform lives through communication and leadership development.

With the Toastmasters year drawing to a close, the confluence was designed around three key objectives: celebrating the achievements of Area 15 clubs, reinforcing efforts toward year-end goals, and creating a strong foundation for incoming club leaders to begin the new term with confidence and momentum.

Themed "One Journey, Many Voices," the meeting showcased three compelling personal stories that resonated deeply with the audience. The speakers shared authentic experiences of growth, resilience, and transformation, demonstrating the power of storytelling to connect, inspire, and motivate. Their presentations, supported by insightful evaluations and dedicated role players, created an engaging and memorable experience for all attendees.

Distinguished Toastmaster Naila Rizvan encouraged both current and incoming leaders to reflect on their journeys, pursue excellence until the very end of the term, and embrace the opportunities that lie ahead. Her keynote provided practical insights, motivation, and a clear roadmap for success, leaving attendees energized and focused on finishing the year strong.

The event recognised outstanding individual achievements, including Midhila Grace Zacharia, who recently secured second place in the International Speech Contest category at the World Malayalam Toastmasters, bringing honour to Area 15 and inspiring fellow members to pursue excellence in their Toastmasters journey.

The event also recognised the collective efforts of leaders and volunteers who have contributed to the success of Area 15 throughout the year. Special appreciation was extended to Nivedita Ketkar, former Area 15 director and current Division A director, for her continued guidance and support. Gratitude was also expressed to Sampath Samarasekara, president's distinguished Division D director and our ex-KEF member, Abdurehman for being our guest.

Area 15 also acknowledged the unwavering support of its senior leaders, Distinguished Toastmasters - Pradip Sadiye and Bindu Pillai, as well as the Executive Committees of all Area 15 clubs whose dedication continues to strengthen the Toastmasters community.



"One Journey, Many Voices" - Members from Area 15 clubs, district leaders, and guests pose for a commemorative photograph following a successful Area Confluence Meeting that inspired learning, collaboration, and growth.

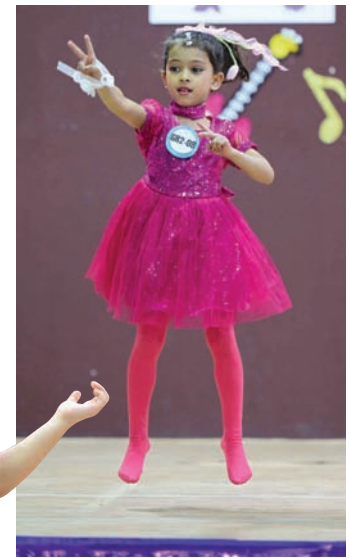


**M**ES Indian School hosted Dazzlora 2026, a two-day kids' fest for students in KG I and KG II, providing a magnificent platform to showcase their talents, creativity, and confidence through a variety of engaging competitions.

The "Groovy Stars" - dance competition brought energy and excitement to the event, as the young performers, dressed in colourful costumes, captivated the audience with lively and well-coordinated dances. The "Sing & Swing" competition by KG I students showcased the children's ability to combine music, movement, and expression.

The "Little Orators" - Elocution Competition for KG II students provided a platform to develop public speaking and self-expression. The "Splash Spark" - Colouring Competition for KG I encouraged creativity as children coloured a tortoise using vibrant shades, while the "Little Sketchers" - Pencil Drawing Competition for

## MES kids fest: A vibrant showcase of young talent



expressing her gratitude to the parents for their unwavering support and encouragement.

Dazzlora was a memorable celebration of creativity, confidence, and self-expression, providing every child with an opportunity to shine and creating lasting memories for students, parents, and teachers. Sahana Anish and Jesna Siju were the teachers in charge of this exquisite kids' fest.

KG II featured the themes "Under the Sea" and "Garden Scenery." The event witnessed enthusias-

tic participation from parents who came to support and encourage their children. The school principal, Dr

Hameeda Kadar, felicitated the young participants and applauded their enthusiasm, creativity, and dedication. She encouraged the

students to continue exploring and developing their talents while

### MES triumphs at Horwitz Bishop Rapid Chess Tournament 2026



The Horwitz Bishop Rapid Chess Tournament 2026, held on June 12, witnessed an outstanding performance by students of MES Indian School, who secured the overall first runner-up trophy, bringing laurels to the institution. In the Under-13 category, Ain Vaibhav (Class VIII-H) emerged as champion, while Evan Varghese Sanju (Class VII-D) secured the first runner-

up position. In the Under-11 category, Edwin Idiculla Sanju (Class VI-I) secured a remarkable position, reflecting commendable consistency and skill. The principal, Dr Hameeda Kadar, congratulated the achievers, appreciating their dedication, discipline, and sportsmanship, and lauded their success in bringing pride to the school.

### Expat organisation launches six-month anti-drug campaign

By Joseph Varghese  
Staff Reporter

**C**oinciding with the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, an expatriate organisation has launched an anti-drug awareness campaign that lasts for six months.

The Diaspora of Malappuram (DoM Qatar), an association of people from Malappuram district, India, has announced a campaign to be held among youth in both Qatar and Kerala, India. The official launch of the campaign was announced by the organisation's president, Usman Kallan.

Named 'AMAL', the six-month anti-drug awareness campaign aims to highlight the dangers that the use of drugs creates among the people, especially among the youth. It aims to protect the youngsters from falling prey to this dangerous practice that can spoil generations.

Chief advisor of DoM Qatar, V C Mashoud, said the campaign targets all those who are likely to



fall victim to drug use. "The campaign is named 'AMAL', which means 'Hope' in Arabic, and aims to create strong awareness against the growing menace of substance abuse in society. We plan to protect against such practices and guide young people toward a healthy and responsible lifestyle." According to the official, the campaign will be implemented through four key focus areas. "AMAL refers to: Awareness, Motivation, Action, and Leadership. We aim to engage the youth in a number of programmes and make sure that they are well aware of the dangers arising out of drug abuse,"

explained Mashoud. As part of the initiative, a variety of programmes have been planned to highlight the campaign's features. These include seminars, discussions, youth empowerment activities, family gatherings, and leadership training sessions. All these activities will be organised both in Qatar and in Kerala. The project and the associate programme will be carried out in collaboration with social, cultural, and educational organisations in Qatar, relevant ministries, and Indian doctors practising in Qatar. The campaign aims to create a drug-free society by engaging all

sections of the community. Siddique Vazhakkad, Dr Shafeeq Mampad, Dr Amanullah Vadakkangara, and Saleem Rose are among the officials spearheading the campaign with the necessary support and guidance. A formal inauguration of the campaign took place yesterday, and Abdul Latheef Feroke, State Secretary of the Kerala Lahari Nirmaarjjana Samithi, delivered the keynote address. Prominent personalities from Qatar's social, cultural, educational, and media sectors, along with representatives of various organisations, took part in the event.

## BPS celebrates International Museum Day with Heritage Exhibition

**A**s part of the CBSE-mandated YUVA Club activities, Birla Public School (BPS) organised a Heritage Exhibition in observance of International Museum Day. The event, conducted by members of the YUVA Club, saw enthusiastic participation by students in Grades VI-VIII.

The exhibition was inaugurated by Dr Anand R Nair, principal of BPS, in the presence of the vice-principals, Radhika Rele and Edna Fernandes, and the heads of various sections. The principal commended the students for their dedicated efforts and highlighted the importance of preserving and promoting cultural heritage. He encouraged students to develop a deeper appreciation for the rich traditions and historical legacies that shape societies.

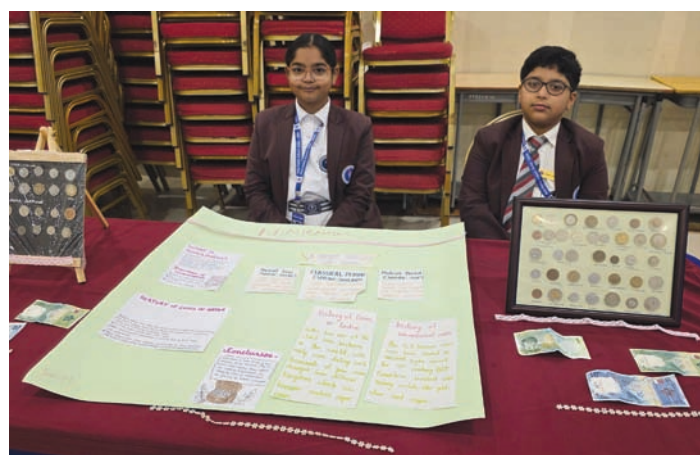
The exhibition showcased a remarkable blend of Indian and Qatari heritage, reflecting the cultural diversity and historical richness of both nations. Students presented an impressive array of exhibits, including models of iconic monuments, traditional artworks, coins, cultural artefacts, and food items that represented the unique customs and traditions of India and Qatar.

Demonstrating exceptional creativity, research, and presentation skills, the young participants confidently explained the historical and cultural significance of



their exhibits to visitors. The event provided an engaging platform for students to explore, appreciate, and preserve cultural heritage while fostering meaningful cross-cultural understanding.

The Heritage Exhibition successfully promoted cultural awareness, historical understanding, and a sense of pride in heritage among students. Teachers and visitors highly appreciated the initiative and commended the YUVA Club members for organising an informative, educational, and meaningful event.





# Ebola deaths exceed 300 in DRC in one month: Health authorities

AFP  
Kinshasa

The Ebola epidemic has claimed more than 300 lives in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a little over one month after it was declared, health authorities said yesterday.

The deadly viral disease, which spreads through direct contact with bodily fluids, can cause severe bleeding and organ failure.

A total of 304 people in the DRC have now died of the virus, from 1,115 confirmed infections since the outbreak was detected on May 15, giving a mortality rate of 26.3%, the National Public Health Institute (INSP) said.

This is a jump from the 202 deaths confirmed on June 18 by the African Union's health agency,

from 875 confirmed infections — a mortality rate of 23%.

The Red Cross warned last week that the outbreak of the haemorrhagic fever has yet to peak and could take up to a year to contain.

In some rare good news, the DRC authorities announced in early June that several Ebola patients had been treated and cured.

Responders to the epidemic, the 17th to hit the vast, unstable central African country, face towering challenges. No approved vaccines or treatments exist for the Bundibugyo strain of the virus responsible for the latest outbreak to hit the DRC.

The three affected provinces in eastern DRC — Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu — have been plagued for three decades by conflict and mass displacement, complicating the response.



Healthcare workers carry a patient suffering at the Ebola Treatment Center (ETC) in Bunia, Ituri yesterday. (AFP)

The outbreak has spread to neighbouring Uganda, where containment measures have been effective. Kampala has reported 20 confirmed cases nationwide, including two deaths since May 15.

Most of those infected are Congolese nationals who have travelled to Uganda.

On Wednesday, France reported the outbreak's first confirmed case of Ebola outside Africa — a Congo-

lese doctor who was working in the DRC for the international medical aid NGO ALIMA.

The World Health Organisation says there is minimal risk of the virus spreading in Europe and there is no need for travel restrictions.

Air France, on which the doctor flew back to France, has nevertheless suspended all flights to Kinshasa for several days.

The vast majority of cases in the DRC have been detected in Ituri.

The mineral-rich province is plagued with unrest from a string of rival armed groups, and frequent population movements favour the spread of the disease.

More than 91% of all infections have been registered in the provincial capital, Bunia, and more than 82% of all deaths.

Efforts to contain the virus have been ratcheted up in Ituri.

But healthcare facilities — which often operate with limited resources — still lack basic equipment and supplies, such as personal protective equipment and chlorine.

Many clinics set up by the WHO and aid agencies are close to full, the country's public health agency said. At least 78 healthcare workers have been infected with the virus, and 18 have died, it added.

Medical and aid workers also have to contend with deep mistrust from some local communities.

Some families have demanded that hospitals hand over the bodies of the deceased, not realising that touching the body puts them at risk of contamination.

The reluctance of some families to allow post-mortem examinations on the victims is also leading to an underestimation of the number of cases, officials said.

# Former NSA Bolton pleads guilty in classified files case

AFP  
Washington

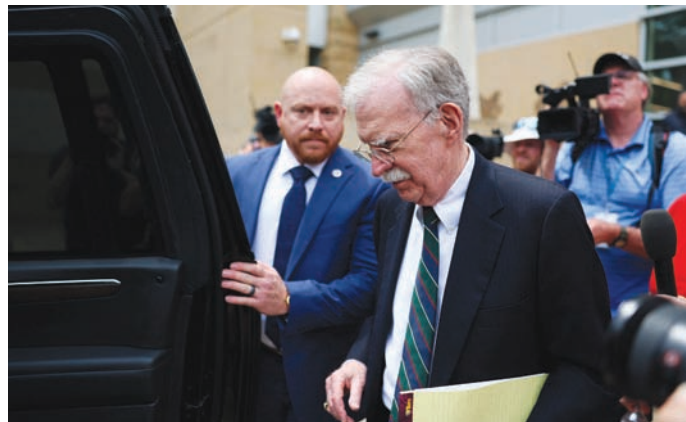
John Bolton, who served as Donald Trump's national security advisor before becoming an outspoken critic of the US president, pleaded guilty yesterday to one count of retaining classified documents.

Asked by federal judge Theodore Chuang if he was guilty, the 77-year-old veteran diplomat replied: "I am, Your Honour, and I'm sorry for it."

Bolton, who faces a maximum prison sentence of five years, must also pay a \$2.25mn fine and forfeit his federal pension as part of a plea agreement, the Department of Justice said.

Sentencing was set for October 28. "As Mr Bolton admitted, he shared more than 1,000 pages of information about his day-to-day activities as the National Security Advisor, including information related to national defense with two individuals who neither had the security clearances nor the need to know that information," prosecutor Kelly Hayes said after the hearing.

"Remarkably, he did so using his personal email account and non-government messaging applications," she said of his actions



Former White House national security adviser John Bolton leaves the US District Court in Greenbelt, Maryland, yesterday. (Reuters)

from April 2018 and September 2019.

Bolton, one of several Trump foes to be hit with criminal charges since the Republican president returned to the White House, was indicted in October on 18 counts of transmitting and retaining top secret national defense information. The two individuals have not been identified, but Bolton is believed to have shared the information with his wife and daughter.

The material was allegedly later used in a book that Bolton wrote, "The Room Where It Happened," that was highly critical of the

Trump administration.

Bolton, who served as Trump's national security advisor during his first term, frequently appears on television news shows and in print to condemn the man he has called "unfit to be president."

Amplifying the impact of Bolton's actions, his personal email was hacked by an Iranian-linked actor after he left office in September 2019, authorities said.

"He reported that hack to law enforcement but did not tell the agents or anyone else in the US government that the account contained national defense information," the Department of

Justice said.

Trump has repeatedly lashed out at his former aide and withdrew his security detail shortly after returning to the White House in January of last year.

The Trump Justice Department has sought to bring cases against other prominent critics of the president, including New York Attorney General Letitia James and former FBI director James Comey.

Comey was indicted in April for allegedly threatening Trump's life, five months after a previous case against the ex-FBI chief was thrown out.

The indictment by a grand jury in North Carolina stems from an Instagram post Comey made that showed the numbers "86 47" spelled out in seashells on a beach.

Trump has alleged that "86" was slang for kill and "47" was a reference to his being the 47th president.

The case against James, which has since been dismissed, centered on an allegedly falsified mortgage application.

Unlike the James and Comey cases, however, the investigation into Bolton's alleged mishandling of classified material began during the administration of former president Joe Biden.

# US pledges \$150mn in aid, sends warships in Venezuela quake relief

The US said it was deploying two warships, transport planes and helicopters and mobilising \$150 mn in aid to assist earthquake-hit Venezuela.

The aid push follows back-to-back 7.2 and 7.5 magnitude earthquakes that struck near Venezuela's Caribbean coast on Wednesday, collapsing buildings, damaging the country's main airport and prompting warnings of heavy casualties. At least 188 people have died.

The US military's Southern Command said in a statement that its forces would provide support for search and rescue teams and deliver critical, life-saving assistance.

The forces to be deployed include the amphibious transport ship USS Fort Lauderdale and the littoral combat ship USS Billings (LCS 15) as well as C-17 Globemaster and C-130 Hercules transport aircraft. Earlier, the State Department announced an aid package would include \$50 mn in new bilateral awards to aid groups already working in Venezuela, as well as a \$100 mn contribution to a UN humanitarian fund for the country.

The funding will support organisations including World Vision, Samaritan's Purse, Catho-

lic Relief Services, International Medical Corps, the International Organisation for Migration and the World Food Program, the department said.

Washington is also deploying a Disaster Assistance Response Team and two urban search-and-rescue units from Fairfax County, Virginia, and Los Angeles County, California. "We have a whole-of-government response. It'll be big, it'll be fast, and it'll be effective," US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on a visit to Bahrain, telling reporters the American military would play a "big logistical role."

State Department officials said Washington was coordinating with interim Venezuelan authorities, aid partners and the private sector to assess needs and deliver assistance in the crucial first days after the disaster. The US response comes as ties between Washington and Caracas have warmed in since US forces captured former president Nicolas Maduro in January and the Trump administration began working with an interim government led by Delcy Rodriguez.

The US joins Spain, France, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Cuba and other nations that have offered rescuers, medical personnel, aircraft or humanitarian supplies. (AFP)

## US announces fresh sanctions targeting both sides in Sudan war

The United States yesterday announced sanctions on several individuals and organisations linked to the war in Sudan, accusing them of supplying "weapons, explosives, and foreign fighters" to both sides of the conflict. Sudan has been mired since April 2023 in a brutal war between the army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

The conflict has killed tens of thousands and, at its height, forced more than 14 million to flee their homes, according to the United Nations. There have been allegations of crimes against humanity. Washington has been actively involved in negotiations and its fresh sanctions targeted both sides. The United States called for "an end to all external support to the belligerents and urges all our partners to press for a comprehensive cessation of hostilities and increased, unhindered humanitarian access," State Department spokesperson Tommy Pigott said in a statement.

The networks targeted by yesterday's sanctions have "prolonged a conflict that has created the world's worst humanitarian crisis and provided space for terrorist groups to operate," he added. Among the newly sanctioned companies were affiliates of Defence Industries Systems (DIS), Sudan's largest defense sector enterprise. DIS, which supports the Sudanese army, was itself sanctioned by Washington in mid-2023. Another Sudanese company is accused of importing uniforms and footwear "worn by Sudanese intelligence personnel from an Emirati company."

Since last year, the US government has targeted a transnational network allegedly led by a retired Colombian military officer that is accused of supplying fighters to the RSF. (AFP)

# Trump climate pushback spurs legal battles: report

AFP  
Paris

President Donald Trump's rollback of federal regulations has spurred an unprecedented wave of lawsuits in defence of climate protections, a new global analysis of litigation trends showed this week.

The trend was most prevalent in the US, but similar legal battles over the dismantling of climate policies were playing out globally at a scale "without precedent", the report said.

"Between last year and this year, the climate movement has responded to that pushback," report co-author Joana Setzer from the Grantham Research Institute at the London School of Economics told AFP.

"What we see is an increase in litigation that is challenging de-regulation"

These "protective" cases are brought not to pursue new climate goals but to seek to keep hard-won policies or pledges in place, she said.

One in five new climate cases in the US in 2025 fell into this class of legal action, the report said, a sharp rise from Trump's first term in office.

"The legal landscape of protective climate litigation in the US is evolving rapidly and will be a critical area to track through the remainder of 2026," the report said.

But a "significant number" of similar cases were filed outside the US in 2025, the report said, including in Europe and Brazil.

Courtrooms have increasingly become a battleground in the fight for stronger climate action in recent years.

Activists have sued fossil fuel companies and gone to The Hague in an effort to hold governments accountable for their greenhouse

gas emissions.

Last year, the International Court of Justice ruled that states were obliged to tackle climate change under international law in a landmark ruling.

On Thursday, a French court ordered oil and gas giant TotalEnergies to account for its clients' emissions in a closely watched climate case.

More than 3,600 climate cases have been filed over the past 40 years — the overwhelming majority of them in the US.

But most cases have been lodged since 2015, the year of the Paris Agreement on climate change.

Climate litigation is expanding and "maturing", the report said.

Grenada, Guatemala, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Singapore and Zambia recorded their first climate cases in 2025, it added.

But opponents have also used the law to thwart climate action. The report underscored the "in-

creasing scale, coordination and institutional depth" of these efforts.

It cited the proposed "Stop the Climate Shakedowns Act" in the US, which seeks to shield polluting companies from legal action.

This "concerning new development" could restrain access to justice and had inspired similar policies in New Zealand and Germany, said Setzer.

"It suggests others are paying attention... It's the kind of idea that travels," said Setzer.

The report also warned that lawsuits against AI data centres were growing, particularly in Ireland where these facilities require a large share of national energy demand.

This was "the next area that is set to grow massively in the US and across the world, as people challenge their climate impacts in the courts," said report co-author Catherine Higham.

# South Africa processes over 15,000 Malawians for repatriation ahead of protests

AFP  
Johannesburg

South Africa has processed more than 15,000 Malawian nationals to exit the country ahead of next week's anti-immigration marches that many fear could turn violent, the justice minister said yesterday, with thousands of people in the country awaiting clearance in makeshift encampments.

Citizen-led groups have issued an unofficial June 30 deadline for undocumented foreign nationals to leave the country and called nationwide marches, raising fears of renewed xenophobic violence.

"To date, a total of 15,162 Malawian nationals have been

processed for deportation and repatriation, and more are still undergoing the verification process," said Minister of Justice Mmamoloko Kubayi.

Living conditions in parts of southeastern KwaZulu-Natal province, where Malawians had gathered for weeks, had become "untenable", she said.

Growing security fears after businesses were looted and foreigners targeted have forced several countries, including Malawi, Ghana, Nigeria, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Kenya and the Democratic Republic of Congo, to offer voluntary repatriations for their nationals.

South Africa's Border Management Authority said it processed 8,200 foreign nationals for repa-



Supporters chant slogans during a protest in Estcourt yesterday. South African President Cyril Ramaphosa vowed this week to crush any attempts to destabilise the nation during planned anti-immigrant marches next week, amid a wave of xenophobia. (AFP)

triation between June 12 and 24 at the Beitbridge border post with Zimbabwe.

It said 6,709 Malawian nationals were transported in 112 buses and 1,521 Zimbabwean nationals in 26 buses.

"This brings the total number of repatriated foreign nationals processed at Beitbridge only during this period to 8,230 persons," it said.

South Africa has been on edge following weeks of sometimes violent xenophobic unrest that has left at least three people dead, according to official sources.

Mozambican authorities put the toll among their nationals at five.

Minister Kubayi said two were killed in the unrest, while three died in a car accident, and another Mozambican national was report-

edly killed in an altercation at an entertainment venue.

The six have been repatriated, she said.

A Malawian national was also killed during a march in Pietermaritzburg, Kubayi said, adding that the body had not yet been repatriated.

International Relations Minister Ronald Lamola said concerns had been raised over groups that "move from house to house enforcing the law", describing it as "problematic".

The latest tensions come ahead of local government elections scheduled for November 4.

Past flare-ups of violence targeting undocumented foreign nationals have been deadly, with 62 people killed in riots in 2008.

# Venezuela quakes: Over 50,000 missing as death toll soars to 920

AFP  
La Guaira, Venezuela

More than 50,000 people were missing yesterday after twin earthquakes in Venezuela, the United Nations' aid chief told AFP as international rescue teams and sniffer dogs arrived to join a desperate search for survivors. The death toll was now at 920.

According to UN aid chief Tom Fletcher, "We've got over 50,000 people missing, over 900 people dead, so a massive job to go through the rubble," he told AFP. Rescuers used heavy machinery, but also their bare hands, in a race to claw out people caught under rubble in the worst-hit earthquake zone, north of the capital Caracas.

At one of the flattened buildings, AFP saw workers using sledgehammers to break the debris and calling for "absolute silence" to detect cries from survivors.

Oil-rich Venezuela is facing its worst natural disaster in more than a century after more than a



The rubble of a collapsed building after earthquakes hit the country, in La Guaira, Venezuela, yesterday. (Reuters)

decade of economic collapse followed out hospitals and public services, driving millions to leave the country.

Rescue efforts have been slow with desperate calls for more heavy machinery as families stand by helpless to pull out loved ones they could hear alive in the rubble.

"It is a lot of rock, and with bare hands it is impossible," said Amparo del Giudice, scrabbling through rubble in search of her son.

Two earthquakes, measured at magnitudes 7.2 and 7.5, hit northern Venezuela within less than a minute of each other on Wednesday night, sending hundreds of

buildings tumbling. National Assembly President Jorge Rodríguez said Thursday that more than 200 people were confirmed trapped alive. The UN humanitarian agency OCHA said search and rescue teams from at least 17 countries were being mobilised to help find survivors. Spanish, Salvadoran, Swiss, Colombian, and Mexican rescue teams were already on the ground.

"Even before the earthquakes, millions of people across Venezuela were facing food insecurity, collapsing health services, protection risks, and limited access to basic services," the UN and other aid agencies said.

"The international community must not allow this emergency to deepen into a larger human tragedy."

Earthquakes of similar magnitude claimed more than 200,000 lives in Haiti in January 2010 and 73,000 lives in Pakistan-administered Kashmir in October 2005.

The dead included nine Portuguese nationals, four Spaniards, two Brazilians, two Chinese nationals and one Italian-Venezuelan.

Fifty-six Portuguese citizens and 120 Spaniards were missing or otherwise unaccounted for, according to their respective governments. Satellite photographs of La Guaira – the worst hit area north of Caracas – showed one crumpled residential complex after another. AFP reporters witnessed residents looting a local supermarket in the city on Thursday.

"This isn't the time for looting, it's time to enforce the law," said Argenis Mendez, a local resident who lamented the lack of help.

"The authorities are useless; useless because the military should be here with all the heavy machinery they have," he added.

Venezuela's northern coast sits on a boundary between the Caribbean and South American tectonic plates, but has not experienced a significant quake since 1997, when 73 people died. Another quake in 1967 killed 236 people.

Wednesday's 7.5-magnitude earthquake was the most powerful since October 29, 1900, when a 7.7-magnitude tremor struck offshore.

## US lifts some Venezuela sanctions to help rescue efforts

The US government has lifted a number of economic sanctions against Venezuela for four months to facilitate relief operations following a pair of deadly earthquakes that jolted the country. "All transactions related to earthquake relief efforts in Venezuela...are authorised" until October 23, according to a license issued Thursday evening by the US Treasury.

International aid has begun flowing into the country, home to nearly 30 mn people whose economy has been in crisis for years.

Teams from Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, Italy, Mexico, Switzerland and the US have already arrived, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Additional teams from the United Kingdom, Czech Republic, Ecuador, France, Germany, Jordan, the Netherlands, Qatar and Spain are being deployed.

Washington had imposed sweeping economic sanctions on Venezuela, particularly from 2019 onward, in an effort to squeeze the leftist government of president Nicolas Maduro, whom the US considered illegitimate. (AFP)

## International teams rushing to Venezuela: UN

AFP  
Geneva

International search and rescue teams from at least 17 countries are being scrambled to Venezuela to help look for survivors of devastating twin earthquakes, the UN said yesterday.

Getting those teams to the scene is the "top priority," the UN humanitarian agency OCHA said.

"Earthquakes are one of the most devastating things that can happen to any country," spokesman Jens Laerke told reporters in Geneva. "But what we are seeing right now is also an international mobilisation at its very best. The entire humanitarian system is moving very fast, and at scale."

So far, a total of 25 teams – 17 national urban search and rescue teams, with the rest emergency medical response teams – were being deployed, with a total of 1,000 rescue personnel, said Laerke. Teams from Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, Italy, Mexico, Switzerland and the US were already in Venezuela, he said.

Teams from Britain, the Czech Republic, Ecuador, France, Germany, Jordan, the Netherlands, Qatar and Spain among others are also being mobilised.

UN and other humanitarian agencies insisted yesterday that the international community "must not allow this emergency to deepen into a larger human tragedy" in fragile Venezuela.

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee – a forum of UN and non-UN humanitarian organisation chiefs – called for "rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access" to those affected.

The World Health Organisation said the immediate needs included

mass casualty management and trauma care, particularly in areas with collapsed buildings.

"The overriding priority is to rescue as many people as possible while urgently providing life-saving health care to the injured," said Ciro Ugarte, emergencies director for PAHO, the UN health agency's Americas regional branch.

"The first 72 hours are critical to saving lives," he said, speaking from Washington.

The number of deaths and injuries would "significantly increase" in the coming hours and days, he warned.

Ugarte said the earthquakes had hit a fragile health system, but more than 15 health ministries in the region had pledged support and were ready to deploy teams. He said PAHO experts were mapping the affected health facilities.

They had identified more than 90 hospitals which were exposed to shaking intensities beyond six and seven on the Modified Mercalli intensity scale.

"We are prioritising those facilities, including the assessment of the structural safety, emergency department capacities, operating theatres, inpatient beds, blood supply, and oxygen," he said.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the world's largest humanitarian network, said the first 17 tonnes of humanitarian aid was leaving from the IFRC's logistics hub in Panama. It includes kitchen sets, hygiene kits, mosquito nets, tents and blankets.

The IFRC has released two mn Swiss francs (\$2.5mn) from its Disaster Response Emergency Fund, and launched an appeal for 50 mn Swiss francs to help the Venezuelan Red Cross assist 300,000 people.

## Trump consolidates rightward shift in Latin America

A victory by hard-right candidate Abelardo de la Espriella in Colombia's presidential election was another diplomatic victory in Latin America for US leader Donald Trump, who is pushing for the region to crack down on organised crime and migration.

Since Trump returned to the White House a year and a half ago, Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Honduras have shifted to the right or consolidated conservative realignments.

The shock US ouster of Venezuela's Nicolas Maduro in January has led to unprecedented collaboration with the administration of interim president Delcy Rodríguez, who remains in power as she bends to Washington's demands.

The Trump administration now has its sights set on Cuba, enforcing a choking oil embargo that has forced the communist government to hastily adopt economic reforms.

This heavy-handed approach has drawn barely any protest from Mexico and Brazil – the last major leftist strongholds in Latin America – or from Colombian



A man rides past election campaign posters in Bogota. (AFP)

President Gustavo Petro, whose days in office are numbered.

Millionaire lawyer-turned-politician De la Espriella "speaks the language many in Washington want to hear: tougher enforcement," said Rebecca Bill Chavez, president of the Inter-American Dialogue think tank.

Trump had enthusiastically backed De la Espriella in the Colombian vote and has pledged stronger co-operation "which will bring new levels of Greatness for both of our Countries!"

In March, following the deadly military operation to seize Ma-

duro in Caracas, Trump established the "Shield of the Americas" grouping alongside allies in Latin America to boost regional security.

Evan Ellis at the Center for Strategic and International Studies said a conservative-led Colombia will likely join the effort.

"I would indeed expect greater Colombian co-operation in supporting US actions against designated terrorist groups across the region, far beyond Colombia," he told AFP.

One point of friction in the ambitious US security agenda had

been discord between Ecuadoran President Daniel Noboa and Colombia's Petro over anti-narcotics military operations conducted by Washington and Quito.

"With Daniel Noboa, de la Espriella, and Washington all pushing in the same direction, the politics are as aligned as they have been in years," Chavez said.

Across the region, several conservative governments have adopted Trump's militarised anti-narcotics strategy, as well as the mass incarceration model championed by El Salvador's Nayib Bukele.

Panama is preparing to announce changes to its prison system in July following inmate escapes, while Honduras plans to purchase drones from Ukraine for its anti-drug efforts.

In Washington, debate at the Organization of American States underscores that this ideological shift is not being driven solely by Trump.

Latin American views on organised crime and migration pressures have shifted right, as evidenced by Chile, where ultra-conservative Jose Antonio Kast won the presidency on pledges of harsh crackdowns. (AFP)

## Ultimatum to armed groups to surrender in Colombia

Colombia's hard-right president-elect Abelardo de la Espriella this week gave the country's guerrilla groups one month to surrender, taking a tough stand on an issue that helped propel him to victory.

Last week De la Espriella won tightly-fought presidential election by less than a percentage point as Colombia endures its highest levels of violence in a decade. "To all those acting outside the law, you have one month to



Colombia's president-elect Abelardo de la Espriella. (AFP)

arrange your submission," the millionaire lawyer said in his first speech since official results confirmed his electoral win.

"In my administration, there will be no generous offers or unacceptable concessions like those they received from the regime that is coming to an end," he added, in reference to the outgoing administration that favoured dialogue with armed groups.

During the campaign, he told AFP he wanted to conduct bomb-

ing campaigns against guerrillas and construct "mega-prisons" like those of El Salvador's President Nayib Bukele. His victory marks the end of Colombia's first-ever leftist government led by President Gustavo Petro.

The president-elect once called for the left to be "gutted." In a report published Thursday, the UN said drug crops in Colombia, the world's largest cocaine producer, increased by 3.5% in 2024 as compared to the previous year. (AFP)

## Socialism with a twist or crony capitalism? Cuban reforms spark debate

AFP  
Havana

Cuba's communist president has cited China and Vietnam as models for a historic shift towards a market economy that was hurriedly pushed through last week to try to end a severe crisis.

But some worry that Russian-style crony capitalism could be on the menu instead.

Under immense pressure from US sanctions, including a crippling fuel blockade, Cuba's government last week drew a line under nearly seven decades of central planning.

Unveiling 176 reforms that represent a seismic change to the island's socialist model, it said state-owned enterprises would be converted into joint-stock companies and opened up to private investors, private banks would be authorized and private developers would be allowed to build tourist infrastructure.

President Miguel Diaz-Canel said the measures, which also in-

cluded sweeping changes to land use, aimed to "preserve" socialism rather than bury it.

But economists warned that a politically-connected elite would profit most from a rushed transition implemented without any semblance of democratic reforms.

Spain-based Cuban economist Pedro Monreal warned that a quick-fire sale of state enterprises "without robust legal safeguards" could result in "the capture of state assets by insiders well-connected to those in power."

"I inevitably think of the 'crony capitalism' of the Russian transition," he wrote on X, referring to the former communist officials who snapped up state assets at knock-down prices after the break-up of the Soviet Union.

Fellow Cuban economist Ricardo Torres, a research fellow at the American University in Washington, issued a similar warning.

The "structural conditions for insider capture are present," he told AFP, noting that there are "no independent valuation mechanisms, no competitive bidding re-



Cuban soldiers head to clear rubbish from street-corner dumps. (AFP)

quirements, and no oversight body insulated from party control."

Former president Raul Castro, Fidel's brother, who led the country from 2006 to 2018, regularly cited Vietnam as an inspiration for his timid reform effort starting in 2010, when he boosted small private businesses and legalized home sales.

Communist Vietnam has become one of southeast Asia's fastest growing economies since introducing market-led reforms in the 1980s.

In China, meanwhile, Deng Xiaoping's "socialism with Chinese characteristics" has produced hundreds of billionaires and major homegrown companies such as in-

ternet giants Alibaba and Tencent.

London-based Cuban economist Daniel Torralbas argued that neither China nor Vietnam served as a useful comparison for Cuba because their transformation was "much more gradual."

"Both began with agricultural reforms that lasted several years, and then the reforms expanded to promoting foreign direct investment, international capital, the creation of special economic zones, and, of course, the expansion of the role of private property in the economy."

Cuba's opening up, by contrast, comes "at its worst moment," he said, when the economy is at rock bottom and US sanctions, including the fuel blockade, have caused an exodus of foreign investors and tourists.

Alexei, a 52-year-old building supervisor in Havana, recalled Mikhail Gorbachev's 1989 visit to Cuba, when the Soviet leader touted his perestroika reforms to a skeptical Fidel Castro and suggested that Cuba, too, needed to adapt. "The best time to implement

these reforms was in the 1990s," Alexei, who did not wish to be identified when talking about government policy, said, echoing a sentiment voiced by many Cubans.

Santiago, an engineer who worked in the Soviet Union in the 1980s, said the move to privatize chunks of the economy was long overdue, "because the state can't be dealing with simple things like fixing a television."

But the 59-year-old, like many Cubans who spoke to AFP, was worried about the pace of the changes and the risk of the island's most vulnerable being left behind.

In a recent opinion article in Time magazine, Torres, the economist, urged Havana to "resist the temptation to leap from bureaucratic centralism to a harsh, socially detached form of capitalism."

He called for the preservation of Cuba's core values: "that education is a fundamental good, that access to healthcare should not depend solely on purchasing power, and that exclusion of whole communities, whole generations, is not an acceptable price for growth."



## Small aircraft crashes into Beijing's tallest building

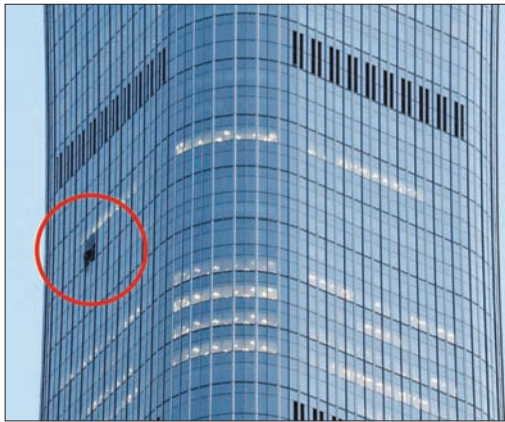
Reuters  
Beijing

An aircraft about the size of a car crashed into Beijing's tallest building, CITIC Tower, yesterday, two bystanders told Reuters, as police closed off roads around the skyscraper and stopped passersby from filming the scene.

The building, known as CITIC Tower or China Zun, is a 108-storey skyscraper in Beijing's central business district. It is the headquarters of the state-owned conglomerate CITIC Group.

There was a heavy police presence at the site, with some approach roads closed to cars. Police prevented some people from taking pictures and asked others to delete those they had taken while ushering people away from the building.

Two glass panels on a high floor were damaged. There was no immediate official comment. Beijing's municipal government did not immediately respond to a faxed request for comment from Reuters outside of business hours.



The damaged exterior of CITIC Tower (Circled), also known as China Zun, in Beijing, yesterday. (Reuters)

A courier whom Reuters spoke to near the building said he had rushed over to CITIC Tower around 6pm local time from a nearby location after hearing a loud crash as a aircraft about the size of a car hit the building.

"It was so loud - louder than fireworks," he said. He said he had shot a video of the aircraft sticking out of the building, but later deleted it because he was scared of getting caught by police.

Another courier whom Reuters spoke to said he had come to the scene after seeing unverified social media images showing wreckage of a small aircraft on a road next to the building.

## Indonesia to cut spending further on free-meals scheme

Reuters  
Jakarta

Indonesia will reduce spending on its free-meals programme, possibly by around 40tn rupiah (\$2.2bn) this year, the finance minister said yesterday, amid growing concerns about the cost and governance of the scheme.

Purbaya Yudhi Sadewa told reporters a budget efficiency plan had been discussed with the National Nutrition Agency, which runs the programme. The NNA would determine the final figure and inform President Prabowo Subianto before releasing it publicly, he said.

"There will be further savings from the programme and I think quite significant," Purbaya said. He answered "maybe" when asked if the cuts would be 40tn rupiah. The minister did not comment on whether there would be a reduction in the number of schoolchildren, toddlers, pregnant women, and breastfeeding mothers covered

by the scheme, which was a key election promise of Prabowo. On Thursday, Reuters reported that Jakarta was weighing cuts of more than \$2bn to the programme and the number of recipients could be cut to 49mn from a current 62.5mn. The initial target of the programme was to provide meals for 83mn people. The budget for the programme this year was initially set at 335tn rupiah, making it one of the biggest allocations to a single project. In May, the planned spending was cut to 268tn rupiah.

Purbaya said the "budget sharpening" and lower global oil prices would give the government more room to maintain the fiscal deficit below the mandated level of 3% of GDP this year.

He said the NNA had asked the Finance Ministry to help it monitor the implementation of the programme.

The flagged lower spending comes as Jakarta seeks to reduce pressure on its budget position, which has been stretched by factors including higher oil prices and a weaker rupiah currency.

## TikTok, YouTube deactivate 4.7mn child accounts in Indonesia

Social media companies TikTok and YouTube have deactivated a total of around 4.7mn accounts belonging to children under the age of 16 in Indonesia, the country's communications minister said, as its social media curbs began to take effect.

Here are the details:

TikTok, developed by Chinese technology company ByteDance, has deactivated 4.1mn accounts, while Alphabet's Google's video platform YouTube has deactivated 600,000 accounts. Communications and Digital Minister Meutya Hafid said late on Thursday, adding that the ministry wanted others to follow.

Neither company responded immediately to a request for comment. In March, Indonesia issued a regulation which requires social media companies with platforms it deems high risk to deactivate accounts belonging to children under 16, which have so far included X, Meta's Instagram and videogame platform Roblox.

"We're not just delaying a child's access, but we want behaviours from platforms to change, too," Meutya said on Thursday, adding that the ministry is currently checking self-assessment reports by the companies. Indonesia's curbs, which the government says are intended to reduce the risk of cyberbullying and addiction, follow a ban in Australia last year over concerns about the potential harm social media poses to the mental health of young people.

Australia's groundbreaking experiment is being closely watched, with countries around the world seeking to emulate it amid concerns about the mental and physical health of minors.

Britain announced this month that it planned wider restrictions that include gaming and live-streaming platforms. (Reuters)

## Magnitude 6.5 quake hits off southern Philippines

AFP  
Manila

A 6.5-magnitude earthquake struck off the southern Philippines yesterday, the United States Geological Survey said, less than three weeks after a major tremor in the same area left more than 80 people dead.

The quake struck at 7:42pm at a depth of 52.4km (33 miles) in the waters about 35km southwest of Mindanao island's Jose Abad Santos town, according to the USGS, which revised the magnitude from an initial 6.7.

No tsunami alert was issued. Santa Maria town rescue official Jerson Talahig told AFP there were no immediate reports of casualties or damage.

"It was kind of strong, but it was quick. We saw the table and some of the lights shaking," he said.

The 7.8-magnitude tremor that hit Mindanao on June 8 brought down buildings, triggered landslides and displaced thousands on the southern island, while also setting off

tsunami warnings across the region.

The powerful quake forced the seabed upwards by two metres (6.6 feet) on a long stretch of the coast, pushing previously submerged coral above the water and extending the shoreline by as much as 200 metres in a geological phenomenon known as "coastal uplift".

A series of strong aftershocks rocked the area from about two hours after the first quake, including a 6.5-magnitude tremor.

As of yesterday, the June 8 quake had killed 81 people and injured more than 1,300.

Earthquakes are a near-daily occurrence in the Philippines, which is situated on the Pacific "Ring of Fire", an arc of intense seismic activity stretching from Japan through Southeast Asia and across the Pacific basin.

The Cotabato Trench, which lies as close as 50km (31 miles) off the coast of southern Mindanao, is the site of frequent seismic activity, including a "swarm" of thousands of mostly small earthquakes recorded in January.

## Korea says it will train 500,000 'drone warriors' to counter North Korea

Reuters  
Seoul

Republic of Korea will rapidly expand its drone and counter-drone capabilities to counter North Korea, including by training 500,000 "drone warriors" and distributing tens of thousands of unmanned systems across front-line units, the Defence Ministry said yesterday. Defence Minister Ahn Gyu-back said the military planned to produce 110,000 drones by 2029 for deployment across the army, navy, air force and marines, but the ministry later revised this to about 60,000, with around 11,000 to be introduced in 2026. It said the systems would be issued across services, aiming to make drones a standard item for individual sol-

diers. "Drones should no longer be equipment used by a limited number of units, but a universal combat tool," Ahn told a briefing, adding they should be used by troops like a "second personal weapon." Ahn said Seoul would rely on 100% domestically produced components rather than Chinese parts in building the systems, in response to security concerns. The announcement comes as both Koreas accelerate efforts to build drone capabilities, shaped by lessons from conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East, where unmanned systems have emerged as game changers on the battlefield. "Low-cost drones operated in large numbers are fundamentally changing the nature of warfare," Ahn said, warning North Korea was also advancing unmanned systems, increasing threats to military

and civilian facilities in Korea. Korean plan includes expanding counter-drone systems such as lasers and high-power microwave weapons, and shifting operations so each service can conduct surveillance and strike missions using drones rather than relying on a centralised command. A senior defence official said the military would also move quickly to acquire more than 20,000 low-cost, expendable drones and introduce AI-based swarm systems and loitering munitions. The ministry said it would revamp procurement rules to speed up adoption of civilian technology and position the military as a major buyer to help build a domestic drone ecosystem. The expansion comes amid political sensitivity over drone operations under the previous administration.

## Japan braces for double storms; rains shut down parts of Taiwan

Japan orders 1mn to evacuate; more than 200 flights were cancelled; offices, schools shut in parts of Taiwan

Reuters  
Tokyo/Zhubei, Taiwan

Japan grappled with transport disruptions yesterday while bracing for more torrential rain and risks from two approaching tropical storms that spurred authorities to issue high-level landslide warnings and order the evacuation of 1mn people.

More than 200 flights were cancelled and dozens of train services suspended while many expressways were closed, the land ministry said, while carmaker Toyota briefly halted operations at a factory in the southern region of Kyushu.

Weather officials said a lingering seasonal rain front combined with warm, moist air from tropical storms Mekkhala and Higos brought downpours to wide swathes of Japan's west, threatening landslides, floods and swollen rivers.

About 1mn people faced evacuation orders after some were lifted

in Okinawa and other southern areas, emergency management authorities said.

Mekkhala, downgraded from a typhoon to a tropical storm, was passing over the southern Ryukyu Islands yesterday after skirting Taiwan, where severe rains shut down parts of the island to keep about 6mn people from work or school.

"Last night the rain wasn't too bad. But this morning the rain didn't stop," said Chi, a dessert shop owner in northern Taiwan's Zhubei city. "The road outside was flooded up to the knees, and inside our shop it was a little below knee level."

By today, Mekkhala was expected to accelerate and approach western and eastern Japan, around the same time that Higos was forecast to draw close to the country's east, and possibly make landfall, the Japan Meteorological Agency said.

The combined impact of the storms and the rain front could boost rainfall across much of the country, it added.

Toyota said work would resume from Friday's second shift at its Kyushu factory, shut from Thursday afternoon.

Taiwan ordered offices and schools closed yesterday in its three hardest-hit southern regions of Kaohsiung, Pingtung



The Kamo River, swollen by heavy rain, flows rapidly in Kyoto, Japan, yesterday. (Reuters)

and Tainan, where severe flooding shut down a section of the island's main north-south railway link.

In the northern city of Hsinchu home to the world's largest contract chipmaker, TSMC, offices and schools closed from noon.

In a statement, TSMC said its factories were operating normally, and it had taken measures across its Taiwan facilities to prepare for the rain.

About 6 mn people live in the four affected areas of Taiwan. In parts of largely rural Pingtung, almost a metre (3.3 ft) of rain has fallen since Thursday.

No casualties were reported in Taiwan but authorities in Hualien county were evacuating nearly

200 residents from two townships downstream of a rapidly filling barrier lake in the mountains.

Barrier lakes result when rocks, landslides or other natural blockages form a dam across a river, normally in a valley, holding back flows or even natural drainage. Last year, 19 people died elsewhere in Hualien when another barrier lake breached its banks during Super Typhoon Ragasa, unleashing a wall of water and mud into homes.

Rain is not all bad news for southern Taiwan, which relies on the traditional summer and autumn typhoon season to fill its reservoirs after winters that are typically dry.

## Malaysian customs foil \$13mn AI chip smuggling bid

AFP  
Sepang, Malaysia

Malaysian authorities foiled an attempt to smuggle advanced artificial intelligence (AI) chips through the country's main airport, customs officials said yesterday, in a case worth nearly \$13mn.

A team raided Kuala Lumpur airport's free trade zone on June 5 and seized 72 servers that were reportedly bound for export to another Asian country, airport customs director Zulkifli Muhammad said.

Malaysia tightened export and transship-

ment controls on chips from the US last year, requiring a strategic trade permit and advance notification if there is suspicion of misuse or diversion.

The southeast Asian nation, as a growing data-centre hub, is seeking to prevent itself from being used as a transit point for restricted chips headed elsewhere.

"The servers were declared as 'computer components' to avoid detection from the authorities," Zulkifli told a news conference.

The syndicate involved used Malaysia as a transit point to ensure there were no restrictions during the export process, The Star daily newspaper said.

Zulkifli declined to say where the servers came from, where the chips were made, or where they were headed, adding that investigations were continuing.

However, he said a local logistics company involved in the shipment had been asked to assist in the investigation.

The US has been tightening restrictions on exports of advanced semiconductors through Malaysia and Thailand in an effort to curb their diversion to China.

Malaysia has also launched several probes, including one into how servers containing US-made Nvidia chips destined for Singapore ended up in Malaysia.

## Myanmar burns \$525mn of illegal drugs: minister

AFP  
Yangon

Myanmar authorities torched yesterday seized drugs worth an estimated \$525mn, according to the home affairs minister who blamed rebel factions for the war-ravaged country's booming trade in illegal narcotics.

Analysts say crumbling governance since a military putsch in 2021 triggered a civil war has allowed all sides to profit from the illicit drug trade.

Police in Yangon incinerated 31 different classes of drugs to mark the UN's International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, local officials said, sending plumes of thick black smoke into the sky.

On an industrial zone compound on the outskirts of Yangon, officials gave a three-second countdown before setting the petrol-doused drugs ablaze in a fire lasting 30 minutes. Firefighters then extinguished the flames.

"There are more than 28 tonnes of it."



People take photos as they attend a destruction ceremony of seized illegal drugs to mark the United Nations' "International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking" in Yangon yesterday. (AFP)

Drugs slated for burning in ceremonies across Yangon, Mandalay and Taunggyi were double the quantity of last year, officials said.

Rebel factions "have exploited periods of political uncertainty to expand their involvement in the illicit drug trade", home affairs minister Nyunt Win Swe said in a speech printed in state media.

"These activities not only prolong the existence of insurgent groups but also pose a per-

sistent danger to the stability of our nation," he said.

In January, Myanmar authorities said they had captured a trio of record-sized jungle drug laboratories responsible for making a third of all the methamphetamine seized in Myanmar over the previous year.

Nestled in the hills of Shan state some 180km (112 miles) from the China border, the sites were the size of villages with their own elaborate power and water infrastructure.

## Taiwan opposition stalls \$6.6bn drone bill

Taiwan's opposition-controlled parliament stalled yesterday the government's proposed \$6.6bn in spending on domestically made drones that could be used to defend the island against a potential Chinese attack. President Lai Ching-te's government has been at loggerheads for months with the Kuomintang (KMT) and Taiwan People's Party (TPP) over how much to spend on improving the island democracy's defence capabilities against China. China claims Taiwan is part of its territory and has threatened to seize it by force if necessary. Lai's government wants to allocate up to NT\$210bn (\$6.6bn) over more than five years for Taiwan-made unmanned vehicles, including coastal surveillance, attack and surface drones. But the KMT and TPP, which hold the majority of seats in the parliament, refused yesterday to consider the bill while they come up with their own versions. (AFP)

# King Charles will not live at Buckingham Palace: officials

Reuters  
London

King Charles will not live at Buckingham Palace after its 10-year refurbishment finishes next year, royal officials said on Thursday, ending nearly two centuries of the London landmark serving as the British monarch's primary residence.

Officials at the same time disclosed the king paid £12.9 mn (\$17.0 mn) in tax in 2024/25 – the first time the figure has been made public – placing him among Britain's top 100 taxpayers.

Members of the royal family have promised greater transparency about their finances amid growing scrutiny and criticism since the death of Queen Elizabeth in 2022.

Charles' decision not to live at Buckingham Palace and remain at Clarence House, his longstanding London home nearby, comes ahead of the completion next year of a £369mn (\$487mn) refurbishment to replace ageing electrical wiring, pipes and heating systems.

When work started in 2017, officials had expected the palace to remain the monarch's primary London residence, as it had been since Queen Victoria became sovereign in 1837.

James Chalmers, the king's treasurer, known as the Keeper of the Privy Purse, said it would remain the primary venue for ceremonial and official functions including hosting state visits.

"It is and will remain 'monarchy HQ', the crown jewel of our national buildings, with the sovereign's standard flying proudly from the roof whenever His Majesty is in London," he told reporters.

Neither Charles nor the late Queen Elizabeth had stayed over-



People gather outside Buckingham Palace after it was announced that Britain's King Charles will not live there after its 10-year refurbishment finishes next year, in London, yesterday. (Reuters)

night at the palace since 2019. The king will maintain private rooms there that could be used as accommodation.

Some 700,000 people visit the building every year, and public access will be increased, Chalmers said, without providing details.

## CHARLES REVEALS TAX BILL

By law, the British king is not obliged to pay income, capital gains or inheritance tax, but Charles, has voluntarily done so without disclosing the amounts, as his mother did after 1993.

Charles, like all monarchs since 1399, gets a private income from the vast Duchy of Lancaster estate – £25.2mn in 2025/26 – as well as from his other holdings and investments.

Chalmers said the king had paid £11.7mn in tax in 2023/24 and more than £30mn in all since

becoming king in 2022.

He also receives money from the government, known as the Sovereign Grant, based on a percentage of profits from the Crown Estate, a property portfolio whose revenues the monarch surrenders to state coffers in exchange for an annual payment, to pay for staff, royal palaces and travel.

The grant, boosted by soaring profits from the sale of offshore windfarm licences, rose from £86mn in 2024/25 to £132mn the following year and will be £137.9mn in 2026/27.

But Chalmers said it would be cut for the first time in 2027/28, to £100mn, "in line with His Majesty's clear wishes", a level where it will stay until 2031/32.

That makes it almost £60mn higher than in 2016, when the funding formula was changed to pay for the Buckingham Palace refit. "This is not a blank cheque,"

Chalmers said, adding there were safeguards in place to ensure the amount was proportional.

Media revelations in 2024 that the Duchy of Lancaster and heir-to-the throne Prince William's Duchy of Cornwall estate were charging Britain's health service, army and schools rent have generated criticism, as did details this month about royal property arrangements.

William's office said he had paid £7.76mn in tax in 2024/25 and instructed that £1.5mn in rent from a closed prison go to the local community.

Critics said the royal finances still remained opaque.

"Another hike for Charles, more spin and gloss and more misdirection on taxes," said Graham Smith, the chief executive of anti-monarchy campaign group Republic. "This is the way with royal reporting: the more they reveal, the more questions are raised."

# Australia pledges tougher enforcement of social media ban for teens

Reuters  
Sydney

Australia's prime minister vowed yesterday to bullet-proof laws supporting a social media ban for under-16s as the government prepares legal action against platforms amid a steady stream of evidence that the ban has had little impact on teen use.

The country's groundbreaking six-month-old experiment is being closely watched by many nations seeking to emulate it due to concerns about the impact of social media on youth mental and physical health. Britain this month said it planned restrictions that go further as gaming and live-streaming platforms will also be affected.

The Australian government plans to stress-test the law which bans platforms like Meta's Instagram and Google's YouTube from giving under-16s accounts.

Numerous studies have shown age-assurance mechanisms, such as taking a selfie, that have been put in place by tech companies are easily circumvented by children and that in many cases, the children have never been asked to prove their age.

"What we want to do is to make sure that the laws are as strong as possible and that they will withstand any legal challenges which are made," Prime Minister Anthony Albanese told the Australian Broadcasting Corp.

One focus would be making sure that the eSafety commissioner, the country's Internet regulator, was sufficiently empowered to do the job, he said.

He did not give further details

about what steps the government would take and the regulator declined to comment.

The eSafety commissioner and Australia's Communications Minister Anika Wells have said they are preparing legal action against five of the biggest platforms, which face a fine of up to A\$49.5mn (\$34mn) if they are found to have systematically failed to uphold the ban.

Message board website Reddit is separately challenging the ban in Australia's highest court, seeking to overturn it on free speech grounds. The government has said it will defend the lawsuit. Reddit was not immediately available for comment on Friday.

When Australia's ban went live last December, there were early reports that platforms had shut down millions of accounts, but parents have said and studies have shown that teen social media use is little changed.

A paper published in the British Medical Journal this week said 85% of Australians aged 12 to 15 were still using social media three months after the ban took effect, according to a study of 408 adolescents.

Two-thirds of underage users stayed online by self-declaring an age over 16 or posting a selfie that the platform accepted as over 16, the paper said.

That broadly matched data shared by Australia's eSafety Commissioner in March which showed one-third of Australians under 16 were still on social media.

Experts on youth social media use say that a teething period in which platforms, parents and teenagers adjusted to the new rules was always to be expected.

# UK hottest June day record broken for third day in a row: Met Office

AFP  
London

The UK broke the record for its hottest-ever June day for the third day in a row yesterday, the Met Office weather agency said, as a sweltering heatwave strained schools and hospitals and drove down business.

The 36.9C record temperature was chalked in Wattisham, Suffolk, in southeast England, the meteorologists said, breaking the previous high of 36.7C set on Thursday.

The Met Office has issued its highest level "extreme heat" warning and yesterday extended it yet again for an unprecedented fourth day in a row until 9:00am (0800GMT) Sunday morning for southwest and southeast England, including London.

The weather agency has warned of "population-wide adverse health effects" as doctors, teachers and climate experts cautioned that the UK was unprepared for increasingly frequent heatwaves due to climate change.

At a market in central London which mainly caters to office workers, street food vendors were struggling to work besides the gas-fired stoves and footfall was down. "I do just want to stick my face in the ice bucket," said 37-year-old turkey stall owner Will Evans, sporting a green cooling towel he bought online as a bandana.

Working under a black canopy, the chef said it got up to 5C hotter in his workspace, compared to the temperature outside the tent.

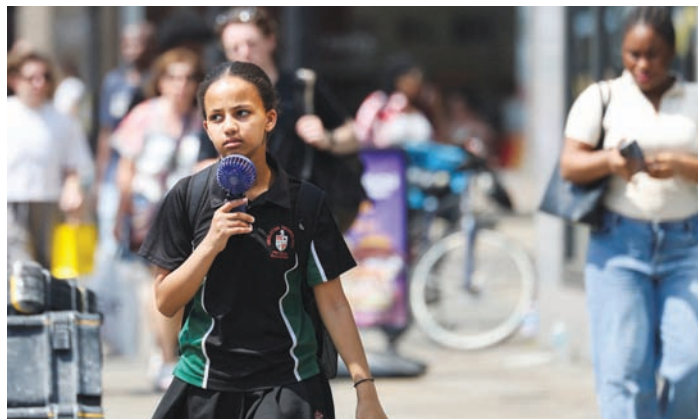
According to Evans, public advice to remain at home and limit travel meant fewer officer workers were buying lunch at the market.

At a nearby fried chicken stall, Rainai Almeida said it felt as hot as 43C due to the fryers. "It's going to be a difficult summer for everyone here in the market, the traders, unfortunately," said the 27-year-old stall worker from Ecuador.

Hospitals and emergency serv-



People use umbrellas to shield themselves from the sun while punting on the River Cam as Britain experiences record temperatures during a heatwave, in Cambridge, yesterday. (Reuters)



A girl uses a hand fan amid a heatwave, as Britain experiences record temperatures that disrupts schools and transport networks, in Manchester, yesterday. (Reuters)

ices were stretched thin as well, with London Ambulance Service recording the highest number of "life-threatening" emergency calls in a day on Wednesday, driven by the heat.

"Clinical colleagues who aren't routinely deployed on the front line have been deployed back on the front line," London Ambulance Service chief Jason

Killens told BBC Radio 4.

Meanwhile some tourist attractions and museums in London were closed yesterday due to the red heat warning, including the iconic Tower Bridge and the Royal Observatory in Greenwich.

The British Museum said it was closing early and warned it "may also temporarily close some galleries".

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Thursday India was "ready to extend all possible assistance".

International rescuers, aid and medical workers have begun arriving to help the South American country after Thursday's twin earthquakes, which killed at least 235 people and injured more than 1,500.

took-off today for Venezuela with urgent assistance to support their post-earthquake relief efforts," Jaishankar said in a statement.

"The assistance contains an Indian army field hospital and over 35 tonnes of relief supplies, medicines and medical equipment," he said.

The Indian army said a team of 41 included nine medical officers.

# New Zealand internal report warns of Chinese military forays in Pacific

AFP  
Wellington

Chinese ballistic missile tests and naval forays will become a "persistent" feature of the Pacific as Beijing expands its security presence, New Zealand officials said in an internal document obtained by AFP.

The warning was issued in a December 2025 report by New Zealand's Defence Force and Ministry of Foreign Affairs while they were monitoring a People's Liberation Army navy (PLA-N) flotilla in the Philippine Sea.

"New Zealand officials are in close contact with Australian counterparts and maintaining situational awareness of these vessels," said the document obtained by AFP under freedom of information laws.

"More broadly we anticipate that Chinese actions, such as the PLA-N task group that transited the Tasman Sea in February and China's launch of an inter-continental ballistic missile into the Pacific in September 2024, will be a persistent feature of our strategic environment."

The 15-page report was sent to New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon and his ministers for defence, foreign affairs and intelligence.

China has directed billions

of dollars into defence in recent years, a trend that has unnerved some governments despite Beijing insisting its aims are peaceful.

Beijing's foreign ministry said yesterday that it was "not aware" of the document obtained by AFP, when asked about it at a news conference.

"China's military development is for the purpose of safeguarding national sovereignty, security and development interests, and is not directed against any country," ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun told reporters.

The navy in particular has expanded rapidly as Chinese leaders seek to grow their country's reach in the Pacific, where the US has long been the predominant military power.

Wellington's concerns over Chinese military movements had already been heightened by the February 2025 deployment of three Chinese warships to the Tasman Sea between Australia and New Zealand.

Most of the report given to AFP was redacted, citing privacy, national security and confidentiality concerns.

But in the remaining sections, officials said China's February 2025 deployment to the Tasman Sea was conducted in accordance with international law, including the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

"This included the manner in which the task group notified its intentions to conduct live fire exercises, which we consider did not align with international best practice and caused several commercial airlines to change route," the report said.

Beijing's December deployment to the Philippine Sea "was consistent with China's incremental expansion of its maritime security presence in the South Pacific over the past decade", it said.

"Beijing has deployed a broad range of naval vessels to the region, including but not limited to hospital ships, large amphibious vessels in support of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations, and outer space event support ships."

Space support ships are designed to track rocket launches, satellites and intercontinental missile activity.

New Zealand's Defence Force did not identify the type of one of the naval vessels deployed by China to the South Pacific, saying it would "be likely to prejudice the security or defence of New Zealand".

It declined to release details on how New Zealand would respond, for the same reason.

"In all scenarios, New Zealand's response would be in accordance with international law," the defence force said.

# India ends restrictions on commercial gas after supply from Mideast eases

AFP  
New Delhi

India has removed restrictions on supplies of commercial liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) imposed during the Middle East war when energy supplies were hit by the closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

India, the world's most populous country, is the second-largest importer of LPG, much of it from the Middle East. A fifth of global oil and gas usually pass through the waterway, which was shut after the start of the US-Iran war in late February.

The government ended the restrictions late Thursday on "non-domestic packed LPG and restored supplies to the levels prevailing prior to the West Asia crisis", the petroleum ministry



An employee rides a bike carrying LPG cylinders at a HP Gas distribution point in Bengaluru yesterday. (AFP)

said in a statement.

"The supply of bulk LPG, which had been suspended at the onset of the crisis, has been relaxed by 50% of the pre-crisis consumption levels," the statement added.

"The restoration follows the recent improvement in the LPG supply situation."

The decision follows improved energy cargo passing through the Strait of Hormuz after Iran and the US signed a deal that included opening the strategic waterway.

During the crisis, the government raised prices for LPG, a primary cooking fuel for millions of households.

# India sends medical team, aid to Venezuela

AFP  
New Delhi

India sent medical teams and 35 tonnes of emergency supplies, as well as a military field hospital, to quake-hit Venezuela yesterday, Foreign Minister Subrahmanya Jaishankar said.

"Two Indian Air Force C-17s



## Luxury property buyers flock to Spain seeking haven from war, turmoil

WEalthy Polish, American and Gulf-based property buyers are pouring into Spain's capital Madrid and Costa del Sol seeking luxury refuge from the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East as well as political turmoil in the United States.

Spain, particularly its Mediterranean coast, has long been a magnet for sun-seeking Britons and Germans. But in recent years a broader mix of investors looking to diversify their assets and hedge against instability has moved in, a half dozen real estate agents, European housing market analysts and a property lawyer told Reuters. Official government data confirm the trend.

"Whether it's Ukrainians or Poles settling on the Costa del Sol, or Americans coming to Spain, the common factor is the geopolitical situation," said Rebeca Caballero, head of realtor Gilmar's international department.

According to last year's property register data, more than 39% of all home sales in major tourist

provinces including Malaga on the Costa del Sol, Alicante on the Costa Blanca and the Balearic Islands involved foreign buyers. That has helped to send prices surging in a country where housing is a major political issue and the central bank called for coordinated policy efforts to boost housing supply with an estimated shortage of 750,000 homes.

Buyers from Poland, among Europe's fastest-growing economies, have been investing in Spanish coastal properties since 2020. But their purchases have tripled since the Covid-19 pandemic and accounted for 4% of all foreign purchases last year, up from 1.6% in 2019.

"The strongest wave of investment came after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine ... with a frenzy of purchases made over the phone," said Agnieszka Marciniak-Kostrzewa, founder of a Marbella-based real estate agency.

Marlena Bartkowiak is part of that surge. The 46-year-old, who owns a transport company in Poland, purchased an apartment in Benalmadena

on Andalusia's Costa del Sol as a backup plan when the war broke out.

"Spain came to mind as it was somehow the least involved in all sorts of political manoeuvring on the European stage," said Bartkowiak, who still lives primarily in Poland.

Neinor, one of Spain's largest property developers, sold 70% of its premium 102-home Santa Clara complex completed in Marbella last year to Polish clients. And Polish buyers dominate a 64-floor skyscraper under construction in Benidorm, another coastal hot spot.

"Spain right now is a diversification play on security grounds," said Paloma Perez Bravo, CEO of real estate firm Dils-Lucas Fox. In the same way that conflict on Poland's eastern border has driven Polish purchases, realtors are already seeing an influx of demand from investors based in the Gulf following the outbreak of the Iran war.

Three real estate firms told Reuters they are negotiating luxury property deals on the Costa del

Sol with buyers from Dubai as the conflict deals a blow to the emirate's image as a peaceful haven for the rich. At least two deals have already been completed.

Marciniak-Kostrzewa recently sold a property to a Polish client living in Dubai, who was seeking a safer alternative base for their family.

While Dubai has wooed foreigners with zero property tax, realty lawyer Maria Ruiz Lopez said regional wealth tax exemptions or allowances are a draw for Madrid and the Costa del Sol, making them more attractive to rich buyers than other parts of Spain.

"It's not just violent conflict, but also the political and social pressure," said Gilmar's Caballero, pointing to the surge in Americans — many of them of Hispanic origin — investing in Spain since President Donald Trump's return to office last year. "Many do it as an investment. And others see it as a Plan B, because they don't know what's going to happen in the United States," she said. — Reuters

### What is causing Europe's intense heatwave?

The intense heatwave engulfing Western Europe, resulting in more than 40 deaths in France alone, is being sustained by a weather pattern known as an omega block. Here is what you need to know about omega blocks and whether climate change means they could become more frequent in the years ahead.

An omega block takes its name from the shape of the Greek letter Ω - with a bulge of warmer, settled high pressure held between two cooler low pressure systems. The "blocking" element refers to how the high pressure area of warm air gets stuck. Under normal conditions, the jet stream carries weather systems steadily from west to east. But during an omega block, that flow becomes disrupted and can buckle dramatically north and south, isolating the pressure systems. Weaker steering winds and temperature contrasts in the atmosphere contribute to these slow-moving, locked patterns.

The result is that hot, still air gets lodged over the same area. Omega blocks typically last between three and 10 days, but can persist for weeks. Under the high-pressure area in the centre, conditions become hot and dry. The high pressure also suppresses cloud formation, resulting in clear, sunny skies that allow temperatures to climb. It is

conditions like these that are baking France and Spain, where temperatures have exceeded 40C. Regions in the low-pressure areas flanking the heatwave, meanwhile, are more likely to see cooler, rainy conditions. Britain lies on the boundary between the high-pressure system and the cooler air to the northwest — producing intense heat in the south and east, and cooler, wetter conditions in the north and west, according to the UK Met Office.

Scientists have not yet agreed upon how climate change is affecting the frequency of blocking events like this one. However, the global scientific consensus is clear that climate change is increasing the frequency and intensity of heatwaves. Greenhouse gas emissions, mainly from burning coal, oil and gas, have heated the planet by about 1.3C since pre-industrial times. That warmer baseline means heatwaves reach higher temperatures. Europe is now experiencing heatwaves that are 2 to 4 degrees hotter than they would have been without human-caused warming, said Clair Barnes, a research associate in extreme weather and climate at Imperial College London. As a result, when patterns like omega blocks occur, the resulting heat can be significantly more intense. — Reuters

### Bangladesh delegation in Beijing



Bangladesh's Prime Minister Tarique Rahman attends a meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping (not pictured) at the Great Hall of the People, in Beijing, China. (Reuters)

# Qatari women diplomats — active presence, notable contributions in international forums

**QNA**  
Doha

Alongside various countries around the globe, Qatar celebrated the International Day of Women in Diplomacy, which falls on June 24. This day was established by the United Nations to celebrate the role of women in diplomatic work, to recognize their achievements and contributions in this field, and to encourage governments, international organizations, academic institutions, civil society and diplomatic circles to promote inclusion, remove structural barriers and ensure equal opportunities for women to participate in decision-making that affects societies, countries and the world.

The celebration of this occasion aims to highlight the pivotal role of women in the field of diplomatic work, to shed light on their qualitative contributions to building and strengthening international relations, their active role in supporting peace efforts and consolidating global security, as well as to highlight their ability to provide innovative visions in addressing international challenges.

Qatar is proud of its contributions to the establishment and adoption of this day, in recognition of the vital role of women in strengthening diplomatic relations and multilateral international work, and building bridges between different cultures.

#### Essential partner

The country has provided all the energies and capabilities for Qatari women to participate and excel in diplomatic work, so that they now hold many diplomatic positions and represent Qatar in international organizations, and are given increasing opportunities to reach leadership positions and

June 24 of every year, the State of Qatar is celebrating the International Day of Women in Diplomacy, alongside various countries around the globe

Qatar is proud of its contributions to establishment and adoption of this day, and has provided all capabilities for Qatari women to participate and excel in diplomatic

**Interview with Qatar News Agency**

**HE Dr. Hind Abdulrahman Al-Muftah**  
Permanent Representative of Qatar to UN Office in Geneva

Qatari women have contributed to strengthening the international community's confidence in Qatari diplomacy

Qatari women diplomats have communication and negotiations skills that contribute to establishing a positive image of the country

Qatari women diplomats have proven their ability to serve the country in all bilateral and multilateral international forums

Number of Qatari women working in the diplomatic field has increased significantly, and they work in various job grades

Qatar Council is an informal meeting organized by Permanent Mission of Qatar in Geneva, to discuss issues and challenges facing the world

One of the most significant challenges facing women working in the diplomatic field is balancing professional and personal responsibilities

participate effectively in political decision-making.

This occasion comes as Qatari women have become an essential partner in Qatari diplomacy, supported by Qatar National Vision 2030, which has given women's empowerment a strategic priority. Between female ambassadors, envoys, and officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Qatari diplomacy has become a model of efficiency and active presence on the international stage, whether in peace mediations, promoting international cooperation, or defending women's issues and equality.

The participation of Qatari women in diplomatic work reflects a qualitative development in Qatari society, as it combines authenticity and openness, and enriches Qatari diplomacy with visions and skills that add qualitative value to the country's foreign policy.

HE Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the UN Office in Geneva, Dr Hind Abdulrahman al-Muftah said that the UN's Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda affirms that involving women in negotiations increases the likelihood of agreements succeeding and lasting in the long term.

It also contributes to strengthening cultural and human ties, reflects developmental transformations in society and provides a model that reflects this, as well as building broad international networks of influence, she added.

In an interview with Qatar News Agency (QNA), HE al-Muftah said that Qatari women diplomats have proven over the past years their ability to serve the country in all bilateral and multilateral international forums, and have succeeded in building bridges of dialogue and enhancing

understanding between different peoples and cultures, through their communication and negotiations skills that contribute to establishing a positive image of the country and enhancing its humanitarian and cultural presence on the international stage.

Today, the number of Qatari women working in the diplomatic field has increased significantly, and they work in various job grades, including leading positions. They have also proven their superior efficiency and ability in several high-ranking diplomatic positions, which confirms the Qatari leadership's confidence in the ability and efficiency of Qatari women to contribute and excel in all forums, she added.

HE Dr al-Muftah pointed out that, through their participation in international forums, Qatari women have contributed to strengthening the international community's confidence in Qatari diplomacy, highlighting national values, expanding areas of cultural and humanitarian cooperation, and advancing negotiation and dialogue processes on many priority issues in international forums.

Regarding the achievement of diplomatic file that HE Dr al-Muftah is proud to have managed and represented Qatar in, she noted that among the initiatives that she is most proud to participate in are those that combine the humanitarian and developmental dimensions, and have contributed to enhancing the image of Qatar as a reliable and internationally responsible partner, explaining further that true success in diplomatic work is not measured only by signing agreements and memoranda of understanding, but by the ability to build sustainable partnerships that reflect the country's values and its humanitarian and developmental mission.

As for the United Nations

Human Rights Council (UNHRC), HE Dr al-Muftah said that she and her team at the Permanent Mission in Geneva were able to present several initiatives in the form of resolutions addressing important issues, which were adopted unanimously. As is well known, UN resolutions issued by the UNHRC represent the pinnacle of joint diplomatic efforts, and can have a direct impact on changing people's lives for the better.

Among the important initiative in this regard, Qatar is leading a draft resolution at the current 62nd session of the Human Rights Council on protecting health care in armed conflict, which is a major concern for the international community due to the spread and increasing scope of armed conflicts, HE Dr al-Muftah added, noting that this resolution is expected to have a significant impact on the international humanitarian landscape concerning the promotion and protection of the right to health during armed conflicts.

#### Building bridges

On the other hand, the Qatari delegation worked to build bridges of understanding between the various regional groups within the HRC in particular and the international community in Geneva, through the launch of the Qatar Council, an informal meeting organized by the Permanent Mission of the State of Qatar in Geneva, which brings together a number of permanent delegates and senior officials of the UN and international organizations, to discuss many of the issues and challenges facing the world today and reaching understandings about them, and working to strengthen multilateral international action.

She noted that she also contributed to holding the first round of the strategic dialogue between the State of Qatar, the United Nations High

Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the World Health Organization (WHO) in May 2025, to strengthen international cooperation in the humanitarian, development, and health fields.

She participated in submitting a number of resolutions at the WHO, most notably the resolution titled 'Health conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory, including east Jerusalem', which was adopted by consensus during the special session of the WHO Executive Board held on Dec 10, 2023.

She said that among the initiatives she is proud of is her contribution to organizing Qatar's hosting of the 'Doha Best Negotiator of the Year in 2024', presented annually by the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), recognizing outstanding contributions to international negotiation and mediation, and was held during the annual Doha Forum, highlighting the strengthening of technical cooperation with specialized UN agencies, such as training lawyers and judges in investment and intellectual property matters with relevant entities in the country.

#### Balancing responsibilities

Regarding the most prominent challenges that women may face while working in the diplomatic field, HE Dr al-Muftah affirmed that one of the most significant challenges is balancing professional and personal responsibilities, as multilateral diplomatic work requires being present and actively participating in all international organizations, adding that the successful experiences of Qatari women diplomats have proven that competence and achievement are the true standard of success, contrary to some traditional and stereotypical perceptions that confined women's roles to specific fields.

# Europe heatwave swamps hospitals, halts festivities

AFP  
Berlin

Authorities banned major weekend festivities as a deadly European heatwave was forecast to shift east yesterday, choking 150mn people under 35C temperatures.

Medics in Britain and France warned hospitals were struggling with the heat and a surge in emergency calls.

German's weather service DWD warned of "severe to extreme heat stress in nearly all parts of the country", with records likely to be broken.

Authorities have reported hundreds of people dead in Spain and others across Europe, including in France, where scores of people drowned and several children died in hot cars.

Some cooler air breezed over western parts, but central and eastern Europe warned their heatwaves had yet to peak. The Czech Republic and Hungary were on red alert for the weekend, with temperatures of up to 40C forecast.

Scientists have shown that recurring heatwaves are a clear



Kids cool off under a water mist near the Colosseum as Italy's Civil Protection deploys measures to help residents and tourists cope with a heatwave, in Rome, yesterday. (Reuters)

marker of global warming driven by humans burning fossil fuels — and are set to become more frequent, longer and more intense.

At a homeless shelter on Thursday in Berlin, where the temperature topped 33C, Christian Bernhardt, 52, found relief in a cool room.

"The heat is exhausting... Nobody was expecting this heatwave," he said.

"It's very tiring, especially when you have to walk down the street with all your luggage, wandering

from train station to train station."

The deputy director of the EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service, Samantha Burgess, said the hot weather was due to a "heat dome" of trapped air from north Africa in a low-lying high-pressure system.

"The weather pattern itself is not particularly unusual," climate scientist Friederike Otto, co-founder of World Weather Attribution (WWA), told reporters.

"But the temperatures are — or at least they used to be, without human-induced climate change."



Women use hand fans while walking through historical centre of Sarajevo during a heatwave yesterday. (AFP)

At least 150mn people in Europe were expected to experience temperatures above 35C yesterday, according to AFP calculations based on forecasts.

Maximum temperatures were forecast to exceed 30C for more than 420mn people across Europe, excluding Turkey — around 70% of the population.

London Ambulance Service said Wednesday's extreme heat had led to the highest number of life-threatening emergency calls in a day.

France saw a fourfold increase

in emergency room visits for heat-related reasons and a surge of cardiac arrests, the health ministry said.

"We are reaching a saturation point in hospital facilities," Paris police chief Patrice Faure said.

Near Italy's Po River estuary, clam fishermen toiled picking their nets free of algae spawned by the heat.

"On top of all our problems, now there's this crazy heat, so long, so unexpected," said Paolo Mancini, head of a fishers' cooperative,

standing in the 31C water.

"Algae form and the clams are dying in large numbers."

Authorities in the region warned the low level of the Po river threatened to cause a drought. Across Italy 18 cities were under red alert.

Europe's western fringe enjoyed some relief, with a storm breaking overnight in the French region of Brittany, yielding cooler air yesterday.

"I've come back to life. We can breathe at last," said one local woman, Aurelie Sauvager, 47.

But much of the Netherlands remained under red alert, with authorities advising people to travel only if necessary and most schools closed.

Organisers cancelled the four-day techno music festival Defqon.1 in the central Netherlands.

Slovakia forecast temperatures up to 36C. In Bratislava swimming pools announced extended opening hours and authorities deployed tanker trucks of drinking water.

Hungary's Prime Minister Peter Magyar said authorities were preparing millions of bags of drinking water for possible public distribution and urging residents to conserve water.

# Crimea declares 'emergency' amid Ukrainian aerial attacks

AFP  
Moscow

Authorities in Russian-annexed Crimea yesterday declared an "emergency situation" in a bid to ease the fallout from increasing Ukrainian aerial attacks on the peninsula.

The announcement comes amid fuel shortages and power cuts triggered by the Ukrainian attacks on logistics chains and oil facilities across Crimea, the rest of Russian-occupied Ukraine and southern Russia.

"A decision has been made... to sign decrees declaring a regional-level emergency situation in the Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol," the Moscow-installed governor Sergey Aksyonov said in a post on Telegram.

The emergency situation would allow for a "rapid resolution of tasks related to ensuring the stable operation of all sectors", Aksyonov said in the post.

Kyiv has stepped up its air attacks that it calls fair retribution for Russia's near-daily barrages on Ukrainian civilians and energy infrastructure since Moscow launched its offensive in February 2022.

Russian air defences shot down



People cross a street after local authorities in Crimea announced a state of emergency on the peninsula to deal with economic issues, amid the Russia-Ukraine conflict in the Black Sea resort city of Yevpatoriya, Crimea yesterday. (Reuters)

660 Ukrainian drones overnight, including over the capital Moscow and the annexed Crimea, its defence ministry said yesterday, one of the highest figures since the start of the conflict.

Ukraine mostly targets Russian oil processing and export facilities in a bid to deprive the Kremlin of a source of revenue crucial for financing Moscow's war effort.

Last week, Kyiv's attack caused a major fire at a refinery in the southeast of Moscow, shrouding the suburbs in plumes of thick black smoke.

Aksyonov had a day earlier acknowledged that Crimea "is going through a challenging time" and that "the fuel situation is the most difficult."

"I cannot say exactly how long it will take, nor can I publicly disclose the specific action plan. However, we are taking action," he said in the statement.

He also conceded that the Russian army were unable to fully protect the peninsula.

"Unfortunately ... there are no air defence systems in the world that are absolutely perfect in terms

of security and effectiveness."

Speaking to AFP by phone, a Moscow resident holidaying in Feodosia on Crimea's southeastern coast said earlier this week that "everyone is afraid: locals and visitors alike."

"We were afraid we'd never wake up again, we prayed all night," she recounted following a recent overnight attack. "The sky was like Star Wars," she said.

Despite the ongoing war that has killed tens of thousands and ravaged swaths of Ukraine, Crimea has been a popular holiday destination for Russians.

On Monday, Ukraine's defence ministry said the strikes by its forces were "closing the beach season in Crimea."

Listing successful strikes, including on oil depots, gas compressor stations and air defence systems, it said on social media that "the forecast for tourists is unfavourable."

Russia seized and annexed Crimea in 2014, though the vast majority of countries — including many of Moscow's allies — do not recognise the move.

The Black Sea territory holds special importance to President Vladimir Putin, who hailed the annexation as a historic victory and has poured resources into the peninsula since 2014.

# EU to refuse refuge to military-age Ukrainian men

AFP  
Brussels

The EU yesterday proposed stopping granting Ukrainian men of fighting age refugee protection to settle in the bloc, while extending the right beyond 2027 for others from the country.

Brussels said the change follows a request from Kyiv, whose army has struggled with manpower shortages as Russia's war of invasion grinds into a fifth year.

"Our proposal provides that temporary protection should not be granted to newly arriving persons who are not allowed to leave Ukraine because of their military obligations," Magnus Brunner, the European Union's internal affairs chief told journalists.

The 27-nation EU granted Ukrainians temporary protection after Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, a measure rolled over several times and currently set to expire next March.

About 4.4mn people currently benefit from the scheme, which grants them residence permits, the right to work, and access to medical assistance, social welfare and education.

Under the commission's proposal the welcome will be

extended until March 2028, including for military-age men already living in the bloc.

But newcomers aged 23 to 60 — who are prohibited from leaving the country under Ukraine's martial law — will be excluded from the scheme once the plan is adopted by EU member states, the commission said, noting that however they will still be able to apply for asylum.

Brussels said it will also develop a pilot programme to support Ukrainians who wish to return home with practical support in areas such as jobs, housing, and education.

"As the war continues, our support must also continue," Brunner said, adding that the commission's proposal took into account "Ukraine's evolving defence needs and recovery needs."

"This is something the Ukrainians asked us to do," he said of the decision to limit protection for men of fighting age.

Adult men account for about 27% of all Ukrainians currently benefiting from EU protection, with women making up 43% of the total and minors another 30%, according to EU data.

Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic host the largest communities.

# Sweden violates rights of Roma in healthcare: ECSR

AFP  
Strasbourg

Sweden has violated several provisions of the Council of Europe's European Social Charter by refusing to provide necessary healthcare to Roma migrants, the rights body said yesterday.

It also criticised the difference in treatment they receive compared with undocumented migrants.

In 2023 Amnesty International and Medecins du Monde International filed a complaint, arguing that in 129 cases Roma were either denied necessary healthcare or charged the full cost of that care — unlike others — which discouraged them from seeking it.

The European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR), the Council of Europe's body responsible for

monitoring compliance with the European Social Charter — which has been ratified by 42 states including Sweden — had found that Stockholm is breaching three of its provisions.

"Healthcare is a prerequisite for the preservation of human dignity," the ECSR stressed and said the difference in effective access to medical care is discriminatory.

The ECSR also found that the lack of clear national rules and the divergence in regional practices in Sweden had led to indirect discrimination particularly affecting Roma, notably by them being charged different amounts.

"It is encouraging that the committee is now confirming what we have seen time and again over our 35 years in our encounters with people: that despite a statutory right, they do not receive the care

they need and are entitled to," Hannah Laustiola, secretary-general of the Swedish branch of Medecins du Monde, said in a joint statement with Amnesty.

Laustiola cited examples "like the elderly man with diabetes who became seriously ill but was denied treatment, or the pregnant woman who received an invoice for thousands of kronor."

Amnesty noted that "vulnerable EU citizens" meaning people who are citizens of other EU countries but who live in Sweden in a state of poverty and marginalisation often lack health insurance in their home countries. Many of them identify as Roma according to the rights group.

Under the international conventions it has signed, Sweden is obliged to ensure affordable access to healthcare for all, without discrimination, the group stressed.

# Montenegro police, FBI arrest Iranian wanted by US for hacking

Reuters  
Belgrade

Montenegrin police and the US Federal Bureau of Investigation arrested an Iranian national suspected of hacking attacks that damaged US infrastructure to the tune of \$3.4bn, Montenegrin police said.

The 39-year-old man, with dual Iranian and Turkish citizenship, is sought by the Southern District Court in New York on charges including conspiracy to commit computer fraud, hacking, and identity theft.

He was arrested in the Adriatic coastal resort of Kotor, Montenegro's police directorate said on Thursday.

"From 2013 onward, ... he carried out massive hacking attacks ... targeting more than 150 universities in the US, causing damage estimated at over \$3.4bn," it added in a statement.

The case will now go to a High Court judge in Montenegro's



A police officer escorts an Iranian national, who is suspected of hacking attacks that damaged US infrastructure according to Montenegrin police, and was arrested in a joint operation with the FBI, to an investigating judge on a US extradition request, in Podgorica, yesterday. (Reuters)

capital of Podgorica for extradition proceedings, the police added.

The acquired data, as well as access to compromised university accounts, were used for the benefit of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and other Iranian entities, including universities, it said.

Iran and the IRGC have a long history of state-sponsored cyber operations targeting the US, often linked to IRGC.

In April, US cybersecurity, law enforcement, and intelligence agencies warned about an escalation of Iranian hacking campaigns targeting equipment across critical US infrastructure.

# EU worries jet fuel supply situation to worsen

AFP  
Brussels

Commercial supplies of jet fuel may worsen this summer despite the improving situation in the Strait of Hormuz, EU Energy Commissioner Dan Jorgensen said yesterday.

Since June 15, traffic has been steadily increasing through the strait, which normally sees around a fifth of the world's oil and gas exports.

It has also increased since Iran and the US signed a preliminary

deal last week to end the conflict, the UN's International Maritime Organisation launching a plan to help ships and their sailors stranded by the conflict exit the Gulf.

Jorgensen said that even with the pick up in maritime traffic through the strait it would take time for energy markets to recover.

"It will still take some months to get back to normal for oil and some years to get back to normal on gas because of the destruction of infrastructure in the region," he said.

The halt in exports of crude and oil products exports from the Gulf quickly caused shortages of jet fuel in Asia and there have been concerns about supplies in Europe during the peak summer travel season.

Jorgensen said that in "the short term, there will most likely be a more serious situation with regards to the commercial stocks when we reach the end of the summer."

He said EU nations may need to release jet fuel supplies to avoid shortages and that the officials would monitor the situation.

# Greece says preparing 'historic' ISS space mission

Greece is planning "a first historic mission" to send a Greek astronaut to the International Space Station, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis's office announced yesterday.

The mission is part of a new national space strategy through to 2035 and also the European Space Agency's astronaut training programme.

Astronomer and ESA flight surgeon Adriano Golemis will join the maiden Greek mission, lasting up to three weeks and

scheduled to take place within the next two years.

Greece has secured 350 million euros in European funding for space projects over the next four years, Mitsotakis said in talks with Golemis under the auspices of the Greek Ministry of Digital Governance and AI. Golemis is set to carry out experiments and undertake technology demonstrations proposed by dozens of Greek research teams, organisations and universities.

A meeting Thursday which both attended along with digital governance minister, Dimitris Papastergiou, hailed "the considerable benefits that the decision to have Greece represented for the first time on the ISS crew will bring to the national scientific community," a statement read.

The statement added the project will give Greek firms opportunities to present space-related innovative solutions. (AFP)



## Parents urged to keep children active and healthy during summer break

As summer vacation begins, a paediatric specialist at the Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC) has urged parents to prioritise children's physical activity, healthy eating, proper sleep, and balanced screen time, warning that habits developed during the school break can have a lasting impact on their overall health and well-being.

Dr Budoor al-Shammari, consultant paediatrician at PHCC's Al Thumama Health Centre, said the long summer holiday should be viewed not only as a time for rest and recreation but also as an opportunity to build healthy routines that support children's physical, mental, and social development.

"Summer vacation is a period that children eagerly anticipate because it provides a break from school and homework and allows them to spend quality time with family and friends," she said. "However, it should not mean neglecting healthy habits. Instead, it presents an excellent opportunity to promote children's well-being while helping them develop their skills and talents."

Dr al-Shammari stressed the importance of encouraging children to remain physically active throughout the holiday. Activities such as walking, swimming, cycling, football, and other forms of exercise help strengthen muscles, improve physical fitness, and reduce the risk of obesity and other health conditions associated with sedentary lifestyles.



Dr Budoor al-Shammari

She also highlighted the need for parents to pay close attention to children's nutrition by providing balanced meals rich in proteins, vitamins, and minerals that support healthy growth. Fresh fruits and vegetables, along with adequate water intake, should form part of children's daily diets, while the consumption of sweets, fast food, and sugary soft drinks should be limited.

Maintaining a regular sleep schedule is equally important, Dr al-Shammari noted. During school holidays, many children tend to stay up late and sleep irregularly, a pattern that can affect their energy levels, concentration, mood, and overall health. Adequate sleep is essential for healthy growth and provides children with the energy they need for daily activities.

Dr al-Shammari underscored

the importance of supporting children's mental and emotional well-being. Summer vacation offers valuable opportunities for families to spend quality time together and for children to strengthen relationships with relatives and friends, helping boost their emotional health and sense of happiness.

She also encouraged parents to motivate children to pursue productive hobbies such as reading, drawing, arts and crafts, and learning new skills. Such activities help nurture creativity, stimulate intellectual development, and make constructive use of free time.

Dr al-Shammari further advised parents to monitor children's use of electronic devices, warning that excessive screen time can lead to eye strain, reduced physical activity, and sleep disturbances.

She stressed the importance of maintaining a healthy balance between technology use and activities that promote children's overall development.

She concluded that summer vacation is a valuable opportunity for children to recharge, develop positive lifelong habits, and enjoy a balanced lifestyle. By staying physically active, eating nutritious meals, following healthy sleep routines, limiting screen time, and engaging in enriching activities, children can return to school more energetic, motivated, and better prepared for academic success.

## Sheikh Joaan attends ANOC meeting



HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, First Vice-President of the Association of National Olympic Committees (ANOC) and President of the Olympic Council of Asia, has taken part in the 94th meeting of ANOC's Executive Council in Lausanne, Switzerland. The meeting brought together members of the Executive Council to discuss a range of organisational and strategic issues, including the association's financial report, a review of its strategic plan and budget, and other administrative matters. The council also reviewed key outcomes of the 146th Session of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and their implications for ANOC's work. Members discussed preparations for ANOC's upcoming General Assembly, including its agenda, program and related organisational arrangements. (QNA)



## Residents turn malls into community fitness spaces amid the summer heat

By Mikola Alabanza  
Doha

Before stores open and shoppers arrive, many residents in Qatar are filling malls early in the morning to join fitness activities, adapting their routines to the country's rising temperatures.

With public health guidance advising against prolonged outdoor physical activity during peak daytime heat, some fitness communities have moved indoors to air-conditioned public spaces to maintain consistency.

One example is a social running club led by Jorge Cota, which has moved its weekly sessions indoors at Doha Festival City during the summer. Instead of pausing activities altogether, members now trace the mall's layout with their footsteps, completing multiple laps around the corridors.

"In my previous experiences

with run clubs, they don't run during the summer because it's impossible to run with this heat," Cota told Gulf Times. "At least here, we have the possibility to keep running, but inside the mall."

He added that malls have become the most practical option among the alternatives the club considered, such as air-conditioned parks in Doha. Limited operating hours made those less suitable for early-morning runs, so the club ultimately opted for a space that could offer continuous air conditioning and predictable loops.

For Cota, preserving the social aspect of the club is just as important as the exercise itself. "We are focusing on the fun part of the run," he said, explaining that participants are encouraged to gather at cafés after every session to meet and catch up with one another.

Among residents adapting their fitness habits during the summer months is Zaara Shaheer

Khan, who said she values the opportunity to meet new people through indoor fitness activities.

A regular participant in indoor fitness sessions, she said their appeal also lies in how the environment shapes her experience of exercising in the heat.

"Outdoors is absolutely a battle in this weather," Khan said. "Being indoors really helps to focus on mindset and form without worrying about burning or sweating."

Exercising in a shopping destination also adds to the appeal of the experience afterwards, she said, noting that grabbing a meal or shopping often becomes "too easy or alluring after the activity".

Khan acknowledged that while indoor fitness sessions cannot be a daily occurrence due to travel times and scheduling, they offer a flexible alternative that allows residents to remain active in a city where heat can hinder outdoor activity.

## Municipality intensifies summer upgrades to keep parks safe, ready

By Ayman Adly  
Staff Reporter

The Ministry of Municipality is taking advantage of the quieter summer season to accelerate an extensive programme of maintenance and rehabilitation across public parks and gardens, ensuring that recreational facilities remain safe, attractive, and fully operational throughout the year.

While visitor numbers are typically lower during the hotter months, maintenance teams have been able to carry out upgrades more efficiently while minimising disruption to park users. The ongoing works include the rehabilitation of sports and play surfaces, the replacement of damaged nets, the renewal of rubber safety flooring, the repainting and remarking of courts, as well as comprehensive cleaning and inspection programmes. These efforts form part of a structured maintenance strategy designed to preserve the quality of public facilities and enhance user safety.

According to the ministry, rehabilitation projects are implemented under long-term contracts with specialised companies. Some agreements include the

complete replacement and renewal of playground surfaces during the contract period, while others focus on routine maintenance and continuous monitoring. Decisions on whether to replace or postpone rehabilitation works are based on detailed technical assessments, with facilities regularly inspected to evaluate their condition and determine the most appropriate course of action.

Further, maintenance activities extend beyond playgrounds to encompass pathways and other park infrastructure. Through systematic monitoring and upkeep, the ministry aims to preserve the overall appearance of public spaces while maintaining high standards of safety and quality for visitors.

Besides, regular maintenance significantly extends the lifespan of playground surfaces and recreational facilities. Particular attention is given to artificial turf, where rubber granules are redistributed, and grass fibres realigned to maintain shock-absorption performance and provide a safer environment, especially for children.

In the meantime, carrying out rehabilitation works during the summer offers several operational advantages, including reduced

impact on park visitors and faster project completion due to lower usage rates compared with other seasons.

The maintenance programme is a cornerstone of public park management, with daily, weekly, and periodic schedules implemented across municipalities. These efforts are taking place alongside the country's remarkable expansion of green spaces over recent years. The area of landscaped green spaces increased from around 4.4sq km in 2019 to 16.8sq km in 2024, while the country's total green space, developed in cooperation with various government entities, has reached around 43sq km.

The growth has also boosted per-capita access to green areas, rising from 1.64sq m in 2019 to 5.8sq m in 2023, with the broader national figure reaching approximately 14.7sq m per person.

The increased use of treated water for irrigation has considerably supported such expansion of green public areas. The share of treated water used to irrigate green spaces rose from 36% in 2019 to 75% in 2023, stressing the commitment to sustainable environmental management and supporting the continued growth of the green infrastructure network.



## Golden hour at Doha Corniche

Traditional dhow boats rest along the waterfront at the Museum of Islamic Art Park as the setting sun casts a golden glow over the Doha Corniche yesterday. The picturesque scene drew residents and visitors to the park, where many enjoyed an evening stroll while taking in panoramic views of the city's skyline. PICTURES: Shaji Kayamkulam

