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**SPORT | Page 1**

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## Qatar pushes dialogue after Hormuz strikes

**H**E the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani condemned attacks on commercial vessels in the Strait of Hormuz in a series of telephone calls with regional counterparts yesterday, warning that such actions undermine trust and threaten international maritime security.

The prime minister received a call from Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, during which they reviewed the latest developments in the recent military escalation between the United States and Iran.

He expressed Qatar's condemnation and rejection of the attacks targeting commercial ships in the strait, despite the atmosphere of calm and the efforts made to reduce escalation in the region, stressing that such actions would undermine trust, threaten international maritime security, and harm efforts to con-

### PM holds calls with Iran, Saudi, UAE, Oman and Turkiye FMs

solidate regional security and stability.

The prime minister stressed the need for all parties to commit to dialogue and diplomacy, and to implement what was agreed within the framework of the memorandum of understanding, in order to maintain the security of the region, preserve the gains achieved, and enhance regional stability.

He reiterated Qatar's support for all efforts aimed at containing the escalation and reaching a comprehensive agreement that contributes to sustainable peace.

He conveyed the same message in a call with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah al-Saud, reviewing developments between Washington and Tehran and renewing Qatar's rejection of the attacks on shipping in the strait. **To Page 2**

### GCC slams attacks on Gulf tankers

**QNA**  
Riyadh

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) yesterday issued its strongest condemnation of Iranian attacks on two Gulf tankers in the Strait of Hormuz, holding Tehran fully responsible and warning that the assaults endanger international navigation, energy supplies and the global economy. The attacks targeted the Saudi tanker Wadiyan and the Qatari tanker al-Rekayyat as they passed through the strait, endangering the lives of their crews. **To Page 2**

## Amir, Greek PM discuss regional developments



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani received a phone call from Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis. They discussed bilateral co-operation between the two countries and the scope for expanding it in different fields to advance the two countries' joint interests.

The two leaders call also discussed the latest regional and international developments, led by the Middle East. The two sides exchanged views on efforts to

de-escalate, enhance regional security and stability, and the importance of continuing diplomatic efforts to resolve urgent crises peacefully. They also stressed the importance of enhancing international co-operation and co-ordination to advance international peace and security, maintain the security and safety of international maritime and trade routes, and enhance stability and promote development for the people of the region and the world. **(QNA)**

### 'Trust, not power, defines Qatar's mediation'



HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi during a speech at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House, in London.

**QNA**  
London

Qatar does not view mediation as merely one tool of its foreign policy, but as a reflection of a deep-rooted constitutional conviction, HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi has said. He noted that Article 7 of Qatar's Constitution stipulates that the country's foreign policy is based on promoting international peace and security through peaceful means of resolving disputes. In a speech titled "Qatar: The Future of Diplomacy and Mediation — Opportunities and Challenges" at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House, in London, Dr al-Khulaifi said Qatar's approach had never been based on choosing between relationships, but on preserving them, particularly during periods of deep disagreement.

Engaging with all parties should not be understood as agreement with them, he stressed, adding that keeping channels of dialogue open during times of crisis may be the highest responsible contribution a "middle power" can make, because dialogue is not a reward for consensus, but the path that leads to it. International influence throughout much of modern history had been associated with military or economic power or geopolitical reach, he said. But today's world required a reassessment of that assumption: amid growing divisions, intensifying strategic competition and increasingly complex conflicts, the ability to keep channels of dialogue open when others believed it impossible had become one of the most valuable forms of influence. **To Page 2**

## Ceasefire teeters as Iran hits Gulf targets

**Reuters,AFP**  
Tehran, Washington

**I**ranian armed forces launched attacks on US military infrastructure in Gulf states yesterday following US strikes on Iran's southern coastal and eastern provinces, putting further strain on a three-week-old ceasefire agreement.

Iran's army said it had targeted US Patriot systems in Kuwait, an early-warning site in Qatar and a US Army fuel depot in Bahrain. Kuwait said its armed forces had engaged a cruise missile, three ballistic missiles and 10 drones in its airspace, with one person injured by falling shrapnel. Sirens also sounded in Jordan after missiles launched from Iran were detected; eight were intercepted, with no injuries or damage reported.

The Revolutionary Guards lat-

er said Iran had fired 10 ballistic missiles at Jordan's Azraq military base, used by US forces, as well as a US military control centre in the Middle East, without elaborating.

The developments came on the day Iran buried its slain Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in Mashhad, the culmination of a week of mass funeral processions. Khamenei was killed in a US air strike on the first day of the war on February 28, part of a US-Israeli barrage that set off a months-long conflict that has killed thousands and throttled worldwide energy supplies. His funeral procession reached Mashhad with a huge crowd packing the courtyard, some bearing banners denouncing the US president.

Attacks on Qatari and Saudi shipping vessels earlier this week had upended the fragile truce, with US President Donald Trump declaring it "over". **To Page 2**

## PM, UN refugee chief discuss ties



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani met yesterday with UN High Commissioner for Refugees Barham Salih, who is visiting the country. They discussed co-operation between Qatar and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), ways to support and strengthen it, and several other issues of common interest. **(QNA)**

## Qatar breaks into world's top dozen for quality of life

**By Joey Aguilar**  
Staff Reporter

Qatar has vaulted six places to rank 12th globally in the mid-2026 Quality of Life Index published by the Numbeo global database, placing it among the world's top 15 nations and second in the Gulf — confirmation, if any were needed, that the country's long game on infrastructure, services and safety is paying dividends where it matters most: in the daily lives of the people who call it home. The National Planning Council highlighted the leap, noting that Qatar's overall score rose from 182.7 to 188.6 — progress it attributed to the country's long-term development approach, built on sustainable infrastructure, enhanced public services, improved facilities and a strengthened healthcare system. The Council stressed that maintaining high standards of safety and stability continues to underpin a secure and prosperous environment for individuals and businesses alike.

The company Qatar now keeps tells its own story. The mid-2026 table is led by The Netherlands on 205.6, followed by Luxembourg, Oman, Denmark and

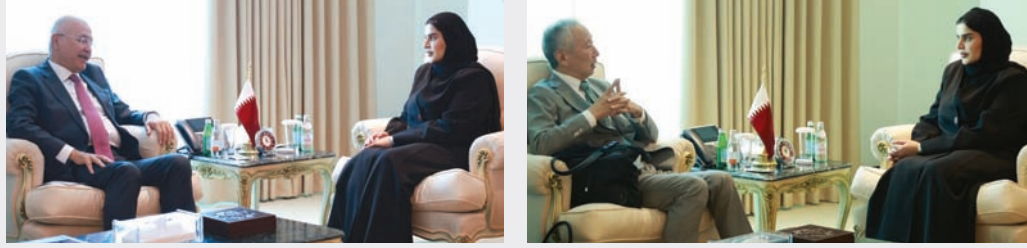


Switzerland — and Qatar, at 188.6, sits ahead of Sweden (187.6), Australia (186.8), New Zealand (186.2), the United States (184.7) and Spain (183.4). Further down the table, the

United Kingdom (173.8) and France (172.6) trail well behind. Few oil-era sceptics would have predicted a Gulf state outscoring Scandinavia on liveability, yet here it is in black and white.

A closer look at the numbers reveals where Qatar's strength lies. Its purchasing power score of 173.5 is among the highest in the world, bettered only by neighbouring Kuwait (179.7) — residents' riyals simply stretch further than most currencies anywhere. Its safety score of 84.8 is likewise among the very best globally, edged out only by the UAE (86.3), while a property price-to-income ratio of 4.5 makes housing markedly more attainable than in the crowded capitals of Europe and East Asia, where the figure routinely runs into double digits. The index, a composite measure of the factors shaping daily living conditions and overall well-being, assesses countries on safety, purchasing power, healthcare, housing affordability, cost of living, commuting time, pollution and climate. Within the Gulf, Qatar's second place puts it behind only Oman, which ranks a remarkable third in the world on 203.9 — the region's standard-bearer this cycle — and comfortably clear of the UAE (168.5), Kuwait (158.6) and Saudi Arabia (154.5). That two Gulf states now sit inside the global top 12 speaks to a wider regional transformation in which quality of life has become as much a marker of national ambition as GDP.

## Al-Misnad meets High Commissioner for Refugees, aide to Japan's foreign minister



HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation Dr Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad met separately yesterday with the special assistant to the Japanese minister of foreign affairs and ambassador in charge of the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, Okubo Takeshi, and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Dr Barham Salih, who are visiting the country. - QNA

## Qatar condemns Iranian attacks on Jordan, Bahrain and Kuwait

Qatar has strongly condemned repeated Iranian attacks on Jordan, Bahrain and Kuwait, calling them a blatant violation of the sovereignty of these countries and a flagrant breach of international law.

In a statement yesterday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) stressed the need to spare the region the repercussions of these unjustified attacks, to continue the path of dialogue and diplomacy, to de-

escalate tensions, and to build on the gains achieved within the framework of the memorandum of understanding, thereby contributing to the consolidation of security and stability at the regional and international levels.

The ministry reiterated Qatar's full solidarity with Jordan, Bahrain and Kuwait, and its support for all measures they take to preserve their sovereignty and security. - QNA

## Qatar pushes dialogue after Hormuz strikes

From Page 1

In a call with UAE Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan, the two sides discussed the same developments, with the prime minister reiterating his call for dia-

logue and adherence to the memorandum of understanding.

He also held a call with Omani Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad bin Hamood al-Busaidi, reviewing the escalation and stressing the need for all parties to preserve regional security and stability.

In a call with Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, the prime minister discussed the latest developments and reaffirmed Qatar's support for containing the escalation and reaching a comprehensive agreement for sustainable peace in the region. - QNA

## IQRA launches new standard in digitally enabled Umrah travel

IQRA for Umrah Services has officially opened a dedicated provider focused on delivering professionally managed, seamless, and spiritually enriching Umrah journeys for pilgrims worldwide.

IQRA has been established to simplify Umrah travel while upholding the highest standards of trust, transparency, and spiritual respect.

The brand brings together deep religious understanding, operational reliability, and modern digital innovation to redefine how pilgrims plan and experience their Umrah journey.

Registered with the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs, IQRA offers comprehensive end-to-end Umrah solutions, including Umrah visa processing, international and regional flights, carefully selected hotel accommodations in Makkah and Madinah, ground transportation, travel insurance, and guided Ziyarat tours.

Every service is designed to ensure comfort, clarity, and peace of mind throughout the pilgrimage. A key pillar of IQRA's offering is its hybrid service model, combining personalised consultation through physical offices with the launch of Iqraatours.com.

The digital platform allows pilgrims to browse, customise, and book Umrah packages securely online, anytime, from anywhere in the world - while remaining supported by experienced travel professionals.

Pilgrims can now take full advantage of technology to book



their Umrah online with ease, or book with us in person.

"IQRA for Umrah Services reflects our commitment to delivering Umrah journeys that are professionally managed and spiritually meaningful," said general manager Nasiruddin Mohammed Shafiq.

"By combining digital innovation with personalised service and deep religious understanding, IQRA is designed to simplify Umrah travel while ensuring care, clarity, and peace of mind for every pilgrim."

IQRA caters to a diverse range

of travellers, offering both accessible Umrah packages and bespoke luxury Umrah experiences.

Premium offerings include curated itineraries, luxury hotels near the Haramain, private transfers, VIP ground services, and dedicated relationship managers.

In addition, IQRA provides curated Saudi cultural and heritage experiences that can be seamlessly combined with Umrah travel.

Supported by strong partnerships with airlines, hotels, and ground operators, and guided by clear pricing and transparent processes, IQRA is committed to setting new benchmarks in service quality, reliability, and spiritual care.

With the opening of IQRA for Umrah Services and the launch of Iqraatours.com, pilgrims can now book their Umrah with us in person or online and experience a new standard in digitally-enabled Umrah travel.



## MoCI imposes final anti-dumping duties on imported batteries

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) has announced the imposition of final anti-dumping duties on imports of batteries originating in or exported from China and Malaysia under Decision No. 48 of 2026.

In a post on X yesterday, the ministry said that the decision aims to combat dumping practices affecting the State's imports of electric accumulators covered by the decision, support the competitiveness of national products and

combat harmful practices affecting them in international trade, implement the measures approved by the Industrial Co-operation Committee of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) regarding the imposition of final anti-dumping duties on the covered imports, and regulate imports of electric accumulators originating in or exported from China and Malaysia, in accordance with the customs heading and Harmonised System code specified in the decision.

The MoCI said the decision applies to products classified under tariff heading 8507 and Harmonised System code 85071000 of the GCC Common Customs Tariff.

The ministry added that the duty rates were determined according to the dumping margin for each producer or exporter in China and Malaysia.

The duties range from 25.8% to 74% on imports from China and from 43.2% to 77% on imports from Malaysia. - QNA



## Minister meets UK, Commonwealth officials

HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi met yesterday with the UK Minister for the Middle East and North Africa, Hamish Falconer; the UK Minister of State for Multilateral Affairs, Human Rights, Latin America and the Caribbean, Chris Allmore; and Commonwealth Secretary-General Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey.

The meetings reviewed bilateral relations and explored opportunities to further expand co-operation between the two countries.

Views were also exchanged on the latest developments in the Middle East and Latin America, as well as several issues of mutual interest. - QNA

## Ceasefire teeters as Iran hits Gulf targets

From Page 1

Iranian media later reported multiple explosions across southern Iran, including Bushehr, where a Russian-built nuclear plant is located, along with Konarak, Choghadak and Bandar Abbas.

A local official said a US projectile had hit the perimeter of the Bushehr facility.

Iranian officials said the US attacks had killed 14 people and injured 78 across five provinces on July 8 and 9, state media reported.

Qatar, which hosts the largest US base in the region and has often mediated between Washington and Tehran, condemned the attacks on commercial shipping but also called for a return to diplomacy.

The foreign ministers of Türkiye and Oman likewise stressed the need to avoid further escalation in separate calls with their Iranian counterpart, Abbas Araqchi.

US Central Command said its forces had struck about 90 Iranian military targets, including air defence systems, coastal surveillance assets, and missile and drone storage sites.

"This is in retribution for yesterday's bombing of ships by Iran. If it happens again, it will get much worse!" Trump wrote on Truth Social.

The US leader, attending a Nato summit in Türkiye, said he did not think the strikes would escalate into a full-fledged conflict.

"Anything that happens is going to be over very quickly," he told reporters in Ankara.

The Strait of Hormuz handled about a fifth of global oil supplies before the war.

Tehran has since largely taken control of the waterway.

"The Strait of Hormuz will be reopened only under Iranian arrangements, not through US threats," Iran's top negotiator, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, wrote on X.

## Qatar hails US move to delist Syria as sponsor of terrorism

From Page 1

Qatar has welcomed the US announcement that it has begun the process of removing Syria from its list of state sponsors of terrorism.

In a statement issued yesterday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) said the move marks a positive step toward supporting stability in Syria and the wider region, while advancing a political settlement in line with relevant international resolutions and the aspirations of the Syrian people.

The ministry reaffirmed Qatar's unwavering support for the unity, sovereignty, and independence of Syria. - QNA

## Trust, not power, defines Qatar's mediation: minister

From Page 1

Mediation was no longer merely a diplomatic tool but a strategic necessity, he said, pointing out that today's conflicts involved intertwined military, political, economic, technological and humanitarian dimensions.

Conflicts were no longer limited to states alone but also involved international organisations, non-state actors, commercial companies and global public opinion, making peace-building during conflicts, rather than after they end, an increasingly important necessity.

The changing international landscape, HE Dr al-Khulaifi said, required a new form of diplomacy characterised by the patience needed to build trust, the flexibility to adapt to rapidly evolving crises, and the credibility to engage with all parties even when communication channels collapse.

He added that artificial intelligence (AI) could accelerate the spread of misinformation, cyberattacks could disrupt diplomatic efforts, and public opinion could sometimes harden before negotiators sat at the table - requiring diplomacy that was faster, more flexible and more resilient, without sacrificing the patience on which trust is built.

He added that the role of middle powers was gaining renewed importance.

While major powers remained a key pillar in preserving international peace and security, and regional powers naturally played a role in their regions, middle powers were distinguished by their ability to facilitate outcomes rather than impose them - keeping dialogue alive amid political divisions and providing the diplomatic space that makes consensual solutions possible.

Credibility, HE Dr al-Khulaifi added, represented a value greater than power for middle powers.

A mediator could not force parties to negotiate or impose reconciliation, but derived influence from trust - whether in the fairness of treatment, the confidentiality of deliberations, or the use of the process to serve peace

rather than political interests.

Complete neutrality might be rare in international relations, he said, but fairness was always possible.

Qatar's experience confirmed that successful mediation rested on three pillars: access, trust and perseverance.

Access meant maintaining communication channels with all parties, especially when dialogue became politically unacceptable; trust was built through consistency, confidentiality and reliability; and perseverance was the quality most likely to be underestimated, as peace processes rarely followed a straight path.

Citing Qatar's role in facilitating negotiations in Afghanistan, supporting humanitarian relief and hostage release in Gaza, advancing dialogue in Chad, and facilitating talks in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, HE Dr al-Khulaifi said sustainable progress was rarely achieved through sudden breakthroughs, but through careful engagement, quiet perseverance and the political will to continue dialogue even when others believed it had failed.

He pointed to a paradox: a mediator's success was often accompanied by reduced visibility, as credit rightly went to the parties that chose compromise over confrontation.

Trust-building could not take place at the speed of social media, he said, and algorithms could not create consensus, because reconciliation remained a deeply human process.

The need for credible mediation would only grow, HE Dr al-Khulaifi said, as challenges emerged from artificial intelligence, climate pressures, competition over resources, migration and pandemics - challenges no single country could resolve alone.

Concluding, the minister cited the late Nelson Mandela: "If you want to make peace with your enemy, you have to work with your enemy."

The influence of middle powers, HE Dr al-Khulaifi said, was measured not by the size of their armies or economies, but by a factor more difficult to acquire and easier to lose: trust.

## GCC slams attacks on Gulf tankers

From Page 1

The GCC called it an unacceptable assault on the security of international navigation and global energy supplies, and also condemned repeated Iranian attacks on Bahrain and Kuwait.

The bloc said the strikes were a grave violation of international law and UN Security Council Resolution 2817, which guarantees freedom of maritime navigation, as well as a breach of the memorandum of understanding between the United States and Iran, under which a ceasefire and the reopening of the strait were agreed.

Reaffirming full solidarity among member states, the GCC stressed that its security is indivisible, and that any attack on one member is an attack on all, in line with the GCC Charter and the Joint Defence Agreement.

It underlined the right to individual and collective self-defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter, and to take all measures necessary to safeguard sovereignty and stability.

The GCC urged the international community, particularly the Security Council, to condemn the attacks and take a firm stance to guarantee freedom of navigation in the strait without restrictions or the imposition of transit or service fees, in accordance with international law and the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

It called for an immediate and unconditional halt to all Iranian hostilities and the sustainable reopening of the strait, and stressed the need for Iran's full compliance with Resolution 2817 and the memorandum of understanding. - QNA

## Qatar Airways to take part in UK international airshow

Qatar Airways has announced that it will participate in Farnborough International Airshow 2026, bringing its world-class travel experience to one of the most influential global events in the aviation industry.

Qatar Airways will showcase its FIFA special livery aircraft, carrying the vibrant spirit of the beautiful game from the FIFA World Cup 2026 final to Farnborough in the United Kingdom.

Featuring the airline's world-class onboard experience, including Starlink connectivity, the

state-of-the-art Boeing 777-300ER aircraft reflects Qatar Airways' ongoing commitment to keeping passengers connected to what matters most throughout their journey.

Qatar Executive's Gulfstream G700, one of the most advanced private jets in the world, will also be on display.

The carrier called on attendees to join its aircraft display area for a first-hand look at the world-class comfort, design and innovation onboard the world's best airline, as voted by Skytrax in 2025. - QNA



## Qatar Tourism takes part in 30th Annual Government Roundtable in Athens

Qatar Tourism (QT) participated at the 30th Annual Government Roundtable, held in Athens from July 8-10.

HE the Qatar Tourism Chairman Saad bin Ali al-Kharji, who is also the Visit Qatar chairman, represented the QT in the forum.

Inaugurated by Greece's President Constantine Tsoulas, the forum brought together senior officials, business leaders, decision-makers and international experts from around the world to discuss ways of strengthening international co-operation and the role of infrastructure and innovation in supporting sustainable development.

During the forum, HE al-Kharji took part in the main panel discussion on "Connecting Regions, Communities and Countries - Promoting Resilience and Prosperity", alongside a distinguished group of international leaders.

The session explored the role of international co-operation in driving sustainable growth, strengthening resilience, and building economies better able to withstand global changes.

HE al-Kharji highlighted Qatar's experience in strengthening the resilience of the tourism sector through effective crisis response and the integration of efforts across various entities, underscoring how resilience has become a critical pillar in sustaining investor and traveller confidence, as well as a key driver of the sector's sustainable growth.

He also emphasised Qatar's position as a global hub, seamlessly connecting travellers across Europe, Asia, Africa and the Middle East through a leading air connectivity network and strategic international partnerships that enhance travel flow and connectivity between markets. - QNA

## Qatar wins WSIS cybersecurity award again

Qatar, represented by the National Cyber Security Agency, has won the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) 2026 Award for the second consecutive year in the ALC5 - Building Confidence and Security in the Use of Information and Communication Technologies category. The award was received by National Cyber Security Agency Director-General Ahmed Mohammed al-Mutawa al-Hammadi during the official ceremony in Geneva.

The achievement followed a competitive selection process involving hundreds of projects from countries around the world. The nominated projects underwent a comprehensive evaluation, including public voting, expert assessment, and review by specialised committees, before the National Cybersecurity Training Programme was selected as the winning project. The programme was recognised for its significant contribution to achieving the objectives of the WSIS and supporting the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. - QNA



## MoEHE launches activities for student activity centres

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) has launched the activities of the student activity centres for the summer of 2026, under the theme *Invest their summer in creativity*.

The ministry said in a statement yesterday that the events, which will continue until August 3, aim to provide an enjoyable and comprehensive educational experience during the summer vacation, in a safe and stimulating learning environment for students, in co-operation with a select group of strategic partners in the country.

The MoEHE indicated that the centres have begun receiving students with diverse programmes and interactive activities that refine their creative and cognitive skills, noting that the events are held daily from 9am until 1pm, targeting age groups from 6-18 years of government school students and Qatari students in private schools, in addition to students with special needs, for whom an independent centre fully equipped to meet their requirements has been allocated.

The activities are distributed across five summer centres: Al Wakra and Khalifa Secondary Schools for boys, Al Khor and Amna Bint Wahab Secondary Schools for girls, in addition to Al Hidayah School for Special Needs in the Al Hilal area for boys. - QNA

# MoEHE, UDST launch academic programmes

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE), in co-operation with the University of Doha for Science and Technology (UDST), has announced the launch of new academic programmes in animal health and veterinary sciences, alongside a foundation programme for humanities-track students, aimed at expanding higher education opportunities and preparing national talent for priority sectors aligned with labour market needs.

Speaking at a press conference, Assistant Undersecretary for Higher Education Affairs at the MoEHE Dr Hareb Mohamed Aljabri described the UDST as a key strategic partner in delivering high-quality applied education that equips graduates with practical skills required by the labour market.

He said that the new animal health and veterinary sciences programmes were developed in collaboration with the Ministry of Municipality and other stakeholders to address national workforce needs in animal security, public health, and food safety.

He added that the initiative supports Qatar National Vision 2030 and the country's long-term workforce development strategy. Aljabri also highlighted the ministry's efforts to broaden academic pathways, particularly for humanities-track graduates, who account for around 75% of secondary school graduates.

He noted that the new foundation programme will enable eligible students to pursue scientific and engineering disciplines after meeting the required English and mathematics standards, expand-

ing their academic and career prospects.

The official added that students admitted through the government scholarship programme will receive a monthly stipend of QR4,000 while pursuing a diploma, rising to QR6,000 upon progressing to a bachelor's degree.

The programme also offers a clear pathway to employment based on the needs of participating entities.

UDST vice-president for Student Affairs Fahad Abdullah al-Hajri described the Animal Health and Veterinary Sciences programme as the first of its kind in Qatar.

He said the programme will start in Fall 2026 semester and prepare graduates for careers in animal welfare, animal security, public health, and food safety through



specialised coursework in animal diseases, nutrition, laboratory techniques, and veterinary science, complemented by practical training in veterinary hospitals, laboratories, and related institutions.

Al-Hajri noted that the programme provides students with flexibility in their academic pathway, allowing them to obtain a diploma after successfully completing the first two years, or continue their studies to earn a bachelor's

degree, with the option of pursuing veterinary medicine in the future in accordance with the requirements of universities offering the specialisation.

He also highlighted that the first two years of study include common courses and intensive practical training, enabling students to graduate with a diploma and enter the labour market, or continue their studies to obtain a bachelor's degree.

He noted that admission to the programme requires a high school certificate in the scientific track with a minimum grade of 60%, while meeting the requirements for core science subjects, English and mathematics, in addition to the option of enrolling in the foundation programme that prepares students for university studies. - QNA

## Qatar's selection as Guest of Honour reflects its cultural status, says Jerash Festival director

The director of the Jerash Festival of Culture and Arts, Yazan al-Khudair, said that the selection of Qatar as the guest of honour for the festival's 40th edition, which will open on July 22 in Jordan, reflects the country's prominent cultural standing at both the Arab and international levels and embodies the deep fraternal ties and growing cultural co-operation between Qatar and Jordan.

In remarks to the Qatar News Agency (QNA), al-Khudair said the selection was made in recognition of Qatar's cultural role in the Arab world and the significant achievements it has made in recent years in the fields of culture, arts, and creativity.

He noted that Doha has presented a distinguished model of using culture as a means of connecting people and promoting intercultural dialogue.

Al-Khudair added that culture has become one of the most important means of bringing societies closer together, and that Qatar has provided a notable example through its major cultural projects, its hosting of international events, and its commitment to preserving heritage while embracing diverse cultures.

The official also said Qatar's hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup demonstrated how major international events can be used to showcase Arab culture, giving millions of visitors the opportunity to learn about Arab and Gulf heritage, as well as its values and traditions.

He added that this global cultural presence was one of the factors behind Qatar's selection as the guest of honour for the festival's 40th edition, as the country has successfully combined preserving its national identity with openness to the world while establishing a meaningful cultural presence on the international stage.

Al-Khudair noted that Qatar's participation will also include intellectual and cultural contributions through seminars, poetry evenings, and literary events, reflecting the country's vibrant cultural scene and fostering dialogue between writers, intellectuals, and artists from both countries.

Qatar's participation, he added, will give the festival an additional Gulf dimension and provide audiences with the opportunity to experience a different cultural perspective, further strengthening the Jerash Festival's position as a gathering place for writers, intellectuals, and artists from across the Arab world.

Al Khudair said the festival's 40th edition will run until August 2, marking an exceptional milestone celebrating four decades of cultural and artistic achievements.

He noted that the 40th edition represents a significant milestone in the festival's history, which began with its inaugural edition in 1980. Al Khudair said the 40th edition will feature more than 220 cultural and artistic events, with cultural activities accounting for over 60% of the overall programme.

Around 120 events will be held within the ancient city of Jerash, in addition to activities at the Royal Cultural Centre and several cultural centres across Jordan's governorates. - QNA

## Healthy living is key to career success, say graduates

By Tawfik Lamari  
Staff Reporter

The graduation of a new cohort from Kawader's "Excelling in Job Interviews" programme marked another step in preparing young Qataris for the labour market.

Organised through Kawader, the Civil Service and Government Development Bureau, the programme equips Qatari jobseekers with the skills needed to navigate recruitment processes and excel in employment interviews.

Gulf Times spoke with health advocate Khawla al-Bahr and two programme graduates about the role of sport and healthy lifestyles in preparing young people not only for employment but also for healthier, more productive lives.

Al-Bahr stressed that physical wellbeing is a cornerstone of both personal and professional success.

"A healthy mind exists in a healthy body," she said. "Young people entering the workforce are also the generation that will shape future families and communities. Mothers of young children have a unique opportunity to establish healthy habits at home and raise children who value exercise and balanced nutrition."

Al-Bahr lauded Qatar's National Sport Day for helping transform public attitudes towards exercise.

"It has changed mindsets among both adults and children," she said.

Among the programme graduates were Bdoor Saeed Ba-khamees and Mai Khamis al-Mansouri, both Qatar University graduates specialising in Management Information Systems and Taxation, who are currently seeking employment through the Kawader platform.

For Ba-khamees, sport has become an essential part of her daily routine and a major contributor to her personal development.

"Exercise is one of the most important activities in my life," she said.

"People often think it is only about health or appearance, but it has taught me discipline, helped me organise my time and improved my mental wellbeing," Ba-Khamees said. "Whenever I begin my day with exercise, I feel more energetic and productive."

Her routine includes strength training, cardiovascular exercise, cycling, Pilates and horse riding.



Khawla al-Bahr



Qatar's growing sporting culture has encouraged more young people to embrace active lifestyles.

"Sport also introduces you to people from different professions and backgrounds, expanding your network while building confidence and self-esteem," she said.

The benefits, she added, quickly extended beyond her own life.

"I was once the only person in my family who exercised regularly," Ba-Khamees said. "Today everyone does, my parents and my brothers."

"We've also changed the way we eat by reducing fats, sugar and excessive portions," she added. "The atmosphere at home has become healthier, happier and more positive."

Al-Mansouri described exercise as a turning point during the demanding final year of her university studies.

"My graduation year was extremely stressful," she recounted. "I needed an outlet, so I began walking for an hour every day."

The results, she said, were immediate. "I noticed my productivity improving significantly," al-Mansouri said.

"As stress began affecting my health, my sister-in-law suggested I try Pilates," she said. "After I started practicing it, my health improved, my eating habits became more balanced, my weight returned to a healthy level after dropping considerably, and my mental wellbeing improved enormously."

Inspired by the experience, al-Mansouri is now looking to broaden her sporting interests. "I'm considering taking up shooting next," she said. "A friend who practices the sport has encouraged me to try it, and I'm excited to discover a new challenge."

Both graduates believe Qatar's growing sporting culture has encouraged more young people to embrace active lifestyles.

"Five years ago, it was common to see teenagers paying little attention to their health," Ba-khamees said.

"Today, people motivate each other to become fitter and healthier," she added. "The country has opened the door to many new sports, making exercise a sustainable lifestyle rather than a passing trend."

She cited the rapid growth of Padel as an example of how innovative sports have attracted young people and inspired wider participation.

Al-Mansouri agreed, noting that positive role models have played an important part in that transformation.

"When students see university lecturers or people they admire playing sports such as Padel, it encourages them to follow their example," she said. "The sport has become popular across different segments of society, particularly among women, creating a supportive community that motivates others to stay active."

For al-Bahr, such stories illustrate the long-term impact of sustained health awareness efforts.

"It is encouraging to see high school and university graduates leading this positive transformation," she said. "By embracing healthy lifestyles themselves, they become role models who can inspire future generations to make health and wellbeing a lifelong priority."

## Football evolution in Qatar, a story of achievement, investment and immense success

By Ayman Adly  
Staff Reporter

Football in Qatar has undergone one of the most remarkable transformations in modern sporting history. In just a few decades, the country has progressed from informal matches played by oil workers to winning back-to-back AFC Asian Cup titles and hosting the FIFA World Cup.

Organised football first took root in the late 1940s and early 1950s, when oil workers and expatriates arranged friendly matches in Dukhan and Doha, introducing the game to local communities. What began as a recreational pastime quickly gained popularity, leading to the formation of early clubs that later evolved into institutions such as Al Ahli and Al Sadd. By the 1950s, football had become one of Qatar's most popular sports.

A major milestone came in 1960 with the establishment of the Qatar Football Association, providing the sport with formal governance. Qatar joined FIFA in 1963 and the Asian Football Confederation in 1967, enabling its national team to compete officially on the international stage. These developments transformed football from a com-

munity pastime into a structured national sport.

The first generation of Qatari footballers faced significant challenges. Facilities were limited, pitches were basic, and professional support was scarce. Despite these obstacles, they laid the foundations for the country's football culture. Among the pioneers was Mohamed Ghanem al-Rumaihi, who represented Qatar in its earliest international matches during the 1970s and helped establish the nation's reputation in Gulf football.

During the same decade, Qatar became a regular participant in the Gulf Cup, competing against regional powers such as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Iraq. Although victories were initially rare, the tournament provided invaluable experience that accelerated the national team's development. Domestically, clubs including Al Sadd, Al Arabi and Al Rayyan drove the growth of competitive football.

Al Arabi emerged as one of the country's dominant clubs in the 1970s and 1980s, producing numerous national team players and raising domestic standards. Al Rayyan built one of Qatar's most passionate fan bases, while Al Sadd established itself as the country's most successful club through strong management and



a sustained commitment to developing talent.

Qatar's first major international breakthrough came at the 1981 FIFA World Youth Championship in Australia. The under-20 national team stunned the football world by reaching the final after defeating Brazil and England before finishing as runners-up. The achievement remains one of the defining moments in Qatari football history, inspiring a generation of young players and proving the country could compete with the world's best.

The 1980s and 1990s produced Qatar's first football icons. Mansoor Muffah became one of the nation's greatest strikers, re-

nowned for his prolific goal-scoring and consistency at both club and country level. Midfielder Mubarak Mustafa emerged as another influential figure, admired for his creativity, technical ability and leadership, while defenders such as Jassim Yaqoub strengthened the national team's growing competitiveness.

Qatar reached another milestone in 1992 by winning its first Gulf Cup, announcing its arrival as a serious regional force. Additional titles in 2004 and 2014 reflected the steady progress of the country's football system.

At the domestic level, the Qatar Stars League continued to professionalise. Clubs strengthened

their organisations, improved infrastructure and recruited experienced international players and coaches to raise technical standards. Alongside traditional powerhouses Al Sadd, Al Arabi, and Al Rayyan, clubs such as Al Gharafa and Qatar SC contributed to a stronger, more competitive league.

A turning point came with the establishment of Aspire Academy in 2004. Combining elite coaching, sports science, education and modern training methods, the academy became the centrepiece of Qatar's long-term football strategy. Many of the country's leading players, including Akram Afif, Almoez Ali and Saad al-Sheeb, developed through Aspire's pathways.

This new generation transformed Qatar's standing in Asian football. Akram Afif emerged as the team's creative force, excelling in vision, dribbling, and playmaking. At the 2019 AFC Asian Cup, he set a tournament record for assists, while Almoez Ali scored a record nine goals to become the competition's top scorer. Together, they formed one of Asia's most formidable attacking partnerships.

The squad's success was reinforced by versatile defender Boualem Khoukhi, AFC Player of the Year 2018 Abdelkarim Hassan,

and goalkeeper Saad al-Sheeb, whose series of clean sheets provided defensive stability throughout the tournament.

The 2019 AFC Asian Cup represented the culmination of years of planning and investment. Qatar won all seven matches, conceded only one goal and defeated Japan 3-1 in the final, completing one of the most dominant title-winning campaigns in the competition's history.

The success continued in 2023 when Qatar defended its Asian Cup crown on home soil. A 3-1 victory over Jordan in the final secured consecutive continental titles, with Akram Afif scoring all three goals from the penalty spot, cementing Qatar's place among Asia's leading football nations.

Hosting the FIFA World Cup in 2022 marked another historic milestone, making Qatar the first Arab and Middle Eastern country to stage football's biggest tournament. Today, the nation continues to invest in youth development, coach education and international partnerships. With a competitive Qatar Stars League, a thriving Aspire Academy and a proven pathway for developing elite talent, Qatar has established a sustainable football model that continues to shape its future on both the continental and global stage.

## Al Khor Cultural Centre announces series of events as part of summer activities

The Ministry of Culture's Al Khor Cultural Centre announced a series of events and activities as part of its summer programme, held under the slogan 'Learn, Create, Enjoy!'

Among this year's summer activities is a training course in the traditional art of Al Ardha for children, taking place from July 12-15 at the Al Khor community centre (Corniche), in co-operation with the Nomas Centre, it said.

The course, part of Al Khor Cultural Centre's summer programme which began on June 28 and continues until August 12, features a diverse range of workshops and educational and creative activities.

Presented by Imran al-Kuwari, a trainer from the Nomas Centre, the course aims to instil a sense of

pride in national identity among young people and revive Qatari folk arts in line with the Ministry of Culture's vision to preserve and promote cultural heritage among new generations.

Director of Al Khor Cultural Centre Mariam al-Mohannadi stated that the centre is committed each summer to offering a distinguished selection of workshops and programmes that serve various segments of society and contribute to enriching the summer vacation for young people and children. This initiative aligns with the Ministry of Culture's support for talent development and skills enhancement.

She added that this year's summer programme includes a wide range of workshops and courses. (QNA)

## MoEHE holds workshop for top high school graduates

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) held an introductory workshop yesterday for top-performing Qatari high school graduates to present the 2026-2027 government scholarship programme and explain the academic opportunities and benefits available.

Speaking at the event, Assistant Undersecretary for Higher Education Affairs, Dr Hareb Mohamed Aljabri, said the workshop was designed to help outstanding students better understand the scholarship system and the advantages available to them.

He noted that the initiative was introduced after the ministry found that some eligible students in previous years had missed out on scholarship opportunities because they were unfamiliar with the application process or mistakenly believed that academic excellence alone guaranteed an Amiri scholarship.

Dr Aljabri said the government scholarship programme consists of three tracks: the Amiri Scholarship, the Overseas Scholarship, and the Domestic Scholarship. He explained that applicants for the Amiri Scholarship must secure unconditional admission to one of the world's top 24 universities or one of the designated Amiri universities in Education City, noting



that academic excellence alone does not qualify a student without university admission.

The Amiri Scholarship provides a monthly stipend of QR20,000, two annual business-class return tickets, recognition of study years as years of service, and a one-time pre-departure allowance of QR40,000.

Dr Aljabri added that top-performing students enrolled in the Overseas Scholarship Programme may pursue any field of study, regardless of whether it appears on the ministry's approved list of majors. Other scholarship recipients are limited to the approved disciplines. The Overseas Scholarship includes a monthly stipend of QR14,000, airfare, and a pre-departure allowance.

He identified nuclear engineering as one of the country's priority fields, saying scholarship recipi-

ents in the discipline are eligible for additional incentives, including monthly financial support of up to QR20,000, appointment at pay grade 9 upon employment, recognition of study years for service and pension purposes, and other scholarship benefits.

He also said clinical psychology remains a priority specialisation because of the growing demand within Qatar's healthcare and social sectors.

On medical scholarships, Dr Aljabri explained that they operate under separate regulations. Students receive a monthly stipend of QR18,000 during the first four years of overseas study, increasing to QR30,000 from the fifth year onward, in addition to service-year recognition and other benefits linked to the length of the programme.

He added that the top ten Qatari

graduates in the science, humanities, and technology streams, as well as the top three graduates from specialised schools, are eligible to study any discipline at accredited universities in Qatar through the Domestic Scholarship Programme without being restricted to the approved list of majors.

Dr Aljabri noted that Qatar University reserves 30 places for the Amiri Scholarship Programme under its own admission criteria. Students who have already been awarded ministry scholarships do not compete for those places because they qualify under separate scholarship schemes.

During the workshop, Dr Aljabri answered questions from students and parents on financial guarantees, student visas, university admissions, online applications, postgraduate study opportunities, and other scholarship-related procedures.

Dr Aljabri said applications for overseas scholarships will remain open until August 15, while applications for domestic scholarships at local universities will be accepted from November 15-30. He encouraged students to explore scholarship opportunities offered by both the ministry and other national institutions to support their academic and career ambitions. (QNA)

## Friends of The Environment Centre concludes first week of summer of sustainability



The Friends of The Environment Centre of the Ministry of Sports and Youth concluded the first week of its summer of sustainability 2026 programme.

Held under the motto "Together towards a sustainable future", the programme was marked by strong attendee participation and engagement, featuring a series of awareness programmes and practical activities to promote environmental awareness and instil sustainability concepts in young people.

The first week's activities included environmentally themed recreational competitions, awareness workshops on oral and dental health, and workshops on the importance of personal hygiene during the summer.

Participants also visited the Quality and Safety Department at the Public Works Authority (Ashghal), where they learned about the latest technologies used in materials testing and project quality assurance. They also visited the Aquatic Research Centre of the Ministry of Municipality's Fisheries Department, where they introduced to the importance of water and marine resources and the efforts to conserve them. (QNA)

## Qatar's youth national handball team departs for China

Qatar's youth national handball team departs today for China to participate in the 19th Asian Men's Junior Handball Championship, hosted by the Chinese city of Chuzhou from July 15-27.

This tournament serves as a qualifier for the IHF Men's Junior World Championship, scheduled to be held in North Macedonia.

Qatar's team has completed its preparations for the continental championship, aiming to reach the knockout stages and contend for the title.

The team will begin the tourna-

ment with a match against the Republic of Korea on July 15.

They will then face the UAE in a Gulf derby on July 16, followed by a match against Japan on July 17.

The team will play its fourth match against Iran on July 19, then Kuwait on July 21, before concluding its preliminary round matches against India on July 22.

The continental participation comes as part of the Qatar national team's efforts to continue Qatar handball's presence on the podiums, and to enhance the successes achieved at the regional and international levels.

The director of the Qatari youth and junior handball teams, Salem Mohammed al-Dosari, confirmed the team's readiness to participate in the Asian Men's Junior Handball Championship.

In a statement to the Qatar News Agency (QNA), al-Dosari said they benefited greatly from participating in the friendly tournament in the UAE, reaching the final and securing second place. The results were not the primary objective, he said, as the focus was on gaining technical experience and assessing the players' readiness as part of their preparation programme for the

Asian Championship in China.

He added that during the final stage of their preparations in Doha, they played three friendly matches against Bahrain's national team.

These matches were an important opportunity for the coaching staff to evaluate the team's performance. Al-Dosari said that the team is now fully prepared for the tournament.

They will play one final international friendly against the Chinese national team in China to ensure their technical preparations are complete before their opening match against Korea on July 15. (QNA)

## 12 IAS undergraduate fellows earn international recognition at IAMCR 2026

Undergraduate researchers from Northwestern University in Qatar (NUQ)'s Institute for Advanced Study in the Global South (#IAS\_NUQ) will present original scholarship alongside leading international academics at the 2026 International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) Conference, marking a significant milestone for the Institute's Global Undergraduate Fellowship.

Following a rigorous blind peer-review process, 12 projects developed through the year-long fellowship were accepted to the conference, with ten featured in the final programme.

The fellows will present alongside graduate students, postdoctoral researchers, and established scholars from around the world, reflecting the scholarly quality

of their work and the strength of undergraduate research at Northwestern Qatar.

"The work of our undergraduate fellows demonstrates what is possible when students are entrusted with ambitious research and supported through close mentorship," said Marwan M Kraidy, dean and CEO of NUQ.

The accepted projects explore a broad range of issues affecting communities across the Global South, including migration, memory, cultural heritage, gender, identity, and social justice. Together, they demonstrate how rigorous research and creative practice can generate new ways of understanding complex social issues while bringing underrepresented perspectives into international academic conversations.

Many of the presentations embrace multimodal forms of schol-



arship, an area that sits at the heart of #IAS\_NUQ's mission. Fellows will present documentary films, interactive digital experiences, graphic narratives, oral history projects, educational websites, and game-based research that combine academic inquiry with evidence-based storytelling.

Five fellows will present original documentary films exploring themes ranging from displacement and cultural memory to migration, gender identity, and

women's lived experiences. Their work will be shared both through scholarly conference presentations and through the conference's Flow34 screenings, creating opportunities for delegates to engage with research through multiple forms of storytelling.

Other fellows will present innovative digital and creative projects, including an interactive oral history documenting the experiences of Ahiska Turks, an educational platform exploring

Kazakh ornamentation, a graphic novel examining gender-based violence in Kyrgyzstan, and an immersive game prototype centred on the 1986 Jeltoksan protests in Kazakhstan.

Maryam al-Musleh's paper on Gulf Television, for example, is one of only two papers on the Gulf region in the programme. Collectively, these projects illustrate how emerging scholars are expanding the possibilities of communication research through interdisciplinary and creative methodologies.

The fellows' research aligns closely with this year's IAMCR theme, foregrounding voices and experiences that have often remained at the margins of global scholarship. Representing multiple countries, cultures, and languages, their work contributes fresh perspectives on memory,

identity, resilience, and social transformation.

Their participation forms part of a broader #IAS\_NUQ presence at IAMCR, which includes faculty, postdoctoral scholars, and Institute leadership. Together, they reflect the Institute's commitment to cultivating emerging scholars while creating opportunities for undergraduate researchers to contribute meaningfully to international academic dialogue.

Presenting at IAMCR offers the fellows an opportunity not only to share their work with leading scholars from around the world, but also to engage in conversations shaping the future of media and communication research. Their participation exemplifies NUQ's distinctive approach to integrating undergraduate education, original research, and evidence-based storytelling on a global stage.

# Iran mourners defiant at Ali Khamenei burial

AFP  
Mashhad

Calling for revenge and rejecting any compromise with the West, Iranians loyal to the Islamic republic braved sweltering heat yesterday to mass for the burial of supreme leader Ali Khamenei in his hometown of Mashhad.

An Israeli strike killed Khamenei in late February on the first day of the US-Israeli war against Iran, bringing an end to his more than three and a half decades in power.

Beating their chests and weeping, mourners lined the route as they waited for Khamenei's coffin to arrive at the eastern city's shrine of Imam Reza, the holiest site for Shias in Iran and the burial place he had chosen in his will.

State TV reported that a helicopter would transport the body across the final stretch to the shrine because the main avenue was expected to be crammed with people.

With new hostilities breaking out with the United States even after an accord last month to end the war, at least one fighter jet escorted the plane carrying the late Iranian leader's coffin to Mashhad.

The burial is to be the final act in a marathon six days of funeral ceremonies, which have allowed people to pay tribute in Tehran, the clerical hub of Qom and also Iraq.

Led by the funeral eulogist, they chanted slogans against compromise and US President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

"The loss of the leader is heavier than losing our parents," said Hoda, 35, a housewife attending the funeral.

From the early hours of the morning, mourners dressed largely in black streamed towards the shrine carrying red flags despite temperatures nearing 40C.

Fire trucks sprayed water over the crowd as the heat intensified while fighter jets conducted low-flights over the event in what local media said was to provide security.

Some mourners poured water over their heads while others lay in patches of shade waiting for the funeral procession, which arrived shortly after 2:00pm during the hottest part of the day.

"People here all seek revenge," said Mohammad Afsharian, 41, a shop owner.

"I don't know what's the story with diplomacy and what's the policy to continue diplomacy but all the people are seeking revenge," he said.

The anger echoed criticism from Iranian hardliners, who have repeatedly attacked President Masoud Pezeshkian's government for pursuing talks with Washington after the killing of Khamenei.

"Only revenge, only revenge can soothe the pain," said Tahereh Rahmani, 37, a school executive.

Near the mausoleum, many children were present. Many came with their families, wearing caps in the colours of the Islamic republic.

At the foot of a hotel called Miami, a giant banner showed a caricature of Trump with a



Crowds of mourners surround the convoy carrying the coffins of Iran's slain supreme leader Ali Khamenei and members of his family during a funeral procession before his burial in Mashhad yesterday. (AFP)

bounty on his head.

Another sign showed Netanyahu with a message in English: "There will be blood."

The prayer will be led by Hossein Noori Hamedani, a 101-year-old ayatollah and conservative figure in the Islamic republic.

Meanwhile, the eruption of fighting forced the closure of

the rail link between Tehran and Mashhad, which is located some 800km (500 miles) from the capital, although road transport was being organised for stranded passengers, the state rail company said.

Observers have been watching closely for any signs of Khamenei's son and successor Mojtaba

Khamenei, who has yet to make any public appearances and was said to have been injured in the same strike that killed his father.

Khamenei will be buried with his infant granddaughter, son-in-law, daughter and Mojtaba Khamenei's wife Zahra Haddad Adel, who were all killed in the February 28 strikes.

## Amnesty urges investigating Israeli attacks on Lebanon as 'war crimes'

AFP  
Beirut

Amnesty International yesterday accused Israel of wiping out families in its strikes on Lebanon during its war with Hezbollah, calling for those attacks to be investigated as war crimes.

Hezbollah drew Lebanon into the Middle East war on March 2 by launching rockets at Israel in support of its backer Iran.

Israel responded with major air strikes and a ground invasion, killing more than 4,300 people according to Lebanese authorities, including more than 250 children.

Amnesty analysed three strikes on civilian homes between March 6 and 13, in which 24 civilians were killed, 12 of them children.

The London-based rights group accused Israel of "wiping out families" in those strikes and called for them to be treated as "war crimes".

The group said it reached out to Israeli authorities, who said that some of the attacks "were carried out against Hezbollah military objectives", while others were "referred for examination".

The authorities told Amnesty

they were "committed to mitigating harm to civilians during operational activity".

"Despite follow up, the Israeli military did not provide specific information regarding the three attacks... including what the targets may have been," Amnesty added.

Its findings in the investigation were based on interviews with 15 people, including survivors, relatives, paramedics, journalists who visited attack sites and local officials.

"Based on the evidence gathered, in each of these air strikes, Amnesty International has reasonable basis to conclude that Israeli forces violated international humanitarian law, including by failing to distinguish between civilians and military objectives, by carrying out attacks directed against civilians or civilian objects, or by failing to take all feasible precautions to minimise harm to civilians," the report read.

Kristine Beckerle, Amnesty's deputy regional director for the Middle East and North Africa, said that "within the space of just a week - the Israeli military obliterated entire families, including a dozen children, in Lebanon,

demonstrating a callous disregard for civilian lives".

"States must impose an immediate comprehensive arms embargo on Israel and use universal and extraterritorial jurisdiction to investigate and prosecute those responsible," she added.

Israel's Defence Minister Israel Katz said, in a statement yesterday, that the military's operations in Lebanon were a response to attacks by Hezbollah.

"Israel responded with force and, over the past two and half years, has crushed most of Hezbollah's capabilities and its leadership," adding that Israeli forces would remain in their self-declared "security zone" inside Lebanon "as long as necessary" to protect Israel's northern communities.

Last month, Lebanon and Israel concluded a US-backed framework agreement aiming to pave the way for a permanent end to hostilities.

It was preceded by a memorandum of understanding between Iran and the US to end the broader Middle East conflict, which included a ceasefire in Lebanon.

Despite this, Israel still carries out intermittent strikes on southern Lebanon, some of them deadly,

## Palestinian legislative vote set for Nov 28

AFP  
Ramallah

Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas issued a decree yesterday setting legislative elections for November 28, which if they take place, would mark the first such vote in two decades.

The last legislative elections in the Palestinian territories were held in 2006, when Hamas won, defeating Abbas's Fatah party, which had previously dominated Palestinian politics.

As a result, the Palestinian Legislative Council, which is the parliament of Abbas's Palestinian Authority (PA), has not met since 2007.

"The presidential decree calls on the Palestinian people in Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to participate in free and direct legislative elections to elect members of the Palestinian Legislative Council on the date specified," the official Wafa news agency reported, citing the decree.

Holding elections is part of the reforms demanded by the international community, including the European Union.

Abbas, 90, won the last Palestinian presidential election in 2005 with a mandate of four years, meaning his term should have expired in 2009.

However his term was extended and no presidential election has been held since, with Abbas ruling by presidential decree, facing criticism at home and abroad.

Ghassan Khatib, a political science professor at Birzeit University, said he believed Abbas was now serious about holding elections for both domestic and international reasons.

"There is a feeling among everyone that Palestinian legitimacy has eroded because of how long it has been since elections were held," Khatib told AFP, describing a "gap between the public and the leadership and a need to 'renew the blood'" at the top.

"The absence of a legislative council for such a long time has caused significant damage to the political system," he added.

The Palestinian Authority has faced widespread criticism over corruption, stagnation and declining legitimacy, with donors increasingly tying their financial and diplomatic support to reform, par-

ticularly of local governance.

In 2021, Abbas announced legislative and presidential elections to be held in May and July of that year respectively.

They were then postponed indefinitely due to the absence of guarantees that voting could take place in Israel-annexed east Jerusalem.

In April, Palestinians went to the polls to elect municipal council heads in the occupied West Bank, in the first vote since the outbreak of the Gaza war in October 2023.

Khatib said the main obstacle for elections would be logistical challenges arising from Israeli measures in the Gaza Strip, as well as in east Jerusalem and the West Bank, which Israel has occupied since 1967.

Under the October 2025 US-brokered ceasefire, a technocratic committee has been formed to govern Gaza, but it has yet to enter the Palestinian territory.

Khatib added that the international community had a responsibility to "pressure Israel to provide an appropriate environment, or at least to refrain from measures that would hinder these elections".

## Zambian vice-president survives as chopper crashes on takeoff

Zambia's vice-president said she and seven other people survived unharmed after their helicopter crashed just after takeoff yesterday while they were campaigning for next month's elections.

Zambia goes to the polls on August 13 with President Hakainde Hichilema expected to win a second term as head of the country, one of Africa's top copper producers. Vice-President Mutale Nalumango, 71, told Diamond TV online the helicopter came down as she and her team were leaving a campaign rally in the northeastern town of Nakonde.

"After we lifted off, I don't know whether it was a minute or two... and then we came down," she said, showing no signs of injury.

"We were eight and all of us are fine," she said. It was not clear what caused the crash but the chopper was badly damaged, she said. Nalumango had undergone a routine medical check after the crash and was discharged in good health, a government statement said. Pictures shared on social media showed the white air force helicopter on its side having apparently crashed into a tree. (AFP)

## Syria welcomes US' removal from blacklist

Damascus welcomed a US announcement that it would remove Syria from its list of "state sponsors of terrorism", a move that one economist told AFP opened the door to economic recovery and foreign investment.

"A dark page in Syria's history has been turned," Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shabani wrote on X.

The United States announced on Wednesday that it would remove Syria from its blacklist of countries it accuses of supporting terrorism, a designation it placed on Syria nearly five decades ago and which had curbed investment in the country.

The Syrian foreign ministry called the move "an important development in the course of Syrian-American

relations, which are based on dialogue, mutual respect and shared interests". The US decision "paves the way to boost investment, accelerate economic recovery and reintegrate Syria into the global economy", Syrian Finance Minister Mohammed Barnieh said.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio notified Congress on Wednesday of the long-expected move, which will be effective in 45 days unless lawmakers take the unlikely step of blocking it. It came as President Donald Trump met on the sidelines of a Nato summit in Türkiye with Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa.

The delisting is a "pivotal shift from an economic standpoint", academic and economic adviser Ziad Arbash told AFP.

## Ebola outbreak is 'fastest growing ever' as 600 die

AFP  
Nairobi

The Ebola outbreak in Democratic Republic of Congo is the "fastest growing" ever, African health authorities said yesterday, as the World Health Organisation (WHO) said it had killed 600 people.

Updated numbers issued by the UN health agency showed there have been 1,759 confirmed cases in DR Congo since the outbreak was declared in mid-May, including 600 confirmed deaths.

"This is the fastest growing Ebola outbreak ever, not only among the previous Bundibugyo outbreaks, but all the different viruses that are causing Ebola," Wessam Mankoula, head of emergency preparedness and response for the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) told reporters.

The deadliest Ebola outbreak - in 2013-16 in West Africa - had 994 cases in the first six weeks, compared to 1,596 in the current one, he said.

"Unfortunately the virus is still ahead of our response. It's moving faster than deploying the resources to control the situation," Mankoula said, adding that the number of cases was estimated to



Healthcare workers a patient suffering from the Ebola virus disease from an ambulance at the Ebola Treatment Centre in Bunia, Ituri, in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo. (AFP/File photo)

be doubling every 28 days.

He said \$1.4bn was needed in total for the disease and humanitarian response.

"We need to surge our response, and surging our response means financial resources, human resources," Wessam said. "We are urging all partners, donors... to fast-track the disbursement of those resources."

Ebola spreads through close contact and infected bodily fluids. The current outbreak is caused by Bundibugyo, a rare species that has no approved vaccine or treatment and is believed to have spread for some time before it was detected.

The WHO's figures for the DRC, which come from the health

authorities in the vast country, show that the outbreak there has a case fatality rate of 34%.

A total of 285 patients in the DRC have recovered, while 304 suspected cases of the viral haemorrhagic fever are under investigation.

The outbreak in northeastern DRC has hit four provinces but is focused on Ituri province.

The trial of two potential treatments for Bundibugyo began in the DRC on July 2, and is evaluating the effectiveness of the monoclonal antibody MBP134 and the antiviral drug remdesivir, alone and in combination.

The DRC's 17th Ebola outbreak was declared on May 15 after several deaths in Ituri, a mineral-

rich province plagued by armed groups.

"Population movements, persistent insecurity, and the fragility of the health system continue to complicate efforts to bring the outbreak under control," Anne Anicia, the WHO's representative in the DRC, said Tuesday.

She said there were now around 700 beds across 22 treatment centres and 300 more beds in the pipeline, with centres operating at around 90% capacity.

More than 10,000 contacts of infected people are being monitored, at a follow-up rate of 82%. The WHO believes a rate of 95% is needed to get on top of the outbreak.

Laboratory capacity has increased from 30 tests per day in the capital Kinshasa to more than 2,000 in decentralised labs in the affected provinces.

One of the affected provinces is South Kivu, which has seen clashes between the Congolese armed forces and the Rwanda-backed M23 armed group.

UN rights chief Volker Turk yesterday called for an immediate end to the fighting, deploring its impact on civilians and saying there were growing fears that the increased clashes could force further displacement, including into other countries.

## World's chemical weapons watchdog reinstates Syria

AFP  
The Hague

The world's chemical weapons watchdog reinstated Syria yesterday, noting a "significant change in circumstances" since the fall of Bashar al-Assad and "concrete steps" to dismantle his deadly stockpile of banned substances.

In 2021, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) took the unprecedented step of stripping Syria of its voting rights after finding its air force had used nerve agent sarin and chlorine gas on its own people.

But since Assad's 2024 overthrow, the new authorities in Damascus have vowed to co-operate with the OPCW to destroy the chemical weapons the former president was repeatedly accused of using during Syria's 13-year civil war.

The new Syrian government has "committed to fulfilling Syria's obligation under the (Chemical Weapons) Convention and... since taken concrete steps to co-operate... to achieve this goal," the OPCW said in a statement.

The decision "marks another milestone in the OPCW's efforts to achieve the complete and verified elimination of all remain-

ing chemical weapons associated with the former Syrian government," said the watchdog's Director-General Fernando Arias.

Syria's foreign ministry on Thursday welcomed the decision, saying it "reflects the international community's confidence in the transformation that Syria has undergone and in the efforts of its institutions to fulfil their commitments".

It stated Syria's "commitment to continuing full and transparent co-operation" with the OPCW and thanked the countries that supported the decision to reinstate it, particularly Qatar, "for its diplomatic efforts, which contributed to achieving consensus".

In 2013, Syria agreed to join the OPCW and disclose and hand over its toxic stockpile under Russian and US pressure, and to avert the threat of air strikes by Washington and its allies.

The post-Assad government has allowed OPCW inspectors to establish a permanent presence in the country to document suspected chemical weapons sites and interview witnesses to past attacks.

The OPCW in its statement welcomed the "tangible progress" made and urged Damascus to continue co-operating "towards closing the chemical weapons dossier inherited from the former regime".



## Florida airport renamed 'Trump' in latest push to expand his brand

AFP  
West Palm Beach

A Florida airport was renamed after Donald Trump yesterday, accelerating a push by the US president and supporters to plaster his name and image on everything from national landmarks to banknotes.

The Republican leader's son Eric celebrated by landing in the private family Boeing 757 – so-called "Trump Force One" – at what had been known as Palm Beach International Airport for nearly half a century.

"A beautiful day," a grinning Eric Trump said on Fox News at the newly minted President Donald J. Trump International Airport, a short drive from the family's Mar-a-Lago golf resort and compound. The airport renaming was signed into law by Florida's Republican governor, Ron DeSantis.

"I don't think there's anybody more synonymous with Palm

Beach than Donald Trump and maybe all of Florida," Eric Trump said.

He pointed out that the main road leading out of the airport is already called "President Donald J. Trump Boulevard."

And now anyone flying into Palm Beach will have a ticket where "you're going to see 'DJT' in perpetuity."

Travellers at the airport yesterday morning were mixed on the name change.

Corporate pilot Chris Bailey welcomed the switch, telling AFP that Trump has "certainly done enough to warrant a name of an airport."

But others were hostile. "Palm Beach is a better brand. People don't really like Donald Trump," John Manov, a doctor, said. "It seems in poor taste."

Breaking the long-held US tradition against celebrating living figures – and particularly serving presidents – on currency and buildings, the Trump name and



A new welcome sign reading "Donald J. Trump International Airport" is seen at the airport's main entrance ramp in West Palm Beach, yesterday. (AFP)

image are spreading rapidly.

Officials, including US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, were due to unveil the Donald J. Trump

Bridge in Tennessee yesterday.

Washington already features the renamed Donald J. Trump US Institute of Peace and giant posters

with his face have been hung from the facades of major government buildings.

Trump's name was briefly im-

posed on the famous Kennedy Arts Center in the capital, before a judge ruled this illegal.

In addition, there are Trump-branded visa, medical and other official government programmes.

His image is due to appear on some US passports and already appears on passes to National Parks. An entire "Trump class" of naval ships has been announced.

In yet another first, Trump's signature will appear on US dollar notes later this year, the Treasury says.

Critics liken the spread of the Trump brand to cults of personality usually seen in authoritarian countries and dictatorships.

Eric Trump dismissed there was anything wrong with the airport renaming, telling Fox News that "anything that bears our name is slightly controversial."

Asked about how the president feels to have the Florida airport named after him, Eric Trump said he was "honoured" and "humbled."

## Canada wants broader Saudi ties, won't lecture from 'afar': Carney

AFP  
Riyadh

Canada wants closer ties with Saudi Arabia and will not lecture about rights "from afar," Prime Minister Mark Carney said yesterday during the first visit to the kingdom by a Canadian premier in 25 years.

Carney flew to Jeddah from the Nato summit in Türkiye for talks with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, signing agreements that aim to expand partnerships in sectors ranging from energy to critical minerals and artificial intelligence.

Saudi-Canadian relations fractured under Carney's predecessor Justin Trudeau, whose government publicly scolded the kingdom for its treatment of human rights activists, including the prominent blogger Raif Badawi whose family moved to Canada.

Carney framed the trip as part of his global effort to diversify Canada's trade ties with key regional powers to help reduce economic dependence on the US.

Asked about his decision to re-engage with Saudi Arabia, in an apparent departure from the previous Liberal government's approach, Carney said: "Engagement is not endorsement."

"Engaging with the country doesn't mean that we agree with everything that a country is doing."

He said Canada needs to "diversify our partnerships" as it has become "over-reliant on a partner," naming the US.



Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman walking with Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney during his official visit at Al-Salam Royal Palace in Jeddah yesterday. (Reuters)

"We are actively engaging with key partners around the world," Carney told reporters.

Noting he is his country's first leader to visit Saudi Arabia in a quarter century, Carney emphasised what he sees as the value of private, face-to-face diplomacy.

"Lecturing countries from afar is an ineffective strategy. It's satisfying, but it's ineffective," he said.

Canada-Saudi relations soured in 2018 after Ottawa demanded the release of jailed human rights campaigners, including Raif Badawi's sister Samar.

The kingdom reacted with fury,

expelling the Canadian ambassador and severing all trade and investment ties in protest.

Carney's office said the prime minister and crown prince will finalise a deal next year that will make it easier for Canadian businesses to expand into Saudi Arabia.

Carney was also asked about negotiations with the US, and whether he had personally made progress with President Donald Trump on unlocking a reported impasse over the future of the North American free trade deal.

"I'll keep you posted," Carney said.

## Jailed Ecuadoran mayor refuses surgery

AFP  
Quito

The imprisoned mayor of Ecuador's most populous city and main commercial port refused surgery Wednesday, Interior Minister John Reimberg said, despite claims that he is suffering from heart and gallbladder conditions.

Aquiles Alvarez – a vocal critic of right-wing President Daniel Noboa – is in prison after a February arrest over alleged money laundering.

Alvarez was flown by helicopter to a private clinic for testing, but later "rejected the treatment and the gallbladder surgery," according to Reimberg.

A lawyer for the mayor, Julio

Cesar Cueva, said that "the decision had been made for the mayor to undergo surgery, but it will not be today."

Both the minister and the lawyer said the mayor was back in El Encuentro prison, a mega-security facility in neighbouring Santa Elena province.

Alvarez, an ally of opposition socialist ex-president Rafael Correa, has criticised Noboa's war on gangs, including his decision to send soldiers into the streets, and has not ruled out running for president.

After his arrest, prosecutors released pictures showing bags of money as well as computers and mobile phones.

In July of last year he was fitted with an electronic ankle monitor while being investigated in a separate case, for alleged fuel trafficking.

Alvarez denies all the allegations against him, arguing that they are an attempt to disqualify him from running for re-election next year.

Human rights groups and relatives of inmates have questioned the management of Ecuador's prison system.

Five mayors from different Ecuadorian cities have been arrested for alleged corruption ahead of November local elections, which have been clouded by the suspension of political parties opposed to the government.

Guayaquil, a city of nearly three million people, is the nexus of Ecuador's ballooning drug trade.

Its port has become a major transit point for drug smugglers trafficking cocaine from neighbouring Colombia and Peru en route to the US and Europe.

## Mexico seeks US prosecution over immigrant deaths

Reuters  
Mexico City

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum said yesterday that her government plans to file criminal complaints in the US regarding Mexican citizens who have died in immigration custody or while being targeted in anti-immigration operations.

Fourteen Mexican nationals have died while in the custody of US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and three more died in arrest operations conducted by the agency, the Mexican government said.

On Tuesday, a US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agent shot Lorenzo Salgado Araujo, 52, a Mexican national living in the US illegally for three decades. His killing, which sparked protests in Houston, brought to at least six the number of people shot dead in immigration enforcement

operations since January 2025, when President Donald Trump returned to office and launched a campaign of mass deportations.

"We cannot turn a blind eye to the Mexicans who have died," Sheinbaum said during her daily press conference, adding that the criminal complaints will seek to hold accountable those considered to have committed homicides or human rights violations. Sheinbaum said that her government provides assistance to all citizens who request it, but "especially to Mexicans whose only crime is working honestly in the US."

Although the Mexican government has previously spoken out about the deaths of Mexican nationals in the US, yesterday's announcement represents significantly stronger criticism as relations between the two neighbours continue to worsen. In a response to a Reuters request for comment, the US Department of Homeland Security said

that there has been no increase in the rate of deaths of detainees under the Trump administration and that "all detainees receive full due process and are provided with proper meals, water, medical treatment, and have opportunities to communicate with their family members and lawyers."

The Department of Justice did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Mexican Foreign Minister Roberto Velasco said the move comes after repeated failed attempts to engage with the US through diplomatic channels.

"We are going to move beyond the diplomatic sphere and go directly to US prosecutors to file complaints regarding these incidents, requesting that they are investigated as criminal matters," Velasco said.

The Mexican government will also file civil lawsuits against the private companies that operate immigration detention centres in the US, Velasco added.

## Costa Rica's president clashes with judiciary over tackling drug violence

Reuters  
San Jose

A fierce standoff between Costa Rica's recently elected President Laura Fernandez and the country's judiciary is stalling a co-ordinated state response to violent drug-related crime in the once-peaceful Central American nation.

The turmoil reflects a broader crisis across Central America, a major cocaine transit corridor to the United States, where violence and corruption have destabilised governments as criminal groups exploit institutional weaknesses, experts say.

Costa Rica's institutional clash, coming just two months into Fernandez's term, has centred around significant budget cuts imposed on the judiciary and a legislative proposal to have Congress, rather than the Supreme Court, appoint the attorney general.

Tensions peaked last week when Fernandez accused the judiciary of being infiltrated by organised crime "to the core" and criticised courts for blocking the "iron fist" security policies her administration champions, inspired by Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele, who has radically brought down crime in El Salvador by incarcerating some 90,000 people.



Costa Rica's President Laura Fernandez delivers a speech during her inauguration ceremony at the Estadio Nacional in San Jose. (Reuters/File Photo)

Judicial officials have denied corruption allegations, challenging Fernandez to provide evidence. They argue that budget cuts planned for 2026 and 2027 threaten democratic checks and balances and hinder the fight against crime.

Fernandez campaigned on a hardline anti-crime platform, vowing to restore order in Costa Rica, a country of 5.2 million people, where an average of two people are murdered every day. The homicide rate has largely remained steady since hitting a record 17.2 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2023, double the rate of a decade ago.

Security Minister Gerald Campos told Reuters that only 38% of homicides result in a conviction. "The problem here is not a lack of an army... the prob-

lem is a lack of convictions in the courts," he said.

Experts, judicial authorities and the government attribute the crisis in Costa Rica to drug trafficking groups using the country's strategic location to ship narcotics to northern markets.

"Facing an enemy with infinite resources... fighting among ourselves makes it very difficult to be prepared," said Evelyn Villarreal, coordinator of the State of Justice report, a research programme that evaluates the country's judicial system.

Weeks after taking office, Fernandez called for the resignation of Attorney General Carlo Diaz and top Supreme Court magistrates, citing a lack of action on the security crisis. None have stepped down.

## Overcrowded shelters, poor water access pose health risks after Venezuela quakes: PAHO

Reuters  
Caracas

The biggest health risks following twin earthquakes that ripped across Venezuela's northern coast last month include interruptions to regular medical care, crowded shelters and lack of access to clean water, the head of the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO) said yesterday.

The entity is working with Venezuela's health ministry to trace any outbreaks of respiratory or digestive illnesses, especially in shelters set up for those who lost their

homes, officials from PAHO, the Americas branch of the World Health Organisation, added in a call with journalists.

"In the coming weeks, the greatest health risks may stem not only from injuries caused by the earthquakes, but also from disruptions to health services, overcrowded conditions, deficiencies in water and sanitation and reduced access to vaccination and routine healthcare," said PAHO's director Jarbas Barbosa.

He emphasised that vaccine access is a priority, and noted that Venezuela's coverage indicators were low even before the quakes. The people now living at more than 80 temporary shelters are

especially at risk for outbreaks.

PAHO is working with the government to incorporate field hospitals and shelters into an early warning system, focusing on diarrhoeal diseases, respiratory infections, febrile syndromes and vaccine-preventable illness.

Venezuela's health system had deteriorated significantly after years of economic crisis, contributing to a lack of care available immediately after the quake, said Ciro Ugarte, PAHO's director for health emergencies.

The migration of healthcare professionals in recent years – part of broader waves of people leaving the country – also left Venezuela in a difficult position.

"The shortage of essential services in the immediate aftermath was critical, and facilities that had not been intended for trauma care or emergency patient treatment had to be adapted for that purpose throughout Venezuela," Ugarte said.

Care has improved with international assistance, personnel from other regions and field hospitals, he said.

Acting President Delcy Rodriguez has vehemently defended the government's handling of the quakes, amid criticism that civilians have led many of the rescue and recovery operations, with the help of professional rescue teams from around the world, firefighters and army volunteers.

Authorities raised their death toll to 3,811 on Wednesday, adding 16,740 were injured and 17,907 people are homeless.

Three hundred victims in La Guaira, the hardest-hit state, have been buried without being identified, but Venezuela's forensic service is keeping records to allow for matches at a later time, said Armando De Negri, PAHO's acting director in Venezuela.

"The exact location where they are buried is recorded, and material currently being collected – such as teeth, bones, and fingernails, which provide stable genetic material – is preserved and archived," he said. "All are in coffins, all have been handled properly."

## Top court upholds Korean ex-president Yoon's 7-year jail sentence

AFP  
Seoul

Republic of Korea's highest court upheld ex-president Yoon Suk-yeol's seven-year prison sentence yesterday over crimes tied to his botched 2024 martial law declaration and its chaotic aftermath.

The case covered accusations that Yoon had obstructed cabinet deliberations and used forged signatures of the prime minister in the lead-up to the declaration, as

well as using presidential security agents to block his own arrest after lawmakers had nullified it.

The disgraced former president is already in detention while he appeals a separate life sentence for leading an insurrection with his martial law declaration, which he insists was motivated by the public interest.

In the case brought before the Supreme Court, Yoon was accused of obstructing deliberations by convening only a select group of ministers for a meeting shortly before he declared martial law.

Other charges included allegedly creating and destroying a false martial law decree bearing forged signatures from the prime minister, ordering officials to distribute a misleading press release to foreign media and directing an army commander to delete records from secure military phones.

Prosecutors had sought a 10-year prison sentence for Yoon.

In January, a lower court had sentenced Yoon to five years in prison after convicting him on most charges.

In April, an appeals court up-

held the ruling, added a guilty verdict on the misleading press release, and raised the sentence to seven years.

Both prosecutors and Yoon's legal team had appealed to the Supreme Court, whose rulings are final.

"All appeals are dismissed," a Supreme Court judge said in a televised ruling, adding that the lower court's judgment "contained no errors".

The ex-president did not attend yesterday's hearing.

Yoon's legal team expressed

"deep regret", accusing the Supreme Court of concluding the case "without sufficient deliberation".

The ex-president's lawyers plan to challenge the ruling on constitutional grounds and said they would raise a complaint.

Prosecutors said they respected the top court's decision, adding they would do their "utmost to successfully prosecute the remaining cases related to insurrection."

The top court said yesterday that measures by Yoon's presi-



Yoon Suk-yeol. (AFP/File photo)

dential security team, including human-chain drills and barbed wire, to obstruct a court warrant could not be justified as legitimate security activities.

The former president has insisted his martial law declaration was "solely for the sake of the nation".

## North Korea prepares for floods as heavy rains loom

AFP  
Seoul

North Korea has prepared key sectors for heavy rainfall and floods, state media said yesterday, warning of "disastrous" conditions as both sides of the Korean Peninsula brace for intense monsoon weather.

Natural disasters tend to have an outsized impact on isolated North Korea due to its weak infrastructure and economy.

Authorities have issued repeated calls to minimise damage from increasingly frequent extreme weather, which has hit the impoverished country's agriculture and infrastructure in recent years.

Pyeongyang's State Hydro-Meteorological Administration issued a heavy rain warning, forecasting 100-150mm (3.9-5.9 inches) of rain between Thursday night and Friday morning across several southern provinces, state television said, according to South Korea's Yonhap News Agency.

North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said authorities had intensified disaster prevention efforts in recent weeks.

The Kim Chaek Iron and Steel Complex, widely believed to be the largest steel mill in North Korea, completed river dredging, built retaining walls and reinforced embankments in flood-prone areas, KCNA said.

The Musan Mining Complex in the country's north has also carried out dredging and landslide prevention work, while rearrang-

ing mining facilities to prevent iron ore from being washed away.

Monsoon downpours have also battered South Korea, where heavy rain advisories were in effect Thursday for parts of the Seoul metropolitan area, mountainous areas of Gangwon province and parts of North Gyeong-sang province.

Emergency crews were searching for a person swept away by a swollen stream, while more than 300 cases of property damage were reported.

In the central province of North Chungcheong, torrential rain damaged schools and other educational facilities, with classes suspended in some areas.

Last summer was South Korea's hottest on record, with both the North and the South recording their warmest June.

Scientists say human-driven climate change is increasing the intensity, length and frequency of extreme weather events such as heatwaves.

Adding to the mix is the return this year of El Nino, a natural climate phenomenon that warms Pacific surface temperatures and can bring heat, drought and heavy rain to parts of Asia.

North Korea has long endured power shortages, and experts say most residents have no access to air conditioning.

The country was hit by severe flooding in its northern regions near China in 2024, with South Korean media reporting the number of dead and missing in the North could be as high as 1,500 - estimates Pyongyang dismissed at the time.

## China, Taiwan brace for Bavi, days after Typhoon Maysak

Reuters  
Beijing/Suao, Taiwan/Tokyo

Fishermen sheltered in harbours, residents queued for sandbags and farmers raced to bring in crops on Thursday as China and Taiwan braced for Typhoon Bavi, possibly the most destructive tropical storm in years.

As Bavi churned southeast of Taiwan, rescue workers in southern China continued to search for victims and survivors of Typhoon Maysak, which killed at least 39 people earlier this week.

In the northeastern Taiwanese fishing town of Suao, hundreds of boats crowded into port to shelter from the approaching storm.

"Don't be fooled by the nice and calm weather now. A storm like this could be the most terrifying," said Chen Ming-hui, captain of a 3-metric-tonne fishing vessel, recalling how previous typhoons had sunk boats and inundated the town.

Authorities in Taiwan warned that Bavi could bring up to 1m (3.3 feet) of rain to mountains north of Taipei and placed about 29,000 soldiers on standby, according to the defence ministry. The storm could become Taiwan's most powerful typhoon since Kong-rey in 2024, which killed three people.

Bavi, with winds approaching 200kph (124mph), spans about 1,000km (621 miles) at its widest point, roughly the width of France, and is forecast to skirt northern Taiwan before making landfall in China's eastern Fujian province on Saturday evening, according to China's National Meteorological Centre.

Storms of this size have been "fairly rare in recent years," Jason Chang, Taiwan's Central Weather Administration forecaster, told Reuters, adding that Bavi is set to be the largest storm by size to hit the island since 1987.

Taiwan's main international airport at Taoy-



A woman clears equipment from a house during a cleanup operation in Gantang after it was flooded when a nearby reservoir collapsed in China's southwest Guangxi region yesterday. (AFP)

uan said Taiwanese airlines had cancelled all Saturday departures because of the typhoon.

Across the Taiwan Strait, rescue workers in China's Guangxi region were still combing through wreckage left by Typhoon Maysak. At least 39 people were killed, with nine others still missing.

China, the world's second-largest economy, as well as neighbouring Japan and Taiwan, are increasingly exposed to destructive weather events that scientists link to climate change. This year is of particular concern because the expected emergence of El Nino could drive up temperatures and help fuel more frequent and intense typhoons.

"Some loss of wind intensity is anticipated starting Thursday, but Bavi will remain a dangerous storm as it impacts Taiwan and eastern China later Friday into Monday," said Jason Nicholls, an expert at AccuWeather, a commercial forecasting service.

In Japan's Okinawa Prefecture, the country's meteorological agency warned residents

to remain on high alert today and tomorrow for violent winds, landslides, flooding and storm surges.

Japan Airlines said it had cancelled 50 flights for Friday, affecting about 7,600 passengers, while All Nippon Airways cancelled 34 flights affecting around 1,800 travellers, with further cancellations planned for Saturday.

"We should pay much attention to Bavi as it has spent a long time intensifying over the open Pacific, extracting energy from warm oceans and accumulating large amounts of moisture," said Xiangbo Feng, a tropical cyclone researcher at Imperial College London.

"When it makes landfall or gets close to coastal regions, the damage could be catastrophic. A small change in Bavi's track could have a significant influence."

Even as authorities prepared for Bavi's arrival, communities in southern China were still grappling with the devastation left by Typhoon Maysak.

The remnants of Maysak spawned at least two inland tornadoes and major flooding in China's central Hubei province.

In the worst-hit towns in the Guangxi region, residents were trying to piece their lives back together before the next storm hit. Footage broadcast by state media showed people clambering out of second-storey windows onto the backs of rescue workers to escape their apartments and pulling belongings from floodwaters, while aid workers deployed drones to deliver essentials to inaccessible areas.

Rows of dead pigs lay on their backs at a farm in Binyang County in images published by Beijing News, their bloated bodies mottled grey and already decomposing after being submerged for two days, the report said.

At Guigang Zoo, three lions died in floodwaters, China's Global Times reported, while about 100 animals - including zebras, porcupines, parrots and raccoons - remained missing, according to the zoo's operator.

## Malaysia, Thai PMs resolve fisheries issue, to work on special economic border zone

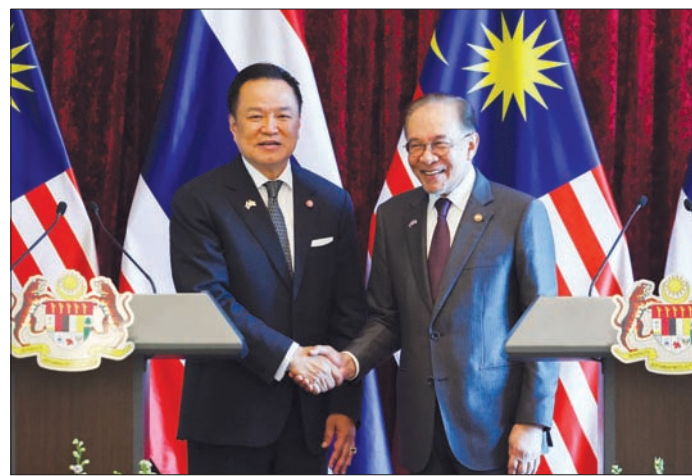
Reuters  
Kuala Lumpur

The leaders of Malaysia and Thailand said yesterday they would work on developing a special border economic zone, and had resolved an issue that had disrupted trade in sea-food between the neighbours.

In May, Thailand restricted the import of Malaysian-caught sea bass due to concerns over chemical residues, prompting Kuala Lumpur to temporarily ban some varieties of Thai shrimp over food safety controls last month. "We have resolved this outstanding issue of fisheries... we agree it should be effected in one week," Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim told reporters following a meeting with his Thai counterpart, Anutin Charnvirakul, in Malaysia's administrative capital Putrajaya.

Anutin is on a two-day visit to Malaysia that is aimed at boosting economic co-operation and smoothing over longstanding border issues between the Southeast Asian neighbours.

The leaders agreed to proceed with developing a special border economic zone, and to facilitate exchanges in immigration customs between the two countries, Anwar said.



Thailand's Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul with Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim after a press conference during Anutin's official visit, at the Federal Government office of Perdana Putra in Putrajaya, Malaysia, yesterday. (Reuters)

They also witnessed the signing of a memorandum of understanding on agricultural co-operation.

Today, Anutin and Anwar will travel to the northern Malaysian state of Kedah to jointly open a new border crossing linked to Thailand's customs and immigration complex in Sadao, Songkhla province.

Their visit comes amid renewed security concerns following a recent spike in violence tied to the decades-old separatist insurgen-

cy in Thailand's predominantly Malay-Muslim southern border provinces.

"Ending the violence and addressing the challenges in Thailand's southern border provinces remains a top priority for my government," Anutin said at the media briefing.

Two Malaysians were injured in a roadside bomb in Narathiwat's Tak Bai district in late June, prompting both countries to tighten border security measures.

## 'China factory fire kills at least 28 people'

A fire that tore through a shoe factory in eastern China yesterday killed at least 28 people, state media said, after dozens of fire and rescue personnel raced to extinguish the blaze. Hours after the fire broke out at the Huiteng Shoes factory around noon, there were fears people were still trapped inside the building in Jinjiang city, Fujian province.

President Xi Jinping said the fire resulted in "heavy

human losses", with state news agency Xinhua later citing a preliminary toll of 28 dead.

Footage shared by state television CCTV showed firefighters dousing the facade and interior of a large, multi-story white building with fire hoses, as thick black smoke poured out. People can be seen taking refuge near the windows and on the roof of the building, while the blaze raged in the lower floors. (AFP)

## Myanmar FM to meet Asean ministers

AFP  
Hanoi

Myanmar's foreign minister will meet his regional Asean counterparts in Bangkok on Sunday, Vietnam's foreign ministry said yesterday, as the pariah state seeks a return to the diplomatic fold.

Myanmar has been largely frozen out of the 11-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) since a military coup ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in 2021, triggering a civil war.

But junta chief Min Aung Hlaing was installed as civilian president in April following highly restricted elections, and neighbouring Thailand has been leading the charge to begin normalising relations.

While informal, Myanmar Foreign Minister Tin Maung Swe's attendance at the talks on Sun-

day represents "another crack in the Asean position", said Richard Horsey, senior Asia advisor at the International Crisis Group.

"It's diplomatic choreography towards an end which is Min Aung Hlaing standing with Asean leaders in Manila in November," he told AFP, referring to the bloc's summit.

But he noted that as Asean chair, the Philippines would make the final decision on whether to invite Min Aung Hlaing - and was "by no means guaranteed" to do so.

The Bangkok talks follow a state visit by Min Aung Hlaing to Laos at the weekend - a trip Horsey described as the "beginning of the end of Asean's principled position" of refusing to normalise relations with Myanmar.

Vietnam Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Pham Thu Hang said there would be two rounds of talks in Bangkok - one with the Myanmar minister and the other without.

They would provide "an op-

portunity for the foreign ministers to engage in direct exchanges, strengthen co-operation, and promote dialogue and reconciliation in Myanmar".

Thailand's foreign ministry said there would be an informal meeting of Asean foreign ministers, including Myanmar, but did not specify the date or location.

A diplomatic source from another Asean member state separately confirmed to AFP that the Myanmar foreign minister would attend the talks in person.

Min Aung Hlaing plunged Myanmar into civil war with his 2021 coup, which ended a decade-long experiment with democracy.

He ruled directly as military chief for five years before becoming civilian president in April after staging elections that excluded Suu Kyi's party and others, and were blocked from rebel-held territory.

His new administration is making a push for international legitimacy, analysts say.

## Nearly 150 Japan academics oppose bill banning national flag desecration

AFP  
Tokyo

A group of nearly 150 Japanese academics said yesterday they had petitioned lawmakers over a bill that criminalises the act of damaging the national flag, arguing it threatens the right to freedom of expression.

The bill, a key part of Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's conservative agenda, states that

anyone who publicly damages, removes or defaces the national flag in a manner that causes significant discomfort or revulsion to others will face up to two years in prison or a fine of up to 200,000 yen (\$1,200).

It cleared the lower house last week, where the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) holds a majority, and could pass through the upper house later this month.

But in a statement submitted to lawmakers, 148 legal experts said

they had "strong concerns that it could curb freedom of political expression" and grave worries "from the viewpoint of criminal law".

At a news conference on Thursday, Takaaki Matsumiya, law professor of Ritsumeikan University, said that "Japan has a history of waging wars of aggression, and even among the Japanese there are some people who have a negative image" of the national flag.

"The ideas of those people should be respected in the process

of legislation," he told reporters.

Unlike the flags of nations such as Germany, Italy and France, which "symbolise the values of freedom and democracy", the Japanese flag "doesn't symbolise such values", he said.

Following its World War II defeat in 1945, Japan established a US-imposed, pacifist constitution, but its national flag remains unchanged.

Matsumiya argued that the bill could also be used "as a tool of hate". "For example, if people joining

anti-foreigner rallies hold a national flag, and if that flag is damaged by those who protest against xenophobia, protesters could be arrested by police," he said.

The statement urged caution over "punishing someone for causing discomfort, because it means it is possible to create various 'crimes of hurting feelings'".

"This kind of law that is open to abuse should never be enacted," the academics said.

The ruling bloc is in a minority

in the upper house, but the flag bill is supported by several other parties in addition to the LDP.

But the legislation also faces significant pushback among opposition parties who say it violates a constitutional right to freedom of expression.

The Centrist Reform Alliance, an opposition party that holds 48 seats in the lower house, has questioned the legal rationale behind the criminalisation of damaging the flag and has urged more careful discussions.

# Labour leadership contest takes Burnham closer to PM's office

AFP  
London

Veteran politician Andy Burnham (pictured) took another step towards becoming the UK's next prime minister yesterday as nominations to replace Keir Starmer as Labour leader formally opened.

The 56-year-old is the only Labour member of parliament to have publicly said they are a candidate to succeed Starmer, who announced he was quitting last month.

A steady trickle of MPs entered Labour's parliamentary office yesterday morning to nominate the person they want to lead Britain's ruling party.

In the absence of a contest, Burnham is expected to be crowned Labour's new leader — and prime minister in waiting — at a special conference on July 17.

Burnham, nicknamed the "King of the North" for winning three consecutive Greater Manchester mayoral elections, would then replace Starmer at 10 Downing Street three days later.

"There's no one else," one Labour MP told AFP on condition of anonymity after casting their vote.

If a contest does take place, then the victor would be announced on August 29 following a ballot of Labour members and affiliated unions.

Burnham's path to Downing Street looked increasingly assured after former armed forces minister Al Carns ruled himself out of the running late Wednesday.

Carns had said he had hoped a leadership contest would give the party the "opportunity for a proper debate".

"But months of internal Labour



politics isn't what the country needs right now. We've got to get on with the job," he said, throwing his support behind Burnham.

Burnham needs the support of 81 of Labour's 402 MPs to become a formal candidate, a tally that he will surpass easily.

He vowed in a keynote speech in June to "bring about the biggest rebalancing of power our country has seen".

He pledged to put power "in the hands of the people and places who can use it best".

"We need a new determination to raise living standards of every single person in this land," he added.

"And we must accept that to do that, to fix the economy and the country, we need to change politics and we need to do it now".

Starmer, under pressure for months over policy U-turns and questions about his judgement, announced on June 22 that he was resigning after losing the support of Labour MPs.

His move came after Burnham won a by-election that allowed him to return to parliament to launch a widely expected leadership challenge.

On the day Starmer announced his resignation, Burnham was

sworn into parliament, becoming an MP again following his stint between 2001 and 2017.

Afterwards, some 200 Labour MPs feted Burnham during a group photo in Westminster, in a clear sign that they expect him to take over.

Former health minister Wes Streeting announced he was dropping his intention to run and backing Burnham.

Burnham — seen as slightly to the left of the more centrist Starmer — is Labour's most popular politician, surveys show.

Many MPs feel he is the party's best chance of clawing back support from Nigel Farage's anti-immigrant Reform UK party before the next general election, expected in 2029.

Reform has led Labour in national opinion polls for well over a year, although the gap has narrowed in recent weeks amid questions over Farage's finances.

Burnham has pledged fiscal discipline and to reduce the country's ballooning welfare bill, having already sought to calm markets by committing to the government's current borrowing limits.

And he has also proposed the creation of a "No. 10 North" to co-ordinate a devolution — a reference to the UK prime minister's address at 10 Downing Street.

One Labour MP, who asked not to be named, said the party was right to "roll the dice" on Burnham, saying "he couldn't be worse than Starmer".

"I hope he's a breath of fresh air," the lawmaker told AFP.

Another, also speaking on condition of anonymity, said he backed Burnham but was concerned that Burnham will only have a few weeks to prepare for government.

# PM-in-waiting vows to rebuild 'hard power' for more dangerous world

Reuters  
London

Britain's likely next prime minister, Andy Burnham, has vowed to strengthen the nation's armed forces and defence industry, arguing that a more dangerous world requires a renewed focus on "hard power".

Burnham, who is expected to replace Keir Starmer as prime minister on July 20, said he wanted investment in defence to help re-industrialise struggling parts of Britain, instead of Britain relying on equipment bought from other countries.

"It is right that we rebuild our hard power for a new era that is very different to the one in which much of our current military

equipment was first designed," Burnham wrote in *The Times* newspaper.

Burnham said recent world events had highlighted the need for Britain to strengthen its defence capabilities, including the US-Israeli war against Iran, Russia's war against Ukraine, and last year's cyber attack on Jaguar Land Rover that he said cost the economy nearly £2bn (\$2.68bn).

Britain also needed to be more open about how and where defence funding was spent and should reduce its reliance on foreign suppliers, he said, arguing that doing so was "critical" for its economic and national security.

Burnham's views on foreign policy are relatively unknown. Before returning to parliament last month, he spent almost a

decade as mayor of Greater Manchester and has never before held a foreign affairs or defence role in government.

In the newspaper article, Burnham pledged to build closer ties with European countries on defence and security, particularly France and Germany, while also committing to speeding up negotiations with the European Union on issues such as tackling illegal migration.

He also confirmed that Starmer's national security adviser, Jonathan Powell, will remain in his role.

Nominations open to select the next leader of the governing Labour Party and British prime minister on Thursday with no other candidate expected to challenge Burnham.

# Royals celebrate ZSL London Zoo bicentenary



King Charles and Queen Camilla feed 'Polly', a Galapagos turtle, with staff member Daniel Kane at ZSL London Zoo, which they visited to celebrate the zoo's 200th anniversary, yesterday. (Reuters)

# India's monsoon to weaken over west, south, slowing crop sowing

Reuters  
Mumbai

A monsoon in India is expected to bring below-average rainfall to the country's western and southern regions over the next fortnight after heavy rain lashed the west coast this week, potentially slowing the sowing of cotton, soybeans and corn, two senior weather officials said.

The monsoon delivers about 70% of India's annual rains to replenish crucial water sources in the nearly \$4 trillion economy, where nearly half of farmland lacks irrigation and about half the population earns its livelihood from agriculture.

"The Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO) is unlikely to be favourable over the next fortnight and the chances of any low-pressure system developing during this period are also low," S D Sanap, a scientist with the India Meteorological Department (IMD), told Reuters.

"As a result, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala are likely to receive below-average rainfall."

An MJO is an eastward-moving band of clouds, rain and winds that circles the tropics every 30 to 60 days. It is a key driver of short-term monsoon activity, with its



A man rides his bike through a flooded road during heavy rains in New Delhi, yesterday. (Reuters)

active phase boosting rainfall and its suppressed phase often bringing dry spells.

India received 39.8% below-average rainfall in June and the IMD has forecast below-average rainfall for July as well.

Heavy rain during the first eight days of July, particularly along the west coast, shrank the country's rainfall deficit to 15.2%.

The sowing of summer crops like rice, cotton, corn and soybeans has trailed last year's pace due to weak June rainfall, with farmers planting 35 million hectares (86.5 million acres) as of July 5, down

21% from a year earlier, farm ministry data showed.

"Farmers have been advised to cultivate short-duration and low-water-intensive crops such as corn, pearl millet and green gram to minimise the impact of delayed rainfall," said Shivraj Singh Chouhan, the farm minister, on Wednesday.

Farmers in central, western and southern India will begin sowing in rainfed areas after the recent showers, but if a dry spell follows immediately, it could affect crop growth, said a Mumbai-based dealer with a global trading house.

# India opposition party alleges vendetta after account freeze

AFP  
New Delhi

An Indian opposition party accused federal investigators yesterday of a "politically motivated" attack after \$46mn was frozen in its bank accounts as part of a money-laundering probe.

Critics and rights groups have accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government of using law enforcement agencies to target its political foes.

India's top financial crimes agency, the Enforcement Directorate, said Wednesday it was investigating alleged illegal transactions involving the Trinamool Congress (TMC), which governed West Bengal state for 15 years before Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)

upstaged it in May.

According to the agency, \$16.8mn was transferred from TMC-linked bank accounts to an aviation firm and associated companies between April 2023 and June this year.

Investigators alleged the funds were used to purchase a private jet and a helicopter that were subsequently leased back to the party.

The TMC has denied any wrongdoing, saying all funds had been "fully and transparently disclosed" to authorities.

"The Enforcement Directorate's decision to freeze the party's bank accounts is a politically motivated act. We strongly condemn this arbitrary and illegal action," it said in a statement on Wednesday.

"The misuse of investigative agencies to target political oppo-

nents has become a hallmark of the BJP's politics and represents a serious assault on democratic institutions and the principles of a level playing field."

Several Indian opposition leaders have faced criminal investigations in recent years, including Arvind Kejriwal, the former chief minister of Delhi.

Kejriwal spent months in jail in 2024 after being arrested over allegations his administration received kickbacks in the allocation of liquor licences. He has denied any wrongdoing.

Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren, another opposition leader, was also arrested and jailed in 2024 on corruption charges that he has denied.

The BJP has repeatedly insisted that corruption cases are pursued independently and in accordance with the law.

# Sri Lanka's spy-thriller probe into deadly 2019 'Easter bombings'

AFP  
Colombo

Suresh Sallay, a retired Sri Lankan major general and counterterrorism expert, has addressed the Pentagon and the United Nations on subjects including social media's role in "radicalisation, extremism and terrorism".

But the island's former spy chief was himself arrested under anti-terrorism laws in February and accused by the government of masterminding the deadliest attack against civilians in Sri Lanka's history.

The so-called Easter bombings on April 21, 2019, which killed 279 people and wounded more than 500, were blamed on militants.

However, the government now accuses Sallay of having "strategically directed" the attacks.

Those killed included 45 for-

eigners, many of them tourists, including Australian, British, Chinese, Danish, Dutch, Japanese and US citizens.

Sallay has not been charged with any offence and denies any wrongdoing, with his next court hearing scheduled for Friday.

The allegations against him mark a dramatic reversal in the official narrative about the devastating bombings.

Sri Lanka says seven Sunni Muslim suicide bombers attacked three luxury hotels and three churches in coordinated strikes inspired by the Islamic State group.

But questions quickly emerged over Indian intelligence warnings that were ignored and how the bombers evaded detection.

Investigations have since shifted from an IS-inspired attack to an alleged conspiracy involving deep state actors seeking to seize power.

Critics argue that the attacks succeeded not because of an intel-

ligence failure, but because they were the product of a planned intelligence operation.

Public Security Minister Ananda Wijepala told parliament in June that Sallay was the "mastermind" behind the attacks who "conspired with and strategically directed Islamic extremists until they carried out the attacks".

Government inquiries have exposed links between the bombers and at least two state intelligence agencies, but Wijepala was the first minister to publicly accuse Sallay of orchestrating the attacks.

"Just three weeks prior to the attack, Sallay met Muslim men to obtain details of the locations," Wijepala said.

Critics argue the network was cultivated to create an enemy to justify greater state backing for a radical Buddhist group aligned with the then-powerful Rajapaksa political dynasty.

Britain's Channel 4 reported in

2023 that a whistleblower alleged the attack was allowed to help Gotabaya Rajapaksa win the 2019 presidency on a pledge to crush extremism.

Investigators have told the court the alleged plot was to create chaos and position Rajapaksa as the leader capable of crushing militancy, as he had done against Tamil rebels a decade earlier.

Rajapaksa administrations have acknowledged that the state funded militants to gather intelligence on Tamil rebels during the 1983-2009 civil war.

However, they insist that the militants double-crossed their handlers and carried out the Easter attacks.

Nearly 70 percent of Sri Lankans are Buddhist, with 12 percent Hindu, 10 percent Sunni Muslims and seven percent Christians.

Sallay in many ways reflects the diversity of Sri Lanka's 22 million people: he is a Muslim, married to a Buddhist, while his Catholic

mother has appealed to the pope to secure his release.

A career officer, he served in Sri Lanka's missions in France and Malaysia, and studied at New Delhi's prestigious National Defence College, as well as India's Madras University and Britain's University of Bradford.

Colombo's Institute of National Security Studies, a think tank linked to the defence ministry, says Sallay addressed the Pentagon in a 2003 speech titled "Suicide Terrorism and its Impact".

He said in a 2023 speech at UN headquarters that terrorism was "one of the greatest challenges" to international security.

"A number of attacks... including in Sri Lanka, have demonstrated the power of social media and digital platforms in radicalisation, extremism, and terrorism," he said.

"We have witnessed horrific acts of violence that affect innocent lives and communities."

Sallay prospered under the Rajapaksas.

He was appointed to head the State Intelligence Service after Gotabaya Rajapaksa won the 2019 election, the first military officer to do so.

Sallay had Muslim human rights lawyer Hejaz Hizbullah arrested in 2020, accusing him of being the attack "mastermind" of the attacks the year before.

Hizbullah was freed 22 months later after authorities failed to produce evidence.

Sallay has complained of "inhuman and degrading" treatment in detention since his own arrest.

Hizbullah said his detention conditions were worse but that Sallay nevertheless deserved fair treatment, legal counsel and family access.

Sallay fell from grace in 2024 after President Anura Kumara Disanayake took office and reopened stalled investigations. He remains in custody.

# Remember the rich rewards for virtuous deeds

Allah The Almighty repeatedly reminds us to perform various virtuous deeds. He says (what means): ["Race with one another in hastening towards forgiveness from your Lord."] [Qur'an, 57:21].

Shaykh ibn As-Sa'di, may Allah have mercy upon him, said, commenting on this, "One who hastens towards virtuous deeds during his life will therefore also hasten to enter Paradise in the Hereafter."

However, forgetfulness is a trait that is inherent in human beings, which leads to neglecting virtuous deeds and weakens their effect. Allah The Almighty says (what means): {"And indeed We made a covenant with Adam before, but he forgot, and We found on his part no firm willpower"} [Qur'an, 20:115]

Remembering the reward for performing these deeds is one of the most successful ways of treating laziness and encourages people to perform them. For example, a person is encouraged not to belittle even the smallest good deed, when one reads the saying of the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam (may Allah exalt his mention): "I saw a man enjoying Paradise as a result of a tree he cut, which was in people's way and harming them." [Muslim].

Attending the assemblies of knowledge with virtuous Muslims also encourages one to perform virtuous deeds, or continue performing them. It reminds the Muslim of his Lord, fosters a sense of competition and keeps the heart occupied with virtuous thoughts. A believer is stronger when he is with a group of virtuous people, and he becomes more enthused to utilise his time and take advantage of his life, in obedience to Allah The Almighty.

## Incentives to perform good deeds

1. Visiting charitable and humanitarian organisations encourages a Muslim to perform virtuous deeds.

2. Remembering that competing in performing virtuous deeds is one of the qualities of the true believers, as Allah The Almighty says (what means): {"So, We answered his call, and We bestowed upon him Yahyaa, and cured his wife (to bear a child) for him. Verily, they used to hasten on to do good deeds, and they used to call on Us with hope and fear."} [Qur'an, 21:90]. This is also one of the characteris-



tics of angels, as Allah The Almighty Says (what means): {"And by those that press forward as in a race (angels)."} [Qur'an, 79:4] Mujaahid, may Allah have mercy upon him, commented on this by saying, "This refers to the angels when they defeated the son of Adam in the performance of virtuous deeds."

3. Learning about how much our pious predecessors would cry whenever they missed out on a chance to perform virtuous deeds. The Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "The people of Paradise do not regret anything more than regretting an hour they spent (in this life) without mentioning Allah." [Tabaraani]

Sa'eed At-Tanookhi, may Allah have mercy upon him, used to cry if for any reason he had missed a congregational prayer. Ibn Mas'ood, may Allah be pleased with him, said: "I never regretted anything more than regretting a day which passed in which I did not increase (upon) my virtuous deeds."

4. Remembering that life is short makes a Muslim exert extra effort in performing virtuous deeds; the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Rush towards the performance of virtuous deeds before you are afflicted with trials

as dark as the night." [Muslim].

5. Reading books that soften the heart, mention virtuous deeds and encourage people to perform them.

6. Knowing that encouraging others entitles you to the same reward as theirs, as the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "He who revives a deed from Islam (which people forgot or abandoned) gets the same reward as the one who (subsequently) performs it." [Muslim]

7. Loving those who perform virtuous deeds, because the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "A person will be (on the Day of Resurrection) with those whom he loves (in life)." [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

8. Knowing how eager our pious predecessors were in performing virtuous deeds. Competing in performing virtuous deeds was an intrinsic quality of the Companions of the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam. 'Umar, may Allah be pleased with him, said regarding Abu Bakr, may Allah be pleased with him: "Whenever we competed to perform virtuous deeds, Abu Bakr would win."

One should always supplicate to Allah The Almighty to enable him to perform good deeds and facilitate them for

him, because performing virtuous deeds is a gift from Allah The Almighty which He grants to whomever He wishes from amongst His slaves. Humaam ibn al-Haarith, may Allah have mercy upon him, used to supplicate saying, "O Allah! Make me satisfied with little sleep and grant me (the ability of) staying up during the night performing acts of obedience to you" and he would sleep very little, while sitting down.

Performing virtuous deeds is one of the main duties for Muslims in this life, as Allah commands by saying what means: {"O you who have believed! Bow down, and prostrate yourselves, and worship your Lord and do good, that you may be successful."} [Qur'an, 24:77]

Performing virtuous deeds is also included in the saying of Allah The Almighty (which means): {"...Help you one another in virtue, righteousness and piety; but do not help one another in sin and transgression..."} [Qur'an, 5:2]

Performing virtuous deeds is an important component of the propagation of Islam, which is not restricted to delivering lectures or talks, or publishing books. Behaving virtuously and helping others endears one to people and opens the hearts and minds of others, who would then listen attentively to what one says.

Similarly, there are many Ahadith (narrations) from the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, addressing this issue, such as the following:

- "Rush towards the performance of virtuous deeds." [Muslim].
- "He who leads others to virtue gets the same reward as the one performing it." [Muslim].
- "O people! Spread (the greeting of) Salaam, feed the needy, and pray at night while people are sleeping, and you will (therefore) enter into Paradise peacefully!" [At-Tirmithi].
- "He who calls others to guidance will get the same reward as those who follow guidance." [Muslim].

## The people beloved to Allah

1. Having your mind and heart constantly occupied with these deeds and having a sincere intention, because, with sincerity, a slave reaches high ranks, and it also acts as an encouraging factor to perform the deed.

2. Knowing that the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, used to ask Allah The Almighty to enable him to perform virtuous deeds saying: "O Allah! I ask You to enable me to perform virtuous deeds and (for) the abandonment of sins." [At-Tirmithi]. It is known that the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, would only supplicate with what Allah The Almighty loves.

3. Remembering Paradise and its pleasures, and what has been prepared for the people of virtue there. Allah The Almighty says (what means): {"And march forth in the way (leading to) forgiveness from your Lord, and for Paradise as wide as the heavens and the earth."} [Qur'an, 3:133]

4. Knowing that performing virtuous deeds results in other people loving him, even after his death. The believers are witnesses on earth as Anas, may Allah be pleased with him, said: "A funeral passed by us and people praised the deceased, so the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: 'It has become mandatory! Then another one passed and people spoke of how bad the deceased was, so the Prophet said: 'It has become mandatory! So 'Umar asked about his comments on the two funerals, and the Prophet replied: 'You praised the first one so Paradise became mandatory for him, and you dispraised the second one so Hell became mandatory for him; you are the witnesses of Allah on earth.'" [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

5. Realising that the longer virtuous people live, the more beloved to Allah The Almighty they become, as the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said when he was asked about the best people in the sight of Allah The Almighty: "He who lives long and performs virtuous deeds." [At-Tirmithi], because such a person utilised his life in virtuous deeds and was obedient to Allah The Almighty.

6. Knowing that being steadfast in performing virtuous deeds is beloved to Allah The Almighty even if the deeds are little in number, as the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "The most beloved deeds to Allah are those which are persistent, even if they are little (in number)."

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

## Severity and violence lead to remorse

In a Hadith on the authority of 'A'ishah, radhiallah 'anha, it was mentioned that some Jews came to the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, and said, "As-Samu 'Alaykum [death be on you]." 'A'ishah therefore said (to the Jews), "[Death] be upon you, and may Allah curse you and inflict His wrath upon you." The Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "O 'A'ishah! Be calm. You should be kind and lenient, and beware of severity and bad words." She said, "Did you not hear what they said?" He, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, replied: "And did you hear what I said [to them]? I said the same to them, and my supplication against them will be accepted while theirs against me will be rejected." [Imam Al-Bukhari and Imam Muslim]

This is how the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, taught us to avoid severity and resort to easygoingness in all matters; he, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Leniency adorns anything that contains it, while anything that it is void of is distorted."

## The meaning of severity

Leniency means moderateness and kindness while severity is the absence of these qualities in dealing with any matter. In other words, it is extremism and exaggeration that are accompanied by stiffness and rudeness when dealing with others, even if they have behaved impolitely.

Treating people severely creates a desire for retaliation when there is a chance to do so, while kindness reconciles the hearts and makes people obedient.

## Deprived of goodness

The one deprived of leniency and who lives among people and treats them violently would be deprived of goodness, as the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "The one who is deprived of leniency would be deprived of all goodness."

Severity is a disgraceful and evil phenomenon that leads to the spreading of grudges and enmities among people. It creates a desire for challenging others and stubbornness that in turn leads to disobeying orders and directives, even if they are good. Severity in attempting to fix any mechanism leads to its breakage, while severity when facing calamities destroys one's power and energy.

## Violence, severity and the mass media

Many studies and seminars have tackled the effects of violence and severity propagated by the mass media on the behaviour of its audience, especially youngsters.

Unfortunately, many of the programmes and series that are broadcast today represent the oppression that people suffer at others' hands, beginning from snubbing, neglecting and ridiculing them up to hitting, cursing, or even committing crimes against them such as assault or murder. This, undoubtedly, affects young people and this effect appears later on in life, as some studies have revealed.

## Violence and severity with servants and the weak

An aspect of violence that people see in some communities is that practised against servants and other weak people, in addition to despising them and burdening them with unbearable hard work, some people may even hit them and abuse them physically and mentally. This is something that should not, for any reason, be spread in Muslim communities.

Here is an incident that took place at the time of the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam: Abu

Mas'ood al-Badri, radhiallah 'anhu, said: "Once, I was beating my slave with a whip when I heard a voice behind me saying, 'O Abu Mas'ood, you ought to know! I did not recognise the voice because of my severe anger. When he [who had spoken] approached me, I found that it was the Messenger of Allah, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, and he was saying: 'O Abu Mas'ood, you ought to know that Allah has more dominance over you than you have over your slave! I [then] said, 'I would never ever beat a servant again in future.' The wording of another narration of this incident reads, 'Abu Mas'ood said 'He is free for the Sake of Allah.' The Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said, 'If you had not have done that, you would have been burnt by the Fire.'"

## Violence and severity against women

Statistics show that violence against women has become a widespread phenomenon in western countries, which may be due to the corruption and deviation of the methods of upbringing there. There is no doubt that our societies are not free from such strange cases where women and children are exposed to violence. In spite of the fact that these cases are limited in our societies, we should remind people that this is something that is despicable and contradicts the Shari'ah (Islamic law) and its moral system.

The Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "I forbid the [usurping of the] right of two weak people: orphans and women." When the Prophet was informed that some men hit their wives, he said: "They are not the best among you."

If women or children needed to be reformed, physical punishment should be the last resort. Allah The Almighty Says (what means): {Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth. So righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in [the husband's] absence what Allah would have them guard. But those [wives] from whom you fear arrogance - [first] advise them; [then if they persist], forsake them in bed; and [finally], strike them gently. But if they obey you [once more], seek no means against them. Indeed, Allah is ever Exalted and Grand} [Qur'an 4:34]

Even if it reaches this extent, the Shari'ah rules that guarantee the safety of the soul and the body and that allow no harm to be done should be observed.

## Violence with animals

Some people who have a corrupt disposition find pleasure in tormenting animals and use violence against them. Islam forbids this. The Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, once entered an orchard that was owned by one of the Ansar (Companions of the Prophet from Madina) and found a camel in it. When the camel saw the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, it shed tears, so the Prophet wiped his tears and asked about his owner. A man from the Ansar said that it was his, so the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said to him: "Will not you fear Allah with regards to the animal that He has granted you? It complained to me that you keep it hungry and exhaust it."

To be lenient to all creatures is the teaching of Islam and the way to Jannah (Heaven). In conclusion, it has to be remembered that the lenient person gains safety, while violence and severity only lead to remorse.

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

## The arrows of Satan

Satan readies himself and chooses his prey carefully. He is determined as he shoots the arrows of looks to go through your eyes, tearing the veils of modesty and chastity. This arouses the desires of the weak heart, which commands the body to pursue the satisfaction of such desires. The tongue speaks, the legs walk, and thus, unlawful acts are committed and the soul falls into the mire of sin.

## "That is purer for them"

In order to ward off this Satanic cycle, Allah The Almighty instructed his believing slaves, both men and women, to lower their gaze. He told them that this would purify them. Allah The Almighty Says (what means): {Tell the believing men to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts. That is purer for them. Indeed, Allah is acquainted with what they do. And tell the believing women to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts.} [Qur'an 24:30-31]

Ibn al-Qayyim, may Allah have mercy upon him, said in his well-known book Al-Fawaa'id: A collection of Wise Sayings that Sahl ibn 'Abdullah, may Allah have mercy upon him says, "Abandoning the order is greater than committing the prohibition in the Sight of Allah because Adam, may Allah exalt his mention, was forbidden to eat from the tree and when he, may Allah exalt his mention, ate from it Allah accepted his repentance, but Satan was ordered to prostrate to Adam, when he refused and Allah did not accept his repentance."

Again Ibn al-Qayyim says in his another famous book in Ad-Daa' wad-Dawaa', "Look at the accuracy of the Qur'anic expression in the order to lower the gaze, as if Allah The Almighty reminds us that not lowering the gaze causes the doom of the doer and his suffering in this life and in the Hereafter. Failing to lower one's gaze is the basis for the problems that afflict man. An unlawful look generates thoughts, then thoughts generate ideas, then ideas generate desires, then desires generate will, which develops into resolve and determination, then the action inevitably takes place if there is nothing to prevent it."

This is the destructive cycle of Satan, which traps the one who does not lower his gaze, then records the images and scenes seen by his treacherous eyes. The cursed Satan waits for the moment of weakness in man's faith to release these images and scenes in his mind and soul, igniting his sexual desire, which dominates the heart that commands the body to disobey Allah The Almighty, and so on in a consecutive sequence. The more the images vary, the easier arousal and falling into sin will be. On the other hand, the less the images and scenes, the weaker their impact and influence on the heart will be. According to a saying, "Patience over lowering the gaze is easier than patience over the pain of its consequences."

O Muslim who does not lower his gaze, if your eyes roam around looking at the charms of beautiful women, you would plant in your heart thorns of loss and regret.

## "Allah knows that which deceives the eyes"

Allah The Almighty Says (what means): {He knows that which deceives the eyes and what the breasts conceal.} [Qur'an 40:19] This is a great verse and the interpreter of the Qur'an, Ibn Mas'ood, may Allah be pleased with him,

tells you its meaning, "It refers to a man who enters a person's house where there is a beautiful woman among them, or that a beautiful woman passes by them, and while they do not notice him, he looks at her; when they see him, he lowers his gaze. However, Allah The Almighty Knows that he inwardly wishes to see her private parts."

The great scholar, Al-Ameen Ash-Shinqeeti, may Allah have mercy upon him, said in his book Adhwa' Al-Bayaan, "The verse contains a warning for the one who betrays with his eyes by looking at what is unlawful for him. The slave of Allah will stand before Allah and be questioned about his senses. Allah The Almighty Says (what means): {Indeed, the hearing, the sight and the heart - about all those [one] will be questioned.} [Qur'an 17:36]

If you will be questioned on the Day of Resurrection about your stares and looks, have you prepared an answer for this?

## The fornication of the eyes

To make this act more repugnant to the souls, the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, called it adultery of the eyes. It was narrated on the authority of Abu Hurairah, may Allah be pleased with him, that the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Allah has written for the son of Adam his inevitable share of adultery. The adultery of the eye is looking (at what is prohibited), the adultery of the ears is listening (to what is prohibited), the adultery of the tongue is uttering (what it is unlawful to utter), the adultery of the hand is doing (what is prohibited), the adultery of the legs is walking (to what is prohibited) and the heart desires and wishes for (adultery) and the private parts affirm that or contradict it." [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

In Sharh Saheeh Muslim, An-Nawawi, may Allah have mercy upon him, said, "The meaning of the Hadith is that a share of adultery is written for the son of Adam. Some people commit actual adultery such as a male commits sexual intercourse with a female who is unlawful to him. Other people commit adultery in the figurative sense by looking at the prohibition or listening to adultery and its relevant affairs, or by touching with the hand a non-Mahram (marriageable) woman or kissing her, or by walking to commit adultery, seeing, touching, or forbidden talking with a non-Mahram woman, or by inner thoughts. All these things belong to metaphoric adultery. By "the private parts affirm that or contradict it" it means that adultery might actually happen... or might not take place... even if he is close to doing it. Allah knows best."

## Public corruption

Giving free rein to the gaze has corrupted most human beings; the display of beauty no longer has limits, and indulgence in luxury no longer has restraints. Adornment, clothing and fashion have penetrated our minds, surpassed all the restrictions and barriers, and has become like a sea of chaos where good taste is drowned and the pure, chaste heart is spoiled.

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



## Where the classroom meets the field: a scholarship worth its salt

There is a quiet but telling assumption behind the sports scholarship pathway unveiled this week by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education: that a young Qatari with a talent for sport should never be forced to trade a degree for a career on the field, or a career on the field for a degree. In offering both at once, the state has done more than open a new admissions track. It has restated a principle that runs through much of Qatari public policy – that the role of government is not merely to demand achievement from its citizens, but to build the environment in which achievement becomes possible.

The mechanics of the scheme are sensible enough. Under the Government Scholarship Programme, gifted athletes nominated by the Ministry of Sports and Youth and the Qatar Olympic Committee may now win a government scholarship on the strength of their sporting talent, enrol across a range of

disciplines at local universities, and study within a learning environment tailored to accommodate training and competition. Tuition at eligible private universities is covered under approved regulations, sporting authorities are brought into the arrangement, and graduates gain access to employment-linked scholarship opportunities designed to smooth their entry into the labour market. Applications for the second public-university admission period open on the Government Scholarship Platform between November 15 and December 30.

Read the fine print, though, and a philosophy emerges. The state is not simply writing cheques. It is removing the obstacles that ordinarily force a hard choice. An athlete in most countries reaches a fork in the road early: the demands of elite sport and the demands of a degree pull in opposite directions, and one usually gives way. The young person who backs their talent and loses ends up with neither

a medal nor a qualification. Qatar's answer is to redesign the road so the fork need not appear at all. That is what an enabling environment means in practice – not the elimination of effort, which no policy can or should attempt, but the removal of the artificial barriers that waste it.

This instinct is not new here. It is visible in the sustained investment in higher education, in the sporting infrastructure that made Qatar a credible host of world-class events, and in the broader ambition of Qatar National Vision 2030 to build a knowledge economy powered by capable citizens. What the new pathway adds is a bridge between two sectors that have too often been managed in separate silos. Education and sport now speak to one another through a single mechanism, and the young Qatari standing between them is the beneficiary.

There is a demand implicit in the offer, and it is the right one. Scholarship holders must secure

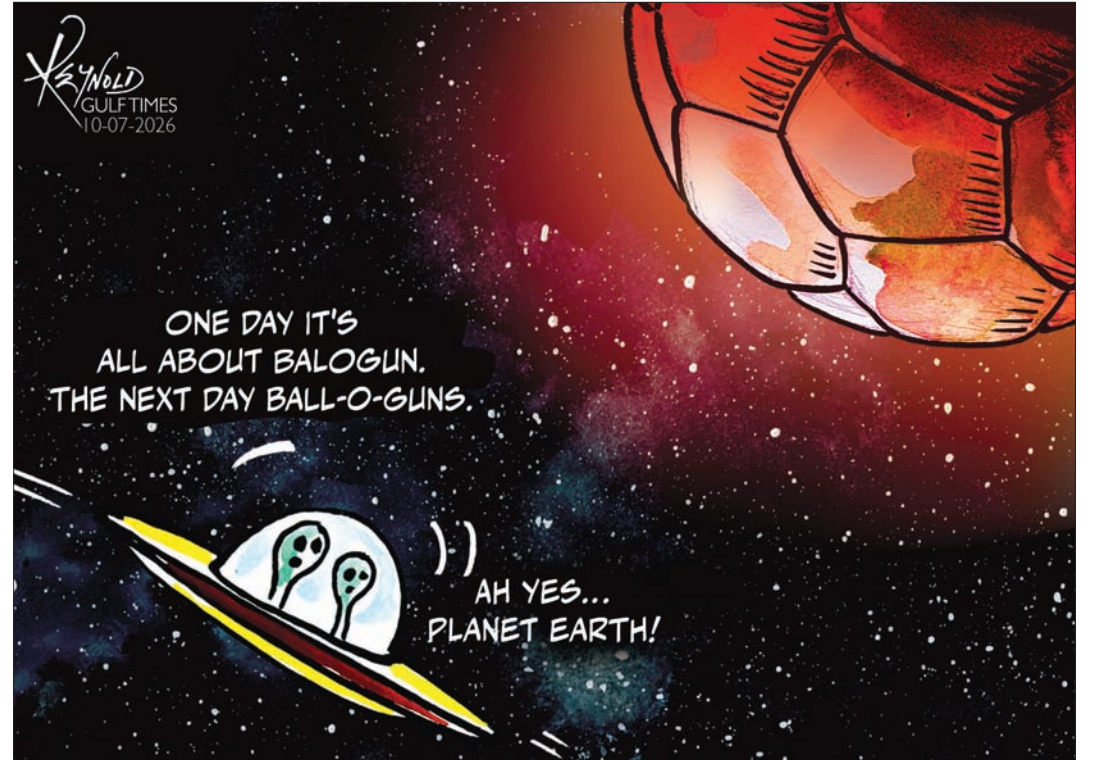
an unconditional university place and commit to maintaining their professional sporting pathway throughout their studies. The state is not lowering the bar; it is raising it, and then supplying the ladder. The graduate this produces – academically and athletically qualified, able to represent the country abroad and contribute to its development at home – is precisely the sort of citizen a small nation with large ambitions cannot afford to lose to a false choice.

The measure of a policy like this will lie in its execution: in whether the promised co-ordination between ministries is real, whether universities adapt genuinely rather than nominally, and whether the athletes themselves seize the opening. But the intent deserves recognition. In telling its most promising young people that they need not choose between the classroom and the field, Qatar has again demonstrated that the surest investment a state can make is in the conditions that let its citizens succeed.

### Postcard from the edge



This aerial view shows the saltwater swimming pool at the San Alfonso del Mar resort in Algarrobo, Chile. (AFP)



## Qatar makes its bid to help write the rules of AI

Qatar's launch of the Global Alliance for AI Ethics (GAAIE) during the first session of the UN Global Dialogue on AI Governance in Geneva represents a significant milestone in the country's journey towards establishing itself as an active partner in shaping the future of digital governance at the international level.

The initiative reflects Qatar's vision of building a knowledge-based and innovation-driven digital economy alongside developing an ethical and legislative framework that ensures the responsible use of AI technologies, safeguarding the rights of individuals and institutions and fostering trust in emerging technologies.

HE Minister of Communications and Information Technology Mohammed bin Ali al-Mannai announced the initiative during his address at the high-level session of the UN Global Dialogue, emphasising that Qatar adopts an approach based on leveraging AI to serve sustainable development, while striving to build an international framework that strengthens co-operation between governments, academic institutions, the private sector, and international organisations to ensure the development of this technology in accordance with the principles of justice, transparency, and accountability.

This approach is based on Qatar's advanced national experience in digital transformation. The minister highlighted that Qatar's approach to artificial intelligence builds on its national experience and is guided by Qatar National Vision 2030 and the National AI Strategy, through sustained investment in digital infrastructure, computing capacity, scientific research, and regulatory frameworks that foster trust in emerging technologies.

The GAAIE is an initiative launched by Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU), a member of Qatar Foundation, to foster a multi-stakeholder global dialogue on AI ethics. The Alliance seeks to ensure that diverse ethical

values and cultural traditions contribute to the development of international technical and regulatory frameworks, while amplifying perspectives and experiences from across the world in global AI governance discussions.

The Alliance aims to ensure that ethical values and cultural diversity across the globe contribute to shaping the regulatory and technical frameworks for AI by enhancing the inclusiveness of the international governance system and ensuring that diverse perspectives and experiences are represented in the development of future policies and standards, preventing their monopolisation by a limited number of countries or companies.

This initiative is particularly important given the rapid transformations the world is witnessing in the AI field. The challenge is no longer limited to developing more advanced models but also extends to the ability of countries to establish legal and ethical frameworks that regulate the use of these technologies and mitigate their risks, while simultaneously maintaining an environment conducive to innovation and economic growth.

In this context, the launch of the GAAIE aligns with the objectives of the UN Global Dialogue on AI Governance, established pursuant to the Global Digital Compact and the Global Pact for the Future, aiming to promote international co-operation, the exchange of expertise, and the development of more inclusive and flexible regulatory frameworks that ensure all countries benefit from the economic and developmental opportunities offered by AI, and that these benefits are not limited to the most advanced economies.

The initiative also comes at a time when international calls are growing for unified rules for the governance of AI, as confirmed by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres during the opening of the global dialogue, when he warned that the pace of AI development has become faster than the ability of institutions to keep up with

it, calling for strengthening international co-operation and setting co-ordinated global rules to limit potential risks, especially those affecting children and the fundamental rights of individuals.

Experts said that the Qatari initiative represents a qualitative shift from simply advocating for AI ethics to establishing an international institutional framework for dialogue and co-ordination, thereby contributing to unifying international efforts and bridging differing perspectives on the principles governing this technology, especially given the multiplicity of regulatory initiatives and the varying legislation among countries.

Mohammed Saeed al-Saqtri, a technology and cybersecurity expert, noted that Qatar and the Gulf states possess the economic resources and digital infrastructure that qualify them to actively participate in shaping the future of AI, thanks to significant investments in data centres, technological infrastructure, and the computing power necessary to develop and operate advanced models.

He pointed out that the global race is no longer limited to possessing the most powerful

models or the greatest computing power. Rather, it now revolves around who sets the ethical and regulatory standards, who owns the highest quality data, and who participates in formulating the international rules that governments and companies will adhere to in the coming years.

He added that the GAAIE represents a strategic shift from the role of "technology consumer" to that of "partner in shaping its rules" – a transformation that empowers participating countries to exert greater influence on the future of the global digital economy and strengthens their role in shaping international AI policies.

Al-Saqtri cited several international models that underscore the importance of legislation in shaping the future of technology, most notably the European Union AI Act, which has become a global benchmark, prompting many companies to adapt their products to its requirements. He also mentioned Unesco's recommendations on AI ethics, which have become a reference point for many countries when drafting their national legislation.

He emphasised that the Qatari

initiative focuses on building a global AI governance model based on common, interoperable standards that will allow for the harmonisation of regulations and legislation across countries, similar to the practices in the civil aviation and cybersecurity sectors, thereby reducing regulatory disparities and fostering international co-operation.

To achieve this goal, al-Saqtri said it is essential to agree on a set of fundamental principles, including obligating companies to conduct risk assessments before launching AI systems, disclosing the nature of the data used to train models, enhancing privacy protection, and documenting content produced using AI. He also emphasised the need for human oversight of high-risk applications and the establishment of an international mechanism for the mutual recognition of compliance standards, which would allow systems to operate in multiple markets without requiring redevelopment to meet the specific requirements of each country.

He further identified four key priorities that should be addressed by the international community: combating deepfakes and misleading content; strengthening

data protection as the most important strategic resource in the age of AI; countering cyber threats associated with the use of these technologies in developing malware and launching cyberattacks; and establishing principles of transparency and accountability. This would ensure that users are clear on when content is AI-generated and who bears legal responsibility for decisions made by intelligent systems, particularly in vital sectors such as health, energy, and financial services.

This vision reflects a growing awareness that the future of AI will not be determined solely by technological advancements but also by the international community's ability to build a balanced governance framework that harmonises fostering innovation, protecting rights, and mitigating risks, which underscores the importance of multilateral initiatives in the coming phase.

From this perspective, the Qatari initiative opens broad horizons for enhancing international co-operation in research and development, establishing specialised centres for AI ethics, data governance, and AI security, attracting global companies to conduct research and experiments in the region, supporting startups, developing national expertise, and promoting regional integration in advanced technology.

Overall, the launch of the GAAIE underscores Qatar's growing role in shaping the global digital governance agenda through the adoption of initiatives that integrate technical, human, and developmental dimensions, contributing to a more inclusive, equitable, and transparent international framework. It also reflects the country's commitment to ensuring that AI serves as a tool for promoting sustainable development and economic prosperity within a global system based on trust, co-operation, and accountability. This will guarantee that the benefits of this technology are maximised and harnessed to serve humanity and societies worldwide. (QNA)

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# Italy expels Russian diplomats accused of spying: minister

AFP  
Rome

Italy yesterday ordered the expulsion of two Russian military attaches accused of spying, with its foreign minister condemning “serious and unacceptable acts of interference” by Moscow.

The expulsions came two days after police announced the arrest of two former Italian intelligence agents who media reports said gave Russia secrets on military aid to Ukraine.

“The Italian government has decided to expel two military attaches from the embassy of the Russian Federation in Italy, involved in espionage activities uncovered by the Rome public prosecutor’s office,” Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani wrote on X.

The minister named the Russians as Ivan Petrovich Gorbachev and Mikhail Vasilyevich Astakhov and said they had been ordered to leave within three days.

“Moscow continues to use hybrid warfare to attack the West and Italy – acts of interference that are serious and unacceptable to Italian institutions and national security,” Tajani commented.

Rome police said on Tuesday



Italian Military corps patrol in front of the Russian Embassy in central Rome. (AFP/File Photo)

that one of the detained Italians, a 59-year-old former intelligence officer, had been paid by a Russian handler and “disclosed to him information of interest through six sources – including four serving military personnel assigned to posts marked by a high level of confidentiality”.

Media reports said the Italians had handed over information on an Italian-French air defence system, the SAMP/T, due to be delivered

to Ukraine this year, and on Aster missiles that have already been sent to Kyiv.

Russian handlers had also sought details on a Nato mission in Bulgaria and the Italian company Avio that makes motors for drones and supersonic missiles.

*Corriere della Sera* newspaper said the 59-year-old also provided the identities of Italian counter-espionage agents who were meant to monitor the Russians.

Quoting a recording of the suspect’s telephone conversations, *La Stampa* newspaper said the man gave “thousands” of items of information over a 12-year period.

A lawyer for the former Italian spy denied there had been any treason, asserting that the man, who was to be formally questioned today, had only gathered publicly available information.

Italy’s Defence Minister Guido Crosetto said on Tuesday that the case was “just the tip of the iceberg” in Russia’s so-called “hybrid war” in Europe as it pursues its invasion of Ukraine.

In 2024, an Italian court jailed a navy captain caught selling classified documents to the Russian embassy three years earlier.

Italy expelled two Russian officials then and Moscow expelled an Italian diplomat in retaliation.

The Russian foreign ministry quoted by state news agency RIA Novosti yesterday said Moscow would react with “an appropriate response”.

Russia’s ambassador to Italy, Sergei Paramonov, said the Italian foreign ministry “wants to limit as much as possible Russia’s influence in Italy” by expelling diplomats.

# Families of crew aboard crashed Pakistani cargo plane face agonising wait

Reuters  
Islamabad

The family of Faisal Jatoi, the Pakistani co-pilot missing with four others after their cargo plane crashed into the Arabian Sea, faced an agonising wait for news yesterday, as rescuers continued their search.

Jatoi was co-piloting a K2 Airways Boeing 737 freighter from Sharjah in the UAE to Karachi on Tuesday night when it went down off Pakistan’s southern coast. Pakistani rescuers found the wreckage in a deep-sea search operation on Wednesday.

Jatoi’s father-in-law, Ghulam Nabi Bahrani, said the family became alarmed when they could not reach him, and a Google search showed them the word “crash”.

“That moment felt like doomsday for us,” Bahrani told Reuters at his home in Karachi. Jatoi has a wife and two-year-old son.

The aircraft, a 27-year-old Boeing 737-400 converted freighter, spent 10 days in Sharjah for repairs after delivering cargo, awaiting a spare part from

the US before the crew could return, Bahrani said.

It reported a navigational problem at 9:18pm Pakistan time (1618 GMT) on its way to Karachi, the Pakistan Airports Authority said, while FlightRadar24 data showed erratic altitude changes before a steep descent.

Wreckage was found 53 nautical miles (98km) south of Ormara port on Wednesday, and navy and maritime security teams are searching for the flight recorders.

K2 Airways said the five people on board were two pilots, two engineers and one support staffer. Their status has not been officially declared.

A Pakistani aviation expert said the recovery could be among the most difficult in Pakistan’s recent history, with water depths in parts of the Arabian Sea ranging from about 2,500 to more than 3,500 metres.

Strong currents, poor visibility, uneven seabed terrain and changing sea states could complicate efforts to recover submerged wreckage and flight recorders, said the expert, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to discuss the matter publicly.

# Poland jails former Russian opposition activist, his wife for spying for FSB

AFP  
Warsaw

A Polish court yesterday jailed a former Russian opposition activist and his wife for spying for Moscow and also accused them of organising a parcel containing explosives.

The authorities in Warsaw have warned of Russian sabotage acts in Poland since the start of the war in neighbouring Ukraine more than four years ago.

According to court documents seen by AFP, Russian citizen Igor R. – identified by Russian media as Igor Rogov – was jailed for seven years while his wife Irina was sentenced to three years.

The couple – living in Poland since the start of Moscow’s 2022

Ukraine invasion – were sentenced in the southern city of Katowice.

Poland said Rogov – previously an activist for the anti-Kremlin group Open Russia – had been spying for Russia’s FSB security services, gathering information on Russian opposition members and organisations who support them.

According to Polish media, Rogov appeared in court holding a poster with slogans against Russian President Vladimir Putin’s rule.

The sentencing came after a closed-door trial, with Warsaw citing national security reasons.

The couple have been in detention since their arrest two years ago.

The court said Rogov had spied for the FSB between February and

August 2022, passing on data on an encrypted device to his wife, who was due to transfer it to Russian intelligence officers.

The prosecutors also said Rogov had in July 2024 – along with two Ukrainians and another Russian – sent and arranged the pickup of a parcel containing explosives through a courier company.

They said the package was intercepted by Polish security services at a courier company warehouse in Poland’s Lodz region.

Before Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine, Rogov was an opposition figure based in Russia’s Saransk, working for the organisation of the late Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny since 2017.

He later joined the opposition group Open Russia, backed by exiled oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky.

# Clashes in Lviv highlight wartime tensions over draft

Reuters  
Kyiv

Authorities in Ukraine launched inquiries yesterday into violent clashes in the western city of Lviv a day earlier over the country’s military draft, the latest sign of wartime tensions over the call-up in the fifth year of the war with Russia.

Prosecutors said a group of people blocked on-duty draft officers late on Wednesday, overturning their car, in a fit of unrest that led to broader scuffles with police and service members.

Ukraine’s General Staff strongly condemned the attack, but also said it would review the draft officers’ conduct for any potential violations.

Footage aired by Ukraine’s public broadcaster yesterday showed crowds swarming vehicles in a darkened residential neighbourhood, chanting

“Shame!” and tearing off the uniform of one of the officers.

The incident was the latest in a string of attacks on draft officers that has highlighted long-simmering anger over how the Ukrainian military is filling its ranks to fight a bigger and better-armed Russia.

Kyiv’s war effort has relied on a sweeping call-up that has been marred by reports of abuse and corruption, further dampening enthusiasm for service despite new efforts to entice Ukrainians to enlist.

Last month, reports of harsh treatment and non-combat deaths in a prominent Ukrainian assault unit sparked public anger and calls for investigations.

Ukraine’s parliamentary commissioner for human rights, Dmytro Lubinets, decried the violence but said it should not be seen as an isolated incident.

“When people have been

contacting the authorities for years, reporting possible violations of their rights ... but do not see a proper legal assessment of such facts, this inevitably creates even greater problems,” he wrote on the Telegram messaging app.

“Mistrust accumulates, tension grows, and society becomes radicalised.”

Defence Minister Mykhailo Fedorov has pledged to reform the draft but has yet to unveil the details, a politically sensitive issue in war-weary Ukraine.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s chief of staff, Kyrilo Budanov, defended the military and said he expected a fair reaction from authorities.

“If you beat and tear the clothes off a service member of your army today,” he wrote on Telegram, “then think about who will protect you from the enemy who will also beat and tear clothes – but off of you.”

# US approves sale of Tomahawk missiles to Germany: Merz

AFP  
Berlin

The US has approved the sale of long-range Tomahawk cruise missiles to Germany, Chancellor Friedrich Merz said yesterday, despite previous doubts over a planned deployment.

“On the sidelines of the Nato meeting in Ankara, we agreed with the American government that American Tomahawk missiles will be purchased by us and stationed in Germany,” Merz told MPs in a statement to parliament.

The move will “close an important strategic gap in our defences,” he said.

“At the same time we will work on developing our own European systems and stationing them in Europe.”

Merz did not say when he expected the Tomahawks to be delivered.

The missiles are mainly launched from submarines and warships and can travel more than 1,600 kilometres (1,000 miles).

“The USA possesses key capabilities that we in Europe cannot do without,” German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius said.

Pistorius said that Germany was committed to building up Europe’s defence industry, but buying Tomahawk missiles from Washington is currently “the only way” to deliver on Germany’s Nato commitments.

“This applies particularly to the offensive capabilities needed for deterrence – and for responding to an attack on Nato territory, which we aim to prevent,” Pistorius said.

He added that the deal was “a strong sign of transatlantic friend-

ship and trusting co-operation”.

Berlin views the deployment of long-range cruise missiles – such as the US-made Tomahawk – as a key part of its deterrence strategy against Russia.

Moscow has deployed Iskander cruise missiles to the Kaliningrad exclave, which could strike targets in European Nato countries.

A German government source said the defence ministers for both countries signed a letter of intent for the Tomahawk missile deal on Tuesday after previous negotiations between Merz and US President Donald Trump and senior security officials from both countries.

In the letter, the US committed to granting formal approval for the sale of Tomahawk missiles and ground-based Typhoon launchers by August, although the number of missiles acquired would remain classified.

# France urges calm during World Cup game against Morocco

AFP  
Paris

France has urged its football fans to be responsible as their team prepares to face African champions Morocco yesterday in a World Cup quarter-final, after previous high-profile matches led to unrest.

Morocco won independence from France in 1956 and has a mostly settled relationship with the former colonial power, which is home to hundreds

of thousands of Moroccans or French citizens of Moroccan descent.

Several members of Morocco’s national team this year were born in France and play for French clubs.

Team captain Achraf Hakimi was born in Spain but plays for Paris Saint-Germain.

Celebrations were mostly peaceful when France beat Morocco in the 2022 World Cup semi-final.

But security forces are to be on alert around France during the game from 10:00pm

(20:00 GMT) on Thursday.

“I appeal to everyone’s sense of responsibility. It has to remain a celebration,” Sports Minister Marina Ferreri told the France Info broadcaster.

Interior Minister Laurent Nunez has said “no misconduct would be tolerated”.

After the PSG beat Arsenal in the Champions League final in May, Paris police took 225 adults into custody, charging around half of them with offences including confronting the police and material damage, the city’s top prosecutor said.

# Erdogan gives Nato leaders revolver conundrum after summit

Reuters  
Madrid

Belgium’s prime minister was a little surprised on landing back home from Wednesday’s Nato summit in Türkiye to find that he had a handgun and ammunition in his luggage.

After Nato leaders gathered for Wednesday’s fractious summit in Ankara, their host, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, handed each an unusual parting gift: a vintage revolver, along with live ammunition indicating it was not just for show.

Erdogan wanted to showcase Türkiye’s defence industry, which has become a key export and foreign policy tool.

Images shared by the office of Lithuanian President Gitanas

Nauseda showed what appeared to be the Gumusay .357 Magnum, a rare six-shooter produced by Turkish arms maker MKE in the 1990s.

It was set in a wooden display box featuring Türkiye’s flag and the Nato logo as well as a placard inscribed “Gumusay, the first revolver-type handgun produced in our country” in Turkish and English.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez’s spokesperson said all the leaders had been given the same model, engraved on the barrel with their own names.

The Belgian premier, Bart De Wever, handed his to Brussels’ airport police to be secured in a safe.

An aide to Polish President Karol Nawrocki told Radio RMF FM that his revolver was awaiting customs clearance at Warsaw Airport and

would be kept in an appropriate place “so that it is firstly safe and secondly respected as a gift”.

“Certainly no one will be shooting it,” he added.

The offices of the Dutch and Swedish prime ministers said their revolvers had been taken to their respective embassies in Ankara. The Dutch one was due to be disabled while the Swedish one was awaiting import paperwork.

The gun given to Britain’s Keir Starmer came with a cleaning kit and 500 bullets, a Downing Street source said.

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni’s revolver was already stored at the seat of government, the Palazzo Chigi, along with other state gifts.

EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen was intending to donate hers to a military museum, while the leader of Greece

planned to give his to the War Museum in Athens.

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, joking that “it struck me that my gift of maple syrup kind of undermatched” the Turkish present, said he had not actually seen the pistol.

“I would like to reassure Canadians – they keep guns away from me,” he told a press conference, saying the revolver had been deactivated and might end up in the national war museum.

Türkiye’s modern handgun industry focuses mainly on semi-automatics, making the Gumusay something of a collector’s curiosity.

Turkish gunmakers have muscled into Europe’s civilian firearms market with inexpensive pistols and shotguns, challenging older Italian and Belgian names long associated with higher-priced sport-



This handout photo taken and obtained yesterday from the office of the Lithuanian President shows a revolver offered by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Lithuanian President Gitanas Nauseda with the president’s name engraved, including live rounds, and displayed during a press presentation in Vilnius, Lithuania. (AFP)

ing and service weapons.

According to the Geneva-based Small Arms Survey, Türkiye was the world’s third-largest exporter

of small arms between 2019 and 2024, with exports totalling about \$3bn over the period, behind the US and Italy.

## Pakistani mango exhibition deepens Qatar trade and cultural ties

By Shaima Sheriff  
Staff Reporter

The third Hamba Pakistani Mango Exhibition is strengthening trade and cultural links between Qatar and Pakistan, while creating new opportunities for businesses to showcase the country's renowned agricultural produce, Pakistani ambassador Muhammad Aamer has said.

Running at Souq Waqif until July 18, the exhibition brings Pakistani producers, restaurants and local businesses to showcase premium mango varieties, seasonal fruits and mango-based products

to visitors from across Qatar.

Speaking to *Gulf Times*, Aamer said the exhibition plays an important role in expanding commercial relations by introducing Qatar to Pakistan's agricultural strengths.

"Pakistan is an agricultural country and our best agricultural products coming here to Doha make people aware of our agricultural potential," he said. "It brings the trade volume between the two countries higher than before."

Describing mangoes as an integral part of Pakistan's heritage, Aamer said the festival has become a cultural bridge between the two nations.

"Mangoes are part of our culture," he

added. "The success of the last two festivals made people realise that these agricultural products can bring the two countries closer than before."

The envoy noted that the event continues to grow in popularity since its launch and has become an important platform for bringing people closer.

"This is the third time that Pakistani mangoes are being brought to Doha and, I am sure, like the previous two events, this event is going to be a success," he said.

What makes this event successful, Aamer pointed out, is the opportunity for people to connect with one another.

Combined with the sweetness and quality of the mangoes, he expressed

confidence that it will be a memorable celebration

The exhibition is also a valuable platform for new entrepreneurs looking to enter the Qatar market.

New World Organics chief executive Saad Hafiz is participating in the exhibition for the first time after launching his company earlier this year.

"We have our own farm in Multan, Punjab, and we are importing these mangoes directly from Pakistan," he said. "We have different varieties, including Chaunsa, Anwar Ratol and Sindhri."

Describing Chaunsa as one of Pakistan's most celebrated mango varieties, Hafiz noted that the exhibition coincides

with the country's summer mango harvest.

He said events such as the Hamba exhibition are particularly valuable for small and emerging businesses.

"It's very important because new businesses can promote themselves here," he said. "It's a good opportunity for marketing and for people to learn about the Pakistani mangoes and our culture."

Hafiz lauded the support provided by the embassy, saying that it has played a key role in encouraging traders, restaurants and entrepreneurs to participate, while inviting visitors to experience fresh Pakistani mangoes and seasonal fruits throughout the exhibition.



Officials and dignitaries at the opening of the Third Hamba Pakistani Mango Exhibition and Its Officials Products at Souq Waqif. **PICTURES:** Thajudheen



## 3rd Hamba Pakistani Mango Exhibition opens at Souq Waqif

By Shaima Sheriff  
Staff Reporter

The third Hamba Pakistani Mango Exhibition and Its Products opened yesterday at Souq Waqif, welcoming visitors to its biggest edition with over 30 exhibitors, exclusive mango varieties and a diverse culinary showcase celebrating one of Pakistan's most treasured fruits.

The event was inaugurated by Abdulrahman Mohammed al-Naama, representative of the Private Engineering Office (PEO), in

the presence of Pakistan's ambassador to Qatar Muhammad Aamer, in addition to a number of other ambassadors and members of the diplomatic corps, among other guests.

The exhibition, running until July 18 and organised by the PEO's Celebrations Committee in co-operation with the Pakistan embassy, welcomes visitors daily from 4pm-10pm within a fully air-conditioned tent, offering shopping, tasting and cultural experiences centred around Pakistani mangoes and their products.

Speaking to *Gulf Times*, exhibi-

tion general supervisor Khalid Saif al-Suwaidi said this year's event has expanded significantly in both scale and variety.

"We have 30 companies for the mango and 30 companies for the restaurants," he said. "We have more than 10 kinds of mango, and we also have a promise from the embassy of Pakistan: they have sent something special - a mango variety coming to Qatar for the first time."

Visitors can explore more than 10 renowned Pakistani mango varieties, including Sindhri, Chaunsa, White Chaunsa, Anwar Ratol and Dusehri, alongside seasonal fruits such as apricots, peaches, jamun and chikoo.

More than 30 restaurants and food exhibitors are serving mango-inspired desserts, juices, ice cream, pickles and authentic Pakistani cuisine.

Highlighting one of the exhibition's unique attractions, al-Suwaidi said visitors are encouraged to taste the fruit before making a purchase.

"This exhibition may be the only one where you can try all the mangoes before you buy," he said. "In another market, you buy directly. Here, you can taste and then buy."

He also stressed that food quality and visitor safety are priorities throughout the event.

"Every day, samples are taken



Pakistani ambassador Muhammad Aamer, along with PEO officials and other ambassadors.

and checked to ensure everything is okay," al-Suwaidi said, noting that laboratory testing and inspections by the Ministry of Public Health are conducted daily.

According to the organisers, Pakistan is the world's fifth-largest mango producer, harvesting more than 1.8mn tonnes annually.

Building on the success of the previous Pakistani editions and the recent Indian mango exhibition, organisers expect this year's event to attract record visitor numbers while offering a rich cultural and culinary experience in the heart of Souq Waqif.



The exhibition showcases 10 renowned Pakistani mango varieties, including Sindhri, Chaunsa, White Chaunsa, Anwar Ratol and Dusehri, alongside seasonal fruits.



### Summer workshops at QF bring M F Husain's art to life

Qatar Foundation's Lawh Wa Qalam: M F Husain Museum is hosting a series of summer workshops - under the theme *Paint Your Summer* - featuring hands-on art activities inspired by renowned artist Maqbool Fida Husain. With a variety of activities on offer throughout the summer, participants can explore metal embossing techniques to create textured designs and motifs, as well as enjoy interactive story sessions before creating their own Husain-inspired horse artwork using oil pastels and a simple drawing transfer technique. Those interested in participating can browse programmes and register through the Education City App, which is available to download for free from Google Play and the Apple Store, and at <https://educationcity.qa/>

### Barzan University College students witness sea turtle hatchlings

Barzan University College (BUC), in partnership with Swinburne University of Technology, provided students with an experiential learning op-



portunity through an educational visit to Fuwairit Beach during Qatar's annual hawksbill sea turtle hatching season.

Organised in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC), the visit gave students the opportunity to witness endangered hawksbill sea turtle hatchlings emerge from their nests before participating in their safe release into the Arabian Gulf.

Guided by environmental specialists from the ministry, the students gained first-hand insight into the life cycle of hawksbill sea turtles, the ecological importance of protecting nesting habitats,

and the scientific methods used to monitor nests, safeguard hatchlings, and preserve Qatar's marine biodiversity.

They also explored the environmental challenges facing the species, including habitat degradation, climate change, marine pollution, and human activity, while learning how scientific research, conservation programmes, and public policy work together to protect Qatar's coastal ecosystems.

By participating in the release of the hatchlings into their natural habitat, the students developed a deeper appreciation of the shared responsibility individuals, organisations, and communities have in

protecting the environment for future generations.

"Witnessing the hatching of Qatar's endangered hawksbill sea turtles and participating in their release into the Arabian Gulf was a truly memorable experience that brought environmental conservation to life," said BUC chief executive and vice-chairman Dr Hassan al-Derham.

"We are proud to partner with the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change in creating opportunities that connect academic learning with national priorities while inspiring our students to become responsible leaders who contribute to a more sustain-



able future," he continued. "Opportunities such as these foster curiosity, critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving, preparing our graduates to ad-

dress the complex environmental and societal challenges of the future with confidence and purpose," said BUC dean and chief academic officer Dr Lotfi Belkhir.