



Passing of Father Amir a loss for international community



QATAR NEWS AGENCY



UNESCO

UNESCO Executive Board Chairperson:

Passing of HH the Father Amir a Loss to International Community, to Advancing Development and Education Worldwide



HE Dr. Nasser bin Hamad Al Hinzab

Chairperson of the Executive Board of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to UNESCO

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His Highness, made education, science, culture, and international cooperation key tools for empowering individuals, expanding opportunities, and building more inclusive societies capable of facing challenges

His Highness' support for initiatives aimed at expanding access to quality education, promoting scientific progress, and investing in human capital contributed to establishing a global legacy

The legacy of HH the Father Amir aligns closely with the organization's mission of building peace in the minds of people through education, science, culture, and international cooperation

The chairperson of the Executive Board of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) and Permanent Representative of Qatar to Unesco, Dr Nasser bin Hamad al-Hinzab, has said that the passing of His Highness the Father Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani represents a loss for the international community, given his enduring contributions to advancing development and expanding educational opportunities worldwide.

This came at the beginning of his address during the opening of the high-level ministerial dialogue on “The global compact for sciences – sustainable development: Commitments for 2030 and beyond”, held at Unesco in Paris, in the presence of Unesco Director-General Dr Khaled El-Enany, and a number of ministers and senior officials.

Dr al-Hinzab called upon the participants to observe a minute of silence in mourning for HH the late Father Amir in recognition of his humanitarian legacy and contributions to the fields of education and development.

He said that HH Sheikh Hamad believed that education is the cornerstone of human dignity, sustainable development, and lasting peace.

HH the late Father Amir, Dr al-Hinzab noted, made education, science, culture, and international co-operation key tools for empowering individuals, expanding opportunities, and building more inclusive societies capable of facing challenges.

Dr al-Hinzab added that HH Sheikh Hamad's support for initiatives aimed at expanding access to quality education, promoting scientific progress, and investing



in human capital contributed to establishing a global legacy that continues to inspire the international community and strengthens efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

He also praised the visionary leadership of HH the late Father Amir, his unwavering belief in the values of intellectual pluralism, and the pivotal role of independent media, stemming from his conviction that open dialogue and the free exchange of ideas are fundamental to progress and the consolidation of peace.

Dr al-Hinzab affirmed that the legacy of HH the late Father Amir aligns closely with the UN organisation's mission of building peace in the minds of people through education, science, culture, and international co-operation.

The Unesco Executive Board chairman also noted that HH Sheikh Hamad's contributions will remain etched in the memory of

the international community.

The conference, which brought together a large number of ministers from around the world, aimed to assess progress in implementing the goals of the International Decade for Sustainable Development, review innovative scientific solutions that contribute to addressing global challenges, and strengthen the international partnerships necessary to expand the role of science in achieving sustainable development.

Held under the theme *Science in action: Charting a sustainable and equitable future for all*, the conference highlighted the importance of interdisciplinary research, the principles of open science, and promoting the integration of science, policymaking, and society to contribute to building a more inclusive and equitable future, and to support efforts to shape the post-2030 global development agenda.

– QNA

Amir receives condolence calls from world leaders

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Grand Duke Guillaume of Luxembourg offered his condolences on HH the Father Amir's passing.

HH the Amir thanked the Luxembourg grand duke for his condolences and kind sentiments.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-

Maktoum, UAE Vice-President and Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai, offered his condolences, praying to Almighty Allah to grant HH the Father Amir His boundless mercy and admit him into His vast Paradise.

HH the Amir thanked the UAE vice-president for his heartfelt fraternal sentiments.

King Felipe VI of Spain conveyed his condolences on HH Sheikh Hamad's passing.

HH the Amir thanked the Spanish king for his condolences, wishing him continued health and wellness, and bilateral relations between the two countries continued progress and growth.

The Netherlands's King Willem-Alexan-

der also conveyed his condolences on the passing of HH Sheikh Hamad in a call with HH the Amir.

HH the Amir expressed his thanks and appreciation to the king for his condolences, wishing him good health and wellness, and for bilateral relations between the two countries further progress and growth.

– QNA

US and Iran trade blows again as Hormuz truce unravels

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The re-escalation has again largely closed Hormuz, the world's most important route for oil and gas, pushing global energy prices higher.

Iran triggered the renewed fighting last week by striking ships in the strait, causing a dangerous fire aboard a Qatari liquefied natural gas (LNG) tanker.

After Tehran resumed its blockade, Washington reimposed its blockade of Iranian ports from Wednesday and fired Hellfire missiles at a tanker near Kharg Island, hitting its smokestack.

Tehran wants all shipping to use a channel close to its shores and has made no secret of its intention to charge passage fees at the end of a 60-day negotiation period set in last month's memorandum.

Iranian military spokesperson Brigadier-General Mohammad Akraminia said US strikes on coastal targets would never break Iran's grip, as it can strike the strait from anywhere on its territory.

A senior military spokesman said: “We will never back down over the Strait of Hormuz.”

Iran has signalled it could prod its Houthi allies to close the Bab al-Mandeb, and sources told Reuters that Tehran had already instructed them to do so if Washington attacks Iranian infrastructure.

Iran's military headquarters warned that “all infrastructure in the region” would be “crushed” if President Donald Trump follows through on threats to hit Iranian power plants and bridges.

“Next week it gets really bad for them,” Trump told Fox News.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said that Trump would not allow Iran to fire on ships “without paying a consequence”, but added he was “always open to diplomacy at the very same time”.

Trump on Wednesday welcomed the release of a US citizen, identified by her lawyer as Dena Karari, as a “gesture of goodwill”.

Iran's judiciary disputed the account yesterday, saying that no American prisoner had been released.

Pakistan's foreign office spokesman Tahir Andrabi said that Islamabad would “continue to encourage all sides to end violence and resume technical-level talks” under the memorandum it helped mediate.

– Reuters/AFP

Qatar's embassies receive more condolence messages

Qatar's embassies abroad continued to receive an outpouring of condolences yesterday from mourners who extended their deepest sympathies following the passing of His Highness the Father Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani.

In **Georgetown**, Guyana's President Dr Mohamed Irfaan Ali offered his condolences at Qatar's embassy.

In **Lisbon**, Portugal's Foreign Minister Paulo Rangel offered his message of condolence.

In **Singapore**, Minister for Digital Development and Information Josephine Teo offered condolences at Qatar's embassy on behalf of Singapore's foreign minister.

In **New York**, the president of the 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly, Annalena Baerbock, offered her condolences at the headquarters of Qatar's Permanent Mission to the United Nations.

– QNA

Father Amir's legacy will endure as long as Qatar endures, says envoy

From Page 1

The ambassador reserved his most striking words for the durability of HH the late Father Amir's achievements.

“The Father Amir was a visionary leader and his legacy is not going to stay for years or decades but for the time Qatar is there, Insha' Allah,” he told *Gulf Times*.

“He had conviction in what he was dreaming, and he had the power to convert his dream into reality in his short span of being Amir of Qatar,” the envoy continued.

“Allah made sure that he sees his nation prosper

and become one of the most important countries in the world.”

On behalf of the people of Pakistan, the ambassador extended heartfelt condolences to HH the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, the ruling family and the people of Qatar, praying that Allah Almighty grants HH the late Father Amir the highest place in Jannah.

Presiding over the gathering at TNG Al Wakra Campus, held in co-ordination with the embassy of Pakistan, Aamer reaffirmed the enduring strength of Pakistan-Qatar relations and the mutual respect shared by the two brotherly nations.

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Arab League slams attacks on Oman, UAE and Kuwait

The Arab League has reaffirmed that the Iranian attacks on Oman, two UAE oil tankers, and Kuwait are totally unacceptable.

This came in telephone conversations that Secretary-General Nabil Fahmy held with the foreign ministers of the three countries.

In phone discussions with Badr Albusaidi, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan, and Sheikh Jarrah Jaber al-Ahmad al-Sabah, Fahmy slammed the assaults as criminal, saying they violate international law and UN Security Council Resolution 2817.

He stressed that the security and safety of maritime traffic, as well as respect for the international rules-based order, constitute fundamental pillars of social security and global economic stability.

Fahmy called on the international community to assume its responsibilities in keeping further escalation at bay.

In addition, he reiterated that the bloc fully stands with the three countries in confronting these attacks, offering the League's full support for in all measures they take to safeguard their security and territorial integrity.

He reaffirmed that the League rejects any actions that would endanger the security and stability of Arab nations.

– QNA

Turkmenistan embassy hosts farewell dinner for Kazakh and Turkish envoys

Turkmenistan's ambassador to Qatar Myratgeldi Seyitmammedov hosted a farewell dinner at the embassy in honour of the outgoing ambassadors of Kazakhstan, Arman Isagaliyev, and Turkiye, Mustafa Goksu, upon the completion of their diplomatic missions in Qatar.

The dinner was held in a cordial atmosphere and provided an opportunity to express appreciation for the two ambas-



sadors' contributions to strengthening bilateral relations and enhancing co-operation among the countries represented.

In his remarks, the Turkmenistan ambassador thanked the envoys of Kazakhstan and Turkiye for their dedicated service during their tenure in Qatar and wished them continued success in their future endeavours.

The guests attending the event also

conveyed their best wishes and appreciation to the departing envoys for their valuable contributions to diplomatic relations and friendly co-operation.

They also wished the departing ambassadors good luck in their future assignments.

The evening concluded with the exchange of goodwill messages, gifts and a commemorative group photograph.

Vice-president Vance speaks on Israel's villainous role

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The vice-president said that, while he has “good relationships” with some members of the Israeli government, “there are some people within their system that we know beyond a shadow of a doubt that are manipulating and trying to change American public opinion to keep the war going on indefinitely”.

Vance said that many countries, allies and adversaries try to influence American policy and that “it doesn't bother me that Israel tries to do this, it frankly doesn't even

bother me that Russia or some of these other countries do it”.

He said it was “just the nature of being a political leader in 2026”.

“What does bother me is when those operations, those influence campaigns, actually affect American political judgement,” said the vice-president.

Vance lashed out at Israeli critics of the Iran deal in June, saying that President Donald Trump is Israel's only ally, in a sharp rebuke that referenced the billions in US defence aid the country receives.

The Israeli Prime Minister's Office did

not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Vance also expressed frustration at Americans and others “who say you cannot negotiate with the Iranians”.

Asked about the apparently contradictory comments later yesterday, White House spokeswoman Karoline Leavitt said the remarks were made at different points in the war and did not conflict.

“The president and vice-president are on the exact same page about where we are right now in this conflict,” Leavitt said at a briefing.

The Amir of great benevolence: Remembering HH Sheikh Hamad

By Dr Nedžad Grabus
Mufti of Sarajevo, Bosnia
and Herzegovina

The passing of HH the Father Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani has left a profound sense of loss among countless people around the world. Visionary leaders are remembered not only for the years they spend in office, but for the institutions they build, the lives they transform and the enduring legacy they leave behind. HH Sheikh Hamad was one of those exceptional leaders.

As crown prince in 1989 and later as Amir of the State of Qatar from 1995-2013, he led one of the most remarkable national transformations of the modern era. Under his leadership, Qatar emerged as a global centre for diplomacy, education, culture, humanitarian work and sustainable economic development. His decision in 2013 to transfer power peacefully to His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani reflected his confidence in a new generation of leadership and set a rare example of political foresight.

Among the many memories I cherish of HH Sheikh Hamad, one encounter remains especially close to my heart.

“I would like to build that mosque”

For more than four decades, the Islamic community in Slovenia had dreamed of building a mosque in Ljubljana. The dream seemed almost impossible to realise.

Although we finally purchased land in 2008, we possessed little beyond determination and sincere intentions. We had neither sufficient financial resources nor architectural plans, construction permits or the technical capacity required for such a major undertaking. Soon afterwards, the global financial crisis further complicated our efforts.

In December 2009, during a re-

ception marking Slovenia’s National Day, I asked then president Danilo Türk to mention our mosque project during his forthcoming official visits to Qatar and Kuwait.

A month later, president Türk informed me that the Amir of Qatar had expressed genuine interest.

That encouraging message eventually led to one of the most unforgettable evenings of my life.

On July 20, 2010, I attended the official state dinner hosted by president Türk in honour of HH Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani.

Throughout the evening, the Amir spoke warmly about Qatar’s remarkable progress, Doha’s cultural renaissance, its museums and its commitment to preserving Islamic heritage. His manner was humble, thoughtful and remarkably approachable.

He asked about my family, my work and life in Slovenia. The more we spoke, the more I realised that I was not simply speaking with a statesman, but with a man of exceptional humanity.

At one point he asked me in Arabic:

“Mufti, what are you working on?”

I replied honestly:

“Your Highness, for more than forty years we have been trying to build a mosque in Ljubljana, but we have not succeeded.”

Without hesitation, he smiled and replied:

“I would like to build that mosque.”

Those simple words carried extraordinary meaning.

I politely asked whether he would be willing to share that intention with President Türk.

The conversation soon returned to international affairs, yet my thoughts remained fixed on the mosque. For me, nothing discussed that evening mattered more.

Then came the moment that changed everything.

Turning to president Türk, the Amir said:



“Mr President, I have spoken with the Mufti regarding the construction of the mosque.”

The president responded:

“Yes, we fully support the project.”

The Amir then added:

“Mr President, if the Mufti agrees, I would be honoured to build that mosque.”

His words reflected far more than generosity.

They reflected dignity.

He did not present himself as a benefactor bestowing a favour. Instead, he expressed his support in a manner that preserved the dignity of a Mufti whose community still had no mosque in the capital city.

That moment remains one of the greatest lessons in leadership I have ever witnessed.

“Pray for the Amir”

Before concluding the meeting, the Amir instructed Sheikh Khalid bin Mohamed al-Attiyah to over-

see the project and maintain direct contact with us.

Several months later, together with my colleagues Ibrahim Malanovic and Nevzet Poric, I travelled to Doha to continue discussions.

When we met Sheikh Khalid, his first question was straightforward:

“Mufti, do you have a project?”

I explained that we were still burdened by debts related to purchasing the land.

His answer was equally direct:

“I am not interested in the land or the debts. I am interested in the project.”

He immediately asked officials from the Qatar Fund for Development to work with us on preparing the necessary documentation.

Working closely with architects in Ljubljana and specialists in Doha, we developed the initial proposal. The estimated value of the project reached €15 mn.

Weeks later, Sheikh Khalid telephoned me.

After exchanging greetings, he said:

“Mufti, pray for the Amir.”

I replied:

“I pray for him every day.”

He answered:

“Pray even more. The Amir has approved €15mn for your project.”

For several moments I could barely speak.

That historic decision enabled us to organise an international architectural competition, prepare the complete design documentation and settle the outstanding debts on the land.

By the project’s completion, whose total investment reached €34mn, the State of Qatar had contributed €28mn towards what is today recognised as one of the most beautiful Islamic cultural centres built by Bosniaks outside Bosnia and Herzegovina.

More importantly, the mosque

gave Muslims in Slovenia a permanent spiritual and cultural home.

A legacy that will endure

HH the late Father Amir laid the foundations of this extraordinary project.

In May 2022, His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, the Amir of the State of Qatar, officially visited the Ljubljana Mosque together with Slovenian President Borut Pahor, reaffirming Qatar’s enduring friendship with Slovenia and its unwavering commitment to dialogue, coexistence and mutual respect.

Today, every prayer performed within that mosque, every verse of the Holy Qur’an recited there and every child who learns about Islam beneath its roof stands as a living testament to HH Sheikh Hamad’s generosity.

His contribution was not confined to bricks and mortar.

He invested in people.

He invested in dignity.

He invested in the future.

For that reason, the Ljubljana Mosque will forever remain among the enduring charities (sadaqah jariyah) that continue to benefit generations long after their benefactor has departed this world.

We pray that Allah Almighty grants HH Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani the highest ranks in Paradise, rewards him abundantly for his countless acts of generosity and accepts all the good he accomplished in service of humanity.

We also pray that Allah grants His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani continued good health, wisdom and success, and blesses the State of Qatar and its people with lasting peace, prosperity and continued progress.

Indeed, noble leaders may depart this world, but their legacy continues to inspire future generations.

HH the late Father Amir’s legacy is one such legacy – written not only in history books, but also in the hearts of those whose lives he transformed.

Qatar Museums exhibitions celebrate Mathaf milestone, World Cup legacy through August

By Joey Aguilar
Doha

From marking the 15th anniversary of Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art to highlighting the lasting legacy of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 and football’s global cultural significance, Qatar Museums (QM) is continuing to engage audiences in Qatar and overseas with a diverse programme of exhibitions running through the end of August.

According to QM, the programme brings together exhibitions on modern and contemporary Arab art, cultural heritage, and design, alongside travelling exhibitions in Mexico presented as part of the Qatar-Canada and Mexico 2026 Year of Culture initiative.

Leading the programme are two anniversary exhibitions at Mathaf that commemorate the museum’s 15-year journey and its contribution to modern and contemporary Arab art.

Running until August 8, ‘Resolutions: Celebrating 15 Years of Mathaf’ revisits the museum’s founding vision through works from its permanent collection while examining its evolution as a centre for exhibitions, research, education and collaboration.

The exhibition is organised around four thematic sections: Infrastructure: Traces of a Legacy, which explores Mathaf’s origins through the pioneering efforts of Sheikh Hassan bin Mohammed bin Ali al-Thani; Mathaf as Institutional Memory, tracing

the museum’s exhibition history; Education: Art as Knowledge Creation, highlighting the role of art education in shaping visual culture across the Arab world; and Representation and the Writing of History, which examines how artists from West Asia and North Africa helped define modern Arab identity in the post-independence era.

Together, the exhibition reflects on Mathaf’s legacy, encourages decolonial discussions on the visual identity of the Arab world, and presents diverse regional narratives alongside the museum’s future aspirations.

Also on view until August 8 is Resolutions: Evolving Realities, which brings together commissioned works and artworks previously exhibited at Mathaf, including pieces from the museum’s inaugural exhibitions in 2010.

The exhibition also presents for the first time a large-scale sculptural work by renowned Iraqi artist Ismail Fattah al-Turk, produced during the artist residency programme that preceded Mathaf’s opening as a public museum.

Featuring works by 10 intergenerational artists and collectives, the exhibition explores the theme of time, demonstrating how artistic narratives evolve and acquire new meanings over the years. It also reflects Mathaf’s commitment to supporting innovative artistic practices and community-driven curatorial approaches.

QM is also showcasing the country’s cultural story through two travelling exhibitions in Mexico City.



Presented at Museo Jumex in Mexico City, the exhibition traces football’s evolution from local origins to a global cultural phenomenon through iconic objects.

Running until August 9 at Centro de Cultura Digital, Qatar 2022 Legacy: Journeys to Greatness explores the lasting impact of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 as the first tournament held in the Middle East and the Arab world.

The exhibition traces Qatar’s journey from securing the hosting rights in 2010 to delivering a global sporting event that reshaped international perceptions of the country while highlighting its emergence as a centre for cultural and sporting exchange.

Through objects, stories and key moments, it examines themes of identity, representation and cultural diversity, inviting visitors to reflect on the World Cup’s enduring cultural

legacy beyond the football pitch.

Also in Mexico City, Objects of Glory: Iconic Moments in the History of Football is on display at Museo Jumex until August 30.

The exhibition presents football as a global cultural phenomenon through iconic objects, including balls, jerseys, trophies and personal memorabilia that chart the sport’s evolution from its nineteenth-century origins in England to the modern FIFA World Cup.

Items linked to football legends such as Pelé, Diego Maradona, Lionel Messi, David Beckham and Kylian Mbappé illustrate the game’s worldwide cultural influence, while the inclusion of Palestinian footballer Honey Thaljieh highlights football’s role in promoting inclusion and breaking barriers.

Both travelling exhibitions form part of the Qatar Canada and Mexico 2026 Year of Culture initiative.

Meanwhile, visitors to the Museum of Islamic Art Library can explore The Astrolabe: Taker of the Stars, a display that runs until August 31 and features the work of Qatari graphic designer Khawla al-Essa.

Developed from research conducted between 2024 and 2026, the display examines the historical astrolabe through publications, sketches, printmaking, laser-cut models and interactive book design, illustrating how contemporary graphic design can make scientific heritage more accessible while fostering greater public appreciation of Islamic scientific achievements.



Part of QOSM’s permanent collection, this football was used in the 1888 FA Cup Final, in which West Bromwich Albion defeated Preston North End 2-1 in England. (Photo courtesy of 3-2-1 Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum)



The display showcases the results of a multi-year graphic design project centred on the astrolabe.



Raqs Media Collective, To People, 2019, Mathaf Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha (Resolutions: Evolving Realities exhibition).



Qatar 2022 Legacy: Journeys to Greatness exhibition examines the enduring legacy of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. **PICTURE:** QM Years of Culture



Part of Resolutions: Celebrating 15 Years of Mathaf exhibition. **PICTURES:** Qatar Museums

French PM Lecornu pledges deeper ties on Morocco visit

AFP
Rabat

France and Morocco moved yesterday to strengthen a renewed partnership that has flourished over the past two years, with French Prime Minister Sébastien Lecornu hailing “exceptionally positive” ties in Rabat.

But the high-level visit came as a media consortium published fresh reports that Morocco used the Israeli-made Pegasus spyware to target French officials when tensions were high between the nations, after allegations first emerged in 2021.

During his visit, Lecornu praised the diplomatic advances Paris and Rabat achieved since President Emmanuel Macron backed Morocco’s sovereignty claim over the disputed Western Sahara in 2024.

Lecornu described the two countries’ ties as being at a “turning point”, saying that France sought to deepen cooperation particularly on security and counter-terrorism.

His Moroccan counterpart Aziz Akhannouch said their partner-



French PM Sébastien Lecornu (left) and his Moroccan counterpart Aziz Akhannouch gesture after delivering their press statements at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs office in Rabat, yesterday. (AFP)

ship was now based on “a shared strategic vision, restored trust and common ambition”.

The trip also resulted in a series of agreements and the signing of an “enhanced exceptional partnership” between the kingdom and France.

However the reports published by a media consortium, led by Forbidden Stories, about the Pegasus spyware threatened

to overshadow his visit.

In a new series of articles published on Thursday, the consortium, including Le Monde newspaper, said email traces that Morocco used to spy on domestic political opponents had also been found on the phone of French ministers, including Lecornu.

Lecornu and Akhannouch were initially set to hold a press conference after their meeting but in-

stead only made brief statements to reporters without questions.

Pegasus can be installed surreptitiously onto a target’s smartphone and read messages, geolocate and secretly turn on the device’s camera and microphone - effectively turning the phone into a pocket spy.

The media consortium first alleged in 2021 extensive Moroccan use of the Israeli-made Pegasus spyware, including against French officials.

Morocco has firmly rejected all the accusations made against it, and has demanded evidence.

The reports also said Paris had considered acquiring the software.

The French foreign ministry did not immediately respond to AFP’s request for comment on the reports.

Macron’s office said France’s objective was “to strengthen the framework of cooperation and trust with the Moroccans”.

Ties between the two countries had been strained over issues including a visa dispute and allegations of Moroccan espionage.

‘Drone strikes ship off southern Iraqi port’

AFP
Baghdad

A drone struck a ship off the port in Iraq’s southern province of Basra yesterday, a security official told AFP, while the country’s oil ministry said an unspecified object fell near a tanker.

This is the latest drone-related incident in Iraq, coming against the backdrop of renewed military escalation between the United States and Iran, Iraq’s main allies.

A security official told AFP that a drone struck a ship “carrying American-branded cars” near an oil terminal after it had arrived from the United Arab Emirates.

Iraq’s oil ministry said that “the incident involved a tanker reporting a sighting of a foreign object in its vicinity. However, no fire or damage to the vessel has occurred.”

The ministry added that “loading operations are continuing as normal,” without mentioning the cargo ship with cars onboard.

On Wednesday evening, the US-led coalition shot down eight explosive-laden drones over Erbil, the capital of Iraq’s northern Kurdistan region.

AFP journalists reported see-

ing several drones over Erbil. The drones were then hit by air defences near the US consulate, they said, which was a target of repeated drone and rocket attacks launched by pro-Iran armed groups during the Middle East war.

No group has claimed responsibility for Wednesday’s attacks.

The US embassy in Baghdad warned yesterday that “following Iran-enabled drone attacks in Erbil... US citizens in Iraq are advised to maintain heightened readiness”.

The mission reminded US nationals of its travel advisory to avoid all travel to Iraq “for any reason”.

The attacks coincided with Iraqi Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi’s one-week visit to Washington, where he met President Donald Trump.

Al-Zaidi denounced the drone attacks, and said his government “will not tolerate these malicious attempts, which seek in vain to undermine the stability of our people”.

He directed security forces to “take all necessary measures to prevent the recurrence of such attacks”.

During the Middle East war, the Kurdistan region, which hosts US troops and foreign oil companies, was a primary target for drone attacks.

Troops will stay in Lebanon, Syria, Gaza ‘security zones’, Israel tells Pentagon chief

AFP
Jerusalem

Israel’s Defence Minister Israel Katz told his US counterpart Pete Hegseth early yesterday that Israel is determined to keep its forces in “security zones” it has carved out inside Lebanon, Syria and the Gaza Strip.

In a statement, Katz’s office said the two men spoke overnight and the minister “emphasised Israel’s determination to remain in the security zones in Syria, Gaza, and Lebanon in order to protect Israel’s borders and the communities near the border from the threats”.

“We have never asked the US to act in our place along our borders,” Katz said.

His comments come days after US President Donald Trump asked Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to pull Israeli forces out of Syria and Lebanon, according to US news outlet Axios.

Citing a US official, Axios reported that Trump told Netanyahu the Israeli deployment was fuelling tensions in Syria.

“They don’t want you there. You should redeploy,” Trump told him, according to Axios.

After the December 2024 overthrow of Syria’s long-time

ruler Bashar al-Assad, Israel sent troops into a UN-patrolled buffer zone that separated Israeli and Syrian forces on the Golan Heights.

Israel has also carried out repeated incursions into Syrian territory since then, as well as bombings, and has said it wants a demilitarised zone in the country’s south.

In Lebanon, Israeli forces remain deployed in what the military describes as a security zone extending roughly 10 kilometres (six miles) into Lebanese territory.

Lebanon and Israel, which have no formal relations, are engaged in talks to end hostilities after militant group Hezbollah drew Lebanon into the broader Middle East war by attacking Israel in March.

The two countries concluded their fifth round of talks in Rome on Wednesday.

The US-brokered negotiations are aimed at having Israeli forces steadily withdraw from Lebanon, starting with two “pilot zones” located outside the “security zone” that Israel has established in the south.

In Gaza, Israel’s military controls 60% of the territory and is present on the entire outside perimeter along the borders with Israel and Egypt.

Escalating Israeli strikes kill 5 people in Gaza

Reuters
Cairo

Israeli strikes killed at least five Palestinians in the Gaza Strip yesterday, Palestinian health officials said, as a US-based research group reported a surge in Israeli attacks to levels not seen since the latest truce took effect in October.

Medics said an Israeli air strike killed two people near the Tuffah neighbourhood in the north of the enclave, while a third person was killed in Israeli tank shelling in the Zeitoun suburb in eastern Gaza City.

Another air strike at a tent encampment for displaced people in western Gaza City killed one person and wounded several, while an attack on a vehicle in Khan Younis, in the south, killed another, medics said. Witnesses also reported that an airstrike hit a residential building in the Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza, causing damage to several homes nearby.

The Israeli military had no immediate comment on any of the incidents. The deaths add to a toll of more than 1,100 Palestinians, mostly civilians, killed by Israeli attacks since an October ceasefire between Israel and Hamas took effect, according to Gazan health officials. Hamas does not usually disclose its losses. “The entire



Palestinians inspect the site of an Israeli strike at the Bureij refugee camp in central Gaza Strip, yesterday. (AFP)

people of Gaza have not lived a single day or a single moment of ceasefire. This ceasefire is an illusion,” Jibril Khattab, a relative of one of the fatal victims, told Reuters in Gaza City’s Al Shifa Hospital. “No place in all of Gaza is safe,” he added.

The truce halted major fighting, but has failed to stop near daily Israeli strikes. Four Israeli soldiers have been killed by militants in Gaza over the same period.

Conflict monitor ACLED, which tracks Israeli attacks in Gaza, said air strikes against Hamas and other militants increased to more than 40 in June, the highest monthly total since the ceasefire.

“With polls showing the opposition in the lead, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is facing growing domestic pressure to take a tougher security position against Hamas,” ACLED Middle East Assistant Research Manager Nasser

Khdour said, referring to Israel’s legislative election in October.

Israel says its strikes aim to thwart attacks by Gaza militants.

Nearly all of Gaza’s 2mn people now live on a tiny strip of land along the coast, mainly in makeshift tents or damaged buildings, under Hamas control.

The Gazan health ministry said Israel’s offensive, since October 7, 2023, killed more than 73,000 Palestinians.

Lebanese FM reaffirms goal of full Israeli withdrawal

Lebanese Foreign Minister Youssef Raji said yesterday that Lebanon’s objective in the negotiations is to secure a full Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Lebanese territory.

Speaking at a conference hosted by the French Senate under the title “Solidarity with Lebanon: Local Authorities at the Heart of the Franco-Lebanese Partnership,” Raji said the negotiations aim to gradually extend the authority of the Lebanese Armed Forces across the entire country, including the south. He stressed that no country can fully establish its institutions and sovereignty while part of its territory remains under occupation.



He stated that the occupation weakens state institutions, fuels tensions, delays political and security stability, and prevents the state from exercising full authority over

its territory. He added that lasting stability can only be achieved when the state has the sole legitimate authority to use force.

Raji said that no state can en-

joy full sovereignty while foreign military forces remain on its territory, nor can it achieve full sovereignty unless its legitimate institutions alone exercise public authority and hold the exclusive right to use force.

He also called on France to expand its partnership with Lebanon beyond expressions of solidarity by supporting efforts to strengthen state institutions, reinforce stability, and enable the state to fully exercise its authority and responsibilities.

Lebanon and the Israeli entity recently held a sixth round of negotiations at the US Embassy in Rome to discuss arrangements for implementing the agreement signed in Washington last June. (QNA)

UK unveils sanctions against Sudan finance, gold networks

AFP
London

Britain yesterday announced sanctions targeting what it said are “illicit gold and finance networks” propping up rival factions in Sudan’s devastating civil war.

The foreign ministry said the war-torn country’s gold trade worth billions of dollars was helping finance “weapons procurement, military operations and the activities of armed groups”.

The sanctions are aimed at 11 individuals and businesses suspected of being linked to the networks financing and supporting the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the regular army.

The war between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the RSF, that erupted in April 2023, has killed 200,000 people by some estimates and displaced upwards of 11 million.

The sanction targets are all Sudanese, but trade internationally “including in the gold markets in Dubai and Hong Kong”, the UK’s Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) said.

Among them is Sudanese national Abu Dharr, accused of financing the RSF through “a web of real estate, conflict gold and holding companies based in Dubai”.

There are also three Sudanese United Arab Emirates-based companies and one Sudanese Hong Kong-based firm.

Two Sudanese-state owned

mining companies were also sanctioned, suspected of generating gold revenues for the SAF.

A third state-owned firm, the Ariab Mining Company, was targeted for “channelling revenue from conflict gold to both the SAF and RSF”.

“The people of Sudan continue to pay the price for a war fuelled not only by guns and fighters, but by illicit flows of gold and finance to fill the war chests on both sides,” Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper said.

Africa’s third-largest country is one of the continent’s top gold producers, and the state Sudanese Mineral Resources Company reported a “five-year high” in production of 70 tonnes in 2025.

The United Nations on Wednesday said the rival factions were profiting from control over the country’s resources and that a “war economy” was sustaining the conflict.

The UK has previously sanctioned senior commanders of the RSF, who have also been targeted by the European Union.

The RSF has been accused of being a “proxy” for the UAE, which denies arming the paramilitary despite evidence presented in numerous international reports.

On Tuesday, the European Council had said it was also boosting sanctions.

In measures designed to “curb sources of financing for the conflict”, the council said it would ban “the purchase, import or transfer if gold originating in Sudan.”

Syria says seized weapons at Iraqi border

AFP
Damascus

Syria said yesterday it had foiled an attempt to smuggle weapons to Hezbollah in Lebanon by seizing a shipment that included missiles at its border with Iraq.

“Specialised units thwarted an attempt to bring in a shipment of sophisticated weapons and missiles through the Syrian-Iraqi border,” a source from the interior ministry was quoted as saying by Syria’s official Sana news agency.

“Initial investigations established that the shipment was intended to transit through Syria

for the benefit of Hezbollah,” the source added.

The Iran-backed group in a statement dismissed the accusations as “fabricated narratives with no basis in fact, aimed at harming Hezbollah”.

Syrian authorities are hostile to the group, which was an ally of former president Bashar al-Assad before he was ousted in 2024.

They have previously announced several other seizures of weapons they say were bound for Hezbollah, but yesterday’s announcement is the first involving the border with Iraq.

According to Syria’s customs authority, the shipment was seized inside an oil tanker truck at the Al-Tanf border crossing.

The tanker was heading to Baniyas city, whose port Iraq has been using in recent months to export limited amounts of oil after its main route through the Strait of Hormuz was disrupted by the Middle East war.

The interior ministry said the shipment included long-range and anti-tank missiles, as well as drones.

Iraqi Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi ordered the formation of an inquiry commission and Iraqi authorities will “co-ordinate” with Syria on the matter, the Iraqi government’s security media cell said in a statement.

The statement said Iraqi authorities would “hold those responsible for any negligence ac-

countable, in order to ensure the safety and security of the shared border and prevent any attempt to undermine national security”.

Since a coalition took power in Syria in 2024, the authorities say they have dismantled several Hezbollah-linked cells preparing attacks in Syria, but Hezbollah has denied the accusation.

The group has been weakened by the war it has waged against Israel since March in support of Iran.

US President Donald Trump has recently floated the idea of Syria intervening in Lebanon against Hezbollah.

But Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa has said he has no interest in taking military action, despite Trump’s suggestions.

Ebola spreading in DR Congo ‘faster than any previous outbreak’: WHO

AFP
Geneva

The World Health Organisation (WHO) warned yesterday that Ebola was spreading in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo) more quickly than during any previous outbreak of the deadly virus.

More than 2,000 cases including 796 deaths have been confirmed in the DR Congo since the outbreak was declared two months ago, making it “now the third-largest Ebola outbreak on record”, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told reporters.

By comparison, he pointed out that the big Ebola outbreak in the DR Congo in 2018-20 “took more than 10 months to reach 2,000 confirmed cases”, warning

that the virus was spreading faster than ever seen before.

“In the past month, it has expanded faster than any previous outbreak,” he warned.

The DR Congo’s 17th Ebola outbreak was declared on May 15 after several deaths in Ituri, a mineral-rich northeastern province, plagued by armed groups.

Cases of Ebola, which spreads through close contact and infected bodily fluids, have so far been found in five DR Congo provinces, as well as in neighbouring Uganda, though the vast majority are in Ituri.

Tedros hailed the rapid ramping-up of the response to the outbreak, pointing out that treatment capacity in northeastern DR Congo now stood at 800 beds, while laboratory capacity had jumped from a single lab to 16.

However, he warned that “despite the progress we have made, the outbreak in DR Congo is continuing to outpace the response”.

The WHO chief highlighted that over 80% of new cases were being detected “outside known contact lists, showing that transmission chains are still being missed”.

“About two-thirds of deaths are occurring in communities, among people who never receive care in a health facility,” he acknowledged.

Complicating things further, the current outbreak is caused by the rare Bundibugyo species of Ebola, for which there is no approved vaccine or treatment.

However, the WHO chief hailed “encouraging progress on vaccines and therapeutics”.

Trials for two potential treatments for

Bundibugyo patients – the monoclonal antibody MBP134 and the antiviral drug remdesivir – have also been under way in Ituri since July 2.

And this past Monday, the first safety trial began on Monday for the ChAdOx1 vaccine, led by the University of Oxford, Tedros said.

And on Tuesday, a trial of the antiviral obeldesivir began to test its effectiveness in post-exposure prophylaxis for people who had come in contact with confirmed Bundibugyo cases but had yet to develop the disease.

Even without approved vaccines and treatments, 377 people have recovered in the DR Congo, said Tedros, “showing that with early diagnosis and safe care, this disease can be survived and stopped”.

The WHO chief said that one of the biggest concerns remained “the complex

environment in which the outbreak is happening”, with the vast majority of cases found in conflict-torn Ituri.

“Active armed conflict is hampering access to the affected areas, and hindering the response,” he said, pointing out that on Wednesday, a treatment centre “was attacked” in Ituri’s capital Bunia.

The main priorities, he said, included reducing transmission in Ituri by strengthening surveillance; safe and dignified burials of highly infectious bodies of deceased Ebola patients; and clinical management of the sick.

To do this, he stressed the urgent need for more support from the international community, pointing to “a shortfall of more than \$400mn” for a joint plan put forward by the WHO and the African Centres for Disease Control to address the outbreak.

Uganda has discharged its last Ebola patient, says minister

Reuters/AFP
Kampala

Uganda discharged its last remaining Ebola patient yesterday, triggering a 42-day countdown after which it can be declared free of the virus, the East African nation’s health ministry said.

Uganda has confirmed a total of 20 cases of the rare Bundibugyo strain of Ebola since mid-May.

Fifteen of those were people infected in neighbouring Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo), the epicentre of the outbreak, who then travelled to Uganda.

Unlike in the DR Congo, where cases are still surging, Uganda has not reported a new case since June 22.

“Today, Uganda has discharged the last Ebola patient, a Congolese national who has successfully recovered and (is) ready to be with his family,” Uganda’s health ministry said in a post on X.

On Wednesday, government spokesperson Alan Kasujja said the patient would be released from an isolation unit at the Mulago National Referral Hospital in Kampala.

“Uganda starts counting down,” he wrote on X. “If 42 days pass without a single new case, WHO guidelines stipulate that we will be declared Ebola free.”

Uganda’s efforts against the virus, described by African health officials as the fastest-growing Ebola outbreak on record, have been praised.

“The contact-tracing was very efficient, and the follow-up of those that were in care,” said Serawit Bruck-Landais, regional global health counsellor for the French embassy.

“It’s an example that actually an Ebola outbreak can be managed,” she told AFP.

There is currently no approved vaccine or treatment for the Bundibugyo strain behind the outbreak, but the WHO said the first clinical trial of an antiviral drug began on Tuesday.

Nigeria’s govt moves to track poverty, incomes

Nigeria plans to publish indicators tracking poverty, incomes and inequality as President Bola Tinubu’s government seeks to show that economic reforms are improving living standards in Africa’s largest economy, the finance minister said yesterday.

The planned scorecard is an attempt to answer a central criticism of Tinubu’s reform programme: that gains in revenue, foreign exchange liquidity and investor confidence have yet to translate into meaningful relief for households facing high food, transport and living costs.

Speaking at a conference in Lagos, organised by *Business Day* newspaper, Taiwo Oyelede said the government would assess “shared prosperity” using three measures: reductions in multidimensional poverty, increases in real income per capita and lower inequality.

Tinubu’s government is seeking to demonstrate that reforms introduced in 2023, including scrapping a fuel subsidy and liberalising the naira, applauded by lenders and investors, are translating into broader gains for Nigerians after driving up inflation and living costs.

The International Monetary Fund said in June that while the reforms were improving investor confidence and economic stability, 63% of Nigeria’s 200mn population remained in poverty and millions faced food insecurity.

The measures have also been accompanied by criticism over persistent corruption and allegations of unbudgeted government spending, raising questions about whether the sacrifices demanded of citizens are being matched by fiscal discipline.

Oyelede said inflation was easing, the foreign exchange market was functioning more efficiently and investor interest was returning, but acknowledged that macroeconomic stability alone would not be enough.

“A stable economy can still be a stagnant one if we become complacent,” he said.

Oyelede said the ministry of finance would be responsible for producing the scorecard but did not provide a timeline for publishing the indicators or say how frequently they would be updated.

- Reuters

Smoke from more than 130 wildfires chokes millions in US and Canada

AFP/Reuters
Montreal/Washington

Out-of-control wildfires were raging yesterday in the Canadian province of Ontario, prompting evacuations and sending dangerous smoke billowing into the United States where millions of people were exposed to the unhealthy air.

US states near the Canadian border including Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan and Illinois were particularly choked, as forecasters predicted the Northeast including New York would also see air quality continue to deteriorate.

Tracker IQAir listed Detroit, Toronto, Minneapolis and Chicago yesterday as the most polluted cities in the world.

A hazy cast hung over New York where forecasters expected the densest strip of smoke to cloud the region into the afternoon.

A New York state air quality health advisory warned of fine particulate matter from the fires that would make the outdoors “unhealthy” for everyone across the New York metro area and Long Island, with even worse conditions in the central and western regions of the state.

Authorities encouraged New Yorkers to spend as little time outside as possible.

The dangerous conditions in the New York area came just days before the FIFA World Cup final is set to be played in nearby New Jersey on Sunday in front of more than 80,000 fans.

“Today is expected to be the worst day of this event,” New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani said at an event yesterday. “At ‘unhealthy’ levels, everyone – not just people with asthma or heart conditions, not just older adults – everyone may feel health effects. So today, every New Yorker should take precautions.”

“The combination of dangerous heat and unhealthy air is a serious threat,” he added.

Libraries and train stations were offering free masks, while hundreds of cooling centres were open across the city for those without access to air conditioning.

“This could become the most significant smoke event in New York City since 2023, and conditions will be closely monitored for any deterioration,” the city’s Department of Emergency Management said.

That year, the city’s skies turned an apocalyptic orange, and the air quality index reached a hazardous 465.



A person points to the skyline while on the ferry from the Toronto Islands, as wildfire smoke from northwestern Ontario fills the sky, combined with an intense heatwave, prompting health warnings and calls for Toronto residents to limit outdoor activity. - Reuters



Cyclists pause on the Toronto Islands as forest fires in northwestern Ontario cause poor air quality over the city of Toronto. - AFP



People look out from Toronto’s CN Tower as smoke from wildfires in northwestern Ontario blankets the city, causing poor air quality. - AFP

There are more than 130 active fires in northwestern Ontario, with at least 60 out of control.

Authorities there have formally requested additional assistance from the federal government, in particular seeking air support to evacuate remote communities.

“More than 150 fire crews and nearly 50 firefighting aircraft are working around the clock to protect communities from the fires in northern Ontario,” said the province’s Premier Doug Ford on the platform X.

So far, Canadian wildfires have scorched 1.9mn hectares (4.7mn acres) this year, an area nearly the size of Slovenia.

That damage remains far off the pace of 2023, Canada’s worst wildfire season on record, when nearly 18mn hectares burned in the country.

Climate experts say that rising global temperatures are driving an increase in the frequency and intensity of wildfires around the world.

Wildfire smoke, which can linger in the air for weeks and travel thousands of miles, is more toxic than normal air pollution.

Studies have linked wildfire smoke with higher rates of heart attacks, strokes, cancer, pregnancy complications and weakened immune defences.

Nigeria launches \$552mn education drive backed by World Bank, GPE

Reuters
Abuja

Nigeria has launched a \$552mn basic education programme co-financed by the World Bank and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), President Bola Tinubu said yesterday, to improve learning outcomes, widen access to schooling and strengthen the education system.

The HOPE-EDU programme will directly benefit about 29mn children, more than 500,000 teachers, 65,000 public schools and 10,000 non-formal learning centres nationwide, Tinubu said at the launch in Abuja.

The programme is one of five initiatives in place to speed up poverty reduction, human capi-

tal development, community growth, and strengthen healthcare.

“These programmes are not separate efforts; they are one co-ordinated national strategy for poverty reduction, human capital development and community resilience,” the president said.

Tinubu, who is seeking reelection in January, has pursued Nigeria’s biggest economic reforms in decades since taking office in 2023, scrapping costly fuel and electricity subsidies, devaluing the naira and overhauling the tax system to bolster public finances.

He said the initiatives would translate recent economic reforms into tangible gains in livelihoods, education, healthcare and social protection.

Ex-Federal Reserve adviser sentenced to jail for lying about China ties

A former senior adviser to the US Federal Reserve was sentenced to 38 months in federal prison for making false statements to investigators about sharing restricted information related to the central bank with Chinese intelligence operatives, the Justice Department said on Wednesday.

John Harold Rogers, 64, was arrested last year on charges he conspired to steal Fed trade secrets for the benefit of China, prosecutors said.

In his trial, a federal jury deliberated for two days before finding Rogers guilty on February 3 “of making false statements to government investigators at the Office of Inspector General for the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau”, the Justice Department said in a statement.

“John Rogers spent years secretly funneling sensitive Federal Reserve information to Chi-

nese spies, then looked investigators in the eye and lied about it,” US Attorney Jeanine Pirro said. “And when that wasn’t enough, he lied again under oath at trial.”

In addition to the prison sentence, Judge Dabney Friedrich ordered Rogers to serve 12 months of supervised release.

Rogers worked as a senior adviser in the Fed’s division of international finance from 2010 until 2021. - Reuters



US to tighten visa regulations for foreign students, journalists

Reuters/AFP
Washington

The Trump administration moved yesterday to tighten the duration of visas for foreign students, cultural exchange visitors and journalists.

Under a change that could be implemented as soon as September, foreigners on student visas would be admitted for the length of their academic programme up to a maximum of four years.

Foreign journalists would be limited to stays of just 240 days, or around eight months, although they could apply to extend by 240-day periods, except for Chinese journalists who would get just 90 days.

The effective date is 60 days from publication in the federal register, subject to congressional review.

President Donald Trump, a Republican, kicked off a wide-ranging immigration crackdown after taking office in January 2025.

His administration has increased scrutiny of legal immigration, revoking student visas and green cards of university students over their ideological views and stripping legal status from hundreds of thousands of migrants.

The latest action would create new hurdles for international students, exchange workers and foreign journalists.

In August, China's foreign ministry opposed the proposed new rule for Chinese journalists as being discriminatory.

The Chinese embassy did not immediately return a request for comment.

The regulations prohibit graduate students from changing their "educational objectives" at any point or from transferring to another school without authorisation.

They halve the amount of time students have to leave the United States after completing their degree or training, from 60 to 30 days.

"Most Americans understand the value of welcoming international students and getting rid of needless red tape," said Doug

Rand, a former DHS official. "This rule would do the opposite."

David J Bier, immigration studies director at the Cato Institute, said there was no legal basis for the study and transfer restrictions in the new regulations.

"International students, many of whom will have spent years in the US, will now have just 30 days to find an employer to sponsor them or immediately be turned into illegal immigrants," he said. "Have these people no understanding of how life works?"

The department cited a dramatic rise in such visas in the posting.

It said there were more than 1.8mn student visa admissions in 2024, a more than 11% increase over the previous year.

The US granted visas to more than 500,000 exchange visitors and 37,300 members of the media in fiscal year 2024, which began on October 1, 2023, it said.

The significant increase in the volume of such visitors "poses a challenge to the DHS's ability to monitor and oversee these

non-immigrants while they are in the United States," the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) said.

The DHS said it has many examples of students and exchange visitors staying for decades on their visas.

Visa holders who want to stay in the United States beyond their fixed period of admission will need to apply to the DHS for an extension or gain readmission by traveling abroad and then re-entering the United States, the DHS said.

Higher education groups had denounced the proposal as a needless bureaucratic hurdle that would deter talented students, with the Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration warning it "weakens the ability of US colleges and universities to attract top talent".

Universities have already reported lower international enrolments after earlier Trump administration actions, including the revocation of thousands of student visas and the suspension of billions of dollars in federal research funding.

US unveils 25% tariff on certain goods from Brazil

An incoming US tariff targeting various imports from Brazil has drawn a rebuke from the Latin American giant, as Washington accused the country of unfair trade practices and policies.

The levy, announced on Wednesday, is set to take effect July 22 and is shaping up as a major campaign flashpoint three months before Brazil holds a presidential election.

Washington imposed the tariff after a year-long investigation into Brazilian policies that it argues harm US commerce – an accusation Brasilia has fiercely denied.

A range of products including beef, coffee and certain aircraft parts will be exempted, however, a senior US official told reporters late on Wednesday.

The exclusions also cover some goods that the United States does not produce.

Brazil condemned the tariffs yesterday, promising that "reciprocal" measures would be taken.

"There is no justification for unilateral measures against our country," President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's office said in a statement on X.

Deploring the "lamentable outcome", he highlighted that in 2025, 76% of imports originating from the US entered his country without paying import duties.

US Trade Representative Jamie-Greer said Brazil's "unreasonable" policies have hurt US commerce by unfairly benefiting Brazilian producers and "restricting access to one of the world's top export markets".

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio added that the Brazilian government had "not negotiated with the US in good faith".

"Lula has put his own ego ahead of making a deal for the welfare of the Brazilian people, and these tariffs are the price for that," he said on X.

The tariff issue has increased political friction ahead of Brazil's October election.

Lula's main rival is Flavio Bolsonaro, son of far-right former leader Jair Bolsonaro, who is serving a 27-year sentence for attempting a coup d'etat.

Trump imposed tariffs on Brazil last year over the trial against his ally, which the US president described as a "witch hunt".

Most of those duties were later lifted.

While Jair Bolsonaro's sons backed those tariffs during their father's trial, Flavio Bolsonaro urged Washington against imposing the new duties, arguing they could boost Lula's electoral campaign.

"Lula is no longer fit to be the president of Brazil. We are on a plane without a pilot," the younger Bolsonaro said after the fresh duties were announced.

The 44-year-old senator has fallen in the polls after a financial scandal and a public feud with his stepmother, the former first lady Michelle Bolsonaro.

The tariff outcome "is part of the plot built with the active collaboration of the Bolsonaro family", Lula said yesterday. "They are false patriots who orchestrated and publicly defended actions against our country, driven by electoral objectives."

The family has denied such allegations.

A survey published yesterday, conducted this week by pollster Quaeset, showed that 42% of respondents said the levies swayed them to vote for Lula, compared to 27% for Flavio Bolsonaro.

A majority – 63% – said they thought the tariffs would hurt them or their family.

The new tariff comes as Trump's administration pushes to rebuild his economic agenda after the US Supreme Court in February struck down a swath of his global duties.

US anti-terror focus to be on left-wing groups: Rubio

Reuters
Washington

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said yesterday that the US would focus international counterterrorism efforts on "far-left terror", telling officials from more than 60 countries that leftist violence had been overlooked.

A Washington conference hosted by Rubio has sparked concerns from Democrats that the Trump administration is politicising counterterrorism efforts and draining resources from fighting extremism on other fronts.

In a speech, Rubio said the religious militancy threat was "severely diminished" due to coordinated international efforts but that rising left-wing violence was a "blind spot".

"We can and we must identify and map this threat and rebuild our counterterrorism architecture to defeat it," Rubio said, citing a transnational threat from groups who hate the West and target its politicians and infrastructure.

The conference marks the Trump administration's most significant effort yet to internationalise a counterterrorism focus that critics say is not supported by data, raising questions about whether resources will be shifted away from monitoring religious militancy and far-right violence.

President Donald Trump has made countering left-wing groups a priority.

Trump singled out the antifa movement on the campaign trail in 2024, and vowed to take action against left-wing groups that he accuses of fomenting violence after the killing of conservative activist and Trump ally Charlie Kirk last year.

The Trump administration convened a law enforcement workshop in May to discuss the threat of far-left groups and would co-host a second workshop with Germany, Rubio said.

"We will either co-operate across our borders, or the terrorists will continue to exploit the gaps between them," Rubio said. "The United States is building the infrastructure, the partnership and the strategy to defeat the scourge of far-left terror."

Since November, Washington has designated four European groups – Antifa Ost, the Informal Anarchist Federation/International Revolutionary Front, Armed Proletarian Justice and Revolutionary Class Self-Defence – as Foreign Terrorist Organisations, offering rewards of up to \$10mn for information on their financing.

The US Treasury is expanding probes into the use of charitable and nonprofit structures to hide foreign influence and allow violence, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent told the conference yesterday.

Eleven Democratic lawmakers wrote to Rubio on Wednesday questioning the evidence for the new focus on left-wing groups and called the White House's May counterterrorism strategy, which did not mention neo-Nazi or other far-right groups, a "politically partisan document".

The letter, obtained by Reuters, referred to concerns that desig-



Rubio: Rising left-wing violence is a 'blind spot'.

nating groups as far-left terror or organisations risked targeting lawful protests and political opponents.

"We strongly urge the Department to return its focus to a serious mission set that is definitionally apolitical, data-driven, and rooted in reality, instead of rubber-stamping the political priorities of extremists within the Administration whose views and policies put US national security – and the American people – at risk," wrote the lawmakers.

The lawmakers included Representative Gregory Meeks, the ranking Democrat on the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, and William Keating, the ranking member of the subcommittee on Europe.

The State Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the letter.

At the conference, White House deputy chief of staff Stephen Miller said leftists were driven by "envy and hatred" and derided antifa demonstrators as "all deformed in some way, in their appearance, in their dress, in their mannerism".

"Why is there not one normal-looking person among them? Every one of them, through the course of their life and their decisions, has scarred their body and their appearance in many different ways to the point in which their outer appearance becomes a manifestation of their inner hatred," Miller said.

In his speech, Rubio cited property damage and looting during demonstrations after the 2020 police killing of George Floyd as an example of left-wing violence that had been ignored, arguing that think tanks and journalists often agree with the goals of left-wing militants.

Rubio also said left-wing groups work with foreign states hostile to the US, citing Iranian proxy networks as "increasingly intimately tied to leftist militant groups around the world", though he did not provide evidence of such links.

He also accused Cuba's Communist leaders of having "helped build the far left" in the United States, without offering evidence to support the claim.

Trump reverses suspension of ICE traffic stops after fatal shootings

Reuters
Washington

US President Donald Trump has directed federal immigration agents to resume traffic stops as an arrest tactic, overruling top administration officials after agents fatally shot two drivers in Texas and Maine within days of each other.

The reversal came a day after White House border czar Tom Homan said that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) would suspend most vehicle stops on an indefinite but short-term, temporary basis to review procedures to "make sure ICE agents are safe and doing the right thing".

Homan's comments on Tuesday, on Fox News Channel, drew sharp criticism from some of Trump's hardline Republican faithful, including conservative political strategist Mike Davis, and the president countermanded Homan and his Secretary of Homeland Security Markwayne Mullin the next day.

"We must be strong, tough, and smart, and we CANNOT give up one of I.C.E.'s most important and effective Crime Fighting tools, THE TRAFFIC STOP!" Trump wrote in a social media post.

The agency's aggressive tactics came under renewed public scrutiny this week after an ICE officer killed a driver from Colombia in the coastal Maine town of Biddeford, about 15 miles (24km) south of Portland, on Monday.

Six days earlier, another ICE officer in Houston shot dead a Mexican national.

In both cases, the agents had attempted to pull over the drivers, though officials have acknowledged that they were not the targets of immigration enforcement operations being conducted at the time.

Federal authorities have offered no evidence to support contentions that either man posed a threat to ICE agents or



Immigrant rights activists hold signs as they protest against the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency outside the Jacob K Javits Federal Building in New York City. -AFP

the public at large that would justify the use of lethal force to stop them.

In other instances involving violent encounters, initial statements from immigration enforcement officials have been contradicted by video or other evidence.

The back-to-back shootings also sparked protests in Maine, Houston and Boston, raised questions over ICE agents' lack of body cameras and thrust the debate over ICE tactics to the forefront of a closely watched Senate race in Maine, a state far from the US-Mexico border.

"The automobile stops should be halted until those investigations are completed," Republican Senator Susan Collins told reporters in the US Capitol on Wednesday.

Collins, seeking re-election in a race that could tip Senate control in favour of Democrats, took credit on Tuesday for urging Mullin to suspend ICE vehicle stops.

Between early June and early July, ICE arrests in Maine more than quadrupled to around 70 per day, according to internal ICE data shared with Reuters by a source familiar with the matter.

At least seven people have been shot dead during federal immigration enforcement oper-

ations since January 2025, when Trump launched mass deportations after returning to office following campaign promises of an immigration crackdown.

Fifty-three people have died in ICE custody during the same period, agency records show.

The latest ICE detainee to die was identified by the government as Jesus Manuel Arenas-Silva, 45, a Venezuelan national who was found unconscious on Monday while being transferred between migrant detention centres in Georgia.

Arenas-Silva had underlying health issues, and ICE agents who took him into custody at his home ignored family pleas to take along all the medications he needed, leaving him without those drugs during his detention until he died, according to a statement from migrant advocates, citing information from his family.

Nationwide arrests of immigrants have surged in recent weeks, despite the Trump administration's shift to more targeted operations, away from the broad street sweeps that characterised earlier crackdowns in Democratic-led cities.

Those heavy-handed tactics drew a public outcry, especially after two US citizens were shot dead in Minnesota earlier this year.

More than 700 drones seized near World Cup sites

US agencies have seized over 700 drones near FIFA World Cup venues and fan zones since the start of the tournament on June 11, the FBI said. On match days, all aircraft operations, including drones, are prohibited within a radius of three nautical miles and up to 3,000' (914m) above ground level around the stadiums unless specifically authorised by air traffic controllers. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) said that drones have been seized from restricted airspace across all 11 US host cities. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)

imposed dozens of temporary flight restrictions to bar drones around World Cup sites. At fan gatherings, drones are barred within a one-nautical-mile radius and up to 1,000' above ground level. Operators whose drones enter restricted airspace without approval can face fines of up to \$100,000, along with criminal charges and confiscation of their drone, the FBI said. The FBI has teams stationed around World Cup stadiums to detect and disable unauthorised drones. -Reuters

Kenya poll violence raises fears for 2027 election

AFP
Nairobi

Armed men fired tear gas and attacked voters and journalists during a by-election in Kenya yesterday, underlining the threat of violence during next year's general election.

Kenya has a history of political violence, and recent months have seen increased use of armed gangs by politicians, which analysts fear will only increase as President William Ruto seeks re-election in August 2027.

The build-up to yesterday's by-election in Ol Kalou in central Kenya was marked by allegations of voter bribery and clashes between gangs, some armed with bows and arrows, reportedly hired by rival politicians.

Videos posted by local media showed mul-

tiplied black SUVs sweeping through the streets during the vote yesterday, with hooded men firing tear gas into the air and beating voters at polling stations.

The Nation Media Group condemned attacks on its journalists at a polling station in a primary school, saying a cameraman was tasered and beaten, and another was robbed at gunpoint.

A journalist for *The Star newspaper said he was attacked by one group who identified themselves as police and took his equipment.

Kenyan police had said 1,000 officers were deployed to keep the peace.

However, Interior Minister Kipchumba Murkomen appeared to say that police may have been responsible for some of the violence.

"These allegations of... persons who are causing havoc in Ol Kalou must be investi-

gated thoroughly and anyone who is culpable must be arrested," Murkomen told journalists. "Whether they were deployed by the Inspector General (of police) and went and misbehaved they must be dealt with."

The by-election pitted candidates backed by Ruto and his arch-rival, Rigathi Gachagua, who was his deputy until he was impeached in 2024.

Gachagua said the violence was "a pilot of what will happen next year".

Amnesty International this week denounced the by-election campaign, saying that it involved "bribery, intimidation, misuse of public resources, and the involvement of public officers in partisan campaigns".

It highlighted an attack by "gun-toting goons" on one campaign vehicle, and said voters were being bribed with cash handouts, mattresses, cooking gas, and food items.

One dead, 24 missing after boat sinks in Indonesia

AFP
Jakarta

A passenger boat sank off an Indonesian island, killing at least one person and leaving 24 others missing, the local search and rescue agency said yesterday. An engine failure caused the boat to sink as it sailed near Selayar, a small island south of the

larger Sulawesi, said the head of the local search and rescue agency, Muhammad Arif Anwar.

The crew was unable to repair the engine, prompting the skipper to call local authorities requesting evacuation, he told AFP.

The boat was already partially sunken when rescuers reached it on Thursday, according to Arif.

Forty-nine people were rescued, one woman was found

dead, and “24 people are still being searched for”, said Arif.

The vessel’s manifest listed 50 people on board, but further verification revealed there were in fact 74, he added.

It is common in Indonesia for the number of actual passengers on a boat to differ from the manifest.

An Indonesian Navy vessel had been deployed to assist with the search, which is expected to con-

tinue into the night, Arif said.

Marine accidents are a regular occurrence in the Southeast Asian archipelago, due in part to lax safety standards and inclement weather.

In January, three Spanish tourists died when their boat sank off eastern Indonesia, and a 10-year-old boy was listed as officially missing after authorities ended the search.

Japan PM approval rating below 50% for first time

Approval ratings for Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi’s conservative government dipped below 50% for the first time since coming to power in October in a poll published yesterday.

The Jiji Press survey put backing for Takaichi’s cabinet at 49%, with the sharpest drop among voters in their 60s, whose support went from 63.7% last month to 39.9%.

While supporters still cited the leadership and trustworthiness of Japan’s first woman prime minister, top reasons for disapproval included “cannot hope for much” and “poor policies”. In February, Takaichi further cemented her power base with a resounding victory in lower house snap elections, in part buoyed by her popularity among young voters charmed by her diplomatic savvy, relatability and the change she symbolised.

But at the same time, her suggestion in November that Tokyo could intervene militarily in any attack on self-ruled Taiwan has hit Japan’s ties with China, which sees the island as its territory.

And earlier this month a group of nearly 150 Japanese academics petitioned lawmakers over her push for a bill that criminalises the desecration of Japan’s national flag. Also helping Takaichi has been a slowdown in inflation in recent months, after sharp price rises contributed to the downfall of her two predecessors in quick succession. **(AFP)**



Sanae Takaichi. **(AFP)**

Blast at Indonesia munitions storage kills soldier: army

AFP
Jakarta

An explosion in a military munition warehouse on Indonesia’s Java island killed one soldier and injured six others

on Thursday, an army spokesman said, describing it as an accident.

Spokesman Donny Pramono said soldiers were carrying out “inspection and maintenance procedures” at the site in Madiun district when the blast occurred.

“One personnel was declared

dead, four suffered serious injuries, and two others suffered minor injuries,” Donny told a televised news conference, adding that military investigators will look into the incident.

Last year, at least four soldiers and nine civilians were killed when

Indonesian troops attempted to dispose of rejected munitions by detonating them in a pit.

In 2024, multiple explosions ripped through a military ammunition warehouse on the outskirts of Jakarta, forcing evacuations but causing no casualties.

Taiwan rejects PNG decision

Taiwan said yesterday it rejects Papua New Guinea’s decision to shut down its representative office in the South Pacific nation, as China welcomed the move. Like many countries, PNG has formal diplomatic relations with China, but allows Taiwan to have a representative office in the capital Port Moresby. “The Ministry of Foreign Affairs expresses its strong protest against this (decision), which was taken without prior consultation with our side,” Taiwan’s foreign ministry said in a statement. “Our representative office in Papua New Guinea will continue to operate as normal and, in accordance with relevant regulations, safeguard our national interests and provide necessary services to our nationals,” the statement added. PNG Foreign Minister Justin Tkatchenko posted on Facebook yesterday a statement from his office announcing the “immediate cessation of operations” and “formal closure” of the Taipei Economic Office. The statement, dated July 15, said the decision underscored the PNG government’s “unwavering commitment to honouring, respecting, and upholding Papua New Guinea’s foundational One-China Policy”. **(AFP)**

PNG says it will shut Taiwan’s rep office

Reuters
Beijing/Taipei

Papua New Guinea’s foreign minister said yesterday his government has decided to close Taiwan’s representative office in the country immediately, winning praise from China, though the government in Taipei said the office would remain open.

The Pacific has long been an area for diplomatic competition between China and Taiwan, which Beijing views as its own territory with no right to the trappings of a state. The democratically ruled island rejects China’s sovereignty claims.

Posting on his Facebook page, Papua New Guinea Foreign Minister Justin Tkatchenko said the “physical presence of Chinese Taipei will no longer be recognised or required within the jurisdiction of Papua New Guinea”, using the name Taiwan uses for certain international bodies like Apec.

Tkatchenko said he had told the Chinese ambassador, Yang Xiaoguang, this week of the decision, and that Papua New Guinea viewed this “administrative alignment” as a vital step towards elevating ties.

Taiwan’s foreign ministry said

the move had not been discussed in advance and that it would talk to the Papua New Guinea government.

“Our representative office in Papua New Guinea will continue to operate normally and, in accordance with relevant regulations, safeguard our nation’s rights and interests and provide necessary services to our nationals,” it said.

The ministry added that it had contacted “like-minded countries to seek the international community’s attention and support”, without giving details.

China’s foreign ministry said the move was “highly appreciated” by its government.

The “right decision” to close Taiwan’s office would “further consolidate political foundation for the development of China-PNG bilateral relations”, China’s embassy in Papua New Guinea said.

Papua New Guinea very briefly had diplomatic relations with Taiwan in 1999.

Taiwan has formal diplomatic ties with only three Pacific Islands nations - Palau, Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands - but had maintained a de facto embassy in Papua New Guinea. It also has a similar office in Fiji.

Senior Chinese, North Korean officials hold talks in Pyongyang, KCNA reports

Reuters
Seoul

China’s Wang Huning, a Communist Party Politburo Standing Committee member, held talks in Pyongyang with Jo Yong Won, a top official of North Korea’s ruling Workers’ Party, the North Korean state media KCNA reported yesterday.

The Chinese delegation led by Wang arrived in Pyongyang on Wednesday, KCNA reported, at the invitation of North Korea.

At the meeting, Wang affirmed “the will of the Chinese party and the government” to implement the agreement reached between Chinese President Xi Jinping and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un during Xi’s visit to Pyongyang, KCNA said. He also referred to the 65th anniversary of friendship ties between the two countries, it added.

Jo told Wang that North Korea seeks to develop strategic communication and tactical cooperation with Beijing.

The two officials discussed ways to improve public welfare and to deepen mutual cooperation in business, culture and the ruling parties of the two countries, KCNA said, without elaborating.

Earlier this month, North Korean Premier Pak Thae Song met with Xi in Beijing during his visit for



Wang Huning shakes hands with Jo Yong Won in Pyongyang, on Wednesday. **(Reuters)**

an event marking the 65th anniversary of the neighbours’ friendship treaty.

Xi urged the two allies to maintain “strategic resolve” amid a turbulent global environment and to speed up implementation of agreements he reached with Kim.

The Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance, signed on July 11, 1961, remains China’s only active mutual defence pact.

Asean envoy says to engage all Myanmar stakeholders at Manila meeting next week

Reuters
Manila

Asean’s special envoy on Myanmar will keep talking to all stakeholders in the war-torn country, including armed rebel groups, the Philippines said on Thursday as it prepares to host a meeting of Asean foreign ministers next week.

Manila, this year’s Asean chair, is expecting US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov to attend next week’s summit, along with ministers from Japan, Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom.

Myanmar is expected to be among the key issues at the talks in the Philippine capital, along with

Asean’s planned code of conduct for the South China Sea against a backdrop of geopolitical tensions in the Indo-Pacific and the disruption to global trade and markets caused by the Iran war. Last weekend, Asean foreign ministers held informal talks with Myanmar’s foreign minister in Bangkok, the first such face-to-face talks since the 2021 coup in Myanmar that led to Asean barring the country’s leaders from its meetings.

Philippine Foreign Secretary Ma. Theresa Lazaro, who is Asean’s special envoy on Myanmar, also held talks with rebel groups, representatives of the National Unity Government (NUG) and other stakeholders, and will brief her counterparts on the discussions next week.

Foreign Affairs spokesperson Dominic Xavier Imperial said Lazaro’s talks with the armed groups

were “candid” and “productive”, noting they would be important in any dialogue on Myanmar’s future.

“We are not limiting these engagements to certain groups, but it’s actually an open invitation to be able to engage with everyone,” he added. The Asean summit comes shortly after the 10th anniversary of a landmark 2016 arbitral ruling that invalidated the legal basis of China’s sweeping South China Sea claims, a decision Beijing rejects. Imperial said Asean and China remained committed to negotiating a “substantive and effective” code of conduct and expressed confidence that progress toward concluding talks could still be achieved this year.

“We see the commitment from all parties to really come up with a substantive and effective COC,” he said.

Protecting the protectors: racing to save Philippine mangroves

AFP
Masbate

Standing knee-deep in coastal waters, environmentalist Andrea Pimentel guides workers as they drive bamboo poles into the seabed to block sediment from choking the tidal channel sustaining a mangrove forest.

Mangroves are a key natural defence against storm surges and coastal erosion in the Philippines, which is hit by around 20 typhoons each year.

But the country has lost over 60 percent of its mangrove cover since 1918, government data shows, and increasingly powerful storms are threatening what remains by stirring up sediment that clogs water channels and suffocates mangroves at the roots.

“Our typhoons are becoming

frequent and getting stronger,” said Pimentel, project manager for environmental organisation WWF-Philippines.

“Even (if) mangroves are resilient, they can also be affected, and eventually they could die,” she added, shortly before heading by boat to a mangrove site in Masbate province’s Batuan town.

Pimentel works with local communities to rehabilitate mangroves across 245 hectares, including a two-hectare stretch where repeated typhoons have left bare patches in a once-dense forest.

Park ranger Bernard Almogera, who fished at the site with his father decades ago, has witnessed the mangroves deteriorate over the years.

“Some of them were snapped off, others like this one were uprooted,” the 58-year-old told AFP, pointing to a tree with branches broken by previous storms.

Sweating under the morning sun, men hauled bamboo across the exposed mudflat while Almogera knelt nearby, cutting the stalks into 1.5m poles before driving them deep into the seabed with a heavier bamboo pole.

The fence they were building is intended to slow incoming waves so suspended sediment settles before reaching the tidal channel carrying seawater through the mangrove forest.

If the channel becomes clogged, water stagnates and the mangrove’s roots are deprived of oxygen, eventually suffocating and killing them.

“We’re really scared, because if the mangroves disappear and a strong typhoon comes, our houses will surely be knocked down,” Almogera said.

“There’ll be nothing left to protect us.”

Scientists warn that while bam-

“Even (if) mangroves are resilient, they can also be affected, and eventually they could die”

boo fences are a cheap way to protect mangroves, they can rot within three years, unlike more expensive permeable concrete designs, leaving debris that may affect the trees they are meant to shield.

But they remain a quick, affordable way to protect mangroves in one of the world’s most climate-vulnerable countries.

And the urgency is growing. Warming waters caused by climate change can produce stronger tropical storms.

The world’s oceans experienced their hottest June on record, and could reach new highs in coming months as a strong El Nino weather pattern takes hold.

Pimentel said mangroves need

immediate protection and rehabilitation, even if bamboo fences must be replaced before they deteriorate.

“If we don’t act now, our mangroves will be vulnerable to climate change,” she said.

The urgency extends beyond Masbate province.

A 2024 study by the International Union for Conservation of Nature found that half the world’s mangrove ecosystems are at risk of collapse due to climate change, rising sea levels and human activity, with about a quarter potentially submerged by 2050 without proper conservation.

The Philippines suffered the second-highest mangrove losses, according to a 2023 survey of 10 Southeast Asian countries led by Filipino scientist Severino Salmo, with climate change impacts and the conversion of mangrove sites to seafood ponds largely to blame.

“It will be more difficult (for the mangroves) to adjust now because of the massive losses in the past,” Salmo, who has been studying mangroves in the archipelago for more than three decades, told AFP.

Salmo warned they will only “decline more” in the coming years without proper restoration projects and better government policies.

“It’s disappointing that we keep losing mangroves given how important they are,” he said.

“For now, (the best response) should be to conserve whatever is left.”

As workers continued assembling the bamboo fence, Pimentel looked around the forest and pointed to trees whose once grey-brown roots had turned charcoal black due to suffocation.

“Mangroves have always protected us from typhoons,” she said. “It’s time we protect them too.”

British hackers jailed for London transport cyberattack

AFP
London

A UK court yesterday jailed two young men for a 2024 cyberattack on London's public transport operator that exposed the details of millions of customers, in one of Britain's biggest data breaches.

Thalha Jubair, 20, from east London, and 18-year-old Owen Flowers from England's West Midlands were each handed five-and-a-half-year sentences at London's Woolwich Crown Court.

The pair pleaded guilty last month to hacking Transport for London's (TfL) network between August 31 and September 3 2024, gaining access to around seven mn customers' names and contacts.

Sentencing the men, judge Mark Turner said their actions had caused "very serious" disruption and were motivated primarily by "selfish bravado".

The attack did not affect transport on TfL's networks but knocked its services offline for three months, costing the organisation around £25mn (\$33mn), according to the judge.

TfL, which had to reset the passwords of some 27,000 employees, estimated the attack cost £29mn in damages and £10mn in lost income.

With the level of control they achieved over multiple days in the system, prosecutors said the British pair "could have shut down TfL completely" and potentially caused "catastrophic damage".

Both men were linked to Scattered Spider, an online criminal collective believed to be behind a string of high-profile cyberattacks, including on British retailers Marks & Spencer and the Co-op.

Arrested in September 2025 following a National Crime Agency (NCA) investigation, the pair were described by prosecutors as "experienced and talented" hackers who had been known to police for years.

Flowers also admitted to two counts of hacking into US-based organisations, Sutter Health and SSM Health Care Corp

When the NCA raided Flowers' home on September 6 2024 as part of their TfL investigation, they found him actively carrying out those attacks.

Jubair had previously been convicted as a juvenile over cyber-

attacks targeting US chipmaker Nvidia and admitted hacking the City of London Police force.

The pair gained access to the transport network using TfL employee credentials found on "russianmarket", a dark web marketplace for stolen logins, prosecutor Mark Fenhalls told the court on Wednesday.

They worked for 16 straight hours and throughout the night, communicating via messaging app Telegram, to breach the system after convincing the helpdesk to reset an employee password.

During the intrusion, the teenagers searched the network for the travel histories of celebrities and tried to access customers' payment information.

After gaining more privileges in the system over several days, the hackers effectively held "the keys to the kingdom", giving them "control over the whole network", Fenhalls said.

During the intrusion, Flowers told Jubair that "the government deserves to be hacked", the court heard, as TfL and authorities, who discovered the attack on September 1, 2024, took days to regain control of the network.

The NCA's cybercrime boss Paul Foster said the conviction marked "the largest criminal prosecution of cyber offenders in UK history".

Scattered Spider is "responsible for some of the most serious and damaging cyber attacks affecting the UK and countries around the world," he said in comments made outside the court Wednesday.

"As a result of this investigation, that threat has been significantly disrupted and degraded," he added.

Jubair began hacking as a child, teaching himself to code when he was 10 before attracting the attention of older cybercriminals by age 14, the court heard.

His lawyer, Paul Keleher, told the court he had been groomed and exploited by online criminals while under 18 to conduct cyberattacks globally.

Judge Turner said the TfL attack showed he had moved from being exploited to becoming a perpetrator himself.

While remanded in custody, Flowers managed to gain access to online tools to attempt to hack into multiple international government domains.

India ask its seafarers not to take Hormuz voyages

Reuters
New Delhi

India has ordered shipowners, ship managers and recruitment companies not to deploy the country's seafarers on vessels undertaking trips through the Strait of Hormuz amid renewed fighting in the region.

India is the world's third-largest supplier of seafarers, with more than 300,000 sailors working across global shipping fleets, according to government data.

"No deployment of Indian seafarers on vessels undertaking voyages involving passage through the Strait of Hormuz until further orders," the Directorate General of Shipping said in an order issued late Wednesday.

Two Indian seafarers have been killed in attacks on vessels in the region over the last three days, as tensions escalate in the Middle East, and multiple peo-

ple died previously, according to government data.

Recent attacks on vessels have increased the risks faced by seafarers and commercial ships operating in the conflict-affected area "significantly", the shipping regulator said.

"In view of the heightened security situation in the Persian Gulf region ... the Directorate considers it necessary to adopt enhanced precautionary measures to safeguard the interests of Indian seafarers serving on board ships operating in the region," the order said.

It also directed masters of the vessels to ensure that they are sufficiently vigilant about the security situation in the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz and adjoining waters, and called for continuous monitoring of navigational warnings.

More than 15,000 Indian seafarers are still stranded on the west of the Strait of Hormuz, said Manoj Yadav, general secretary of the Forward Seamen's Union of India.

Starmer given Order of Freedom medal in final Ukraine trip as premier

AFP
Kyiv

Ukraine awarded Britain's Keir Starmer its "Order of Freedom" honour yesterday as the outgoing prime minister made his final visit to the capital, Kyiv.

Starmer is set to depart Downing Street on Monday and be replaced by former Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham, who only became an MP again last month.

"Britain has always been, and remains, with Ukraine, and we value this immensely," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky told Starmer at a press conference in Kyiv.

"I want to thank you personally and wish you good luck," he said.

Starmer thanked Zelensky and pledged continued support for Kyiv, saying that even though he was leaving, Britain's support for Ukraine "will never change".

"Your fight is our fight. Your security is our security. And the United Kingdom will not waver," he said.

Two of Starmer's Conservative party predecessors as prime minister, Boris Johnson and Rishi Su-



nak, have previously been awarded the Order of Freedom.

Burnham will become leader of the ruling Labour party today before taking over as prime minister on Monday after meeting head of state King Charles III.

He will be the UK's fifth leader since Russia invaded its neighbour in February 2022.

Starmer announced his resignation on June 22 after losing the confidence of Labour lawmakers, following several domestic policy U-turns that impacted his popularity and regional elections that badly bruised his party.

He is held in high regard by many foreign leaders though, including for his work on Ukraine and commitment to Nato.

Starmer, along with French President Emmanuel Macron, helped lead efforts to establish a peacekeeping force aimed at deterring Russia in the event of a peace deal.

On Monday, Britain joined the European Union's 90-billion-euro (\$103bn) support loan for Ukraine.

Fears grow for activist's life after 18 days of hunger strike

AFP
New Delhi

New Delhi court ordered government doctors yesterday to monitor activist Sonam Wangchuk's health daily, as supporters fear for his life after nearly three weeks of hunger strike to protest India's examination system.

Wangchuk, 59, has been fasting since June 28, demanding the resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over alleged irregularities in medical entrance, and other reforms.

Angry students from across India have joined protests in recent weeks organised by the satirical Cockroach Janta Party online movement, with many saying repeated paper leaks have left them with little faith in the system.

Wangchuk, resting on a stage in New Delhi's well-known protest site Jantar Mantar, appeared frail and weak yesterday as he waved to supporters.

Following a petition, the Delhi High Court ordered yesterday that "whatever medical intervention is needed to save Sonam Wangchuk's life should be done".

The "life of any citizen is precious", the court said.

The petition filed this week by activist lawyer Rakesh Kumar Saini warned that Wangchuk may not survive for long if he did not break his fast.

Some of Wangchuk's supporters and members of the protest movement have asked him to end his hunger strike. An engineer by training, Wangchuk is best known for pioneering water conservation projects in the Himalayas.

He received the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay Award in 2018 for his environmental work and contributions to reforming local

school system in the Himalayan territory of Ladakh.

A group of about a dozen students have also been on a hunger strike alongside Wangchuk, including Bahadur Singh from the northern state of Uttar Pradesh.

"I am not fasting for myself. This is about every student who has lost hope in the system," Singh, 29, told AFP.

Last month, some 2.2mn aspiring medical students sat for a re-examination under tight security, after the previous test was scrapped following a paper leak that triggered widespread outrage.

The failure of the hugely competitive exam, along with a separate marking fiasco in high school tests, sparked an outcry and fuelled youth protests.

Several members of opposition parties have voiced their support to Wangchuk and the student activists.

Bangladesh police arrests fugitive suspect in ex-president's murder

AFP
Dhaka

Bangladesh police arrested yesterday a retired military officer accused of involvement in the assassination of former president Ziaur Rahman more than four decades ago, a senior official said.

Ziaur Rahman, a war hero who went on to become president, was killed in 1981 during a military coup.

Following his assassination, a martial law court convicted 18 military officers of murdering him, although the defence argued they had not been given a fair trial.

Thirteen of them were then executed by hanging.

One of the alleged assassins, Md Mozaffar Hossain, went into hiding immediately after Rahman was killed. Authorities had offered a reward of \$2,000 for information leading to Hossain's arrest, and yesterday he was taken into custody.

"Md Mozaffar Hossain had remained a fugitive

since 1981 after president Ziaur Rahman was assassinated. We detained him today," Md Shafiqul Islam, chief of the police's Detective Branch, told AFP.

"During interrogation, he explained his role in the assassination to us," Islam added.

Police arrested the suspect shortly after he landed in Dhaka.

"Hossain left Bangladesh immediately after the coup attempt and had remained abroad ever since," Islam said.

Rahman, whose son Tarique Rahman is now the country's prime minister, became president in 1977 following the assassination of Bangladesh's founding president Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

His four-year presidency was marked by dozens of coup attempts.

The circumstances surrounding Rahman's assassination have remained shrouded in mystery.

He was killed while on a visit to Chattogram, where he had gone to resolve a crisis within his newly formed political party.

Strong earthquake rattles NZ's South Island

A magnitude 5.9 earthquake struck near the town of Te Anau in New Zealand's South Island, shaking buildings and prompting authorities to briefly issue a tsunami warning.

The earthquake's epicentre was about 40km (25 miles) north of Te Anau, which is the gateway to

the tourist hotspot of Fiordland, according to New Zealand's National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA). There were no immediate reports of injuries or damage.

The quake struck at 9:14pm local time (0914 GMT). Authorities initially assessed its strength at magnitude 6.3, with NEMA issuing a

tsunami warning and urging people in coastal areas to evacuate.

It later downgraded the warning to an advisory after the magnitude was revised to 5.9, before cancelling it altogether, saying the threat had passed after no tsunami signals were detected for two hours following the quake. (Reuters)

Burnham faces 'harder test' to mirror Manchester's revival

AFP
Manchester

When Andy Burnham left Britain's parliament in 2017 to become Greater Manchester's first elected mayor, few would have predicted his return within a decade to be prime minister.

A government minister in the 2000s who twice lost centre-left Labour Party leadership contests, Burnham, 56, found political rejuvenation and the perfect springboard for his ambition in the thriving northwest English city-region.

"He played a good hand well," Henri Murison, chief executive at The Northern Powerhouse Partnership think tank, said of Burnham's mayoral tenure.

"The question is... how does he play a bad one?" he asked, referring to Britain's gloomier national picture of high debt, squeezed finances, sluggish growth and poor productivity.

Today, Burnham will vanquish the ghosts of his past to become ruling Labour's new leader. He will replace outgoing Prime Minister

Keir Starmer at 10 Downing Street on Monday.

He has vowed to devolve powers to other cities and create a "No. 10 North" based in Manchester to ensure regions outside the British capital are not neglected.

But Burnham's apparent bid to emulate Manchester's decades-spanning transformation from post-industrial wasteland to economic success story may not survive contact with Britain's rigid national governing culture.

"This is a harder test than he had in Greater Manchester," said Murison.

Some question whether Burnham even played a meaningful role in the city-region's revival, and has the skillset to deliver seismic change.

Greater Manchester — home to three mn people — is several decades into a long-term project to boost public and private sector investment through entrepreneurial local governance and various data-led strategies, collaborations and innovations.

Home to two world-famous football teams, five major higher education institutions and a highly



A general view of Underbanks in Stockport, Manchester. (Reuters)

profitable airport part-owned by the regional government, its burgeoning skyline is testament to its turnaround under so-called "Manchesterism".

Under 2016 reforms that created the mayoralty, Burnham headed the Greater Manchester Combined Authority but shared power in devolved policy areas like transport with the elected leaders of the city-region's 10 boroughs.

That meant he was mostly just "one of 11 votes" and more like "the captain of a football team,"

noted journalist and author Andy Spinoza, whose 2023 book "Manchester Unspun" charts its 40-year resurrection.

"He's had to be collaborative, and people talk about that as being his superpower when really, it's a basic prerequisite of the job."

Less than 1,000 people lived in the city centre in the early 1990s, compared to more than 100,000 now, explained Philip McCann, professor at the Manchester-based Productivity Institute.

"Walk around... the changes are

phenomenal," he told AFP.

With Manchester, he and others credit the "visionary leadership" of Howard Bernstein, the city council's unelected chief executive from 1998 to 2017, and Richard Leese, its elected leader for 25 years from 1996.

McCann argued Burnham has been "both a custodian and an accelerator" of their agenda.

Working in Greater Manchester required power-sharing and "long-term thinking", Leese told AFP.

"That's not the way that Westminster works," he added.

"But not only did he learn a new way of working, he now wants to take that new way of working and try and apply that to a central government that's frankly been dysfunctional for decades."

For Spinoza and others, Burnham's achievements have been overstated.

"The part that he's played is both being in the right place at the right time," he said. "He's an agile politician who's seen this opportunity and Manchester's given it to him."

Burnham's most visible policy success was bringing the previ-

ously fragmented, privately run bus system back under public control within an integrated transport network.

He is also credited with trying to broaden economic activity geographically.

"His political skill has created this kind of momentum and legitimacy around a Greater Manchester idea," Joshi Herrmann, founder of local journalism start-up Mill Media, told AFP.

However, Burnham took office vowing to end rough sleeping in the city by 2020 and failed.

Matthew Johnson, homeless charity Lifeshare's chairman, lauded him for raising the problem's profile and showing "genuine care".

But he noted "homelessness remains a huge issue" and views the failure as symbolic of something bigger.

"We dreamt of becoming like London, and that's what we've managed to do — we've created a more unequal city space."

Burnham endured other setbacks, including attempting to impose a clean air zone on drivers that ended up a costly failure.

Caution against apathy

All praise be to Allah The Almighty, Who created and proportioned, Who destined and guided; and may prayers and peace be upon the Prophet of guidance, sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam, and those who are guided by him.

Success is the goal of those who work hard; and, Allah The Almighty has made it contingent on purifying, disciplining and refining the soul, as He Says (what means):

{He has certainly succeeded who purifies himself.} [Qur'an 87:14]

{He has succeeded who purifies it, and he has failed who instills it [with corruption].} [Qur'an 91:9-10]

Furthermore, Allah The Almighty sent His Prophet, sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam (may Allah exalt his mention), as a teacher and a mentor, as He Says (what means): {It is He Who Has Sent among the unlettered a Messenger from themselves reciting to them His verses and purifying them and teaching them the Book and wisdom -- although they were before in clear error.} [Qur'an 62:2] Hence, the Prophet, sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam, was careful to elevate and cleanse the souls of his Companions, may Allah be pleased with them.

And such is the practice of all those who seek to draw close to Allah The Almighty. The Prophets, may Allah exalt their mention, and their followers, all reformed and purified their souls. The Prophet, sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam, endured much hardship in calling his people to Allah The Almighty. Every night, he used to stand before his Lord, bowing and prostrating, supplicating to Him and seeking His help, in full submission and humility to Him. And so, for an entire year, this practice became obligatory on all Muslims because of its great effect in reforming their hearts, motivating them and keeping them steadfast. Therefore, even today, though it is no longer mandatory, praying at night is indispensable.

Thus, all Muslims, particularly those who seek religious knowledge and those who call others to Allah The Almighty, are required to prioritise the reform and discipline of their souls, maintain their relationship with Allah The Almighty and take care of their manners toward others. This should be the starting point for inviting other people toward the faith and rectifying them.

Purification, beautification and striving

Among the most important guidelines in reforming the soul,



is to purify it from following its desires, which bring about countless diseases. Since the source of an illness can only be treated by countering its effects, the heart can be cured by acting in a way that contradicts one's whims. Allah The Almighty concisely mentioned this, when He Said (what means), {But as for he who feared the position of his Lord and prevented the soul from [unlawful] inclination, Then indeed, Paradise will be [his] refuge.} [Qur'an 79:40-41]

The other requisite to the rectification of the self, is to truly struggle for it, to be among those Allah The Almighty mentions, when He Says (what means): {And those who strive for Us -- We will surely guide them to Our ways. And indeed, Allah is with the doers of good.} [Qur'an 29:69] An important aspect of striving is to be resolute; so, when one forsakes a certain desire and Allah The Almighty tests him or her by facilitating its causes, he or she must be patient and determined. Otherwise, if the soul is irresolute, it will become accustomed to being that way and be prone to corruption.

The third step in reforming the soul is to beautify it, by instructing it to do righteous deeds until it gets used to them and doing them becomes an inherent characteristic. The

Prophet, sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam, said: “Knowledge and forbearance are obtained by training for, and perseverance in attaining, them. The one who earnestly seeks goodness will be granted it and the one who avoids evil, will be protected against it.” There is no doubt that one's deeds have a correlation to the heart. Every quality that is in the heart is reflected on one's body; equally, every deed that is performed by the limbs, influences the heart. This is only one aspect that showcases the wonderful link between the heart and the body.

When the soul is purified from following its base desires and is beautified by its righteous deeds and virtues, a person is required to then shift his or her focus to the manner of his or her performance of religious duties and favourable acts, and refraining from prohibitions and disliked deeds.

Thus, even when a person is doing what is permissible, it is essential to ensure having a pure intention, because laziness and negligence are part of human nature. The Prophet, sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam, said: “Every act of worship and obedience witnesses a primary surge followed by a state of slackness. A person who remains within the boundaries of my Sunnah, even at times of slackness, will

prosper. Otherwise, he [or she] would be on the path towards ruin.”

In his book, Madaarij As-Saalikeen, Ibn Al-Qayyim, may Allah have mercy upon him, said: “It is inevitable that worshippers become dispassionate. Yet, even during such a phase, if a man adheres to what is right and remains steadfast without neglecting obligations or committing unlawful acts, he is expected to eventually return to a state that is perhaps even better than his former one.”

Degrees of apathy

Based on the above, it is inevitable that everyone will experience a period of listlessness and apathy. However, it may be of either of these types:

- 1. General:** this impacts all acts of worship and instills an intense dislike toward them; it is the most dangerous kind and is a state of the hypocrites.
- 2. Specific:** this is characterised by a sense of lassitude regarding certain acts of obedience, along with undesirability, but not hatred; such is what many immoral Muslims are mired in.
- 3. Physical:** sometimes, there is a desire to perform good deeds, but there is a feeling of weariness and disinterest; and this is how many Muslims are. The danger here lies in the fact

that one's time passes by, and his or her life is wasted without having done anything beneficial. What is even more dangerous is if he or she deteriorates to a worse level and ends up being like the hypocrites in their neglect of obligations and other good deeds.

Hence, even the Prophet, sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam, used to seek refuge with Allah The Almighty from weakness and laziness every morning and evening, and teach his Companions to do the same. Moreover, when the believers were slow in their response to the call for Jihad (fighting or struggling), Allah The Almighty reproached them for it and urged them to race each other and hasten in doing righteous deeds, and motivated them by describing the reward of such forerunners in faith.

Apathy and the caller to Islam

Listlessness is a disease that afflicts everyone, regardless of their degrees of faith. However, it is particularly alarming if it affects the callers to Allah The Almighty and those who seek knowledge. Therefore, it is necessary to evade it by all means and immediately treat it if one does fall prey to it.

Since prevention is better than cure, one should make a habit of being attentive so as to steer clear of any symptoms of

apathy that may gradually lead to ruin. If that happens, the remedy and cure would be very difficult. The diseases of the heart are like a plant, easy to uproot in its early stages; however, if it grows and becomes firm in the earth, removing it requires strong men and tools.

Moreover, an ill heart presents with simple symptoms, but, if left untreated, will choke a person in its grip and turn into a chronic and incurable problem. Therefore, as callers to Allah The Almighty, we are required to examine ourselves and ponder our condition. If there is any sign of apathy, we are immediately obliged to look for the cause and seek treatment.

Aspects of apathy

Apathy manifests itself in many ways, some of which are as follows:

- Sense of lethargy and disinterest in performing acts of obedience
- Neglecting Thikr (remembrance of Allah The Almighty) and recitation of the Qur'an
- Hardness of the heart, such that it is not moved by Qur'anic verses or sermons
- Indifference toward committing acts of disobedience and letting that become a habit
- Lack of responsibility and realisation of being entrusted with a great trust
- Lack of eagerness in performing Da'wah (propagation to Islam)
- Weakness of the bonds of brotherhood among those who should love each other for the sake of Allah The Almighty
- An intense concern with this worldly life and indulging oneself in its pleasures at the expense of doing righteous deeds
- Idle talk, increasingly engaging in disputes and self-praise
- Creating problems
- Bothering oneself with petty issues and neglecting serious and beneficial work that serves the Ummah
- Weakness of faith and an indifference toward violations of the commands of Allah The Almighty
- Wasting time
- Exhibiting no readiness to handle responsibility and avoiding serious work, instead indulging in actions with no objectives
- Demonstrating a chaotic demeanour in one's work
- Criticising every positive act
- Postponing good deeds
- Possessing excessive wishes

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



Causes and treatment of apathy

There are many causes of apathy and they vary in importance. Some of them are: insincerity in performing deeds, ostentation, and a lack of religious knowledge that makes one ignorant of the reward of deeds and the virtues of patience. Also, being attached to this worldly life and forgetting the Hereafter, perhaps because of obeying or being occupied with one's spouse and children, causes one to neglect many acts of obedience, and if one is not alert, to misunderstand religion itself. This may seem a strange possibility, but what is even more bizarre is for one to understand the nature of this religion and taste the sweetness of faith, and then stop working for its development. Additionally, other causes include: committing sins and evil deeds and consuming money procured through unlawful or doubtful means.

As for why those who call others to Islam fall prey to apathy, the reasons are numerous:

- Being unclear of one's goals behind his or her propagation, which should be: seeking the satisfaction of Allah The Almighty, liberating people from slavery to any entity other than the Lord of the worlds and establishing the religion of Allah on earth.
- Weakness of belief in the goal or the means employed in Da'wah.
- Extremism that drives one to despair and abandoning his or her work
- Apprehension because of the many impediments and obstacles in the path of Da'wah and the preacher, which Allah The Almighty has tested all previous callers to Islam with.
- Independence and reclusiveness that leads to misery and boredom.
- Adopting limited methods of propagation and not considering new means that may assist in conveying the message to people and at the same time, retain the principles of Da'wah and its spirit. For example, people may avoid a variation in the modes of address, whereas everyone should be spoken to in a manner that suits their level of intellect and the medium they prefer: audio or print, or other forms. Likewise, there is sometimes no variation in the method of delivering lectures of knowledge and the Qur'an, in terms of place and means.
- Forgetting the persistent enmity of Satan.

- Being heedless of the challenge the disbelievers present for Muslims and that they utilise every means to turn us away from our religion and contrive plots against us.
- The illusions and whispers of the devil that sow fear and cast doubts in the heart of the caller about the soundness of the way that he or she is following.

In addition to the aforesaid causes, there are diseases of the heart: envy, suspicions about others, hatred, love of fame, arrogance and negligence in performing acts of worship, such as the daily prayers and Thikr (remembrance of Allah The Almighty). Also, apathy may stem from believing victory is out of reach, always expecting immediate results, having a lack of stability because there is no sense of direction, leaving work uncompleted and moving on to something else, looking at those lesser in terms of knowledge and worship, thereby undermining the morale, and socialising with those who seek this worldly life, thus being negatively influenced by them.

Indeed, only those whom Allah The Almighty protects, are saved from that and from being overcome by apathy when treating one's state of indifference.

Treatment of apathy

Allah The Almighty provided a remedy for every disease, apathy being one of the severest spiritual kind. When left unnoticed, it leads an afflicted person toward deviation and may very well cause his or her ultimate destruction. Hence, treatment is very important, by utilising every means that prevent the disease from occurring and eradicating it if it has already developed. The following are some of the most important means that would be useful in that regard:

- Avoiding the causes that lead to this disease, which is the most crucial factor in helping safeguard a person from its evil. Moreover, it is necessary to realise the gravity of the illness and the significance of avoiding it, through precautionary measures or proper treatment.
- Supplicating to Allah The Almighty and seeking His help, as He is the One Who responds to the prayer of the distressed; and indeed, whoever is afflicted in faith and fears destruction, is in the worst state of distress. Moreover, it is only He Whose help is sought in everything, as the

Prophet, sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam, commanded Mu'aath, may Allah be pleased with him, to say at the end of every prayer: “Allaahumma a‘inni ‘alaa thikrika wa-shukrika wa-husni ‘ibaadatik (O Allah, Help me to remember [only] You, thank You and worship You perfectly).”

- Enhancing, renewing and caring to increase one's faith by intensifying worship, for this is the true provision of the believer that alleviates his or her suffering on the trying path to Paradise.
- Having confidence in the oversight of Allah the Almighty and increasing one's remembrance of Him. This necessitates fearing, glorifying, loving and imploring Him, and believing in His knowledge and omnipotence. By invoking Him, one's heart becomes tranquil; but, perhaps the greatest of all acts, is strengthening one's bond with the Qur'an through frequent recitation, understanding, contemplation and application. Moreover, one is required to consider it as a judge and refer all issues and disputes to its authority; surely, the one who is not guided by the Qur'an will be led astray by his or her fancies.
- Sincerity and piety; Allah The Almighty Says (what means): {O you who have believed, if you fear Allah, He Will Grant you a criterion [between right and wrong].} [Qur'an 8:29]
- Purifying hearts from animosity, rancour, jealousy and ill thoughts of others; this helps to open the heart and guard its integrity.
- Seeking knowledge, as it is very important to attend religious lectures and circles of Thikr. Knowledge is the way to knowing and fearing Allah The Almighty, and it is the provision of one's heart.
- Being moderate in worship and all righteous deeds.
- Organising one's time and constantly calling oneself to account.
- Adhering to the society of Muslims and strengthening the ties of brotherhood.
- Maintaining relations with those who may also be overcome by apathy and aiding them in avoiding deviation.
- Having been brought up according to the comprehensive methodology of the Prophet, sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam, which is a deterrent to listlessness.



- Performing numerous good deeds and not the exact same ones. Thikr, recitation of the Qur'an, prayers, reading useful books, enjoining good, forbidding evil, helping others to fulfil their needs and relieving the troubled, are but a few examples.
- Following the paradigm of the Prophets, may Allah exalt their mention, and the sincere preachers, in their zeal, punctuality and righteousness, steadfastness, noble aims and determination. A Muslim's first concern should be Paradise and main purpose, seeking the satisfaction of Allah The Almighty by continuing to worship, until death arrives.
- Remembering death frequently, fearing an evil demise, visiting the graves and seeing people in the throes of death. This urges a Muslim to repent without delay, have a content heart and a body yearning to worship. On the other hand, forgetting about death leads a person to adopt the opposite.
- Remembering Paradise and Hell and reading their descriptions in the Qur'an and the Sunnah; this would strengthen the determination of a Muslim and sharpen his or her resolve.
- Increasing and carrying on in righteous deeds, while avoiding slackness. This is especially important with respect to routine acts of worship, because a person who abandons a voluntary deed is very close to leaving an obligation as well.
- Being patient and training oneself to be so. Undoubtedly, the way of knowledge, worship and Da'wah is lengthy, strenuous and full of troubles and hardship. We seek the help of Allah The Almighty to keep us steadfast on His religion and grant us a good end.

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

Tax breaks alone won't power Bangladesh's energy transition

Bangladesh has rolled out tax breaks and incentives to accelerate solar energy adoption as it grapples with a worsening power crisis linked to global fuel disruptions and domestic supply shortfalls.

The measures, introduced in the July 1 national budget, aim to help the country meet its target of generating 20% of electricity from renewable sources by 2030. They include removing customs duties on solar equipment and exempting solar producers and suppliers from income tax. Institutions adopting solar power will also receive a rebate equivalent to 5% of their electricity bills over the next five years.

The policy push comes as Bangladesh faces acute energy stress. The country relies heavily on imported natural gas, which accounts for about half of its electricity generation. Disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz following the US-Israel attack on Iran in February led QatarEnergy—Bangladesh's largest supplier—to halve shipments this year.

The fallout has been severe. Rural areas have endured electricity outages lasting up to 10 hours,

while industrial output has dropped by 25% to 30%, according to the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association. Rising global energy prices are also fuelling inflation and could cap economic growth at 4.5% this year, the Asian Development Bank said on July 9.

Against this backdrop, Dhaka is betting on solar power to reduce import dependence and stabilise supply. The incentives are expected to lower rooftop solar installation costs by 30% to 37%, according to environmental group CLEAN, and encourage large-scale projects, energy storage expansion and grid upgrades.

The focus is particularly on industry, including the garment sector, which contributes about 11% to GDP. But critics warn that the approach risks sidelining rural households, where nearly 70% of the population lives.

"The tax reforms have raised hopes, but the problem runs much deeper," said Syeda Rizwana Hasan of the Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association.

"Electricity outages are severe outside Dhaka, and rural

consumers must benefit from any reforms."

Bangladesh's renewable energy drive has historically lagged. It missed its earlier goal of generating 10% of electricity from renewables by 2020, and current installed capacity stands at just 5%, according to official data. Solar capacity is about 1,515 megawatts.

Expanding rooftop solar could significantly ease pressure on imports. Adding 2,000 MW of capacity could save between \$476mn and \$1 billion annually, estimates the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA).

However, scaling up remains a challenge. Bangladesh needs to add roughly 760 MW of renewable capacity each year to meet its 2030 target—more than three times its recent annual average of about 228 MW.

Private developers are unlikely to prioritise small household systems, which generate limited returns. Analysts suggest aggregating demand across communities to make rural projects commercially viable.

"There is clear potential for rural solar," said IEEFA

analyst Shafiqul Alam. "But it requires new delivery models that bring multiple households together."

Experts say financing is another major constraint. While the government has allocated 171.93bn taka (\$1.40bn) to the power and energy sector, only about 2% is earmarked for renewables. Current annual investment of \$238mn falls far short of the \$933mn to \$98 mn needed each year to meet 2030 goals.

Industry voices are calling for a dedicated renewable energy fund and expanded access to low-interest loans for households, farmers and small businesses.

"Tax incentives are a step forward, but not sufficient," said Hasan Mehedi of CLEAN. "Without affordable financing and targeted support, smaller consumers will remain excluded from the transition."

Bangladesh's solar push reflects both necessity and opportunity. But without broader reforms that extend beyond industry and address financing gaps, the country risks deepening existing inequalities even as it seeks to secure its energy future. — Thomson Reuters Foundation

Making a statement



People hold signs during a protest organised by environmental collective "Salvemos el Golfo" (Save the Gulf) outside the JP Morgan Foundation, urging the financial institution to withdraw support for the Saguaro liquefied natural gas export project, which protesters say threatens whales, biodiversity in the Gulf of California and other marine species, in Mexico City, Mexico. The sign reads "Whales yes, gas no". (Reuters)



Pollution from Musk's unpermitted xAI power project hits hardest in Black communities

By Disha Raychaudhuri and Valerie Volcovici
Reuters

Elon Musk's artificial intelligence company xAI has installed 59 natural gas turbines for its Colossus 2 data center project in Tennessee without securing federal clean air permits, according to communications between regulators and xAI representatives.

Potential emissions from the turbines are far beyond the threshold that would require a federal permit, and would be released near predominantly Black communities already estimated to be suffering disproportionately high rates of lung disease, according to a Reuters analysis based on government data and information in the correspondence with regulators.

The findings, which have not been previously reported, reflect how exploding electricity demand from AI data centers is driving companies to build off-grid power plants at a pace outstripping environmental oversight, with potentially big risks to public health.

The number of unpermitted turbines identified by Reuters is about double what xAI has publicly acknowledged. The company previously said it was running 27 unpermitted turbines for Colossus 2 as of January and has argued the permits are not required. At least 57 of the 59 turbines are located in Mississippi, just over the state line from Tennessee where the data center is located. The xAI turbines are among scores of off-grid power plants for data centers proposed or under construction around the country. Local authorities often fast-track approvals in just weeks or months, without the years of environmental studies and public hearings typically required for such power generation projects that connect to the grid, Reuters has reported.

Mississippi regulators in March issued a permit for permanent turbines for Colossus 2, allowing construction of 41 gas-fired turbines. The approval came three weeks after the state's only public hearing on the project. The xAI cluster of temporary turbines in Mississippi is already among the biggest off-grid data center power projects, according to Ben King, an analyst with think tank Rhodium Group, who reviewed the Reuters analysis.

"This looks to be an unprecedented level



A sound monitoring system in the Colonial Hills neighbourhood located in Southaven, Mississippi. The neighbourhood sits adjacent to xAI's gas turbine facility, where the constant noise of the turbines can be heard throughout the community. (Reuters)

of behind-the-meter gas being installed in one place," he said, referring to off-grid natural gas plants serving just one customer.

The communications reviewed by Reuters show xAI, now owned by billionaire Musk's SpaceX, has installed 57 off-grid turbines in Southaven, Mississippi, just across the state line from its Colossus 2 data center in Memphis, a facility supporting the Grok chatbot and other AI systems. The records show the company has also installed two other unpermitted turbines for the project on a different site. Reuters could not determine the location.

The communications, obtained through a Reuters public records request, included emails between Trinity Consultants, representing xAI and subsidiary MZX Tech, and the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ).

xAI did not respond to Reuters' request for comment.

xAI's turbines are part of a widening environmental justice battle over whether the AI boom is adding disproportionate pollution burdens to communities of color.

Civil rights groups including the NAACP and the Southern Environmental Law Center sued xAI in April to halt their operations, arguing the turbines produce

emissions subject to the federal Clean Air Act and shouldn't be operated without permits. They contend the turbines are polluting homes, schools and churches in historically Black communities.

"The scale of it is astonishing," said Patrick Anderson, an attorney with the Southern Environmental Law Center. "This is an absolutely huge Clean Air Act violation that threatens public health."

Securing a Clean Air Act permit would have exposed xAI's project to extensive review and public comment, potentially taking years. Mississippi environmental regulators and xAI have argued in court filings that the turbines are exempt because they are "mobile" and intended to operate onsite for less than a year.

"MDEQ has determined that portable/temporary turbines do not require an air permit," the agency said in a statement to Reuters.

The US Environmental Protection Agency said in January 2026 that even temporary turbines exceeding emissions thresholds must obtain permits. The agency, however, told Reuters it's considering changes allowing "regulatory flexibilities" for portable units while continuing to protect public health.

xAI, the MDEQ and the EPA did not

answer questions from Reuters about pollution impacts on communities of color from power generation to serve data centers.

The US Justice Department weighed in on the lawsuit in a June 15 filing, saying that restricting the turbines could threaten national security interests because xAI's systems support US military operations, including operations involving Iran.

The outcome of the lawsuit filed by civil rights groups could help define how environmental laws apply to the fast-growing AI sector, where companies are scrambling to bring power supplies online to support energy-intensive computing.

"This sets up scenarios where the government can create sacrifice zones and tell communities they have to breathe illegal air pollution," said Mary Rock, a senior attorney for Earthjustice which is representing the NAACP and SELC.

The dispute echoes the findings of a 2022 study by researchers from UCLA and Columbia University and published in the Nature Energy journal that found that previously redlined communities—where banks historically discriminated against Black mortgage applicants—now face disproportionately high exposure to pollutants from fossil fuel facilities.

"Air pollution from these and other sources contributes to systemic racial disparities in chronic disease and ultimately shorter lives," Lara Cushing, a UCLA public health professor who co-authored the study, told Reuters.

The emails reviewed by Reuters included the manufacturer emissions profiles for 32 of the 59 turbines, including 30 at the Southaven site.

A Reuters analysis based on that information found that those 30 turbines alone could emit nearly 2,500 short tons of nitrogen oxide, 4,000 short tons of carbon monoxide and 22 short tons of formaldehyde annually, assuming they operate continuously at 80% of capacity. According to the EPA, gas turbines are typically operated at loads of 80% or more to achieve efficiency.

Nitrogen oxides contribute to smog and respiratory inflammation, according to the American Lung Association. Carbon monoxide deprives the body of oxygen, and formaldehyde is a carcinogen.

The xAI site's potential emissions far exceed a Clean Air Act threshold that

requires permitting for facilities capable of more than 100 short tons annually of pollutants such as nitrogen oxide.

"This is a massive amount of turbines and an unfathomable amount of air pollution," Southaven resident Shannon Samsa said in an interview.

"It's not a hypothetical," she said, "that air pollution is bad for you."

The nitrogen oxide emissions calculated by Reuters for about half the plant's turbines would put the facility "up there with some of the heaviest polluting natural gas power plants across the entire country," said Nicholas Mailloux, a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Wisconsin-Madison who studies air quality and health benefits of the clean-energy transition. He said the facility would be on par with the top 25 U.S. gas plants for nitrogen oxide emissions, citing EPA data for actual emissions.

In the Colonial Hills neighborhood of Southaven, the turbines serving Colossus 2 can be heard around the clock, often firing off noisy bursts that residents compare to jet engines.

Ervin Laws, a Colonial Hills resident in his 20s, said the noise wakes him up at night. "I can't do anything about it, because he's got more money than me," he said, referring to Musk.

The turbines were installed in communities already estimated to be facing relatively high respiratory disease burdens, according to a Reuters analysis of CDC data.

In 27 of 28 census tracts within five miles of the site—spanning both Mississippi and Tennessee—the estimated asthma rates were higher than their respective countywide figures. In 24 tracts, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease rates were also higher.

Five miles is a distance commonly used in environmental health research to capture populations likely to be exposed to air pollution from a stationary source.

A separate Reuters analysis of Census Bureau data found that the residents living near the facility are disproportionately Black. Because the five-mile radius crosses state lines, Reuters compared each side against its own county baseline.

Within five miles of the facility in DeSoto county, Mississippi—where the turbines are located—about 46% of residents are Black, compared with 33% countywide, according to census data.

Ukraine military fractures as defence minister ousted

AFP
Kyiv

Ukraine's ousted defence minister issued stunning public criticism of the army's top commander yesterday, forcing President Volodymyr Zelensky to call for unity to halt signs of an emerging split in the military top ranks.

Large protests erupted in several Ukrainian cities yesterday against the removal of popular defence minister Mykhailo Fedorov, who had been brought in six months ago to digitise and modernise an army fatigued after four years fighting off the Russian invasion.

Following Fedorov's removal, Zelensky announced yesterday he had appointed Yevgeniy Khmara — head of Ukraine's SBU security service — as acting defence minister.

"Khmara has gained extensive and, in many respects, unprecedented experience with technological combat operations," Zelensky said in a Facebook post.

The spiralling leadership row risks throwing uncertainty on the war effort at a time when Ukraine was in one of its best positions for months. Kyiv's troops have largely halted the pace of Russia's advance while pounding Russian oil and military sites with long-range drones, triggering a nationwide fuel crisis inside its neighbour.



Ukrainian Defence Minister Mykhailo Fedorov speaks to the media during a press conference following the announcement of his resignation, in Kyiv, yesterday. (AFP)

After being forced to resign, Fedorov yesterday accused Ukraine's commander-in-chief Oleksandr Syrsky of dividing the country.

"Instead of figuring out how to defeat Russia asymmetrically — which is the commander-in-chief's task — he figured out how to split the country," Fedorov told reporters, including AFP.

He criticised slow bureaucracy and a lack of flexibility, questioning whether Ukraine could defeat Russia with Syrsky in charge of the army.

"In this configuration, I personally don't know how to win the war," he said, wearing his trademark jeans and dark T-shirt, speaking in front of a large screen showing drones.

He also alleged Syrsky had en-

gineered his removal through an ultimatum issued to Zelensky after months of clashes.

Zelensky himself issued a plea for "unity" and said the two sides — the defence ministry and the army command — were barely on speaking terms.

"A president in wartime should not have to choose in such a situation, honestly," he said, speaking alongside UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer in Kyiv.

"I would very much like unity." A soldier serving in Ukraine's army told AFP the political chaos in Kyiv could hit the war effort.

"For some, replacing a minister is merely a political reshuffle. For us, it can determine whether a needed

drone arrives on time, whether essential equipment is purchased," they said, asking to speak anonymously to criticise the decision.

In a public statement, Syrsky tried to stem the criticism, defending his results and calling to "focus on the war".

But one of his most senior commanders — a rumoured possible successor — came to Fedorov's defence and called for the pace of reform to continue.

Joint Forces Commander Mykhailo Drapaty said the army "needs change" and "new rules" as he thanked Fedorov for "not being afraid to tackle issues".

In Kyiv, AFP reporters saw more than a thousand people gathered on a central square, singing Ukraine's national anthem, waving Ukrainian and European Union flags and chanting "shame" and "bring Fedorov back".

Analysts said Zelensky had backed his trusted army chief over an outsider defence minister at a key moment of the war.

Fedorov's backers cast the removal as retribution for trying to shake up the system and weeding out graft.

"He fell out with various generals and with different drone suppliers. In other words, he really did start implementing many useful reforms that threatened certain vested interests," said political analyst Anatoliy Otkysiuk.

UN atomic chief slams 'unacceptable' killing at Ukraine power plant

AFP
Vienna

The United Nations atomic agency's head on denounced the killing of the chief engineer of Ukraine's Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in a drone strike, which no one has claimed.

Russia blamed Ukraine for this death, but Kyiv described the accusations as "baseless" and said Moscow has failed to provide evidence.

The head of Russian nuclear giant Rosatom, Alexei Likhachev said on Wednesday that Aleksandr Yakovlev died when "a drone belonging to the Ukrainian armed forces" hit a service vehicle near the flash-point power station.

International Atomic Energy Agency chief Rafael Grossi "condemns the reported incident which he says represents an unacceptable attack on the plant and its management, seriously threatening nuclear safety," the watchdog posted late on Wednesday on X.

"The IAEA calls for an immediate end to all attacks on or near nuclear sites and their staff," it added.

Russia's foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova

had urged the agency to condemn the alleged "murder".

Likhachev said in a post on Rosatom's Telegram account that Yakovlev "devoted his entire life to nuclear energy and he died, in effect, at his combat post".

A driver was also killed in the attack, he said.

The Telegram accounts of the plant and Rosatom have never previously mentioned Yakovlev.

Normally, the plant's Moscow-appointed director Yuri Chernichuk, a former chief engineer at the plant, speaks publicly.

Ukraine's foreign ministry rejected the claims.

"No independent confirmation of the Russian version or evidence of Ukraine's involvement has been presented, and information from Russian occupation structures cannot be considered reliable," it wrote.

Russian troops captured the Zaporizhzhia plant in March 2022, shortly after Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

The plant is the largest in Europe and its safety has been a recurring source of concern throughout the long-running conflict.

Both sides regularly accuse the other of carrying out strikes on the site, which is located in Enerhodar, on the banks of the Dnipro river, which marks the frontline in the area.

Kosovo files lawsuit against Serbian minister over 'ethnic cleansing' remark

AFP
Pristina

Kosovo yesterday filed a suit against a Serbian minister who said she would "ethnically cleanse" the territory had she been in power during the 1990s conflict.

The comments by Belgrade's Public Administration Minister Snezana Paunovic have triggered days of backlash — including condemnation from Brussels and a ban from entering Kosovo — a country she was born in.

Justice Minister Donika Gervalla said she had filed a charge of "inciting discord and intolerance" with prosecutors.

"They carry serious historical, legal and human consequences," she said.

Paunovic over the weekend said she would have removed Kosovo Albanians if she had been in the place of strongman Slobodan Milosevic during the 1998-1999 war between Serbian armed forces and independence-seeking ethnic Albanian guerrillas.

"Not by liquidating them in the way they have sought to ethnically cleanse Kosovo to this day, but

by ensuring that anyone who feels less like a citizen... leaves and goes to their homeland," the minister said.

Yesterday, Britain's foreign ministry called her remarks "utterly abhorrent" and said they have "no place in today's society".

Despite calls for her to resign, Paunovic yesterday apologised for causing problems for her government but refused to retract her statement.

"I offer my apologies to the prime minister and to the government... which found itself in an embarrassing position," she told the pro-government channel Informer TV, explaining her personal stance was not the same as the government's.

Earlier, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic told media her comments did not reflect the government's line and were made "recklessly and irresponsibly".

Since the end of the Kosovo war, which killed around 13,000 people, tensions have remained high between Pristina and Belgrade — with Serbia refusing to recognise its former territory's independence.

Following Milosevic's overthrow, he was arrested and charged with crimes against humanity committed during the war, but he died while his trial was ongoing before an international court in The Hague.

Macron pledges 'zero tolerance' for arson after spate of fires in France

AFP
Noisy-sur-Ecole

French President Emmanuel Macron yesterday said there would be "zero tolerance" for arson after France was hit by wildfires that have scorched thousands of hectares.

Dozens of people have been arrested across the country over starting fires deliberately or by accident as France has sweltered through multiple intense heatwaves since May that have fuelled dry conditions.

Around 35,000 hectares (nearly 86,500 acres) have been impacted by fires — more than during the entire 2025 fire season, according to authorities.

France "has never faced so many outbreaks of fire across the country since the end of World War II", Macron said during a visit to the historic Fontainebleau forest near Paris that has seen more than 2,000 hectares hit by fires since July 5.



France's President Emmanuel Macron shakes hands with firefighters during a visit at the firefighters' central command site following a fire in the Fontainebleau Forest, in Noisy-sur-Ecole, yesterday. (AFP)

"Here, as everywhere else in France, there will be zero tolerance" for arsonists "because it is, of course, our national territory that is under attack every time a fire breaks out", Macron added.

Around 1,000 residents were forced to leave their homes as the fires spread in the forest some 60km southeast of Paris, in a rare

blaze in the north of the country.

Six people had been arrested in connection with the fires as of Wednesday, as firefighters continued to work to extinguish the flames completely.

Macron announced a funding drive to raise money to rehabilitate and protect the forest, a Unesco biosphere reserve.

Spain back on wildfire alert as blaze burns 4,500 hectares

AFP
Madrid

Spanish authorities yesterday said a large wildfire in the northeast would take days to control, sparking fresh alarm a week after the country's deadliest such disaster in recent history.

More than 400 firefighters backed by army reinforcements were battling the blaze in the municipality of Ores, which had burned 4,500 hectares (11,100 acres) in a sparsely populated part of the region of Aragon.

Several small villages had been

evacuated with some damage to houses, said Roberto Bermudez de Castro, a senior member of the regional government.

"It will take days to control, to contain, it will be a complex fire," he said.

Footage shot from helicopters showed the fire eating away at vast expanses of forest and parched fields.

Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez expressed "all my solidarity with the residents affected by the fire" on X, urging the population to exercise caution and obey the authorities.

Scientists say human-driven climate change is increasing the

length, intensity and frequency of extreme heat, which creates favourable conditions for the spread of wildfires and complicates fire-fighting efforts.

Peak temperatures of up to 40C have hit Aragon in recent days.

Spain is scarred by last week's ferocious wildfire in the south-eastern province of Almeria that claimed 13 lives — including seven Britons and an American — and ravaged 7,000 hectares.

Deadly wildfires devoured almost 400,000 hectares of land in Spain last year, the highest figure recorded for the country by the European Forest Fire Information System.

Italy court finds 32 people guilty over deadly Genoa bridge collapse

AFP
Genoa

An Italian court sentenced 32 defendants yesterday, including the former head of motorway operator Autostrade, for their role in a deadly bridge disaster eight years ago that killed 43 people.

Autostrade's former chief executive, Giovanni Castellucci, was found guilty of vehicular homicide and negligence related to the collapse of the bridge in Genoa — one of the country's worst infrastructure disasters.

The crowded courtroom was packed with relatives of those who plunged to their deaths when the Morandi Bridge — part of a key highway connecting France and Italy — gave way in torrential rain on August 14, 2018.

Castellucci, who was accused of postponing key maintenance work, was sentenced to 12 years behind bars.

The former executive is already



This general view shows abandoned vehicles on the Morandi motorway bridge the day after a section collapsed in the north western Italian city of Genoa. (AFP/File Photo)

serving time for his responsibility in a 2013 accident in which a bus crashed through the barriers of a viaduct, killing 40 people.

"Today we can say there are those guilty of the murder of our relatives," said Michele Matti Altadonna, whose brother was one of the victims.

"We are here for our loved ones,

in their memory," he told AFP.

Legal teams for some of the defendants, including Castellucci, said they would appeal the ruling.

But Altadonna said "for the four children my brother left behind... we will not give up, we will not give up until the Supreme Court".

Under Italian law, judges will have to publish the reasoning for

their decision within six months.

The findings of the investigation were damning: "Between the inauguration in 1967 and the collapse, i.e. 51 years later, not even minimal maintenance work was carried out to reinforce the stays of pillar number nine".

Work had been carried out on two other pillars, numbers 10 and

11, and was planned for number nine, which came crashing down in morning traffic.

Raffaele Caruso, a lawyer for the victims, said the Morandi bridge had not collapsed "by chance".

"This collapse, as we have always said and as the prosecutor's office, above all, has always said, could have been avoided."

Most of the defendants were executives and technicians from Autostrade per l'Italia (ASPI), which runs almost half of the country's motorway network, and engineering company Spea, in charge of maintenance.

Besides Castellucci, they included the former head of Spea, Antonio Galata, as well as officials from the infrastructure ministry.

ASPI's executive in charge of maintenance, Michele Mitelli, was sentenced to 11 years, while the group's number two, Paolo Berti, received five years and six months.

Italy's deputy transport secretary, Edoardo Rixi, wrote that yesterday's ruling marked an "impor-

tant step on the path of truth and justice".

"The collapse was not a stroke of fate, but the result of serious errors and omissions by those who had a duty to ensure safety. It is right that responsibility has finally been established," wrote Rixi on social media.

The defence's main argument was that the bridge had a hidden construction defect, namely corrosion of its cables, and it was this that caused its collapse, not a lack of maintenance.

Lawyers for Castellucci wrote in a note following the verdict that the court had erroneously relied on a theory that "equates liability with hierarchical position", noting that the ex-CEO had taken "every initiative deemed necessary for the safety of the infrastructure".

"Today it is considered appropriate to assign personal criminal liability to the CEO of a company who did nothing other than rely on the best engineering specialists in the field," they wrote.



Pakistani community pays rich tributes to HH Sheikh Hamad

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

The Pakistani community in Qatar led by ambassador Muhammad Aamer, gathered yesterday evening to honour the memory of HH the late Father Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, paying tribute to the visionary leader whose transformative leadership reshaped Qatar and strengthened one of the Gulf's closest bilateral partnerships.

Presiding over the event, ambassador Muhammad Aamer reaffirmed the enduring strength of Pakistan-Qatar relations and the mutual respect shared by the two brotherly nations.

Talking to *Gulf Times* exclusively, the ambassador said: "The passing of HH the Father Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani is a profound loss for Qatar and for all those who witnessed his remarkable leadership and vision. His Highness was the architect of modern Qatar, whose wisdom, courage and foresight transformed the nation and laid the foundations for its prosperity, global standing and enduring progress. His legacy lives on in the institutions he built, the generations he empowered and the respect Qatar commands across the world today."

"The Father Amir", he noted, "was a visionary leader and his legacy is not going to stay for years

or decades but for the time Qatar is there Insha' Allah. He had conviction in what he was dreaming, and he had the power to convert his dream into reality in his short span of being Amir of Qatar. Allah made sure that he sees his nation prosper and become one of the most important countries in the world."

On behalf of the people of Pakistan, the ambassador extended heartfelt condolences to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, the Royal Family and the people of Qatar, praying that Allah Almighty grants HH the late Father Amir the highest place in Jannah.

Held at TNG Al Wakra Campus in co-ordination with the Embassy of Pakistan, the condolence and tribute gathering brought together

er diplomats, community leaders, professionals and prominent members of the Pakistani diaspora to celebrate the extraordinary legacy of the leader widely recognised as the architect of modern Qatar.

Throughout the evening, speakers reflected on HH the late Father Amir's remarkable journey, recalling how his leadership between 1995 and 2013 propelled Qatar from a modest Gulf state into a globally influential nation through ambitious investments in energy, education, healthcare, infrastructure, diplomacy and human development. His vision of building a knowledge-based society placed people at the centre of national progress, creating opportunities for generations while positioning Qatar as a respected international actor.



Members taking a pledge on behalf of the Pakistani community in Qatar. **PICTURES:** Shaji Kayamkulam



Pakistan's ambassador Muhammad Aamer addressing the community.

The gathering also highlighted the special relationship between Qatar and Pakistan, one built on decades of friendship, shared values and mutual respect. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were formally established in 1973, but speakers noted that bilateral ties entered a new chapter following HH the late Father Amir's landmark visit to Pakistan in 1999.

That historic visit laid the foundations for expanded political,

economic and social co-operation, with agreements signed across multiple sectors.

Participants recalled that this deep bond was reaffirmed recently by Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif during his visit to Doha to offer condolences. The prime minister praised HH the late Father Amir as an exceptional statesman whose wisdom, foresight and commitment to public service left a lasting mark, while recalling his warmth and longstanding affection for Pakistan.

Speakers also highlighted HH the late Father Amir's appreciation for the Pakistani community's contribution to Qatar's development. Pakistani workers, a speaker noted, contributed to major infrastructure projects.

The hour-long ceremony opened with a recitation from the Holy Qur'an, followed by the national anthems of Qatar and Pakistan. Attendees observed a moment of silence before offering prayers for HH the late Father Amir. A commemorative documentary tracing HH Sheikh Hamad's life and achievements was

then screened, drawing heartfelt reflections from those in attendance.

The programme, presented by Mahnoor Balooch, featured tributes from representatives of major Pakistani organisations in Qatar.

Each speaker reflected on HH the late Father Amir's visionary leadership and the profound impact of his legacy on Qatar's development and on the lives of hundreds of thousands of expatriates who have helped shape the country's modern success story.

Badar Sohail Khan delivered a pledge on behalf of the Pakistani community, reaffirming its continued commitment to serving Qatar and contributing to its future prosperity under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani.

The ceremony concluded with a vote of thanks by Mohsin Qureshi, Community Welfare Attaché at the Embassy of Pakistan, who expressed appreciation to the embassy, community organisations and participants for coming together to honour a leader whose legacy continues to inspire.

Qatar's diving community to mark PADI Women's Dive Day

By Joey Aguilar
Doha

Qatar's growing community of women scuba divers will join the global celebration of 'PADI Women's Dive Day' on July 18, highlighting how the sport has evolved beyond recreation into a platform for confidence, friendship and marine conservation.

Observed on the third Saturday of July every year, PADI Women's Dive Day was launched in 2015 by the Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) to encourage more women to explore scuba diving while promoting inclusion, confidence, and ocean conservation. Since then, it has grown into one of the world's largest annual recreational diving events, bringing together thousands of divers in more than 180 countries under this year's theme, "Celebrate Community. Create Change."

In Qatar, the occasion was initially set to feature SEAsterns-in-Action's second community clean-up dive at Sealine. However, organisers cancelled the activity following the recent period of national mourning, out of respect and to prioritise participants' safety and security. Instead, they opted for a women-only recreational dive that provided an opportunity to reconnect, welcome new divers and strengthen the supportive community that has continued to grow across the country.

For Michelle Anne "Meech" del Carmen, a PADI Open Water scuba instructor

and founder of SEAsterns-in-Action, the annual celebration represents a journey of personal transformation and an opportunity to inspire others.

"When I moved to Qatar, I didn't know how to swim properly, and I was genuinely afraid of swimming in the open sea," she recalled. "If someone had told me that one day I would become a scuba diving instructor, I honestly wouldn't have believed them."

Del Carmen completed her first Discover Scuba Diving experience in July 2021 before earning her Open Water Diver certification three months later. She continued advancing through the ranks and, in May 2025, achieved one of her proudest milestones by becoming a PADI Open Water Scuba Instructor.

"In less than four years, I went from someone who was afraid of the sea to an instructor dedicated to helping others discover the life-changing power of scuba diving," she said.

She described diving as her "vitamin sea," saying it became a source of healing, peace and confidence while introducing her to a community that believed in her long before she believed in herself.

Inspired by that experience, Del Carmen established SEAsterns-in-Action to encourage more women to discover scuba diving in a welcoming environment and to promote marine conservation.

"My biggest hope is that when a woman walks into the diving community for the first time, she immediately feels that she



(From left) Margaux De Pauw, Michelle Anne "Meech" del Carmen and Nushi Kandaiah.

belongs," she said. "If someone who was afraid of the sea and couldn't swim properly can become a scuba instructor, then perhaps my story can encourage someone else to take that first step."

She credited Qatar's diving community for helping shape that journey. "Qatar gave me more than a hobby; it gave me confidence, purpose, lifelong friendships and a second family."

"The diving community here welcomed me, guided me and encouraged me every step of the way. That's the same culture of kindness we hope to continue passing on," Del Carmen said.

She also acknowledged fellow organisers Margaux De Pauw, a PADI Divemaster, and Nushi Kandaiah, an Advanced Open Water diver, for their dedication in helping SEAsterns-in-Action grow into a commu-

nity initiative that supports women divers and marine conservation.

The organisers thanked a number of organisations, businesses and individuals for supporting the initiative, including Captain Saleh al-Mazrooei and Amandio Nunes.

They also expressed appreciation to the female divers, volunteers, surface support teams and dive buddies whose encouragement has helped create a welcoming environment for newcomers.

"As women continue to earn certifications, become dive professionals and lead conservation initiatives, we are witnessing something truly special in Qatar. More women are embracing scuba diving not only as a sport, but as a way to build confidence, connect with others and care for our oceans," Del Carmen said.

While this year's celebration took a different form than originally planned, Del Carmen said its message remained the same.

"PADI Women's Dive Day in Qatar is not simply about celebrating women; it is about celebrating the communities that encourage us, the friendships that keep us going and the belief that when people come together with a shared purpose, meaningful change happens," she said.

Encouraging more women to experience the underwater world, she added: "You don't have to be fearless to begin. You simply need the courage to take that first breath underwater. The rest of us will be here to welcome you."

Mukayamna camp opens new sporting pathways for Qatar's youth

By Shaima Sherif
Staff Reporter

Qatar Foundation's (QF) Mukayamna summer programme is giving children aged 6 to 16 early access to diverse sports, building confidence, healthy habits and potential pathways towards future athletic development across Qatar.

The camp, organised through Pre-University Education at QF, allows young participants to spend their summer exploring disciplines including cycling, taekwondo, swimming, basketball and volleyball. The wider initiative also features the Mukayamna X Ability Friendly summer programme, placing inclusive participation within the season's sporting activities.

Abdulla Shaheen al-Kaabi, head of Sports Affairs at Pre-University Education, told *Gulf Times* that the programme was designed to create opportunities for children to discover activities they may not previously have tried.

"We have just started the summer sports camp," he said. "This kind of camp focuses on sport and gives our students more opportunities to try new sports."

Rather than concentrating on a single discipline, the programme



Abdulla Shaheen al-Kaabi

introduces children to different coaching environments, physical skills and competitive experiences. Al-Kaabi said participants "come to join and explore a new sport and a new experience", while the camp also gives them opportunities to take part in competitions.

He added that the broad age range is intentional. Children between 6 and 16 are welcomed so that younger participants can begin building confidence and basic sporting ability, while older students can continue developing their interests and skills.

"For athletes and elite athletes, it is usually preferable to start at an early age," al-Kaabi said. "That gives them more confi-



dence, gives them more skills and gives them time to improve as they grow."

That early exposure can be especially valuable during the summer break, when structured activities offer children a productive way to remain active, interact with others and discover whether a particular sport could become a lasting interest, he added.

The programme also supports a wider national emphasis on physical well-being and active living, according to al-Kaabi. He said QF encourages its entities, units and departments to ensure their initiatives remain aligned with Qatar National Vision 2030.



"We also try to work in parallel with the Qatar Olympic Committee's vision and strategy, which seeks to improve and provide more opportunities for our athletes and students," he added.

