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## Shura Speaker leads delegation to funeral of Iranian leader

QNA/Reuters/AFP  
Doha/Dubai/Tehran

HE the Speaker of the Shura Council Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanem led a delegation from Qatar yesterday to the funeral ceremony of Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei at the vast Grand Mosalla religious complex in Tehran.

The body of the late supreme leader lay in state in a vast hall in Tehran yesterday as clerics, officials, foreign dignitaries and other mourners paid their respects.

During the funeral service yesterday, HE al-Ghanem conveyed Qatar's condolences to Iran's President Dr Masoud Pezeshkian, senior Iranian officials and members of the deceased leader's family.

He expressed sympathy to the Islamic Republic and its people over the loss.

Qatar's delegation included

Shura Council members Abdulrahman bin Yousuf al-Khulaifi, Mohammed bin Yousuf al-Mana, Nasser bin Salmine al-Suwaidi and Yousef bin Ali al-Khater, as well as Qatar's ambassador to Iran Saad Abdullah Saad al-Mahmoud al-Sharif.

Representatives from around 30 countries are expected to attend the ceremony.

Former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev, Chinese National People's Congress deputy head He Wei, Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Iraqi President Nizar Amadi were among the foreign leaders and officials attending.

Families of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah and senior commander Imad Mughniyeh, close Lebanese allies of Iran killed in Israeli strikes, attended the ceremony.

Iran's own political leaders - the president, parliament speaker, foreign minister and others - filed



HE the Speaker of the Shura Council Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanem led Qatar's delegation to the funeral ceremony in Tehran yesterday. (QNA)

in to weep and pray yesterday morning.

State TV broadcast footage of Iranian President Pezeshkian paying his respects at Khamenei's coffin in the afternoon, alongside parliament speaker and chief negotiator Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf.

A group of generals stood saluting in front of the coffin. Among them was the new Revolutionary Guards head Ahmad Vahidi, having not appeared in public since his appointment for fear of assassination.

Iran is staging a week of mass funeral processions for Khamenei, whose 37-year reign was brought to an end in late February by the first air strike of the war, in a show of public devotion to the Islamic Republic's theocratic state and revolutionary zeal.

Khamenei's body was expected to be taken to Qom, Najaf and Kerbala, the great Shia centres of Iran and Iraq, before being laid to rest on Thursday in Mashhad, home to the country's holiest pilgrim shrine.

His coffin was unveiled late on Thursday to a throng of sobbing supporters, swaying and beating their heads in time to a sung lament as flowers were thrown from the bier into the crowd.

Yesterday the coffin - and those of family members killed with him - was laid in state in the great prayer hall built to honour his predecessor, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

Burials are meant to be conducted within a day of death in Islam, but because of the risks of holding a big funeral during the war it was postponed until after

last month's interim truce deal was agreed.

The funeral is taking place at a critical moment for Iran, where the clerical rulers backed by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) are riding high from surviving what they saw as an existential war against their greatest and most powerful foes.

Authorities aim to mobilise millions of people for the big processions over the coming days, offering transport, food and lodging to buoy the numbers.

Iran has warned the United States and Israel against any attacks during the funeral.

It remains unknown if Khamenei's son and successor Mojtaba, who has not been seen in public since becoming supreme leader, will be present at the main ceremony in Tehran.

## QRCS participates in Qatar's relief airlift to Venezuela

As part of Qatar's efforts to provide relief for those affected by the two devastating earthquakes that hit Venezuela recently, the Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) has launched an emergency humanitarian response to the disaster, in cooperation with Qatar's government authorities and the international Red Crescent and Red Cross organisations.

The QRCS said in a statement yesterday that, shortly after the magnitudes 7.2 and 7.5 earthquakes struck northwestern and central Venezuela respectively, the organisation activated its Disaster Information Management Centre (DIMC) to receive humanitarian situation updates and keep in touch with the Venezuelan Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

On board a relief aircraft of the Qatari airlift ordered by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, the QRCS de-



Along with Lekhwiya and the Hamad Medical Corporation, the QRCS is sending a team to help with field relief efforts in Venezuela.

ployed a medical and relief aid shipment containing 24 tonnes of medications, medical supplies, and hygiene kits, as an immediate response to the emergency appeal issued by IFRC and UN agencies.

In addition to the Qatari International Search and Rescue Group of the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya), the aircraft transported a

medical and relief delegation from the Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) and QRCS, to take part in field relief efforts.

The HMC sent anaesthesiology, plastic surgery, and orthopaedics specialists/consultants, while the QRCS sent emergency medicine, general surgery, and orthopaedics doctors, along with development



projects, disaster response, and psychosocial support professionals.

Given the difficult conditions and large-scale destruction in the affected parts of Venezuela, the QRCS launched a fundraising campaign to expand relief operations.

"Inspired by Qatar's tradition of helping affected people in times of crisis, this charitable drive has been launched to intensify vital humanitarian aid, address the limited local resources in Venezuela, avoid growth of the death

toll, and bring back hope and reassurance to the affected families and communities," said the assistant secretary-general for Relief and International Development at the QRCS, Mohamed Bader al-Sada.

He called upon benevolent donors to support this noble endeavour, by donating via the website (<https://qrqs.qa/R-Venezuela>), mobile app (QRCS), donor service (66666364), home donation collection service (33998898), or donation agents/desks at malls and shopping centres. (QNA) Page 12

## 2 in 5 people with cardiovascular inflammation have increased risk of heart attack and stroke

By Joseph Varghese  
Staff Reporter

A new international study shows that cardiovascular inflammation remains highly prevalent among people with cardiovascular diseases and can have serious health implications, despite the current standard of care treatment. The study found that two in five people with atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease and chronic kidney disease have cardiovascular inflammation, causing an increased risk of major cardiovascular issues. This is an important concern because cardiovascular inflammation is an independent risk factor for cardiovascular issues such as heart attack and

stroke in people living with cardiovascular diseases. A Poseidon analysis by Novo Nordisk was recently published in the *European Journal of Heart Failure* and showed that two in five people with heart failure also have cardiovascular inflammation. Poseidon was a large, multinational, cross-sectional observational real-world evidence study designed to evaluate the prevalence and characteristics of high inflammatory risk in patients with atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease with and without chronic kidney disease and/or heart failure. The Poseidon included 18,904 patients across 18 countries and showed that cardiovascular inflammation remains highly prevalent among people with

cardiovascular disease despite the current standard of care treatment. These findings underscore a significant gap in current cardiovascular care. Even when people receive guideline-recommended treatments to control cholesterol, blood pressure and blood sugar, inflammation-driven cardiovascular risk persists. The study represents one of the largest contemporary global assessments of the prevalence of cardiovascular inflammation in this high-risk population. "Poseidon makes clear that inflammation is not a peripheral concern. It is a shared driver of risk affecting millions of patients worldwide with cardiovascular disease who remain vulnerable despite our best current

therapies," said Prof Carolyn SP Lam, senior consultant at Singapore National Heart Centre's Department of Cardiology and professor at the Duke-NUS Medical School's Cardiovascular and Metabolic Disorders Signature Research Programme. "What is striking is the consistency of inflammatory signals across such diverse patient populations," she said. "That consistency points to a practical way forward - identifying patients most likely to benefit from therapies that directly target inflammation." Poseidon enrolled 18,904 patients across 18 countries spanning Europe, North America, South America and Asia-Pacific between 2023 and 2025. Within the study, 13,475 patients had atherosclerotic cardiovascular

disease, of whom 5,757 (42.7%) had chronic kidney disease, while 11,809 patients had heart failure spanning all types of heart failure. Cardiovascular inflammation plays a central role in the development and progression of atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease. Multiple studies have shown that people with cardiovascular inflammation face an increased risk of major adverse cardiovascular events, including heart attack, stroke and cardiovascular death. Inflammation also contributes to chronic kidney disease progression, and chronic kidney disease itself may promote inflammation, creating a cycle that amplifies cardiovascular risk. It plays a key role in heart failure, and it is common across all types

of heart failure, particularly in people with obesity, kidney disease and other metabolic conditions. The growing recognition of the role of inflammation in cardiovascular disease is reflected in recent guidelines from the European Society of Cardiology, the American Heart Association, and the American College of Cardiology. Cardiovascular inflammation is increasingly recognised as a key driver of atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease and a major contributor to persistent cardiovascular risk in people receiving standard preventative therapies. It also plays a key role in heart failure, and it is common across all types of heart failure, particularly in people with obesity, kidney disease and other metabolic conditions.

## Qatar takes part in sustainability forum in North Macedonia

The State of Qatar has participated in an economic forum in the Republic of North Macedonia focused on turning sustainability into a competitive advantage and building resilient institutions in an uncertain global environment.

The forum, held in Skopje yesterday, was organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of North Macedonia, the country's Chamber of Commerce, and the UN Resident Coordinator's Office, in partnership with the European Union mission.

The State of Qatar was represented by Rashid bin Saeed al-Khayarin, Charge d'Affaires at its embassy in North Macedonia.

The event was attended by the Prime Minister of the Republic of North Macedonia Hristijan Mickoski, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade Timcho Mucunski and the UN Resident Coordinator in North Macedonia Rita Columbia. Also present were diplomats, international organisation representatives and figures



from political, economic and cultural sectors. Discussions focused on ways to strengthen sustainability practices, enhance institutional competitiveness and build more resilient economies in the face of global challenges and uncertainty. (QNA)

## Qatar highlights role of sport in combating racism at UNHRC

The State of Qatar has emphasised the role of sport as a powerful tool to promote equality and diversity and combat racism and xenophobia, during a session at the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva.

The State of Qatar took part yesterday in an interactive dialogue with the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, as part of the council's 62nd session.

The State of Qatar was represented by Sheikh Sultan bin Khalid al-Thani, Second Secretary at its Permanent Mission to the United Nations Office in Geneva.

In his remarks, Sheikh Sultan stressed that the State of Qatar believes sport serves as a universal language that brings together peoples and cultures, helping to reinforce values of respect, tolerance and solidarity.

He pointed to Qatar's efforts to combat racism and promote social inclusion through sport, highlighting initiatives such as hosting the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, which he said helped foster cultural understanding and challenge stereotypes.

He also noted support for FIFA's "No Discrimination" campaign during the tournament, as well as Qatar's annual National Sports Day, held every February to encourage participation in sport and reduce cultural and social barriers among residents. (QNA)

## Amir sends congratulations to Belarusian president

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani sent cables of congratulations to the President Aleksandr Lukashenko of the Republic of Belarus on the occasion of his country's Independence Day. HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani has sent a cable of congratulations to the Prime Minister of the Republic of Belarus Alexander Turchin on the occasion of his country's Independence Day. (QNA)

# Al-Marri meets Singapore's minister, attends meetings

HE the Minister of Labour Dr Ali bin Smaikh al-Marri met yesterday with the Minister for Manpower of the Republic of Singapore Dr Tan See Leng as part of His Excellency's official visit to the Republic of Singapore, accompanied by an official delegation.

HE Dr al-Marri affirmed that the meeting with the Singaporean side reflects the two countries' shared commitment to strengthening bilateral cooperation in the field of labour and building on the fruitful partnership established over recent years. He noted that this cooperation will facilitate the exchange of expertise, enable both sides to benefit from leading experiences, and support efforts to further develop the labour markets of both countries.

He stated that the meeting represents a new step towards strengthening cooperation between the two countries and that its outcomes will contribute to advancing the existing partnership and launching practical initiatives that support the development agenda and serve the mutual interests of both nations. He added that the State of Qatar continues to enhance its legislative and regulatory framework in line with evolving economic developments and labour market needs, while reinforcing investment in human capital.

The meeting dealt with the existing bilateral cooperation between the State of Qatar and the Republic of Singapore in the fields of labour and workforce affairs, exploring ways to strengthen and further develop this cooperation in the mutual interests of both countries. The two sides also reviewed the Memorandum of Understanding on labour cooperation and discussed mechanisms for its implementation and how best to utilise it to support areas of mutual cooperation.

The two sides discussed opportunities to exchange expertise in labour market policy development, skills development, vocational education and training, and to benefit from the leading experiences and best practices of both countries, with a view to supporting labour market development and enhancing workforce efficiency.

They also reviewed the outcomes of the technical meetings held between officials from the two Ministries of Labour and discussed mechanisms for following up on the implementation of the key matters addressed during those meetings, thereby strengthening cooperation and coordination between the two sides.

At the conclusion of the meeting, both sides reaffirmed the importance of continuing close



coordination and cooperation, promoting the exchange of expertise and experience, and further strengthening bilateral relations and cooperation in the labour sector between the State of Qatar and the Republic of Singapore.

HE the Minister of Labour Dr Ali bin Smaikh al-Marri also held a series of meetings with senior officials from Singapore's Ministry of Manpower, responsible for employment, national policies and regulatory frameworks, workforce



training and skills development, and social protection.

The meetings reviewed the existing cooperation between the State of Qatar and the Republic of Singapore in the labour sector and explored ways to strengthen

and expand it. The discussions also covered the Memorandum of Understanding on labour cooperation signed between the two countries and examined mechanisms for its effective implementation in support of enhanced bilateral cooperation.

Separately, HE Dr al-Marri paid a site visit yesterday to Certis Group, one of the Asia-Pacific region's leading companies specialising in integrated security services, facilities management, and technology solutions. Established in 1958 as the Singapore Police Force's Guard and Escort Unit, the organisation was subsequently transformed into a commercial enterprise wholly owned by Singapore's sovereign wealth fund.

During the visit, he was briefed on Singapore's experience in regulating and managing the workforce in the security services sector. He also explored opportunities to benefit from the company's expertise in developing and training human capital and enhancing professional skills within the sector. In addition, the visit included discussions on the use of modern technologies and artificial intelligence in security operations management to improve operational efficiency, as well as opportunities for the exchange of expertise in safety and security, facilities management, and support services. (QNA)

## MoL undersecretary meets Singaporean counterpart, officials

HE Undersecretary of the Ministry of Labour (MoL) Sheikha Najwa bint Abdulrahman al-Thani met yesterday with the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Manpower of the Republic of Singapore Stanley Loh.

The meeting explored ways to strengthen bilateral cooperation in the areas of labour market policy development, skills development and workforce training, and social protection, as well as means of further supporting and expanding cooperation.

In her remarks during the meeting, HE Sheikha Najwa bint Abdulrahman al-Thani said that the State of Qatar attaches great importance to developing its labour system through the continuous modernisation of legislation and policies, improving the working environment, strengthening

the protection of workers' rights, investing in vocational training and professional development, and enhancing the efficiency and skills of the workforce in line with labour market developments and requirements.

She affirmed that the meeting represents an important platform for strengthening dialogue, exchanging expertise, and benefiting from successful experiences in developing labour market policies and enhancing human capital capabilities.

Sheikha Najwa also commended the Republic of Singapore's leading experience in the fields of occupational safety and health, social protection systems, skills development, and aligning education and training outcomes with labour market needs. She expressed the State of Qatar's

aspiration to expand cooperation and exchange best practices between the two sides.

Sheikha Najwa further emphasised the importance of the official visit and the accompanying technical meetings in strengthening communication between the relevant authorities and opening new avenues for partnership and the exchange of knowledge and expertise in support of the shared interests of both countries.

HE Sheikha Najwa bint Abdulrahman al-Thani also held a series of technical meetings with officials from the Ministry of Manpower and relevant authorities in the Republic of Singapore.

During the visit, they met with officials from the Workplace Policy and Strategy Division, Skills Future Singapore, and the Foreign Manpower Policy Division in Sin-

gapore's Ministry of Manpower.

The meetings explored ways to strengthen and further develop bilateral cooperation between the two countries, while also reviewing Singapore's experience in labour market policies and strategies, including its workforce development strategy and the policies adopted to prioritise the employment of citizens. Discussions also covered mechanisms for skills development and aligning training outcomes with labour market needs.

The meetings further addressed Singapore's work permit system and the key policies and procedures governing the recruitment and employment of foreign workers, with a view to achieving a balanced labour market while enhancing the efficiency of workforce management. (QNA)

## Qatar raises concern over attacks on Sudan's El Obeid at UNHRC

The State of Qatar has expressed deep concern over the continuing humanitarian crisis in Sudan, calling on all parties to the conflict to respect international law and engage in dialogue to reach a lasting peace.

The remarks were given yesterday by HE the Permanent Representative to the United Nations Office in Geneva, Dr Hind Abdulrahman al-Muftah, during an urgent debate to "address the human rights situation in and around El Obeid, North Kordofan, in the context of the ongoing conflict in the Sudan." The debate was part of the 62nd session of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva.

Dr al-Muftah said the State of Qatar voices concern over the continued suffering of the Sudanese people and repeated attacks on civilian and vital infrastructure in and around the city of El Obeid.

She urged all sides to comply with international humanitarian law and international human rights law, de-escalate tensions, exercise restraint and avoid further fighting, warning that continued hostilities would have catastrophic consequences for civilians.

Dr al-Muftah reiterated Doha's call for dialogue among all Sudanese parties to bring the armed



conflict to a permanent end, address the humanitarian situation and launch broad negotiations leading to a comprehensive agreement and sustainable peace.

She also reaffirmed Qatar's support for Sudan's unity, independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as its opposition to any form of external interference in the country's internal affairs.

She stressed the importance of respecting the Sudanese government's preference to build on existing Human Rights Council mechanisms that have the government's confidence and are able to operate effectively on the ground. (QNA)



## Pakistan Fruit Festival at Al Meera highlights country's rich agricultural heritage



The Pakistan Fruit Festival is offering shoppers across Doha the opportunity to enjoy a wide selection of premium Pakistani fruits and agricultural products at 15 Al Meera outlets until July 8. Organised by Al Meera in collaboration with the embassy of Pakistan in Qatar, the week-long festival highlights Pakistan's rich agricultural heritage by showcasing some of the country's finest seasonal produce. Taking centre stage are Pakistan's world-renowned mangoes, with popular varieties including Sindhri, Chaunsa, Anwar Ratol, Langra, Fajri, Dussehri and Sunera. The festival also features an array of fresh fruits and other seasonal produce, giving residents access to authentic, farm-fresh flavours from Pakistan. PICTURES: Shaji Kayamkulam

# DR Congo opposition builds against presidential third-term bid

AFP  
Kinshasa

The opposition in the Democratic Republic of Congo has called demonstrations in the capital and other cities next week to demand the resignation of the president, who it says is trying to cling on to power by changing the constitution.

Political tensions have grown recently, more than two years before the African country, beset by decades-long conflict and an Ebola outbreak, goes to the polls.

President Felix Tshisekedi, 63, came to power in 2019 and his second — and under the current rules

— final five-year mandate is due to end in late 2028.

But, at a rare press conference in May, Tshisekedi spelled out his intentions, which effectively concurred with what the opposition had complained about for months: “If the people want me to have a third term, I will accept,” Fatshi, as he’s known locally, declared.

The dispute now focuses on a bill setting out the framework for a referendum on constitutional change, which was adopted last month in parliament, where the presidential bloc holds an overwhelming majority.

In the DR Congo “parliamentary oversight is rarely exercised”, the country’s Ebuteli research

centre said in a recent report.

This week, Tshisekedi announced in an address to mark Independence Day that he had “referred this law to the Constitutional Court for review of its constitutionality”.

Examination by the Constitutional Court — whose independence has often been called into question — is the last step before the president decides on whether to enact the bill into law.

“Over the years, the perceived politicisation of certain judicial bodies, particularly the Constitutional Court, has fuelled debate over how effective this independence truly is,” the Ebuteli centre said.

The bill has mobilised the opposition, which emerged weakened and scattered from the 2023 presidential election, won by Tshisekedi with 73% of the vote.

In May, the C64 coalition was formed, its name a reference to an article in the constitution allowing citizens to oppose any seizure of power deemed unconstitutional.

Instrumental in the group is former presidential candidate Moise Katumbi, a former governor of mining hub Katanga province, who now lives in exile.

Other key figures include ex-minister and former lawmaker Dely Sesanga and Martin Fayulu, who also ran in 2023 and still

claims he won the 2018 election.

“History will be unforgiving towards those who chose ambitions of power over the defence of the nation,” Sesanga said recently.

“We will not give in; we are ready to do whatever it takes for the good of the nation,” Fayulu said.

Sesanga and Fayulu were wounded during a June 12 rally in Kinshasa against what the opposition called an attempted “constitutional coup d’Etat” when clashes broke out with pro-government activists and the police. The UN said one demonstrator was killed.

Congolese political analyst Tresor Kibangula said the fight against amending the constitution

could rally public opinion and “allow the opposition to regain levers for political remobilisation”.

Pressure from the street and the international community forced ex-president Joseph Kabila to ditch an attempt in 2015 to extend his rule beyond two mandates by changing the electoral law.

Public engagement in the nation of 100mn people is low. In 2023, voter turnout was just 43%.

The high abstention rate is linked to a lack of confidence in the political elite and people’s overriding need to feed their families, in a country rich in mineral resources but where two-thirds of the population lives below the poverty line.

# More than 600,000 displaced Lebanese return home: IOM

AFP  
Beirut

More than 640,000 displaced people in Lebanon have returned home, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), as clashes between Hezbollah and Israel have wound down following a deal to end the Middle East war.

Lebanon was drawn into the regional war on March 2 when Tehran-backed group Hezbollah fired rockets at Israel to avenge the killing of Iran’s supreme leader in US-Israeli strikes.

Israel responded with heavy airstrikes and an invasion of southern Lebanon, where its troops still occupy swathes of territory.

Lebanese authorities say Israeli attacks have killed around 4,300 people and displaced over one mn, particularly from southern Lebanon and Beirut’s southern suburbs.

In a report on Thursday, the IOM said “646,107 IDPs (internally displaced persons) have begun returning to their communities”, while about 500,000 other people remain displaced, based on data collected in coordination with local authorities since June 22.

An agreement signed by Tehran and Washington last month established a ceasefire in Lebanon starting June 21.



A youth rides his bike near a damaged house in Tyre, Lebanon. (AFP)

Since then, hundreds of thousands of people have returned to their homes in southern Lebanon and Beirut’s southern suburbs.

Lebanese authorities say they have worked to remove informal tent encampments in and around Beirut and reduce the number of official shelters. But it remains impossible to return to dozens of towns and villages near the southern border, many of which have suffered massive destruction.

Israeli officials have also vowed that their forces will remain in a “security zone” 10 kilometres (six miles) deep, despite the ceasefire.

Last week Lebanon and Israel

concluded a US-backed framework agreement aiming to pave the way for a permanent end to the war. The agreement calls for the disarmament of Hezbollah, a gradual Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon and the deployment of the Lebanese army there — starting with two “pilot” areas.

However, the agreement — rejected by Hezbollah — does not set a timetable for Israeli withdrawal.

Instead, it makes Israeli withdrawal contingent on Hezbollah’s disarmament first, a tall order that experts say the Lebanese state cannot meet.

Reacting to criticism of the

agreement, particularly from Hezbollah, Lebanese President Joseph Aoun insisted on Friday that the document “does not legitimise the continuation of the Israeli occupation in Lebanon”.

He said the absence of a timetable was because it was a “framework formula” rather than a final agreement.

“Our shared objective is one: to secure Israel’s withdrawal,” he said, according to a statement from the presidency.

Amnesty International and five other NGOs warned yesterday that the framework agreement “threatens to betray war crimes victims in Lebanon”.

They argued that “parts of the text appear to be aimed at preventing victims of serious international crimes from seeking justice before international forums”.

Aoun responded to this criticism of article 13 of the framework agreement by saying that “it affirms the suspension of legal proceedings between the two states during the negotiation period” but “does not preclude” any private entity from taking legal action.

The NGOs added that other parts of the text “seem to acquiesce to the prolonged and indefinite forced displacement of tens of thousands of residents of vast swathes of southern Lebanon occupied by Israeli forces”.

# Thousands more head for S Africa’s borders

Several thousands more foreign nationals clamoured to leave South Africa yesterday, many of them gathered near the Zimbabwe border after a push that has already seen around 35,000 go home.

The exodus began weeks ago as fringe groups began demanding all illegal migrants leave by June 30, in a campaign that saw violent protests and clashes in which at least four foreign nationals were killed.

Around 11,000 people, most of them Malawians and Zimbabweans, were near the border town of Musina for registration and verification, the national broadcaster SABC reported.

They were relocated to Musina from various cities where migrants had gathered outside government offices or foreign consulates for help to get home. The Border Management Authority says that more than 35,000 people have already been repatriated or deported since June 7.

The groups mobilising against illegal immigrants blame them for high unemployment and lack of services, pressing social problems that analysts say are largely due to government failures.

At least two Mozambicans, an Ethiopian and a Malawian have been killed in violence linked to recent tensions around illegal immigrants, according to police.

The tensions have prompted the government to announce

ramped up measures to tackle illegal immigration and warn people to not take the law into their own hands.

“You cannot continue to go door to door asking for proof of identification of foreign nationals,” minister in the presidency, Khumbudzo Ntshavheni, said at a media briefing yesterday.

“You cannot continue to go workplace to workplace asking for how many foreign nationals are employed.”

Still, several African governments, including Nigeria, Malawi, Ghana, Zimbabwe and Mozambique, have organised voluntary repatriation flights and buses for their citizens.

Around 270 Ugandan nationals arrived home late on Thursday aboard the first flight, the high commissioner said.

Even though officials had emptied and closed a site in Durban which had at one stage held roughly 10,000 people, foreign nationals continued to arrive and numbered around 1,000 yesterday.

“I thought I would lay low for a while and seek new employment once the situation calms,” said Musa Hashimi, who worked as a machinist in a textile factory.

“But after June 30, people in my neighbourhood started singing that they will kill all the foreigners,” he said. “I said I must leave and come here before they kill me,” he added. (AFP)

# Houthi threaten Saudi after alleged airspace intrusion

AFP  
Sanaa

Yemen’s Houthis threatened yesterday Saudi airports and vital assets should Riyadh violate its airspace or attempt to attack it, as the rebels accused the kingdom of trying to stop an Iranian plane from landing.

The threats followed a time of relative calm between Saudi Arabia and the Iran-backed rebels, which did not target Gulf states during the Middle East war that saw Iran pummel its oil-rich neighbours.

“We warn the criminal Saudi enemy against repeating any attempt to violate our airspace or any aggression targeting our country,” military spokesman Yahya Saree said in a video statement.

“Such actions will be met with a comprehensive response targeting its airports and vital interests on land and sea.” Saree said the rebels had thwarted an attempt by Saudi warplanes to infiltrate their airspace at 5:20 am (0220 GMT) in a bid “to prevent an Iranian civilian aircraft carrying more than 200 stranded, wounded and sick citizens from landing at Sanaa International Airport”.

Houthi media earlier reported that the aircraft had headed back to Tehran carrying the Houthi delegation meant to attend the funeral of Iran’s former supreme leader, killed in US-Israeli strikes that triggered the Middle East war.



An armed Yemeni man. (AFP)

The rebels said its fighters were ready for “any options” and that “their fingers are on the trigger to implement directives aimed at breaking the Saudi-American siege”, without providing further details.

The renewed threats came months after the Saudi-backed government and the Houthis had agreed to their largest prisoner exchange, confirmed in May, which includes seven Saudi nationals.

The Houthis have been at war with the government since 2015 in a conflict that has killed hundreds of thousands of people and triggered a major humanitarian crisis in Yemen.

The Houthi rebels control Yemen’s capital Sanaa and much of the north, including most population centres, while the internationally-recognised government holds much of the south.

# Cyprus talks on Gaza touted ‘highly productive’

AFP  
Jerusalem

The Palestinian technocratic committee tasked with administering post-war Gaza said yesterday it concluded two days of “highly productive” talks in Cyprus on easing humanitarian suffering and advancing plans to rebuild the territory.

The National Committee for the Administration of Gaza (NCAG) said on X that it held “a series of working meetings in Cyprus with experts and advisers of the Board of Peace, the Office of the High Representative for Gaza (Nikolai Mladenov) and the Tony Blair Institute”.

The talks focused on efforts to “relieve the suffering” of Gazans, the committee said, including through projects that “can



Tents, makeshift shelters housing displaced Palestinians in Gaza. (AFP)

be done immediately”.

Participants also reviewed plans for reconstruction, security and governance, while developing a framework to ensure transparency and accountability for international donors.

The committee reiterated its commitment to US President Donald Trump’s 20-point plan and said it remained prepared to assume its responsibilities in coordination with the Board of Peace.

It gave no timeframe, saying further steps would be announced “once the right conditions are met”.

The Board of Peace was established by Trump earlier this year as part of a US-backed ceasefire plan for Gaza endorsed by the UN Security Council.

The initiative aims to facilitate a transition away from Hamas rule while supporting the restoration of civilian administration and basic services across the territory of over two million Palestinians.

However progress has been slow, and the technocratic committee has yet to enter Gaza.

Under the second phase of the US-backed deal, Israel was to gradually pull out of the territory and Hamas was to hand over its weapons, neither of which has happened.

# South Africa loses bid to block exports of rhino horn

South Africa has lost a bid to overturn a court ruling that could allow exports of legally harvested rhino horn, the private conservationist who brought the case said yesterday. Trade in rhino horn has been banned globally since 1977 under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Supporters say the ban is vital to protect dwindling wild rhino populations from poaching, while advocates of legal trade argue that regulated sales of horn harvested from live animals could fund conservation and curb black-market demand. Wicus Diedericks, owner of a 13,355-hectare game reserve in South Africa’s Northern Cape province, sued the government to compel it to authorise the export of more than 500 white rhino horns. In 2025, the Northern Cape High Court ruled in his favour, finding that horn from captive-bred white rhinos bred for conservation purposes could qualify for export certificates, subject to legal requirements. Diedericks said the same court had yesterday dismissed, with costs, the government’s application for leave to appeal that judgment.

“This historic decision validates the rights of private conservationists and breeding facilities to fund their critical, high-cost protection efforts,” he said in a statement. Yesterday’s decision can still be appealed to a higher court under South African law.

British non-governmental organisation the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) in May called Diedericks’ lawsuit “a reckless gambit”, saying it sought to circumvent the international ban on rhino horn trade and could increase demand, weaken enforcement and fuel illegal trafficking. (AFP)

# UN alarmed by violence in Lake Chad region

The United Nations voiced concern yesterday over escalating violence in Africa’s Lake Chad basin, which it said has cost 5,700 lives since November and triggered a displacement surge. UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, said that across the basin, which covers swathes of Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria, more than 3.5 mn people are forcibly displaced, while 8.2 mn need humanitarian assistance.

Security has deteriorated sharply in recent months, said Andrew Wylie, UNHCR’s deputy director for west and central Africa. “Between September 2025 and May 2026 alone, nearly 1,800 security incidents and more than 5,700 fatalities were recorded across the basin,” he told a press conference in Geneva. “These incidents include attacks on civilians, killings, kidnappings, explosions, clashes between armed actors and raids on villages,” he said, speaking from Madrid. Since 2009, Lake Chad has

turned into a militant stronghold, harbouring fighters from Boko Haram and its rival offshoot, Islamic State West Africa Province.

Borno State in northeast Nigeria remains the epicentre of the crisis, said Wylie.

He said that since January, more than 77,500 people have been displaced across the four countries, including more than 16,000 refugees who fled attacks in northeast Nigeria and crossed into neighbouring Niger. “In Cameroon’s far North, persistent attacks, abductions and village-level violence continue to drive chronic insecurity and new displacement,” said Wylie. “In Chad’s Lac province, recurrent attacks and military operations have displaced some 60,000 people.”

“Displaced people and returnees are now particularly exposed in areas with limited protection services and few safe options to move.” Civilians are bearing the brunt of the crisis, he added. (AFP)

# Burning hopes and dreams



Israeli settlers use a leaf blower to fan the flames of a fire they allegedly set on Palestinian wheat fields in Salem village in West Bank. (AFP)



# Dancing for culture, unity and a sustainable future

Representing Africa at the Diamond League, Kenyans Green Maasai Qatar used music, dance and cultural expression to celebrate identity, foster unity and preserve tradition

By Joey Aguilar  
Doha

Every rhythm, dance step and colourful costume carried a message beyond entertainment as Kenyans Green Maasai Qatar (KGMQ) represented Africa at the Diamond League in Doha, showcasing the richness of Maasai culture on one of the world's premier athletics stages.

The performance also underscored the power of sport and culture to unite communities while promoting cultural preservation, diversity and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

For the troupe, appearing at the Diamond League at Qatar Sports Club on June 19 was more than a cultural presentation. It was an opportunity to represent not only



KGMQ founder Zacchaeus Njuguna with his daughter MaryKayla.



Josephat Muchiri

Kenya but the entire African continent before a global audience.

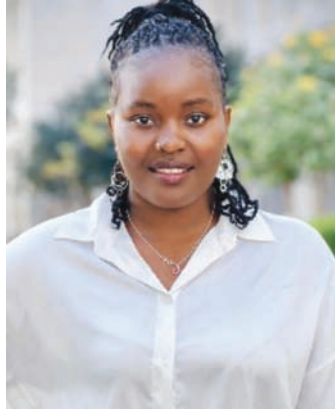
KGMQ founder Zacchaeus Njuguna told *Gulf Times* that the group's appearance reflected a broader mission of advancing sustainable development through culture and sport.

"Our dance carried a deeper message of the SDGs, promoting quality education, gender equality, environmental conservation, cultural preservation, good health and peaceful communities," he said.

"Through every step, rhythm and movement, we shared a vision of a sustainable future where no one is left behind. Together, we celebrate diversity, inspire youth and promote sustainable development through culture and sport."

Beyond the cultural performances, KGMQ members also contributed to the event through community service. A team of volunteers distributed tickets and guided spectators to the appropriate entrances and seating areas, an initiative coordinated by the group's organising secretary for sports, John Oshea.

For Francis Muturi, representing Africa at the Diamond League



Elizabeth Nyambura

was both a privilege and a responsibility.

"Representing Africa at the Diamond League in Doha is a profound honour for our group. It symbolised more than just a performance. It was about carrying the spirit, colour and unity of the continent onto a global stage," he said.

Muturi added that the troupe showcased African heritage through rhythm, dance and cultural expression, reminding audiences that Africa's identity is vibrant, dignified and deeply rooted in community.

He pointed out that participating in major events across Qatar has enabled the group to build bridges between cultures by sharing the warmth and resilience of African traditions with diverse audiences.

"Each performance became a moment of pride not only for us as artists but for every African watching their culture celebrated internationally," he said.

Qatar's position as a global destination for sports, tourism and cultural exchange has also amplified the group's message.

Josephat Muchiri, another



Francis Muturi

KGMQ member, said the country provides a unique platform for sharing Maasai culture because it attracts millions of visitors, expatriates and professionals from around the world.

"Qatar has established itself as a global hub for tourism, business, sports and cultural exchange. That creates a unique opportunity for cultural communities such as ours to introduce Maasai traditions to audiences far beyond Kenya," Muchiri said.

He noted that major international events, particularly the 2022 FIFA World Cup, demonstrated how cultural programmes can bring together traditions from around the globe. Such occasions, he said, have enabled Maasai performers to showcase traditional dance, music, clothing, storytelling and handcrafted beadwork while helping visitors gain a deeper understanding of Maasai history, language, pastoral traditions, conservation practices and contemporary life.

"These experiences not only promote our rich cultural heritage but also challenge misconceptions and foster greater appreciation of the Maasai way of

life," Muchiri added.

Elizabeth Nyambura, also a KGMQ member, believes sport and culture naturally complement one another because both create opportunities for people to connect.

"Traditional culture unites people through dance, music, art, costumes and other cultural traditions, while sports encourage participation, teamwork and shared experiences," she said. "Together, they help preserve these traditions

and pass them on to younger generations?"

Meanwhile, Njuguna thanked the Kenyan Embassy in Qatar, the Diamond League organisers and the Government of Qatar for providing the opportunity to showcase Maasai culture on an international stage.

"It was a great honour to represent Kenya, Africa and our rich cultural heritage at such a prestigious global sporting event," he said



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## MES Indian School shines at CBSE Qatar Cluster Taekwondo Championship 2026

MES Indian School delivered a commendable performance at the CBSE Qatar Cluster Taekwondo Championship 2026, held at Loyola International School, achieving an impressive medal tally and securing distinguished team rankings across multiple age categories. Demonstrating exceptional prowess,

resilience, and sportsmanship, the MES girls' team clinched an outstanding tally of 8 gold, 8 silver medals, and 8 bronze medals. Their exemplary performances earned the school the prestigious distinction of first runner-up in all three girls' categories: U-14, U-17, and U-19. The boys' team also delivered a

remarkable performance, securing 4 silver medals and 21 bronze medals, contributing to the school's overall success and medal standings. The girls' team was guided by Mariam Sameer, who also served as an official for the championship, officiating during the tournament. Mohammed

Navas coached the boys' team, while Aboobacker served with distinction as the tournament official and team manager. The teams were additionally supported by Reshma C A and Kabia Badoni, who fulfilled their roles as team managers with dedication and commitment.

The principal, Dr Hameeda Kadar, extended heartfelt congratulations to all the medal winners, coaches, team managers, and officials for their outstanding accomplishments, commending their efforts in bringing great pride and honour to the institution.





By Joey Aguilar  
Doha

More than just a volleyball tournament, the BMKQ Women One-Day Volleyball League 2026 brought together 11 Filipino community teams in Qatar to promote sportsmanship, healthy living and worker welfare while strengthening ties among community organisations and labour-support institutions.

Held at Valley Forge Academy Qatar on June 26 with the support of Bayanihan Qatar, a federation of more than 20 Filipino community organisations, the event drew around 150 participants, including athletes, organisers, volunteers, officials and supporters.

Organisers said the tournament went beyond competition, serving as a platform to foster teamwork, camaraderie and community engagement while encouraging active lifestyles among Filipinos in Qatar.

"The one-day volleyball league successfully achieved its objectives by promoting physical fitness, wellness and active lifestyles, while strengthening camaraderie and collaboration among Filipino community organisations in Qatar," BMKQ Women said in its post-activity report.

The organisation added that the event also strengthened partnerships between community organisations, labour-support institutions and stakeholders committed to workers' welfare, while providing a safe and inclusive environment for sports and recreation.

BMKQ president Engineer Joseph Catarungan welcomed the participating teams, partners, volunteers and guests, highlighting the role of sport in promoting unity, friendship, discipline and personal well-being.

In her keynote address, Lulwa al-Merehi, public relations researcher at the Workers Support and Insurance Fund, speaking on behalf of

# Volleyball serves as rallying point for health, community



**BMKQ Women unites Filipino community through volleyball tournament**



The event drew around 150 participants, including athletes, organisers, volunteers, officials and supporters.

executive director Khulood Saif Abdullah al-Kubaisi, underscored the importance of initiatives that promote workers' welfare, physical wellness and social inclusion.

She commended BMKQ Women for organising an activity that not only encouraged healthy living but also strengthened community bonds.

Marco Polo Ferrer, community liaison officer of the Building and Wood Workers' International, also stressed the value of sports in fostering cooperation, mutual respect and solidarity among workers and communities.

Before the tournament, participants attended a heat stress awareness session that provided practical guidance on recognising

symptoms of heat stress and heat exhaustion, proper hydration, preventive measures during physical activities and appropriate responses to heat-related emergencies.

According to BMKQ Women, the session underlines the organisers' commitment to promoting occupational safety, health and well-being, particularly during Qatar's summer months.

The event also received a boost from the presence of Philippine Consul General Cassandra B Sawadjaan, who lauded the organisers and participants for their commitment to sportsmanship, community engagement and healthy living. She encouraged continued support for activities that promote unity, friendship and the

welfare of Filipinos in Qatar.

After a full day of competition, BIMAAK Igorota Aces emerged champions, followed by Bayanihan Domestic Workers Qatar as first runners-up and Serve Squad in third place.

The tournament featured 11 teams representing Filipino organisations in Qatar, including Dragon Chapter GABII, Bantay at Kasangga ng OFW International-Qatar Chapter, Volleyball Buffs of Expats in Qatar, Ace Sizzlers, BIMAAK Igorota Aces, Bayanihan Domestic Workers Qatar, Serve Squad, OFW International Kasangga, OFW Advocates International, Qatar Pinay Nannies Association and The Guardians Brotherhood Inc - The Original.



BMKQ president Joseph Catarungan.



## MES commemorates Father's Day with gratitude and mirth



To honour fathers and recognise their invaluable contributions in nurturing, guiding, and inspiring their children, MES Indian School celebrated Father's Day with great enthusiasm and warmth on June 22, 2026, under the theme "Celebrating Our Heroes". The occasion was graced by the principal and the school officials.

The event began with an inspiring address by the principal, Dr Hameeda Kadar, followed by Fathers' Day messages delivered by students. In the Boys' Section, "Shades of Love - Fathers' Day Tree", a display of beautifully decorated heart-shaped photographs and thoughtful greetings from students expressing their gratitude and love for fathers became a highlight.

The event also featured an engaging "Voices on Fatherhood" panel discussion with panel members including Mohammed Ilias, vice-principal and head of



Section; Shaji Kumar, assistant head of Section and several teachers, including D A S Rex, Sameer Pande, and Akbar Ali.

Activities like 'Master Chef and Mini Chef', a fireless cooking activity encouraging teamwork and creativity between fathers and children, were also organised.



## TAC Qatar successfully hosts 'Melaprapancham 2026 - Season 2'

TAC Qatar successfully organised Melaprapancham 2026 - Season 2 on June 26 at Bhavan's Public School, Doha, celebrating the vibrant tradition of Kerala's percussion arts.

The event was inaugurated by school principal Shanthi V S, who appreciated TAC Qatar's efforts to preserve and promote traditional art forms among the younger generation.

A major highlight of the evening was the Arangettam performances of two student batches—the Pathikalam students and the Panchari Melam students—performed before a packed audience.

Their disciplined and energetic performances created an unforgettable experience for all, making the event a true feast for chenda enthusiasts.

The programme concluded with an electrifying Kalasakottu, presented jointly by the Kanal Qatar Team and TAC Qatar students, which was thoroughly enjoyed by the audience and brought the event to a grand finale.

TAC Qatar also announced that admissions for new batches of Chenda Melam classes have now begun, inviting students to learn and experience this rich traditional art form.



## Heatwave hits peak temps along US east coast

AFP  
Washington

A brutal heatwave hit peak temperatures across the eastern United States yesterday, straining power grids, threatening World Cup matches and playing havoc with celebrations for America's 250th independence anniversary.

With the heat index threatening to top 46C, records could be broken in New York City, as extreme heat warnings blanketed the northeast and mid-Atlantic regions.

Combined with very humid air, the "feels like" temperature could reach 40C in Boston, 44C in Philadelphia, and 45C in Washington.

"Numerous daily temperature records are expected today and Independence Day, with some consecutive-day, monthly, and

all-time records possible," the National Weather Service said.

Hang Dang, a 76-year-old retiree, was not letting extreme temperatures deter her from attending celebrations in Washington for the 250th July Fourth anniversary.

"I came to the US in 1975 from Vietnam and... I was here for the bicentennial," Dang told AFP, noting she drove 12 hours from Florida to attend festivities.

"I said I've got to get back for the 250th because I don't think I'll make it to the 300th!" she joked as a Marine Corps Osprey aircraft hovered nearby.

In New York, the most populous US city, Mayor Zohran Mamdani urged residents to "stay cool, stay vigilant and check in on your neighbors."

The city has transformed hundreds of public buildings into cooling centers, dispatched volunteers to check on vulnerable citizens,

and extended the hours of swimming pools across the city.

Three World Cup matches were slated for yesterday in the US, including in Miami where Argentina and Cape Verde face off. The stadium has no air conditioning and the heat index at kickoff was expected to hit 37C.

On Saturday, France and Paraguay will clash in Philadelphia where the heat index could reach 40C.

In response to concerns over heat, FIFA has introduced a mandatory "hydration break" in each half of every game at this World Cup, although it was not clear whether that would be adequate for matches taking place outdoors during the heat wave.

Although many buildings in the United States are air-conditioned, heat waves cause more deaths in the country than hurricanes and floods.

This particular heat wave is worrying because of its duration and intensity, but also because high nighttime temperatures could threaten vulnerable people and strain energy infrastructure.

On Thursday, Chicago utility company ComEd said its power grid was under "critical strain," and urged residents to "raise your thermostat as high as is comfortably safe."

The current extreme heat and humidity would have been "virtually impossible" without climate change, a study from the World Weather Attribution group of leading climate researchers said Friday.

In Washington yesterday morning, hundreds of people braved sizzling heat to visit the Great American State Fair taking place on the National Mall.

Many visitors said they had altered their plans so they could



A worker rests in the shade in Washington, DC. (Reuters)

avoid the afternoon sun. "The problem here is that the heat builds," said Kevin Ashley of Alexandria, Virginia. "In the afternoon it becomes really intolerable, because this is reclaimed swamp," he said. Nearby, crowds huddled in thin strips of shade outside pavilions, gulping free bottles of water that workers were distributing throughout the event.

Paramedics meanwhile carted

away a young woman suffering from apparent heat exhaustion.

"It's like the 30th person," said an event staffer.

A short time later, organisers closed the fair until 5 pm.

"The safety and well-being of our guests, volunteers, performers, vendors, and staff is our highest priority," a spokesperson told AFP.

"Conditions are expected to improve later this afternoon."

## President heads to Mount Rushmore as US turns 250

AFP  
Washington

President Donald Trump kicks off America's 250th birthday weekend yesterday with a trip to a landmark upon which many suspect he would like to see his own face carved in rock – Mount Rushmore.

On the eve of Independence Day, Trump will give a speech beneath the giant granite heads of four of his legendary predecessors at the national monument in South Dakota.

It's a fitting image for a president who views himself as being one of the greats himself, and who has at every stage tried to turn the US's big anniversary into a celebration of himself.

Republican Trump's supporters have even introduced legislation to have his likeness chiseled beside those of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt.

On July Fourth itself, Trump will hold a campaign-style political rally on the National Mall in Washington, along with flyovers by military jets and what he has billed as the world's biggest fireworks display.

For Trump – the billionaire former reality TV star who became the consummate political showman – taking center stage is in his blood. "Trump likes the spotlight, and I think he's trying



Final preparations going on at Mount Rushmore National Memorial for the Fourth of July fireworks display, where U.S. President Donald Trump is expected to appear. (Reuters)

to take the spotlight," Peter Loge, director of George Washington University's School of Media said.

But America under Trump is deeply divided at what should be a time of national unity.

Trump's approval ratings are near historic lows, fueled largely by the war in Iran and cost of living.

His Democratic opponents have castigated him over his immigration policies, family wealth and attempts to extend presidential power.

In an appearance posted Friday on second lady Usha Vance's podcast, Trump alluded to the sense of national division when he was asked why children should go out and celebrate Saturday's anniversary.

"We have a great country. We have a country that is under a little bit of a ledge right now," he said. "It can go one way or another, you understand that, but we're going to go the other."

Trump's attempts to stamp his political brand on America's 250th anniversary have, meanwhile, not always gone to plan.

A Trump-linked organisation called Freedom 250 has taken control of several festivities from the bipartisan America250 group, leading many people to stay away from key events.

A "Great American State Fair" in the capital designed as a celebration of the country's birthday has drawn sparse crowds and widespread mockery for its empty booths.

As the US marks two-and-a-half centuries of triumphs and tragedies, slavery and freedom, civil war and world wars, surveys show the nation is pessimistic about the chances of realising the "American Dream."

A Quinnipiac University Poll on Thursday showed 61% of Americans thought the US was not living up to the ideals stated in the Declaration of Independence – though even opinion on that was divided, with most Republicans thinking it did, and most Democrats thinking it didn't.

"The Fourth of July really is a moment of freedom, but I have to be honest, in these political times, it hasn't been as exciting to me over the last few years," Amy Kimaara, a 49-year-old special education teacher said.

Increasingly, Trump is using the 250th anniversary celebrations as a platform to rally political support for Republicans – and himself – ahead of crucial US midterm elections in November.

Republicans fear Trump's unpopularity could cost them control of Congress, which could leave Trump facing a record third impeachment.

However, for other Americans, it's still a time to celebrate. "I think it's been politicised, but that doesn't change that the Fourth of July is a great holiday for all of us," said Matt Jarvis, 55, an entrepreneur from Los Angeles.

### Pope urges Americans to find 'unity'

Pope Leo XIV called for "moderation" in US public discourse yesterday as the country celebrated its 250th birthday, in his first speech focused on US politics.

Without mentioning US President Donald Trump, the US Pope urged Americans to find "common ground" and "unity" and spoke of how "successive waves of immigrants" had shaped the future of the country. The video speech relayed to the National Constitution Centre in Philadelphia appeared to make several points aimed at Trump's divisive style.

Leo and Trump have repeatedly clashed in recent months over papal criticism of the harsh crackdown on immigration in the US and of the war on Iran.

In his speech, Leo said he hoped the 250th anniversary of Independence would be the occasion of a "solemn recommitment" to the US's founding ideals. (AFP)

## Trump says 'ridiculous' for US to maintain support for Nato

AFP  
Washington

President Donald Trump said late on Thursday it is "ridiculous" for the US to continue its "one sided" relationship with Nato.

He expressed with disdain his views less than a week before a Nato summit in Ankara, where he is also expected to be present.

Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform: "They were not there for us!!!" and Washington's relationship with Nato "is not reciprocal!"

Trump has repeatedly lashed out at European allies over their response to the war in Iran – several countries, including Nato members restricted the use of bases for US forces and did not support the United States.

Trump also insists he wants Europe to take the lead role for its own defence, and Washington has already moved to scale back commitments.

The president's Truth Social post on Thursday included a chart displaying the amount of Nato spending, with the United States investing vastly more than a few

other member states depicted.

Under pressure from Trump, Nato leaders had agreed at a gathering last year to boost defence-related spending to 5% of GDP by 2035.

The upcoming Nato summit, which will bring together 32 member states, will be held in the Turkish capital on July 7-8.

The alliance, founded in 1949, became a US-led defence force credited with maintaining stability in Europe, keeping the Soviet Union at bay and solidifying Washington as a world power for decades to come.



President Donald Trump. (Reuters/File Photo)

## US Supreme Court expands Trump powers but also doles out defeats

AFP  
Washington

The US Supreme Court vastly expanded President Donald Trump's executive powers during the eventful term that ended this week, but also dealt him defeats on signature initiatives.

The court, where conservatives hold a 6-3 supermajority, also handed down decisions on a number of hot-button issues including gun ownership and minority gender rights.

In February, in one of the first rulings of the session that began in October, the Supreme Court voted 6-3 to strike down Trump's tariffs -- one of the core planks of the Republican president's economic agenda.

The setback saw Trump lash out in unusually personal terms at the conservative justices who voted against his tariffs, including two of his own appointees – Neil Gorsuch and Amy Coney Barrett – calling them "fools and lap dogs."

Trump was much more laudatory

of the court this week after it ruled he has the authority to fire members of federal government agencies once considered independent.

"This Decision gives tremendous additional Power back to the Presidency, where it belongs," he said on Truth Social.

Harry Litman, a former US attorney and law professor, said in a Substack post that the ruling could have a "corrosive" impact on the administrative state.

"Nothing excites Trump more than the power of saying 'you're fired,'" Litman said, referencing the catchphrase Trump popularised in his former role as a reality competition show host.

"An expert at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission deciding whether a reactor is safe, an economist weighing a rate decision, a scientist evaluating a vaccine – all of them now know that the 'wrong' finding, the politically inconvenient one, can get them sacked at will, no cause required," he said.

While granting Trump the power to dismiss regulatory agency



A voter places his ballot in a drop off box as he votes in Colorado's primary election in Denver, Colorado. (AFP)

members, the court drew the line at the Federal Reserve, turning back his attempt to fire a governor of the US central bank.

The president's other major defeat was the court's 6-3 rejection of his bid to restrict birthright citizenship.

Trump signed an executive order last year decreeing that children born to parents in the United States illegally or on temporary

visas would not automatically become US citizens.

And in an unprecedented move for a sitting US president, he personally attended oral arguments in the case at the Supreme Court in April. While Trump suffered a loss on birthright citizenship, the Supreme Court handed him a victory on another plank of his anti-immigration agenda – stripping legal protections against deportation

from approximately 350,000 Haitian migrants and 6,000 Syrians.

Trump's Republican Party got a boost in a pair of election-related cases ahead of November's midterms, which could decide control of Congress for the remainder of his presidency.

The court sharply limited the use of race in drawing electoral districts and lifted restrictions on the amount of money political parties can spend in coordination with individual candidates.

The court did hand Trump a defeat in another election-related case, ruling that mail-in ballots can be counted if they are post-marked Election Day and arrive within five business days after the day of the vote.

Trump has been a vocal critic of mail-in ballots, falsely claiming they are subject to fraud and contributed to his 2020 election loss to Democrat Joe Biden.

The Supreme Court also issued rulings in gun-related cases during the term.

It struck down a Hawaii law banning the carrying of firearms

on private property that is open to the public, such as stores or restaurants, without the owner's permission. And it ruled unanimously that a habitual user of marijuana cannot be barred from owning a firearm.

In one of the country's most fiercely contested culture-war battles, the court split along ideological lines and delivered a 6-3 victory to conservatives, upholding state laws barring transgender athletes from competing in girls' and women's school sports.

Gerard Magliocca, a law professor at Indiana University, said the session could be seen as a mixed bag.

"(Trump) cared about tariffs, he cared about birthright citizenship, he wanted to fire this person from the Federal Reserve," Magliocca said. "He lost all three of those so he's probably going to look at it as if it was a bad term for him."

"Whereas others are going to look at it and think, well, overall it was a good term for the administration because they won most of the cases," he told AFP.

## Rescuers dig out Venezuelan man 8 days after quakes

AFP  
Catia La Mar, Venezuela

Hundreds of rescuers in Venezuela cheered and embraced Thursday after pulling a 43-year-old man alive from the ruins of a collapsed building eight days after deadly twin earthquakes, AFP journalists witnessed.

The official death toll has risen to nearly 2,600 and huge numbers of people are still missing, which meant the rescue of security guard Hernan Gil after so long under the rubble was greeted as a miracle.

Gil was brought out on a stretcher after a painstaking operation to extract him from the collapsed seven-story building where he worked in Catia La Mar, a coastal area almost entirely razed to the ground in the June 24 catastrophe. "This is truly a miracle," Gil's wife Gusbimar Gonzalez told AFP as rescuers worked to free him.

One of Latin America's worst earthquake disasters crushed scores of residential apartment complexes, burying many in the rubble and triggering an international rescue operation.

Teams from seven countries — Venezuela, Chile, the US, Portugal, Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Mexico — worked around the clock over three days to free Gil.

They provided him with more than ten liters of water to keep him hydrated via a hose and installed a tube to provide him with oxygen.

During the final phase of the operation, about 30 people worked in the building's parking area to clear away debris, while two rescuers dug a three-meter tunnel.

"It wasn't easy to reach the exact spot where the victim was located," Cristian Vera, the leader of the Chilean rescue team, told AFP.

However, while there have been a few astounding rescues — a three-year-old boy was found Tuesday, six days after the quake

— hope has faded of finding many more survivors.

The focus is now shifting to survival for those who escaped the quakes.

Many are homeless, food and water are becoming scarce and hospitals are stretched to the limit, with experts warning of the risk of disease outbreaks.

Venezuelans have not hidden their anger at what they see as the government's inadequate response to the disaster, with help arriving slowly for many.

Speaking at a press conference late on Thursday, Interim President Delcy Rodriguez defended her government's response to dispatch military and civilian officials to help.

"In the first 24 hours, it reached 4,000 personnel, and within 48 hours there were 11,000 officials," she told reporters.

She said the death toll had risen to 2,595 with more than 12,400 wounded. But she dismissed any

plans for mass graves of those killed.

While the government has not given any figure for the number missing, the UN has estimated as many as 50,000 people are still unaccounted for.

NASA data shows almost 60,000 buildings were likely damaged or destroyed.

Officials say 13,000 people had been left homeless — many of them sleeping in tents on the streets, parks and vacant lots.

The majority of collapsed buildings in the hardest-hit city of La Guaira, just north of Caracas, have been marked with the letter 'D' for 'deceased' — a sign they had been searched with no signs of life found.

Relatives, volunteers, and rescue workers were largely focused on retrieving the dead.

In Los Corales area, Hernan Sandoval was trying to dig out his 8-year-old son Ronald and his nephew and niece, Leo, 8, and Vic-



Locals wait amid rubble as rescue teams work on search operations in Caraballeda, La Guaira state. (AFP)

toria Madera, 10, buried in the collapse of their La Gambarra complex.

"I ran out like a desperate madman" to save them, he said. "My heart broke. I cried a little and then kept going. I've searched for him in so many places."

"I still have a lot of faith."

Chances of finding anyone alive beneath deep rubble dwindle rapidly after a critical 72-hour window.

Cesar Gonzalez, 54, a Mexican firefighter and handler of search-and-rescue dogs, gave water to his two dogs, Zeus and Bom.

"One is for detecting the living, the other for cadavers. Just two days ago, there was much more hope. Now, it would take a miracle," to find anyone alive, he said.

Queues for aid are growing longer by the day, with many surviving on the goodwill of volunteers and donations from fellow citizens.



President Luiz Inacio Lula Silva gestures during an event. (AFP)

## Lula blasts Bolsonaro for US tariff delay request

AFP  
Brasilia

Brazil's leader Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva on Thursday lashed out at his right-wing rival Flavio Bolsonaro for looking to postpone potential US tariff hikes until after the South American country's elections.

Polls are projecting a tight race between leftist Lula and Bolsonaro — the son of former far-right president Jair Bolsonaro — in the October presidential ballot.

US tariffs have become a key issue throughout the campaign, with US President Donald Trump's administration proposing 25% tariffs on some Brazilian goods.

In a document sent to the US Trade Representative on Wednesday, Bolsonaro suggested "postponing implementation until after the October vote."

The delay would prevent the rate hike from being interpreted "as an attempt to influence the outcome" of the elections, he said.

**'Asking that the brutal rate hike against our country be postponed until after the elections is yet another act of treason against the homeland,' he said**

Lula blasted the request in a post on X.

"Asking that the brutal rate hike against our country be postponed until after the elections is yet another act of treason against the homeland," he said.

Trump will decide by July 15 whether to impose the measure, which Lula accuses Bolsonaro of pushing by allegedly lobbying the White House.

The right-wing presidential candidate denies the accusations, and last week stated that he had requested to testify at a hearing to prevent the introduction of the tariffs.

Trump maintains close relations with right-wing leaders across Latin America, including Bolsonaro senior, who was convicted of plotting a coup in 2022.

## Petro, Trump discuss sanctions, anti-drug efforts on call

Outgoing Colombian President Gustavo Petro and US President Donald Trump held a phone call yesterday focused on Colombia's efforts to reduce coca cultivation, the Colombian government said in a statement.

According to the statement, Colombia said it had met a previously agreed target of eradicating about 30,000 hectares of coca, the base ingredient in cocaine, under a voluntary program.

The government said it now expects that total to reach 41,000 hectares by the end of 2026. It added that funding for the program is secured through the end of this year.

The call comes as Petro enters the final weeks of his presidency, before conservative Abelardo De La Espriella takes office.

The conversation also took place against the backdrop of strained ties between Bogota and Washington. In October, the US imposed sanctions on Petro, accusing him of failing to curb the drug trade.

Petro asked Trump to remove the personal sanction, Petro's office said, and Trump replied he would "do his best."

Colombia has long been one of Washington's closest security partners in Latin America, and anti-drug co-operation has been a central part of that relationship for decades. (Reuters)

## Venezuela struggles to recover bodies buried deep in rubble

AFP  
Caraballeda, Venezuela

With little hope of finding loved ones alive, frustrated families of those affected by Venezuela's double earthquakes demanded help yesterday to recover their bodies as uncertainty grows over the death toll from the tragedy.

Authorities reported nearly 2,600 deaths as of Thursday from the 7.2 and 7.5 magnitude earthquakes that struck the country last week, most in coastal town of La Guaira, where scores of residential complexes were flattened.

But officials have avoided estimating the number of missing, though the UN has put that figure at as many as 50,000. Many left homeless are also sleeping in the streets or in makeshift shelters set up in parks and public spaces.

Nine days after one of Latin America's worst earthquake disasters, rescue teams are beginning to wind down search operations for survivors, although many relatives still cling desperately to any sound from the rubble as a sign of life.

In front of the Tahiti building in the Caraballeda sector of La Guaira, one rescuer reported hearing shouts from an adult in the early Friday morning hours.

Reports also emerged that a 9-year-old boy had been found alive, but foreign rescuers told AFP there were no traces of any survivors.

Outside the Tahiti, frustrations boiled over as several of the families trying to recover bodies shouted at others wanting to clear the



Rescuers work at the site of a collapsed building in the aftermath of the June 24 earthquakes, in La Guaira, Venezuela, yesterday. (Reuters)

way for potential rescue.

"Until I recover the bodies, I won't be at peace," said Jose Francisco Liendo, who was trying to dig out the bodies of his father and sister.

"Don't let the machines come and take them away like garbage."

Venezuela's interim President Delcy Rodriguez has suggested there is still a possibility of finding survivors, but after nine days, that scenario is remote.

The critical window for rescues in these disasters usually closes after 72 hours, though a few people have miraculously been found alive this week.

Rodriguez assumed interim power after the capture of Nicolas Maduro in a US military operation six months ago.

The government's response to the tragedy has been the target of harsh criticism from many in La Guaira, who denounced the ab-

sence of rescuers until the arrival of international brigades.

Many residents in La Guaira said neighbors, family members, and volunteers were the first to remove rubble and search for people by hand.

AFP witnessed one volunteer urging soldiers to put down their rifles and help with the rubble removal.

Rodriguez has defended the official response and denounced media manipulation.

"Anyone who wants to audit the reality is welcome," she said in her first formal press conference as president.

The interim president currently has the support of US President Donald Trump's administration. The United States is helping coordinate international rescue efforts in Venezuela.

But exiled opposition leader and Nobel Peace Prize winner Maria

Corina Machado, who wants to return to the country, criticised the government response.

"The total absence of the state has become evident; the country needs figures it can trust," she told correspondents in Venezuela via Zoom, arguing she should be a stabilising presence there.

Rodriguez has ruled out the possibility of the dead ending up in mass graves and ordered their proper identification.

A makeshift morgue is operating outdoors in the port of La Guaira, where long lines form to receive the bodies of loved ones and the death certificates.

But many families are denouncing a lack of support and heavy machinery needed in the recovery of bodies from collapsed buildings.

"They tell us no, that they're looking for the living, but what about the dead? Aren't they human beings too?" said Dalimer Diaz, 43.

"Nobody wants to remove the dead; we have to retrieve the bodies ourselves. We need machinery to help us."

Soldiers arrived at the Tahiti building where residents had been arguing. A Spanish brigade also arrived with a crane to begin removing rubble.

Aloa Gonzalez was waiting for her sister's body, buried under blocks and concrete of the Tahiti.

"I just came from burying my father and mother, and I came here to rescue my sister," she said.

"How do I feel? Dead inside," she said. "I can't believe it. I don't want to stop because I don't want to face the reality of what's happening."

## Nato exercises off US coast as it loses political fight in Washington

The warning came booming over the airwaves, in a voice unmistakably from the American south: "Warship! Get out of our waters!"

Norwegian Lieutenant Thomas Johannesen and his sailors were preparing for a simulated boarding operation — a core mission for their Nato maritime unit. But with so many other war games happening in the area, the crew was picking up unrelated chatter from a nearby vessel.

Johannesen pivoted to a clear frequency before addressing the cargo ship in his sights. "Please stop your vessel and accept my boarding team," he commanded.

Reuters gained exclusive access to the last week's Nato exercise, one in a series of US-hosted drills focused on defending the American homeland — and timed to coincide with the country's 250th anniversary.

They were conducted at a perilous moment for Nato, with the Trump administration questioning the value of the 77-year-old alliance, reviewing its force posture in Europe and lashing out at long-time allies.

In an Oval Office meeting few weeks back with Nato Secretary General Mark Rutte, President Donald Trump admonished Britain, Spain, Germany and France for not doing more to support the US war in Iran.

"We're disappointed with most of them," the president said.

David Cattler, a former Nato intelligence chief during Trump's first term, said the drills send a potent message about the ability



A Norwegian Coastal Corvette sails during the Nato Cold Response 2026 military exercise in Arctic Norway. (Reuters/File Photo)

and willingness of European nations to defend both sides of the Atlantic.

Yet he doubted it would change minds at the Pentagon.

"It's hard for me to see," Cattler said.

Trump has long believed the US shoulders too much of the cost for European security, upsetting many decades of bipartisan support for Nato in Washington.

In an address at Nato headquarters in mid-June, Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth announced a six-month Pentagon review that could lead to a draw-down of US forces in Europe. He scorned "free riding" allies and said the alliance had to be a two-way street.

The conflict in Iran has sharpened tensions further.

An internal Pentagon e-mail reported by Reuters in April float-

ed suspending Spain from the alliance over its refusal to grant basing and overflight rights to the US military during operations against Tehran.

But Spanish Marines joined the FLEETEX 250 exercises, carrying out ship-to-shore amphibious operations. French Marines also took part in drills, including on heavy machine guns, at US Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

The US military's working-level embrace of allies is a sign that operational ties remain strong, experts say, transcending the political turbulence.

Drills like these are planned months or even years ahead of time. It is what militaries do to maintain readiness.

"Absent any intervention that would tell them to stop, they're gonna continue to do it," said

Mark Cancian, a retired US Marine officer at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies.

"This is just Nato being Nato," he said.

Ingham said her unit is used to being at sea, but they are more accustomed to the icy northern waters near the Arctic and around the Baltics, where they are on alert for Russian activity.

"This area doesn't require as much patrolling because there isn't as much threat here," Ingham said.

For Norwegian Stian Buunk, the Fridtjof Nansen's commanding officer, it was his first time operating in American waters. His frigate is smaller than US destroyers but can still pack a punch, with air defence and anti-ship missiles, torpedoes for hunting submarines, and a 76 mm deck gun.

Being close to the Navy's 2nd Fleet headquarters in Norfolk, Virginia, meant plenty of American assets were also available, Buunk said.

"We had anti-air warfare exercises two days ago with F-18s. We had drones coming in," he recounted. "And that makes it very realistic."

One of Norway's biggest contributions to Nato is its expertise in anti-submarine warfare. One drill involved mobilising search-and-attack units to detect, track and expel a US submarine.

Asked how his ship performed, Buunk tried to answer without gloating: "This ship is built for anti-submarine warfare," he said. "So, yah." Ingham said many

European nations had other specialisations required by Nato's maritime forces. Belgium, for instance, is known for its anti-mine warfare capabilities.

"We are demonstrating both the flexibility in the reach of our unit, but also our ability to seamlessly operate alongside the Americans," said Ingham.

The boarding drill involved a case of suspected smuggling by a cargo ship from Pyrophia, a fictitious country.

The actual ship was a US Navy training support vessel.

Prior to boarding, Norwegian forces cleared their weapons to avoid any accidental discharge.

Then Johannesen asked over the radio whether there were any weapons or animals on board.

"We had a goat. But we eat goat. So now, no more goat," the US ship responded.

Lieutenant Erik Aasen, a navigation officer who led the boarding team, said a search of the ship turned up rifles, four bags of narcotics and some cash (issued by the "National Bank of Garnet," another made-up nation).

It was Aasen's first boarding operation outside Norwegian waters, and he considered it a success.

The highlight of the drills, he said, was getting the chance to work with his American counterparts. US forces "have a lot of other experiences," he said.

If the Pentagon moves ahead with plans to reduce Nato's reliance on US troops, it could mean fewer joint exercises in the future. (Reuters)



# Myanmar ex-junta chief makes first Asean visit as civilian leader

AFP  
Yangon

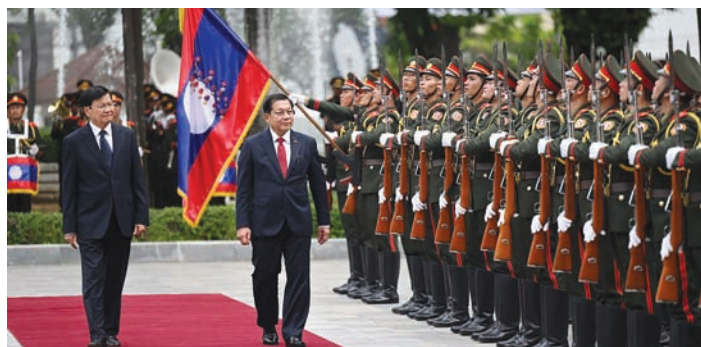
Myanmar coup chief turned president Min Aung Hlaing landed in Laos yesterday, officials said, in his first state visit to an Asean country since claiming the post of civilian leader.

Min Aung Hlaing plunged Myanmar into civil war in 2021 when he commanded a military coup ousting the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi, detaining her and ending a decade-long experiment with democracy.

He ruled directly as military chief for five years before becoming civilian president in April after staging elections blocked from rebel territory, excluding Suu Kyi's party and jailing dissidents.

His new administration is making a push for international legitimacy, analysts say, including in the 11-member Association of South-east Asian Nations (Asean) bloc which has largely frozen Myanmar out since the coup.

Min Aung Hlaing landed in neighbouring Laos yesterday morning accompanied by his wife Kyu Kyu Hla, according to images



Myanmar's President Min Aung Hlaing and Lao President Thongloun Sisoulith inspecting a guard of honour during a welcoming ceremony in Vientiane. (AFP)

shared by his presidential information team.

Laos local media said the state visit will last three days.

In a statement earlier this week, Min Aung Hlaing's office said he would meet Laos' President Thongloun Sisoulith and Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone.

"The president will engage in a cordial and open exchange of views to further the consolidation of existing friendly relations," the statement said.

The trip is Min Aung Hlaing's third since taking over as civilian

president. Last month he was feted with visits to India and China.

Consensus in Asean is fraying over how to treat Myanmar's new administration, analysts say.

Some nations are seen as open to restarting engagement, seizing on apparent concessions by the new administration – including Min Aung Hlaing's recent personal command that 81-year-old Suu Kyi be moved from prison to house arrest.

Analysts say other nations remain focused on the fact the leader of the 2021 coup still remains in charge.

# Beijing says Japan-India cooperation 'should not target' China's interests

AFP  
Beijing

China said yesterday that cooperation between India and Japan "should not target" Beijing, after the leaders of the other two countries agreed to work more closely on critical minerals.

The strategic commodities, which are used in everything from electric vehicles and smartphones to jet engines and guided missiles, featured prominently during talks between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Japan's Sanae Takaichi in New Delhi on Thursday.

Asked about the meeting, China's foreign ministry said coun-

tries should work to "foster understanding and trust".

"Cooperation between nations... should not target or harm the interests of third parties, let alone serve as a pretext for forming exclusive cliques or stoking confrontation," spokesperson Guo Jiakun told a news conference.

The relationship between Beijing and Tokyo has become more turbulent since Takaichi suggested in November that a potential future attack on Taiwan – the self-ruled island claimed by China – could warrant Japanese military involvement.

Chinese authorities have responded in part by restricting flows to Japan of rare earths, a sector China dominates globally in

both mining and processing.

Modi said after his talks with Takaichi that the countries had agreed to "strengthen supply chain resilience in strategic sectors such as semiconductors, quantum technologies and critical minerals".

Takaichi warned that Japan and India were facing challenges including "weaponisation of the economy and non-market policies and practices".

This week, China's commerce ministry added 20 Japanese entities to an export blacklist on the basis that they had boosted Tokyo's military capabilities.

Japan called the latest move "unacceptable and deeply regrettable", demanding its reversal.

# China promotes two officers to full generals

Reuters  
Beijing

Chinese President Xi Jinping, who also chairs the Central Military Commission (CMC), attended a ceremony in Beijing yesterday to promote two senior military officers to the rank of general, the highest rank for officers on active duty in China.

The officers are Zhang Shuguang, secretary of the CMC discipline inspection commis-

sion and director of the CMC commission of supervision, and Wang Gang, commander of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Air Force, state media reported. China has been undergoing a years-long anti-corruption campaign, initiated by Xi, that has seen scores of senior officials and top generals investigated, removed and purged.

That crackdown has reduced China's seven-man supreme military command body to just two people – CMC chair Xi himself and newly promoted vice-

chairman Zhang Shengmin. At a ceremony this week marking the ruling Communist Party's 105th anniversary, Zhang Shuguang and Wang Gang were seen seated alongside other top military leaders, fuelling speculation about their possible promotion in the PLA leadership.

The current CMC lineup was named in October 2022 and is expected to be replaced or renewed after the Communist Party's next five-year congress, which is likely to take place in autumn 2027.

# Korean president to attend Nato summit in Ankara, visit Mongolia

Reuters  
Seoul

Korean President Lee Jae-myung will attend a Nato summit in Ankara, Turkey, from July 7 to 8, Seoul's national security adviser said yesterday.

Lee aims to build defence industry cooperation between Republic of Korea and Nato member countries, Wi Sung-lac told a press briefing.

In Ankara, Lee will meet Nato Secretary-General Mark Rutte and take part in a group summit with leaders from Indo-Pacific countries, including Japan, New Zealand and Australia, Wi said.

He will also attend the Nato defence industry forum and deliver a speech at one of its sessions.

"As geopolitical instability deepens, Nato member states are increasing their defence spending and also pursuing efforts to strengthen their own domestic defence production capabilities," Wi said.

"Republic of Korea, which is not a Nato member, must advance partnerships with Nato based on the alliance's standards to facilitate exports of defence materials," he said.

Cooperation between Nato and the Indo-Pacific region has been continuously strengthening since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, the adviser added.

"The security of Europe is not irrelevant to that of Asia," Wi said.

"North Korean troops fighting for Russia in Ukraine is a striking example."

Lee's office is arranging more summits with leaders of other countries for defence cooperation, Wi added, without elaborating.

After the two-day trip to Turkey, Lee will arrive in Ulaanbaatar on July 9 for a three-day state visit at the invitation of Mongolian President Khurelsukh Ukhnaa, Lee's office said.

On the first day of the visit, the two leaders will hold a summit, issue a joint statement and sign multiple memorandums of understanding, Wi said.

Republic of Korea views Mongolia as a key partner given its reserves of critical minerals and as a neighbour that can contribute to peace on the Korean Peninsula through its close ties with North Korea, Wi said.

# Mount Merapi spews lava



People watch as Mount Merapi volcano spews hot lava and steam as seen from Srumbung, in Magelang, Central Java province, Indonesia, yesterday. (Reuters)

# Indonesia recovers body of American pilot killed by rebels in Papua: military

Reuters  
Jakarta

Indonesia's military has recovered the body of an American pilot who was shot dead by rebels in the restive eastern region of Papua, it said yesterday after a separatist group said the attack was 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 Liberation Army (TPNPB), an armed separatist group, said on Thursday 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", and said there would be more attacks if Indonesia kept allowing civilian aircraft to enter rebel-controlled red zones of Papua.

The attack was a message to the Indonesian and US governments 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.

Yesterday, Wirya Artadiguna, a military spokesperson in Papua, confirmed the separatist group had carried out the attack and said the body of the American pilot had been recovered and evacuated.

The military is seeking the perpetrators, he said, adding that all passengers on the flight are safe and have returned home.

Officials had earlier said there were seven passengers on board, all of whom were Papuans.

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

A video supplied by the TPNPB showed rebels armed with guns and axes and raising the "Morning Star" flag, a symbol of independence, while announcing the attack.

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 respond to a request for comment.

In a high-profile case, Papuan rebels kidnapped New Zealand pilot Phillip Mehrrens in February 2023 after he landed a small commercial plane in the remote, mountainous area of Nduga in Highland Papua, before freeing him in September 2024.



Cambodia's King Norodom Sihamoni (right) being greeted by Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Manet upon his arrival at Techo International Airport in Kandal province, on the outskirts of Phnom Penh, yesterday. (AFP)

# Cambodian king returns from China after treatment

AFP  
Phnom Penh

Cambodia's King Norodom Sihamoni returned home yesterday from China where he was treated for prostate cancer, according to state media, with the palace saying that his health was improved.

Sihamoni, 73, departed for Beijing for health checks earlier this year and shared his cancer diagnosis in April.

The king has been receiving treatment from Chinese doctors in Beijing after undergoing "successful" surgery, according to the Royal Palace in Phnom Penh.

In a statement on Tuesday, the palace said the king's health was "getting better" after more than three months of treatment.

Sihamoni touched down in Phnom Penh yesterday afternoon and was greeted by senior Cambodian officials, including influential former leader Hun Sen and his son Hun Manet, the current prime minister, according to state-run TVK.

The king has "arrived in the country safely", Hun Sen said in a post on his Facebook page, which also broadcasted the arrival of the monarch at the airport.

A lifelong bachelor who speaks Khmer, French, Czech and English, Sihamoni spent most of his adult life abroad pursuing a career in the arts before taking the throne in 2004.

He took over the role after his father, king Norodom Sihanouk, abdicated following his own cancer treatment in Beijing. King Norodom Sihanouk died in 2012.

# Death toll hits 10 in Thai monk procession crash

AFP  
Bangkok

The number of monks killed has risen to 10 after an 11-year-old boy drove a pickup truck into a Buddhist procession in Thailand, officials said yesterday.

Ten other people were still hospitalised after Thursday's crash – two in critical condition and eight with injuries – according to the latest update from Mukdahan Hospital, in the north-east of the country.

A group of 35 monks and five lay followers were walking along a roadside in Mukdahan province during a pilgrimage when a truck ploughed into them.

Police said it was driven by an 11-year-old who had taken his parents' vehicle without permission.

Five monks died at the scene, and another five died later in hospital.

Prayut Ruanthongkam, chief of Mukdahan City Police, told AFP yesterday the boy was unable to give a statement to police.



Emergency medical personnel work at the site of a crash by a vehicle driven by an 11-year-old boy into a group of monks along the roadside in Mukdahan. (Reuters)

He had been referred to child welfare authorities for assessment, accompanied by his mother.

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

Police were also taking witness testimony from surviving monks as part of the investigation, Prayut said.

Buddhist monks are highly venerated in Thailand, entrusted with preserving and pass-

ing on the Buddha's teachings.

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

A representative of Wat Roi Phra Phutthabat Phu Manorom, a hilltop temple in Mukdahan, told AFP the temple had taken in surviving and recovering monks, along with other followers involved in the procession.

# UK, Italy, Japan sign \$6bn fighter jet deal

Reuters  
London

Britain, Italy and Japan awarded a £4.6bn (\$6.14bn) contract to industry joint venture Edgewing to build the new Global Combat Air Programme fighter jet, the UK government said yesterday, advancing the project to the next phase of development.

After nine months of delays over its squeezed military budget, Britain committed on Tuesday £8.6bn over four years to GCAP, providing its share of the funding for the tri-nation project as part of efforts to boost defence.

"The Global Combat Air Programme will give our pilots a

cutting-edge stealth fighter jet. Signing this £4.6bn contract alongside Italy and Japan is a major step forward towards delivery," Luke Pollard, Britain's minister for defence readiness, said in a statement.

The contract award comes after a rival Franco-German fighter programme collapsed in June, leaving European defence alliances in flux, and making it more likely that another country could seek to join GCAP.

BAE Systems in Britain, Leonardo in Italy and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries in Japan are developing GCAP, a sixth-generation stealth fighter that the countries want ready by 2035.

Through GCAP, also known as Tempest in the UK, the countries

can share tens of billions of dollars in costs to build an advanced fighter jet and secure more orders.

Any GCAP expansion would require the agreement of its three founding members, and executives have previously said there could be opportunities to join later at varying levels of involvement.

The joint venture developing GCAP is named Edgewing, which is jointly owned by BAE, Leonardo and Japan Aircraft Industrial Enhancement. Its headquarters are in Britain, with a CEO from Italy.

BAE has previously said GCAP would be three to four metres (10 to 13 feet) longer than the Typhoon military jet and designed to fly a longer range.

# Britain cuts planning consultation rules for major infrastructure

Reuters  
London

Britain said on Thursday it would remove a mandatory pre-application consultation requirement for major infrastructure projects later this month, a planning reform the government said would reduce approval timelines by up to 12 months.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer's Labour government has made planning reform a central part of its strategy to boost economic growth, saying lengthy approval processes have slowed investment and delayed critical infrastructure.

The government said the reforms could save developers around £1bn (\$1.34bn) during the current parliament.

Energy minister Michael Shanks said Britain could not afford delays to infrastructure needed to improve energy security and expand clean power generation.

"Every turbine, every solar panel, every cable we connect helps protect families from volatile fossil fuel markets and paves the way for a new era of clean energy for our country," Shanks said.

The changes, due to take effect on July 24, will remove statutory pre-application consultation requirements for development projects such as wind farms, solar projects, reservoirs and transport links, replacing them with earlier engagement between developers and planning authorities.

The government said the wider reforms would also help accelerate approvals for data centres,

with ministers having designated three proposed developments as nationally significant infrastructure projects.

The changes build on wider planning reforms that seek to reduce delays from legal challenges and give ministers greater powers over some planning decisions.

The government said it had approved 41 major infrastructure projects since taking office, including the Lower Thames Crossing road tunnel and the Mona Offshore Wind Farm, and remained on track to decide at least 150 other projects during the current parliament, compared with 59 in the last parliament.

The changes will also remove mandatory pre-application consultation requirements for certain onshore wind projects.

# 'Vanishingly rare' copy of US Declaration of Independence unearthed in UK archives

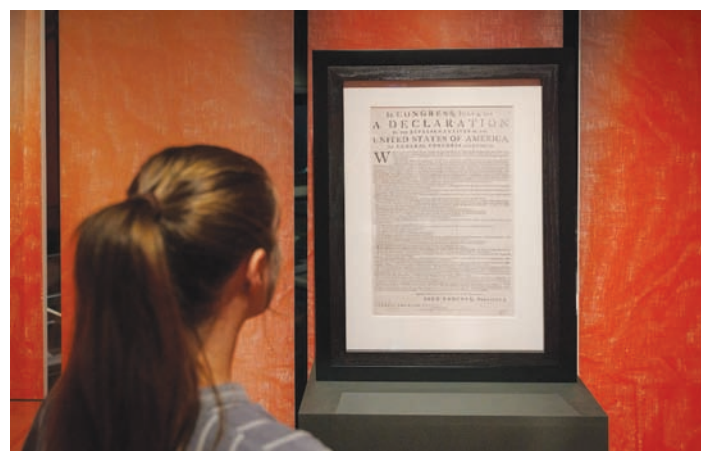
Reuters  
London

A "vanishingly rare" copy of the Declaration of Independence has been found in London, dug up in archives holding documents from the British capture of an American privateer ship in 1776, just as the US celebrates its 250th anniversary.

The text, famous for its rallying cry for "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness", had been listed in 18th century records as simply "another document" but in May a volunteer at Britain's National Archives took a closer look.

"Unearthing and handling such a significant historical document has been thrilling, particularly in this important anniversary year," said Michael Scurr, the volunteer who found it while working on a cataloguing project.

News of the discovery was published yesterday, the day before the US celebrates its semiquincentennial Declaration of Independence from Britain, when millions of Americans will enjoy cookouts and



A 1776 copy of the US Declaration of Independence, one of the 11 surviving copies of the so-called 'Exeter Declarations', and the first to be found outside the United States, which has been discovered at The National Archives in Kew, yesterday. (Reuters)

display the Stars and Stripes outside their homes.

Back in 1776, July 4 was when the declaration was adopted by Congress, and as the revolutionary mood swept through the American colonies, supportive printers rushed to reproduce it and share as widely as they could the new

country's founding document.

The one found in London was printed in Exeter, New Hampshire, in mid-July 1776 and is the 11th surviving copy of the so-called "Exeter Declarations", and the first to be found outside the US.

Eleazer Johnson, captain of the Dalton ship, picked up a copy some

months later that same year before he set sail across the Atlantic on a mission to try to seize British vessels, possibly hoping the text would inspire his crew to fight for the new country.

But on December 24, 1776, off the coast of Portugal, the Royal Navy captured the Dalton, and brought it and its contents back to Plymouth, southwest England.

The National Archives said the document is the only known copy of the declaration taken by military action.

Under the red tape of late 18th century England, all British captains had to present a captured ship's documents to the authorities in order to claim their share of the prize.

Given the British seized 3,600 ships during the American Revolutionary War, the National Archives offers a vast and fertile hunting ground for historians.

"Thanks to the bureaucratic processes of war ... we can present an unusually rich backstory that most surviving declarations do not have," Graham Moore, curator at the National Archives, said.

# Murderer in UK student Nowak case seeking to appeal conviction

AFP  
London

A British Sikh man who was jailed for life for murdering young white student Henry Nowak is seeking to appeal against his conviction and sentence, the Court of Appeal said yesterday.

The contentious, high-profile case has sparked a furore - and violent protests - in Britain as police handcuffed 18-year-old Nowak after his attacker, Vickrum Digwa, falsely claimed he had been racially abused.

Digwa, 23, was handed a life sentence with a minimum of 21 years behind bars on June 1.

The UK government last month also asked the appeals court to review the sentence as too lenient, which could see it potentially increased.

Solicitor General Ellie Reeves said she had formally requested Digwa's jail term be reconsid-

ered. The appeals court will decide whether to quash it and replace it with a more appropriate sentence.

No date has been set yet for a hearing for the appeal to increase the sentence, or for Digwa's appeal against his conviction.

The case was seized on by right-wing and far-right figures in the UK and abroad - including X-owner and trillionaire Elon Musk - accusing British police of treating white people and ethnic minorities differently.

On Wednesday, the UK police watchdog said it was probing for possible gross misconduct two police officers who were the first at the scene after the December attack in the southern city of Southampton.

Nowak, a finance and accounting university student, told officers he had been stabbed, but was initially dismissed. He died from his wounds soon after.

# India seeks to quell public backlash on ethanol-mixed fuel after 'experiment' remark

Reuters  
New Delhi

India's government yesterday sought to contain a growing backlash against its mandatory use of 20% ethanol-blended petrol, as consumers unhappy about lower fuel efficiency and vehicle performance planned a protest against the policy.

The mandate to use the blend, called E20, came into force last year but is now one of the biggest political flashpoints for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government and motorists in the world's third-biggest car market.

The controversy intensified this week after Attorney General R Venkataramani told a court hearing that E20 was an "experiment" whose results would only come out next year.

The government denied the remark was ever made, but video of the court hearing showing Venkataramani saying the words has since gone viral on social media.

Venkataramani told Reuters yesterday he used the term "experiment" in the context of the volume of ethanol supplies, not the ethanol petrol policy itself.

This has done little to quell public anger, with opponents of the policy accusing the government of rushing its rollout.

The government's press office dismissed the criticism as "wild claims" yesterday, asking people to not "fall for the rage bait".

Seeking to reassure motorists, Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri on Thursday compared ethanol fuel to its use in motor racing.

"They use it in racing cars also, the acceleration increases. Mileage, yes, it may drop a little," Puri said.

Tehseen Poonawalla, a New Delhi-based socialite and Congress party supporter, said he was planning a protest against the E20 policy in New Delhi tomorrow, and had received interest from thousands of people wanting to join in.

Many motorists are frustrated that they no longer have a choice at fuel stations and have seized on the attorney general's comment to vent their anger on social media.

Priyank Kharge, a state minister in India's opposition Congress party, said on X that the E20 policy rollout lacked consultation and that the government "cannot challenge citizens to prove damage when your own data is still pending".

Hundreds of motorists have posted complaints on X alleging reduced fuel efficiency and increased wear and tear of car parts from E20.

# Modi to visit Indonesia, Australia and New Zealand next week

AFP  
New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Indonesia, Australia and New Zealand next week, as New Delhi seeks to strengthen strategic ties in the region.

The July 6-11 tour comes after Modi's visits to Mauritius in March last year and Seychelles last month, reflecting what India's external affairs ministry described as a shift in diplomatic focus to the eastern maritime region under its 'Act East' policy.

"The focus has shifted to the eastern maritime zones of the Indian Ocean and our Act East engagement," senior Indian foreign ministry official Rudrendra Tandon, told reporters at a news briefing yesterday.

Modi will visit Indonesia on

July 6-8, where he is scheduled to hold talks in Jakarta before travelling to the historic city of Yogyakarta and the Unesco-listed Prambanan Temple complex, where India and Indonesia are planning to collaborate on conservation work.

Modi will review cooperation across a range of sectors during his visit to Indonesia, including maritime security, defence, trade and cultural ties, Tandon said.

It's hoped this will build on talks held during Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto's visit to India during Republic Day celebrations last year, Tandon added.

Modi will then travel to Australia on July 8-10 for the third India-Australia Annual Summit, an institutional dialogue established under the two countries' Comprehensive Strategic Partnership launched in 2020.

Tandon said discussions would

review cooperation across defence, foreign policy and trade while also focusing on newer areas including critical minerals, cybersecurity, supply chain resilience and emerging technologies.

Modi will finish the tour in New Zealand on July 10 and 11, where he will hold talks with Prime Minister Christopher Luxon.

Tandon said bilateral ties had gathered momentum since Luxon's visit to India in 2025, describing it as "a kind of inflection in our relationship".

"This culminated in the signing of New Zealand FTA in a fairly short period of time," he said.

The India-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (FTA), signed on April 27 this year, eliminated duties on 100 percent of Indian exports to New Zealand while securing a \$20 billion investment commitment from New Zealand over the next 15 years.

# Sydney skyline view



Residential properties stand against the backdrop of the city skyline in Sydney, Australia. (Reuters)

# Sri Lanka detains ex-navy chief on corruption charges

AFP  
Colombo

Authorities in Sri Lanka arrested a former navy commander yesterday over allegations he illegally helped secure the recruitment and overseas training of ex-president Mahinda Rajapaksa's son.

Admiral of the Fleet Wasantha Karannagoda, 73, was taken into custody by the Bribery Commission over the 2006 enlistment of Yoshitha Rajapaksa without the required qualifications.

Karannagoda was the navy commander when Sri Lanka's decades-long Tamil separatist war ended in 2009. He was elevated to the rank of admiral of the fleet in 2019, and currently has no active role in the navy.

Yoshitha Rajapaksa, 38, is out on bail following his arrest last month in a related case in which he is accused of using public

funds for training at Britain's prestigious naval college in Dartmouth.

"The Admiral of the Fleet has committed the offence of corruption in the recruitment and training of Yoshitha Rajapaksa," the Bribery Commission said in a statement.

Karannagoda also faces allegations of war crimes and was sanctioned by Britain in March 2025 after being accused of serious human rights violations and extrajudicial killings.

He faces additional conspiracy to murder charges over the killing of 11 young men between 2008 and 2009.

Those charges were initially dropped in October 2021, when Mahinda Rajapaksa's younger brother Gotabaya was president, but they were later revived under the administration of President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, who came to power in September 2024 on a pledge to crack down

on corruption and unsolved high-profile crimes.

Cases against the Rajapaksa family and their associates have gained renewed impetus since Dissanayake's election.

Several Rajapaksa family members and close associates have been charged with a range of offences over the years, all of which remain pending before the courts.

Yoshitha Rajapaksa is also facing criminal prosecution after failing to explain the sources of income used to purchase a house while his father was in power from 2005 to 2015.

He told investigators that he raised money by selling gems given to him by his grandaunt, who could not recall how she had obtained the precious stones.

His uncle Gotabaya Rajapaksa was handed a foreign travel ban last month over his alleged links to the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings that killed 279 people.



## Beyond defence and deterrence: Challenges ahead for Nato

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) leaders gathering for a summit in Ankara on July 7-8 will discuss a host of challenges facing the alliance, from Europe taking on more responsibility for the continent's security to boosting defence industrial production.

Some officials worry the Iran war could overshadow the gathering, but hope leaders will remain focused on the alliance's core business: defence and deterrence.

Nato officials say one of their primary goals is to maintain unity and keep the US committed to the alliance's Article 5 clause, which specifies that an attack on one of its members is an attack on all.

The alliance faced two crises this year which have fueled tension in the transatlantic relationship: US President Donald Trump's demands for ownership of Greenland, an autonomous territory of Nato member Denmark, and his anger at Nato allies over their response to the Iran war.

The US president has branded the alliance a "paper

tiger" and said he was considering quitting Nato.

The alliance's secretary-general, Mark Rutte, has sought to smooth over tensions, using a mix of flattery and data to persuade Trump that European Nato members are fulfilling their promises.

The Trump administration has pushed European governments to take on primary responsibility for the conventional defence of Europe as Washington seeks to dedicate more resources to the Indo-Pacific.

Some changes are already under way: Washington has decided to shrink the pool of US military capabilities available to Nato in a crisis, and European Nato members have filled almost all the gaps.

US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth has also announced a new review of America's troop deployments in Europe and threatened to withhold some US dues to Nato if "free-riding" allies did not meet their defence spending commitments.

European officials say they are working to step up on defence.

European Nato members and Canada are under

significant pressure to boost defence investment both to improve deterrence and defence against Russia and to demonstrate to Trump that they are taking his demands for burden-shifting seriously.

At a summit in the Hague last year, Nato leaders backed the big increase in defence spending that Trump demanded, pledging to spend 5% of GDP on defence and defence-related measures within a decade.

Countries pledged to spend 3.5% of GDP on core defence – such as troops and weapons – and 1.5% on broader defence-related measures.

Nato's European allies and Canada increased defence spending by 20% in 2025 compared with the previous year in real terms, according to alliance data.

With European Nato countries boosting defence investment, a major challenge for the alliance is how to turn money into new military capabilities in a short timeframe.

In Ankara, Nato members are expected to

announce tens of billions of dollars in new contracts.

However, some officials have expressed frustration that production has not increased at the pace they had hoped.

Nato's leadership has called on industry to work together, open new production lines and deliver more quickly.

While alliance officials say Russia is grappling with significant economic problems and Ukraine has strengthened its position, Rutte has cautioned that nearly half of Russia's state budget is now dedicated to defence and that the alliance cannot be naive about Moscow.

European Nato members are continuing to send aid to Kyiv, more than four years since Russia's invasion.

While most European leaders say they are committed to continuing to support Kyiv, sustaining a high level of funding remains a challenge amid other demands on national budgets and concern in some capitals that some governments are contributing more than others. — Reuters

### One for the history books: what we know about the European heatwave

Europe is still taking stock of a powerful heatwave in late June but experts are already confident it ranks among the worst ever recorded – even rivalling a freak 2003 episode. As the June episode intensified, comparisons were quickly made to August 2003, when a heatwave of unprecedented magnitude baked Europe for a fortnight, causing tens of thousands of excess deaths.

Alvaro Silva, from the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), said duration was one measure of heatwave severity – along with intensity and range – and this recent episode was not as long as 2003.

"But we got many temperature records during this heatwave and the most impressive thing, we were still in June. So this is a big difference," the climate scientist told AFP.

France's weather service said the 14-day heatwave was even "more intense" than the 2003 episode, although it was two days shorter.

Meteo France said temperatures above 40° Celsius were registered 114 times between June 17 and June 29 – surpassing the previous record of 87 instances during August 2003.

World Weather Attribution, a network of climate scientists, said the heatwave was the "most severe ever recorded" based on a three-day forecast of average peak temperatures over the region studied.

Such a heatwave would have been "virtually impossible" without the influence of climate change, they said. In a preliminary assessment, Germany's weather service said the heatwave "can without a doubt be described as historic".

Radim Tolasz, a climatologist at the Czech Hydrometeorological Institute, told AFP that the heatwave smashed previous temperature highs and for June was the longest ever recorded.

More than two-thirds of Europeans endured temperatures topping 35C during the June 15-30 heatwave, according to an AFP analysis. Temperature records tumbled across Europe, with the thermostat topping 40C in many locations during the hot spell.

Germany, Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Hungary recorded their hottest ever temperatures, while the United Kingdom, France and Switzerland hit new highs for June. — AFP

### Cooldown



Police use water cannon to cool down people in Budapest's Heroes' Square during an extreme heatwave. Police and fire department vehicles sprayed water in the afternoon to relieve the high temperatures. The cooling initiative was well received by visitors. (AFP)

By Maria Martinez and Kate Abnett  
Reuters

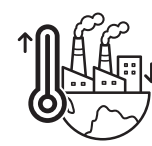
# Net-zero champion Europe snared by climate change on its doorstep



**Climate adaptation effort has lagged the net-zero drive**



**EU plan will recognise no one size fits all**



**Last year's heatwaves wiped 0.3% points off output**

The June heatwave that broke a series of temperature records in Europe has focused minds on the urgency of adapting to global warming in a continent once complacent about its relatively gentle climate and its ambitious goals on reducing emissions.

The European Union has sought to be a leader in addressing climate change, and was one of the first major economies to set a legally binding target to reach net-zero emissions by 2050.

However, a June heatwave that peaked at above 40° Celsius (104° Fahrenheit) in parts of Europe has revealed how its businesses, amenities and critical infrastructure are not prepared for the consequences of climate change in the here and now.

"We've not been good enough on adaptation," Poland's Deputy Climate Minister Krzysztof Bolesta told Reuters after some power supplies across the region were disrupted, outdoor work was banned in places, trains cancelled in Germany and in Sweden a cargo train derailed as extreme temperatures buckled metal rails.

Among the countries worst affected, Spain reported 1,000 excess deaths that it linked to the record heat.

Adapting buildings and public spaces to cope with extreme heat is typically the responsibility of national or regional authorities, rather than the EU, which says individual countries are best placed to understand their particular needs.

"There's no point in trying to say from Brussels how the Greeks or the Spaniards need to battle wildfires," EU Climate Commissioner Wopke Hoekstra, who later this year will set out an EU-wide "climate resilience plan", told journalists.

"They know that much better than we do as the Dutch know much better how to build dikes," he said, adding the EU plan would focus on common

scenarios and best practice. Still, the EU's own spending on adapting remains small, even as global warming is heating Europe at a faster rate than any other continent.

Between 2021 and 2025, 72% of the climate-related spending from the EU's joint budget went to mitigation, or limiting the greenhouse gases that cause warming, while just 18% went to adaptation, and 9% touched both issues, official figures show.

The EU and its member governments have a suite of financial incentives in place to reduce emissions, including subsidies to build renewable energy, and the EU's Emissions Trading System, which caps the emissions companies produce and lets greener firms trade at a profit their spare permits to pollute.

Poland's Bolesta said that for businesses there was no equivalent encouragement to

invest in adaptation measures. "It's easier to see the business case for mitigation, because you have the cap-and-trade system, you have carbon credits, you have renewables companies," he said. "Adaptation, it's mostly regarded as a cost with very long-term benefits, so delayed gratification, but also sometimes just an insurance policy – it might or it might not kick in."

Climate change-fuelled

extremes like heatwaves, drought and floods cost the near-stagnant European economy 0.3% points in output last year, Dutch bank ING said in a note this week.

"The uncomfortable truth is that heatwaves have quietly graduated from 'weather event' to 'macro variable'," ING said. "The thermometer, it turns out, has become a leading indicator."

The cost to economies ranges from threats to tourism or farming revenues in southern countries, to the difficulty of working in offices that are not adapted to hot weather.

Despite an official estimate that one day of heat above 30C (86F) costs the German economy €430mn (\$465mn) due to productivity losses, only half of German offices are air-conditioned, according to the Federal Environment Agency versus 90-95% in southern Europe.

"For decades, we (Germany) built against cold and not against heat and that's an adaptation gap," said Geraldine Dany-Knedlik from the German Institute for Economic Research DIW.

Irene Seemann, who heads efforts to help businesses with climate adaptation in the large German state of North Rhine-Westphalia, said there were signs of mindset change.

"To use a football analogy, Germany has been one-nil down because heat has not been much of an issue," Seemann said. "Now companies see that it has a direct impact on their operations."

Some adaptation fixes are simple and relatively cheap. Forbidden by heritage laws from structurally altering its historic, glass-domed headquarters in Cologne, German flooring firm Project Floors applied reflective film to its windows and managed to lower indoor temperatures by 10C. "It was simple, effective, and required no power," said Project Floors managing director Bernd Greve.

Others require more fundamental changes to workplaces and labour organisation, for example by rearranging work shifts to cooler times of the day, right through to reinventing public transport networks and urban spaces.

There has been progress compared with a deadly heatwave in 2003, when peer-reviewed studies have found around 70,000 excess deaths occurred over the summer in Europe.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) released a statement this week estimating that heat-related deaths in Europe, more than two decades later, would have been around 80% higher without the adaptation measures now in place.

They include heat-health action plans, early warnings, cooling spaces and outreach to vulnerable people.

"They are saving lives right now," said the WHO's regional director for Europe, Hans Henri P Kluge. "We need more of them, across all of the European region."



A woman uses a fan to cool off next to the ruins of an ancient temple in Portugal's Evora where temperatures were nearing 40° Celsius. (AFP)

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## At least 40 dead, 11 hurt after bus falls into ravine in west Pakistan

AFP  
Quetta

An overloaded bus veered off a road and fell more than 20 metres into a ravine in western Pakistan yesterday, killing at least 40 people, officials said.

The chief minister of Balochistan province where the accident took place had ordered an inquiry, according to his spokesman, and Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in a statement expressed grief over the passenger casualties.

"A passenger bus travelling from Quetta to Peshawar plunged into a deep ravine in the mountainous Dana Sar area... 40 people have been confirmed dead and 11 others injured," said Sanaullah Sherani, the head of the emergency centre in Zhob district near where the incident took place.

Sherani said the injured passengers had been taken to hospital, three of them in critical condition.

"The bus fell approximately 70 to 80 feet (21 to 24 metres) into the ravine," Sherani added.

"As the accident occurred in a rugged mountainous area, rescue teams faced significant difficulties during the initial phase of the operation," he said.

Shahid Rind, the spokesperson for south-western Balochistan's chief minister, told AFP the bus had left the provincial capital Quetta on Thursday evening.

It had picked up extra passengers from another broken down



This handout photograph taken and released by Pakistan's Balochistan Emergency Rescue 1122 service yesterday shows locals at the crash site of a passenger bus in the mountainous Dana Sar area of Zhob district. (AFP)

bus on the way, causing it to become overloaded, he added. The chief minister had ordered an investigation into the causes of the accident, which took place near the border with northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

Rescue teams from both provinces were at the scene, he added.

Road accidents are common in Pakistan due to weak enforcement of traffic laws, speeding, poor road safety standards and reckless driving.

## US says it supports Pakistan's right to defend itself against 'terrorist attacks'

Reuters  
Washington

The US State Department said on Thursday that Washington "supports Pakistan's right to defend itself against terrorist attacks" as an intermittent conflict between Pakistan and neighbouring Afghanistan continues.

"The Pakistani people have suffered greatly at the hands of terrorists," the State Department added.

Former allies Afghanistan and Pakistan fought their worst battle in years in February.

The UN said on Monday that at least 28 civilians were killed and 49 injured in air strikes car-

ried out by Pakistan on the border with Afghanistan.

Afghanistan's Taliban said later in the week that they launched air strikes into Pakistani territory, while Islamabad said its forces had intercepted and shot down four rudimentary drones in the southern resource-rich province of Balochistan.

Pakistan is nuclear-armed and its military capabilities are vastly superior to Afghanistan's.

However, the Afghan Taliban, who govern Afghanistan, are adept at guerrilla warfare, hardened by decades of fighting US-led forces, before returning to power in 2021 when Washington withdrew.

Pakistan is a major non-Nato ally of Washington.

Relations between Washington and Islamabad have improved since President Donald Trump returned to the White House.

Pakistan has also been a mediator in attempts to resolve the US-Israeli war with Iran.

Washington considers the Afghan Taliban to be a terrorist group.

Islamabad accuses Afghanistan of harbouring militants that it blames for plotting attacks in Pakistan.

The Afghan Taliban deny the accusations.

They say that militancy is Pakistan's internal problem and argue that Pakistan is deflecting blame for its own security failures.

## Portugal asks EU, Spain, Morocco for support as wildfire risk rises

Reuters  
Lisbon

Portugal has asked the EU, Spain and Morocco to have extra firefighting aircraft ready in case wildfires worsen during the current heatwave, Prime Minister Luis Montenegro said yesterday.

He said the unusual move was prompted not by a shortage of national resources, but by what

he described as an "exceptional situation" in the coming days, with the "entire country facing a very high risk of wildfires."

"We believe it is better to receive support from our EU allies and closest neighbours than to divert resources from other parts of the country where they are currently deployed," he told a news conference, explaining why Lisbon had activated the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism and bilateral agree-

ments with Spain and Morocco.

Parts of mainland Portugal are under red weather warnings issued by the national weather agency IPMA, with temperatures exceeding 40 degrees Celsius in some districts.

Mainland Portugal is under a state of alert until Monday, with authorities restricting access to certain forest areas, banning forestry work using machinery and prohibiting farmers from conducting controlled burns.

## Russia jails group over plot to kill media mogul

AFP  
Moscow

Russia said yesterday it had jailed 12 members of a neo-Nazi cell, two members of which planned to assassinate state media mogul Margarita Simonyan, a leading backer of the Ukraine war and of President Vladimir Putin.

The cell's leader - 21-year-old Mikhail Balashov - received a 20-year prison sentence, while 11 other defendants received sentences of between six and 18 years, Russia's Investigative Committee said.

It was not immediately clear to what extent each of them were involved in the assassination plot, as the trial was held behind closed doors and prosecutors did not reveal detailed information on the case.

According to prosecutors, in 2022, Balashov "founded and led a cell of the international 'National Socialism/White Power' movement operating in Moscow, which he named 'Pure Blood'."

Among the other crimes of which the 12 were accused were attacks on migrants and LGBTQ people, as well as committing robberies and inciting ethnic hatred.

Simonyan is one of Russia's most powerful state media executives, heading the government-owned media conglomerate that runs the RT broadcaster, Sputnik radio service and RIA news agency.

Russian prosecutors did not give an exact motive for the plot, saying only that two of the defendants were "acting on the orders of unidentified individuals" and had been offered a reward of \$50,000.

"The accomplices were unable to execute their criminal plan, as they were detained by officers of the FSB," it added, referring to Russia's state security service.

Described by the US State Department as "one of Russian President Vladimir Putin's main faces of propaganda", Simonyan is a vocal supporter of the Ukraine war and a frequent anti-Western commentator.

Reacting to the ruling, Simonyan said in a voice note on Telegram that she was saddened by the case and bore "no ill will toward anyone".

Russia says it has thwarted dozens of plots against pro-Kremlin figures since launching its 2022 Ukraine offensive, linking most of them to Ukrainian special services.

## Ukraine backers to vow major support at Nato summit

AFP  
Brussels

Nato's European members and Canada will pledge to give Ukraine 70bn euros (\$80bn) in military aid both this year and next at the alliance's summit in Ankara next week, diplomats said yesterday.

The vow - to be contained in a final summit declaration - includes 30bn euros each year from a European Union loan and funds already committed by individual countries, diplomats said.

The largely symbolic move is aimed at showing US President Donald Trump that allies have fully taken over the financing of Ukraine's fight against Russia as he has stopped Washington's support.

And it is meant to demonstrate to Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky - who will attend the summit - that backing remains steadfast as his country appears to be turning the tide in the war.

Diplomats say that the financing from the European Union loan and the pledges they have made already mean they are on course to reach the 70bn euros in each year.

Germany - now the largest backer of Ukraine - had pushed to have the commitment put in writing as it seeks

to drive other European countries to do more.

Officials said that there was some pushback from Italy over putting the pledge in black and white, but that it was eventually approved yesterday by ambassadors at Nato.

Zelensky is to attend a dinner of Nato leaders on Tuesday but will not be part of the main summit the day after as the alliance keeps him on the sidelines.

Officials do not want to make Ukraine too prominent an issue for fear of upsetting Trump as his efforts to end the war have hit a wall.

But the US leader appeared to signal he could be warming to Ukraine at a G7 meeting last month and other leaders may seek to build on any perceived momentum.

Allies will be hoping to use the summit to convince Trump that they are making good on a pledge made last year to boost defence-related spending to five % of GDP by 2035.

Diplomats said that the declaration will call for a "stronger Europe in a stronger Nato" as Washington presses its allies to take responsibility for their own defences.

Trump signalled on Thursday that he was still upset at the pace of Europe's spending - saying it was "ridiculous" for the US to continue its "one-sided" relationship to Nato.

# Police hunt for Ukrainian woman over Monaco blast

AFP  
Monaco

Authorities across Europe were hunting yesterday for a Ukrainian woman suspected of planting a bomb in Monaco that wounded three people, including a Ukrainian-born tycoon and his teenaged son.

Identified as Anastasiia Berезovska, 39, the suspect is wanted in Monaco for attempted murder, placing an explosive device on a public road with criminal intent, and criminal conspiracy over the explosion on Monday, according to an Interpol Red Notice.

German law enforcement said they searched her rented apartment near the western city of Frankfurt on Thursday.

"The woman being sought is currently on the run," they said, adding that evidence would be handed over to Monaco.

After the explosion, she is believed to have walked to the nearby French town of Beausoleil, where she retrieved her rental car and drove through Italy to Germany, her last known country of residence, Morgan Raymond, Monaco's deputy public prosecutor, told reporters.

"The relative sophistication of the explosive device and the modus operandi appear to indicate that the person who planted the device did not act alone," the prosecutor said, confirming that the individual was "a woman posing as a man".

Eric Arella, Monaco's police chief, said the suspect was identified in 53 hours thanks to "an



Monaco's Public Safety director Eric Arella holds up the red notice issued by Interpol against a Ukrainian woman suspected of planting a bomb in Monaco that injured three people according to an Interpol Red Notice during a press conference in Monaco yesterday. (AFP)

exceptional mobilisation by Monaco's public security personnel", also stressing cooperation with countries including France.

Ukrainian authorities said they had launched an investigation since the woman and child were Ukrainian citizens.

The bombing has sent shockwaves through Monaco, an ultra-secure microstate near Nice in southern France that is a playground of the world's ultra-rich. Prince Albert II has described the attack as a "heinous crime".

Authorities have not confirmed the victims' identities, but according to several sources, the attack targeted Vadym Yermolaiev, 58, a wealthy businessman originally from Ukraine and now a Cypriot national, as well as his partner and his 13-year-old son.

On Monday evening, an individual left a package in the entrance

hall of an apartment building near the French border.

Shortly afterwards, an explosive device went off in the hall just as three residents - a couple and a child - were entering.

The suspect, who was captured on CCTV wearing a black fisherman's hat, was initially believed to be a man.

But a review of surveillance footage and testimony from a person who came into contact with the suspect led investigators to focus on a woman who had allegedly conducted several reconnaissance visits in the days before the explosion, Raymond said.

On the evening of the attack, she is thought to have waited on a bench before placing an explosive device - taken out of a shopping bag - at the entrance of the building.

At 8:58pm, she detonated it re-

motedly as the trio returned from dinner.

The suspect with dark shoulder-length hair appears in two photographs released by Interpol.

The notice says the woman has a tattoo on her right arm, "possibly" depicting a snake, and that she speaks German.

The couple received particularly serious injuries.

A source initially said the man had suffered severe burns and the woman was in critical condition.

The child was admitted in non-critical condition to a children's hospital in Nice, while the two adults were taken to the Nice University Hospital.

Yermolaiev's condition stabilised, but as of yesterday, his partner's life was still in danger.

A resident of Monaco since at least 2021, Yermolaiev has since December 2023 been subject to sanctions in Ukraine over his business activities in Crimea, which was annexed by Russia.

In 2021, the Ukrainian edition of Forbes magazine estimated his fortune at \$220mn, ranking him the country's 45th richest person.

A source told AFP that people would have been lining up to gun down the construction magnate in Dnipro, the industrial Ukrainian city where he made his wealth.

The magnate's 35-year-old son Artur Yermolaiev is believed to also have made a long list of enemies.

He was convicted of fraud in Estonia this year, where he pleaded guilty to running a fake investment phone scam out of Ukraine that obtained around 100mn euros through fraud.

## Italy's waterways in 'critical state' due to drought

AFP  
Castelvetro Piacentino

Several waterways in northern Italy are in a "critical state" due to drought, and the weather forecast bodes ill for the coming days, the Po River Authority (ADBPO) said yesterday.

"The grip of drought continues to tighten on northern Italy," the institution monitoring Italy's longest river said in a statement.

Light rainfall brought a drop in temperatures on Wednesday and Thursday but the authority said that if there was no more rain measures such as limiting irrigation would be needed.

The body said that Lake Maggiore at the foot of the Alps was losing four centimetres (1.6 inches) per day and was now only 48% full. In Piedmont, "the waterways are suffering, and difficulties are being recorded in the agricultural



A general view shows sandbanks along river Po at Ponte della Becca, near Pavia, Northern Italy yesterday. (AFP)

sector, which is forced to make choices about which crops to bring to production", the ADBPO said.

Near Cremona, in the middle of the plain, part of the Po riverbed was dry yesterday, and sandbanks were increasingly

visible, an AFP journalist saw.

The river's flow was 278 cubic metres (9,820 cubic feet) per second on Wednesday, July 1, compared to an average of 929 on that date between 1991 and 2020.

In the Po delta, salt water from

the Adriatic Sea has now travelled 25 kilometres (15.5 miles) up the river, partly preventing irrigation of the fields.

The Veneto region declared a state of emergency due to drought on Thursday.

The heatwave that has swept across Europe would have been virtually impossible in June without climate change, according to climatologists from World Weather Attribution.

All-time temperature records have been broken in northern Italy, Germany, Poland, and Slovakia, and records for the month of June have been set in France, the United Kingdom, and Switzerland.

This heatwave has caused thousands of excess deaths in Europe, according to estimates in France, Spain and Belgium.

It would have been "virtually impossible" in June without climate change, the World Weather Attribution group of scientists said.

## Doha palm trees alight with ripening dates



Clusters of fresh dates are now ripening on palm trees across Doha, adding a unique touch to the city's summer landscape and drawing the attention of residents and passersby. From parks and public spaces to roadsides and residential neighbourhoods, the golden and reddish fruits have become an unexpected seasonal attraction, with many stopping to admire and photograph the heavily laden trees. Date palms have long been woven into Qatar's cultural heritage, symbolising hospitality, resilience and life in the desert. While most of the fruit on ornamental palms is not harvested by the public, the annual ripening season serves as a reminder of the country's deep connection to one of the region's oldest and most cherished crops. **PICTURES:** Shaji Kayamkulam

# International Plastic Bag Free Day marked at MoECC

By Ayman Adly  
Staff Reporter

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC) marked International Plastic Bag Free Day, observed annually on July 3, by urging the public, particularly visitors to beaches, Rawdat (natural meadows), and other land and marine areas, to reduce their use of plastic bags and dispose of them responsibly.

The ministry called on visitors to place plastic bags in designated waste bins rather than leaving them behind or discarding them indiscriminately, warning that such waste poses a serious threat to wildlife and fragile ecosystems. It stressed that individuals' daily behaviour directly protects Qatar's natural environment.

Plastic bags left on beaches or in Rawdat often do not remain where they are discarded. Carried by wind or tidal currents, they can travel long distances and threaten land and marine ecosystems, including important nesting sites for birds and sea turtles. Plastic waste can suffocate wildlife, entangle animals or be mistaken for food. It also degrades natural landscapes, damages native vegetation and persists in the environment for years, making prevention far more effective than cleanup.

The ministry emphasised that maintaining clean terrestrial and marine environments is essential to conserving biodiversity. Through its Departments of Land Protection, Marine Protection, Nature Reserves and Wildlife Development, it continues to conduct field campaigns to clean natural meadows, beaches, islands and other marine and land areas, particularly during peak visitor seasons and public holidays.

The Land Protection Department regularly removes plastic bags, bottles and other litter from Rawdat, wilderness areas and camping sites to safeguard native plants, animals and birds. Inspection campaigns are intensified during holidays and special occasions when visitor numbers increase. Field teams also educate visitors on the importance of disposing of waste properly before leaving natural areas.

Meanwhile, the Marine Protection Department continues its monitoring, inspection, and beach-cleaning operations along coastlines, islands, and marine areas. Its teams also participate in initiatives to remove marine debris from coastal waters and the seabed, in collaboration with government agencies and environmental organisations.

Special attention is given to beaches that serve as critical habitats for marine species, particularly during the sea turtle nesting season. Beach-cleaning and rehabilitation efforts help reduce risks around nesting sites and cre-



ate safer pathways for hatchlings as they make their way to the sea.

The ministry also supports these efforts through public awareness campaigns and community engagement initiatives involving schools, universities, government and private institutions, and volunteers. It stressed that protecting the environment cannot rely solely on cleanup operations but also requires responsible public behaviour to prevent pollution from recurring.

Dr Farhoud Hadi al-Hajri, director of the Public Relations and Communication Department at MoECC, said International Plastic Bag Free Day offers an opportunity to renew calls for the responsible use of single-use products and encourage greater adoption of reusable alternatives.

He noted that the environmental challenge extends far beyond the brief period during which a plastic bag is used. Improperly discarded bags can be carried by wind and currents from populated areas to meadows, beaches, islands and the sea, turning an item used for only a few minutes into a long-term environmental hazard.

Dr al-Hajri said the ministry's cleaning campaigns play a vital role in protecting natural areas and removing waste, but prevention remains the most effective solution through environmentally friendly alternatives and responsible consumption that reduce waste and conserve resources.

He stressed that every plastic bag prevented from reaching the natural environment represents an environmental risk avoided, adding that the success of national environmental efforts depends on the cooperation of individuals, retailers, institutions, tour operators and organisers of land- and sea-based recreational activities.

Dr al-Hajri lauded volunteer initiatives that support beach and environmental cleanups, as well as organisations that are reducing their reliance on single-use products in their daily operations.

He urged visitors to natural areas and beaches to plan ahead by carrying reusable shopping bags, minimising their use of plastic bags, placing waste in secure bins and ensuring all belongings and rubbish are collected before leaving. He also called on boat owners and marine recreation enthusiasts to secure waste on board and refrain from disposing of any materials into the sea, noting that marine debris can easily travel far from where it is discarded.

## Waste separation at source programme expanding across Al Rayyan Municipality

By Ayman Adly  
Staff Reporter

The Ministry of Municipality's General Cleanliness Department has continued to advance Qatar's transition towards a more sustainable waste management system by expanding the National Waste Separation at Source Programme across Al Rayyan Municipality.

Accordingly, the ministry distributed 1,117 blue bins designated for recyclable waste and an equal number of grey bins for organic waste in several residential areas of Al Rayyan Municipality during June. Distribution is continuing throughout July to ensure comprehensive coverage of all targeted neighbourhoods. With the latest deployment, the cumulative number of blue recycling bins distributed in Al Rayyan has reached 16,127, making it one of the country's largest municipal waste-separation initiatives.

The initiative forms a key component of Qatar's broader environmental strategy to reduce landfill dependency, increase recycling rates and promote the efficient use of resources.

By encouraging residents to separate waste at the household level, the programme improves the quality of the recyclable materials collected while reducing contamination, which often limits the effectiveness of recycling processes.

Under the scheme, blue bins are designated for recyclable materials, including paper, cardboard, plastic packaging and metal containers, while grey bins are intended for biodegradable and organic household waste. Separating waste before collection allows municipal authorities to recover more valuable materials for recycling and to facilitate the appropriate treatment of organic waste.

The programme has expanded steadily throughout 2026. Earlier phases saw the distribution of 885 blue recycling bins in May, bringing the cumulative total to 15,027 before the June rollout increased the figure to 16,127. The phased approach enables the Ministry to gradually extend the programme across residential areas.

The initiative also aligns with the Ministry of Municipality's 2024-2030 National Integrated Solid Waste Programme, which includes expanding waste segregation at source, strengthening recycling infrastructure, developing engineered landfill facilities, rehabilitating older disposal sites and introducing smarter waste management systems across the country.

According to the Qatar Development Bank's Recycling Sector Report, the strategy targets a 15% material recycling rate for municipal waste, reflecting the country's commitment to advancing a circular economy.

Alongside bin distribution, the Ministry continues to implement public awareness and educational campaigns encouraging residents to actively participate in the programme.

Since the launch of the National Waste Separation at Source Programme in 2019, more than 30,000 recycling and organic waste bins of various sizes have been distributed across different municipalities, supporting household-level segregation systems. However, annual municipal solid waste generation has been estimated at around 1.8-2.0 million tonnes, with recycling rates remaining limited but steadily improving through source-separation and recovery programmes.



## QRCS participates in Qatar's relief airlift to Venezuela



The Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) has launched an emergency humanitarian response as part of Qatar's efforts to provide relief for those affected by the two devastating earthquakes that hit Venezuela recently, in cooperation with Qatar's government authorities and the international Red Crescent and Red Cross organisations. On board a relief aircraft of the Qatari airlift ordered by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, the QRCS deployed a medical and relief aid shipment containing 24 tonnes of medications, medical supplies, and hygiene kits, as an immediate response to the emergency appeal issued by IFRC and UN agencies. In addition to the Qatari International Search and Rescue Group of the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya), the aircraft transported a medical and relief delegation from the Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) and QRCS, to take part in field relief efforts. **(QNA)**