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Doha talks keep hopes alive as US, Iran eye further negotiations

AFP
Doha/Tehran/Washington

Iran and the United States concluded a round of indirect talks in Doha, mediators said yesterday, as they kept up efforts to advance negotiations and lower tensions following recent exchanges of fire.



In June, Washington and Tehran agreed a memorandum of understanding, brokered by Qatar and Pakistan, which included a 60-day ceasefire pausing the war that broke out with US-Israeli strikes in late February, as well as the reopening of the blockaded Strait of Hormuz.

A source familiar with the matter told AFP on condition of anonymity that the indirect negotiations in Doha had focused more specifically on arrangements for the Strait of Hormuz, with the nuclear issue slated for deeper discussion later.

The 14-point deal also set a timeline for talks to permanently end the war and settle issues like arrangements for Hormuz, reconstruction funding for Iran and the future of the Islamic republic's nuclear programme.

The next indirect US-Iran talks will come after the Iranian supreme leader's funeral.

Following the foes' indirect discussions in Doha on Wednesday, US President Donald Trump as well as mediators Qatar and Pakistan offered signs that diplomacy was holding.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was killed aged 86 at his compound in the centre of the Iranian capital on February 28, the first day of the war. Power was swiftly passed to his son Mojtaba.

"Qatari and Pakistani mediators concluded separate meetings with the US and Iranian negotiators in Doha (Wednesday), with positive progress made," the two mediating nations said in a statement yesterday.

Ali Khamenei's public funeral will begin tomorrow, with his body lying in state at the colossal Grand Mosalla complex in central Tehran that hosts major Friday prayers, official ceremonies and religious gatherings.

At the talks' conclusion, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi, who led Tehran's delegation, said an agreement had been reached to establish a communications channel to report and record alleged violations of the memorandum.

Qatar and Pakistan said in statements that the sides had agreed to keep talking, "with the next meeting to be set at the earliest possible time following the funeral processions".

Gharibabadi said discussions also covered frozen Iranian assets, whose release Tehran has demanded as part of any settlement.

Since the signing of the US-Iran deal in June, both sides have traded sporadic fire in the Gulf.

He said officials reviewed the use of part of an initial \$6bn and agreed that goods needed by Iran would be purchased and made available.

Tehran's enforcement of its claim to the Strait of Hormuz has sparked repeated flare-ups.

Trump told reporters Wednesday before boarding Air Force One that "the denuclearisation of Iran is moving along well".

The latest came when US Central Command said over the weekend that it had attacked 10 Iranian military targets over "continued Iranian aggression against commercial shipping".

Iran said it retaliated with strikes against US bases in Kuwait and Bahrain, which both condemned Tehran.

However, the exchanges of fire had calmed in the days leading up to the talks in Qatar.

Ambassadors present credentials to Amir



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani has received the credentials of two newly appointed ambassadors to the country during a ceremony at the Amiri Diwan in Doha. The credentials were presented yesterday by Saeed Abdullah al-Qamzi, ambassador of the United Arab Emirates, and Dr Mahmood Yakubu, ambassador of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. His Highness the Amir welcomed the two diplomats and wished them success in carrying out their

diplomatic duties. His Highness also expressed his hope for continued progress and prosperity in the bilateral relations between Qatar and their respective countries. Meanwhile, the ambassadors conveyed to His Highness the Amir the greetings of their countries' leaders, along with their best wishes for the continued development and prosperity of the people of Qatar. An official reception ceremony was held for the two ambassadors upon their arrival at the Amiri Diwan. (QNA) Page 2

Deputy PM visits Amiri Guard Camp



HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Sheikh Saud bin Abdulrahman bin Hassan al-Thani paid a visit to the Amiri Guard Camp "Barzan" yesterday, where he was received by HE the Commander of the Amiri Guard Major General Mohammed bin Sultan al-Suwaidi. Also present to welcome him were the Deputy Commander of the Amiri Guard, the Inspector General, assistants to the Commander of the

Amiri Guard, and a number of senior officers. During a tour of the Amiri Guard Command building, HE Sheikh Saud was briefed on the modern and advanced facilities and equipment of the various departments and units of the Amiri Guard that meet the highest military and security standards. He was accompanied during the visit by a number of senior officers from the Armed Forces. (QNA) Page 12

Boys claim majority of top marks as scientific track leads results

90% pass rate in daytime science stream

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

More than 16,000 students received their General Secondary Certificate results yesterday, with boys taking the majority of the year's top marks and the daytime scientific track posting the strongest showing at a 90.10% pass rate.



Of the 50 students who achieved a flawless 100% in the scientific stream, 31 were boys and 19 girls — a split officials said reflected the level of academic competition on display through the year.

2026 academic year at an official meeting at the ministry's Doha headquarters, attended by senior officials and education leaders.

HE the Minister of Education and Higher Education Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhatir approved the first-round results for the 2025-

The minister congratulated successful students and their families, saying the results reflected a year of sustained effort and dedication, and praised the work

of teachers, school administrators and parents in carrying pupils through the year.

The numbers tell a story of broad improvement. In all, 10,898 students scored 70% or above — the threshold that opens the door to higher education institutions in Qatar and abroad — while a

marked lift in attainment was recorded across the board compared with previous years.

Performance varied by track. The daytime scientific stream led at 90.10%, followed by the humanities track at 82.24% and the technological track at 80.14%. Adult education trailed, with the

scientific stream at 37.93%, humanities at 52.10% and the parallel track at 41.80%.

Several schools turned in near-perfect sheets. Qatar Science and Technology Secondary School for Boys, Qatar Banking Studies and Business Administration Secondary School and the two Audio Education Schools each recorded a clean 100%. The Religious Institute Preparatory and Secondary School for Boys came in at 97.87%, while Qatar Technical Secondary School logged 89.24% in daytime study and 83.72% in adult education.

Assistant Undersecretary for Evaluation Affairs Khalid Abdullah al-Harqan told a press conference that 16,486 students sat the examinations across the various tracks. He credited co-ordinated work across state institutions and the dedication of school staff for the year's outcomes, singling out the stability and quality maintained by teaching and administrative teams.

Some 3,501 students did not clear the first round, he added, but will have the chance to sit second-round examinations.

Director of the Student Assessment Department Ibrahim al-Mohannadi said the achievement was the product of a full year of continuous work and co-operation between students, families and schools. The process ran well beyond the exam period itself, he noted, taking in marking, review, verification and moderation under a system built on transparency, accuracy and fairness. Examination centres, invigilators and supervisors had been central to keeping the testing environment well regulated, he said, with discipline key to safeguarding fairness.

Director of Public Relations and Communication Maryam al-Mohannadi said success in the certificate was never an individual feat but the fruit of partnership between families, schools and teachers.



Amir receives credentials of Nigeria's ambassador



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani has received the credentials of two newly appointed ambassadors to the country during a ceremony at the Amiri Diwan in Doha. Pictured here is Nigeria's ambassador Dr Mahmood Yakubu with His Highness the Amir. His Highness the Amir welcomed the diplomat and wished him success in carrying out their diplomatic duties. He also expressed his hope for continued progress and prosperity in the bilateral relations between Qatar and Nigeria. Meanwhile, the ambassador conveyed to His Highness the Amir the greetings of Nigeria's leader, along with his best wishes for the continued development and prosperity of the people of Qatar. An official reception ceremony was held for both ambassadors upon their arrival at the Amiri Diwan. - **QNA**



Qatar participates in GCC Petroleum Cooperation Committee meeting

Qatar participated yesterday in the extraordinary meeting of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) Petroleum Cooperation Committee, held via videoconference. Qatar was represented by HE the Minister of State for Energy Affairs Eng. Saad bin Sherida al-Kaabi. The meeting reviewed several decisions issued during the 19th Consultative Meeting of the GCC leaders, held on April 28. - **QNA**



Qatar participates in UN Counter-Terrorism Week

Qatar, represented by the National Counter-Terrorism Committee, participated in the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Week, which was held in New York City from June 26 to July 2. On the sidelines of the week's activities, Qatar's delegation held a meeting with UN Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate Natalia Gherman. The delegation also met with Officer-in-Charge of the Office of the Under-Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism Alexander Zuev, in the presence of several officials from the office. The two meetings dealt with discussing the existing cooperation between Qatar and both the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate, and ways to enhance coordination in the areas of counter-terrorism and capacity building were discussed, in addition to exchanging views on other topics of joint interest. - **QNA**

Qatar condemns bombing of cafe in Damascus

Qatar has condemned the bombing that targeted a cafe in the vicinity of the Palace of Justice in Damascus, which led to deaths and injuries.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs reiterated in a statement yesterday Qatar's firm stance against violence, terrorism, and criminal acts, regardless of the motives or reasons.

The ministry voiced Qatar's condolences to the families of the victims, and to the government and people of Syria, wishing the injured a speedy recovery. - **QNA**

Qatar takes part in GCC meeting on food security

Qatar participated yesterday in the meeting of the Ministerial Committee for Agricultural Cooperation and Food Security of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Agricultural Cooperation Committee, which was held via videoconference. HE the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Municipality Eng. Ali bin Mohammed al-Ali represented Qatar at the meeting. - **QNA**

Culture minister attends opening of private heritage museum in Syria

In the presence of HE the Minister of Culture Sheikh Abdulrahman bin Hamad al-Thani, Syria's Minister of Culture Mohammad Yassin Saleh opened private folk heritage museum in the city of Jayroud in the Damascus countryside, a step that reflects a shared commitment to preserving folk heritage, safeguarding cultural legacy, and ensuring its continued presence among future generations.

The museum's opening was attended by a number of officials and those interested in cultural affairs and heritage.

The museum represents a valuable addition to the Syrian cultural landscape, housing a collection of artefacts that document aspects of social and economic life, as well as the customs and traditions that have characterised the region for centuries.

The museum officials stressed that the project aims to revive cultural memory, preserve folklore, and enhance cultural awareness among all segments of society by displaying artefacts, tools, and heritage items that reflect the authenticity and diversity of the Syrian environment, contributing to visitors' understanding of the region's history and cultural legacy.

The museum houses a large collection of artefacts, antique household and agricultural tools, traditional costumes, and objects that document details of daily life in the past.

All of this is presented within a traditional architectural setting that preserves the region's authentic character, offering visitors a comprehensive cultural experience that evokes the spirit of the past. - **QNA**

Ministry of Justice unveils upgraded official website

The Ministry of Justice has launched an upgraded version of its official website as part of efforts to advance digital transformation and support the objectives of Qatar's Digital Agenda 2030.

The ministry said the redesigned website serves as a unified digital platform providing easier access to its services, as well as legal and legislative resources, including the Permanent Constitution of the State of Qatar, the *Official Gazette*, legislation across various sectors, real estate publications, and electronic services offered to individuals, government entities, and the private sector.

The platform also features new interactive sections for multimedia content and open data, enabling users to access official announcements and updates through a single portal, while enhancing transparency and improving access to information.

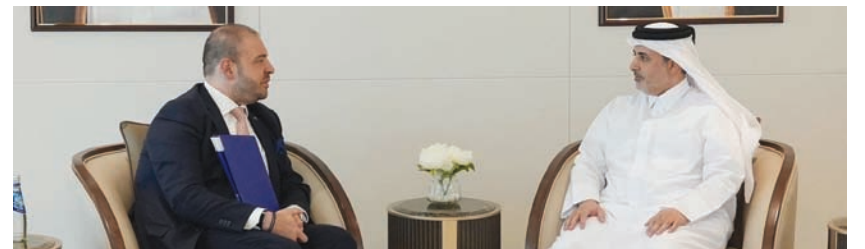
The new website offers a more streamlined and user-friendly interface, with simplified navigation and dedicated channels for communicating with the public and the ministry's senior leadership.

It includes a comprehensive Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section, providing quick and clear guidance on services and procedures, helping improve legal awareness, reduce processing time, and facilitate access to information.

According to the ministry, the upgraded website is designed to improve access to legal and real estate services, enhance the quality of judicial services, strengthen Qatar's legal ecosystem, support the country's investment environment, and meet growing demand for integrated and efficient digital services. - **QNA**

Environment minister meets EU ambassador

HE the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Dr Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki al-Subaie met yesterday with European Union ambassador Cristian Tudor. They discussed ways to enhance cooperation between the two sides as well as topics of common interest. - **QNA**



New villa rules offer families room to grow: experts

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

Engineers, architects and contractors say Qatar's newly approved planning regulations for villas and palaces are built to give homeowners greater flexibility rather than heftier construction bills, insisting that careful planning is what keeps a project affordable.

They said the framework lets families tailor homes to their needs while holding budgets in check, provided the work is thought through from the outset.

The revised rules, they stressed, do not oblige anyone to build bigger.

Instead, they open up optional features - expanded living spaces, mezzanine floors, larger majlis areas and extra annexes - with costs staying close to previous levels unless owners choose to make full use of them.

Go the whole way, and a project could climb by as much as 40% on the back of added concrete, steel, finishing materials and electromechanical systems.



Villa new design

Engineer and international arbitrator Khaled Ahmed al-Nasr told reporters that the regulations are meant to maximise the value of residential properties and support sustainable urban development, not to pile on financial burdens.

Subject to technical assessments, he noted, owners may now extend existing buildings or add floors - cutting the need for costly foundation work and infrastructure while improving efficiency.

Construction costs, al-Nasr

said, are far more often driven by poor planning, repeated design changes mid-build, luxury finishes and swings in material prices than by the regulations themselves.

"Comprehensive engineering studies and careful budgeting from the outset are essential to keeping projects on track," he said.

Architect Badriya Kafoud feels the updated rules are a welcome response to the changing needs of Qatari families.

While approved building ratios

stay tied to zoning, the framework permits separate wings for children, first-floor extensions above majlis and annexes, two-storey additions and higher ceilings to house modern air-conditioning systems.

"These enhancements would increase costs only marginally, typically by no more than 5%, and remain entirely optional," she said.

Engineer Mohammed Hassan al-Nuaimi agreed that owners who build to their actual requirements will notice little difference in outlay.

He put budget overruns down chiefly to over-ambitious expansion at the design stage, frequent changes once work is under way, and thin preliminary planning.

Contractor Jaber al-Marri, too, said the new regulations "would not automatically inflate construction costs".

He urged homeowners to match designs to genuine needs and realistic budgets, arguing that disciplined planning and sensible space allocation are the keys to getting the most from the rules without running up unnecessary expense.



Al-Muraikhi bids farewell to Malawi's ambassador

HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi met yesterday with Malawi's ambassador Roy Akajuwe Kachale, on the occasion of the end of his tenure.

The minister thanked Kachale for his efforts in supporting and strengthening bilateral relations, wishing him success in his new duties. - **QNA**

Minister receives copy of Maldives ambassador's credentials

HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi received yesterday a copy of the credentials of Maldives's ambassador Adam Shareef Umar.

HE al-Muraikhi wished the envoy success in his duties, emphasising his support for bilateral relations and foster cooperation. - **QNA**



Qatar renews condemnation of terrorism, reiterates commitment to strategy countering it

Qatar has reaffirmed its condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, regardless of its perpetrators or motives, describing it as a serious threat to international peace and security, sustainable development, human rights, and the rule of law.

Qatar also reiterated its commitment to the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and to implementing its four pillars in a comprehensive and balanced manner, as well as to relevant resolu-

tions of the United Nations General Assembly and the United Nations Security Council, and to applicable international and regional conventions.

The statement was delivered by HE the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations Sheikhha Alya Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani, before the General Assembly during the ninth review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy at UN Headquarters in New York.

She noted that Qatar believes prevent-

ing terrorism requires addressing the conditions that contribute to its spread, including conflicts, foreign occupation, hate speech, and human rights violations, which terrorist groups exploit for recruitment and incitement.

HE Sheikhha Alya stressed that terrorism should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilisation, culture, or ethnic group, and underscored the need to confront terrorist threats driven by intolerance, racism, xenophobia, and Islamophobia.

She said that Qatar has strengthened its strategic partnership with the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism and was among the first countries to contribute to the office following its establishment.

Since 2019, Qatar has provided an annual grant of \$15mn, which has been renewed through 2026.

HE Sheikhha Alya added that Qatar's total contributions now exceed \$141mn, equivalent to nearly one-third of the total

contributions to the Counter-Terrorism Trust Fund, which makes Qatar the office's largest donor.

She also highlighted that Doha has hosted the International Hub on Behavioural Insights to Counter Terrorism, one of the office's principal programme offices outside its headquarters, since 2020.

At the national level, she said that Qatar has continued to strengthen its legislative and institutional framework. - **QNA**



Police Academy celebrates graduation of first and second groups of 7th Police of Tomorrow programme

The Police Academy celebrated the graduation of the first and second groups of the 7th edition of the "Police of Tomorrow" programme for the summer of 2026, comprising 600 students. The ceremony was attended by HE the Legal Adviser to the Minister of Interior and General Supervisor of the Police Academy Dr Abdullah Yusuf al-Mal, Police Academy vice-president and Police College director Colonel Dr Fahad Saeed al-Subaie, and officers from the Ministry of Interior (MoI) and the students' parents. The ceremony featured presentations showcasing the skills the students acquired during the programme, which aims to deepen national identity, instill values of loyalty and belonging, and promote a sense of responsibility and community service alongside activities that contribute to developing leadership skills and boosting self-confidence. - QNA



Kahramaa launches comprehensive Customer Satisfaction Survey 2026

The Qatar General Electricity and Water Corporation (Kahramaa) has announced the launch of a comprehensive Customer Satisfaction Survey for 2026, aimed at evaluating the quality of services provided across Qatar. This initiative reflects Kahramaa's ongoing commitment to placing the customers at the centre of its decision-making process, with the goal of achieving and maintaining the highest standards of service excellence. The corporation emphasised the importance of this annual, broad-based survey as a key mechanism for capturing customer insights and feedback. It enables Kahramaa to stay attuned to evolving customer expectations and support its ongoing efforts to enhance service quality and the overall customer experience.

In addition, the survey provides valuable insight into customer perceptions, measures confidence in the services delivered, and helps identify areas for improvement. It also supports aligning service delivery with best international practices, ultimately strengthening customer satisfaction. The survey is scheduled to be conducted over an extended period from July to November. Kahramaa collaborated with Nielsen Consultancy LLC to design and implement the survey, with the firm authorised to conduct the survey on behalf of the corporation. The survey covers all customer segments, including residential, commercial, corporate, and bulk/industrial customers. Furthermore, it seeks input from licensed electrical consultants and contractors who act on behalf of customers during building

permit and service connection processes. This approach provides valuable insight into Kahramaa's performance and efficiency in these key areas. Dheya Saad al-Naimi, the director of the Planning and Quality Department, highlighted the importance of the Customer Satisfaction Survey as a key pillar in guiding the Corporation's strategies and projects. She reaffirmed Kahramaa's commitment to continuously enhancing its services and delivering a seamless, high-quality experience that aligns with Qatar's dynamic development and its regional and global leadership in public services. "In designing this survey, we have focused on establishing a comprehensive assessment framework to measure satisfaction levels across all key services provided by Kahramaa, through multiple service

channels, including customer service centres, call centres, and digital channels," al-Naimi said. "This approach enables us to gain a holistic understanding of our performance in meeting customer expectations and delivering services of the highest standard," she added. As a leading government service provider at both the regional and global levels, Kahramaa established a corporate management model that serves as a benchmark for effective governance within Qatar's public sector. Through the implementation of a customer-centric approach across its customer management portfolio, the corporation continues to enhance service quality in line with international standards, supporting the Qatar's ongoing economic, social, and urban development.

Qatar urges reduced use of plastic bags

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC) has called on the public to reduce the use of plastic bags and ensure their proper disposal, warning of their environmental impact on beaches, deserts, and marine areas. In a statement marking the International Plastic Bag Free Day, observed annually today (July 3), the ministry urged residents and visitors to coastal and natural areas to collect plastic waste and dispose of it in designated bins rather than leaving it scattered in the environment. It warned that plastic bags left on beaches or in natural reserves can be carried by wind or tides over long distances, posing risks to wildlife and marine life. The MoECC said reducing plastic use should go beyond limiting consumption at the point of sale to preventing its release into natural ecosystems. Dr Farhoud Al Hajri, the director of the ministry's Public Relations and Communications Department, said that the awareness day is an opportunity to reinforce responsible use of single-use products and encourage reusable alternatives, stressing that prevention is more effective than dealing with waste after it has spread. He called for cooperation between individuals, retailers and organizers of outdoor and marine activities, urging people to carry reusable bags, collect their waste and dispose of it properly, in order to protect the environment and biodiversity. - QNA

Celebrating 250 years of American history

As Americans prepare to celebrate the 250th anniversary of US independence on July 4, audiences in Qatar and around the world are invited to explore the history, values, and landmarks that define the US. Among the most recognisable are the presidential monuments in Washington, DC, which honour leaders whose legacies continue to shape America's national story. In the heart of the nation's capital are grand monuments dedicated to former presidents, but none are as iconic as the Washington Monument, the Jefferson Memorial or the Lincoln Memorial. The Washington Monument, located in the centre of the National Mall, honours America's first president, George Washington. The 169m obelisk references the civilisations of ancient Egypt and Rome. Despite his roles as a founding father and a successful Revolutionary War general, Washington had a quiet demeanour and an air of stoicism. He never lived in the White House - it was under construction at the time - but instead lived with his wife Martha and her children from an earlier marriage at Mount Vernon, 22km outside of the city in Virginia. The Jefferson Memorial, lo-

cated on the Tidal Basin on the National Mall and built in the Palladian style of Italian Renaissance architecture, was completed in 1943. It reflects Thomas Jefferson's belief in Renaissance ideals of balance and unity, which he strove to apply to both art and politics. Jefferson designed his home estate, Monticello, in Charlottesville, Virginia, in a similar style. He was America's third president and a founding father who worked to secure international diplomacy abroad while expanding the US westward. He became the first secretary of state in 1789. The Lincoln Memorial, on the National Mall at the end of the reflecting pool, houses a giant statue of Abraham Lincoln. The 5.8m seated figure looks out at the nation's capital, with the Washington Monument and Jefferson Memorial in its line of sight. Lincoln guided the nation through the Civil War and signed the 13th Amendment, which emancipated enslaved people. He was a tall man, around 2m, and spoke softly despite his towering presence. The monument reflects his larger-than-life presence and legacy and is among the most popular US monuments - an estimated 7mn tourists visit each year.



The Washington Monument seen with the capital city's famous cherry blossom trees at full bloom.

QU extends admission application deadline

Qatar University (QU) has announced an extension of the application deadline for prospective students seeking admission for the 2026-27 academic year. Applications will now be accepted until July 5, 2026. The QU encourages all applicants and prospective students to complete their applications through the online admissions portal and review the admission requirements and criteria available on the university's official website. - QNA

UDST achieves ISO certification for Quality Management System

The University of Doha for Science and Technology (UDST) has announced that it has achieved ISO 9001:2015 certification for its institution-wide Quality Management System (QMS), a globally recognised standard for quality management. The UDST said in a press release yesterday that the certification reflects the university's commitment to excellence, effectiveness, and continuous improvement of its operations and service delivery across the certified scope of higher

education, applied research, professional training, and support services. Awarded following a comprehensive audit conducted by Bureau Veritas Certification, a globally recognised certification body accredited by the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS), the university-wide ISO 9001:2015 certification recognises the UDST's effective quality management system and its ability to consistently and systematically meet stakeholder expectations while maintaining internationally

recognised standards across all of its academic and administrative functions. "Achieving ISO 9001:2015 certification is a significant milestone for the university and a testament to the dedication of our faculty, staff, and leadership team," said UDST president Dr Salem al-Naemi said. "This accomplishment reinforces our commitment to delivering an exceptional educational experience, advancing impactful research, and providing high-quality services that support

the needs of our students, industry partners, and the wider community," he said. "It also reflects our ongoing pursuit of excellence and continuous improvement in everything we do." The ISO 9001:2015 certification is the world's most widely recognised quality management standard and is awarded to organisations that have demonstrated strong governance, effective processes, customer focus, and a culture of continuous improvement. - QNA

Ashghal affirms role of national cadres in key projects

The Public Works Authority (Ashghal) has affirmed that Qatari nationals continue to play a pivotal role in implementing the country's development projects. This is part of Ashghal's ongoing efforts to attract, train, and empower Qatari talent across various disciplines, thereby enhancing their contribution to infrastructure and public building projects according to the highest standards.

In a statement released yesterday, Ashghal said that Qataris comprise nearly 60% of its professional workforce, reflecting its commitment to investing in national human capital and supporting national development goals. On the engineering front, the authority noted that its engineering staff includes 1,305 engineers, of whom 741 are Qatari, representing 57% of the total engineering workforce.

Furthermore, the male and female percentages of the national engineering talent within the authority are 55% and 45%. This reflects Ashghal's success in empowering national talent of both genders and providing them with opportunities to actively participate in implementing strategic projects, contributing to the development of sustainable infrastructure that supports Qatar National Vision 2030. - QNA



Atreatment trial for the Bundibugyo Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo) enrolled its first patient yesterday, marking a milestone in efforts to combat the epidemic, World Health Organisation (WHO) chief Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told reporters.

Tedros, however, cited an attack on an Ebola treatment centre in Ituri province in which two people died as a sign of ongoing difficulties in tackling the spread of the disease.

"Despite all this progress, we continue to face significant challenges, including mistrust and violence," the WHO director-general said.

Trial of potential Ebola treatments begins in DR Congo

There are currently no approved vaccines or treatments for Ebola's Bundibugyo strain, which has caused more than 1,400 cases in the DR Congo, including 438 deaths.

The DR Congo has recorded an average of 38 new confirmed cases a day over the past two weeks, Tedros said.

He said that the study was being conducted by the DR Congo's National Institute for Biomedical Research, backed up by partners including the WHO.

"Patients who enrol in the trial will receive comprehensive supportive care and

close follow-up," Tedros said. "We are also working to ensure they have access to the two drugs should they prove safe and efficacious in the trial."

The trial, which could take months to complete and includes more than 1,000 patients, will evaluate Mapp Biopharmaceutical's experimental MBP134 antibody as a standalone treatment for Bundibugyo Ebola, as well as in combination with Gilead Sciences' antiviral drug remdesivir, the WHO said.

There are enough drug supplies for the trials, according to the WHO, which said it

was in discussions with the United States, which donated supplies of MBP134, and Gilead to ensure patients would be able to access the drugs after the trials if they are shown to be safe and effective.

Gilead said yesterday that it has donated more than 2,000 vials of remdesivir for the trial, in addition to the 2,000 vials it provided for emergency use in June.

The WHO chief also said other parts of the response were showing improvement: there are now 10 laboratories that can test for Ebola and follow-ups are being conducted for four in five contacts, although

more contacts still needed to be identified per case.

Treatment capacity has also expanded, with 650 beds available, of which about 96% are currently occupied.

Tedros said the WHO and its partners were working to add 300 additional beds.

Separately, the WHO also declared the hantavirus outbreak linked to a cruise ship over after the last identified contact of an exposed person completed quarantine and tested negative for the virus.

The outbreak, which infected 13 people and killed three, involved the Andes virus, a rare hantavirus strain that typically circulates in Argentina and Chile. — **AFP/Reuters**

Bomb blast at Damascus cafe kills six, injures 22

Reuters/AFP
Beirut

A bomb blast at a crowded cafe in central Damascus killed at least six people and wounded 22 others yesterday, Syrian state media reported.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility.

An AFP correspondent saw ambulances weaving through traffic with their sirens blaring as they headed to the site, and security forces cordoned off the area of the blast.

Syrian state television said an explosive device had been planted at the cafe, near the Palace of Justice in the centre of the capital.

Damascus Governor Maher Idlibi said the blast was caused by a crudely made improvised explosive device (IED), according to Syrian state media.

"Those responsible for this bloodshed will be punished," he said. "Each time the country sees a period of stability, malicious parties try to destabilise it."

Videos that circulated on social media showed wounded people and blood on the floors of a cafe, purportedly the site of the blast.

Reuters could not immediately verify the footage.

Nour Khayyat, 40, who owns a shop selling batteries for solar panels near the site, told AFP that "at about 3pm (1200 GMT), I heard a powerful blast and the storefront shook".

"People rushed to the cafe and called ambulances," he added.

Mohammed al-Dahabi, the owner of a glasses shop next to the targeted cafe, was trembling as he described the explosion, telling AFP: "I felt strong pressure, and the whole place shook."

"I ran to the place and saw people ly-

ing on the floor with blood pooled around them everywhere," he added, saying the scenes recalled the bombings Damascus experienced during Syria's nearly 14-year civil war.

The attack presents another security challenge to the Syrian government of President Ahmed al-Sharaa, who took control after overthrowing former president Bashar al-Assad in late 2024.

Assad's ouster effectively ended more than 14 years of civil war.

Damascus has witnessed a handful of security incidents since then, including a car bomb that killed one Syrian soldier and wounded at least 18 people outside the defence ministry in May.

Although no group claimed responsibility for yesterday's blast, Islamic State has sought to exploit the security vacuum created by Assad's ouster by reactivating sleeper cells, recruiting fighters and moving weapons as the new government



Syrian security forces gather at the site of an explosion at a cafe in Damascus. — **AFP**

extends its authority across the country, security officials had said.

The militant group announced earlier this year what it described as a new phase of operations against al-Sharaa's government.

The group is far weaker than when it controlled large parts of Syria and Iraq before the collapse of its self-declared caliphate in 2019.

It remains, however, capable of carrying

out deadly insurgency-style attacks and is viewed by Syrian, Iraqi and Western officials as one of the biggest threats to Syria's transition.

Al-Sharaa's other opponents include Assad-era officers and soldiers.

In 2025, Syria was rocked by fighting between the new government forces and insurgents from Syria's Alawite minority, and separately between government forces and Druze gunmen.



A woman casts her ballot at a polling station during parliamentary elections in Algiers. — **AFP**

Algerians head to polls to vote for new parliament

AFP
Algiers

Algerians headed to the polls yesterday to vote for a new parliament in an election shadowed by fears of low turnout among the 25mn-strong electorate.

Polling stations, which opened at 8am local time (0700 GMT) and were due to close at 7pm, were nearly empty in the capital Algiers as of early afternoon, an AFP journalist reported.

However, images broadcast on national television showed people queuing up to cast their ballots in some parts of the country, including in the northwestern province of El Aricha.

"We came to fulfill our duty, hoping for something good. That's all I have to say," Djammel Bouakkaz, a 74-year-old retiree,

told AFP at a polling station in Algiers.

Voter turnout had reached 11% nationwide as of mid-afternoon, and nearly 10% among those registered to cast ballots overseas, state TV reported, citing the election authority.

The last parliamentary vote in 2021 saw a historic low turnout, while this year's is taking place amid controversy over the government's disqualification of roughly a third of would-be candidates.

Some hopefuls have said they were blocked from competing for major constituencies, including Algiers.

The ruling National Liberation Movement (FLN) was widely expected to still dominate the 407-seat National People's Assembly, whose members are elected for five-year terms.

President Abdelmajid Tebboune said the election was proceeding as expected, the state-run APS agency reported.

Prime Minister Said Sayoud declined to comment on turnout but urged citizens to take part, according to news website TSA.

"I call upon Algerian men and women to turn out in large numbers to vote," Sayoud was quoted as saying.

Algeria had seen record low turnout of 23% in the 2021 poll — the first since a major pro-democracy protest movement swept through the country in 2019.

The Hirak movement erupted in February of that year and led to the resignation of president Abdelaziz Bouteflika two months later.

Tebboune was elected later in 2019 and won a second term in 2024.

Observers have expected little enthusiasm from the voters in yesterday's poll.

"Throughout this campaign, the crucial challenge has been to encourage citizens to turn out in large numbers," wrote the local French-language daily *L'Expression*.

S Africa bus crash leaves at least 16 dead, dozens injured

AFP
Cape Town

A passenger bus carrying 78 people overturned in southwest South Africa yesterday, killing at least 16 people, including children, police and transport officials said.

South Africa has one of the continent's most developed road networks but continues to struggle with a high rate of road deaths, largely blamed on speeding, reckless driving, unroadworthy vehicles and the failure to use seat belts.

The bus was travelling from the tourist city of Cape Town to Idutywa in Eastern Cape province when it crashed in the early hours, the Road Traffic Management Corporation (RTMC), a government road safety partnership, said.

"It is alleged that the bus swerved to avoid colliding with a delivery vehicle when the driver lost control and the vehicle overturned," the RTMC said in a statement.

Police said most of the victims were declared dead at the scene and included seven men, five women and three children.

The RTMC said 43 passengers refused medical treatment but did not provide a reason.

Police said the circumstances surrounding the crash were under investigation.

In 2025, 11,485 people were killed in road crashes in South Africa, down more than 5% from a year earlier, according to RTMC data.

Most of the fatalities were pedestrians.

90% of Gaza devastated 1,000 days into Israeli occupation: official

A senior Gaza official has described the humanitarian situation in the territory as "catastrophic" 1,000 days into what he called "genocide", citing extensive destruction, large numbers of casualties and the collapse of essential services.

Speaking to the Qatar News Agency (QNA), Ismail al-Thawabta, the director of the Government Media Office in Gaza, said that official government and UN reports reflected the scale of devastation caused by Israeli occupation forces' military campaign since the events of October 7, 2023.

He said that "more than 90% of Gaza had been destroyed, with over 80% of the territory's geographical area affected by military operations and displacement".

Al-Thawabta added that "more than 223,000 tonnes of explosives" had been dropped across the territory, including in areas previously designated by the Israeli military as humanitarian or safe zones.

He also said Al Mawasi area in southern Gaza had been struck 241 times.

According to al-Thawabta, a total of 73,066 people have been killed and 9,500 remain missing beneath the rubble or whose fate is unknown.

He said that children, women

and elderly people accounted for more than 55% of the casualties, including more than 21,500 children and over 12,500 women.

The official also said more than 1,022 children under the age of one had been killed, including 520 infants born during the conflict.

Al-Thawabta added that 39,022 families had been affected by "massacres" with more than 2,700 families wiped out entirely and another 6,020 left with only a single surviving member.

The conflict, he said, had also claimed the lives of 1,700 medical workers, 145 civil defence personnel, 262 journalists, more than 194 municipal employees, over 2,800 police officers and aid security personnel, and more than 928 members of the sporting community.

He said that 460 people had died from hunger and malnutrition, including 164 children, while 23 people were killed in what he described as mistaken aid air-drops.

Al-Thawabta added that 28 people, including 25 children, had died from exposure to cold in displacement camps.

According to the official, more than 173,500 injured people sought treatment at hospitals, with over 19,000 requiring long-term rehabilitation.

Al-Thawabta also said 362

healthcare workers had been detained by Israeli occupation, with 83 still being held.

He said the conflict had left 26,370 women widowed and 58,800 children orphaned, while overcrowded displacement conditions had contributed to more than 2.142mn recorded cases of infectious diseases, including 71,338 cases of viral hepatitis.

The Israeli strikes had destroyed or put out of service 38 hospitals, 96 primary healthcare centres and 197 ambulances, with more than 788 attacks carried out against healthcare facilities, personnel and supply chains.

He also said 16 civil defence centres and 84 rescue and fire-fighting vehicles had been destroyed or severely damaged.

Regarding the education sector and the destruction of academic and educational institutions, al-Thawabta said that 100% of the schools in the Gaza Strip suffered material damage because of direct and indirect bombing.

More than 80% of school buildings require reconstruction or major rehabilitation, with 40% of them located within the so-called yellow line.

Some 80 school buildings were directly bombed and destroyed, and 17 higher education institutions were completely or partially destroyed.

Al-Thawabta emphasised that the occupation ultimately deprived more than 620,000 school-aged children and over 90,000 university-aged children of their fundamental right to education.

He stated that the total number of damaged buildings reached 227,703, comprising 510,000 damaged housing units.

The occupation forces completely demolished 335,000 buildings and housing units, and partially destroyed 75,000 buildings and housing units, rendering them uninhabitable.



Displaced Palestinians walk past destroyed buildings and makeshift shelters near the al-Shati refugee camp, west of Gaza City. — **AFP**

This brings the total number of completely destroyed and uninhabitable buildings and units to 410,000.

Meanwhile, some 100,000 housing units were partially destroyed but remained habitable.

He added that this destruction has left more than 350,000 Palestinian families in immediate need of shelter, while more than 2mn people have been forcibly displaced, and the occupation forces deliberately bombed their shelters and gatherings 346 times, forcing them to live in dilapidated conditions in tents, of which more than 132,000 out of 135,000 are now uninhabitable.

He also noted that more than 650 days have passed since the complete closure of all crossings into the Gaza Strip, during which the occupation has prevented the entry of more than 390,000 trucks carrying humanitarian aid and fuel as part of a policy of starvation.

Al-Thawabta added that 48 food distribution points and 64 aid and supply centres have been targeted, 556 aid and relief workers have been killed, and aid convoys and humanitarian shipments have been targeted 128 times.

On the medical front, he told the QNA that the occupation is preventing more than 22,000 sick

and wounded individuals from traveling, including more than 5,200 children in urgent need of medical evacuation to save their lives, and 12,500 cancer patients facing death.

Regarding the destruction of infrastructure and public facilities, al-Thawabta said that the Israeli war machine destroyed 725 central water wells, rendering them inoperable, and targeted 134 freshwater projects.

Furthermore, it destroyed more than 700,000 linear metres of water networks as well as a similar amount of sewage networks, and more than 3mn linear metres of roads and streets.

Al-Thawabta said that the occupation forces also deliberately targeted livelihoods and the foundations of the agricultural, livestock, and fisheries sectors, as the bombing led to the destruction of over 87% of the agricultural land in the Gaza Strip.

He said that the direct and initial material losses incurred by 15 vital sectors are estimated at approximately \$80bn, including housing, health, municipalities and services, commerce and household goods, education, industry, agriculture, Internet and communications, transportation, and other essential service sectors. — **QNA**

Macabre night in La Guaira, Venezuela's earthquake epicentre

AFP
La Guaira

A macabre darkness, the glare of spotlights, the droning of generators and jackhammers, and often the stench of decomposing corpses: eight days after the double earthquake in Venezuela, nighttime in La Guaira, once a festive seaside resort, has transformed into a grim scene of survival and despair.

The vast majority of the nearly 2,300 dead and thousands missing from the tragedy of June 24 are concentrated on the coast of La Guaira, where entire neighbourhoods have been razed.

Nearly 200 buildings have completely collapsed, according to official figures, but local people say the number is higher.

Some 15,000 homeless people are sleeping in tents in the streets, sports facilities, parks, vacant lots after one of Latin America's worst ever earthquake disasters.

Everywhere, relatives, volunteers, and rescue workers are rac-

ing to recover bodies with the slim chance of finding survivors.

But there have been glimmers of hope. Hernan Gil, 43, was astonishingly rescued from the rubble yesterday, eight days after the earthquakes, in Playa Grande, a neighbourhood of Catia La Mar.

On a neighbouring plot of land, under the glare of floodlights, about 10 people are working to excavate a six-metre-high mountain, the remains of an eight-story building that collapsed "like a sandwich of slabs," explained Manuel Alejos, a crane operator.

"We're breaking slab by slab to free the bodies... Their families need the bodies to say their good-byes," said the crane operator, who has already pulled seven bodies from the building.

"We still have the basement to do," he said, still hoping to find survivors.

Angelo Gonzalez, a 27-year-old motorcycle taxi driver, and his friends arrived with water and pasta: "We're helping our brothers. We all have the same blood."

On the docks, people wait on



Rescuers work at the site of a collapsed building in Los Corales, Caraballeda, La Guaira state, yesterday. (AFP)

plastic chairs. A makeshift morgue has been set up to meet the demand.

Owuar Herrera and 12 members of his family have been waiting since 5pm. He brought the bodies of his granddaughter, 10-year-old Dasleidy Herrera, and her grandmother, 50-year-old Mildred Moreno, both killed in the earthquakes.

"After a week of work, we found them today. They were embracing," he says.

In Caraballeda, the other hardest-hit area, only a pile of rubble remains of the upscale Coral Beach residence.

At the top, men were also working with spotlights to recover the body of Dennis Velasquez, 26, the son of their friend.

Plastic bottles had been placed over the protruding metal to prevent injuries. The men worked like ants, forming a chain to pass buckets of small concrete blocks.

"We went past the penthouse, the 12th floor, and on the 11th we pulled out a family of six with a six-year-old child. On the 10th, there's my son," one of the rescuers, Carlos Velasquez, said.

"I've been here since day one. Even if I have to pull him out with my own fingernails, my son will rest in a proper cemetery," Velasquez said, his eyes filled with sadness but determination.

His son's body was recovered shortly afterward.

Cesar Gonzalez, 54, a Mexican firefighter and veterinarian, gives his two dogs, Zeus and Bom, water: "One is for detecting the living, the other for the dead. The more time passes, the less hope there is. Just two days ago, hope was much greater. Now, it would be a miracle," he explains.

Police and soldiers are patrolling to prevent looting. Sergeant Yonder Maita, 24, is patrolling to

protect rescue workers but especially to prevent theft: "There are people who break into houses to steal. Sometimes they pretend to be relatives. They take advantage of the situation."

On many walls, the words "Already looted" are painted in black.

On a soccer field, Maria Arteaga, 33, a mother of four, is preparing to sleep in an improvised shelter made of tarpaulins and a Venezuelan flag.

On the floor, dirty mattresses found in the street will serve as sleeping quarters for nine people.

"The house... Everything, we've lost everything... Except our lives! We're even barefoot."

"We didn't have much to begin with, but we've lost everything," adds a neighbour, Alexis Ramirez, 25, a tyre repairman.

He lives with his two-year-old daughter, Mia, his wife, Fabiola, who is seven months pregnant, and his disabled mother-in-law.

Is he afraid of becoming homeless? Of more aftershocks? Of thieves?

"We've lost our fear."

Venezuelan rescue brings hope to nation in mourning

AFP
Catia La Mar, Venezuela

Hernan Gil survived nearly eight days trapped beneath the ruins of a partially collapsed building in Venezuela before being extricated yesterday in a dramatic operation involving rescuers from seven countries.

The 43-year-old security guard has become a symbol of hope for a nation in mourning after one of the worst earthquakes in Latin American history.

Now only remote chances exist for finding more survivors from the two earthquakes that killed nearly 2,300, destroyed entire residential buildings and left tens of thousands missing.

After a dramatic operation launched on Monday, Gil emerged in Catia La Mar, in the state of La Guaira, the area hardest hit by the June 24 earthquakes.

"I am completely surprised. It's the first time I've seen so many countries come together like this for a single cause, to save one person," his wife Gusbimar Gonzalez said. "This is truly a miracle."

Gonzalez nervously watched the rescue operation throughout.

"He wasn't hurt, he has no trauma, he managed to hide under a



Rescue workers transport survivor Hernan Alberto Gil, who was trapped for over a week following June 24 earthquakes, from a collapsed mall in La Guaira, yesterday. (Reuters)

table and a chair," she said shortly before he emerged to the applause and cheers of his rescuers.

Gil was taken out on a stretcher and transferred to an ambulance that transported him to Caracas, 40 kilometres (25 miles) away.

Gil was brought out through a tunnel about three metres (10 feet) long. In the final phase of the operation, about 30 people worked in the building's parking lot removing debris, while two rescuers dug the tunnel.

Rescuers from seven countries — Venezuela, Chile, the US, Portugal, Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Mexico — were involved in the painstaking operation.

Gil was trapped in the security booth of the seven-story building where he worked as a guard in Catia La Mar.

"The movement caused the booth to shift; it became trapped between the walls," his wife, with whom he has a 10-year-old son, told AFP.

Rescuers learned on Sunday there was a man alive in the rubble of the partially destroyed building. Gil is among the few people who have been miraculously rescued days after the earthquakes.

But chances of finding anyone alive beneath deep rubble dwindle rapidly after a critical 72-hour window for rescuing trapped people.

The rescue crews had set up bases at the site to work day and night to pull out Gil.

They shored up the building's foundations with wood and steel to prevent the partially destroyed structure from collapsing further.

Venezuela has been hit by a string of aftershocks since the initial earthquakes.

An initial plan to build a 60-by-60-centimetre (24-by-24-inch) tunnel was discarded on Tuesday when the building shifted slightly.

"This is a rather complicated structure to access," Chilean rescuer Cristian Vera told AFP.

"With very large pillars... It wasn't easy to reach the exact spot."

On Wednesday, rescuers advanced along two routes simultaneously to reach Gil.

Their efforts were rewarded yesterday when Gil emerged from the rubble, as rescuers cheered, hugged and crowded around the man they worked so hard to save.

Panama to build maximum-security prison for gang leaders

AFP
Panama City

Panamanian President Jose Raul Mulino said Wednesday he is ordering the construction of a maximum-security prison for gang leaders following a prisoner escape and a nationwide surge in violence.

Numerous Latin American countries have sought to replicate the prison-building model of Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele, who is waging a nationwide campaign against street gangs in which some 92,000 people have been locked up since 2022.

Without mentioning Bukele's policies, Mulino said he will toughen prison rules to prevent inmates from continuing to run gangs from behind bars. He blamed such gangs for drug trafficking and most killings in Panama.

"We are going to construct a maximum-security prison and toughen the penitentiary rules for those who commit crimes inside prison," Mulino said in a speech to Congress.

"We will implement a plan with greater effort... totally isolating the leaders of (criminal) gangs," he added without giving details of the plan.

Mulino announced the measures amid outrage after a

10-year-old girl was killed when assailants attacked her father, and after almost 200 prisoners escaped from the La Joyita prison outside Panama City last month. Most were recaptured.

"I would rather they accuse me of overpopulating prisons if that means gangsters will not keep extorting, killing, robbing, and pushing drugs in the streets of our country," Mulino said.

Ecuador and Costa Rica are currently building prisons in the model of the El Salvador's notorious Center for Terrorism Confinement (CECOT).

There, prisoners are subjected to strict rules and NGOs denounce widespread human rights violations, including torture and sexual violence.

Prisoners will "no longer be guests in prisons that look more like resorts," Mulino said.

"I support the policy of human rights, but always those of the victims first," he added.

So far this year Panama has registered a nationwide homicide rate of six killings per 100,000 inhabitants, compared to 24 per 100,000 in its violent Central American neighbour Honduras.

But the violence in Panama is double in the Caribbean province of Colon and the capital city.

Panama has around 24,000 inmates housed in around 20 prisons that have a total capacity is for 14,700 people.



Chile's President Jose Antonio Kast and his Uruguayan counterpart Yamandu Orsi hold a press conference, in Montevideo, Uruguay. (Reuters)

Chile, Uruguay discuss how to fight drug cartels

AFP
Montevideo

The presidents of Chile and Uruguay huddled Wednesday to discuss how to fight organised crime, a problem that right-wing populists campaigned on in their sweep to power across Latin America.

President Jose Antonio Kast of Chile and Yamandu Orsi of Uruguay conferred for an hour a day after attending a summit of the regional trading bloc called Mercosur, in neighbouring Paraguay.

Kast expressed hope that both Uruguay and Paraguay will soon join Chile in signing a crime-fighting agreement to tackle

powerful drug trafficking cartels which send huge amounts of cocaine from South America to the United States and Europe.

"Organised crime can be removed from one country but it needs the same rules in all nations to be able to do away with this scourge," Kast said in a joint statement with Orsi.

Backed by President Donald Trump, Kast won a landslide victory in Chile in December on a platform to crack down hard on crime and illegal immigration, which he blamed for bringing cartels and gangs into Chile, one of the most prosperous countries of Latin America.

The homicide rate in Chile has doubled in the past decade to 5.4 per 100,000 inhabitants. Uruguay's is almost twice that.

In Brazil, a Bolsonaro family rift exposes the right's struggle with women voters

Reuters
Brasilia/Sao Paulo

A widening rift between far-right Brazilian Senator Flavio Bolsonaro and his stepmother, former first lady Michelle Bolsonaro, threatens to worsen his already weak standing among women voters as he campaigns for the presidency ahead of October's general election. The former first lady resigned on Tuesday as head of the women's wing of the Liberal Party, whose most prominent figure is right-wing former president Jair Bolsonaro, in an escalating public dispute with her stepsons. In a video last week that went viral, she accused Flavio of having "disrespected" and "mistreated" her by criticising her involvement in party affairs, which she described as a "stab in the back."

"I understood that he didn't want my support — or that it was insignificant — so I withdrew, kept to myself," she said in the video. "That is how I remain." Michelle, 44, is widely considered one of the most effective messengers to conservative and evangelical women for the party, which deployed her across the country for outreach. Her exit deprives Senator Bolsonaro of a key asset as he tries to broaden his appeal and defeat incumbent President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva in October.

Polls suggest that the younger Bolsonaro, like his father before him, is struggling to boost his support among women voters.

A poll released by BTG Pactual/Nexus on Monday showed Lula leading Senator Bolsonaro among women by 18 percentage points in a hypothetical runoff, 55% to 37%. Among men, the



Former Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro and his wife Michelle Bolsonaro attend a demonstration against Jair Bolsonaro's judicial process and to demand the amnesty of all accused of taking part in allegedly conspiring to overthrow the government, in Sao Paulo. (Reuters/File Photo)

senator held a 49% to 42% advantage.

Among all voters, the poll showed Lula winning re-election with 49% to Senator Bolsonaro's 43%.

"In a tightly contested election, any variable moves the market," said political scientist Rafael Favetti.

The rift between Flavio and Michelle was concerning to some voters.

"I will consider Michelle's points, not about family, that's personal, but about the difficulties in appointing women candidates," said Thaise Lima, a lawyer based in Sao Paulo who identifies as right-wing. "Women still don't have strong representation in politics."

For years, Michelle Bolsonaro worked to build a net-

worked since Flavio launched his campaign late last year, as he attempts to craft an image as a moderate version of his outspoken father.

Some of his allies have been resistant to making peace with Michelle and her camp.

"Women vote really badly," right-wing influencer Paulo Figueiredo said in a video released last week. Flavio Bolsonaro later said Figueiredo's remarks were misguided.

Former president Bolsonaro's two campaigns struggled to appeal to women, weighed down in part by his history of controversial and sexist remarks. Flavio Bolsonaro seemed to be trying to change that.

He has been photographed wearing a T-shirt reading "girl dad" and has floated the idea of choosing a woman as his running mate, a plan that has gained strength in recent days, according to people close to him.

Daniella Marques, a close ally of Jair Bolsonaro's former finance minister, has emerged as a potential running mate or finance minister after joining the senator's campaign as an economic adviser.

Still, away from the public view, the senator ignored his stepmother's opinions when making decisions about their party's national strategy, Michelle said in her video. Flavio held a meeting on Wednesday with dozens of conservative women politicians in Brasilia where he made conciliatory remarks about Michelle, who was invited but did not attend.

"I have tremendous respect for Michelle, and I'm confident that we'll get through this difficult moment and that she will be walking alongside us," he said at the meeting.



'Trump accounts' will accept stock donations: officials

Reuters
Washington

Individuals and corporations will be able to donate shares of stock to "Trump accounts," the government-backed newborn investment accounts created as part of US President Donald Trump's landmark tax and immigration law, officials said yesterday.

The accounts are set to formally launch tomorrow to mark the United States' 250th anniversary. The federal government will contribute \$1,000 for every child born starting in 2025 through 2028, and some companies and philanthropists have made additional donations.

Contributors will be able to transfer publicly traded shares to the US Treasury, the department said, and the stock "will be contributed to Trump Accounts for eligible children consistent with the donor's instructions, applicable law, and Treasury guidance."

"By accepting contributions of

publicly traded stock, Treasury is creating a practical pathway for large-scale private giving to support the next generation," Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said in a statement.

Parents and guardians can create accounts by completing the one-page Internal Revenue Service "Form 4547" – named for Trump, the 45th and 47th president. The accounts are not automatically created by the government; the adult who opens one is responsible for setting it up and choosing how the money is invested while the child is still a minor.

The Treasury Department on Wednesday announced five investment funds in which account holders will be able to place the government's initial cash contribution. The funds track the performance of some of the leading Wall Street indexes and are among the most widely traded exchange-traded funds by retail investors.

Trump holds between \$7mn and \$35.1mn in those same instru-

ments, according to his annual financial disclosures. He purchased up to \$21mn of the funds in 2025.

White House spokeswoman Anna Kelly said Trump's investments in the funds did not represent a conflict of interest and "are in held in fully discretionary accounts managed by independent third-party financial institutions."

More than 6mn families have signed up for the accounts, the Treasury Department said, though only 1.4mn are eligible for the federal seed money, the agency previously reported.

That means the vast majority of account holders who opted into the programme will gain tax advantages but will invest largely their own money.

Trump accounts receive less favourable tax treatment than other savings plans designed for young people, but have fewer restrictions on how the money can be used. The funds are not taxed until an account holder turns 18, but may face some state taxes.

Progress, further delay risk for Boeing Air Force One: report

AFP
New York

Boeing has made progress on its much-delayed new planes for the US president – known as Air Force One when the leader is on board – but the project remains vulnerable to potential further postponement, a government report said yesterday.

The order for two new specially equipped Boeing 747-8 aircraft, known as the VC-25B, are currently scheduled for delivery in mid-2028 and mid-2029. The planes were originally targeted for delivery by the end of 2024.

"Boeing made progress on some of the schedule risks that we previously reported" including the completion of the engineering design for the environmental control system and hiring and Boeing's hiring of "more qualified mechanics," according to an annual weapons report from the US Government Accountability Office.

"Other schedule risks remain, including the detailed designs for the aircraft interiors, fabrication of the wire bundles, and rework to correct defects in structural modifications," the report said.

Signed in 2018 during President Donald Trump's first term, the contract aimed for initial delivery of a plane by the end of 2024.



The new Air Force One, a plane gifted by the Qatari government, stands on the tarmac, at Joint Base Andrews, Maryland. (Reuters)

The famed aircraft has been back in the news this week when Trump, now back in office, took his first flight aboard a new Air Force One plane – a Boeing 747-800 gifted to him by Qatar last year and rapidly retrofitted.

Trump used the plane to fly to North Dakota to attend an event at the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library as part of celebrations for the 250th anniversary of American independence.

The Qatar plane is expected to serve as a stopgap until the Boeing planes are delivered.

Boeing did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

In its most recent quarterly securities filing, Boeing described the work as a \$4bn fixed price contract "to develop and modify two 747-8 commercial aircraft." The company in 2025 increased

its projected loss from the contract by \$60mn.

"We expect finalisation of the contract terms to reset the schedule and adjust the requirements in 2026," Boeing said in the filing. "Risk remains that we may record additional losses in future periods."

In its analysis, GAO said that the programme could benefit from "leading product development practices" such as conducting digital engineering and developing a digital twin. The report also called for formal documentation in some areas.

"Even though the VC-25B is well into development, the adoption of modern tools and methods could help ensure the system works as intended throughout operations and increase future agility so that the system remains relevant and effective," the report said.

Hot spell roasts eastern US ahead of holiday weekend

AFP
New York

Millions of Americans sweltered in stifling heat and humidity yesterday with dangerous temperatures expected to hit major cities through the Fourth of July holiday weekend.

The heat wave that has been broiling the Midwest began intensifying in the Northeast, with temperatures expected to approach or climb past 100 degrees Fahrenheit (38 degrees Celsius) in cities including New York, Philadelphia, Boston and Washington.

The heat index – which measures how hot it feels based on temperature and humidity combined – was even more merciless. The National Weather Service warned the index could peak as high as 115F (46C) in the mid-Atlantic region.

The intense heat was of particular concern given the Fourth of July celebrations that include many outdoor activities like barbecues and fireworks displays. The heat wave also coincides with a string of weekend World Cup matches.

"This level of rare and long-duration heat, with little or no overnight relief, affects anyone without effective cooling and/or adequate hydration," warned the National Weather Service.

Nighttime temperatures across



People wait in line to view the Liberty Bell at Independence National Historical Park amid a heatwave in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, yesterday. (Reuters)

the Northeast are not anticipated to fall much below 80F (27C).

Authorities across the country urged people to stay indoors especially in the hottest parts of the afternoon, to check on their neighbours, drink more water than usual, and to find air conditioning if they don't have access at home.

New York has designated hundreds of public buildings as cooling centres, extended public swimming pool hours, dispatched volunteers to check on vulnerable residents, and opened cooling stations with misting fans and wet towels.

Yesterday many dog-walking New Yorkers were out early before temperatures grew unbearable and hot asphalt posed risks to their pets.

Student Kaneesha Kumar, 22,

was walking her thick-coated dog Chance along Manhattan's Third Avenue where the mercury reached 93 Fahrenheit.

"I just take him on really short walks, and then go back home and put him in the AC, and like, make sure he has water," she told AFP.

Along with detailing public resources to keep cool, New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani stressed on social media that the "power grid is working overtime to keep us cool."

He asked that air conditioning be set to 78F (26C) – which left him, like many of his predecessors who've made similar requests, facing some backlash on social media, with some people urging the city to turn off the bright lights of Times Square first.

The Midwestern city of Chicago was likewise bracing for possible grid overload.

"Raise your thermostat as high as is comfortably safe," the power utility ComEd there urged, while calling on residents to delay using laundry, dishwashers and electric vehicle chargers until after dusk.

More frequent, longer-lasting and more intense heat waves are one of the clearest signs of climate change, with Europe also recently hard hit.

Global average surface temperatures have risen roughly 2.5F above pre-industrial averages as a result of human-caused climate change, mainly driven by the burning of fossil fuels.

This week's "heat dome" conditions in the US occur when high-pressure systems trap warm air like the lid on a pot.

The heat wave falls at a particularly busy time in the US, with amped-up Fourth of July parties as the nation celebrates its 250th anniversary.

The World Cup, which is being co-hosted by the US, Mexico and Canada, is for the first time featuring mandatory three-minute hydration breaks for players.

Toronto, where temperatures Thursday are expected to hit 93F (34C), cancelled a public watch party of the match between Portugal and Croatia, citing extreme heat and humidity.

Amazon to start initial Leo Internet service this year

Reuters
Washington

Amazon expects to roll out initial Internet service with its Leo broadband satellite network later this year after the company's latest launch put the orbiting constellation's satellite count over 390, a company executive said yesterday.

Amazon's latest batch of 29 satellites lifted off from Florida early yesterday aboard an Atlas V rocket from United Launch Alliance, marking the company's 14th launch of dozens more planned to deploy more than 3,200 satellites that will provide global Internet coverage from space.

"Still lots of work ahead – including raising all these new satellites to their assigned altitude," Amazon's Leo chief Chris Weber said in a post on X. "But we've completed enough launches for initial service this yr, and future missions just add coverage and capacity."

Weber did not say in which region Amazon plans to begin service, but initial service is expected to begin near Earth's north and south poles and

gradually spread inward toward the equator as more satellites are added.

The constellation has 394 satellites in orbit so far of 398 launched since April 2025, according to spaceflight analyst and Harvard astronomer Jonathan McDowell.

The growing Leo constellation is a budding rival to SpaceX's established Starlink, which has a growing tally of roughly 10,000 satellites. Like Starlink, Amazon plans to offer Internet service to consumers with Leo terminals – sized from roughly the size of a laptop to larger and more powerful versions – as well as governments and companies such as airlines.

Amazon has been targeting a service start of mid-2026, relying on tens of billions of dollars worth of rocket bookings to loft its satellites into space.ULA's Atlas V has become a workhorse for the network as the other rockets Amazon plans to use, Blue Origin's New Glenn and ULA's Vulcan, are grounded.

A New Glenn rocket exploded on its launchpad last month, destroying the launch tower and other hardware.

Trump's July 4 fireworks show raises health alarms

AFP
Washington

An "unforgettable" tribute to America, or a health hazard that will terrorise animals and pollute the environment?

That's the question as Washington prepares to break the record for the world's largest fireworks display on the United States' 250th birthday tomorrow.

The Trump administration's "Freedom250" project has hired Pennsylvania-based Pyrotecnico to launch more than 850,000 fireworks shells across 10 sites around the Lincoln Memorial and Potomac River, starting at 10:30pm and lasting 40 minutes.

That is around 40,000 more than the current Guinness World Record, set in Bocaue, Philippines in 2016, and roughly 50 times more than Washington's usual annual show.

"Freedom250" has billed it as the "unforgettable" capstone for a day of performances, flyovers and acrobatics displays at the National Mall, claiming it will bring hundreds of thousands of visitors and calling it a generational event.

They haven't however disclosed the bill for the affair and did not respond to a request seeking the sum.

"Fireworks are a tried-and-true American tradition," Jodi Dague, Pyrotecnico's director of marketing, told AFP. "They bring back childhood memories and allow families to create new ones. It's a reason to gather and celebrate."



The Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool is fenced off in preparations for Independence Day fireworks yesterday in Washington, DC. (AFP)

Not everyone is convinced.

"First let me say, I like fireworks – I think they're fun," Russell Dickerson, a professor of atmospheric chemistry at the University of Maryland told AFP, but said the number in question was "frightening."

"In my professional opinion, it's probably ill-advised to try to set off 850,000 fireworks... on a hot, stagnant, already polluted day. I'm not going down to the Mall and I certainly would not bring my grandchildren there."

The biggest concern is fine particulate matter, he explained – particles 2.5 micrometres or smaller that can penetrate deep into the lungs, enter the bloodstream and even cross the blood-brain barrier.

The EPA's 24-hour standard caps exposure at 35 micrograms per cubic metre. After a fireworks show, "it dissipates substantially in a few hours, but in those few hours, people are going to be exposed to huge

amounts," Dickerson said, adding that the smoke could cut visibility to a few hundred yards.

Making matters worse is a heatwave gripping the East Coast, with firework smoke and pollution liable to last longer without rain to clear it, and hot weather itself increasing background levels of pollution as the power grid strains under increased demand for cooling and as vehicles emit more.

"The amount of pollution that we produce is apocalyptic during this one particular day," Glory Dolphin Hammes, CEO of IQAir's North American division, told AFP.

Data compiled by the Swiss-based company from public and private sources showed that hourly PM2.5 in Washington peaked at 11pm on July Fourth, last year at 133 micrograms per cubic metre. The Air Quality Index peaked at 208, levels more commonly associated with South Asian cities.

Family of imprisoned Salvadoran rights lawyer fears for her life

AFP
San Salvador

The health of Salvadoran human rights lawyer Ruth Lopez, an imprisoned critic of President Nayib Bukele, has deteriorated so deeply her family now fears for her life, according to testimony shared yesterday with AFP.

Lopez, whom Amnesty International considers a "prisoner of conscience," is the most internationally prominent inmate in El Salvador's megaprisons.

The 48-year-old lawyer had spent years denouncing human rights violations and alleged corruption under the government of Bukele, a close ally of US President Trump who has overseen a mass gang crackdown in the Central American nation.

On May 18, 2025 she was arrested and accused of illicit enrichment, charges she and her organisation, the NGO Cristosal, deny.

Her sister Claudia Lopez recently visited her behind bars for the first time since her arrest.

"There is a clear deterioration in her health," she said in a video after the visit, without disclosing the exact date when she was allowed access. Lopez had previously not been allowed to have visitors.

Lopez underwent an operation for a 3-centimetre-wide tumour, according to testimony the NGO Cristosal shared



Claudia Lopez, sister of detained human rights lawyer and activist Ruth Lopez, holding a poster of her during an interview in San Salvador, El Salvador. (AFP)

with AFP yesterday.

Cristosal had denounced on May 19 that the family members weren't told she would undergo surgery and didn't receive the results of the biopsy.

Lopez is also showing "overly high levels of triglyceride" and runs the "risk of suffering a heart attack, a stroke, pancreatitis... things that can end up killing her," her sister said.

"We demand the Salvadoran state to guarantee her health and give us the results of all her exams," her sister said, stressing that Ruth still sent a message of gratitude for the displays of "support and solidarity" with her case.

"These things keep her going, give her strength and keep her on her feet to keep fighting, to not give up," she said.

A group of Democratic lawmakers in Washington recently urged the Trump administration to intervene and demanded Lopez be immediately released.

They also demanded that a representative from the US Embassy in El Salvador visit her in prison.

In 2022, Bukele declared a crackdown on gangs that has imprisoned approximately 92,000 people without arrest warrants.

NGOs have repeatedly denounced widespread rights abuses in his mega-prisons – including systematic torture and sexual violence.

Lopez has spent the majority of her time incommunicado and without access to her case file, as the government declared her case secret under the ongoing state of emergency.

Japan deploys bear cameras in mountains as attacks surge

AFP
Tokyo

Japan has begun installing hundreds of cameras in its northern mountains as part of a nationwide survey of the bear population following a surge in maulings, an official told AFP yesterday.

Bears have killed at least five people since April 1, all in the northern region of Tohoku, after a record 13 fatal attacks across the country in the last fiscal year, according to the environment ministry.

The animals have grown in numbers in recent years, a trend scientists attribute in part to a declining number of people living in rural areas.

Residents in Tohoku live in constant fear, with national media providing daily coverage of bear sightings at shopping arcades, parks and schools.

To draw up an effective response, authorities plan to use more than 800 cameras to monitor the animals, initially targeting six major bear populations in Tohoku before expanding the survey across the country over the next

four years, environment ministry official Yu Takahashi told AFP.

Jars of honey mixed with wine placed at about human-head height are meant to attract the bears. The cameras will then capture each animal's unique white chest marks as it stands on its hind legs to sniff the sweet tonic.

"Until now, local governments surveyed bear populations in their jurisdictions at various times and using various methods," Takahashi said.

"Our plan is to conduct a more accurate survey by focusing on population groups," he said.

Meanwhile, a man was arrested yesterday for obstruction of business, police spokesman Kenji Goto told AFP, after he had accidentally set off anti-bear spray in a post office in Nagoya city.

Five people needed hospital treatment after the incident on Wednesday, reports and officials said.

The 22-year-old Vietnamese national, identified by police as Huynh Nhat Duy, apologised and told officers he had discharged the repellent unintentionally, according to media reports.

In recent months there has been

a jump in sightings after the bears emerged from hibernation, and more bears have been straying into urban areas.

This week, authorities said they were investigating a possible sixth fatality after a man's body with bite marks was found in a mountainous area in Tohoku.

Authorities recommend people avoid going alone into the mountains – which make up some 80% of Japan – and to attach a bell to their bags, and carry bear sprays.

These aerosols, sold in outdoor activity stores, contain capsai-

cin – the chemical component in spicy chilli peppers – and cause a burning and irritating sensation.

Bears are also encroaching increasingly into towns and cities in Japan.

In June, dozens of police, hunters and city officials needed four days to trap a bear roaming Utsunomiya, north of Tokyo, forcing mass school closures.

Before that another bear described as "extremely intelligent" – it opened a window and turned on a tap – attacked four people at two factories in Fukushima and remained at large for days.

9 Thai monks killed after boy drives truck into procession

AFP
Bangkok

An 11-year-old boy drove his parents' truck into a Buddhist procession in Thailand yesterday, killing nine monks and seriously injuring around 10 others, police and local authorities said.

A group of 35 monks and five lay followers were walking along a roadside in northeastern Mukdahan province during a pilgrimage when the incident occurred.

"I saw a boy driving a pickup truck, approaching," one monk, identified as Phra Sompong, said in a video posted online by local rescue workers.

"Then suddenly the truck hit at full speed and crashed us," he said.

"Luckily another monk and I managed to jump out of the way in time," he added.

"The first nine monks in line survived. But others who were hit were thrown into the air."

Police said five monks died at the scene and three more in hospital.

The Mukdahan provincial of-



The aftermath of a collision between a pickup truck driven by an 11-year-old and a procession of Buddhist monks in the northeastern Thai province of Mukdahan. (AFP)

ice later announced the death of a ninth monk.

Health authorities had earlier said four monks were in a critical condition and 10 others were seriously hurt, while more were being treated for lighter injuries.

Buddhist monks are highly venerated in Thailand, entrusted with preserving and passing on the Buddha's teachings.

They often hold public processions and are widely seen receiving alms of goodwill from ordinary Thais.

CCTV footage from a nearby property shows the monks walking along the road with multiple vehicles driving past. The sound of a loud crash can then be heard before the procession stops.

Police said the boy had taken his parents' pickup truck without permission before losing control of the vehicle and crashing into the monks.

"The suspect is a child. The vehicle has been taken for forensic examination to determine the cause," said Police Major General

Paibroj Thaiphutsa, commander of the Mukdahan Provincial Police.

"We've asked the child's parents to come in so we can determine who is responsible for the child's care, so we can go on with legal process," he added.

Prayut Ruanthongkam, chief of Mukdahan City Police, told AFP by telephone that the child was a boy aged 11.

In Thailand, children under the age of 12 have no criminal liability.

Mukdahan Governor Worayan Bunnarat said the case should serve as a wider warning on road safety.

Deadly transport accidents are common in Thailand, which has one of the worst road safety records in the world, with speeding, drunk driving and weak law enforcement all contributing factors.

"We've been very strict on road safety in recent years. This case should be a lesson not just for our province, but for the public in general when it comes to preventing road accidents," said the governor.

"I think everyone involved, especially parents, needs to help, because no one wants something like this to happen."

Thailand denies viral claim Macron knelt before king

AFP
Bangkok

Thailand's foreign ministry denied yesterday that French President Emmanuel Macron knelt before the country's king during his state visit to Paris this week, after an AI-generated picture circulated online.

King Maha Vajiralongkorn and Queen Suthida's trip was the first official visit by a Thai monarch to France since 1960, marking the 170th anniversary of formal diplomatic relations between the two nations.

During a state dinner at the presidential palace, Macron presented the 73-year-old king with the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour – France's highest award – and Queen Suthida with the Grand Cross of the National Order of Merit, according to Thai media.

An image widely circulated online in Thailand purported to show Macron kneeling as he presented the awards.

One Thai-language Facebook post showing the image on Wednesday garnered more than 40,000 likes and more than 2,000 shares by the following day.

The post was also shared by a

page with more than 2mn followers that frequently publishes pro-military and nationalist commentary.

One commenter on the post said: "I'm so happy and deeply touched that France, a country far wealthier and more developed than ours, still places such importance on our country."

Another described Macron as "so charming" and said he had "completely won over Thai hearts with this".

But an official from Thailand's foreign ministry confirmed the image was AI-generated.

"There is no evidence of any image showing Emmanuel Macron kneeling to present a royal decoration," the official told AFP.

AFP's Factcheck service ran the picture through OpenAI's image verification tool, which determined that it was "generated with OpenAI tools".

AFP also compared the outfit worn by the woman resembling Queen Suthida in the online post with AFP pictures of the queen taken during the state visit, and found key differences.

There were also no images of Macron kneeling before the king in official photographs published by Thailand's foreign ministry of the leaders at the decoration ceremony and state dinner, an AFP review found.

Rebels 'kill American pilot, burn plane' in Indonesia

Reuters
Jakarta

Rebels in Indonesia's restive easternmost region of Papua yesterday shot dead an American pilot and set a civilian plane on fire in what a spokesperson for a local separatist group described as a "message" to the US and Indonesian governments.

A low-level battle for independence from Indonesia has long raged in the resource-rich western half of Papua, where attacks by independence fighters have grown deadlier and more frequent as they have procured better weaponry. Sebby Sambom, a spokesperson for the West Papua National Libera-

tion Army (TPNPB), an armed separatist group, said that their troops shot dead American pilot Nicholas F Gosselin and set his plane on fire after it landed in the Yahukimo region of Highland Papua province.

He said the aircraft had been "frequently dropping Indonesian military personnel and violating the TPNPB's ultimatum."

Yusuf Sutejo, spokesperson for Indonesia's joint police-military operations in Papua, confirmed that a plane with an American pilot carrying seven passengers was found burned at a local airport in Yahukimo, but he could not confirm whether it had been attacked by rebels, or whether the pilot was killed. All the passengers were Papuans, he said.

The attack in the Balinggama district of Yahukimo was a message to the Indonesian and U.S. government for "failing to address the root causes of the conflict in Papua between the Indonesian military and the West Papua National Liberation Army," Sebby said. Sebby said rebels would start conducting attacks if Indonesia keeps allowing civilian aircraft to enter rebel-controlled red zones of Papua.

Rebels carried guns and axes and raised the "Morning Star" flag, a symbol of independence, while announcing the attack, according to a video sent by TPNPB.

The US embassy in Jakarta did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Indonesia's transportation ministry said yesterday that the plane carried one pilot and seven passengers and had flown to Yahukimo from Wamena, another city in Highland Papua.

It said communications ceased after the plane landed. The aircraft is owned by airline operator PT AMA, whose planes carry food, fuel and mail to remote villages in Papua, according to its website.

PT AMA did not immediately respond to a request for comment. In a high-profile case, Papuan rebels kidnapped New Zealand pilot Phillip Mehrtens after he landed a small commercial plane in the remote, mountainous area of Nduga in Highland Papua before freeing him in 2024.

EFTA successfully concludes free trade deal talks with Vietnam

Reuters
Zurich

The European Free Trade Association (EFTA) said yesterday it has successfully concluded negotiations with Vietnam on a free trade agreement, as its members seek to diversify commercial relations amid global tensions over tariffs.

EFTA, whose members are Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland, said the accord also covers areas ranging from rules of origin, investment, intellectual property rights and competition, to trade remedies and government procurement.

Switzerland, the largest economy in EFTA, was last August saddled with the highest US tariffs in Europe after President Donald

Trump rolled out a raft of import duties worldwide.

Negotiations between EFTA on the free trade deal were launched in 2012 but after 16 rounds got stuck in 2018 due to lack of progress. In September 2025, the talks were relaunched, successfully concluding after five more rounds.

EFTA noted that trade between the bloc and Vietnam has grown steadily over the past decade.

By 2025, bilateral trade between them was worth €4.8bn (\$5.5bn).

The figures exclude Swiss trade in gold, and show a trade surplus in favour of Vietnam worth €2.5bn.

The news was announced as Swiss President Guy Parmelin visits North America on a trip in which he aims to make progress on updating Switzerland's free trade deal with Mexico.

Korean shops turn to robots, self-service to escape labour woes

Reuters
Seoul

Unstaffed coffee shops, ramen eateries and flower outlets are spreading across Republic of Korea as owners turn to robots and self-service to overcome rising labour costs in a business model that relies on the widespread honesty of users.

Such stores, usually open 24 hours, were estimated to number 9,000 nationwide by the end of 2024, the National Fire Agency said, while payments provider Samsung Card said their number probably grew four times by 2025 from 2020.

"The population of baristas in their early twenties is drastically declining," said Kim Dongjin, chief executive of Lounge X, where a

robot arm named "Baris" serves paper cups of Americanos and matcha lattes to fill orders from on-site kiosks.

His company runs eight such 24-hour coffee shops, entirely unstaffed, across Korea, most of them in Seoul, the capital, although human employees prepare coffee drinks in four more.

Stores with no staff are not uncommon globally, with cashier-free grocers in countries such as Britain and the United States, but the concept has spread wider in Korea to encompass even pet supply stores and clothing boutiques.

Owners of such stores cite difficulties in finding suitable staff and rising wage costs as reasons for adopting the model, particularly as rates of petty crime are low in Korea, where customers are generally rule-abiding.

Korea has a rapidly ageing population, with one of the world's lowest birth rates leading to a labour crunch. The government expects the population of 51.8 million to shrink by almost a third to 36.2 million by 2072.

Hiring expert baristas has become increasingly harder, said Kim, a 20-year-veteran of the coffee industry who joined Lounge X's parent, Korean XYZ Robotics, seven years ago to launch the unstaffed coffee shops in 2024.

They first tested the waters with a hybrid model employing one or two baristas in each store. Now each requires just one hour-long morning visit by a human worker to top up inventory such as coffee beans and bakery goods, and run clean-ups.

While sales at a human-staffed coffee shop still tend to be higher,

Kim said, the savings on labour boost the profitability of each unstaffed store to more than 40%, from roughly 10% to 15% at the conventional equivalent.

"Although there has been an incident of theft, the vast majority of customers use the store conscientiously," said Hyun Sun-Joo, who took over an unstaffed ramen eatery last year to bring in some income after years spent as a stay-at-home mother.

Hyung said the self-service format, in which customers pick their choice of instant ramen off wall shelves to add hot water and preferred toppings, lets her juggle her children's schedules and housework, freeing her up from managing staff.

One customer, student Kim Hee-yeon, said she ate there at least once a week, as the operating



A robot arm serves coffee at an unmanned cafe in Seoul. (Reuters)

hours suited her irregular eating habits.

"I like to eat quietly while looking at my phone, so I do feel psychologically more comfortable when there isn't anyone around," she said, adding that a hiccup with the shop systems she once faced

had taken just minutes to resolve.

"It is slightly inconvenient that they aren't right next to me when I have a problem," she said. "But last time... they came and resolved it within about three minutes, so I don't think that was a major inconvenience."



Starmmer says 'deeply sorry' for decades of forced adoptions

AFP
London

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer formally apologised yesterday for the forced adoption of an estimated 185,000 babies born to unmarried mothers in England and Wales between 1949 and 1976, calling it "a stain on our history".

The scandal saw the mothers, including many who were teenagers, coerced into giving up their children, with social, institutional and family pressures used to persuade them that adoption was their only option.

"We are deeply and profoundly sorry to the mothers who were told they were unfit, who were prevented from caring for the children they desperately wanted ... and who have carried this loss for decades," Starmer told parliament.

"The shame is not yours. The shame is ours," he insisted.

The premier paid tribute to survivors who had campaigned for the apology and the "extraordinary courage with which they have shared their harrowing testimonies and fought for the truth time and time again".

The expression of regret comes four years after a parliamentary committee recommended an official apology.

Australia's government issued a landmark apology in 2013 for forced adoptions and Ireland's did so in 2021.

"What happened to them – and to tens of thousands of mothers, children and families – should never have happened," Starmer told UK lawmakers after meeting a group of survivors at his Downing Street office.

"It is a stain on our history. Mothers, many young, vulnerable and without support were coerced, bullied or misled into feeling that they had no choice but to have their children taken away from them."



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer attends a meeting with campaigners to discuss historical forced adoption, at Downing Street in London yesterday. (AFP)

He said the removal of the children had been systemic.

The practice, he said, was "embedded within systems across local authorities, across voluntary and faith-based institutions, and in health and social care services".

"The state bears responsibility for the systems it funded and legitimised, which enabled these practices to occur... For this systemic failure, I am truly sorry," he added.

Ann Keen, a former Labour health minister, said her newborn son was abruptly taken away after she gave birth in Wales in 1966 when she was 17.

"I went to see my baby on the eighth day because I was told I could have him for 10 (days) and they said: 'Oh no, he's gone now. You were getting far too close,'" she told BBC Radio.

Speaking before Starmer's announcement she said she looked forward to being "released from my shame" because "we have always been accused of giving up our babies and we didn't give them up".

The parliamentary committee that investigated the scandal found mothers were abused in multiple ways.

Painkillers would be deliberately denied as "punishment" in hospital during childbirth and afterwards, its report found.

Babies were sometimes pulled

from their sobbing mother's arms to be taken away for adoption.

"Have you learnt your lesson now?" one woman recalled a doctor telling her while she was in labour.

Another told parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights: "A doctor told me that I should be sterilised as I must be a nymphomaniac".

Last month, the Church of England last month said sorry for its role in the forced adoptions.

Archbishop of Canterbury Sarah Mullally apologised for the "pain, trauma and stigma" caused to those affected, saying there was deep shame it had happened to people "in the care of Christian communities".

Abortion was legalised in England, Scotland and Wales in 1967.

But even after then, women faced practical barriers, such as objections by their doctors.

Apologies were also made in 2023 by the devolved administrations in Cardiff and Edinburgh to people affected in Wales and Scotland.

An apology is also expected in Northern Ireland but not until after a public inquiry has been carried out, following a recommendation from a 2021 report on mother and baby institutions, Magdalen laundries and workhouses.

Court overturns lenient teen sentences

AFP
London

Two British teenagers convicted of rape must serve time in custody, an appeals judge ruled yesterday, after a public outcry over a judge's decision to spare them detention.

Lower court judge Nicholas Rowland in May sentenced the two 15-year-old boys to three-year youth rehabilitation orders, saying he wanted to "avoid criminalising these children unnecessarily".

However, the sentences provoked a severe backlash, prompting Attorney General Richard Hermer – the government's chief legal adviser – to refer them to the Court of Appeal in London as potentially "unduly lenient".

The teenagers raped two girls, aged 14 and 15, in separate incidents in November 2024 and January 2025 in Hampshire in southern England. Video of the attacks were shared online.

Quashing the sentences, judge Sue Carr told the pair, who cannot be named due to their age, they both needed "to go into detention" and sentenced them to four years' youth detention.

"What you did was so bad that we have no other choice," she said, addressing them by video link.

The non-custodial sentence handed to a third boy will remain unchanged.

He was convicted of rape charges for encouraging the second defendant in last year's incident.

The families of the two girls welcomed yesterday's ruling. "While nothing can undo our family's anguish, this outcome brings a greater sense of justice and accountability," one of the families said.

The family of the second girl said they were "relieved" the court had "recognised the seriousness of these offences".

"The original sentences were devastating for the family and left us feeling that the harm

caused to our daughter had not been fully recognised," they added.

Although the new custodial sentences could not "undo the trauma she has endured, today's decision gives us a greater sense that justice has been served".

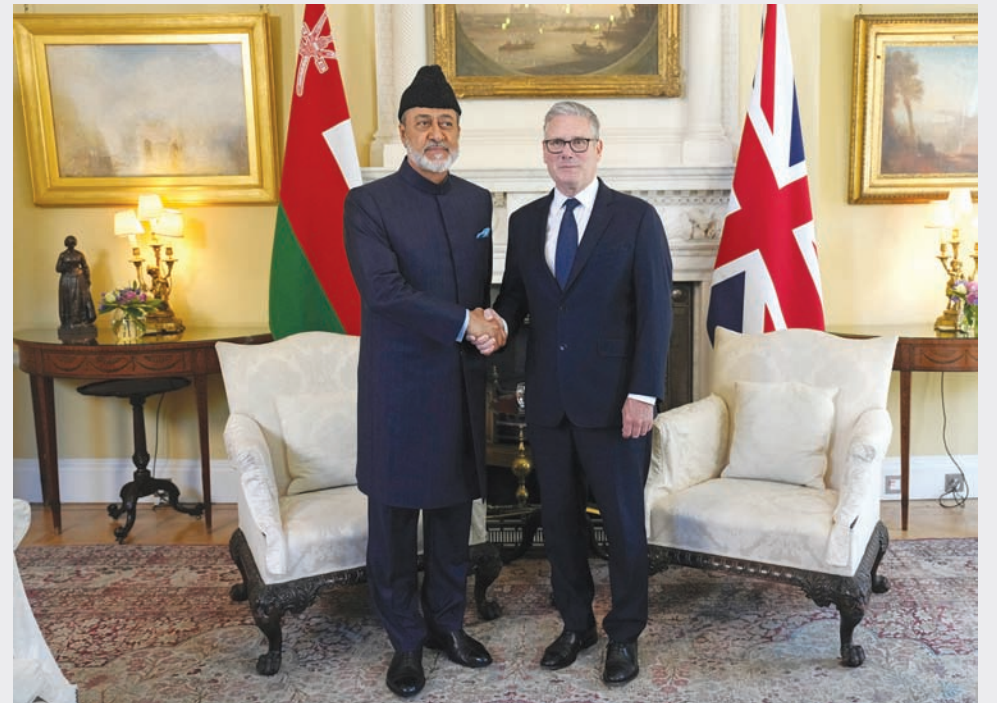
French rape survivor Gisele Pelicot had added her voice to those who criticised the original sentences during a visit to Britain.

She told the BBC she was "deeply shocked that these individuals were in fact able to gain their freedom again when in fact the victims are suffering so hard they will never be able to heal".

Pelicot has become a global symbol in the fight against sexual violence after she waived her right to anonymity during the 2024 trial of her ex-husband and dozens of strangers who raped her while she was unconscious.

The teenagers will initially serve their sentences in youth detention as only those aged 18 or over are held in jail.

UK, Oman leaders meet in London



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer shakes hands with Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tariq during their meeting inside 10 Downing Street, in central London yesterday. (Reuters)

India asks Meta to hold WhatsApp username rollout over fraud fears

AFP
New Delhi

India has asked Meta to hold off launching its username feature on WhatsApp in the world's most populous country, citing concerns over fraud and impersonation, media reports said yesterday.

The move comes as authorities in India grapple with a spike in cybercrime, with scammers exploiting low digital safety awareness among millions of Internet users.

WhatsApp, owned by US tech giant Meta, said Monday that users worldwide would be able to connect via unique usernames instead of sharing their phone numbers, an upcoming feature it said was designed to enhance privacy.

India, WhatsApp's largest market with more than half a billion users, voiced concerns Wednesday that the change could make it easier for fraudsters to target victims.

In a letter to Meta, the Ministry of Electronics and Information



This illustration photograph taken yesterday shows the new upcoming Username feature on US instant messaging software WhatsApp, displayed on a smartphone with the backdrop of India's national flag in New Delhi. (AFP)

Technology said the feature could lead to an increase in online fraud, phishing, digital arrest scams and impersonation attacks, the *Indian Express* newspaper reported.

"There is a possibility that bad actors may claim usernames... and message other users while pretending to be someone they are

not," the English-language daily quoted a senior government official as saying.

"For those who may not be technologically aware to make out the difference, it could be a huge challenge."

The ministry has asked Meta not to roll out the feature until consultation on the matter is

over, the paper added.

Last month, Meta appointed Indian fintech titan Kunal Shah as the new head of WhatsApp.

Meta said the feature was not yet live in India and that it had already reserved usernames for public figures and verified accounts.

"To protect against impersonation, we've held the highest-profile names... so they can only ever be claimed by their legitimate owners," it said in a statement.

"Users still require a phone number to use WhatsApp and we've built multiple layers of defence against scams into usernames."

Username feature is already available on another popular messaging platform WeChat, owned by Chinese tech giant Tencent.

Online fraud has surged in India in recent years as rapid digitisation has outpaced awareness of basic internet safety among many users.

Government figures show Indians lost nearly \$3bn to cyber fraud in 2025, almost 40 times more than in 2021.

India to send minister, governor to Ali Khamenei funeral

Reuters
New Delhi

India said yesterday that its deputy foreign minister and a state governor would represent the country at the state funeral of Iran's former Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Governor of Bihar, Syed Ata Hasnain, and deputy foreign minister Pabitra Margherita will visit Iran today, the Indian foreign ministry said in a statement.

"The high-level representation in the ceremony un-

derscores the importance of civilisational ties, including people-to-people connection, between the two countries, providing a robust foundation to political and economic engagements," it said. Ali Khamenei, who ruled Iran for 36 years and was a fierce critic of Washington, was killed on February 28 – the day the US and Israel began striking Iran, triggering a regional conflict in the Gulf.

The funeral will begin in Tehran tomorrow and conclude with his burial in his hometown, the northeastern holy city of Mashhad, on July 9.

Delhi announces anti-pollution curbs for toxic winter months

Reuters
New Delhi

The government of India's national capital territory of Delhi has announced a spate of measures to curb air pollution during winter, months ahead of the annual season when the city often becomes the world's most polluted.

Government data from the last three years indicates that Delhi's air quality deteriorates from November 1 to February 15, when the average air quality index (AQI) generally ranges from 312 to 342. An AQI of 0-50 is considered to be "good".

Authorities earlier imposed anti-pollution measures during this period according to a graded action plan when air quality dropped below a certain level.

Under the new curbs an-

nounced on Wednesday, they will now be in place continuously from November 1 to February 28, irrespective of AQI.

These include doubling of parking charges to discourage use of private vehicles, staggered timings at all government offices, and a ban on all outdoor civil construction activity except essential public infrastructure projects.

Between November 1 and January 31, all government and private offices will also be mandated to operate with half their staff physically present and the rest working from home.

Violators will face penal action, including prosecution, the announcement said.

The government this week also announced a cash incentive of over \$1,000 to car owners willing to scrap their old vehicles for EVs as part of a new policy aimed at reducing pollution.



Traffic moves along a highway amidst air pollution in New Delhi. (Reuters/File Photo)

Australia seeks to rein in defence spending blowouts, delays

Reuters
Sydney

Australia announced changes yesterday to the way it manages the delivery of defence projects, aiming to curb billions of dollars in cost overruns and lengthy delays.

The government said it would establish a special agency to oversee defence project delivery, over-

haul the way project costs are assessed, and streamline decision-making by cutting bureaucracy.

The decision comes as the country undertakes a major build up of its military capacity, with projects including the AUKUS nuclear submarine pact, a continuous naval shipbuilding programme and investments to develop domestic missile and drone industries.

"For too long, Defence has struggled to deliver major capabil-

ity projects on time and on budget," Pat Conroy, minister for defence industry, said in a statement.

In a speech in Canberra unveiling the reforms, Conroy described the department's systems as "broken".

"The fact is these systems were designed for a very different world," he said. "Through these reforms, we're making sure that when Defence is developing capability projects that we're setting them up for success."

He said an internal review found the average cost of defence projects increased by 38%, or A\$29bn (\$19.97bn), from project conception to government decision.

"The way Defence was operating had become outdated and compromised for at least the last decade," Conroy said.

The government in April announced it would raise defence spending to 3% of gross domestic product by 2033 from about 2%.

New Zealand declares El Nino conditions, strong event likely

Earth Sciences New Zealand declared El Nino conditions in the tropical Pacific yesterday, warning impacts on the country's weather are expected to intensify through the coming months. The agency said there is an 80%

likelihood the event will reach or exceed strong intensity during the July-September period, with effects peaking over the 2026-27 summer. Rainfall is likely to be near or below normal for the north and east of the South Island and the east of the

North Island, with below-normal rainfall most likely for the rest of the North Island. The west of the South Island is likely to see above-normal rainfall. Air temperatures are equally likely to be near or above average

nationwide, though cold snaps and frosts are expected. Increasingly windy and variable conditions are anticipated later in winter and into spring as El Nino signals strengthen. (Reuters)



Warning against despair of the Mercy of Allah

One should never despair of the Mercy of Allah because this is a grave major sin. We can see so many verses in the Qur'an that Allah the Almighty remind us about this grave sin. Here, let's see some of it.

Allah the Almighty says (what means):

{And who despairs of the Mercy of his Lord except for those astray?} [Qur'an 15:56]

{Indeed, no one despairs of relief from Allah except the disbelieving people.} [Qur'an 12:87]

{And do not throw [yourselves] with your [own] hands into destruction.} [Qur'an 2:195]

Commenting on the verse, some scholars said that when the slave of Allah commits a sin and then thinks that his sin will not be forgiven and, therefore, he abandons seeking forgiveness and repentance to Allah, this is the destruction meant in the verse. We seek refuge in Allah form that.

In a Qudsi Hadith (sacred narration), the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam (may Allah exalt his mention), narrated that Allah the Almighty said: "A slave committed a sin and he said, 'O Allah, Forgive me my sin.' Allah The Almighty said, 'My slave committed a sin and came to realise that he has a Lord Who Forgives sins and Calls to account (the sinner) for the sin.' He then again committed a sin and said, 'My Lord, Forgive me my sin.' Allah, The Exalted, said, 'My slave committed a sin and came to realise that he has a Lord Who Forgives sins and Calls to account for the sin.' He again committed a sin and said, 'My Lord, Forgive me for my sin.' Allah, The Exalted, said, 'My slave committed a sin and came to realise that he has a Lord Who Forgives sins and Calls to account for



the sin. O slave, do what you like. I Have Granted you forgiveness." [Muslim]

There is also the example of that man who used to drink alcohol and was brought to the Messenger of Allah, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam. 'Umar, may Allah be pleased with him, narrated: "During the lifetime of the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, there was a man called 'Abdullah whose nickname was Himar (donkey), and he used to make the Messenger of Allah, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, laugh.

The Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, lashed him because of drinking (alcohol). One day, he was brought to the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, for the same charge and was lashed. On that, a man among the people said, 'O Allah, Curse him! How frequently he is brought (to the Prophet for such a charge)!' The Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said, 'Do not curse him, for by Allah, I know that he loves Allah and His Messenger.'" [Al-Bukhari]

The wording of another nar-

ration reads: A man said: "'Why does he do so? May Allah Fail him! The Messenger of Allah, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said, 'Do not support the devil against your brother.'" [Al-Bukhari]

Hence, a slave should never despair of the Mercy of Allah, The Almighty. Rather, whenever he commits a sin, he should ask for forgiveness and repent to Allah. None is infallible. Regarding the righteous people who are promised Paradise, Allah the Almighty Says (what means): {And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord and

a garden as wide as the heavens and earth, prepared for the righteous.} [Qur'an 3:133]

Indicating the characteristics of the righteous people, Allah says (what means): {And those who, when they commit an immorality or wrong themselves [by transgression], remember Allah and seek forgiveness for their sins - and who can forgive sins except Allah? - And [who] do not persist in what they have done while they know. Those -- their reward is forgiveness from their Lord and gardens beneath which rivers

flow [in Paradise], wherein they will abide eternally; and excellent is the reward of the [righteous] workers.} [Qur'an 3:135-136]

Even a righteous person may commit a grave major sin or do an immorality. Nevertheless, he immediately gives up the sin and returns to his Lord, seeking forgiveness and repentance.

Here is also the example of the Messengers, may Allah exalt their mention. Allah the Almighty says (what means): {Indeed, in My presence the messengers do not fear. Otherwise, he who wrongs, then substitutes good after evil - indeed, I Am Forgiving and Merciful.} [Qur'an 27:10-11]

Moosa (Moses), may Allah exalt his mention, who was directly addressed by Allah, killed a person and then said as Allah The Almighty says (what means): {My Lord, indeed I have wronged myself, so Forgive me," and He Forgive him. Indeed, He is the Forgiving, the Merciful.} [Qur'an 28:16]

Allah the Almighty tells us about the righteous people who made mistakes, Allah says (what means): {And the one who has brought the truth and [they who] believed in it - those are the righteous. They will have whatever they desire with their Lord. That is the reward of the doers of good. That Allah May Remove from them the worst of what they did and Reward them their due for the best of what they used to do.} [Qur'an 39:33-35]

The verses stand as evidence that they did bad actions.

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



The prohibition of usurpation

According to the faqih (Islamic jurist), usurpation refers to usurping other's possessions by force without having the right to take them.

Usurpation is prohibited according to juristic consensus, for Allah, The Exalted, Says (what means): {And do not consume one another's wealth unjustly...} [Qur'an 2:188]

Usurpation is considered one of the grievous ways of eating up money unjustly, for the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam (may Allah exalt his mention), said: "Verily, your blood, property and honour are sacred to one another (as Muslims)." (Muslim)

He, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, also said: "The property of a Muslim is not lawful (to be taken) except by his consent." (Abu Ya' la in his Musnad')

The usurped wealth could be real estate or a movable property; the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "If anyone extorts a span of land unjustly, his neck will be encircled with it down seven earths (on the Day of Resurrection)." (Al-Bukhari and Muslim)

A usurper has to repent to Allah, The Almighty and Ever-Majestic, and return whatever he has extorted to its rightful owners, asking them for forgiveness. The Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Whoever wrongs anyone in a matter that concerns his honour or any other matter should ask his forgiveness as soon as possible, before a time comes when there is neither dinar nor dirham (i.e. before the Day of Resurrection) when wealth cannot compensate for one's wrongdoing); if the usurper has good deeds, they will be taken from him according to his usurpation, and if he has no good deeds, the sins of the oppressed person will be loaded on him." (Al-Bukhari)

If the usurped property is available, he should return it in the same condition he has taken it, but if it is damaged, he should return its equivalent.

Imam Al-Muwaffaq said: "Scholars unanimously agree that it is obligatory to return the usurped property if it is still in the same condition and unchanged." (Al-Mughni and Ash-Sharh Al-Kabir)

Furthermore, the usurper has to pay back the usurped property along with the profit he has made through it, be it connected with the property or separated. This is because the profit is the outcome of what has been taken unjustly, so it belongs to its rightful owner just like the original usurped property.

If the usurper has built on the usurped land or has planted vegetation therein, he has to remove the building or the crop in the case the rightful owner demands so. The Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sal-

lam, said: "The unjust root (planted in someone's land without his permission) has no right." [At-Tirmithi and other compilers of Hadith; At-Tirmithi regarded it as a hasan (good) Hadeeth]

If so doing will negatively affect the land, the usurper has to compensate for the damage. He has also to remove the remains of the crop or the structure so that he may deliver the land in good condition to its rightful owner.

The usurper has also to pay a compensation for using the land from the date of its usurpation until its delivery, as he has unrightfully prevented its owner from using it during that period. Moreover, if the usurper withholds the usurped property until its value and price are reduced, he has to pay it back according to its original price according to the sound opinion in this regard.

On the other hand, if the usurped object is mixed with something else that can be distinguished from it - like wheat and barley - the usurper has to separate what he has usurped and return it. If he has mixed it with something that cannot be distinguished, such as mixing wheat with wheat, he has to pay back the usurped object in measure or weight. Yet, if he has mixed the usurped object with something of inferior or superior quality, or with something different but indistinguishable, the mixture is to be sold and each one of them is to be given his share of the price. In this case, if the value of usurped property is less in the mixture than its value when unmixed, the usurper has to compensate the owner for the decrease in its price.

Among the juristic opinions in this connection is that whoever takes the usurped property from the usurper is financially liable for it in case it is damaged in his possession.

There are ten examples of people who may take a usurped property from the usurper:

1. One who may buy the usurped object from the usurper or the like.
2. One who may rent the usurped object from the usurper.
3. One who may be granted the usurped object by the usurper gratis.
4. One who may take possession of the usurped object on behalf of the usurper such as a trustee or a deputy.
5. One who may borrow the usurped object from the usurper.
6. One who may usurp the usurped object from the first usurper.
7. One who may have the usurped object at his disposal, such as a speculator on behalf of the usurper.
8. One who may marry an appropriated bondmaid from her usurper.
9. One whom the usurper may grant, not sell him, the usurped object as a compensation for something.
10. One who may damage the

usurped object while having it on behalf of the usurper.

In all these cases, if the second party is aware that the object is originally usurped, he becomes financially liable for it for obtaining something without the permission of its rightful owner. However, if he is unaware of that, the original usurper shoulders the liability.

If the usurped property is something that is usually rented, the usurper is to pay compensation estimated according to the period of his possession of the usurped property. This is because utilities represent assets, so they have to be paid for just like real estate.

All the dealings of a usurper on the usurped object are invalid, as they are carried out without the permission of the rightful owner.

If the usurper does not know the owner of the usurped object and thus is unable to return it to him, he should deliver it to the ruler (or the one in authority) to put it in its right place or give it in charity on behalf of its owner. In so doing, the real owner of the usurped object will get the reward of charity, and the usurper becomes free from the guilt.

The usurpation of a property is not limited to taking it by force; it rather includes seizing it through unjust disputes and false oaths. Allah, The Exalted, Says (what means): {And do not consume one another's wealth unjustly or send it [in bribery] to the rulers in order that [they might aid] you [to] consume a portion of the wealth of the people in sin, while you know [it is unlawful].} [Qur'an 2:188]

Allah Almighty also Says (what means): {Indeed, those who exchange the covenant of Allah and their [own] oaths for a small price will have no share in the Hereafter, and Allah will not speak to them or look at them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He purify them; and they will have a painful punishment?} [Qur'an 3: 77]

In fact, the Divine command is so strong and binding, and the punishment of violating it is so severe.

Moreover, the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "If anyone extorts a span of land unjustly, his neck will be encircled with it down seven earths (on the Day of Resurrection)." (Abu Daawood, At-Tirmithi, Al-Bukhari)

He, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, also said: "If I gave some one's right to another (mistakenly because of the latter's tricky presentation of the case), he (the latter) should never take it, for I would be really giving him a piece of fire." (Al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Article source: <http://www.islamweb.net/emainpage/> [originally published by Aljumuah magazine]

The right to life in Islam

Allah Almighty honoured man and created him with His own Hand and blew into him from His Spirit. Then, He made His angels prostrate to him and subjected to him all that is in the heavens and the earth - all from Him. Moreover, He made him a successor on earth and bestowed talents and blessings upon him so that he can dominate the earth. He preferred him over all beasts and animals. Man cannot fulfil his goals unless he takes his rights in full. At the forefront of these rights, which are guaranteed by Islam, is the right to life - an inviolable right.

Allah, The Exalted, says (what means): {And do not kill the soul which Allah has forbidden [to be killed] except by [legal] right.} [Qur'an 6:151]. The right that permits the taking of souls was explained by the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam (may Allah exalt his mention), when he reportedly said: "It is not permissible to spill the blood of a Muslim except in three cases: the married person who commits adultery, a life for a life, and the one who forsakes his religion and separates from the group." [Muslim]

Out of its great concern for the protection of life, Islam threatens those who deem it permissible to kill with the severest punishment. In the Qur'an, Allah Almighty says (what means): {But whoever kills a believer intentionally - his recompense is Hell, wherein he will abide eternally, and Allah has become angry with him and has cursed him and has prepared for him a great punishment.} [Qur'an 4:93]

Moreover, it is clearly indicated in authentic hadiths that killing a believer is one of the gravest sins. In a hadith via Al-Bara' ibn 'Azib, may Allah be pleased with him, the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "If this world were to be destroyed, that would be less significant before Allah than the unlawful killing of a believer." [Ibn Majah] In another hadith on the authority of Abu Sa'eed al-Khudri, may Allah be pleased with him, the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "If the inhabitants of the heavens and the inhabitants of the earth all took part in shedding the blood of a believer, then Allah would cast them (all) in the Fire." [At-Tirmithi] Also, Ibn 'Umar, may Allah be pleased with him, narrated that the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "He who helps in (the spilling of) the blood of a Muslim, even with half a word, it will be written between his eyes on the Day of Judgment 'Desperate of the mercy of Allah'" [Al-Bayhaqi]

The Noble Qur'an prohibits us from killing our children out of fear of poverty and starvation. A Qur'anic verse reads (what means): {And do not kill your children for fear of poverty. We provide for them and for you. Indeed, their killing is ever a great sin.} [Qur'an 17:31]

In another verse that speaks about a common practice among the Arabs during the pre-Islamic era of ignorance, Allah, The Exalted, says (what means): {And when the girl [who was] buried alive is asked for what sin she was killed.} [Qur'an 81:8-9] This equally applies to the non-Muslims who live under the rule of a Muslim nation and enter into an agreement of protection with the Muslim ruler - be they Jews or Christians.

'Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn al-'As, may Allah be pleased with him, narrated that the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam,



said: "Whoever killed a mu'ahid (a person who is granted the pledge of protection by the Muslims) shall not smell the fragrance of Paradise, even though its fragrance can be smelt at a distance of forty years." [Al-Bukhari] Moreover, Allah, the Exalted, says (what means): {So if they remove themselves from you and do not fight you and offer you peace, then Allah has not made for you a cause [for fighting] against them.} [Qur'an 4:90]

This also applies to the one who commits suicide. Allah Almighty warns us against this, saying (what means): {And do not kill yourselves [or one another]. Indeed, Allah is to you ever Merciful.} [Qur'an 4:29] Abu Hurairah, may Allah be pleased with him, narrated that the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "He who commits suicide by throttling shall keep on throttling himself in the Hellfire, and he who commits suicide by stabbing himself shall keep on stabbing himself in Hellfire." [Al-Bukhari]

Hence, Allah Almighty legislated retribution and the killing of the intentional killer as a revenge from him and purification for society. Allah Almighty says (what means): {And there is for you in legal retribution [saving of] life, O you [people] of understanding, that you may become righteous.} [Qur'an 2:179] Even in manslaughter, Allah, the Exalted, does not exempt the killer from liability. Rather, He made it obligatory upon him to set a slave free and give ransom. If he cannot free a slave, he is required to fast for two consecutive months. Ransom for manslaughter is ordained by Islam so that people do not take life lightly and to inspire respect for the human soul.

Undoubtedly, the first thing about which the servants will render account on the Day of Judgment is murder. The erudite Andalusian scholar Ibn Hazm, may Allah have mercy upon him, said: "I do not know of any sin, after polytheism, greater than killing a believer without right or abandoning prayer." The Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, is reported to have said: "Every sin may be forgiven by Allah except a man who dies as a disbeliever or a man who kills his (Muslim) brother." [An-Nasa'i] In another hadith, he, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "A servant continues to guard his faith (and thus hopes for the mercy of Allah) so long as he does not shed blood unjustly." [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

This is Islam. It came to preserve the human soul and the blood of Muslims, lest people may take Muslim blood lightly.

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



A look at Qatar's FDI surge and the discipline behind it

There is a kind of confidence that does not announce itself. It surfaces not in slogans but in ledgers – in the deliberate decision of a company to build something new in a place it has studied with care. Invest Qatar's 2025 Annual Report, out this week, is written largely in that quieter register. Its headline figure – \$3.4bn in foreign direct investment capital expenditure across 373 projects – is striking enough on its own. Yet the more instructive story lies in what those numbers reveal about how the world now reads Qatar.

Consider the shape of the money, not merely its size. New projects rose 52% in a single year, and more than half of all capital expenditure went into greenfield ventures – investors building from the ground up rather than buying into what already exists. Close to half the projects fell into the medium-to-high-tech bracket. This is not simply more capital; it is a different quality of capital. Greenfield

builders commit for the long haul, and high-tech ventures come looking for skills, research and a settled environment in which ideas can compound. That such investors chose Qatar in a year shadowed by regional conflict and global uncertainty is the report's most eloquent line, though it is nowhere stated as such.

The breadth is equally reassuring. Five sectors – consumer products, business services, food and beverages, software and IT services, and textiles – accounted for more than two-thirds of all projects, a spread that binds legacy industries to newer, knowledge-intensive ones. This is diversification in its truest sense: not a single audacious bet, but a widening base, precisely the ambition set out under the Third National Development Strategy.

None of this, as HE the Minister of Commerce and Industry Sheikh Faisal bin Thani bin Faisal al-Thani rightly observed, was the work of fortune.

Behind the figures sits a year of patient institution-building. Invest Qatar opened representative offices in London, New York, Paris, Mumbai and Istanbul, placing the country within reach of investors in the markets that matter. It launched a \$1bn incentives programme aimed at advanced industry, logistics, technology and financial services, and rebuilt its digital Gateway into a single channel that now guides more than 15,000 users and 900 companies from market entry to expansion. These are the unglamorous foundations of trust – the plumbing, not the facade – and they explain why the numbers moved.

The external verdicts followed. Qatar entered the top 10 of the IMD's global competitiveness rankings for the first time and vaulted 21 places to 12th on fDi Intelligence's greenfield performance index. Invest Qatar's chief executive, Sheikh Ali Alwaleed al-Thani, framed the year as one of purposeful progress,

and the phrase is apt: what stands out is less the scale of the numbers than the sense of direction behind them. Such endorsements are welcome, but they are best read with a measure of restraint. Rankings describe a year already lived; they are a report on the past, not a guarantee of the future. The harder task, as the agency acknowledges, is to sustain the momentum once the applause fades.

That is where reflection should settle. Foreign investment is, at its heart, a statement of belief in a country's tomorrow – a wager that stability, talent and openness will endure. The 15,000-odd jobs created last year are the human measure of that wager, the point at which macroeconomic strategy becomes a livelihood. The challenge now is neither to celebrate the figures too loudly nor to take them for granted, but to keep faith with the confidence they express – to ensure that those who chose to build here find, year after year, that they were right to do so.

Light in the dark



A person walks next a residential building damaged following a Russian air attack yesterday on the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv, amid the Russian invasion in Ukraine. Russian missile and drone strikes rocked Kyiv early yesterday, killing at least eight people and wounding dozens, after President Volodymyr Zelensky warned that Moscow was preparing a 'massive attack'. (AFP)



Responding to climate change through strategic research



By Dr Logan Cochrane and Dr Dhabia al-Mohannadi
Doha

The Arabian Peninsula is at the forefront of climate change, experiencing some of its most visible and consequential effects. The challenges are serious: rising temperatures, heat waves becoming more prolonged, and sea level rise affecting coastal infrastructure, all of which impacts the well-being of people and the economy.

By prioritising long-term resilience, Qatar could lead global innovations for living in arid environments. Doing so requires innovation, evidence, and strategic planning.

Research to Impact

Over the last 25 years, the Gulf Cooperation Council states have invested in climate change-related research, with output increasing from virtually no published papers in 2000 to over 300 annually by 2023.

While welcome, much of the research is technical and insufficiently studies the systems responsible for translating evidence into action.

Our review of climate change studies across the Gulf identified three blind spots: people, policy, and price.

The next phase of the region's research agenda needs to advance evidence-to-impact pathways, which requires studies on governance, legal frameworks, public attitudes, and economic incentives.

While the best models will help us understand the risks, failure to integrate the social sciences into these research agendas may leave the results sitting on the shelves.

This requires new ways of working, specifically by breaking down disciplinary barriers and working beyond borders.

Much of the Arabian Peninsula shares similar challenges and areas of interest.

We share coastlines and aquifers, air quality transcends borders, and urban heat islands are a feature of cities across the region.

Climate change is not a national issue, but research has been.

As the Gulf's environmental research capacity grows, the next phase must connect evidence to action

Working together has the double benefit of reducing duplication of effort and enabling faster implementation of solutions.

The region has the human capacity and financial resources to invest in research and innovation, ensuring that the outcomes lead to meaningful changes in policies, practices and people's lives.

We are already on the adaptation pathway, from emerging smart cities, expanding public transportation networks, and investment in cooling infrastructure, what comes next should be coordinating efforts to meet the scale of the challenge.

Going Forward

How can we move the next agenda ahead?

The current research landscape is fragmented. Water experts, energy researchers, and policy leaders often work separately.

In reality, these systems are deeply interconnected.

Cooling demand affects desalination needs, which in turn influences grid stability and carbon emissions, all of which shape governments policy choices.

Translating technical evidence into real adaptation requires systems thinking that treat the region's sustainability challenge as one integrated problem rather than separate technical puzzles.

Building on this, four priority areas should be considered.

First, technical projects should embed social scientists, government experts, and economists. This can be a requirement by research donors and supported by research institutions.

Second, we need to build bridges beyond borders in research, which can accelerate regional development. Mutual environmental challenges call for shared solutions and enable countries to progress together.

Third, we need to be strategic in funding research and innovation for lasting impact. Investments in carbon capture and green tech, can be paired with measures such as improved building codes and urban design.

Fourth, focus should be on addressing structural vulnerabilities across the region. This includes developing heat- and salt-tolerant crops, regionalising vertical farming, advancing water recycling, and improving aquifer management. It also means making the current system more efficient by cutting food loss, localising diets, and positioning the region as a testbed for pioneering

breakthroughs in arid agriculture.

We have the opportunity to turn the narrative around: The Arabian Gulf need not be viewed as a hotspot for climate change risks when it can be at the forefront of resilience.

The talent, motivation and resources are in place. The next step requires coordinated, interdisciplinary, and region-wide efforts that connect evidence to policy and action.

If that happens, the region won't just adapt to a changing climate, it will export local knowledge and solutions to other vulnerable communities around the world.

The Arabian Gulf was built on turning hostile environments into prosperity. Climate change is simply the next test. Pass it together, and the desert can teach the rest of the world how to live.

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(This piece has been submitted by HBKU's Communications Directorate on behalf of its author. The thoughts and views expressed are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect an official University stance).

About Hamad Bin Khalifa University Innovating Today, Shaping Tomorrow

Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU), a member of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science, and Community Development (QF), is a leading, innovation-centric university committed to advancing education and research to address critical challenges facing Qatar and beyond. HBKU develops multidisciplinary academic programmes and national research capabilities that drive collaboration with leading global institutions. The university is dedicated to equipping future leaders with an entrepreneurial mindset and advancing innovative solutions that create a positive global impact. For more information about HBKU, its colleges, research institutes, and initiatives, please visit www.hbku.edu.qa. To stay up to date on our social media activities, follow our accounts on: LinkedIn, Instagram, X, and Facebook. For any media inquiries, please contact: media@hbku.edu.qa.

Russia pounds on the gates of Ukraine's 'fortress belt'

Russia is grinding its way into Kostiantynivka, a key stronghold in Ukraine's eastern "fortress belt" long coveted by the Kremlin, even as its gains across the rest of the 1,200km front line have largely stalled. Kostiantynivka is the southernmost of four key settlements forming a defensive line central to Ukraine's effort to hold the heavily industrialised Donetsk region.

The push towards it underscores Moscow's enduring manpower advantage, even as Ukrainian mid-range drone strikes on logistics have weakened its fighting capabilities, analysts said.

"The effect (of mid-range strikes) hasn't been so great that it would have forced the Russians to suspend their offensive," said Emil Kastehelmi of the Black Bird conflict analysis team in Finland. "So, even though Russia has been taking increasingly heavy losses in the rear, they are still able to continue their offensives, at least in certain sectors."

Occupying Kostiantynivka would provide Russian forces a foothold from which to move north along the belt, now the central axis of their campaign.

However, any advance would likely be long and bloody for its forces, in a possible echo of other costly sieges of eastern cities like Pokrovsk and Avdiivka. President Vladimir Putin has insisted Russia must control all of Donetsk before the war ends. Ukraine still holds around a fifth of the region after more than four years of fighting.

Putin said last week that Russia was close to capturing Kostiantynivka, whose pre-war population of nearly 70,000 has fallen to around 2,000. In comments to Ukrainian media, senior commanders of Kyiv's 19th Army Corps dismissed that claim as an exaggeration and said their troops were picking off small groups of Russians that had managed to enter. Major-General Viktor Nikoliuk, the head of Ukraine's eastern operational command, told Ukraine's public broadcaster on Thursday that Kostiantynivka could hold out at the current rate of manpower and resources.

While the tactical situation is worsening for Ukraine, the Russian infiltrations are not enough for "a rapid operational breakthrough", the US-based Institute for the Study of War said in a June 23 assessment. Still, Russian efforts to envelop the city through pincer movements are steadily raising the cost for Kyiv of defending it, said Ukrainian analyst Ruslan Mykula, of the DeepState open-source mapping group.

"A choice will have to be made: either raise the stakes or withdraw," he said. "And right now, the situation is such that the stakes are rising with each passing day."

Kastehelmi said the city's fall "seems to be more of a question of time". Moscow's troops are also encroaching on the northern end of the fortress belt, threatening the cities of Sloviansk and Kramatorsk with frequent air and drone attacks from around 15km away.

Ukrainian supply routes are already under sustained pressure, with artillery, drones and guided bombs battering infrastructure along the road north from Kostiantynivka, troops in the area said.

The creeping Russian gains around Kostiantynivka come despite mounting strains on its war effort caused by Ukrainian attacks on supply lines to and from Crimea, as well as longer-range strikes on the oil sector. Russian-installed authorities on the occupied Black Sea peninsula have imposed a state of emergency to deal with economic issues, and have halted all fuel sales to individuals and businesses.

On the battlefield more broadly, Russian forces appear overextended and frontline assaults often amount to just one or two soldiers, said Mykula, the Ukrainian analyst.

In comments to Reuters, however, Denis Pushilin, the Kremlin-installed head of Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region, said Russia's campaign to capture more cities was continuing.

"Talking about whether this is happening slowly or quickly isn't really the point," he said.

Russian hardliners have urged Putin to abandon the US-backed peace process and escalate his war as Ukraine's strikes intensify, including in Moscow.

Firefighters battle blazes in southern France

Reuters
Lancon, France

Firefighters were battling several wildfires fanned by strong winds in southern France yesterday, as the country grappled with parched conditions following Europe's recent heatwave.

Interior Minister Laurent Nunez said three blazes, two of which broke out on the western edge of the Mediterranean port city of Marseille, had scorched a combined area of 1,210 hectares (2,990 acres).

As Prime Minister Sebastien Lecornu arrived yesterday afternoon in Marseille to hold a new crisis meeting on the heatwave and the wildfires, a new blaze had just started near the city of Roquevaire in the Gard area, firefighters told Lecornu.

Lecornu, whose minority government faces a no-confidence vote in parliament on Monday that was put forward by Green Party lawmakers over its handling of the heatwave crisis,



A Canadair firefighting aircraft drops water to battle a wildfire in Pouzols-Minervois near Narbonne, France, yesterday. (Reuters)

said yesterday that 8,700 hectares had burned in France so far this season, including 1,200 on Wednesday alone, and that 2,000 firefighters had been mobilised.

The World Meteorological Organisation last week warned that the record temperatures that baked Western Europe for over a

week in late June would worsen the risk of wildfires, given the outlook for sustained high temperatures, very low humidity and dry vegetation.

The biggest wildfire was burning in the Aude administrative department area near the border with Spain, with some 900 hectares burnt. Local authorities

said high winds were making it more difficult for the 800 firefighters to battle the fire.

Meanwhile, firefighters were tamping down a small blaze in Rognac near Marseille's airport and had brought another fire covering 260 hectares in Lancon-Provence under control. There were no casualties, local officials said.

An acrid smell of smoke hung over the area and pilots at at least one flight landing at the city reassured passengers the smell was not coming from their aircraft, a Reuters witness said.

Further east, in Frejus, a resort town in the Var department some 35km (22 miles) from Cannes, more than 2,000 people were evacuated from six campsites on Wednesday because of a nearby forest fire.

France's weather office has warned that another spell of extreme heat could hit next week. Health authorities estimate the previous heatwave may have caused at least 1,000 excess deaths in the country during record-breaking temperatures.

Pakistan PM to attend Iran supreme leader's funeral

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif will attend the funeral of the late Iranian supreme leader Ali Khamenei this week, the South Asian nation's foreign ministry said yesterday.

"The Prime Minister, Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, will go to Iran and Turkiye from 3-5 July... he will go to Iran first for (the) supreme leader's funeral," ministry spokesman Tahir Andrabi told reporters.

Pakistan has been mediating between the United States and Iran to end the regional war which began in February with US-Israeli strikes that killed the 86-year-old Iranian supreme leader in Tehran.

Andrabi reiterated earlier statements from Pakistan and fellow mediator Qatar that US-Iranian indirect talks in Doha this week had made progress and another meeting could take place after Khamenei's funeral.

The public funeral will begin on Saturday, with his body lying in state at the colossal complex in central Tehran that hosts major Friday prayers, official ceremonies and religious gatherings.

Pakistan shares deep historic ties with Iran. The two share a 900km (560-mile) border and cultural links. Sharif's trip to Turkiye would involve meetings with Turkish leadership and businesspeople, Andrabi said. (AFP)

French government to face no-confidence vote

French Green party lawmakers yesterday filed a no-confidence motion against the government over its handling of a severe heatwave in late June, as the country braces for a third possible bout of extreme temperatures next week.

The motion, backed by 32 Green lawmakers, 25 hard-left France Unbowed lawmakers and one Socialist lawmaker, was expected to be discussed at the National Assembly on July 6, a spokesperson for the Green party at the National Assembly told Reuters.

Italy's Veneto region declares state of emergency over drought

AFP
Rome

Italy's northeastern Veneto region, which encompasses Venice, declared a state of emergency yesterday due to drought, with more than a quarter less rainfall from January to May compared with 2025.

Citing "abnormal hydrological and hydraulic conditions", Veneto President Alberto Stefani called on local authorities to adopt "more sparing and sustainable use of water resources", according to a statement published on the region's website.

Up to May 31 this year, the region's water resources from rain and melting snow were down 28% from the same period a year before, equivalent to nearly 2.4 bn cubic metres, the region said.

Scientists say human-induced climate change is making extreme weather events like droughts, heatwaves and floods more intense, resulting in temperature records being broken more frequently.

Flow rates of the main rivers were "significantly and consistently" lower than historical averages, with those of the famed Po - Italy's largest river which supplies the country's agro-in-

dustrial heartland, the Po Valley - down 23%.

The water level of Lake Garda was also "falling considerably", the region said. The largest lake in Italy, Lake Garda is a popular vacation spot but also a vital water supply for agriculture, fisheries and industry.

Stefani also warned farmers of the possible risk of "worsening water shortage problems" during July and August, when irrigation is most intense.

In Italy, the declaration of a state of emergency is relatively common, as the step allows government funds to be released more quickly and administrative procedures to be fast-tracked.

The statement called on water management authorities to inform the most affected municipalities of possible water-saving measures such as restrictions on watering gardens and lawns, washing courtyards and filling swimming pools and fountains.

Italy was hit by the recent heatwave that swept much of Europe, smashing records across the continent.

The country's north on Wednesday saw a drop in temperatures and some rainfall, due to a wave of cooler air that spread Thursday to other regions of the peninsula.

Poland to seek extradition of ex-justice minister from US

Warsaw court has upheld criminal charges against Poland's former justice minister, possibly clearing the way for his extradition from the US, prosecutors confirmed to AFP yesterday.

Zbigniew Ziobro served as justice minister and public prosecutor general between 2015 and 2023 under the conservative-nationalist Law and Justice (PiS) government.

He faces charges including abuse of power, leading an organised criminal enterprise and using funds meant for crime victims to buy Israeli Pegasus spyware, allegedly to monitor political opponents.

He faces up to 25 years in prison in Poland if convicted.

The latest court decision "makes it possible to initiate extradition proceedings", Anna Ptaszek, a spokeswoman for the national prosecutor's office, told AFP. "We know that he is currently on the territory of the US, so a request for his extradition will be submitted as soon as possible," she added.

The former minister is known as the architect of judicial reforms that sparked a standoff between Poland and the European Commission.

In November 2025, Polish MPs voted to lift Ziobro's parliamentary immunity and authorise his pre-trial detention.

Ziobro has repeatedly refused to respond to judicial summonses, likening the charges against him to a witch-hunt against conservatives.

Earlier this year he said he had received "asylum" in Hungary - then governed by his ally Viktor Orban - but later fled to the US.

Poland's Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski said in a post on X that Budapest had informed him the authorities had removed the refugee status the Orban administration granted Ziobro.

They had also invalidated his travel documents, Sikorski added. (AFP)

Russia bombards Kyiv in deadliest strike this year, killing at least 25

Reuters
Kyiv

Russia launched hundreds of drones and dozens of missiles at Ukraine's capital Kyiv in the early hours of yesterday, killing at least 25 people, wounding scores more and damaging around 130 buildings in the deadliest attack on the capital this year.

Multiple explosions shook central Kyiv and reverberated across the capital throughout the night as thousands of residents rushed to bomb shelters and underground metro stations. Huge columns of smoke filled the skyline.

Tymur Tkachenko, head of the capital's military administration, said on Telegram that the death toll stood at 25 and was likely to rise as rescue teams worked through the night, sifting through rubble in search of trapped residents.

He said teams at one site in an eastern suburb on the capital's left bank of the Dnipro River had recovered five bodies while eight residents were unaccounted for.

"Rescue crews will work without interruption until all the debris is cleared," he wrote. "Unfortunately, more victims may still be found."

The scale and spread of destruction across the breadth of the capital had little precedent even in a war now in its fifth year. Twenty-four people died in an attack on Kyiv in May.

President Volodymyr Zelensky, who cut short his visit to Ireland and rushed home, visited the site where a nine-storey residential building was half destroyed. He blamed the destruction in part on a failure of allies to deliver promised air defences.

"If our partners had delivered on their promises in a timely manner, I think we could have saved more homes and lives today," said Zelensky, who looked



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky walks with Interior Minister Ihor Klymenko as he visits the site of an apartment building damaged during overnight Russian missile and drone strikes in Kyiv yesterday. (Reuters)

and frustrated. "All we ask of our partners is simply to do what we've agreed on. We're not even asking for more."

Later, in his nightly video address, Zelensky said the issue of air defences would be "one of the key outcomes" of next week's Nato summit in Turkiye, as he repeated his call for the development of European air defences.

"If, of course, Nato still means anything to the allies," he said. "Europe must have its own sufficient capability to defend against all types of threats, including this one - from Russian ballistic missiles." Russia launched 74 missiles

and 496 drones overnight, the Ukrainian air force said. Yuri Ihnat, the Air Force spokesperson, said the number of ballistic missiles was unusually high and the interception rate was low. Ukraine has struggled with shortages of Patriot missiles in recent months.

The Russian Defence Ministry, in a Telegram post, said its "massive attack" using long-range, high-precision air-, land- and sea-launched weapons and drones hit military and energy facilities, as well as airports in Kyiv and other locations.

Moscow said the attacks were retaliation for Ukrainian drone strikes on Russia. Kyiv, which has stepped up strikes in recent weeks on Russia's domestic fuel supply, said it had hit an oil refinery overnight in the Russian region of Nizhny Novgorod, where the governor reported one person killed in a strike on an industrial facility.

The Kremlin said Russian military commanders had briefed President Vladimir Putin about the Russian attacks, adding that Moscow would increase pressure to achieve its war aims.

Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko announced a day of mourning in Kyiv for today. He said that damage was recorded across the city of about 3 mn, with some buildings heavily damaged.

Germany charges Nord Stream suspect with attacking pipeline on behalf of Ukraine

Reuters
Berlin

German federal prosecutors have charged a former Ukrainian army officer with being the co-perpetrator of a war crime over the 2022 Nord Stream gas pipeline blasts, accusing him of acting on behalf of Ukrainian state entities.

Prosecutors said yesterday they had filed charges against Serhii K - identified under German privacy rules only by his first name and initial - before a

regional court in Hamburg.

They accuse him of acting as a co-perpetrator in a war crime involving an attack on civilian objects, causing an explosion, destroying infrastructure and disrupting public services.

Authorities in Kyiv said yesterday that they did not have enough information about the case to respond in detail to German prosecutors' allegations.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said on Wednesday that he had yet to receive full details of the indictment. The list of charges was published yesterday.

"The relevant authorities of our countries will get in touch, and when we receive more details, we will probably be able to respond. For now, it is too early to speak," he said.

Russia and Western countries have described the September 2022 blasts, which followed Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine earlier that year, as sabotage.

The explosions damaged the Nord Stream 1 pipeline, a vital route for Russian gas exports to Europe, as well as the Nord Stream 2 branch, which had yet to enter service.

At the time of the alleged attack, Moscow had recently halt-

ed gas deliveries via Nord Stream 1, blaming Western sanctions and technical issues, though Europe accused it of weaponising energy supplies.

According to the German indictment, Serhii K was an officer in the Ukrainian army in 2022 and, acting on behalf of Ukrainian state entities, helped develop a plan with other military personnel to destroy Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2.

The aim, prosecutors said, was to permanently halt gas deliveries via the pipelines and prevent Russia from using revenue from the natural gas trade to finance its war efforts.

Nato plans to replace AWACS with Saab GlobalEye jets, sources say

Reuters
Berlin/Paris

Nato plans to replace its ageing fleet of US-built AWACS surveillance aircraft with a Swedish alternative, four sources told Reuters, in a move that could jar with President Donald Trump, who has urged allies to buy more US defence equipment.

Trump has repeatedly criticised European allies for relying on the US for their security, while pressing them to boost defence spending and buy more US equipment. He has also threatened at times to pull Washington out of Nato.

The sources said the purchase of Saab's GlobalEye surveillance aircraft would be announced at a Nato summit in Ankara on July 7-8.

A spokesperson for the alliance confirmed that a decision on the AWACS replacement would be announced at the summit but declined to provide details. Saab declined to comment.

With their distinctive nine-metre-wide radar domes, Nato's 14 Airborne Warning and Control System aircraft have served as the alliance's eyes in the sky since 1982.

Based at Geilenkirchen air base in Germany, the fleet has played a key role in surveillance missions along Nato's eastern flank since Russia launched its war in Ukraine.

Under the replacement plan, Geilenkirchen could eventually become home to the world's largest fleet of GlobalEye aircraft, the sources familiar with the situation said.

The system, which entered



A GlobalEye aircraft, manufactured by Saab Technologies, on static design during Dubai Airshow. (Reuters/File Photo)

service in 2018, is designed to detect and track threats across air, land and sea. It is based on the Global 6500 business jet built by Canada's Bombardier

GlobalEye competes with Boe-

ing's E-7 Wedgetail, an early warning and command-and-control aircraft based on the 737 jetliner and designed to oversee and direct battle.

Nato dropped plans in 2025 to

buy six Boeing E-7 Wedgetail aircraft after the Pentagon, its largest prospective customer, scrapped plans to acquire 26 of the jets and instead put greater emphasis on satellite-based capabilities.

Under pressure from US lawmakers, however, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth told a Congressional panel in May that the Pentagon was seeking to restore funding for the programme.

The planned Nato announcement comes weeks after Canada, which has said it wants to reduce its dependence on US defence suppliers, announced plans to buy six GlobalEye aircraft, the largest order for the jet so far.

Nato's purchase is expected to be larger, although it was not immediately clear how many jets it would involve. One source said the final number could depend

on whether the alliance opts for a more expensive version capable of mid-air refuelling.

The current AWACS fleet can be refuelled in flight, a capability that has proved valuable for missions near Ukraine by extending time on station.

The aircraft, among the few military assets owned directly by Nato, are operated by crews from 21 of the alliance's 32 member states.

In a conflict, they can provide a common radar picture for allied fighters, ships and control centres, while directing Nato combat jets to their targets.

The fleet has supported missions in the Balkans, Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as security operations during the 2006 World Cup in Germany and major international summits.

Deputy Prime Minister visits Amiri Guard Camp 'Barzan'



HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Sheikh Saud bin Abdulrahman bin Hassan al-Thani paid a visit to the Amiri Guard Camp "Barzan" yesterday, where he was received by HE the Commander of the Amiri Guard Major General Mohammed bin Sultan al-Suwaidi. Also present to welcome him were the deputy commander of the Amiri Guard, the inspector general, assistants to the Commander of the Amiri Guard, and a number of senior officers. During a tour of the Amiri Guard Command building, HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs was briefed on the modern and advanced facilities and equipment of the various departments and units of the Amiri Guard that meet the highest military and security standards. His Excellency was accompanied during the visit by a number of senior officers from the Armed Forces. (QNA)

Pakistan Fruit Festival opens at Al Meera with premium produce

By Shaima Sherif
Staff Reporter

Pakistani ambassador to Qatar Muhammad Aamer inaugurated the Pakistan Fruit Festival at Al Meera's Mansoura branch yesterday (July 2), marking the start of a week-long celebration of Pakistani agricultural produce and the enduring friendship between Qatar and Pakistan.

Organised by Al Meera in partnership with the embassy of Pakistan in Doha, the festival runs from July 2-8 across 15 Al Meera branches, offering shoppers a wide selection of premium Pakistani fruits and agricultural products.

The initiative forms part of Al Meera's broader strategy to expand its range of authentic international products by working closely with embassies and promoting cultural exchange through themed food festivals.

Speaking to *Gulf Times*, Al Meera Executive Commercial Director Engin Gunlu said the retailer views such initiatives as an extension of its role as Qatar's national retailer.

"Today, as Qatar's national retailer, we serve a diverse commu-



Pakistani ambassador to Qatar Muhammad Aamer inaugurates the Pakistan Fruit Festival at Al Meera's Mansoura branch yesterday. PICTURES: Shaji Kayamkulam

nity," Gunlu said. "These festivals are our way of celebrating the cultures that make Qatar unique."

He said the initiative is designed not only to provide expatriate communities with authentic products from their home countries but also to encourage cultural exchange among Qatar's residents.

"We want our customers to enjoy authentic products from their home countries while also giving everyone the opportunity to discover new flavours and traditions," he said.

Gunlu added that Al Meera has been strengthening its collaboration with diplomatic missions in Qatar to broaden the range of international products available to consumers.

"We are increasing our communication and engagement with embassies," he said. "We work closely with their commercial affairs departments to introduce more suppliers through direct imports and offer a wider variety of authentic products in our stores."

According to Gunlu, the strategy reflects Al Meera's commit-



Engin Gunlu

ment to meeting the evolving needs of Qatar's diverse population by sourcing products directly from their countries of origin.

Apart from introducing new products, the retailer sees cultural festivals as opportunities for residents to experience traditions, flavours and cuisines from around the world without leaving Qatar, while also strengthening commercial and cultural ties between embassies, businesses and consumers.

"For Al Meera, these festivals are more than seasonal promotions," Gunlu said. "They form part of our long-term strategy to broaden product diversity and make authentic international flavours more accessible to shoppers across the country."



Qatar Toy Festival opens with family entertainment programme at DECC

The fourth edition of the Qatar Toy Festival (QTF) has officially opened at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Center (DECC), offering a month of family entertainment, interactive experiences and creative activities.

Held under the theme "More to Imagine, A Whole World of Fun", the festival is organised by Qatar Calendar and will run until July 31, 2026.

Spanning more than 22,000sq m across four halls, the event features seven themed zones designed to cater to different age groups.

Visitors can explore a program that includes more than 66 glo-

bally recognised entertainment brands, 33 activity corners, and 14 live shows each day, providing a range of attractions for families throughout the festival.

The QTF Summer Camp is also returning for its second edition. The programme begins on July 5 and will continue until July 30, offering additional activities for children during the summer break.

The festival's official opening ceremony featured a parade led by the Qatar Toy Festival mascots, followed by a special performance from the ALJ Sisters. The ceremony concluded with the unveiling of the festival's new interactive art installations. (QNA)



Annual Palestine Forum to honour historian Walid Khalidi

The fifth edition of the Annual Palestine Forum in 2027 will feature a special session honouring the life, scholarship and enduring legacy of the late Palestinian historian Walid Khalidi, recognising his pioneering contributions to Palestinian studies and the preservation of the Palestinian historical narrative.

The announcement was made by the organisers – the Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies, in cooperation with the Institute for Palestine Studies – in the July 2 issue of the Centre's periodical.

They said the session will bring together leading scholars and researchers to examine Khalidi's intellectual legacy and his profound influence on generations of academics studying Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Widely regarded as one of the foremost Arab historians of the 20th century, Khalidi devoted his academic career to documenting the history of Palestine, particularly the Nakba, through meticulous archival research and rigorous historical analysis. His scholarship helped establish Nakba studies as a recognised field within contemporary Palestinian history, earning him international recognition as one of the leading authorities on the Palestinian question.

Beyond his prolific writings, Khalidi also played a transformative institutional role. He was among the founders of the Institute for Palestine Studies in Beirut in 1963, which has since become one of the world's leading independent research institutions dedicated to the study of Palestine and the Palestinian people. According to the organisers, the commemorative session will adopt a critical academic perspective, exploring Khalidi's landmark publications, research methodology and the lasting impact of his work on Palestinian historiography. Discussions will also examine his place in modern Arab historical scholarship, his influence on the evolution of Palestinian studies in both Arab and international academic circles, and the future directions of the discipline inspired by his extensive intellectual legacy. The Annual Palestine Forum has established itself as one of the leading international academic platforms dedicated to Palestine, bringing together researchers, scholars and specialists from around the world for interdisciplinary discussions on historical and contemporary Palestinian issues. Reflecting growing interest in the event, the Forum's Scientific Committee announced that it has received nearly 500 research proposals for the 2027 edition.



The late Walid Khalidi

Visit Qatar opens registration for inaugural Ironman 70.3 Doha 2027

Visit Qatar has announced the launch of registration for the inaugural edition of Ironman 70.3 Doha, set to take place at Old Doha Port from March 18-20, 2027.

The international triathlon marks another major addition to Qatar's international sporting calendar, further reinforcing the country's position as a leading destination for sports tourism and large-scale global events.

Visit Qatar is inviting athletes, endurance sports enthusiasts, and fitness communities from Qatar and around the world to

secure their place at the starting line of one of the region's most anticipated sporting events. The early registration phase offers preferential rates for a limited number of entries, providing participants with an exclusive opportunity to be part of the inaugural edition of the international triathlon.

Set against the backdrop of Doha's waterfront and iconic skyline, Ironman 70.3 Doha will deliver a race experience that combines sporting excellence with Qatar's distinctive destination offering.

Participants will begin with a 1.9km swim through the calm waters of Old Doha Port, followed by a 90km cycling course, before concluding with a 21.1km run featuring views of Doha's most prominent landmarks and attractions.

In addition to the main race on March 20, the event programme will include the Ironkids race on March 19, creating a family-friendly sporting festival for participants and visitors of all ages.

Participants can now register during the early access phase and explore full details related to race



routes, participation guidelines through the following link: <https://www.ironman.com/races/im703-doha>

SC expert credits 2022 World Cup legacy in 2026 Kansas City operations

The Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy (SC) is executing a programme meant to impart expertise during the FIFA World Cup 2026 held in the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

This is part of its role in supporting the organisation of this tournament and in keeping pace with the state-of-the-art thrust and global practices in the major events sector.

Among the Qatari talents taking part in this programme is Shouq al-Mahmoudi, Director of the Maps and Drawings Department at SC, who undertakes the management of facility operations at Kansas City Stadium in the US during this tournament.

Representing the State of Qatar at this tournament is a source of

pride, al-Mahmoudi said, adding that the engagement of Qatari talent in imparting this expertise overtly embodies the legacy of the successful hosting of FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

Al-Mahmoudi further underscored that it was her great honour to represent the nation in the 2026 tournament and to impart her expertise that she had internalised in staging major events.

Leveraging this expertise and continuing to contribute to the organisation of major global events, she noted, embodies Qatar's constant leading role in this field, along with the legacy that had been successful.

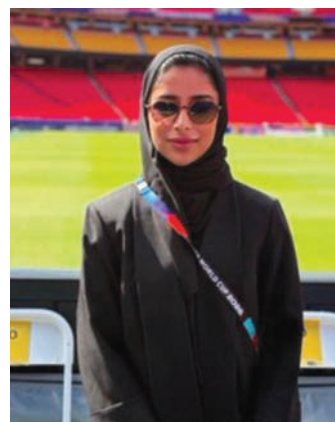
With her ongoing mission at Kansas City Stadium, al-Mahmoudi helps ensure the facility is fully primed ahead of each match

through overseeing various operational aspects of the stadium.

She asserted that a great amount of work is accomplished behind the scenes, but every single detail, whatever starts in small amount, would surely help shape fans' experience.

The operation is to ensure fans arrive smoothly at the stadium to enjoy the matches, as these welcoming atmospheres simultaneously represent an honour and responsibility, al-Mahmoudi underlined.

Al-Mahmoudi finished by emphasising that she is greatly proud of seeing others benefit from Qatar's successes, explaining that her engagement in global events like the World Cup ensures that she remains at the vanguard of the best international practices, while organisational standards are promoted in



every major event Qatar hosts.

Noteworthy, al-Mahmoudi is among the SC's expert team participating in supporting the organisation of this tournament



as part of a knowledge-sharing agreement between FIFA and SC.

The SC's experts are working side by side with the host cities team in the US and Canada, im-

parting their knowledge in multiple operational and organisational aspects by capitalising on the experience Qatar had gained from the historic erstwhile iteration. (QNA)