



Syrian president meets minister of state at MoFA



President of the Syrian Arab Republic Ahmed al-Sharaa met yesterday with HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi. During the meeting, HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs conveyed His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani's greetings to the president of the Syrian Arab Republic and His Highness' wishes for good health and happiness to him, as well as for enduring progress and prosperity for the government and people of Syria. For his part, the president of the Syrian Arab Republic entrusted HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with conveying his greetings to the Amir, wishing His Highness good health and happiness and the State of Qatar continued progress, development, and prosperity. The two sides discussed deepening and expanding bilateral co-operation in a variety of fields, along with a range of matters of shared interest. (QNA)

Al-Khulaifi meets Syrian FM

HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Syrian Arab Republic Asaad al-Shaibani in Damascus yesterday. Following the meeting, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar and the Syrian Arab Republic signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for co-operation in the fields of diplomatic studies and training. The MoU was signed on behalf of Qatar by HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and on behalf of Syria by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates. (QNA)



Qatar researchers aim to end antibiotic guesswork

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The ultimate goal is a predictive model precise enough to flag, ahead of treatment, whether a patient is likely to respond well to a specific antibiotic or react badly to it. "If successfully validated, the technology could become part of routine clinical practice," Puthenveetil said. "Doctors could perform a genetic test before prescribing medication, enabling them to choose the most effective antibiotic, adjust the dosage, or prescribe an alternative treatment tailored to the patient's genetic profile."

The implications extend beyond individual patients. As Qatar deepens its investment in genomics, AI and biomedical research, projects of this kind could reshape antibiotic stewardship nationally, cutting adverse drug reactions while reinforcing the country's ambitions as a regional hub for precision medicine.

"This is precision medicine in action," Puthenveetil said. "Our goal is to prevent unnecessary side effects while ensuring patients receive the medication that is most likely to work for them."

The study remains in its preparatory phase, with ethical approvals underway ahead of patient recruitment, and Puthenveetil cautioned that further laboratory validation will be needed before any hospital rollout, even once the three-year funding period concludes.

The project also carries a teaching dimension: three PhD students and two master's students at HBKU are working directly on the research. "Our students are actively contributing to this work while learning through real-world research," Puthenveetil said. "These projects provide invaluable opportunities to train the next generation of scientists who will drive precision medicine forward."

Qatar takes part in meeting of experts on consumer protection



The State of Qatar participated in the 9th session of the meeting of the Inter-governmental Group of Experts (IGE) on Consumer Protection Law and Policy.

The event was organised by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) from July 6-10, 2026, at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland.

The delegation was led by Assistant Undersecretary for Consumer Affairs at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Hassan bin Sultan al-Ghanim.

The meeting discussed ways to develop legislation and policies related to consumer protection and competition, enhance product safety, and address challenges associated with e-commerce and digital markets.

It likewise addressed avenues for combating harmful goods and unfair commercial practices, strengthening international co-operation, and exchanging best practices, thereby contributing to fostering competitive markets and protecting consumer rights. (QNA)

Amir congratulates president of Mongolia

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani sent cables of congratulations to the President of Mongolia Ukhnaa Khurelsukh on the occasion of his country's Independence Day. HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani sent a cable of congratulations to the Prime Minister of Mongolia Nyam-Osor Uchral on the occasion of his country's Independence Day. (QNA)

Amir sends condolences to Amir of Kuwait

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani and HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani sent cables of condolences to the Amir of the State of Kuwait Sheikh Meshal al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah, on the passing of Sheikh Ali Hamoud al-Salman al-Hamoud al-Sabah. (QNA)

MoL launches 'Maharat 2026' summer programme

The Ministry of Labour (MoL), represented by the Qualifying and Skills Development Department, yesterday launched the "Maharat 2026" Summer Training Programme in co-operation with a number of private sector partners. The programme, one of the ministry's human capital development initiatives, is designed for Qatari secondary and university students, as well as children of Qatari women, who have registered through the Ministry's website. It forms part of the Ministry's efforts to implement the Nationalisation Plan for Jobs in the Private Sector - "Empowering Qatar."

The programme offers training opportunities for Qataris and children of Qatari women across a number of key economic sectors, including financial services, logistics, manufacturing, construction, education, tourism, food and agriculture, information technology and digital services, and healthcare. It is designed to broaden participants' practical experience and enhance their professional and career readiness.

The programme aims to develop students' practical skills, equip them with valuable experience, and prepare them for entry into the labour market. It also introduces participants to the nature of professions and careers across various economic sectors, enabling them to assess how well their skills and abilities align with the requirements of these professions. This, in turn, supports informed academic and career planning and helps them make well-informed decisions regarding their future career paths.

The "Maharat 2026" Summer Training Pro-



gramme reflects the Ministry of Labour's commitment to strengthening partnerships with private sector partners to develop a new generation of qualified national talent capable of supporting the country's development journey and enhancing the competitiveness of the national economy. By providing practical training environments aligned with labour market needs, the programme also promotes a culture of work and productivity while instilling values of responsibility and commitment among students. These efforts contribute to the sustainability of nationalisation and enhance the readiness of national talent to take up specialised roles across various sectors, in line with the objectives of Qatar National Vision 2030. (QNA)

QIIB holds specialised employee training on communication with people with disabilities

QIIB has concluded a specialised employee training programme 'Effective Communication and Interaction with People with Disabilities', delivered in collaboration with the Qatar Society for Rehabilitation of Special Needs.

A highlight of the programme was the certificate presentation ceremony for participating employees, attended by Sheikh Ali bin Abdullah al-Thani, director of Human Resources at QIIB, and Amir al-Mulla, executive director of the Qatar Society for Rehabilitation of Special Needs, alongside senior representatives from both organisations and the programme's instructors.

The initiative reflects QIIB's corporate social responsibility strategy, which places the empowerment of people with disabilities and their dignified, independent access to all banking services at the forefront of its priorities.

The intensive training programme covered key areas, including sign language and best practices for engaging with people with different types of disabilities, supporting QIIB's efforts to deliver an exceptional and equitable banking experience for all customers.

Sheikh Ali highlighted the longstanding partnership between the bank and the Qatar Society for Rehabilitation of Special Needs: "This training programme is another milestone in our long-standing and successful collaboration with the Qatar Society for Rehabilitation of Special Needs."

"At QIIB, we believe that corporate social responsibility extends beyond financial support; it is about making a genuine investment in our people, equipping them with the skills and capabilities to serve all segments of society with efficiency and the highest standards of professionalism."



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He said the ongoing partnership between QIIB and the Qatar Society for Rehabilitation of Special Needs is a strong example of collaboration between the banking sector and civil society organisations. It contributes to raising public awareness, removing barriers for valued members of our community, and ensuring their active participation in economic and social development, he said. "At its core, this programme is driven by both developmental and humanitarian objectives. Through this initiative, QIIB seeks to redefine accessibility as more than the physical design of buildings and branches, such as ramps and lifts. "It is equally about human and institutional accessibility, ensuring that our frontline employees have the knowledge, skills and confidence to understand the needs of customers with disabilities and respond to them seamlessly," he said. Sheikh Ali added: "We are proud of the commitment and dedication demonstrated by

our employees throughout this programme. QIIB will continue to support initiatives that contribute to building a more inclusive and cohesive society, in line with the objectives of Qatar National Vision 2030."

Al-Mulla said: "We are delighted to continue our collaboration with QIIB. The bank's commitment to training its employees and enhancing their ability to communicate effectively with people with disabilities reflects a high level of institutional awareness and reinforces the banking sector's vital role as a key partner in advancing social inclusion. "Qatar Society for Rehabilitation of Special Needs highly values QIIB's continued support. We are confident that the outcomes of this programme will have a direct and positive impact on the quality of services provided to our members and to all people with disabilities in Qatar. We hope this collaboration will serve as a model for other institutions to follow."

QC supports Rohingya refugees with cooking gas in Bangladesh

Qatar Charity (QC) continues to provide cooking gas support to Rohingya refugees living on Bhasan Char in Bangladesh, as part of its ongoing humanitarian relief efforts.

Through this latest intervention, approximately 4,810 individuals have benefited from the distribution of cooking gas cylinders, ensuring access to safe, efficient, and reliable cooking fuel. The initiative continues to improve the daily lives of refugee families by reducing their dependence on traditional firewood and other unsafe cooking methods.

For many refugee households, access to cooking fuel remains an essential daily need. By providing cooking gas cylinders, Qatar Charity seeks to promote safer cooking practices, improve health and well-being, reduce environmental pressure, and ease the daily burden on vulnerable refugee families.

Mabia Khatun, a refugee mother living on Bhasan Char, expressed her appreciation after receiving the support.



"Before receiving the gas cylinder, daily cooking was extremely difficult for my family. We often struggled to manage fuel for preparing meals," she said. "Now cooking has become much easier, safer, and more convenient."

Abdul Matlab, a 42-year-old refugee, also shared his experience.

"This support has brought great relief to our household. With cooking gas, we can prepare meals more quickly and live with greater comfort," he said. "We sincerely thank Qatar Charity for

supporting us."

Government officials have praised Qatar Charity's continued contribution to improving living conditions for refugees on Bhasan Char.

Mohammed Roney Alam Noor, Camp-in-Charge, Bhasan Char, expressed his appreciation to Qatar Charity for the smooth and well-organised LPG distribution, particularly highlighting the fair and needs-based selection of beneficiaries and the distribution's visible positive impact.

He said, "Qatar Charity's LPG support has made a significant difference in the lives of Rohingya families living on Bhasan Char. The distribution process was well-organised, transparent, and ensured that support reached those who needed it most."

Over the last three years, Qatar Charity's cooking gas intervention has benefited approximately 200,000 people, demonstrating its long-term commitment to supporting Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.



Qatar’s sustained commitment to empower youth praised

Qatari newspaper *Arrayah* has underscored the Qatar's sustained commitment to empowering young people, describing them as a key driver of national development and emphasising that investing in people is the surest path to a sustainable future.

In its editorial, “Youth: The Cornerstone of Qatar's Development”, published yesterday, the newspaper said Qatar recognised from an early stage the strategic importance of

investing in young people, adopting comprehensive policies and strategies to empower them with the knowledge and skills needed to navigate global change and contribute meaningfully to the country's sustainable development.

The editorial highlighted the state's integrated framework for supporting young people, citing continued investment in education and training, expanded opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurship, and broader partici-

pation in the economic, social, cultural and sporting spheres. It added that young Qataris have also been given greater opportunities to assume leadership positions and contribute to decision-making.

Arrayah added that Qatar has established a network of general and specialised youth centres offering targeted programs to nurture talent, develop skills, and promote a culture of initiative and volunteerism, strengthening the role of young people as partners

in development and drivers of the country's future.

The newspaper said the Qatar National Youth Policy embodies this strategic vision by seeking to meet the aspirations of younger generations and empower them to contribute to innovation, entrepreneurship and community development. It added that the policy is aligned with the objectives of Qatar National Vision 2030 and the Third National Development Strategy (2024-2030), both

of which place strong emphasis on developing human capital capable of driving the country's sustainable development.

In this context, the editorial noted that Qatar joins countries around the world yesterday in observing World Population Day, marked annually on July 11 under the theme “Realising the hopes and aspirations of young people - today and for the future”. It said the occasion reaffirms the state's commitment to fostering an ena-

bling environment that supports young people's ambitions and strengthens their role in building a cohesive society and a thriving economy.

The newspaper concluded that the occasion also reflects Qatar's commitment to advancing population policies that support families, enhance quality of life, and expand opportunities for young people to realise their aspirations while contributing to a more prosperous and sustainable future. (QNA)

WCM-Q webinars tackle chronic disease, role of environmental risks

Chronic kidney disease and the powerful role of environmental conditions in shaping community health took centre stage in two recent live sessions of the Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar's (WCM-Q) Health and YOU: Community Wellness Webinar series.

In a bid to cut through complexities and bring clarity to everyday health concerns, the webinar series, organised by WCM-Q's Institute for Population Health provides verified facts, evidence based guidance, and plain language explanations. The goal is simple: help people understand the health challenges around them and make informed decisions for themselves and their families.

These sessions aim not just to provide information, but also to empower. By breaking down complex medical issues in easy to understand conversations, the webinars give community members the tools to protect themselves, prevent chronic illness, and take charge of their well being.

Dr Mahrukh Rizvi, assistant professor of medicine at WCM-Q and an alumna of the college, gave a webinar titled, “Safeguarding your kidneys: Understanding chronic kidney disease.” The session discussed the risk factors and early signs of kidney disease, stages of disease progression, management strategies that can be implemented to slow the progression of the disease, and the impact of kidney disease on overall health. Dr Rizvi completed her residency training in internal medicine at Rochester General Hospital in Western New York and her fellowships in nephrology and critical care at Rochester Medical Center and Mayo Clinic, Rochester, respectively.

In a separate event, Dr Sadeer al-Kindi, associate professor at Houston Methodist DeBakey Heart and Vascular Center and Weill Cornell Medicine in the U.S, gave a webinar titled, “How the Environment Shapes Our Health.” Dr al-Kindi, a preventive cardiologist and a leader in environmental and precision cardiovascular health, discussed how air, water, climate, noise and other conditions influence disease risk, aging, and wellbeing. He also explored how these factors shape health trajectories across the lifespan and underpin health disparities among different groups. The webinar also discussed opportunities for prevention of adverse health effects of environmental factors, and ways to build resilience. Dr al-Kindi is also an alumnus of WCM-Q.



Dr Sadeer al-Kindi and Dr Mahrukh Rizvi.

Oman, Iran in Hormuz talks

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US President Donald Trump said on Friday that the US and Iran had agreed to continue talks despite an escalation of hostilities this week, even as he declared an end to the ceasefire between the two sides.

No attacks were reported on Friday or early yesterday, however, and a senior Iranian source said a call between Iran, the US, Qatar and Pakistan had been agreed, with mediators trying to arrange it while Araqchi was in Oman.

Three Qatari and Saudi commercial tankers came under fire earlier in the week, prompting US strikes on Iranian sites and Iranian retaliation against US military installations in Gulf states. Araqchi accused the US of violating the ceasefire after Washington revoked the licence authorising Iranian crude sales on Tuesday. “There can only be mutual compliance,” he wrote on X.

Senior US officials said Iran had told them the shipping attacks stemmed from an “errant part of their system,” language seen as an attempt to calm tensions. The renewed flare-up cast doubt over the interim agreement meant to end the conflict and pushed oil prices higher.

Meanwhile, Iran's new supreme leader, Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, said in a written statement yesterday that Iran would avenge the killing of his predecessor and father on February 28, “whatever happened to Iran.” Trump said he had ordered the US military to be ready to launch thousands of missiles against Iran should Tehran attempt to assassinate him, following reports that Israel had shared intelligence on an alleged Iranian plot.

At least 17 people were killed and 115 wounded in US strikes on six Iranian cities this week, Iran's health ministry said.

Illegal nylon fishing nets seized

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC)'s Marine Protection Department has seized three-layer nylon fishing nets, prohibited due to the severe environmental damage they cause to marine ecosystems, aquatic life, and coral reefs.

The illegal nets were seized during a routine inspection carried out by inspectors from the Marine Protection Department at one of the country's ports. The confiscated equipment was impounded, and the necessary legal measures were taken against the violator in accordance with the environmental laws and regulations governing fishing activities in Qatar.

The ministry stressed that the use of three-layer nylon fishing nets poses a direct threat to fish stocks and marine biodiversity. Such nets contribute to the depletion of marine life and inflict significant damage on sensitive marine ecosystems, making strict enforcement essential to safeguard the country's natural resources for future generations.

The ministry reaffirmed its commitment to continuing inspection and enforcement campaigns across ports and marine areas to detect and address violations, while strengthening compliance with environmental regulations governing fishing practices. These ef-



orts are aimed at protecting fish resources and preserving Qatar's marine environment.

Meanwhile, the Ministry also urged all fishermen to comply with the approved laws and regulations, refrain from using prohibited fishing gear, and adopt only authorised fishing methods. It stressed that adherence to sustainable fishing practices is vital to supporting Qatar's environmental goals, conserving marine biodiversity, and ensuring the long-term sustainability of its marine resources.

Ukraine eyes Qatar agri investment

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Ukraine's fertile land and role as “a leading supplier of grains and oilseeds” make it a compelling destination, he noted. “At the same time, the years of war and economic instability have created a unique investment environment in which high-quality assets can be acquired or financed at valuations significantly below their long-term intrinsic value,” he pointed out.

Fedoranchuk described this as a rare opportunity for strategic investors to participate in the development of “one of the world's most important agricultural regions.”

“Investments in grain elevators, storage facilities, logistics terminals, port infrastructure, processing plants, and agricultural trading platforms offer significant return potential as Ukraine continues its recovery and further integration into the global economy,” he emphasised.

According to Fedoranchuk, the most effective model is a long-

term partnership that combines Qatar's investment capabilities with Ukraine's expertise in production, storage, logistics, and export operations.

“Such cooperation can not only generate attractive investment returns but also strengthen food security through direct access to supply chains at the country of origin,” he stressed.

Emphasising the importance of careful planning and innovative thinking to navigate the evolving market landscape and capitalise on emerging trends and shifts, Fedoranchuk expressed confidence regarding the future, highlighting that the next few years are likely to present extraordinary opportunities for investors who are willing to adopt a strategic mindset.

“I am convinced that the coming years will create exceptional opportunities for investors who are prepared to think strategically and become part of the next stage of development of Ukraine's agricultural sector,” he added.

Qatar youth handball team to face China in friendly match today

Qatar youth handball team will play their final international friendly against China today as they wrap up preparations for the 19th Asian Men's Junior (U20) Handball Championship, set to take place in Suzhou, China, from July 15-27. The tournament also serves as a qualifier for the 2027 IHF Men's Junior World Championship in North Macedonia.

The team arrived in Suzhou yesterday and held their first training session at the championship venue. The session focused on technical and physical prepara-

tions, helping the players acclimatise to the conditions ahead of the tournament.

Talking to Qatar News Agency (QNA), Director of the Qatari Youth and Junior Handball Teams Salem Mohammed al-Dosari said that the team completed a varied training session upon arrival, with a focus on technical and physical preparation. Sunday's friendly against China will provide the coaching staff with a valuable opportunity to assess the players' technical readiness and evaluate their performance levels ahead of the tournament.



All the players are injury-free and fully prepared for the continental championship, he added, while looking forward to delivering strong performances, competing for the top positions, advancing to the knockout stage, and ultimately challenging for the title.

Qatar will begin their campaign against South Korea on July 15 in the opening round, before taking on the UAE in a Gulf derby on July 16. The team will wrap up its group-stage matches against Japan on July 17.

The team is aiming for a strong start in the Asian Championship and to secure one of the qualifying spots for the 2027 IHF Men's Junior World Championship by competing for top positions in the continent. (QNA)



‘A moving target’: South Africa’s seemingly endless border battle

AFP
Musina, South Africa

Perched on weathered wooden rafts, small groups of people hauled themselves and their bundles of cargo hand over hand along a rope strung across the crocodile-infested Limpopo River. Minutes later, they were in South Africa, having bypassed the border post at Beitbridge, a short distance away. By the time patrol officers spotted them, the clandestine migrants had disappeared into the thorn scrub. The short crossing is one of countless illegal passages along South Africa’s porous border with Zimbabwe, where migrants and smugglers routinely slip through efforts to seal the busy frontier. At the official border post, streams of people moved in the op-

posite direction, heading across a bridge over the Limpopo and into Zimbabwe — part of a flood of foreign nationals fleeing deadly anti-immigrant protests in South Africa. Thousands had awaited the journey home inside sprawling white tents serving as a repatriation centre 20 kilometres away for foreigners pouring in from all corners of South Africa. But for weeks, it has been swept by protests and violence against foreigners, who stand accused of taking jobs and resources. At least four foreign nationals have been killed in attacks linked to the protests, according to police, although some African governments repatriating their citizens have put the death toll higher. More than 21,000 people had been housed and processed at the rapidly built repatriation centre, said its manager, provincial home



People awaiting repatriation queue to board a bus headed to Zimbabwe at a repatriation centre in Musina. (AFP)

affairs chief Albert Matsaung. As soon as some leave, more arrive. “This is a moving target. We will never say we’re closed, we will never say we’re finished,” he said. Inside the tents, families slept shoulder to shoulder on thin mattresses while children chased one

another between bags packed for the journey north. Zimbabwean couple Munyai Tungamirai and Patricia Nhamo were returning after paying smugglers \$20 to ferry them across the river in 2024 in search of employment. “It is risky, but I had to do it to feed my family,” Tungamirai told AFP. “During winter, there is not much water, so it’s easy to cross.” The 42-year-old found work on an orange farm in Tzaneen, about 200 kilometres south of the border. But when anti-immigrant groups began targeting undocumented migrants, his employer told him to leave, fearing labour inspections and vigilantes going door to door in search of foreign nationals. Cradling their one-year-old son, the couple said they hoped to return within a year, this time with valid passports.

But Leonard Moyo, in his mid-twenties, vowed he would never come back. “Here in South Africa, it’s like apartheid. They don’t like us,” said the father of two, who arrived in 2010 and had been working for a construction company. “I would rather die in my country,” he said, clutching a 14-inch computer monitor, one of the few possessions he managed to collect before fleeing his home in Limpopo province. For border authorities, the steady flow of departures has done little to resolve a longer-term problem of irregular immigration. Since June 7, more than 46,000 migrants have been repatriated and deported through Beitbridge, most of them Malawians, followed by Zimbabweans, according to Border Management Authority commissioner Michael Masiapato.

Plans for post-war Gaza face hurdles on the ground

AFP
Jerusalem

In spite of the ongoing risk of renewed fighting in Gaza, stakeholders have spent months preparing for the post-war phase. Plans for governance, security and humanitarian relief have begun to take shape, but remain largely theoretical in the absence of a political agreement, credible security guarantees and sustained funding. Below are some of the key challenges facing local and international players as they seek to rebuild the devastated territory home to more than two million Palestinians. Security remains the cornerstone of every post-war scenario under discussion. Israel insists Hamas must disarm before any progress can be made, while the Palestinian movement refuses to surrender its weapons before Israeli troops withdraw and a Palestinian governing authority is established. However, an official from the Board of Peace established by US President Donald Trump to help prepare for post-war Gaza told AFP that Hamas’s disarmament was no longer being treated as a precondition for advancing plans on the ground. “The entire planning is around worst case scenario,” he said, referring to a planned pilot “humanitarian zone” in Rafah, in the south. “We get nothing in the negotiation, but we move forward anyhow.” Among the proposals is an International Stabilisation Force (ISF) tasked with helping maintain order in Gaza. According to the same source, four countries — Morocco, Kosovo, Albania and Kazakhstan — are “really engaged” in the initiative. A logistical base on the Israeli



Displaced people live in tents amid the rubble of buildings destroyed in Israeli offensive in Gaza City. (Reuters)

side of the Kerem Shalom crossing is “close to complete” and would be able to host an initial rotation of around 500 troops before any deployment into Gaza, the official said. Preparations are also continuing for a Palestinian police force, with around 20,000 applications already received, the official added. But several diplomats and security sources interviewed by AFP described a process that remains deadlocked. According to one diplomatic source, training has yet to begin and Israel has rejected the current list of recruits following its vetting process, arguing in particular that a proposed force of 5,000 police officers would be too large for Gaza. The humanitarian needs of Gaza remain overwhelming. The UN estimates reconstruction will take years and require tens of billions of dollars, as construction materials and debris-clearing equipment remain in critically

short supply. Despite substantial donor pledges, much of the expected funding has yet to be disbursed, according to the Board of Peace. “We’re working with an amount that for now meets our needs,” the board official said, adding that if several humanitarian zones have to be established then “we obviously need more funding.” The board is currently planning a pilot humanitarian zone in Rafah which would accommodate tens of thousands of vetted Palestinians, the official said earlier this week. Hamas announced recently it intends to hand over administrative responsibilities to the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza (NCAG), a body set up by the Board of Peace comprising Palestinian technocrats tasked with overseeing day-to-day governance during a transitional period. But the NCAG has still not even managed to enter Gaza, with several Palestinian and diplomatic sources saying Israel has barred the committee from entering. For Israel, dismantling Hamas’s administrative apparatus falls short of its longstanding demand that the group disarm. The future role of the Palestinian Authority (PA) also remains unresolved. Based in Ramallah in the occupied West Bank — a separate Palestinian territory from the Gaza Strip — the PA remains the international community’s officially recognised Palestinian interlocutor. The NCAG is intended as a temporary body implementing basic services across the strip, with European officials expecting it to work in coordination with the PA. Several observers, however, warn that the result could be an administration responsible for delivering public services but lacking authority over security forces or border crossings — leaving it dependent on its international backers while remaining vulnerable to Hamas should the group retain all or part of its military arsenal.

Army suffer casualties in Oyo rescue in Nigeria

AFP
Ibadan, Nigeria

Nigerian security forces suffered “casualties” during the rescue of over 40 kidnapped schoolchildren and teachers, the army said yesterday, in an operation that put an end to a major security crisis in the country’s relatively safe southwest. The pupils, whose rescue was announced Friday, had been seized from three schools in Nigeria’s Oyo state and held captive for nearly two months. The army said the children and staff were rescued following “carefully planned and executed” operations alongside intelligence agencies, police and local vigilante groups. “However, there were some casualties on the part of the security forces,” it said, without elaborating. The shock kidnapping, in Oyo’s Oriire local government area, was blamed on militants from Ansaru, a Boko Haram splinter group known to operate in central Nigeria, extending into the southwest. “I was almost shedding tears yesterday when I saw them. It was mental torture,” Abdulfatai Buhari, a senator from Oyo state, told AFP, noting there were two and three-year-olds among those kidnapped. “They were so frail,” he added. Nigeria has been fighting a conflict that over the years has seen armed groups spread and fracture outside their strongholds in the northeast. But the attack in Oyo state sent shockwaves through a country where many had long written off such violence as a problem confined to the north. There, mass kidnappings have become an increasingly regular tactic of both militants and armed gangs known as “bandits”. The Oyo abduction prompted protests across the country, a state-wide teachers’ strike and

high-profile condemnation — all just months before the January 2027 presidential elections. A spokesman for President Bola Tinubu yesterday accused opposition candidate Atiku Abubakar of having “weaponised the kidnap as a campaign issue”. Southwest Nigeria — home to economic capital Lagos — has long been considered one of the safest regions in a country struggling with multiple security crises. Oyo is one of Nigeria’s most populous states, and its capital, Ibadan, is a major education hub. Defence Minister Christopher Musa said last week the kidnappers had tried to use the students as “leverage” with the Nigerian government, which is holding some of their commanders. He added the kidnappers threatened to kill their hostages if security forces moved in. But the army said its operations, which lasted more than a month, targeted the kidnappers’ wider networks and dismantled several hideouts in the forests of Old Oyo National Park. Arrests across the country, meanwhile, “completely disorganised the group, exerted overwhelming pressure on them and ultimately led the terrorist group to ‘unconditionally release’ the pupils and teachers”, said the military statement. Addressing media outside the military clinic where the pupils are being treated, Oyo Governor Seyi Makinde said family visits were being organised — including for “a small girl in there that has been asking for her mother”. “We have to do a bit of medical intervention,” he said, adding there were “post-traumatic issues to be addressed”. Armed groups have long used mass school kidnappings in an attempt to extract ransoms and press other demands — most infamously in April 2014 when Boko Haram militants abducted 276 schoolgirls from a secondary school in Chibok.

US delegation in Lebanon to discuss Israel ‘pilot zone’ withdrawal: official

A US military delegation met with Lebanon’s army in Beirut to discuss the implementation of Israel’s withdrawal from a “pilot zone” in occupied territory, a Lebanese military official told AFP yesterday. Under a framework agreement reached on June 26, Israel will gradually withdraw from areas of southern Lebanon where it has deployed troops to fight Hezbollah, the Iran-backed movement. As part of the agreement, the long-disempowered Lebanese military will take full control of two small areas dubbed pilot zones. “The American military delegation arrived and began meetings with the Lebanese army command to discuss the mechanisms for implementing the first pilot zone from which the Israelis will withdraw, allowing the Lebanese army to deploy,” the official said, requesting anonymity. “This is the main objective the American military delegation is bringing to Lebanon... it is the translation and implementation of the framework agreement.” US ambassador Michel Issa told President Joseph Aoun on Thursday that the American delegation was coming to “determine the mechanism” for the deal’s implementation. In Washington, a US official had said on condition of anonymity that “the first pilot zone will launch in a matter of days, and further pilot zones are being mapped out and planned”. US Central Command will coordinate on the zones with both countries, he said. The agreement — rejected by Hezbollah — does not set a timetable for Israel’s withdrawal, and Israeli officials have also vowed that their forces will remain in a “security zone” 10 kilometres deep as long as Hezbollah remains armed. The war, which began in early March when Hezbollah entered the wider Middle East conflict on the side of its backer Iran, displaced more than a million people in Lebanon, according to the UN’s humanitarian agency OCHA. Yesterday the agency said more than 732,000 people had now returned home, up from 640,000 a week before. That leaves more than 430,000 still displaced, it added. Lebanon’s state-run National News Agency reporting several strikes in the south yesterday. The latest talks between Lebanon and Israel, which have no formal relations but have met for five rounds of negotiations since the start of the war, will take place in Rome next Wednesday and Thursday. (AFP)

Palestinians fly kites in defiance of Israeli settlers

AFP
Burin, Palestinian Territories

As brightly coloured kites climb above Burin, a Palestinian village in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, children race across a sun-baked hillside, watching their creations soar into the sky. Behind them, the red-roofed houses of Har Bracha, an Israeli settlement, overlook the village below. Established in 1983, the settlement, illegal under international law, is one of several that encircle Burin, a village of a few thousand people. Every summer since 2009, residents have gathered on this hill for a kite festival, held on land they say has been partly lost after being confiscated by settlers. “We want to tell the settlers that this is our land, this is our sky. If we can’t reach those lands anymore, our kites can,” Ghassan Najjar, one of the festival’s organisers, told AFP. While the festival is primarily for children, it also carries a “political message,” he says. In Burin, conversations rarely drift far from settler attacks or the steady spread of Israeli settlements across the Palestinian territory. As early as 2008, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) had warned of settler attacks in the area, citing shootings targeting Burin residents and the uprooting of their olive trees. Since the start of the war in Gaza in October 2023, the UN has reported a sharp increase in violence attributed to Israeli settlers in the West Bank, while several Israeli ministers have continued to call for the annexation of all or part of the territory.



Palestinians and solidarity activists fly kites towards the Israeli settlement of Har Bracha from the village of Burin, south of Nablus in the occupied West Bank. (AFP)

For a few hours, however, the hillside takes on the air of a village fair. A clown paints children’s faces, music fills the air, as families spread picnic carpets across the grass. Kites in the black, white, green and red of the Palestinian flag soar overhead, joined by another in the colours of Egypt, flown in tribute to the Egyptian national football team. “Our children have the right to play and to have a real and a good life,” says Najjar. Yet even this celebration unfolds under the shadow of the conflict. Before gathering, residents say they first checked that no groups of Israeli settlers were nearby. “Sometimes we are scared... Last year we didn’t come because settlers had attacked the village,” says 15-year-old Sanaa Bashar Najjar.

“We stay only half an hour or an hour, just to get a bit of fresh air. With the war and the economic hardship, we’re simply trying to breathe.” Another resident, Dalia Zaban, says her parents’ home was attacked, its windows smashed and cars vandalised. “Today, we just hope they don’t come down here,” she said. As the afternoon wears on, the wind begins to fade and the kites slowly drift back to earth. The villagers, however, say they will return next summer, determined to reclaim at least a patch of sky. Wearing sunglasses and dressed with care, Burin resident Qusai Walid Eid summarises the feeling, saying he attends the festival every year to strengthen “our roots in this land”.

Officials sought ways to sidestep election agency before firings

Reuters
Washington

The White House spent months looking for ways to bypass a federal election agency and use emergency powers to force changes to voting machines, before President Donald Trump ousted its leaders on Thursday, four people familiar with the matter said.

Some officials were frustrated with what they saw as the Election Assistance Commission's slowness in updating guidelines for states on voting machines, the sources said, while some also wanted it to add a proof-of-citizenship requirement to its national mail voter registration form and address other election-related priorities of the administration.

Democratic lawmakers criticised the firings as an attempt to increase its control over US elections, which are the purview of the states, and as undermining election integrity ahead of November's midterm elections, when control of Congress will be at stake.

Trump fired the bipartisan federal agency's two Democratic commissioners and allowed its lone Republican commissioner to resign, Reuters reported on Thursday. The agency's fourth commissioner departed in April.

It was not immediately clear why Trump decided to force the commissioners out at this time or if they will be replaced. The agency remains operational, but without a quorum it cannot take up any new business, such as implementing changes to voting procedures or the national mail voter registration form.

"The administration from the start has been working across all agencies and local partners to safeguard elections from fraud and abuse, and investing in a strong infrastructure to sustain that mission especially in the midterm



People vote during elections in New York. (Reuters/File Photo)

elections," the White House said in a Friday statement when asked about the discussions on sidestepping the commission.

Trump and his allies have pressed Congress to adopt nationwide voting changes and argued that some voting systems require upgrades, as Trump continues to falsely claim that the 2020 election was stolen from him.

In a Thursday statement confirming the firings, the White House cited a Supreme Court decision in June that granted the president more power to fire members of independent agencies.

"(The president) reserves the right to remove individuals that may not be totally aligned with the important task of securing America's elections," the statement said.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, a New York Democrat, called the dismissals a "brazen attempt to seize control of our elections before a single vote is cast" in the midterms.

"He is gutting the independent agency that certifies voting systems and helps election officials run secure elections," Schumer said.

As early as last fall, White House officials reviewed a recommendation from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) to declare a national emergency and create a federal task force that could compel states to address vulnerabilities in voting systems, without going through the elections commission.

The agency at that time was finalizing its probe of voting machines it had seized from Puerto Rico. ODNI officials concluded that there were flaws in the Puerto Rico machines that they believed could exist elsewhere, two of the sources said. Election experts have said the US territory, which does not vote in presidential elections, lags the states in implementing the latest voting system guidelines.

The report was never published and the recommendation was never acted upon, but complaints about the elections commission continued, the two sources said.

During the same period, the two sources said, officials from the Department of Homeland Security, ODNI and the White House met with the commission's leaders to discuss their concerns, includ-

ing flaws that they believed could have contributed to abnormalities in 2020 — claims that have been widely debunked.

The elections commission is responsible for setting guidelines for states on voting machine systems. Some Trump officials have argued internally that there are states operating with outdated software, three of the sources familiar with the conversations said.

Election administration experts said the commission often moves slowly in its work because voting systems are complex, the technology is evolving, and policy changes involve extensive public feedback.

"The voting system guidelines haven't been updated too frequently because the process takes a long time," Matt Weil, vice president of governance at the Bipartisan Policy Center and a former commission staffer, said in an interview. "So yes, there is slowness, but that is not a bug, that's a feature of the system."

The remaining commission staff can still test and certify equipment, as well as publish research and reports and distribute federal grant money.

US extends work permits for Haitians, other immigrants

Reuters
Washington

US President Donald Trump's administration on Friday extended work permits for hundreds of thousands of immigrants with temporary protected status from Haiti and six other countries, hours before they were due to expire.

The US Citizenship and Immigration Services, which is part of the Department of Homeland Security, said work permits for Haitians with temporary protected status will now expire on July 24. Permits for recipients from Ethiopia, Syria, Somalia, Yemen, South Sudan and Myanmar will end in a week's time.

The US Supreme Court ruled last month that the Trump administration could end temporary protected status for Haitians and Syrians.

Temporary protected status allows people already in the US to remain in the country and work legally if their home countries are affected by natural disasters, armed conflict or other extraordinary conditions.

Rights advocates and community members have expressed

fear that the Supreme Court's decision could strip hundreds of thousands of people of work authorization and protection from deportation.

Labour groups had urged an extension of the work permissions, arguing that their removal could result in "chaos in workplaces and disrupt key industries."

Trump has pursued a hardline immigration crackdown and deportation drive, which has been widely condemned by human rights groups as being in violation of free speech and due process rights. Human rights groups also say the crackdown has created an unsafe environment for ethnic minorities and raised concerns of racial profiling.

While Trump campaigned in 2024 on a platform of stopping illegal immigration, his administration has also made legal immigration more difficult — or example, by imposing new and expensive fees for applicants of certain visas and by enforcing the vetting of social media of applicants and immigrants already in the country.

Trump says his actions aim at improving domestic security and at securing jobs for US citizens.

US acting spy chief announces new round of staff reductions

Reuters
Washington

Acting US Director of National Intelligence Bill Pulte announced a third round of staff reductions on Friday after being urged by President Donald Trump in recent weeks to shrink the agency's ranks.

"US National Intelligence is operating more efficiently and effectively than ever before, and today, we started a third round of reducing redundant, or non-critical, personnel," Pulte said in a statement on X.

It did not provide the number of roles or personnel that were being terminated.

Since taking office early last year, the Trump administration has attempted to remake US agencies and institutions by installing Trump loyalists and cracking down on dissent.

The Trump administration has gutted agencies in the name of tackling wasteful spending and fraud but political experts

have warned that the effort has led to elimination of vital roles across government bodies.

Pulte, an ally of Trump, has no prior national security experience, causing Trump to face a political backlash after the Republican leader's loyalist was picked to fill the role temporarily. Pulte's appointment had raised concerns even among some Republicans that he would "weaponise" intelligence against Trump's perceived political foes.

Reuters reported last month that staff at the office of the top US spy were told by managers to expect extensive cuts in the coming months after Trump said he wants the interim director to shrink the agency's ranks.

The nomination hearing for Jay Clayton, Trump's nominee to serve as the next US director of national intelligence to lead the nation's 18 intelligence agencies, is scheduled for July 15.

Former Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard left office on June 19.

Trump revives praise for his health after cognitive test

US President Donald Trump said yesterday that he had "just finished" a physical at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, referring to the medical examination he underwent in late May after which the White House said he was in excellent health.

"I just finished a perfect physical at Walter Reed, I do it every six months, and I requested another Cognitive Test, the only President to do so, three times, and I aced them all — Got every question right," Trump, who turned 80 in June, posted on social media.

The White House said Trump was referring to his May physical. He included the remarks in a



Donald Trump at Nato Summit in Ankara last week. (AFP)

social media post attacking the *New York Times* reporter Maggie Haberman and her colleague Jonathan Swan, who recently pub-

lished a book about Trump's return to power that has drawn widespread attention.

Haberman and Swan's "Re-

gime Change: Inside the Imperial Presidency of Donald Trump" described concerns among some White House aides about Trump's age, stamina and physical condition.

At 80, Trump is the oldest person to serve as US president. Questions about the health and mental fitness of aging leaders have become a recurring issue in Washington after concerns over former President Joe Biden's cognitive abilities ultimately led him to end his 2024 reelection campaign.

Trump has frequently touted his performance on cognitive tests, saying he has taken them multiple times and received perfect scores. (Reuters)

US Democrat Ro Khanna detained by Israeli settlers during West Bank visit

Reuters
West Bank

US Democratic lawmaker Ro Khanna said he was detained by Israeli settlers armed with US-made rifles during a West Bank visit this week that he cast as an unfiltered look at the human toll of Israeli occupation as he weighs a 2028 presidential run.

Speaking with Reuters on Thursday in a Palestinian village, Khanna said his group's van was surrounded by settlers wielding M4 rifles a day earlier while touring a part of the southern West Bank where residents face frequent settler attacks.

"We were at a village that Israeli settlers had destroyed, they had destroyed the school, they had destroyed that village, and we were just looking at it," said Khanna, a progressive lawmaker from California in the US House of Representatives.

"And these hoodlums come in with machine guns — M4, an American-made machine gun — and they detain us. They block off the road. And then they call the IDF and the IDF is on their side, not on the side of the Americans," Khanna said, referring to the Israeli military.

An aide to Khanna who was in the group, Cameron Kasky, said they were held for more than an hour and made appeals to the US Embassy in Jerusalem for help. A group of officers who appeared to be police eventually intervened,



US Representative Ro Khanna speaks with a Palestinian resident of Turmus Ayya, near Ramallah. (Reuters)

leading to their release, Kasky said.

The Israeli military said troops and police officers intervened after receiving a report of settlers blocking vehicles near Khirbet Zanuta, a small Palestinian hamlet whose residents were forcibly displaced by violent settler raids following Hamas' storming of Israel.

"Upon their arrival, the troops dispersed the Israeli civilians and allowed the vehicles to continue on their way," the military said.

Israel's police did not immediately respond to a request for comment, nor did the US Embassy in Jerusalem.

Khanna is the second Demo-

crat considering a White House bid to visit the region this week. In Tel Aviv on Wednesday, Rahm Emanuel, who was chief of staff to former President Barack Obama, said Israeli policies toward Palestinians were eroding support for the US-Israeli alliance.

Asked if he was running for president, Khanna said: "I'm strongly considering it and I'm more resolved to consider it after this trip."

Israel's conduct toward Palestinians has emerged as a flashpoint in Democratic politics ahead of November's US midterm elections, contributing to primary defeats

for some incumbent lawmakers targeted by left-wing challengers who accused them of supporting Israel's right-wing government.

Israel's favourability rating among Democrats fell from 59% in 2018 to 22% in May, according to Reuters/Ipsos polling.

While Israel has long enjoyed strong bipartisan US support, an increasing number of Democrats in Congress are now pressing to cut off military aid, which amounts to \$3.8bn per year and includes funding for light weaponry like M4 rifles and missile interceptors that Israel used in the Iran war.

Overlooking a valley dotted with



A handout image shows Israeli settlers blocking the convoy of US Representative Ro Khanna in Khirbet Zanuta, during a visit in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. (Reuters)

settler outposts on the outskirts of Turmus Ayya, a village home to thousands of Palestinian American dual nationals, Khanna said he believed his party's establishment was "clueless about how much of a moral test Palestine, Gaza and Israel have become."

He said he chose to do a visit exclusively to the West Bank, with programming led by Palestinians, to give him an unfiltered view of territory Israel captured in the 1967 Middle East war.

"If you're unwilling to speak up for Palestinian human rights, if you're unwilling to speak up against the genocide in Gaza, the apartheid in the West Bank, then you are morally compromised," Khanna said.

Israel rejects allegations it carried out a genocide in Gaza or that it institutes an apartheid regime in

the West Bank, which has a population of about three million Palestinians and around 500,000 Jewish settlers.

Most countries and the UN regard Israeli settlements in the West Bank as illegal under international law, citing the Fourth Geneva Convention's prohibition on transferring a civilian population into occupied territory.

Israel rejects that position, saying the West Bank is disputed territory where there has been a Jewish presence for thousands of years.

Palestinians view the West Bank, together with Gaza and East Jerusalem, as part of a Palestinian state.

Support remains strong among Republicans, though some elements of Trump's coalition have also called for cutting off aid.

Teenage quake survivor mourns her lost ‘young forever’ friends

Reuters
La Guaira

Maria Alejandra Sanz turned away when she heard rescue workers had pulled the lifeless body of one of her best friends from the rubble of a building leveled by twin earthquakes that struck the state of La Guaira in northern Venezuela last month.

The 17-year-old high school student had lain in near-darkness for 17 hours after the June 24 quakes, trapped beneath the collapsed building in the coastal town of La Guaira where she had grown up, drinking her own urine to survive and assuming the other members of her dance troupe were dead. Of the group of 10 friends who had been preparing a routine for their high school graduation, four did not make it out alive.

“I’m fine,” Sanz said unconvinced during an interview in front of her former home nine days after the disaster, the Caribbean air still heavy with dust and grief. Earlier that day, rescuers had pulled the body of her friend, Gonzalo Marquez, from the rubble. Then came a string of unanswerable questions: Would her friends have survived if rescuers had arrived sooner? Would things be different if the dance troupe had practiced in a different building? What if she had been with Marquez downstairs instead of fetching him water from her upstairs apartment? Why does she get to go to university, while he is laid to rest?

Raised amid economic collapse, mass migration and authoritarian rule, Sanz and her friends began 2026 believing the US ouster of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro might finally offer a different future. Then came the quakes, which the government says have so far killed over 4,000 people and injured nearly 17,000 others.

Sanz’s troupe had been practicing seven days a week in the month leading up to the quakes, sometimes going until 3 a.m. That evening, in the ground-floor party hall of her building, they had been



A drone view shows Maria Alejandra Sanz’s building. (Reuters)

refining moves to “Dangerous,” a 1991 song by US pop icon Michael Jackson.

Graduation was in three days. About 20 minutes before the quakes struck, Marquez asked Sanz for water. She went up to the third-floor apartment she shared with her parents, petted her dog Bruna for the last time and was about to reach the water when the building started to shake at 6:04 pm.

She moved to the nearest door frame and seconds later was engulfed in darkness as the floors below her gave way. The door frame fell over her midsection diagonally, shielding her from a collapsed wall.

Sanz saw a sliver of light across her fingers and knew she was not buried too deep. She was able to free her feet by slipping out of the oversised sneakers she was given for the dance performance.

She says she knew her own urine might offer her only chance to drink, so she caught what she could in her hand and raised it to her mouth. The light soon faded and she prayed. “If I have to die, let it be while I’m asleep,” she remembers thinking at the time.

Sanz woke to light falling across her hand again and began clawing toward it, wedging her body slowly between chunks of concrete and making a hole she could fit through in the wall above her.

When she emerged with half

her body free, she yelled out to a neighbor for help. Sanz’s 71-year-old father, who had been outside along with his wife at the time of the quakes, sprinted up the pile of debris. The teen hung on to him in a mental fog. When she got to her mother, Sanz learned that five of her 10 friends had escaped unscathed. “What about Gonzalo? Isa?” Sanz asked.

There was no news about Marquez, but volunteer rescue workers had seen Isa Campos, whom Sanz had known her whole life, conscious underneath the rubble. She was alive, they said.

At the time it was true. Jeffrey Campos, the father of the trapped girl, had arrived at the scene within two hours of the disaster and spent all night plunging into the mass of concrete and steel with the father of another dancer. By 11 am, a Caracas police unit joined the effort, using only their bare hands.

The equipment they needed to pull Isa Campos from between two beams never arrived. Known for her intelligence and electric energy, she died some 24 hours after the quakes. Her body remains in the rubble.

“Help arrived late,” her father said outside a church where a mass was held in his daughter’s honor. “Rescue workers, firemen and the military did not arrive until two or three days later.”

After seeing a TikTok video



An excavator removes debris from the site where Maria Alejandra Sanz was trapped for 17 hours in La Guaira. (Reuters)



Maria Alejandra Sanz embraces her father, Alejandro Sanz, with the remains of their apartment building in the background in La Guaira. (Reuters)

about the trapped dancers the night of the quakes, civil engineer Andres Ganscka set out from his home in central Colombia with hydraulic and power jacks, hand tools, diapers and baby cream.

“I saw it and thought, ‘That could be my daughter,’” said Ganscka, a father of three.

He arrived the next night to a disaster site strewn with bodies and limbs. He coordinated volunteer rescue workers at the Sanz family’s building, scouring the rubble for the missing dancers and 15 other children who had been playing table tennis inside. Venezuelan authorities finally arrived three days after him. In total, Ganscka spent around \$35,000 on the rescue effort.

Sanz and Marquez both had places at universities in Caracas; he planned to study engineering

and she was focused on architecture. They talked about staying in Venezuela to build a better country. Like other Venezuelans their age, they had watched their parents struggle through an economic crisis that has lasted more than a decade, political upheaval and outbreaks of violence while friends and relatives migrated abroad. But the capture of Maduro by US forces during a raid in January seemed to offer hope.

When Marquez was assigned the desk next to hers during their freshman year, Sanz says she didn’t think much of him. But by senior year, they were inseparable friends. Though not outwardly funny in the beginning of their relationship, he would later constantly tease her with his sarcastic jokes. They were Mr and Mrs Claus at the school’s Christmas performance. When not dancing, they practiced piano.

“He was often the only boy, he didn’t care what anyone thought, full of personality and the protector of the crew,” Sanz said.

The once-active group chat in which they would coordinate costumes, set design and practice times has largely fallen silent. Sanz says the other survivors drift between numbness and grief, okay one moment and crying the next.

“We talked about how we weren’t going to see each other after graduation, we talked about how Gonzalo looked like his dad and would have gray hair,” Sanz said. “They’ll stay young forever, always young.”

Americas pledge to double down on crime at Peru summit

AFP
Lima

Over 30 countries across North and South America agreed last week on Friday to bolster joint efforts against organised crime at a summit in the Peruvian city of Cusco.

A US official attending the 17th Conference of Defence Ministers of the Americas said Washington would wield its influence to clamp down on soaring crime across the region. The Americas has the world’s highest homicide rates — 15 per 100,000 inhabitants — half of which are linked to organised crime, according to UN data.

The Cusco Declaration, which

‘We live in the same neighbourhood. Thus we are directly affected by the choices you make for the security and defence of your countries,’
— Pentagon official Elbridge Colby

emerged after three days of meetings, detailed how signatories will strengthen joint efforts against “transnational organised crime, terrorism, illicit economies and other emerging threats,” Peru’s Defence Ministry stated.

Gangs such as Venezuela’s Tren de Aragua — declared a terrorist organisation by the US in 2025 — have spilled across borders into neighbouring countries.

Pentagon official Elbridge Colby highlighted the changes to US policy in the Americas under US President Donald Trump.

“We live in the same neighbourhood. Thus we are directly affected by the choices you make for the security and defence of your countries,” he stated at the summit. The Cusco Declaration also stressed the importance of bolstering “regional co-operation in humanitarian assistance and disaster response.”

Ministers also discussed “cyber defence, artificial intelligence, climate change (and) humanitarian assistance,” according to a statement released by the Brazilian government.

US-Canada bridge threatened by President Trump to open on July 27

A long-awaited new bridge between Canada and the US, threatened by President Donald Trump earlier this year, will open for public use in late July, officials said Friday. “Today, Canada and Michigan have agreed to open the Gordie Howe International Bridge on July 27, with the support of the US Government,” Canada’s Ministry of Infrastructure said in a statement, adding the bridge “will be a vital economic link between Canada and the US — generating billions of dollars in economic activity for decades to come.” The \$4.7bn (CAN\$6.4bn) bridge, which connects Detroit and Windsor, Ontario, has been under construction since 2018. Prior to the announcement, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney last month said the bridge’s inauguration had been delayed indefinitely at the request of the US due to “technical issues.” In February, Trump threatened to fully block the bridge, insisting that the US had been treated unfairly in its construction and that it should be “at least half” US-owned. According to a fact sheet issued by the Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority, the bridge was financed entirely by Canada and will be jointly owned by Canada and the US state of Michigan. It is named after late Canadian-born National Hockey League great and Detroit Red Wings star Gordie Howe, in what was meant to be a symbol of unity between Canada and the US. (AFP)



The Gordie Howe International Bridge as seen from Windsor, Ontario, Canada. (Reuters)

Hard times: Cuba’s power grid fails for a second time

Cuba’s national electrical grid collapsed on Friday in the second nationwide outage this week and the fourth this year as a US-imposed oil blockade has crippled the island’s already obsolete generation system.

“We are already working on restoring the National Electric Power System, a complex situation amid all the difficulties we face on a daily basis,” Energy Minister Vicente de la O Levy wrote on social media.

Before the collapse, large swaths of Cuba, including Santiago de Cuba, were still disconnected due to severe fuel shortages after a nationwide outage cut off power to the island’s 10 million residents on Monday. Authorities had reconnected most of the nation’s grid from that outage by late on Tuesday.

Yailin Fis Garcia, 26, stood outside her darkened cafe and pizza joint in central Havana, her 5-month-old baby on her shoulder. She and her family had



Empty streets as Cuba’s national power grid remains down during the second total blackout in a week in Havana. (Reuters)

opened the La Criolla cafe just a few weeks ago, and Friday marked the second time the electrical grid had collapsed since they started.

“All the food spoils, which is an economic hit,” she said.

Still, she knew it could be worse. Her neighborhood on the outskirts of the capital suffers such severe energy shortages that

for the last month her home has only received electricity for an hour or two a day, she said.

President Donald Trump imposed the oil blockade on the Caribbean island after Washington deposed Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro on January 3. Venezuela was Cuba’s primary fuel supplier, and subsequent US

pressure led Mexico to halt oil shipments to the island.

Havana resident Gabriel Rico said he has gotten used to keeping a flashlight handy, as the blackouts have grown more frequent.

“We are prepared for the blockade, which is what has us suffering like this, what has left us in shreds — in shreds, that’s what it has done to us.”

The chronic power failures have fueled rising social tensions, sparking scattered pot-banging protests in Havana after Monday’s nationwide blackout.

But the dispersed protests are a far cry from the most recent mass demonstrations in July 2021, when thousands of Cubans took to the streets in the largest anti-government protest in decades.

Havana blames a decades-old US trade embargo for its failing infrastructure, while Washington says the blackouts are due to the mismanagement of Cuba’s state-run economy. The US has openly stated its goal is to change Cuba’s government. (Reuters)

ANNOUNCEMENT

I, AHMED KHALIL HADDAD VARZI

holder of

IRAN Passport No. N97133765
QID No. 29736400095

hereby change my name

from

AHMED KHALIL HADDAD VARZI

to

AHMED HADDAD VARZI

Any objection, please contact
THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE FOR
NATIONALITY AFFAIRS
within 15 days from the publication of this notice.

Colombia’s president-elect calls for respecting vote results

AFP
Bogotá

Colombia’s right-wing president-elect Abelardo De la Espriella yesterday urged his countrymen to respect his election victory “without ambiguity,” after outgoing leader Gustavo Petro cast doubt on the result.

Lat week on Friday, the US and 12 members of its Shields of the Americas alliance in Latin America issued a joint statement calling on “all” authorities in Bogota to conduct a peaceful transition of power.

De la Espriella, the hard-right president-elect of Colombia backed by US President Donald Trump, said the “sovereign will of the Colombian people, expressed at the ballot box, must be respected without ambiguity” or attempt to flout democracy.

He added in a statement that the



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

international community’s backing of his election victory in a June runoff

over Petro’s political heir, Ivan Cepeda, showed “the importance of preserving

constitutional order and ensuring” the country’s political transition.

Petro, who was constitutionally barred from seeking a second term, said he had proof of vote fraud in the runoff and has called on his supporters to protest on July 20, when he will also give his farewell address as president.

De la Espriella has countered, without providing evidence, that Petro is plotting a “coup” against him, before he takes the oath of office on August 7.

Petro has since promised a “peaceful transition.”

De la Espriella has said he hopes to join the Shield of the Americas, a security initiative created in March by Trump’s administration to combat drug cartels in the region.

In addition to the US, the signatories included Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guyana, Honduras, Panama, Paraguay, and Trinidad and Tobago.

N Korea condemns Nato summit

Reuters
Seoul

North Korea condemned the United States and its allies on Saturday for what it called strengthening military blocs and accelerating arms buildups after a Nato summit this week. Pyongyang accused Nato leaders of portraying North Korea's exercise of its legitimate sovereign rights as a threat, the foreign ministry said in a statement carried on state media KCNA.

The alliance demonstrated a stronger commitment to bloc-to-bloc confrontation through increased arms spending and closer military co-operation with allies in the Asia-Pacific region, the ministry said.

At the Nato summit in Turkiye on Tuesday, officials announced more than \$50bn in military procurement and industrial agreements as European allies face continued pressure from US President Donald Trump to shoulder a greater share of the alliance's defence burden.

President Lee Jae Myung of Pyongyang's rival Reoublic of Korea said on the sidelines of the summit that he hoped Seoul would expand

co-operation with Nato allies in research and development, including in cutting-edge technologies, and in production of weapons systems.

North Korea said the summit showed that Nato was a body geared towards war and confrontation, pursuing what Pyongyang described as exclusive geopolitical interests at the expense of peace and security in Europe and the Asia-Pacific.

Pyongyang, which says a push by the West for it to abandon nuclear weapons has been irreversibly terminated, believes instead that denuclearisation efforts should focus first on what it described as attempts by the Republic of Korea and Japan to pursue their own nuclear weapons under US protection, as well as the nuclear ambitions of Nato members participating in the alliance's nuclear-sharing arrangements, the ministry said.

It said North Korea would safeguard its sovereignty and security interests, as well as regional peace, through the responsible exercise of its sovereign rights. KCNA said on Friday that North Korea had decided on measures to strengthen its nuclear forces "quantitatively and qualitatively" as leader Kim Jong Un calls for modernising its military.

Japan successfully launches reusable rocket

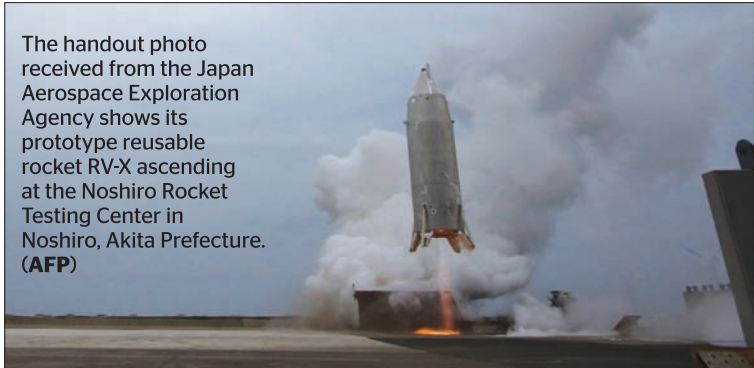
AFP
Tokyo

Japan's space agency said on Saturday its prototype reusable rocket successfully completed the first lift-off and landing test, marking a step forward in the cost-cutting technology dominated by SpaceX.

The prototype, launched from the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA)'s test site in Noshiro, Akita region, reached a height of about 10 metres (33 feet), and then landed.

The flight lasted about 40 seconds, according to JAXA.

"I feel we have put a great deal of time and effort into this, and now that the prototype has taken off and landed without problem, I must say I feel a great sense of relief," JAXA's Takashi Ito, who led the launch, told reporters. Ito said the agency will re-view data to fully determine the success of the test, but he is "confident" that it "obtained very useful data"



Most rockets are designed for single use, with components falling into the sea, burning up in the atmosphere or remaining in orbit as debris. The first launch stage is considered the most expensive component.

But the deployment of partially reusable rockets would slash launch costs.

SpaceX has been operating its reusable Falcon 9 rocket since 2017.

China, however, achieved its first successful reusable rocket landing on Friday, a breakthrough that could challenge US dominance in the field.

In June last year, a subsidiary of Honda became the first Japanese company to successfully launch and land a reusable rocket.

Japan is racing to boost the international competitiveness of the country's rocket industry.



Ambulances line up on a pier to help victims of a boating accident after a tourist vessel capsized off Phu Quoc Island in southern Vietnam's An Giang Province yesterday. (AFP)

Vietnam mishap kills 15

AFP
Hanoi

A speedboat carrying Indian tourists capsized off southern Vietnam's Phu Quoc island on Saturday, killing at least 15 people, state media reported.

The boat was carrying 36 people when it overturned around 400 metres (440 yards) off May Rut Ngoai islet, according to the VnExpress website.

Multiple tourist and coast guard boats participated in a rescue effort, during which some people were plucked safely from the water.

The Tuoi Tre newspaper quoted local police as saying 21 people had been transported to a hospital for emergency treatment, two of whom were in critical condition.

All 15 of the deceased were foreigners, according to Tuoi Tre. India's embassy in Vietnam confirmed the capsized boat had been carrying

"several Indian tourists" but said that "exact details of the incident are being ascertained".

Nguyen Tien Hai, a provincial official of the ruling Communist Party, said authorities were still confirming the exact number of survivors, according to the state media report.

Hai said initial assessments suggested that the speedboat may have overturned due to heavy winds and high waves. Located just south of Vietnam's largest island Phu Quoc, May Rut Ngoai is known for its pristine blue waters, white sand beaches and accessible diving reefs.

Visitors often access the islet by speedboat from the main island.

Phu Quoc has seen a major tourism boom in recent years, with more than 1.8mn foreigners visiting the island last year.

Boating accidents are a regular occurrence in Vietnam, where extreme weather, persistent flooding and inadequate maintenance have led to frequent tragedies.

Xi reaffirms China-N Korea alliance

Chinese President Xi Jinping said China's commitment to its traditional friendship with North Korea would not change regardless of how the international situation evolves, according to letters exchanged with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and published by North Korean state media KCNA on Saturday.

Kim, in a letter to Xi, said bilateral friendship and cooperation had risen to a "new strategic level," KCNA reported.

North Korea's Premier Pak Thae Song arrived in Beijing on Friday for a three-day visit to attend an event marking the 65th anniversary of the neighbours' friendship treaty. Xi travelled to Pyongyang last month for his first visit to North Korea in seven years, where he and Kim agreed to

expand cooperation across politics, economy and culture.

The Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation and Mutual Assistance, signed on July 11, 1961, remains China's only active mutual defence pact. "Regardless of how the international situation changes, the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese government will continue to attach great importance to the traditional friendship between China and North Korea, continue to firmly support North Korea's socialist cause under the leadership of General Secretary Kim Jong Un, and remain firmly committed to safeguarding the common interests of both countries and a favorable strategic environment," Xi was quoted as saying. (Reuters)

Nearly two million people have fled their homes in China as an approaching typhoon lashed northern Taiwan and Japan's remote southwestern islands on Saturday, toppling trees and leaving tens of thousands without power.

Extreme weather has already wreaked havoc on southern and central China this week, with storms leaving at least 39 dead and causing dozens of rivers to overflow and a reservoir dam to burst.

Typhoon Bavi is expected to make landfall early on Sunday in the eastern province of Zhejiang, where more than 1.7mn people have been evacuated from their homes, state media reported.

Classes, work, transport and outdoor activities have been suspended, and more than 400 flights and dozens of train services cancelled in the province.

"The proactive, all-out mobilisation, which is sparing no effort or cost, is undertaken entirely to guard against the (worst-case) scenario," the government in Wenzhou, a metropolis of nearly 10mn people in Zhejiang, said in a statement.

Residents used wood to reinforce metal shutters protecting shops and taped windows, with Bavi forecast to bring "exceptionally heavy rains" to eastern Zhejiang and northeastern Fujian province, CCTV footage showed.

Torrential rain further north prompted the evacuation of more than 100,000 people from their homes in Beijing, the government said, as water discharge flows from the capital's Miyun Reservoir were ramped up to capture potential floodwaters. More than 130,000 people have fled their homes in Fujian and around 34,000



Firefighters place sand bags to reinforce windows and doors at an evacuation centre in Yueqing city in Wenzhou, China's eastern Zhejiang province, yesterday ahead of approaching Typhoon Bavi. (AFP)

people from Shanghai's coastal areas and high-risk areas, state media reported.

Streets were largely deserted in northern Taiwan, where most businesses were shut for a second day as wind and rain buffeted the region.

More than 14,000 people have been evacuated from their homes, hundreds of flights cancelled and more than 170,000 households across the island hit with power outages because of the storm.

"Everyone is afraid of the severe weather and staying indoors, but I only came out because I have orders," a breakfast shop owner surnamed Tsai told AFP in Taiwan's port city of Keelung.

"Some people are on duty and wouldn't have anything to eat, so I still need to deliver food to them," the 50-year-old said.

Bavi was downgraded to a

typhoon as it moved across the Pacific Ocean after slamming into Guam and the Northern Marianas on Monday as a super typhoon.

Its maximum sustained wind speeds slowed to 137 kilometres (85 miles) per hour, with gusts of around 173 kph on Saturday, Taiwan's Central Weather Administration (CWA) said.

The CWA warned of "extremely torrential rain" across northern Taiwan and "dangerous waves" of up to 10 metres (33 feet) along the coast as Bavi skirted the island's north.

In the Philippines, the death toll from landslides and other incidents triggered by heavy rains driven by Bavi rose to 18, most on the southern island of Mindanao.

Nearly 11,000 people across the archipelago fled their homes and dozens of ports re-

main closed, with 313 vessels taking shelter.

More than 18,000 households and facilities across Okinawa lost power as the typhoon pounded Japan's remote southwestern islands, with the Miyako region hardest hit.

Japanese airlines cancelled dozens of flights, affecting more than 26,000 passengers.

Oceans experienced their hottest June on record and could set fresh highs in the months ahead, the European Union's Copernicus Marine Service said last week.

Warmer oceans help tropical storms to intensify and add more moisture, which can fall as heavy rain.

Adding to the mix is the return this year of El Nino, a natural climate phenomenon that warms Pacific Ocean surface temperatures and typically occurs every two to seven years.

Myanmar hit with deadly monsoon floods

AFP
Kyauktaw, Myanmar

Rescuers in Myanmar warned of rising water levels on Saturday as deadly floods swept across the country's western Rakhine and Chin states.

At least three people have been killed in the deluge, according to the latest toll released Thursday by the humanitarian services of the Arakan Army, an ethnic minority rebel group controlling the affected territory.

"Our concern is what happens if the water levels rise any further, especially when it comes to evacuating the elderly, the sick, pregnant people and those living in low-lying areas," local rescuer Bo Aung Thein told AFP in She Ta Lay village in Kyauktaw Township.

Gripped by civil war since a military coup in 2021, Myanmar has faced a litany of transport and communication difficulties, and more than a third of the population suffers from food insecurity, according to the United Nations.

"Our village has around 200 houses, and only one or two left unsubmerged.



Residents wade through floodwaters in Kyauktaw, Myanmar's western Rakhine state. (AFP)

The rest have been flooded. All the paddy fields are submerged too," said May Thein Yaine, 49, a resident of Kyauktaw village. "We have little kids at

home. I'm terrified that if the water rises any higher again at night, we'll have nowhere left to shelter and no way to escape," said 24-year-old Thuzar Aye.

Indonesia's anti-graft prosecutor quits after police seize gold, cash

AFP
Jakarta

Indonesia's top anti-corruption prosecutor resigned on Saturday, the Attorney General's Office said, after police investigating graft cases seized millions of dollars in cash and gold bars from properties including his home.

Assistant Attorney General for Special Crimes Febrie Adriansyah stepped down following raids this week on at least 12 locations that included properties linked to him in and around the capital, Jakarta.

Attorney General's Office spokesman Anang Supriatna said Febrie's resignation had been accepted.

"The decision was a form of commitment to maintain the integrity, objectivity, and neutrality of law enforcement," Anang said.

The locations raided included a house in the Bogor district outside Jakarta, as well as a cafe and another house in South Jakarta, police spokesman Budi Hermanto told reporters late on Friday.

Police seized evidence that included 74 kilograms of gold bars and \$5.8mn and Sg\$17.2mn in cash, he said.

Febrie told reporters on Friday that the house in Bogor was his private residence but denied that assets seized from the house were linked to graft, saying they could all be accounted for.

Budi said police had questioned 15 witnesses.

Head of National Police's corruption eradication corps Totok Suharyanto said on Saturday that a suspect identified as FA faced multiple charges including corruption and money laundering.

If proven guilty, the suspect could face up to a life in prison.

Another suspect, identified as DR, also face multiple money laundering charges, he added.

Budi and Anang did not respond to AFP requests to identify the suspects in the case.

Police are investigating three cases that include suspected corruption and money laundering in relation to coal procurement for state utility company PLN as well as PT Asabri, Indonesian media has reported.

Febrie said before his resignation that the Attorney General's Office remained focused on cases that included a graft scandal in President Prabowo Subianto's flagship free meal scheme.



New Zealand, India strike strategic partnership

AFP
Auckland

New Zealand and India announced yesterday the creation of a strategic partnership encompassing defence and security, during a landmark visit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Prime Minister Christopher Luxon feted his guest with an indigenous Maori welcome and a guard of honour, seeking to expand relations after signing a free-trade pact in April that he has touted as an economic boon.

Modi's visit, at the tail end of a July 6-11 tour that has also taken him to Indonesia and Australia, came in the aftermath of China test-firing a ballistic missile into the Pacific Ocean on Monday, stirring unease in the region.

It was the first visit to New Zealand by an Indian prime minister in 40 years, a sign of Delhi's deeper engagement at a time of strengthened Chinese diplomatic and military presence in the Pacific.

Modi described the strategic partnership as a "milestone" that would inspire greater energy and confidence, as he was hosted by the New Zealand leader for discussions at Government House in Auckland.

"Our firm belief in democratic values makes us natural partners," he said.

The pact covers tighter defence co-operation, including with naval exercises, as well as stronger ties in trade, diplomacy, culture, sport and science, the two countries said in a joint statement.

The nations have a shared interest in a "free, open, peaceful and pros-



India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi inspects a Guard of Honour with New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon during a ceremony at Government House in Auckland yesterday. (AFP)

perous Indo-Pacific", they said.

The two countries "quickly canvassed" the Chinese missile test, Luxon told reporters in a briefing after the talks.

He skirted a question about whether closer New Zealand-India ties would curb Beijing's ambitions in the region.

"We are a small trading nation. We are a maritime nation. We need to have as many relationships as we possibly can with partners around the world that are like-minded, and some of those are around defence, and some of those around trade, some around both."

In the evening, the two leaders fronted an estimated 10,000 or more cheering Modi fans from the country's 300,000-strong Indian diaspora who packed into Auckland's Spark Arena.

"Before me I see a wonderful audience in which there is the light of a developed India and the prosperity of New Zealand," Modi told supporters, many of whom stood and chanted his name.

Luxon praised the Indian diaspora, declaring: "Without you we simply would not be the New Zealand we are today."

Outside the stadium, about 20 Sikh protesters demonstrated with a mannequin of Modi in prison clothes, describing the Hindu nationalist as the face of "Hindu terror" in India.

That sparked more than 100 supporters of the Indian leader to chant: "Modi, Modi", leading scores of police to intervene to keep the two sides apart.

Luxon, who faces New Zealand general elections in November,

has been promoting the jobs and economic benefits of the free trade deal with India, which is awaiting parliamentary approval.

But the trade agreement has faced pushback from some in New Zealand, in particular over its provisions for easier immigration and visa access to Indian students and workers.

Lawmakers in the populist New Zealand First party, part of Luxon's governing coalition, rallied against parts of the agreement.

"I don't care how much criticism we get, I am just never going to agree with a butter chicken tsunami coming to New Zealand," government minister Shane Jones told a local radio show.

An Indian community leader accused Jones of "outright racism".

Malaysians in Johor go to the polls in test of unity for PM Anwar's coalition

Reuters
Kuala Lumpur

Voters in Malaysia's southern state of Johor cast their ballots yesterday in a regional election that could test the unity of Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's coalition government, as frictions over reforms, ethnic issues and the economy fuel talk of an early national poll.

The state election will not directly impact Anwar's majority in the national parliament, but the move by a key coalition partner to run an independent campaign could test his resolve if the result exacerbates simmering tensions within the federal alliance.

Anwar, in office since 2022, has been credited with restoring stability after years of political infighting.

His administration, however, is made up of disparate blocs including a one-time rival coalition, the formerly dominant Barisan Nasional (BN), which has chafed at playing second fiddle to Anwar's Pakatan Harapan alliance.

Frustration has grown among Anwar's progressive allies over the slow pace of reforms, while ruling coalition parties have often clashed over how to tackle racial and religious issues in the multi-ethnic, Muslim-majority country.

Though national elections are not due until 2028, Anwar said in May he would consider calling a snap poll if the internal divisions continued to widen.

BN has governed Johor since 2022 and chose to seek re-election without backing from Pakatan. BN is seen by analysts as the frontrunner but is facing a tough challenge from Pakatan as well as opposition bloc Perikatan Nasional, led by the resurgent Islamic party PAS.

The election in Johor, which borders Singapore, is also being closely watched by investors.

The state is an emerging regional financial hub, attracting billions of dollars in data centre and AI-driven investments in recent years with progress underway on a Johor-Singapore special economic zone.

But development has been uneven with many Johor residents squeezed by rising property and living costs driven partly by proximity to its wealthier neighbour.

The poll will also mark the electoral debut of Bersama, headed by Anwar's protege-turned-rival and former economic minister Rafizi Ramli, which has attracted a wave of defectors from Pakatan.

The Johor poll comes three weeks before an election in Negeri Sembilan state on August 1 that will serve as another test of federal stability. Pakatan is expected to contest all 36 seats, having won 17 seats at the last state election.



People waded through a flooded street after heavy rains in Chittagong. (AFP)

Floods in Bangladesh kill 44

Reuters
Dhaka

Floods and landslides triggered by days of torrential monsoon rain have killed at least 44 people in southeastern Bangladesh and left over a million stranded as authorities raced yesterday to deliver aid to devastated communities.

The disaster management ministry said yesterday that flooding across seven districts — Chattogram, Cox's Bazar, Bandarban, Rangamati, Khagrachhari, Moulvibazar and Habiganj — has disrupted daily life, isolated thousands of families, and stranded 267,918 households.

Power outages, damaged roads and broken communication links have slowed rescue and relief efforts. Many residents have been unable to cook for days as flood waters submerged their homes, while others are struggling after thick layers of mud covered kitchens and living spaces.

"There is still water inside our home and we have no way to cook. The dry food we had has run out, and we spend the nights in the dark with our children because there is no electricity," said Nurul Islam, a resident of a flood-hit area in Chattogram.

Thousands of families are relying on dry food — flattened rice, puffed rice or biscuits that do not re-

quire cooking — and emergency relief. Washed-out roads and damaged bridges, however, have made it difficult for aid workers to reach some of the hardest-hit communities.

Army and navy personnel are ferrying food, drinking water, medicines and other essential supplies by boat to isolated communities, as authorities step up relief efforts.

"The government is doing everything possible to support flood victims. Relief, safe drinking water and medical supplies are being distributed, and we urge people whose homes have been inundated to move to the nearest shelter," Disaster Management and Relief Minister Iqbal Hossain said during a visit to affected areas in Chattogram.

The heavy rain also triggered landslides in Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar earlier this week, killing 16 refugees, including women and children. More than one mn Rohingya refugees live in the camps, where makeshift shelters on steep, deforested hillsides are especially vulnerable during the monsoon season.

Bangladesh is one of the world's most disaster-prone countries, with seasonal monsoon rains regularly causing floods, river erosion and landslides.

Scientists say climate change is making extreme rainfall more frequent and intense, increasing the scale and severity of such disasters.

UK police release man arrested on suspicion of killing former minister

Reuters
Haytor

A 26-year-old man arrested on suspicion of murdering former British government minister Ann Widdecombe has been released and is no longer part of the investigation, police said yesterday.

The man, a white British national, was arrested in Newton Abbot, a town about 9 miles (15km) from Widdecombe's home in Haytor in rural southwest England, police said on Friday.

They have also said that there was no information to suggest the murder of the 78-year-old was related to terrorism or had a political motive.

"Our priority remains identifying those responsible and ensuring that all available evidence is thoroughly examined," Devon and Cornwall Police Assistant Chief Constable Matt Longman said in a statement yesterday, adding that the enquiry was in its early stages but "moving at a significant pace".

In another update, the police said they believed that the attack took place on Wednesday at around 1130 GMT.

That was a day before ambulance workers called police to Widdecombe's home, where she had been found dead after suffering serious injuries.

The police said they consulted counter terrorism policing as part of their initial enquiries, but it was not supporting the investigation.

They also said that the suspect was believed to be a white male and



Police officers investigate the area near the home of 78-year-old former government minister Ann Widdecombe after she was found dead, in Haytor, yesterday. (Reuters)

that they did not believe there was a wider risk to the public.

Widdecombe was known for her socially conservative views, first as a junior minister in Conservative Prime Minister John Major's 1992-1997 government and latterly as an immigration and justice spokesperson for Nigel Farage's populist Reform UK.

She also defended a policy of shackling pregnant prisoners during childbirth to prevent their escape and viewed single mothers as poor role models, but was unusual among Conservative lawmakers in opposing the hunting of foxes with hounds.

News on Friday of her death led to tributes from across the politi-

cal spectrum in Britain, including from Prime Minister Keir Starmer and from Farage, who described her as "an extraordinary woman".

"She stood up and fought for what she believed in — a devout Christian and somebody with strong, socially conservative views," Farage said in a video clip posted on his X account.

Two serving British members of parliament have been murdered in the last decade. The Labour lawmaker Jo Cox was shot and stabbed by a Nazi-obsessed loner during the Brexit campaign in 2016. The Conservative lawmaker David Amess was stabbed to death in 2021 by a man inspired by the militant group Islamic State.

Pacific Islands reject missile test in 'blue continent'

AFP
Sydney

Pacific Islands denounced China's ballistic missile test because they say it landed in the heart of their shared "blue continent", politicians and analysts told AFP.

Even Pacific nations indebted to Beijing joined criticism of Monday's submarine-launched ballistic missile test, which reached far into the Pacific Ocean.

The term "Blue continent" is used by Pacific Islands to describe a joint home and shared stewardship of the ocean.

The nuclear-capable missile fitted with a dummy warhead landed somewhere between Nauru, Tuvalu and the Solomon Islands, according to monitors and Pacific officials.

The reported landing spot lies amidst the Pacific islands, but in one of the few patches between them that is not part of an exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

China said the missile test "was not directed at any country" and breached no international law.

But Palau President Surangel Whipps, who will host an annual meeting of Pacific leaders next month, said the missile landed "right between our EEZs".

"We have missiles going right into the heart of the Pacific, unannounced," he said in an interview with AFP.

China's Pacific envoy had days earlier met with the Pacific Islands Forum, after Beijing donated \$1mn to the regional bloc, but made no mention of a looming test.

The forum's 18 members see themselves as custodians of 20% of the earth's surface, jointly man-

aging fisheries and fighting climate change, within combined EEZs spanning 25mn square kilometres (10mn square miles).

The missile appeared to have landed in a "narrow corridor of international waters" between the surrounding islands' EEZs, said the director of the Pacific Islands programme at the Lowy Institute, Oliver Nobetau.

"It begs the question, why couldn't it have been tested to the north of the Pacific Ocean, where there is an expanse of international waters?" he said.

A dozen Pacific countries have protested the missile test, including small nations that borrowed from China for their infrastructure, and its closest Pacific security partner, the Solomon Islands.

International maritime law expert Donald Rothwell said while vast EEZs give island states con-

trol over ocean resources and coast guard patrols, they don't prohibit missile tests.

Ruth Cross Kwansing, a government minister in Kiribati, said the concept of a "Blue Pacific continent" is fundamental to the region, and is driving the indignation.

"What happens in any part of this ocean vibrates through all of us," she told AFP.

"You have to shift your perspective from a map of dispersed and isolated islands to one where the ocean itself is the living fabric that binds us all together," she said.

"Our seas are not an empty void or a buffer zone between global powers — they are our estate, our livelihood, and our identity as stewards of the sea."

Anna Naupa, a Pacific security expert at the Australian National University, said despite colonial

history fragmenting the map, the idea of a contiguous Pacific continent had re-emerged as island states amplified their collective voice on climate change.

"The Pacific upset is consistent with defending the Ocean of Peace principles," Naupa said, referring to a declaration made by leaders last year that the region stay free of nuclear weapons testing.

The short notice of the test China gave only a handful of countries was seen as disrespectful, she added.

Papua New Guinea's Prime Minister James Marape said Monday it should be the "last such missile test conducted in Pacific waters", a message extended not only to China, but all military powers.

The US conducted 67 nuclear detonations between 1946 and 1958 in the Marshall Islands, and

continues to conduct ballistic missile tests there under a defence compact. The Marshall Islands' President Hilda Heine cited the weight of these historical nuclear scars in criticising China's missile.

France and Britain also conducted Pacific nuclear tests prior to 1996.

All missile testing in the region, including China's, will be discussed at next month's Pacific leaders meeting, said Kiribati's Kwansing.

Many Pacific islands are "still haunted by the legacy of World War II fought in the region, as well as the long term effects of nuclear testing," said Nobetau.

"What strikes the fear in Pacific leaders is that it's a clear demonstration of the reach of Chinese capabilities, but also a preview to what kinetic warfare would look like," he said.

Firefighters gain upper hand on deadly Spain wildfire

AFP
Bedar

Firefighters aided by better weather yesterday gained the upper hand on one of Spain's deadliest wildfires as survivors described "horrific" and terrifying moments as they escaped the flames.

Around 500 firefighters backed by over 20 water-dropping aircraft were battling the blaze which erupted Thursday in the Gallardos area of the southern region of Andalusia, home to many foreign residents.

Calmer winds and higher air humidity levels have allowed firefighters to directly attack the flames for the first time, Antonio Sanz, the Andalusian regional government's emergency chief, told reporters.

"A window of opportunity opened this morning," he added during an interview with Canal Sur television.

"And for the first time, we may be able to start thinking about stabilising the fire."

Officials said the 12 people who died in the fast-moving fire had been trapped in vehicles and as they tried to flee on foot.

The majority were foreigners although their identities have not yet been released.

"We were absolutely terrified. We could see the flames. It was horrific," Manoli Ramos, 72, a councillor in the small white-washed village of Bedar where the victims were found told AFP.

She recalled another major wildfire in 2012 when residents had been able to return home the following day, saying: "This time it was like hell."

Bedar was virtually a ghost town yesterday afternoon, with nearly all of its residents evacuated, according to an AFP reporter.

The hillside village bore the scars of the fire: vegetation had been reduced to ash, while some homes had blackened walls.

Police kept the main road into town closed.

Austin Crilly, an 87-year-old



An aircraft drops fire retardant above wildfires affecting Almeria province, in Los Gallardos, yesterday. (Reuters)

Briton who was evacuated from the affected area, said he was watching television when he "saw a huge black cloud – well I thought it was a cloud".

Shortly after came the warning from police: "Take your money, take your cards and get out," he told AFP.

Officials said some of those who died had not followed orders to evacuate or to shelter in place once the flames got too close.

The wildfire – one of the deadliest in Spain's recent history – forced some 1,500 people to evacuate.

It has so far burned over 6,000 hectares in an area of steep ravines that is hard for vehicles to reach.

"It wasn't good. Not good at all. I'd never seen anything like it. You see things like that in films, but never in real life," said Martin Smith, 63, a British tourist who was evacuated with his wife, Elizabeth, 65, from the campsite where they were on holiday.

The authorities suspect the wildfire began when a power line broke as Spain sweltered in extreme heat, exceeding 40C in recent weeks.

Winter and spring rains spurred abundant vegetation that later dried out in successive heat waves, leaving ample fuel for



A screengrab from video shows remains of burned-out cars destroyed in deadly wildfires affecting Almeria province, in Bedar, Almeria. (Reuters)

wildfires, officials said.

Justice Minister Felix Bolanos said the blaze had at times spread at a rate of 100 metres a minute, "a level of intensity and severity we have never seen before".

"It is clearly a consequence of the climate emergency the world is facing," he told reporters.

Scientists agree that human-driven climate change is making extreme weather events such as heatwaves more likely and more intense.

Sanz said Spain's Civil Guard police had searched the affected areas without finding any further victims, although he cautioned that the search was continuing.

"That does not mean it cannot happen, but after the Civil Guard swept the area, including locations that were still hotspots, it gives us hope," he said.

Sanz said references to 23 missing people were misleading, explaining that the figure referred to people whose relatives had been unable to contact them and who could have reached evacuation centres or other safe locations.

He said seven formal missing persons reports had been filed.

Officials said they could not establish a definitive toll until the bodies recovered from the fire had been formally identified.

France hosts S Africa leader for talks, war remembrance

AFP
Paris

President Cyril Ramaphosa will take part in a commemoration today for South African soldiers killed in World War I, as part of a three-day visit to France.

It marks the 110th anniversary of the Battle of Delville Wood in Longueval, northern France, where several hundred South Africans were killed.

Ramaphosa met with French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris on Friday, a French diplomatic source said, noting that the two found "broad convergence of views" on crises in the Middle East and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

They shared the same assessment of the "crisis in the Gulf and the economic consequences of the situation in the Strait of Hormuz", where shipping has been disrupted by the US-Iran war, the source said.

The two presidents agreed on

the need to "encourage regional efforts for peace and security" around war-torn eastern DRC, where "South Africa plays a stabilising role", the source added.

Macron and Ramaphosa agreed to establish an "annual bilateral dialogue at the level of foreign ministers".

South Africa announced in March that Ramaphosa was no longer invited by France to the G7 summit held in June in Evian, southern France, citing US pressure.

France said it had been under no pressure from US President Donald Trump and had simply limited the number of invited countries to improve the effectiveness of discussions.

Macron hosted a dinner in Ramaphosa's honour on Friday evening at the Elysee Palace following their talks, attended by families of heroes of the anti-apartheid struggle.

On Saturday the South African leader was scheduled to meet French business leaders ahead of the ceremony the following day.

Germany investigates suspected rail sabotage

AFP
Berlin

German police are investigating a new suspected act of sabotage on a major railway line which disrupted traffic and has been claimed by a far-left group.

On Friday morning, technicians noticed a fire in a cable duct near a station in Leverkusen, a city close to Cologne, the police said in a statement published yesterday afternoon.

The material damage led to disruptions to Deutsche Bahn (DB) traffic on this heavily used route in North Rhine-Westphalia, the most populous region in the country.

"Investigators currently as-

sume that the fire was started deliberately," the police added, as they appealed for witnesses.

In a letter published yesterday morning on the far-left online platform Indymedia, a group calling itself "Kommando Angry Birds" said it was "responsible for the sabotage of the railway line north of Leverkusen."

Already strained after decades of underinvestment, Germany's rail network has seen acts of sabotage against it multiply in recent months, the vast majority of which remain unsolved.

Germany is on alert over attempted sabotage, disinformation campaigns and cyberattacks attributed in particular to Russia.

Paris landmarks shutter early as quarter of France swelters under heatwave

The Eiffel Tower and other Paris landmarks announced early closures over the weekend as a quarter of mainland France was under the highest heat alert level yesterday in the third heatwave to hit the country since May.

The operator of the Eiffel Tower said the latticed-steel monument would "exceptionally close" early on Saturday and Sunday at 4pm (1400 GMT), "due to the high temperatures forecast".

The 324-metre (1,063-foot) tower, which attracts seven mn tourists a year, usually stays open past midnight during the high season. Two of the French capital's most famous museums, the Louvre and the Musee d'Orsay, have taken similar measures.

The Louvre, the most visited museum in the world, said on Thursday it would close at 4pm from Friday through to Monday.

The Musee D'Orsay announced it would also close early, "due to the extreme heat" at 5pm from Saturday to Wednesday.

Twenty-four departments, home to 22.2mn people according to an AFP calculation, were under the maximum alert level issued by the national weather service Meteo-France yesterday.

Another 59 departments of 96 in mainland France were under an orange heat warning, a step below the highest, as people flooded trains and highways at the start of a holiday weekend ahead of France's national public holiday on July 14.

Across France, many towns have called off their firework displays for Bastille Day due to increased fires and dry conditions.

Wildfires have scorched twice as much land in France so far this year as in the same period last year, an official said on Friday.

French President Emmanuel Macron called for vigilance yesterday, warning nine out of 10 fires are due to human activity.

"A single second of inattention can put families at risk, endanger those who protect us and destroy our countryside," he wrote on X.

The European nation is facing its third heatwave since May, with a heatwave in June shattering records. The country recorded more than 2,000 excess deaths during the June heatwave, and 300 during the high temperatures in late May, according to official figures.

The government has faced a barrage of criticism, accused of being "unprepared" for the extreme weather, the increasing frequency of which scientists have linked to man-made climate change.

High temperatures are expected to continue until Bastille Day, according to Meteo-France. (AFP)

German far-right unveils anti-migrant policies

Germany's far-right AfD party yesterday unveiled a manifesto for its first 100 days in office if it wins control of an eastern region, pledging to immediately expel all undocumented immigrants. The Alternative for Germany has a lead of nearly 20 points over the mainstream conservatives in opinion polls in the state of Saxony-Anhalt, which votes for its government in September.

In an address to delegates in the city of Magdeburg, AfD candidate Ulrich Siegmund set out the first 10 measures he promised to implement once in office, following the September 6 vote.

The 35-year-old said he would expel all irregular migrants from the state "from the very first minute".

"We will use all available leeway, including detention pending deportation, to send back as many as

possible," and oblige asylum seekers to carry out community service or risk having their benefits cut, he said.

If the anti-immigration, pro-Russia and pro-Donald Trump AfD wins, it would be the first far-right party to govern a German federal region since the end of World War II.

It has surged in popularity in recent years of economic turbulence, in line with far-right parties elsewhere in Europe. (AFP)

Early season skiing in the French Alps



A skier sets off down the red run 'Glacier', in Tignes, south-eastern France, yesterday. Several ski runs and lifts on the Grande Motte Glacier, which is part of the Tignes ski area in the French Alps, allow skiing throughout the winter and into early summer. The resort traditionally reopens selected alpine ski runs earlier than any other in France at the start of the autumn season. The glacier can be accessed via the Perce-Neige funicular, which connects Tignes Val Claret (at around 2,150 metres altitude) to the foot of the glacier (at 3,032 metres). From there, the Grande Motte cable car takes skiers and pedestrians to the 3,456-metre summit of the ski area, offering access to the glacier's highest slopes. (AFP)

One million women and girls lose access to support amid aid cuts: UN

AFP
Geneva

The UN (UN) warned Friday that at least one mn women and girls had lost access to vital support due to dramatic cuts to foreign aid spending since January 2025.

The UN Women agency decried a collapse of women's organisations at a time when needs are soaring.

US President Donald Trump slashed foreign aid after taking office last year, while other key donor countries have also tightened their belts.

As a result, "at least one mn

women and girls affected by conflict and crisis have lost access to critical services and support", Sofia Calltorp, UN Women's head of humanitarian action, told reporters in Geneva.

"We know that this number... is just the tip of the iceberg," she said, describing the findings in a new report as "deeply disturbing".

Speaking from Stockholm, she highlighted that the women's organisations at risk of being shut down "work on the frontlines of the world's most complex and dangerous crises", in places like Afghanistan, Gaza, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan and Yemen.

"Every dollar withdrawn from

women's organisations is a dollar withdrawn from survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, displaced mothers, girls forced from school, and communities struggling to survive," she said.

With armed conflicts at their highest levels since World War II, around 120mn women and girls require humanitarian assistance and protection, UN Women said.

Its report, based on responses from 855 women-led and women's rights organisations across 52 crisis-affected countries, found that 84% of the groups had seen demand for their services increase since January 2025.

"Nearly nine in 10 say they can no longer meet current levels of

need," the agency said, while "two in five organisations surveyed expect to shut down, temporarily or permanently, within the next year".

To keep the organisations afloat, it said leaders and employees were paying with their own labour and well-being.

Sixty-five % of women-led organisations reported staff working without pay to keep services running, while nearly half reported rising staff burnout.

Calltorp warned that "cases of conflict-related sexual violence doubled in 2025", just as the systems designed to protect survivors were collapsing.

UN Women found that 86% of the women's organisations ques-

tioned reported an increase in gender-based violence in the communities they serve.

The consequences can be devastating.

"A woman seeking refuge from violence might show up at the door of a shelter that has shut down; a pregnant woman may have to walk for hours to reach a health clinic; or a mother may be denied food for her children," UN Women pointed out.

And the agency emphasised that the impacts extend beyond crippling the humanitarian response.

"The dismantling of women's organisations is not happening in a vacuum but against a global backlash on the rights of women and girls," it said.

It pointed out that one in five organisations had already suspended work advancing women's leadership and gender equality, while over half reported witnessing declining participation of women in community leadership and local decision-making.

Combined with the cuts to women's organisations, the erosion of women's rights is taking a dire societal toll, Calltorp said.

Around 90% of the women's organisations questioned for Friday's report noted increased poverty among the women they serve.

Eight in 10 meanwhile saw growing numbers of girls dropping out of school, while around 70% saw increases in forced marriages.



World Population Day: Less about numbers, more about nerve

World Population Day passed quietly this year, as it usually does, folded into a news cycle crowded with sharper, louder stories. Yet beneath the modesty of the occasion lay a theme worth lingering on: the hopes and aspirations of young people, today and for the future. It was not an abstraction. It was, in effect, a mirror held up to every government that claimed to be planning for tomorrow while governing for today.

The timing was apt. The observance drew on one of the broadest surveys of its kind, canvassing more than 108,000 young adults across 73 countries about the choices that shaped, or constrained, their paths toward relationships and parenthood. What it found was not despair, exactly, but something more unsettling: a widening gap between what young people wanted for their lives and what they believed was actually attainable. Many still hoped for partnership, for

children, for stability. Fewer believed those hopes would survive contact with reality.

That gap was the story. It was not a shortage of desire that defined this demographic moment, but a shortage of security — economic, social, structural — sturdy enough to let desire become plan, and plan become life.

Qatar's own positioning on the day reflected an awareness of this, whether by design or necessity. The country's population policy, now more than two decades in the making, was framed not merely as an administrative exercise but as an extension of a national vision that placed family and human development at its centre. The ambition to raise fertility rates, to strengthen marriage as an institution, to widen workplace flexibility for women — these were not new commitments, but they arrived this year against a global backdrop that made them feel less like local policy and more like a

considered answer to a worldwide unease.

There was, too, a candour in the UNFPA's own framing that deserved notice. Its executive director spoke of societies reshaped simultaneously by demographic ageing and demographic youth, by disruptive technology and by the blurring of information and misinformation. It was a rare acknowledgment, from within the machinery of international population policy, that numbers alone had stopped telling the whole story. What mattered now was whether young people could trust the systems around them enough to build a life inside them.

Qatar's healthcare ranking, its human development standing, its national strategy stretching to 2030 — these were the sort of credentials a state reached for on a day like this, and rightly so. But the more interesting measure, the one that would not show up in an index, was quieter: whether a young person

in Doha, or Lahore, or anywhere else the survey reached, felt able to say yes to a future rather than merely hope for one.

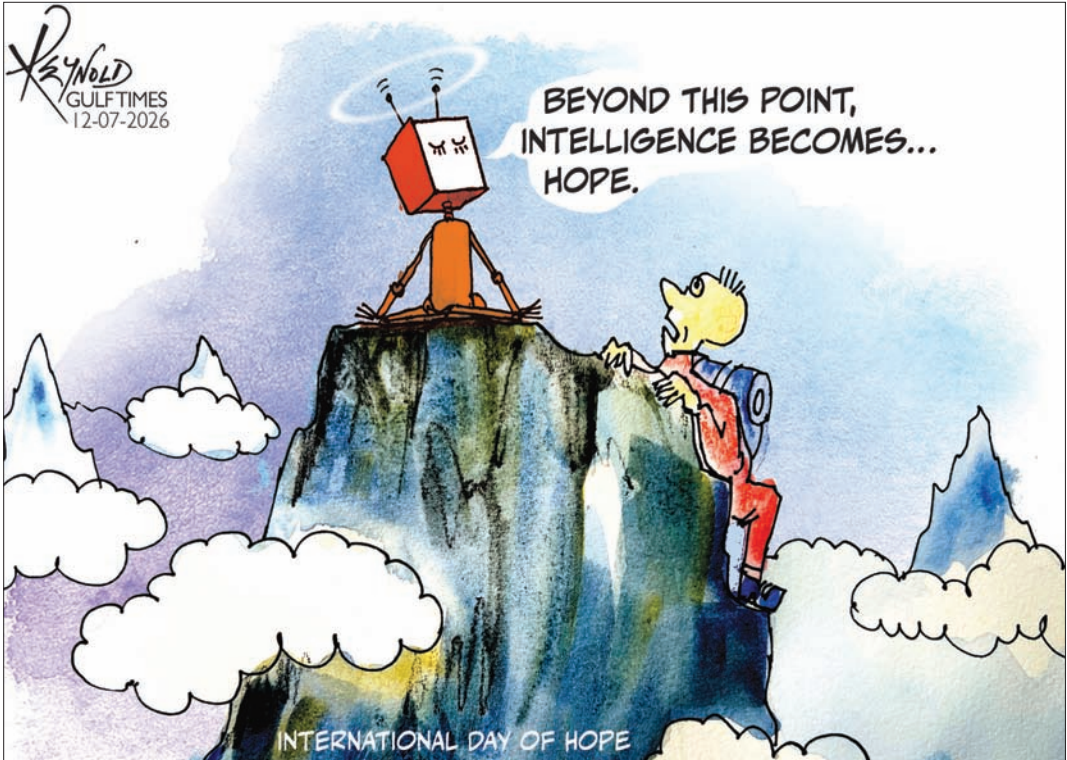
That, ultimately, was what made the day worth marking rather than skimming past. Population policy had long been treated as a numbers game — birth rates, dependency ratios, projections stretching to 2100. But the day's real value lay in insisting, gently, that the numbers were downstream of something else: security, dignity, the basic sense that one's choices were one's own to make.

Whether that insistence changed anything remained, as always, to be seen. Policies took years to bend a demographic curve, and surveys captured sentiment more readily than they captured outcomes. But the question Diene Keita posed, of how young adults saw their futures amid such flux, was not one that expired when the day did. It lingered, as it should, well past July 11.

In Spain, wildfire containment



A helicopter of Infoca (Andalusia Wildfire Service) carrying water to extinguish a wildfire that killed at least 12 people, near Los Gallardos, near Almeria yesterday. Firefighters aided by better weather gained the upper hand on one of Spain's deadliest wildfires, that killed at least 12 people and burned about 6,600 hectares since July 9. (AFP)



BEYOND THIS POINT, INTELLIGENCE BECOMES... HOPE.

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF HOPE

By Daniel Flynn
Kyiv

A pledge by US President Donald Trump to allow Kyiv to produce US Patriot air defence missiles is a victory for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky but it could take at least a year to start producing them, defence experts say.

With its chronic shortage of interceptor missiles likely to continue until then, Kyiv faces tough choices over which targets are a priority to defend as Russia keeps pounding its cities and energy infrastructure.

Trump's promise on Wednesday, when he met Zelensky during a Nato summit in Ankara, was a significant gesture of support that marked a huge improvement in their relationship since they clashed at the White House in February 2025. Patriot interceptor missiles are vital for Ukraine's defence at a time when Zelensky says Russia, whose battlefield advances have stalled, is trying to leverage its advantage in ballistic missiles by hitting Ukraine hard.

The Patriot is the only weapon in Kyiv's arsenal capable of stopping Russian ballistic missiles. Ukraine has brought down only four of the 54 much-faster ballistic missiles launched by Russia this month.

But Trump's pledge was vague. He acknowledged he had not spoken first to the companies that manufacture Patriot interceptors — Lockheed Martin and Raytheon.

Experts say the time needed to build an assembly plant and organise contractors means production of Patriot PAC-2 interceptors made by Raytheon, or the more sophisticated PAC-3 from Lockheed, will not start soon enough to ease Ukraine's situation in the near future.

"Short term, the impact will be very limited," said Fabian Hoffmann, a missile expert at the Norwegian Institute for Defense Studies in Oslo. "I would be very surprised if this is faster than 12 months. I would assume significantly longer."

By way of comparison, Raytheon reached an agreement with European weapons manufacturer MBDA in 2024 to produce GEM-T interceptors for the PAC-2 system in Germany and

Trump's promise on Patriots will take time, leaving Ukraine facing tough choices

- **Trump made pledge on Patriots during Nato summit**
- **Kyiv will be allowed to produce Patriots in Ukraine**
- **Ukraine will need time to produce Patriot interceptors**
- **Experts say it could take at least a year**
- **Kyiv also needs other air defence options: Zelensky**

the first deliveries are not expected before early 2027. Conversations for PAC-3 production in Germany have so far not borne fruit.

A Lockheed Martin spokesperson said the company was focused on supporting the US government and its allies, and said further comments on the proposal should be addressed to the White House. Raytheon did not respond immediately to a request for comment.

Production outside Ukraine?

Ukraine has managed to fast-track military development in the war since Russia's 2022 invasion, but defence experts say building a system to down missiles travelling at several times the speed of sound is the toughest challenge in missile technology.

Serhii Beskrestnov, an advisor to Ukraine's defense ministry, said on Telegram there was uncertainty over how long it would take subcontractors to scale production of scarce components.

One country that might be able



US President Donald Trump (right) holds a bilateral meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky alongside the Nato leaders summit at the Bestepe Presidential Compound in Ankara, Turkiye, last week. (Reuters)

to help Kyiv accelerate the process is Germany, which has developed a domestic production chain for PAC-2 interceptors.

Two sources familiar with the discussions said the new interceptors were likely to be manufactured in Germany or another European country, where it is safer, and production could be shifted to Ukraine when the war ends. Zelensky said on Thursday technical teams would hammer out the details as quickly as possible but that he wanted production to start "in Ukraine as soon as possible." He said a shipment of PAC-3 interceptors from the US was expected in "coming days".

He has also asked other allies to provide missiles from their own stockpiles and under a Nato-coordinated financial arrangement providing for European allies and Canada to transfer funds to the US to procure US-made weapons for Ukraine.

Patriot missiles are not being produced in sufficient quantities to cope with Russia's ballistic



Ukrainian service members walk next to a launcher of a Patriot air defence system in an undisclosed location, Ukraine, in August 2024. (Reuters)

threat, as Russia is producing at least 700-800 Iskander ground-launched and Kinzhal hypersonic air-launched ballistic missiles a year, experts say.

Working on the principle that three Patriots are needed per ballistic missile to ensure an interception, they estimate some 2,400 interceptors would be

needed per year if Russia's output remains stable.

"Even with a licensed production facility in Ukraine, reaching that number will be very, very difficult, if not impossible," Hoffmann said.

Lockheed delivered just over 600 PAC-3s last year and is aiming to scale its production to around

2,000 by 2030. A Ukrainian plant might produce 200 to 300 interceptors a year, Hoffmann said.

Plan B needed?

Zelensky has said Ukraine needs a Plan B.

"The only right option is an alternative to the PAC-3," Zelensky said on Wednesday. He hopes European allies involved in a nascent missile defense project called Freya, being led by Ukrainian company Fire Point, will soon meet in France.

Fire Point is asking European companies to provide radar, data uplink and seeker solutions to bolt on to its existing missile technology, and hopes to have a cheaper alternative to the Patriot ready before year-end.

"Fire Point's Freya project is a long shot but if it works, the reward is enormous," said Jack Watling of the Royal United Services Institute think tank in London.

Watling said there were other European options that should be feasible, such as the SAMP/T NG system developed by Eurosam - a joint venture of MBDA and France's Thales — which he said would just need some technical adjustment and calibration of its radar.

Zelensky said on Thursday he hoped Ukraine would receive these systems from France soon.

Kyiv has previously floated the possibility of a truce on long-range attacks but Moscow rejected this. Zelensky has also sought to bring Russia to the negotiating table by attacking its energy infrastructure, sometimes deep in Russia.

Kyiv's choices look stark as Russia bombards Ukraine.

"You can only defend a very small number of the targets that you would like to defend, so you need to figure out which ones those are," Hoffmann said.

Ukraine aims to increase the protection of energy, manufacturing and military infrastructure by placing them in protective concrete structures or underground, but Hoffmann said its best option may be to go more heavily on the attack. — Reuters

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Russian strikes kill 7, Zelensky seeks faster weapons deliveries

Reuters
Kyiv

Russia launched missile and drone attacks on Ukraine yesterday, killing seven people and wounding dozens more, officials said, as President Volodymyr Zelensky called for diplomatic efforts to ensure Kyiv secured weapons more quickly.

Kyiv awaited supplies of air defence munitions amid a shortage that has left it exposed to Russian attacks. Two glide bombs hit a crowded area in the northern city of Sumy, a frequent Russian target, killing five people and injuring 30, authorities said.

One bomb hit a bus stop and pictures showed a yellow bus with one of its sides ripped off. Other pictures posted online showed damage to apartment building facades.

Glide bombs also injured 10 in the southeastern city of Zaporzhzhia, the regional governor said. Two people were killed and another wounded earlier in the day by a missile strike on the southern port city of Odesa.

Zelensky, speaking in his nightly video address, said Ukraine needed its allies to ensure weapons supplies were provided more promptly. "I am preparing changes in Ukraine's diplomatic efforts. We need a new level of co-operation with our partners to ensure that agreements on arms supplies are fulfilled," Zelensky said. "Agreements reached by national leaders must be implemented much more quickly and completely."

This, he said, applied to an agreement reached with US President Donald Trump this week to grant Ukraine a licence to produce its own Patriot interceptor missiles.

Ukraine is critically low on munitions for its Patriot air defence systems and has been largely un-



Firefighters work at a site of a Russian air strike, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Sumy, yesterday. (Reuters)

able to down ballistic missiles, which travel at several times the speed of sound, over the past month.

It has pleaded with allies for greater supplies of those munitions and has also pushed Europe to work with Kyiv on its own anti-ballistic air defence system. Earlier yesterday, a drone hit a civilian enterprise in the eastern city of Kharkiv, wounding seven.

Twelve people, meanwhile, had been wounded in the capital Kyiv during an overnight attack that used ballistic and cruise missiles as well as drones.

"Civilian infrastructure was hit even before the air raid alert was issued," Zelensky said earlier of the attacks on Kyiv. "Our defend-

ers managed to shoot down most of the targets, but not the ballistic ones."

Russia launched six ballistic missiles, another six cruise missiles and 121 drones in the overnight attacks including against Kyiv, Ukraine's air force said yesterday morning, before the strikes on Odesa, Kharkiv and Sumy took place.

It said it downed at least two cruise missiles and 111 drones.

Russia has stepped up attacks on the capital in recent weeks. So far this month, strikes on Kyiv and the surrounding region have killed more than 60 people.

Kyiv, in turn, has been pressuring Russia's military logistics in occupied southern Ukraine, seeking to deprive Russian forces of

fuel and munitions by conducting strikes on trucks and vessels deep behind the front lines.

Ukraine's drone forces chief Robert Brovdi said his units had struck 21 fuel tanker vessels in the Sea of Azov overnight, as well as seven other cargo and support ships, bringing the total number of vessels struck this week to 76.

Zelensky has said the aim of the drone campaign is to bring Russia to the negotiating table, although Russia's Vladimir Putin has not yet shown any willingness to soften his position.

One person was killed in a drone attack on four vessels, including a tanker carrying methanol, in Taganrog Bay on the Sea of Azov, Russian authorities said yesterday.

Hungary premier ups pressure on president

AFP
Budapest

Hungary's new Prime Minister Peter Magyar yesterday upped the pressure on the country's president, an ally of his predecessor whom he wants removed from office, accusing him of misusing public funds.

Pro-EU Magyar took office in May in the central European nation, after toppling nationalist premier Viktor Orban in elections.

Since then he has waged "regime change" that he promised during his campaign and among his top targets is Hungary's president and Orban ally, Tamas Sulyok, with parliament expected to vote on his removal tomorrow.

Ahead of the vote, in a series of Facebook posts, Magyar ac-

cused Sulyok of misusing public funds during official trips to Britain and the US this year.

Contacted by AFP, the president's office did not immediately respond to the accusations.

Magyar has sought to end Sulyok's term by amending Hungary's basic law, a move that has faced criticism from legal experts, who warn such a move could harm the rule of law.

Magyar says that his blitz of measures since coming to office aims to root out what he calls Orban's "mafia" from the state after 16 years, restore good relations with the European Union, and unlock 16bn euros (\$18.3bn) in EU funds that were frozen over rule-of-law concerns during the Orban era.

But some political experts and rights groups have criticised the speed and scale of Magyar's moves.

North Cyprus president hospitalised after falling ill

AFP
Ankara

Tufan Erhurman, president of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), was hospitalised on Friday evening after being taken ill, local media reports said.

Erhurman, who was elected as head of the breakaway territory in October, fell ill while attending an event in the Old Town in the northern half of the island's divided capital Nicosia, Haber Kibris news website reported.

He was treated by medics at the scene then taken to hospital in an ambulance.

In a statement quoted by Haber Kibris, health minister Hakan Dincyurek said Erhurman's angiography results "were clear",

that no pathology was detected in his main artery and his overall condition was "good".

Erhurman would remain in hospital until all tests had been completed, he added.

Cyprus has been divided since 1974 after Ankara occupied its northern third in response to an Athens-engineered Greek Cypriot coup seeking union with Greece.

Today it comprises the TRNC, which is only recognised by Ankara, and the internationally recognised Republic of Cyprus, a European Union member that controls the island's majority Greek Cypriot south.

Unlike his predecessor who toed the Turkish line of favouring two separate states on Cyprus, Erhurman has said he favours a federal state that would include both sides of the island.

Arrests hit opposition-run district in Ankara

AFP
Istanbul

Turkiye's government pressed on with its campaign against the main opposition CHP yesterday with dozens of arrests targeting a district in the capital Ankara that is run by the party.

Some 27 people were arrested in early-morning raids in Cankaya, out of a total of 36 named in a warrant issued by Ankara's public prosecutor, media reports said.

The warrant reportedly cited accusations of forming or belonging to a criminal organisation, bribery and tender rigging.

Among those named in the warrant was Cankaya Mayor Huiseyin Can Guner.

The arrests come as Türkiye's oldest political party battles a deepening crisis after a court removed its elected chairman

Ozgur Ozel, handing the role to his defeated predecessor Kemal Kilicdaroglu.

The highly controversial decision by an Ankara court, which annulled the party's 2023 leadership election over alleged vote buying, was widely seen by critics as the latest bid by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to cripple his political opponents.

The move has raised major concerns about the state of democracy and the rule of law in Türkiye.

Following yesterday's raids, Ozel — who is currently visiting the southern city of Adana — urged party members to gather in solidarity in front of Cankaya city hall.

Hundreds of CHP officials have been arrested as part of ongoing investigations into alleged corruption, including Istanbul mayor Ekrem Imamoglu, who was widely seen as one of the only politicians capable of de-

feating Erdogan at the ballot box.

Pressure on the CHP has soared since its sweeping local election victory over Erdogan's AKP in 2024. Figures from late June showed at least 26 of its mayors were behind bars, detained on a range of alleged graft offences.

CHP's resounding local election victory took place less than six months after Ozel took over as party leader.

After Imamoglu's arrest, Ozel played a key role in mobilising Türkiye's largest street protests in over a decade, which saw the party's popularity rise in the polls.

An outspoken critic of Erdogan, the 51-year-old is appealing against the Ankara court's decision but on Friday said if the legal moves failed, he would form a new party.

He described that as a "worst-case scenario" option in a YouTube interview with journalist Unsal Unlu.

31st anniversary of Srebrenica genocide



A Bosnian woman prays and mourns at the memorial cemetery in village of Potocari, near Eastern-Bosnian town of Srebrenica, yesterday, marking the 31st anniversary of Srebrenica genocide. On July 11, 1995, Bosnian Serb forces captured the eastern Bosnian town, which was then a UN-protected enclave, and killed 8,000 Muslim men and boys in the following days. (AFP)

Moldova's president nominates Vasile Tofan as PM

AFP
Chisinau

Moldova's pro-European President Maia Sandu yesterday nominated businessman Vasile Tofan as prime minister to replace Alexandru Munteanu, who quit over differences with the ruling majority.

In a social media video, Sandu said Tofan's first responsibility, if his candidacy is approved by parliament, should be to move the country forward on its path of "integration"

into the European Union.

He should also "strengthen the resilience of state institutions and society", and "revive the economy", she added.

Tofan now has two weeks to secure the backing of parliament, to which he has to submit his programme for government and his ministerial nominations.

The businessman had been mentioned as a possible prime minister last year even before Munteanu was appointed.

Igor Grosu, who heads Sandu's Action and Solidarity Party (PAS)

which won parliamentary elections in September, announced on Friday that he had chosen him as his candidate.

He said he shared "the same objectives" as Tofan, namely "EU accession in the years to come, institutional reform and economic growth".

Harvard Business School graduate Tofan, who turns 44 today, has a degree in public management from the Netherlands and is a managing partner at Horizon Capital, a private equity firm focusing on Ukraine and Moldova.

Poland PM vows memorial to victims of Ukrainian wartime 'genocide'

AFP
Warsaw

Poland's Prime Minister Donald Tusk yesterday announced the creation of a new monument to civilian victims of what he called a "genocide" by "Ukrainian nationalists" in World War II.

Warsaw and Kyiv have been at loggerheads for decades over the massacre of civilians on both sides during World War II, souring relations.

But the dispute has taken on more significance given Poland's

support for its neighbour as Ukraine fights off an invasion by Russia.

"A Wall of Remembrance will be erected in Warsaw, with an eternal flame and the names of every victim who has been found and identified," he said in a video on social media.

"The republic will not forget any of them."

Tusk's announcement came on the eve of the anniversary of "Bloody Sunday" in 1943, when units from the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) killed thousands of Poles

in Volhynia, now in northwest Ukraine.

According to Poland, between 70,000 and 100,000 civilians were killed between 1943 and 1945, while reprisals are thought to have claimed the lives of up to 12,000 Ukrainians.

The UPA and the OUN are seen in Ukraine as groups that fought for independence against the Red Army and the Soviet Union.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky caused outrage in Poland in May by announcing that he was naming a military unit after the UPA.

In retaliation, Polish President

Karol Nawrocki stripped Zelensky of the country's highest honour, the Order of the White Eagle.

Tusk, a former president of the European Council and a staunch backer of Ukraine against Russia, said "memory and truth must help us build a better future, without hatred and without contempt".

"The Europe of peace and mutual respect, the Europe reconciled after World War II, was made possible thanks to truth and to calling things by their name.

"Whoever wants to join this community must be ready for this truth."

In Olyka, northwest Ukraine, Poland's Defence Minister Wladyslaw Kosiniak-Kamysz told a commemorative ceremony that Warsaw and Kyiv needed to "move forward together" to "build a better future by accepting responsibility for the past".

"Friendship means telling each other the truth, even the difficult truth," he said, adding that he was "not here to reopen old wounds but to heal them".

In Warsaw, Ukraine's ambassador to Poland, Vasyl Bodnar, laid a wreath in memory of "all victims of the Second World War, whether Polish or Ukrainian".

He called for "reconciliation" between the two countries, which he said was essential to confronting "the Russian threat".

Ceremonies were also held in the southeastern Polish border town of Chelm — a key rail link to Kyiv — at the site of a planned museum to those who died at Volhynia.

The town's mayor, Jakub Banaszek, said the commemorations were "not directed against today's Ukraine or its citizens" nor to cause division and hostility.

"They are an expression of remembrance for the victims of historical events," he added.

National Museum of Qatar revives traditional ‘Mubayyat’ chest for new generation

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

The National Museum of Qatar (NMQ) is inviting the public to reconnect with the country's rich artisanal heritage through a hands-on workshop dedicated to crafting the traditional “Mubayyat” chest, an enduring symbol of Qatar's cultural memory. Held from July 19-22 at the museum's Education Studio, the initiative forms part of the museum's “Mahara” (Skill) programme, which celebrates traditional crafts through immersive learning experiences. Running daily from 4pm-6pm in Arabic, the workshop coincides with the 50th anniversary of the National Museum of Qatar, underscoring the institution's

commitment to preserving Qatar's intangible cultural heritage while introducing younger generations to the craftsmanship that shaped the nation's past. The Mahara programme is a series of practical workshops to showcase traditional professions and handicrafts, highlighting their historical and cultural significance while ensuring that time-honoured skills are passed on through direct instruction from experienced artisans. Speaking to *Gulf Times*, artisan and calligrapher Assaad al-Turki stressed the importance of safeguarding traditional craftsmanship. “Preserving this craft is essential to keeping it alive,” he said. “It gives young participants the opportunity to discover their history and develop traditional artisanal skills



Mubayyat chest artisan

that may one day inspire innovation. Perhaps they will transform these crafts into unique souvenirs valued by tourists, citizens, and residents alike. At the same time, they enjoy a rewarding holiday experience while acquiring skills deeply connected to their country's history

and cultural heritage.” This edition focuses on the “Mubayyat” chest, a handcrafted wooden travel box once widely used in Qatar for short journeys. Travellers relied on the compact chest to carry personal belongings while staying away from home, making it an essential



Assaad al-Turki

companion and a familiar feature of everyday life. Today, it stands as a treasured reminder of the country's traditions of travel, hospitality, and craftsmanship. Throughout the four-day workshop, participants will explore the cultural and historical

significance of the “Mubayyat” before learning how to construct their own chest using authentic traditional techniques. By engaging directly with the craft, attendees will gain practical skills while helping to preserve one of Qatar's distinctive artisanal traditions. Through initiatives such as “Mahara”, the National Museum of Qatar continues to strengthen public appreciation of traditional craftsmanship, encouraging community members to embrace skills that form an integral part of the nation's identity. By preserving these practices through education and participation, the museum reinforces the enduring role of handmade crafts in documenting Qatar's history and safeguarding its cultural legacy for future generations.

GAAIE hosted by QF launches in Geneva to shape inclusive technology governance

The Global Alliance for AI Ethics (GAAIE), an international initiative hosted by Qatar Foundation (QF) member Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU), has been launched on the sidelines of the inaugural United Nations Global Dialogue on AI Governance in Geneva, Switzerland.

Supported by a High-Level Strategic Roundtable through the United Nations Office for Digital and Emerging Technologies, the initiative establishes a landmark platform dedicated to transitioning the global AI ethics discourse from a restrictive, monocultural arena where non-Western perspectives are often merely an echo to an inclusive, polycentric paradigm. This framework elevates the rich moral traditions of the Global South to an active, guiding voice in shaping global technology governance.

GAAIE responds to the urgent need to shift the global AI ethics discourse from a prohibition-focused model to an innovation-enabling, human-centric one. It is designed to counterbalance narrow techno-commercial solutionism with values-based frameworks that position human dignity and socio-cultural well-being as foundational requirements in early-stage AI engineering.

The alliance convened a high-level strategic roundtable titled ‘Epistemic Equity in the Digital Age: Forging a Polycentric Global AI Discourse through North-South Collaboration’. This side event brought together the alliance's newly appointed Advisory Board and senior UN-nominated experts to develop a long-term GAAIE Collaboration Roadmap with international institutions to diversifying the global AI ethics discourse.

This milestone was formally recognised in Qatar's official statement, which was delivered to the UN Global Dialogue plenary prior to the session by



International delegation members participate in the High-Level Strategic Roundtable.

HE Mohammed bin Ali al-Mannai, Minister of Communications and Information Technology and Head of the Qatari Delegation to the Global Dialogue.

“At Hamad Bin Khalifa University, we believe that technological progress is only meaningful when it is guided by robust human-centric values,” stated Dr Ahmad M Hasnah, president, HBKU.

“This alliance seeks to build a global framework where ethics becomes a driver of responsible and sustainable AI innovation, advancing not only what is technologically possible, but also what is genuinely beneficial for humanity. By creating a space where the world can define AI ethics together, we are helping to develop AI that is inclusive and, therefore, can be trusted globally.”

HE Dr Hind Abdulrahman al-Muftah, Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations Office in Geneva, said: “The Geneva launch during this landmark UN Dialogue provides the ideal platform to showcase Qatar's capacity for strategic, values-led technological leadership. This milestone is a crucial step in translating theoretical ethical principles into actionable, internationally recognised frameworks.”



HBKU delegate participates in the high-level launch of the Global Alliance for AI Ethics.

Dr Mohammed Ghaly, Alliance co-chair and director of the Research Center for Islamic Legislation and Ethics, said: “For too long, the global AI ethics discourse has functioned as a Western-centric echo, leaving major non-Western civilisations digitally marginalised.

“With the launch of GAAIE, we are establishing a truly pluralistic voice. Our flagship initiatives will provide the empirical, culturally authentic data required to balance existing biases and build equitable global models.”

At the heart of the GAAIE's mission is the deployment of core, action-oriented initiatives, including the Global AI Ethics Observatory, which is

dedicated to the independent auditing, ethical scoring, and comparative analysis of AI systems, and the Global Heritage AI Project, which coordinates the large-scale digitisation of underrepresented cultural and scholarly archives alongside low-resource languages, including Arabic.

As the alliance expands its global operations, it invites academic institutions, civil society organisations, and international policymakers to join its collaborative network. Through its dual approach of empirical research and normative advocacy, the alliance is positioned to establish new frameworks for inclusive, pluralistic AI governance on the global stage.

Doha Theatre Company celebrates creative force behind ‘Under the Rubble’

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

The Doha Theatre Company has honoured the cast and crew of its acclaimed production “Under the Rubble”, for the collective effort that brought the play to life during the 38th Doha Theatre Festival.

The recognition ceremony celebrated the artists, technicians and administrators whose dedication contributed to the production's success at Al Mayassa Theatre, where the play was met with a strong audience turnout and enthusiastic engagement from theatre enthusiasts across Qatar.

Attended by members of the Doha Theatre Company and the production team, the event reflected the company's commitment to recognising the collaborative spirit that underpins every successful theatrical work. Participants were honoured for their artistic contributions and their role in delivering a production that reaffirmed theatre's enduring ability to explore profound human and social issues through compelling storytelling.

Speaking to reporters during the ceremony, company representatives described the tribute as a celebration of the teamwork, creativity and professionalism that shaped “Under the Rubble”. They praised the remarkable sense of unity among the production's cast and crew, noting that months of intensive rehearsals, meticulous preparation and unwavering commitment culminated in a performance that resonated strongly with festival audiences.

The company also highlighted the dedication demonstrated behind the scenes, emphasising that the achieve-

ments of any theatrical production extend far beyond the performers on stage. Technical specialists, production staff and administrators were recognised as essential partners in transforming the artistic vision into a fully realised theatrical experience.

“Under the Rubble” offered audiences a thought-provoking exploration of resilience, hope and the human capacity to confront adversity. Through a powerful dramatic narrative supported by expressive performances, dynamic direction and striking visual design, the production examined the emotional and psychological dimensions of survival while underscoring the enduring strength of the human spirit.

Members of the production team described their participation in the Doha Theatre Festival as an important milestone in their artistic careers. They noted that the festival provides an invaluable platform for creative exchange, professional development and healthy artistic competition, while fostering collaboration among theatre practitioners from across the region.

They also stressed the importance of such cultural initiatives in strengthening Qatar's theatrical movement, nurturing emerging talent and encouraging a new generation of artists to pursue creative excellence.

The ceremony concluded as both a celebration of “Under the Rubble's” achievements and a reaffirmation of the Doha Theatre Company's commitment to cultivating artistic excellence. By recognising the dedication of its members, the company reinforced the values of teamwork, creativity and cultural engagement that continue to drive the steady growth of Qatar's vibrant theatre scene.



Members of Doha Theatre Company honouring the play's crew.

Saudi entrepreneur, influencer Reem Alswaidi begins exciting new chapter in Doha

Saudi entrepreneur, luxury lifestyle influencer, and communications specialist Reem Alswaidi is embarking on exciting new chapter as she relocates to Doha, bringing her regional expertise, creative vision, and passion for connecting people across the Gulf. Known for her work at the intersection of fashion, luxury, culture and business, Reem's move marks more than a change of address. It reflects her commitment to strengthening creative collaborations within the region and building meaningful bridges between Gulf markets.

As Qatar's fashion and cultural landscape continues to evolve, Reem will work alongside internationally renowned brands as they expand into the Arab market, helping them navigate the region with local insight, cultural understanding, and genuine connections. Drawing



on years of experience and an established network of industry partners, tastemakers, creatives, and brand leaders, she will support launches, events, and partnerships that resonate authentically with regional audience.

“I am incredibly proud to begin this new chapter in Doha and contribute to Qatar's growing fashion and cultural scene,” said Reem Alswaidi. There is so much energy, creativity, and opportunity here. I look forward to working with

internationally renowned brands entering the market while celebrating the incredible talent that already exists in the region. My goal is to create meaningful connections, build lasting relationships, and help bring the Gulf even closer together through creativity, culture and shared experiences.” Reem is also passionate about shining a spotlight on Qatar's emerging designers, artists, entrepreneurs and creatives. Through her platform and collaborations, she hopes to introduce local voices to wider audiences while encouraging greater cultural exchange across the Gulf. With fresh opportunities, exciting collaborations, and a new city to call home, Reem Alswaidi's journey in Doha is only just beginning—and it promises to be one defined by creativity, connection, and a shared passion for celebrating the very best of the Gulf.

Ehsan Center for elderly care launches ‘Our Summer is a Blessing’ programme

Ehsan Center for Empowerment and Care of the Elderly has launched its summer programme, “Our Summer is a Blessing”, which will run from July 26-August 5 at the Ehsan Club in Izghawa.

The initiative aims to provide senior women with a rewarding summer experience that combines learning, recreation, and activities designed to enhance their quality of life. The programme reflects the Centre's commitment to delivering specialised initiatives that promote psychological and social well-being, develop life and creative skills, and foster the concept of active ageing through integrated programmes tailored to the needs of senior citizens while encouraging their meaningful participation in society. The participants will benefit from a diverse range of activities, including arts and crafts workshops, awareness lectures, health and fitness sessions, field visits, and cultural and educational experiences. The programme also features dedicated workshops on digital skills and the use of modern technologies, helping participants strengthen their independence and adapt to the demands of an increasingly digital world.

In addition, the initiative seeks to strengthen social bonds among participants by encouraging them to spend their time in purposeful activities that develop their abilities, boost self-confidence, and showcase the wealth of knowledge and experience they possess within a safe, supportive, and engaging environment.

Manal Ahmed al-Mannai, executive director of Ehsan said: “Our Summer is a Blessing” programme is one of the centre's flagship initiatives, reflecting our commitment to providing comprehensive programmes that enrich the lives of senior citizens while addressing their social, cultural, and health needs. Through such initiatives, we seek to enhance their quality of life and overall well-being.”

She added: “At Ehsan, we believe that investing in senior citizens is an investment in experience, values, and our national identity. So, we design innovative programmes that provide opportunities for lifelong learning, skills development, and greater social engagement, reinforcing their role as active partners in the country's development.” She further noted that “The programme builds on the Center's ongoing efforts to deliver sustainable initiatives that support the State's vision for improving quality of life and promoting active ageing. It is fully aligned with the National Strategy for Senior Citizens and reflects our commitment to providing pioneering services and programmes that create a lasting positive impact for this valued segment of society.”

The programme will conclude with a recognition ceremony celebrating the participants and showcasing the achievements and creative works produced throughout the initiative, highlighting the importance of empowering senior women and recognising their valuable contribution to society.