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The festival also continues to attract families seeking educational and interactive experiences. Among them was Umm Sara, attending for the third time, who praised the event for supporting local businesses. **To Page 12**



Top UN official praises Qatar as key partner in advancing SDGs

United Nations under-secretary-general and executive secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), Dr Rania al-Mashat, has underscored Qatar's role in advancing sustainable development and multilateral co-operation, while stressing the importance of expanding co-operation between the ESCWA and Qatar in areas including social protection, digital transformation, innovation, and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In an interview with the Qatar News Agency (QNA), Dr al-Mashat said that her visit to Doha reflects the strong and long-standing partnership between the ESCWA and Qatar, which she described as a key partner in advancing sustainable development across the Arab region.

She said that she had met with a number of Qatari officials to discuss support for the sustainable development agenda at both the regional and international levels, as well as ways to strengthen the exchange of expertise and technical knowledge to ad-

vance development initiatives across the Arab region.

Highlighting Qatar's role in promoting multilateral co-operation, Dr al-Mashat commended the country's steadfast support for the Palestinian cause and its efforts to promote peace in the region, stressing the importance of sustaining initiatives aimed at enhancing regional stability and addressing common challenges.

Asked to assess Qatar's progress in sustainable development and digital transformation, she commended the country's achievements in advancing its development agenda and its strong commitment to solidarity and multilateral co-operation in support of the SDGs, particularly amid the complex and interconnected challenges facing the Arab region.

Dr al-Mashat added that the ESCWA is working closely with Qatar to strengthen SDG data governance through advisory services and national workshops aimed at improving data quality and enhancing the timely availability of data.

The collaboration includes the localisa-

tion of the ESCWA's SDG monitoring and reporting platform.

On digital transformation, Dr al-Mashat said that Qatar is ranked among the top performers in the 2025 Government Electronic and Mobile Services (GEMS) Maturity Index, which covered 17 countries.

She credited the country with successfully expanding digital government services across key sectors, including commerce and industry, cross-government services, justice, municipal affairs, education, health-care, labor, and tourism.

The UN official also expressed her hope for expanding co-operation with Qatar in the coming years, particularly in the areas of strategic planning, statistics, artificial intelligence (AI), and emerging technologies.

Addressing the economic and technological challenges facing the Arab region, Dr al-Mashat said that Arab countries, including Qatar, are well positioned to accelerate sustainable development, strengthen regional integration, and support the ESCWA's efforts to help countries transform

challenges into opportunities.

She added that this requires advancing digital transformation, harnessing the potential of AI and innovation, improving the efficiency of public institutions, creating jobs, and equipping people with the skills needed for the economy of the future.

Dr al-Mashat added that achieving these objectives also requires economic and social policies that strengthen social protection, enhance food and water security, and mobilise the financing needed to advance sustainable development, thereby fostering more resilient and inclusive economies across the Arab region.

She underscored the importance of sustained investment in human capital, technology and innovation, alongside enhanced Arab co-operation in trade, development finance and knowledge exchange.

Dr al-Mashat emphasised that the challenges confronting the region transcend borders and require collective Arab action to deepen regional integration and advance sustainable and inclusive prosperity for all. - QNA



Al-Muraikhi gets phone call from Haiti minister

HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi received a phone call yesterday from Haiti's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Religious Affairs Raina Forbin. The call discussed bilateral co-operation and relations, and ways to support and strengthen them, in addition to addressing a number of topics of mutual interest. - QNA



Police Academy celebrates graduation of 7th Tomorrow's Police Programme groups

The Police Academy has celebrated the graduation of the third and fourth groups of the seventh edition of the Police of Tomorrow Programme (Summer 2026), with a total of 400 students. The assistant undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior for Technical and Specialised Affairs, Major-General (Staff) Abdullah bin Mohammed al-Suwaidi; Police Academy president Major-General Abdulrahman Majid al-Sulaiti; and Police Academy vice-president and director of the Police College, Colonel Dr Fahad Saeed al-Subaie, attended the graduation ceremony along with a number of Ministry of Interior (MoI) officers and the students' parents. The ceremony featured segments showcasing the skills the students acquired throughout the programme, which aims to strengthen national identity, instill the values of loyalty and belonging, develop leadership skills, and foster a sense of responsibility through a range of sports, military, and educational activities. - QNA



Maritime activities to resume today

From Page 1

That partial reopening followed a blanket suspension, under which the ministry advised owners and users of maritime vessels - including leisure boats, fishing boats and jet skis - to temporarily halt sailing and all maritime activities.

The measure was aimed at ensuring public safety, with updates to be announced through official channels.

The restrictions were introduced against the backdrop of disruption to shipping in the Strait of Hormuz, which has weighed heavily on regional trade and energy flows.

Qatar has said its domestic supply chains and commodity stockpiles held through the crisis, with strategic reserves and alternative supply arrangements protecting local needs.

Energy exports bore the brunt: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed that 10 Qatari energy shipments had been unable to transit the waterway.

Qatar has consistently pressed for the strait to be kept open.

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani has stressed the need for all parties to commit to dialogue and diplomacy, and to implement what was agreed within the framework of the memorandum of understanding between the US and Iran, including ensuring freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz.

Houthis hit Saudi oil ports as US pauses Iran strikes

From Page 1

Video verified by both Reuters and AFP showed a large column of smoke rising above the Aramco refinery at Jizan, which has a capacity of 400,000 barrels per day.

Two Asia-based trading sources said they had been informed of possible damage to fuel and oil storage there.

Aramco did not comment; Saudi civil defence issued warnings for both cities.

At Yanbu, two ballistic missiles and later a drone were intercepted by a Patriot battery operated in Saudi Arabia by Greek personnel under an agreement with Riyadh, Greek security sources and the Greek air force said.

Yanbu is the kingdom's main Red Sea oil terminal and has become the principal route out for Saudi crude skirting the Strait of Hormuz, which Iran has blockaded.

The exchanges threaten to reignite Yemen's own civil war.

The air force of the internation-

ally recognised government struck Houthi missile and drone launch sites and arms depots in Marib and al-Jawf provinces, Yemeni officials said, adding that both sides were mobilising along the front.

The Saudi-led coalition had bombed Houthi positions at Hodeidah

that she had not wanted to believe the strikes had resumed.

Fighting in Yemen had been largely frozen under a UN-brokered truce since 2022, after a conflict that killed hundreds of thousands through combat and famine.

That truce broke down this month.

Iran claims selling \$18bn oil during war and ceasefire

Iranian Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad said Iran sold \$11.5bn worth of oil during the war and a further \$6.5bn during a ceasefire, when lower risks to tanker traffic helped increase exports and enabled the sale of part of some 100mn barrels of stored crude oil and gas condensate. The sales generated 60% of the oil revenue forecast in Iran's annual budget, he said. - Reuters

on Friday; a Yemeni security source said a naval base there and a military camp on Kamaran Island were among the targets.

Faiza, a 36-year-old mother of two in Hodeidah, told AFP that the explosions sounded like loud thunder and

The Houthis declared a naval blockade of Saudi Arabia last week and hit two Saudi tankers, prompting Trump to vow major military punishment.

Houthi leader Abdul Malik al-Houthi has said all Saudi oil facilities are potential targets.

Brent crude spiked above \$100 a barrel this week for the first time since May.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards said they had stopped four ships attempting to transit Hormuz over the previous 24 hours, and the UK Maritime Trade Operations monitor reported a fresh incident involving a tanker near the strait.

Trump said on Friday that he had not decided on major new strikes, arguing that Tehran was becoming more serious in talks.

The US president has threatened to widen targeting to Iranian energy plants and bridges, seize the oil hub of Kharg Island and bomb the underground site known as Pickaxe Mountain, but says his red line remains Iranian progress towards a nuclear weapon.

The war, which Trump once predicted would last four or five weeks, is nearing its fifth month and weighing on his approval ratings ahead of November's midterm elections.

Iranian strikes on US bases have killed four service members.

QIIB announces June 2026 winner of QR1mn grand prize draw

QIIB has announced the winner of the QR1mn grand prize in the June 2026 draw for its “Joud” savings account.

QIIB manager (Retail Branches) Abdullah Hamad al-Mesaifri presented the QR1mn cheque to Enas Jamal A S Nasser during a ceremony held at the bank’s headquarters to mark the presentation of the first grand prize awarded under the Joud savings account in 2026.

“We extend our warmest congratulations to the winner of the QR1mn prize,” said al-Mesaifri said. “And we also thank all QIIB customers who continue to place their trust in our banking and savings solutions.”

“We are proud of the leading role the Joud savings account plays in rewarding customers by delivering genuine added value and competitive benefits that meet their evolving needs,” he continued. “This reflects our ongoing commitment to providing the highest standards of banking products and services.”

“The sustained and growing popularity of the Joud savings account reflects the strong relationship of trust and partnership between QIIB and its customers,” al-Mesaifri said. “It also underscores the account’s success in combining customers’ savings needs with exceptional opportunities to transform winners’ lives.”

“We remain committed to continuously evaluating market trends and performance indicators to further enhance our products and services, with a strong focus on digital innovation and making it easier for customers to access, manage and control their accounts and associated services,” he added.

“At QIIB, we believe our responsibility extends beyond providing traditional banking services,” the official said. “The Joud Savings Account is a cornerstone of our ongoing efforts to promote financial literacy and encourage a culture of saving and future planning across the community.”

“We invite our valued customers, as well as new customers, to take advantage of the exclusive benefits offered by the Joud savings account, particularly by increasing their savings balances to enhance their chances of winning in the multiple prize draws held throughout the year,” al-Mesaifri said. “In addition, customers can benefit from the account’s competitive periodic profit returns.”

QIIB’s Joud savings account offers two annual grand prizes of QR1mn each, in addition to 12 monthly prizes, with each winner receiving QR100,000.

In addition to its “exceptional” range of substantial cash prizes, the Joud savings account offers competitive profit returns distributed quarterly, while giving customers complete flexibility to deposit and withdraw funds at any time through the bank’s advanced digital channels or branch network.

Every customer who holds a Joud savings account is automatically entered into the bank’s regular prize draws.

In addition, every QR10,000 increase in the account balance earns an extra chance to win one of the monthly prizes or one of the two annual grand prizes, each valued at QR1mn.



Abdullah Hamad al-Mesaifri presenting the QR1mn cheque to Enas Jamal A S Nasser during a ceremony at the bank’s headquarters.

QCS launches awareness campaign on blood cancers

The Qatar Cancer Society (QCS) has launched a month-long awareness campaign aimed at increasing public awareness of blood cancers and highlighting the importance of early detection.

QCS programmes director Dr Hadi Mohammed Abu Rasheed said that the main types of blood cancer include leukaemia, lymphoma, and multiple myeloma, each of which has distinct characteristics, diagnostic methods, and treatment approaches.

He added that leukaemia is among the most common blood cancers in Qatar and ranks among the leading cancers overall, particularly among males.

Non-Hodgkin lymphoma is also relatively common and affects both men and women, while Hodgkin lymphoma tends to occur more frequently in younger adults.

Multiple myeloma, on the other hand, is less common but is seen more often in older adults, particularly men.

Dr Abu Rasheed stressed the importance of seeking medical advice if symptoms such as persistent fatigue, recurrent infections, unexplained weight loss, swollen lymph nodes, easy bruising or bleeding,



or persistent bone pain continue, noting that although these symptoms may be caused by conditions other than cancer, persistent or worsening symptoms should always be evaluated by a healthcare professional.

He further said that several factors may increase the risk of blood cancers, including advancing age, genetic predisposition, previous cancer treatments, exposure to high levels of radiation or certain chemicals such as benzene, weakened immunity, certain viral infections, and some autoimmune diseases.

Dr Abu Rasheed also pointed out

that diagnosing blood cancer requires a combination of investigations, including blood tests, bone marrow biopsy, imaging studies, and specialised laboratory tests to accurately identify the cancer type and determine the most appropriate treatment plan.

He noted that treatment options have advanced considerably in recent years and now include chemotherapy, radiation therapy, targeted therapy, immunotherapy, and stem cell (bone marrow) transplantation, all of which have contributed to improved treatment outcomes and increased survival rates.

“Raising awareness about blood cancers is one of the fundamental pillars of cancer control efforts,” Dr Abu Rasheed said. “Recognising warning signs early and seeking prompt medical evaluation can lead to earlier diagnosis and timely treatment, ultimately improving patients’ outcomes and quality of life.”

“The remarkable advances in diagnostic techniques and treatment over recent years have given hope to thousands of patients worldwide, enabling many of them to achieve better treatment outcomes and enjoy healthier, more stable lives,” he added.



Ashghal, QSC conclude 5th edition of ‘Future Engineer’ Programme

The Public Works Authority (Ashghal), in collaboration with the Qatar Scientific Club (QSC), has concluded the fifth edition of the “Future Engineer” programme, held from July 4-23, with the participation of 40 male and female secondary school students.

The initiative is part of Ashghal’s ongoing efforts to develop young talent, foster interest in engineering disciplines, and equip future generations with the knowledge and skills needed to meet evolving national and global demands.

During the first week, participants visited several departments within Ashghal, where they gained

insight into engineering practices across different sectors through guided tours, presentations, and interactive workshops.

These activities provided students with a closer understanding of the authority’s working environment and the major infrastructure projects it delivers.

In the second week, participants moved to the QSC, where they took part in intensive technical workshops and hands-on training sessions.

Working in teams, they developed engineering solutions to real-world challenges, applying the knowledge and skills acquired throughout the programme to produce prototypes under the super-

vision of experienced specialists.

“The Future Engineer programme reflects Ashghal’s commitment to its social responsibility by investing in young people from an early age through an integrated educational experience that combines knowledge with practical application,” said Fatima al-Kubaisi, the head of Ashghal’s External Relations Section.

“Providing students with direct exposure to engineering work environments and introducing them to engineering projects and disciplines helps broaden their perspectives, develop their skills, discover their career interests, and make informed decisions about their future while contributing to

Qatar’s national development,” she added.

QSC administrative and financial director Fatima al-Muhammadi described the programme as a leading example of institutional collaboration in serving the next generation, affirming the club’s commitment to providing an educational environment that nurtures young people’s passion for science and engineering.

The programme concluded with a closing ceremony during which participants presented their final engineering projects before a specialised judging panel.

Winning teams were announced, and all participants were honoured.



Al Furqan team reviews programme in Albania

The Al Furqan Initiative, under Qatar Charity (QC), sent a senior delegation to the Qatar Centre in Tirana, Albania, to review the progress of a comprehensive educational programme benefiting 300 orphaned children aged 6-18.

Designed to nurture both knowledge and character, the programme combines Qur’an memorisation, Arabic language instruction, Islamic values education, and a range of educational and cultural activities that promote confidence, responsibility, and positive personal development.

The delegation was led by Al Furqan Initiative ambassador Mohammed Yahya Taher and included executive assistant to the chief executive Ahmed Fakhroo.

The visit by the delegation was aimed at reviewing the programme’s implementation, assess its outcomes, and observe firsthand its

transformative impact on the children it serves.

During the visit, the delegation toured classrooms, observed Qur’an memorisation and Arabic language sessions, and received a comprehensive briefing on the centre’s educational approach, which integrates academic learning with moral and spiritual development to instill strong values and build resilient young personalities.

The delegation also attended a Qur’an Memorisation and Recitation Competition, where students demonstrated clear evidence of the programme’s success and progress achieved.

The event concluded with an awards ceremony honouring outstanding participants and encouraging them to continue their journey of learning and memorising the Holy Qur’an.

A 24-hour educational camp was also organised for 50 children, featuring inspirational lectures on the role of the Holy Qur’an in shap-

ing character, alongside interactive educational, cultural, and recreational activities that strengthened teamwork, discipline, self-confidence, and leadership skills.

Delegation members expressed their appreciation for the high standard of implementation and organisation, commending the dedication of the programme staff and highlighting the visible positive impact on the children’s Qur’anic achievement, personal conduct, and ethical development.

The initiative forms part of Qatar Charity’s broader commitment to empowering vulnerable children through sustainable education.

The curriculum begins with Arabic letters and language fundamentals before guiding students through the memorisation of selected chapters of the Holy Qur’an from Surat Ad-Duha to Surat An-Nas, while progressively strengthening their recitation skills.

Alhosh Gallery’s AI and robotics summer camp opens today

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

Alhosh Gallery, in partnership with Halatech Robotics & AI Edu, opens today its “AI & Robotics Summer Camp” at Porto Arabia, the Pearl.

Designed to prepare the next generation for the digital economy, the programme transforms abstract scientific concepts into practical, hands-on experiences.

Participants step into the roles of engineers and creators, learning the fundamentals of coding, programming and robotics.

Rather than just consuming technology, the programme will teach students how to actively design, build, and program their own functional robots, turning imaginative concepts into working prototypes.

The camp offers a unique bridge between holiday recreation and academic growth.

Speaking to *Gulf Times*, Mahmud Abdussalam, an engineer and high school robotics teacher, emphasised the long-term value of the programme.

“These artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics summer camps are an excellent opportunity for children and teenagers, not only to give them an interactive opportunity during the holidays, but it is an eye-opener for newcomers as well as it consolidates the skills of enthusiasts,” he said. “It is a good preparation also for the forthcoming activities during the school year 2026-27,” he said.

The programme expertly balances technical skill-building with creative design thinking.

Beyond the keyboard and circuit board, the camp places a heavy emphasis on essential soft skills.

Through collaborative challenges, participants develop critical thinking, rapid problem-solving, and teamwork, aligning their skills with the demands of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

To guarantee a high-quality educational environment, the organisers have strictly capped attendance, allowing only 15 seats per group. This low student-to-instructor ratio ensures personalised attention and direct supervision, maximising the educational impact for each participant.

Organisers urge interested families to secure the remaining open slots immediately before registration officially closes.

The intensive programme concludes with a unique “Tech × Art” exhibition.

This final showcase allows students to professionally present their innovations to parents and visitors, blending technical engineering with artistic expression while boosting their confidence as young creators.



Guterres pledges support on Damascus visit

Reuters/AFP
Damascus

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres pledged help for Syrian reconstruction yesterday during the first visit to Damascus by a serving United Nations chief since 2009, before the start of a civil war that killed hundreds of thousands and displaced millions.

Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa received Guterres at the presidential palace in Damascus, state news agency Sana said, without providing further details.

“No country emerges from a very severe conflict and rebuilds itself on its own,” Guterres said after the talks with al-Sharaa at a joint press conference with Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shaibani.

“We must help Syria in its determination and resolve to do so,” Guterres added. Al-Shaibani reiterated Syria’s request for more support from the international community, especially the European Union.

He said Guterres’s talks with al-Sharaa – which al-Shaibani

also attended – had focused on increasing UN support for reconstruction and a government plan to close displacement camps.

Al-Sharaa, the former head of al-Qaeda’s affiliate in Syria, was until November 2025 under terrorism-related sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council.

Guterres’s visit is another milestone for Syria since rebels ousted president Bashar al-Assad in late 2024, ending the war that began in 2011 and launching a transitional period steered by an Islamist-led leadership.

At the time, Guterres described “the end of the Syrian dictatorship” under Assad as a sign of hope for the region. In a post on X yesterday for what he described as a “visit of solidarity”, Guterres said: “The United Nations stands with Syria at this pivotal moment.”

The UN chief will also meet other government officials and representatives of Syrian civil society and is expected to address the country’s parliament tomorrow, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said earlier this week.



Syria's President Ahmed al-Sharaa with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres at the People's Palace in Damascus. - AFP

He will underline that the country has an opportunity “not only to recover from conflict, but also to lay the foundations for a future for Syria that will be more stable, more inclusive, and more prosperous for all Syrians”, Dujarric said.

Guterres is expected to be in Damascus for several days, but the full schedule of his visit has not been released by his office.

He is visiting just weeks after two bombs exploded near a hotel in Damascus where French Presi-

dent Emmanuel Macron spent the night, overshadowing the first visit to Syria by a European Union head of state since Assad was toppled.

Al-Sharaa’s government is seeking to rebuild Syria’s international ties and economy after nearly 14 years of war and decades of isolation under Assad family rule.

The transition has been marred by two major episodes of sectarian bloodshed that have tested al-Sharaa’s repeated pledges to protect Syria’s religious minorities.

Guterres expressed alarm over both bouts of violence and has called for accountability.

Al-Sharaa, who broke ties with al-Qaeda in 2016, led an alliance of rebel factions that ousted Assad in an offensive in December 2024.

Since taking power, his government has sought to re-establish Syria’s diplomatic ties to expand beyond Assad’s longtime allies, Russia and Iran. Last year, al-Sharaa became the first Syrian president since 1967 to take part in the UN General Assembly in New York.

The United States has lifted most sanctions on Syria and US

President Donald Trump informed al-Sharaa earlier this month that he intended to remove Syria from Washington’s list of state sponsors of terrorism.

Guterres is also expected during his trip to visit a UN peacekeeping force that has maintained a buffer zone between Israeli and Syrian forces for decades, Dujarric said.

Israeli troops have occupied new areas in southern Syria after Assad was ousted. Damascus has demanded they withdraw and return to a 1974 disengagement agreement.

Yesterday Guterres called for an end to Israeli violations in Syria.

“We underscore the importance of fully respecting Syria’s sovereignty, independence, unity, and territorial integrity,” he said at the joint press conference.

“Violations of Syria’s sovereignty and territorial integrity are unacceptable and must cease. What is happening in the region around the Golan Heights is totally unacceptable,” Guterres said, adding: “I’d like to remind the international community that the Golan Heights are Syrian territory”



QatarEnergy LNG Tender Invitation

No.	TENDER NUMBER / DESCRIPTION	TENDER ISSUE PERIOD	TENDER FEE (QAR)	TENDER BOND (QAR)	TENDER CLOSING DATE
1	LTC_C_MNT_7759_26 INSPECTION, MAINTENANCE AND OVERHAULING OF ON LOAD TAP CHANGER (OLTC) INCLUDING THE DIAGNOSTIC TESTING OF POWER TRANSFORMERS	23/07/2026 to 09/08/2026	0	75,000	12/08/2026

Scope of Work:
CONTRACTOR shall provide comprehensive inspection, maintenance and overhauling services for On-Load-Tap Changer (OLTC) including the diagnostic testing of power transformers and associated OLTC components, to be executed on a call-off basis.

Bid Validity: Bid Offer should be valid for **180** calendar days from the Tender Closing Date.

Place for Tender Collection and Bid Submission:
ITT document for this tender will be available in QatarEnergy LNG website under Suppliers tab >Current Open Tenders. The bids shall be submitted through the QatarEnergy LNG online platform (SMART by GEP).

Note: Local Companies (established under the Laws of State of Qatar with local Commercial Registration) are advised to refer to the tender documentation and In-Country Value (ICV) Digital Portal: - <https://icv.qa/en-US/> for details of ICV compliance that may be applicable.

‘No military solution’ to Yemen conflict, says Araghchi

Iran’s Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said yesterday that there is no military solution to the escalating conflict between Saudi Arabia and the Tehran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen, after both sides traded attacks.

“We believe that there is no military solution to the issue of Yemen, Bab al-Mandab, and other regional issues,” said Araghchi in an interview published yesterday by the state-run *Iran Daily* newspaper, calling for “dialogue”.

He said that the situation in Yemen “cannot be attributed to Iran” and that the incidents in the Bab al-Mandab Strait were “rooted in old disputes and issues between Yemen, Saudi Arabia and the countries of the region”.

Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei made similar remarks, expressing Tehran’s readiness to facilitate any talks between the two sides.

Renewed conflict between the Houthis in Yemen and Saudi Arabia – which had largely been frozen since a UN-negotiated truce in 2022 – flared up this month when the rebels declared a blockade of Saudi ports and claiming attacks on tankers.

The blockade has threatened Saudi Arabia’s ability to get its supplies to the world following Iran’s parallel blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, the kingdom’s only other maritime route.

“Returning to the path of dialogue and the full implementation of the agreed roadmap is the only way to end the suffering of the Yemeni people and maintain security and stability in the region,” Baqaei said.

In December 2023, Saudi Arabia and the Houthis committed to a peace process, but this unravelled during the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza, when the rebels struck targets in Israel and international shipping in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

On Friday, a Houthi spokesman insisted the rebels were not blocking all traffic through the Bab al-Mandeb Strait and that the maritime blockade “only affects the Saudi side”.

35 die in Syria bus collision

A crash between two passenger buses yesterday in a central-eastern desert region of Syria killed at least 35, state media said.

News agency Sana, quoting a health ministry official, also said 30 others were injured in the “collision between two passenger buses on the Damascus-Deir Ezzor road”.

The interior ministry said the crash was between “a bus carrying a number of internal security forces personnel and a civilian bus”, without specifying how many casualties were from its forces. - AFP

Tender - Waseef

Waseef Asset Management (Waseef) would like to invite competent Service Providers for the below Open Tenders:

Tender Number	Subject	Bid Bond (QAR)	Non-refundable Tender Fee (QAR)	Bid Submission Closing Date
GTC/WSF/CONS/GS/BABWW/18/2026	TENDER FOR PRE-CONSULTANCY SERVICES FOR GROUND SETTLEMENT ASSESSMENT, REDESIGN, AND TENDER DOCUMENTATION AT BARWA AL BARAHA WAREHOUSES AND WORKSHOPS (CLASSIFICATION MINIMUM GRADE A – CONSULTANCY FROM MME)	10,000	500	August 25, 2026
GTC/WSF/CONS/BAH/19/2026	TENDER FOR PRE-CONSULTANCY DESIGN SERVICES FOR UNIFIED ROOF STEEL STRUCTURE FOR BARWA AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROJECT (CLASSIFICATION MINIMUM GRADE A – CONSULTANCY FROM MME)	10,000	500	August 25, 2026

The Tender Document will be available from July 26, 2026 onwards upon submission of the below documentation to tender@waseef.qa.

To collect please provide the following:

- Authorization Letter on Company letterhead, copy of Commercial Registration and valid Identification of the representative.
- Bank deposit slip carrying tender number and subject details. Tender fee shall be deposited to Account Name – Waseef Asset Management Co, Account Number 0002-105222-200 with Al Rayan Bank.

Minimum requirements to be eligible for obtaining the Tender Documents:

GTC/WSF/CONS/GS/BABWW/18/2026

- The Consultant shall have a minimum of five (5) years' experience in geotechnical engineering, ground settlement assessment, structural investigations, or related consultancy services.
- The Consultant shall possess all necessary licenses and approvals required to perform engineering consultancy services in Qatar, including registration with the relevant authorities where applicable.
- MME (UPDA Registration Certificate- Grade A) Consultancy

GTC/WSF/CONS/BAH/19/2026

- The Consultant shall have a minimum of five (5) years' experience in structural engineering, steel structure design, roof structural systems, or related consultancy services
- The Consultant shall possess all necessary licenses and approvals required to perform engineering consultancy services in Qatar, including registration with the relevant authorities where applicable.
- MME (UPDA Registration Certificate- Grade A) Consultancy

Please note the following:

- Bidders should submit a bid bond issued by a bank operating in the State of Qatar, valid for 120 days from the tender closing date, corresponding to an expiry date of 23 December 2026.
- Technical and Commercial offers must be submitted in separate sealed envelopes and delivered to the below-mentioned address: GTC Secretary, 3rd floor, Waseef Head Office, New Waseef Tower (formerly Alaqaria Tower), Museum Park Street, Doha, Qatar

LET US MANAGE YOUR WORLD

Reminder

Reminder for holders of Al Rabeh Certificates issued by Ahli Bank (QPSC) since more than 10 years and remain unclaimed.

All Al Rabeh Certificates holders are kindly requested to visit any Ahlibank branch to update their profile within a month from the date of this reminder. Al Rabeh certificates not claimed by customers within this period will be redeemed and the certificates value will be transferred to the General Authority for Minors Affairs according to the laws and regulations issued in this regard.

ahlibank.com.qa 4420 5222



INVITATION TO TENDER

Tender Reference	Description	Tender Fee (QAR)	Tender Bond Value (QAR)	Bid Closing Date
QF-RFQ-1381	Cloud-based Higher Education Collaborative Intelligent Platform (CIP)	500.00	N/a	30 August 2026, 2:00 PM
QF-RFQ-1385	Cyber Security Program	500.00	N/A	28 August 2026, 2:00 PM
CO-RFQ-510	Supply and Installation of Furniture and Fittings in Qatar Foundation	500.00	N/A	20 August 2026, 2:00 PM
CO-RFQ-514	DCP and Utility Systems SCADA Integration for Sidra Medicine	1,000.00	100,000.00	27 August 2026, 2:00 PM

Qatar Foundation (QF) Procurement Directorate is inviting companies to participate in the above listed public tenders. To receive the tender documents, please follow the below steps:

1) Supplier Registration It is mandatory to be registered as a supplier with QF in order to participate in the above tender(s). Only QF registered suppliers will be allowed to pay the tender fees online. Therefore, please visit QF website at <https://www.qf.org.qa/supplier-registration> to complete the Supplier Registration process.

Tender Fee: Interested bidders can Sign in by visiting this link <https://suppliers.qf.org.qa/abstract> and pay the respective non-refundable and non-transferrable tender fee online.

All Tender Fees are to be paid using **credit cards only**.

Tender Fee Payment Dates: Payment of Tender Fee online will be from **26th to 30th July 2026**

2) All bidders, who are registered and have paid the required tender fees online to QF, will then be granted access to download the Tender Document.

3) Technical and commercial bids need to be submitted and attached online in QF Supplier Portal as per instructions provided in the ‘Supplier Portal’ work instruction.

- The commercial bid must be valid for **180 days** from Bid Closing Date.
- The commercial bid must be accompanied by a bank guarantee (tender bond) issued by a local bank in Qatar and should be valid for **180 days** from the bid closing date (where applicable as per the Tender documents).
- The successful tenderer will be required to submit a performance bond as prescribed in each of the above tender documents.
- Qatar Foundation special qualifications, terms and conditions shall apply as stipulated in the tender document.

Note: All work instructions for Supplier registration and Supplier portal can be found in below link: <https://www.qf.org.qa/supplier-registration>

Ancient Comoros medinas join Unesco’s heritage list

By Faiza Soule Youssouf
AFP

Unesco has added six centuries-old medinas in the Comoros – once historic sultanates along Indian Ocean trading routes – to its World Heritage List, raising hopes for their preservation.

The ancient cities of palaces, mosques, public squares and narrow streets, some dating back to the 12th century, are still occupied today, even though many structures are in serious disrepair.

“This listing is not a finish line but a starting point,” said Comoros Culture Minister Said Mohamed Ali Said, part of a government delegation that travelled to Unesco’s meeting in Busan, South Korea, for the announcement yesterday.

It was a moment of “immense national pride”, he told AFP.

The medinas are the first sites from the Comoros archipelago to join the Unesco list, which counts more than 1,200 properties around the world considered to have “outstanding universal value” worth protection.

They “are not just historical sites for us: they are living towns, where people still pray, trade, and celebrate life’s great moments exactly as our ancestors did”, the minister said.

“This heritage is fragile and, in places, in real danger,” he said.

“The listing changes things: it places obligations on us, but it also opens doors for us.”

The Islamic country, about 300km (200 miles) off the coast of Africa and home today to around 870,000 people, was for centuries a crossroads of maritime trade

between east Africa, the Middle East and Madagascar.

“We were globalisation before its time,” Comoros President Azali Assoumani declared in Busan, insisting that the archipelago “has long been” an “active crossroads, a place of exchange, knowledge, and refined governance”.

Four of the inscribed medinas are on the main island of Grande Comore and two on the smaller island of Anjouan.

The 14th-century medina in the capital Moroni includes the emblematic Friday Mosque with its green minaret across from the dhow port.

It is surrounded by paved alleyways and multi-storey houses, some with heavy, carved doors.

The small maritime Itsandra medina nearby is considered a cradle of Swahili civilisation.

Further south, the 12th-century Iconi medina houses the tomb of Prince Said Ibrahim, son of the last sultan of Grande Comore, Said Ali.

“The Comorian medinas were once home to historic sultanates; unfortunately, uncontrolled urbanisation and ‘modernisation’ have altered them,” said the heritage promotion office director-general, Ania Mohamed Issa.

After the Unesco inscription, “there will be the development of cultural, historical and architectural tourism, and the preservation of heritage”, said Faniya Abbas, of the Medina Wiratha cultural association.

The medinas have preserved their old urban shape, structures and traditions, according to Unesco’s nomination, but the oldest structures “are highly vulnerable, with several cases in serious disrepair”.



Men perform a dance during a ceremony as part of a grand marriage tradition, at Badjanani square in Moroni. - AFP



Children jump in the ocean in the former dhow port of Kalaweni, opposite the Grand Mosque, in Moroni's historic medina. - AFP



A general view of the facade and entrance of the historic Said Ibrahim Palace in Badjanani, which is currently under restoration, in Moroni. - AFP

Israel kills senior Hamas-led police official in Gaza, medics say

Reuters
Cairo

An Israeli airstrike has killed the head of the Hamas-led police force in the northern Gaza Strip, Brigadier-General Abdel-Nasser al-Maqadma, the Hamas-run interior ministry and medics said yesterday.

Maqadma, one of at least five Palestinians killed in Israeli strikes yesterday, was also known as the

governor of the northern Gaza Strip.

He was killed in the Sheikh Radwan area north of Gaza City, medics said.

The Israeli military said that he was also part of Hamas’s military wing.

Israel has killed dozens of members of the Hamas-led police force, including senior officials, in the past months, accusing many of them of being members of the Hamas armed wing who posed immi-

nent threats to Israel and its forces inside Gaza.

Hamas says Israeli attacks on the police force and its headquarters are intended to sow chaos and anarchy in the enclave and violate the US-brokered October ceasefire.

Another Israeli strike yesterday killed a Palestinian medic in the Nuseirat refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip, medics said.

They added that a police officer wounded by an Israeli airstrike last

week had passed away.

The Israeli military did not immediately comment on the incident.

An Israeli airstrike also killed two people in a house in Khan Younis, in the south of the enclave, medics said.

The Israeli military said the strike targeted a fighter of the Islamic Jihad group.

Later in the day, an Israeli airstrike, also in Khan Younis, killed Khaled al-Breim, a high school

student, taking the death toll yesterday to at least five.

Relatives said al-Breim was killed as he sought to bring sweets to distribute to relatives and friends who had flocked into his family home to offer their congratulations as he had just concluded high school and was preparing for university.

The Israeli military did not immediately comment on the student’s death.

The latest deaths add to a toll

of more than 1,180 Palestinians, mostly civilians, killed by Israeli attacks since an October ceasefire between Israel and Hamas took effect, according to Gaza health officials.

Hamas does not usually disclose its losses.

The truce halted full-scale fighting but has not ended near-daily Israeli strikes.

Four Israeli soldiers have been killed in Gaza over the same period.

Palestinians bury 4 killed in clash with Israeli settlers



Israeli soldiers warn a man on a scooter to leave as Palestinians are evacuated yesterday from the market in the old city of Hebron while Israeli settlers tour the area. - AFP

Palestinians in the occupied West Bank village of Tell buried yesterday four men killed during a clash with Israeli settlers the previous day, local officials said.

Violence in the Israeli-occupied West Bank has surged since the Gaza war began with the events of October 7, 2023, and the clash in Tell has already had political repercussions.

On Friday, Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that, following the deaths of two Israelis in the village, he would allow the establishment of more settlements in the region.

Israel, he said, would conduct more raids in Palestinian villages suspected of hosting militants and accelerate “the legalisation of farm outposts and establishment of new ones”.

All Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank are illegal under international law, while outposts are small settlements usually established without government approval.

Walid Zidan, head of the Tell village council, told AFP that “families of the four martyrs held a common funeral early this morning... but the army restricted who could attend and only about 30 people were able to be there”.

On Friday, about 20 Israelis from a nearby settlement entered the village and clashed with residents, Zidan said.

A Palestinian villager seized an Israeli’s weapon and shot dead one settler, leading an emergency response team from a nearby settlement to rush to the scene and more gunfire that left four Palestinians and a second Israeli dead, the Israeli military said.

Israeli forces closed gates and checkpoints throughout the West Bank, severely obstructing movement.

Troops patrolled Tell, moving between different parts of the village, while residents offered condolences to the families of the four men killed, AFP journalists reported.

A group of settlers was also seen alongside soldiers at a house under construction in the village.

By the time of the funeral,

movement was still restricted for villagers, and Zidan told AFP that the military was still present in the village yesterday morning, having detained 51 residents for questioning, and released just six.

“Every person who was brought in was assigned a number, which was written on their forehead,” said Saif Hamza, who was released after questioning.

Zidan said he still struggled to comprehend what had happened in the village.

“I am in my own home, and someone comes and assaults me,” he said. “Under what law? Under what moral or legal authority? I am in my own home, on my own land. By what right you, as settlers, come here?”

Zidan added that a field interrogation centre had been set up in a house in the village.

The Israeli military said that security forces had questioned 80 people and arrested 11.

Dozens more were arrested in raids across the West Bank, the Israeli military said, including some whom it described as suspects affiliated with Hamas.

Ghassan Daghlis, the governor of the Nablus region, which includes Tell, attended a funeral prayer at the Nabuls hospital where the bodies lay before the burial, his office said.

He was joined by crowds of mourners from Tell and across the Nablus governorate.

Israel has occupied the West Bank since 1967, but in recent years the number of settlements in the Palestinian territory has soared.

Excluding east Jerusalem, more than 500,000 Israelis live in settlements in the West Bank, home to 3mn Palestinians.

Israeli figures show that at least 48 Israelis, including civilians and security personnel, have been killed in Palestinian attacks or during Israeli military operations since the start of the Gaza war.

According to an AFP tally based on data from the Palestinian health ministry, Israeli soldiers or settlers have killed at least 1,097 Palestinians, including both militants and civilians, over the same period.

- AFP/Reuters

Nigeria’s Tinubu approves army expansion to 12 divisions with 28,000 new recruits

Nigerian President Bola Tinubu has approved an expansion of the army to 12 divisions from eight and the recruitment of 28,000 additional personnel, the presidency said on Friday, as the government seeks to bolster its response to persistent security threats.

Tinubu approved four new army divisions in Makurdi, Ilorin, Jalingo and Benin City, spokesperson Bayo Onanuga said.

The government also approved an in-

crease in investment in equipment, operational readiness and troop welfare.

The expanded 12-division structure will retain headquarters in eight cities, with the new formations covering parts of central, northeastern and southern Nigeria.

The expansion will be implemented in two phases, with the 5th, 9th and 10th divisions operational by September and the 83rd Division in Benin City by December.

- Reuters

The Chedi Katara Hotel & Resort announces new leadership with Abbass Al Souki

The Chedi Katara Hotel & Resort is delighted to announce the appointment of Abbass Al Souki to lead The Chedi Katara Hotel & Resort.

Al Souki brings a proven track record of operational excellence, inspiring leadership, and a passion for delivering exceptional guest experiences. We look forward to this exciting new chapter under his leadership as we continue to elevate the guest experience and strengthen.

The Chedi Katara’s position as one of the region’s leading luxury destinations.

Please join us in welcoming Al Souki to The Chedi Katara and wishing him every success in his new role.



NOTICE OF VOLUNTARY WINDING-UP

Notice is hereby given that **Oriental Consultants Global Co. Ltd. – Qatar Branch**, Commercial Registration No. 135092, has resolved to voluntarily wind up its operations in the State of Qatar.

Any person or entity having claims against the company is requested to submit such claims, together with supporting documents, within 45 days from the date of publication of this notice.

Claims should be submitted to: **Oriental Consultants Global Co. Ltd. – Qatar Branch**, 2nd Floor, Office No. 11, Building No. 37, Zone 63, Street 841 Al Reem Tower, West Bay, Doha, Qatar

Email: kimuraai@ocglobal.jp
Telephone: 00974-70376366



Venezuela to withdraw from International Criminal Court

Venezuela will withdraw from the International Criminal Court over the tribunal's perceived bias, the nation's foreign minister said Friday.

The announcement comes amid an ongoing ICC investigation into alleged crimes against humanity committed under ousted Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro's government.

Caracas had informed the UN of its "firm and irrevocable decision" to withdraw from the ICC, Foreign Minister Felix Plasencia wrote on X.

Interim leader Delcy Rodriguez, who took over after US forces ousted Maduro in January, had instructed the move, he added. "Venezuela considers that the Court's actions reflect a demonstrated geographical bias, which has disproportionately concentrated its work on African and Latin American countries," Plasencia said.

The Hague-based court said it had not yet received a formal notification of Venezuela's withdrawal.

"We regret any decision to depart from the collective effort to end impunity for the most serious international crimes," the ICC stated, adding it takes one year for official withdrawal from the court to take effect.

Even after that, "the withdrawing State remains bound by obligations that arose whilst it was a State Party," the statement cautioned.

"Withdrawal does not affect any pre-existing cooperation obligations arising from criminal investigations or proceedings that had commenced" previously, it added.

The ICC is currently probing alleged crimes against humanity committed during crackdowns on protestors in Venezuela since 2014.

In December 2025, Venezuela's parliament took steps to repeal the Rome Statute, the court's founding text, after the tribunal closed its Caracas office citing fruitless government talks.

And in March of this year, the ICC dismissed complaints filed by Venezuela that US sanctions on the country amounted to crimes against humanity.

When President Donald Trump took office for the second time in 2025, the US retaliated by imposing sanctions on the tribunal and its judges. Neither the US nor Israel is a party to the ICC, which tries individuals for the world's worst crimes. (AFP)

Crisis-hit Bolsonaro Jr launches presidential candidacy in Brazil

AFP
Sao Paulo

Battered by a string of political crises, Flavio Bolsonaro was supposed to formally launch his candidacy for Brazil's October presidential election yesterday, seeking to follow in the footsteps of his father, Jair Bolsonaro.

Far-right firebrand Jair Bolsonaro anointed his eldest son as his successor after being sentenced to 27 years in prison for plotting a coup in response to his defeat by leftist President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva in Brazil's 2022 election.

The Liberal Party (PL) will officially name senator Flavio Bolsonaro, 45, as its candidate at a convention in Sao Paulo, with Argentina's libertarian President Javier Milei as a guest of honor.

Flavio is promising change: he wants to "free" Brazil of crime, inflation, high taxes and Lula, who is seeking a fourth term in office.

"We are on a plane without a pilot," he said last week.

The senator was neck-and-neck with Lula in the polls until he was hit by a series of scandals: ties to a disgraced banker, a family feud, and new tariffs from ally US President Donald Trump.

Pollster Datafolha published a survey Friday showing that in a runoff election Lula would win 48 % of votes to Flavio's 43 %.

"It is a moment of weakening for Flavio...there is uncertainty over the viability of his candidacy because rejection of him has increased," Marco Teixeira, a political science professor at the Getulio Vargas Foundation, told AFP.

Flavio's troubles began in May when an audio recording leaked of him asking banker Daniel Vercaro — accused in a multi-million dollar fraud case — to finance a film about his father. Flavio had denied



Senator Bolsonaro, son of former President Jair Bolsonaro, holds dolls depicting US President Donald Trump and his father. (AFP/FilePhoto)

any contact with Vercaro and, just hours before the recording was published, told a reporter that the accusation was "a lie." He now maintains their relationship was limited to the movie.

On Thursday, a Supreme Court justice ordered an investigation into the financing of the film.

A second crisis hit Flavio's campaign when his stepmother, Michelle Bolsonaro posted an Instagram video saying he had "disrespected me and mistreated me... he said I didn't understand anything about politics."

The former first lady is key to the right-wing movement's appeal among Brazil's large female and evangelical electorate.

With divisions growing, Flavio read out a letter on social media from Jair Bolsonaro urging unity — contravening the terms of his father's house arrest.

A Supreme Court justice then blocked Flavio from visiting his father until after the first round of voting. In a bid to unite the right before the convention, Flavio this week posted a video apologizing to Michelle, who quickly accepted the

gesture of reconciliation.

Flavio Bolsonaro has cast himself as the more moderate version of his father, but is a hardliner on crime and this week echoed his father in raising debunked concerns about Brazil's electronic voting system.

The senator has struggled to seal alliances with Brazil's influential centrist bloc, with key parties announcing they will remain neutral in the October 4 election.

Flavio Bolsonaro has also faced backlash after US President Donald Trump's administration imposed two new sets of tariffs on Brazil this month. The Bolsonaro family last year backed tariffs on Brazil introduced in retaliation for the trial against the former president — an ally of Trump.

These duties were partly reversed after talks between Brasilia and Washington.

Flavio Bolsonaro unsuccessfully urged the Trump administration to "postpone" new tariffs until after the election so as not to hand Lula a "political victory." Lula has made tensions with the US a central campaign issue and has accused his rival of being a "traitor".

US casting doubts on Brazil's electoral system

Brazil has denied visa requests for two Trump administration officials who planned to travel to the country to cast doubt on the integrity of its electoral system, two Brazilian officials with knowledge of the matter told Reuters yesterday.

The officials, speaking on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter, said the US plan represented an attempt to shape Brazil's October presidential election, in which leftist incumbent Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva will face Senator Flavio Bolsonaro, a Trump ally.

Brazil denied the request for visas on Friday to the US delegation, which would have included Assistant Secretary Riley M. Barnes from the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, and also Samuel Samson, a deputy assistant secretary, the Brazilian officials said. The rejection was based on "evidence pointing to a renewed attempt to politically exploit the situation and undermine the electoral system", one of the officials said. The US State Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The alleged attempt to weigh in on Brazil's elections comes as President Donald Trump's administration seeks to influence political contests across Latin America. His recent "complete and total endorsement" of Colombia's President-elect Abelardo De La Esprilla followed support for leaders including Javier Milei in Argentina and José Antonio Kast in Chile.

Former President Bolsonaro, a former army captain and far-right firebrand, repeatedly sought to undermine confidence in Brazil's electoral system before the 2022 election, echoing tactics used by Trump in the US.

At the time, the US Central

Intelligence Agency director, under former President Joe Biden, told the Bolsonaro administration to stop casting doubt on Brazil's voting system.

Still, in the months before the 2022 vote, which Lula ultimately won, Bolsonaro had convened foreign diplomats to present unsubstantiated allegations that Brazil's electronic voting system was vulnerable to fraud. However, his campaign backfired badly.

Brazil's Superior Electoral Court, which oversees elections, later ruled that Bolsonaro had abused his position and barred him from seeking public office until 2030. Bolsonaro was later convicted and sentenced to 27 years in prison for plotting to overturn the election result and remain in power. He is serving the sentence under house arrest.

Now, as Brazil heads toward a new election cycle, Senator Bolsonaro, who has been tasked with carrying his father's legacy forward, has reignited doubts over the country's electoral system, which have been spreading through social media.

Speaking at an event attended by dozens of diplomats last week, the senator urged foreign governments to send observers to monitor Brazil's elections.

At the same event, the younger Bolsonaro claimed that Brazil's electronic voting machines were produced by Smartmatic, the company that US authorities have linked to electoral manipulation allegations in Venezuela.

Smartmatic and Brazil's electoral court both told Reuters that no Brazilian voting machines were supplied by the company.

The senator said at the event and in a statement that he had not questioned "the integrity of Brazil's voting system". (Reuters)

UN assembly approves rights chief Turk's extension

The UN General Assembly on Friday voted overwhelmingly to extend the term of UN Human Rights chief Volker Turk for four more years, despite opposition from Russia and Israel and a US threat to reassess its funding and engagement.

Turk, an outspoken critic of Russia's war in Ukraine and Israel's conduct in Gaza, who has also called for investigations into deaths in US immigration custody, had drawn strong opposition from all three countries over his willingness to challenge major powers. The vote highlighted a deepening confrontation between the Trump administration and the UN. Washington has cut funding for UN agencies and withdrawn from dozens of UN entities. A large majority in the 193-member General Assembly earlier voted against a Russian counter-proposal to extend Turk's term by just over two months to the end of 2026. (Reuters)

Trump's jokes, barbs at press freedom dinner

Reuters
Washington

President Donald Trump poked fun at the press and honored the Secret Service for protecting him at the White House Correspondents' Association dinner on Friday, returning to the event celebrating press freedom after a shooting forced the suspension of the original event in April.

Trump, whose administration has often been at odds with the press, started his speech by mostly going along with the warm and relaxed tenor of the evening, alternately mixing friendly jokes with pointed criticism of what he calls the "fake news media."

But he also could not resist taking cracks at his political adversaries in the press and show business, singling out for personal attacks journalists such as Don Lemon and Lawrence O'Donnell, politicians like Chris Christie and Adam Schiff, and celebrities including Bruce Springsteen and Jane Fonda.

Trump suggested he was going easy on the press after he had planned a more fierce criticism last time around. "This place is re-

ally the largest group of Trump derangement syndrome people ever put together at one time," he said. "I suspect some of you are lucky that our last dinner was cut short because ... I was going to go after you."

This year's dual events marked Trump's first presidential appearance at the correspondents' dinner. He had boycotted the event in his previous years in office, though he promised to come back next year.

Press freedom advocates have criticized the Trump administration over lawsuits it has filed against media organizations, restrictions on some journalists' access, and threats of action against broadcasters. He rejects the criticism, saying his administration is promoting accountability and addressing bias.

The black-tie gathering of journalists, politicians and administration officials at the Washington Hilton hotel was called off on April 25 after a man tried to force his way through a security checkpoint and fired a shotgun outside the ballroom where Trump and members of his cabinet were taking their seats.

The suspect, Cole Allen, pleaded



President Donald Trump at the White House Correspondents' Association (WHCA) Dinner, in Washington, DC. (Reuters)

not guilty in May to charges including attempting to assassinate the president.

The dinner was moved to a smaller venue at the Waldorf Astoria hotel under heightened security, and one of the first messages of the night was defiance in the

face of the assault.

"Tonight, our message is this: We are back. We will not be intimidated," said the outgoing president of the White House Correspondents' Association, Weijia Jiang of CBS News.

She added: "We refuse to let an

act of violence have the final word."

Trump later said, "We do not yield to political violence... No deranged loser with a gun will ever change that."

The event also honoured Secret Service officer Victor Gonzales, who was shot at a security checkpoint outside the ballroom in April and is credited with stopping the attack, and the Washington Hilton staff who assisted guests. Gonzales was wearing a protective vest and was the only person wounded that night.

The gala — an annual fixture on Washington's calendar for more than a century — raises money for journalism scholarships and celebrates press freedoms as guaranteed by the First Amendment of the US Constitution.

It normally features a comedian who pokes fun at the president and the press, but this year's entertainment came from mentalist Oz Pearlman.

Trump punctuated his speech with a few jokes, telling journalists, "I know it was not easy finding shoes to go along with your bulletproof vest, which many people didn't want to wear because they'd rather die than look 20 pounds heavier."

ANNOUNCEMENT

I, MD SAFIUL ISLAM MOHAMMAD SHAHABUL

holder of

BANGLADESH Passport No. EH0071324
QID No. 29005036192

hereby change my name

from

MD SAFIUL ISLAM MOHAMMAD SHAHABUL

to

MD SAFIUL ISLAM MD SHAHAJUL

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

ANNOUNCEMENT

I, AJAB KHAN SULTAN KHAN

holder of

BANGLADESH Passport No. A00639281
QID No. 27505012877

hereby change my name

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AJAB KHAN SULTAN KHAN

to

AJAM KHAN SULTAN KHAN

Any objection, please contact
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within 15 days from the publication of this notice.

ANNOUNCEMENT

I, VALAYANGAT HAMZA

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INDIA Passport No. C0551092
QID No. 25335604285

hereby change my name

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VALAYANGAT HAMZA

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HAMSAKOYA VALAYANGAT

Any objection, please contact
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Appeals court rejects bid to halt \$100,000 H-1B visa fee ruling

A federal appeals court on Friday rejected a bid by US President Donald Trump's administration to halt a judge's order preventing it from imposing a \$100,000 fee on new H-1B visas for highly skilled foreign workers. The Boston-based 1st US Circuit Court of Appeals declined to put on hold a lower court judge's June 8 ruling in a lawsuit filed by 20 Democratic state attorneys general, striking down the fee on the basis that it constituted an unlawful tax Congress never authorised. The three-judge panel said the Trump administration failed to show it was likely on appeal to succeed in showing it had not exceeded its authority by imposing the fee. The US president issued a proclamation in September that raised the cost of obtaining H-1B visas, which tech companies rely heavily on to bring on foreign workers. The H-1B program offers 65,000 visas annually, with another 20,000 visas for workers with advanced degrees, approved for three to six years. Employers seeking a visa for a foreign worker before Trump's move typically paid about \$2,000 to \$5,000 in fees. (Reuters)

Wave of Trump tariffs is likely here to stay; more are coming

Reuters
Washington

US President Donald Trump had no time for lengthy tariff investigations when he returned to office last year, wanting to hammer trading partners right away to wring concessions. What followed was a chaotic start to a trade agenda that was eventually upended by a stinging Supreme Court defeat this year. Now he and his team are moving into a new phase to build a more durable US tariff wall using more traditional and court-tested trade laws, those he had little patience for 18 months ago.

His latest global tariff salvo — duties of 10% or 12.5% on 60 countries over allegedly weak enforcement of forced-labour bans — marks the first of numerous tariff actions to be unveiled in the months ahead. They include probes into excess industrial capacity, alleged intellectual property theft by Vietnam, and national security protections for strategic industries from semi-conductors to robotics and industrial machinery.

“We’re at the end of the beginning of the Trump tariff agenda,” said Dan Ujcz, associate general counsel at Canadian oil producer Cenovus Energy, who specialises in US-Canada trade. “Within the next few weeks, and certainly by the end of the summer, we will see large parts of President Trump’s trade policy fully in effect.”

This could bring more clarity and certainty for businesses on Trump’s ultimate tariff structure, along with dread in foreign trade ministries that they may have to cough up more concessions to protect access to a \$3.4tn US import market.

Trump’s new anti-forced labour duties imposed under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, the unfair trade practices statute used against China during his first term, almost directly replace a global 10% temporary tariff that expired on Friday. They cover 99.4% of US imports, the US Trade Representative’s office said.

This rebuilds part of Trump’s signature “Liberation Day” tariffs of 10%-50% on nearly every country, which the US Supreme Court struck down as illegal under an untested national emergencies law Trump used to impose them. Another part of the baseline tariffs is likely to be rebuilt by another Section 301 investigation into excess industrial capacity, targeting 16 big trading partners, including China, the EU, Japan, South Korea, Mexico and Vietnam.

Mark Bissell, CEO of Michigan-based vacuum maker Bissell Inc, said the newest tariffs were largely what the company anticipated and it hadn’t frontloaded inventory from China and elsewhere to try to beat them. “We continued to run the business based on the belief that the tar-



The APL Sentosa container ship departs from Port Liberty in Bayonne, New Jersey on Friday amid new tariffs on 60 US trading partners. (AFP)

iffs would stay in the 10-15% range,” Bissell said.

Trump’s gamble on quick but untested tariffs right out of the gate did four things. It heaped added costs onto retailers and other import-dependent industries; it brought dozens of trading partners to the negotiating table, yielding concessions for lower rates; it prompted swift retaliation and tariff escalation from China that led to a delicate truce; and it filled US fiscal coffers with hundreds of billions of dollars.

The Liberation Day tariffs alone yielded \$166bn in revenue, a major offset to a growing federal deficit, but refunds to importers have now turned those collections negative. The 150-day temporary tariffs, based on a law meant to quell balance-of-payments crises, have added \$31 bn in assessed revenue through July 5. But if a federal court ruling against them stands, that money, too, is subject to refund.

With US public debt approaching \$40tn, Josh Lipsky, chair of international economics at the Atlantic Council, said subsequent administrations may become addicted to tariff revenue that is likely to be sustained.

“The tariff wall is being rebuilt strong brick by strong brick, and it’s very durable,” Lipsky said. Trump’s broad use of Section 301 in the forced-labour case prompted a legal challenge by small businesses, but trade and legal experts say this will take time to play out.

The statute has a solid track record in the courts, and judges may be reluctant to enjoin actions aimed at curbing forced labour and lowering barriers to US goods.

US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer made clear this week that Trump will use everything at his disposal to erect tariffs to reshore

production and shrink the trade deficit. “The specific authorities this administration is using have changed, but the trade strategy has not,” Greer told the US Senate Finance Committee.

Greer, who has not committed to a timeline for the industrial capacity investigations, has said the layers of tariffs being rebuilt will not exceed caps included in deals he has been negotiating, including 15% for the EU, Japan and South Korea and higher rates for Southeast Asian countries.

Administration officials say even though China is viewed as the world’s largest source of excess manufacturing, its rates will not exceed the cap of about 20% agreed by Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping last November, which is on top of the 25% tariffs from his first term.

Some nominal — or announced — duties may be higher than actual applied rates, which analysts say may be an enforcement mechanism for countries to stick to agreed trade deal terms.

Still, some things continue to come out of the blue, including the 50% duties on Canadian beer, dairy, hockey sticks and other products Trump announced on Monday over Ottawa’s refusal to make trade concessions, and his threat to cut off all trade with Spain over not meeting Nato military spending targets.

That proclivity for spontaneous tariff announcements remains an ongoing risk, said Eswar Prasad, a trade professor at Cornell University and former head of the International Monetary Fund’s China department.

“Trump’s eagerness to impose tariffs to address a whole range of grievances will not only continue disrupting the global trading system but will have significant adverse effects on American households and businesses.”

US court rejects Trump’s mail-in voting order

A federal appeals court yesterday declined to allow US President Donald Trump’s administration to implement in 23 states his executive order that aims to tighten rules for mail-in voting ahead of November elections that will decide control of Congress.

The Boston-based 1st US Circuit Court of Appeals rejected the administration’s request to lift an injunction several Democratic-led states secured on June 25 from a lower-court judge who concluded that key parts of the Republican president’s order were unconstitutional.

In asking the court to pause US District Judge Indira Talwani’s ruling while it pursues an appeal, the US Department of Justice had argued that because government agencies had yet to finalise actions and policies to implement Trump’s directive, any lawsuit challenging his order was premature.

The appeals court, in a 2-1 ruling, rejected that argument.

“As the district court reasoned, the (executive order) lays out a clear set of rapidly approaching deadlines by which states must coordinate with federal officials and comply with new voting procedures — all while the states must also ensure that their officials and the public understand the evolving set of rules that would govern the upcoming September and November elections,” the judges wrote.

“The Plaintiff States have no practical choice but to respond to the (order) now.” Before Talwani ruled, a federal judge in Washington, DC, rejected a related effort by Democrats to block Trump’s order on similar grounds. The Justice Department warned that absent a ruling in its favour from the 1st Circuit, it may be forced to ask the US Supreme Court to intervene.

Trump signed the executive order in March after years of calling for tighter rules on voting by mail and pushing the false claim that his 2020 election defeat was the result of widespread voter fraud. Under the US Con-

stitution, states are assigned the role of administering federal elections.

That order came on top of other efforts by Trump to overhaul elections. He has made winning approval in Congress of a divisive package of voting restrictions called the SAVE America Act a priority.

Judges have blocked an earlier executive order he signed requiring proof of citizenship to register to vote and restricting the counting of mail ballots.

The March order directed the US Department of Homeland Security to compile and transmit to the states a list of confirmed US citizens eligible to vote in each state, derived from citizenship and naturalisation records and other federal databases.

Trump’s order also required the US Postal Service to only deliver ballots to voters on each state’s approved mail-in ballot list.

USPS recently moved to implement Trump’s directive by issuing new proposed rules requiring states to provide the names and barcodes tied to their mail-in ballots.

It also directed the US Department of Justice to prioritise the investigation and prosecution of state and local election officials who issue federal ballots to people deemed “not eligible” to vote.

But Talwani, in siding with a coalition of 23 states and the District of Columbia that was led by California, Massachusetts, Nevada and Washington state, said the president lacked any authority to direct DHS to compile voter eligibility lists for each state to use and that USPS had no statutory authorization to adopt any binding regulations on mail-in voting.

The judge, who was appointed by Democratic President Barack Obama, said Trump also could not attempt through his order “to intimidate local election officials to use the necessarily incomplete confirmed citizenship lists as a resource, lest they face criminal prosecution.” (Reuters)

Armenia: The Ancient Land Waiting Beyond the Familiar

In Armenia, the landscape seems to carry memory. Roads climb through open mountains, forests gather around ancient monasteries, and cities pulse with a confidence shaped by centuries of survival, faith and reinvention. Compact in size yet immense in character, the country offers travellers a combination of living history, untamed scenery and deeply rooted culture.

Yerevan sets the rhythm. Built from volcanic stone, the capital moves easily between heritage and modern life. Museums, galleries and historic landmarks sit close to contemporary restaurants, cafés and broad public squares. By day, the city invites exploration. By night, it becomes sociable and animated, with music, conversation and street life spilling into its avenues.

Outside the capital, Armenia becomes quieter and more elemental. Lake Sevan opens across the highlands like an inland sea, its intense blue surface surrounded by mountains and vast skies. Visitors come for the views, air and outdoor pursuits, but the lake’s luxury is its sense of space.

To the north, Dilijan offers another world. Dense woodland, cool air and winding trails give the region a calm, cinematic beauty. Dilijan National Park protects a natural environment, while nearby monasteries appear among the trees, reminders that Armenia’s spiritual heritage has long been shaped by the land itself.

That relationship between architecture and landscape is equally powerful at Garni and Geghard. Garni’s classical temple stands with precision above the surrounding terrain. Geghard Monastery, partly carved into rock and recognised by UNESCO, feels inseparable from the cliffs that shelter it.

Armenia’s culture is also encountered through flavour and craftsmanship. Traditional dishes, fresh local ingredients, markets and handmade objects reveal a national identity expressed as much through daily life as through monuments.



Investment in infrastructure, conservation and sustainable tourism is opening ways to experience the country, from cultural journeys and rural escapes to hiking and adventure. Yet Armenia’s appeal is not manufactured.

It lies in the encounter between ancient stone, mountain light, generous tables and a people proud to share their story. For travellers searching beyond the predictable, Armenia feels less like a discovery and more like a revelation.





Japan identifies large share of rare earths in deep-sea mud off remote island

Reuters
Tokyo

An analysis of rare earth-rich mud retrieved from the deep seabed off a remote Pacific Island earlier this year found medium and heavy rare earth elements accounted for about 54% of the total rare earth content, Japan's government said yesterday.

But it did not disclose the size of the content or the deposits, saying the data was insufficient due to the limited duration and geographic scope of sampling.

The Japanese scientific drilling vessel, Chikyu, completed a month-long mission in February near Minamitori Island, about 1,900km (1,200 miles) southeast of Tokyo, marking the world's first successful attempt to continuously lift rare-earth-bearing seabed mud from depths of around 6km (4 miles).

The project comes as Japan seeks to diversify critical mineral supplies amid tightening Chinese export controls on heavy rare earths and related magnets, which are crucial for the defence and automotive industries.



An aerial view of Minamitori Island in Ogasawara Village, Tokyo Prefecture. (AFP/File photo)

About 50 metric tons of mud were recovered. The analysis identified yttrium, used in aerospace, energy and semiconductor applications; gadolinium, used in magnetic resonance imaging and other high-tech applications; and dysprosium, used in high-performance magnets for electric vehicles, according to the Cabinet Office's national platform

for innovative ocean development.

Japan plans a month-long large-scale mining trial in the same waters from February 2027, aiming to dredge 350 tons of mud a day. The material will be dewatered at Minamitori Island and will be processed on the mainland to test separation, refining and smelting technologies.

The trial is expected to verify the feasibility of domestic rare earth production, with a comprehensive assessment of industrialisation prospects due by March 2028, said Kazushige Kikuchi, project manager at the Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology, which operates the Chikyu.

Japan records fifth 'cruelly hot day'

AFP
Tokyo

Japan recorded its fifth consecutive "cruelly hot day" yesterday, a new meteorological term devised this year to warn people of intense heat above 40C, as officials issued heatstroke warnings in parts of the country.

The streak marks the longest number of days in a row with blistering temperatures since records started in 2010, public broadcaster NHK and other Japanese media reported.

Six cities in central Japan including in the Aichi and Gifu regions surpassed the new threshold for "kokushobi", which translates to "cruelly hot day", according to the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA).

By using this designation, JMA said in April that it would be able to "more effectively call for vigilance against extremely high temperatures", although the term does not trigger any official measures nationwide.

Close to 11,000 people sought out emergency medical care in Japan between July 13 and 19, according to the Fire and Disaster Management Agency.

Fourteen of those were pronounced dead upon arrival, the



A security guard wipes his face on a hot day in Tokyo on Friday. (AFP)

agency said, adding that the public must regard the extreme heat as a "disaster".

Japan experiences about 1,300 heat-related deaths annually and is aiming to halve that number by 2030.

Some 453 people received hospital treatment on Thursday for heat-related issues in a single day in Tokyo — the highest number since records began more than a decade ago.

Scientists say human-induced climate change is increasing the frequency and intensity of extreme heat events in Japan and elsewhere.

Japan sweltered through its hottest summer on record last year.

Its highest recorded temperature was registered on August 5, 2025, at 41.8C in Isesaki, north of Tokyo.

Italian embassy, teen apologise after viral Bangkok train dispute

AFP
Bangkok

A viral video of a Thai woman confronting a group of noisy Italian teenagers who exchange vulgar words and gestures on a Bangkok train prompted online backlash and an apology from Italy's embassy yesterday.

The TikTok video, posted on Friday, was shared more than 28,000 times with the caption: "What nationality are they?? Is it time for Thailand to stop free visas yet?"

In the clip, a Thai woman off-camera is heard repeatedly telling the Italian group to be quiet.

"In Thailand, we don't scream," she says, before a woman from the group replies: "Sorry for bringing money to your country."

One boy was filmed waving and then gesturing to the camera.

The dispute escalated as the Thai woman accused the Italians of having "no manners" — and then also used vulgar language and gestures.

The incident has divided opinion online, with some internet users criticising the teenagers for impropriety and disrespecting local customs, while others said the Thai woman reacted too harshly.

The Italian embassy in Bangkok said it condemned the "inappropriate behaviour of a group of Italian underage tourists" on a

school trip and apologised "to the people of Thailand and to everyone affected".

"Italians deeply understand and appreciate the values that Thai society places on respect for others, courtesy, and harmonious coexistence," the embassy said in a statement posted on Facebook.

The embassy also shared a video featuring three adults, who identified themselves as "leaders" of the Italian group, and the boy filmed, with each apologising to Thai people.

One woman said the teen would be "returning to Italy as soon as possible" on account of his behaviour.

The TikTok user who posted the video did not immediately respond to AFP's request for comment.

Thailand cut the length of visa-free stays for tourists in May as part of efforts to curb crimes committed by foreign nationals.

The move followed a series of high-profile arrests of foreigners over drug offences, sex trafficking, public indecency and operating unlicensed businesses.

Thailand's economy relies heavily on tourism, but foreign arrivals have yet to return to pre-Covid-19 levels.

Total tourist arrivals dropped more than three % in the first half of this year compared to the same period in 2025, with visitors from Italy down around 9.6%, according to the latest tourism ministry figures.

China evacuates over 340,000 people as Typhoon Noul nears

Authorities suspend work and rail services; many flights cancelled

AFP
Beijing

Authorities have evacuated more than 340,000 people and suspended work and rail services as Typhoon Noul approaches southern China, with flight cancellations announced in the financial hub of Hong Kong.

The typhoon is forecast to make landfall along the coast between Shenzhen and Haifeng in Guangdong province early today, China's National Meteorological Center said.

The Chinese weather forecaster issued a red typhoon alert on Saturday night, the highest level in its four-tier system. Parts of Guangdong and neighbouring Hunan, Fujian and Jiangxi provinces are set to receive heavy rainfall from Saturday night to Sunday night, it said.

When the typhoon makes landfall, it is forecast to have maximum sustained winds of 151-173kph (94-107mph).

More than 340,000 people have been evacuated in Guangdong, Xinhua news agency said.

Twelve cities across the province including Guangzhou, Dongguan and Shantou have suspended "classes, work, production, business operations, and transportation" either fully or partially, it added.

All train services in the province will be halted on Sunday, state broadcaster CCTV said.

Financial hub Hong Kong issued on Saturday night its third-highest typhoon warning, with local authorities saying it had opened 28 temporary shelters across the city.

The Hong Kong Observatory said it would consider raising the warning to the second-highest early Sunday.

"Local winds will strengthen significantly overnight," it added.

The city's airport authority said

yesterday that at least 49 flights were cancelled and 238 delayed, adding that "a large number of flights are expected to be affected tomorrow".

Hong Kong airline Cathay Pacific said it had cancelled all flights scheduled to arrive and depart from Hong Kong International Airport between 1:15am and 6:00pm local time Sunday (1715 GMT Saturday and 1000 GMT Sunday).

"A small number of other flights will be delayed as we set up our flying plan to resume once the typhoon passes," it said in a statement yesterday.

Guangdong's Shenzhen Bao'an International Airport said airlines would adjust flight schedules from Sunday morning to around midday "depending on weather conditions".

Typhoon Noul is "characterised by deep inland penetration, a prolonged duration, heavy cumulative rainfall, a path traversing complex terrain, and a high risk of causing disasters", CCTV said, citing meteorologists.

Authorities upgraded Guangdong's emergency response for "flood and typhoon control" to the third level in its four-tier system on Saturday afternoon, Xinhua reported.

A level-four flood emergency response for Jiangxi and Hunan was also activated, Xinhua added.

Extreme weather has already wreaked havoc on southern and central China this month, with 39 people killed when Typhoon Maysak triggered devastating floods in Guangxi.

Maysak also caused thunderstorms and gale-force winds that killed 11 people and injured 331 in the central province of Hubei.

Scientists warn the intensity and frequency of global extreme weather events will increase as the planet continues to heat up because of fossil fuel emissions.

China is the world's biggest emitter of greenhouse gases, but it is also a global renewable energy powerhouse that aims to make its massive economy carbon neutral by 2060.

Rohingya targeted by resurgence of disinformation in Malaysia

AFP
Kuala Lumpur

A wave of political disinformation targeting Malaysia's Rohingya population has raised alarm among rights groups that say it is fuelling xenophobia and intimidation against the refugee community.

AFP fact-checkers have debunked a torrent of falsehoods about the Muslim ethnic group on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and TikTok — including fake quotes, doctored videos and fabricated statistics.

While anti-Rohingya disinformation has proliferated for years amid military crackdowns in their home country of Myanmar, analysts say the recent uptick is part of a broader political campaign ahead of Malaysian elections next year.

"Refugees have become a convenient proxy through which wider anxieties about the economy, migration, public services, security and national identity are channelled and expressed in the most violent and hateful language," said Lilianne Fan, head of the Secretariat of the Malaysian Advisory Group on Myanmar.

"And ultimately the end message seems to be: The government is not listening to citizens."

Malaysia hosts more than 215,000 refugees and asylum seekers through the UN refugee agency UNHCR.

More than 126,000 are Rohingya, making them the country's largest refugee population.

Anti-Rohingya sentiment surged in late May after social media posts accused them of dumping waste from a cattle slaughter during Eid al-Adha.

The incident sparked an online petition calling for the government to resettle Rohingya refugees in "another country" and garnered nearly half a million signatures before it was removed.

Malaysia's human rights commission issued a statement last month expressing its "deep concern over the growing hostility, discriminatory rhetoric and online attacks directed at the Rohingya community".

Accompanying the flood of hate are rumours that the Rohingya are seeking their own territory, special rights and citizenship through marriage to Malaysians.

One Facebook post from a group called "Rohingya Malaysia" claimed there was a call for a Malaysian town to be handed over to a local refugee community.

However, AFP fact-checkers found the post — which racked up thousands of interactions — was



Rohingya refugees walk toward refugee camps after crossing the border from Myanmar at the Bangladeshi shores of the Naf river in Teknaf. (Reuters/File photo)

generated by artificial intelligence, and that no such activist group existed.

A screenshot of another Instagram post shows a man in robes kicking somebody in traditional Malaysian clothing, with the words "Rohingyas kick out Malaysians".

AFP tracked down the account owner in the US, who dismissed the fabricated image and denied having posted it.

Dozens of other posts identi-

fied by AFP used fabricated news reports to falsely claim 2mn babies were born to Malay-Rohingya marriages — a figure disproved by official data and refuted by experts as "impossible".

"Algorithms reward outrage over accuracy, allowing isolated incidents to be generalised to the entire Rohingya refugee population," said Fan, a leading Rohingya crisis expert.

Victoire Rio, a France-based information integrity analyst, ana-

lysed some of the accounts behind the posts and found "many that had a history of monetising on Facebook" as partner publishers.

"Financially motivated activity often relies on politically charged issues, like the Rohingya refugee issue, as these issues are divisive and offer particularly fertile ground for 'engagement farming'," Rio said.

Malaysian NGOs have also raised alarm about rising hate speech and intimidation target-

ing the Rohingya, with activists saying any disputes involving the ethnic group often fuel wider hostility.

"Community members are also increasingly hesitant to share their experiences or seek support because they fear becoming targets of online abuse or public hostility," said an official from the Rohingya Rights Response advocacy group, who asked not to be named due to safety concerns.

Despite accommodating one of Southeast Asia's largest refugee populations, Malaysia is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and does not officially recognise refugee status.

Responding to the calls for deportation, Malaysian Home Minister Saifuddin Nasution said last month that the government would aim to balance security and humanitarian issues by working with other countries that have a high number of migrants.

Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim added that Malaysia will "engage through Asean mechanisms with the Myanmar authorities to resolve part of the issue".

"Through our common effort, we will work to resolve the predicament of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and also here," he said in a joint press conference with his Bangladeshi counterpart.

Education minister resigns as Indian youth end protest

Reuters
New Delhi

Indian youth protesters called off weeks of demonstrations and celebrated in the streets yesterday after the education minister quit and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government bowed to demands including calls to fix a cheating-prone exam system.

The worst political crisis of Modi's third term in office had peaked this week when thousands of protesters marched on parliament, with police using tear gas to control them.

Young voters form a critical base of his Bharatiya Janata Party. But youths calling themselves "cockroaches" had taken to the streets since late June, after national exam papers were leaked forcing a resit which affected 2 million students and galvanised anger about the lack of prospects for young Indians.

The resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, the students' primary demand, came as a surprise because Modi has a reputation for refusing to act under pressure.

Modi's party faces key state elections next year. Similar youth-led protest movements brought down governments in neighbouring Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh in recent years.

Celebrations erupted at the Jantar Mantar protest site in the capital Delhi, with thousands of youngsters chanting victory slogans and dancing.

The youth-led Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) movement, which spearheaded the demonstrations, said it would end its protests.

"We have done it," said Abhijeet Dipke, CJP's founder, to loud cheers at the site.

Youngsters shouted "Jai Hind", a patriotic slogan meaning "Victory to India", as the national an-



Supporters of India's Cockroach Janta Party celebrate after India's Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan resigned following days of protests in New Delhi, yesterday. (Reuters)

them played on loudspeakers and sweets were distributed.

Roads around the central business district of Connaught Place near the protest site were shut amid celebrations and a swelling crowd of thousands of protesters.

Health Minister J P Nadda and Jitendra Singh, a junior minister in Modi's office, held a joint press conference with two CJP spokespersons after another round of talks following Pradhan's resignation.

Nadda said the government had accepted all demands of the protesters, which included reforms in the exam system, dropping police cases filed against protesters and compensating families of students who died by suicide after the exam paper leaks.

"The Cockroach Janta Party declares that we withdraw the agitation in good faith," CJP spokesperson Saurav Das said.

"All the demands raised by our team have been accepted, therefore we request protesters to withdraw and peacefully go home," spokes-



Indian opposition leader Rahul Gandhi speaks with the media in New Delhi. (Reuters)

person Ashutosh Ranka added.

"The bottom line is we have won, your struggle, hard work, and patience have paid off," Ranka told cheering crowds at Jantar Mantar on returning from the talks, and urged them to withdraw peacefully.

Opposition parties had echoed the demands of the youth and disrupted the monsoon session of parliament for the entire week, threatening key legislation

planned by the government.

Scenes of police using tear gas to control protesters had also fuelled public anger, although authorities defended their actions saying they were only enforcing the law.

Pradhan announced his resignation in a post on X.

"Considering the situation that has arisen at Jantar Mantar and across the country, so that anti-national forces do not take advantage of this situation ... I have sent my resignation letter to the Prime Minister," Pradhan wrote.

"I deeply respect the aspirations, feelings, and legitimate expectations of the country's youth."

Pradhan's resignation is "a victory of peace, patience & perseverance," activist Sonam Wangchuk, who was on a hunger strike for 26 days to support the youth movement, wrote on X.

After news of his resignation, federal authorities restored access to the mobile internet around the protest site, after blocking it for most of the week.

What started India's 'cockroach' protests that forced education minister to quit?

India's Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan quit yesterday after days of sustained public protests demanding his resignation for examination paper leaks in May that affected about 2mn students. Here is a look at what sparked the protests and the situation now:

Why did protesters want Pradhan to quit?

The immediate trigger for the demonstrations was the cancellation of the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET), India's undergraduate medical school entrance exam, after its question papers were found to have been leaked.

About 2mn students across India took the exam on May 3, but it was later scrapped, with more than a dozen student suicides linked to its cancellation. A re-test was held in June.

Why is NEET important?

The exam is the sole gateway to undergraduate medical courses across India, and millions of aspirants sit for it every year, competing for fewer than 150,000 seats, making it one of India's toughest entrance exams. The situation is also symptomatic of broader strains on the country's higher education system, where grossly limited spots leave millions cramming for months, or even years, and high-stakes entrance exams leave many of them burnt out and in debt.

Have test papers been leaked before?

Exam question paper leaks are fairly common in India, and the NEET questions themselves were similarly leaked in some places in 2024, although a re-test was not ordered at the time. Other examination papers have also been leaked in the South Asian nation of 1.4 bn people, including those for recruitment of police constables and teachers.

Why is this leak different?

The exam leak this year coincided with the birth of the self-named Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) satire movement, which appears to have channelled the frustration of the youth into the current protests. Analysts say the group, which amassed millions of Instagram followers within days of being created in mid-May, tapped into the concerns of under-30s — who make up more than half the country's population — which include high youth unemployment and the latest exam paper leak.

How did the government respond initially?

Pradhan had said the government was committed to addressing the concerns of the youth and promised exam reforms, while Modi himself vowed to punish those behind the leaks.

The government also proposed amending laws to allow imposing heavy fines and jail terms for culprits after they are tried in special courts created for the purpose. The protesters were, however, not impressed and insisted Pradhan should quit first.

What is the situation now?

Celebrations erupted yesterday at the Jantar Mantar protest site in central Delhi where the protesters have been camping for more than a month. But the founder of CJP said the government needs to fulfil two more of the protesters' demands before the demonstration can end: compensate families of students who died by suicide due to the NEET paper leaks, and act against police officers accused of cracking down on protesters who marched on parliament on Monday. (Reuters)

Scottish police make arrests after anti-immigrant protest clashes

AFP
London

Police in Scotland said yesterday officers responding to "disorder in various areas of Glasgow city centre" had made a number of arrests, after anti-immigration and anti-racism protesters staged duelling demonstrations.

Unverified footage posted on social media showed scuffles and violent confrontations between the two rival groupings in and around Glasgow Green, a park southeast of the city centre.

Police, including officers on

horses, could be seen intervening, with attendees on both sides wearing masks.

Anti-immigration group Unite The Clans Scotland had advertised a protest there starting at 12pm (1100 GMT) under the banner "save our women and children" and "protect our future".

The Stand Up To Racism organisation held a counter-demonstration, saying it was "opposing the far-right in Glasgow".

"Police are responding to incidents of disorder in relation to planned protest in Glasgow Green," Police Scotland said in a mid-afternoon statement.

"A significant policing opera-

tion is in place... and a number of arrests have already been made.

"We understand the concern this is causing in the community and anyone with concerns can approach officers," the force added.

"This is a particularly challenging situation, and officers are working hard to bring this incident to an end."

The Glasgow Green rally was the latest in a series of protests around immigration in Scotland's largest city, while towns and cities in neighbouring England have seen numerous similarly themed demonstrations — some turning violent — in recent years.

Scotland declares 'major' wildfire in Cairngorms national park

Scottish firefighters fought yesterday against a wildfire burning through the Cairngorms national park in the north, with the authorities advising locals to evacuate. The Scottish police have declared a "major incident" over the blaze, which has spread across some 600 hectares (1,500 acres) of the Highland park's heather and brush since being declared 10 days ago.

More than 500 firefighters have been deployed alongside helicopters to douse the flames in the Cairngorms, a mountain range west of Aberdeen which has long been a tourist attraction.

After chairing a crisis meeting on Friday evening, Scottish First Minister John Swinney called the efforts to tackle the fire "a complex and difficult situation".

But in a post on X on Saturday he also said "there has

welcome change in wind direction overnight which has reduced the immediate threat" to the Highland village of Nethy Bridge.

The authorities ordered Nethy Bridge's some 650-strong population to leave "as a precaution".

Other residents of remote areas nearby were also being evacuated on Saturday morning, the firefighters said in a statement. Local resident John McGlinchey told the BBC he felt disappointed that residents were "having to wait until the flames are almost on our doorstep and having to relocate at such notice".

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service likewise advised inhabitants of villages close to the blaze "to keep windows and doors closed as a precaution due to smoke from the wildfire". (AFP)

Australia's Queensland confirms H5N1 bird flu case

Queensland became Australia's fourth state to confirm a case of H5N1 bird flu after authorities said on Saturday that a migratory seabird tested positive for the highly pathogenic virus.

Australia was the final continent to confirm a mainland case of H5N1 when the disease arrived in June, although it had been detected in late 2025 on the sub-Antarctic territory of Heard Island, about 4,100km (2,600 miles) from continental Australia. Eighteen infections have now been confirmed across four states, including in the dead petrel found

by Queensland park rangers at Moreton Island, a wilderness area about 40km (24 miles) by ferry from state capital Brisbane.

"There remain no detections in poultry, nor evidence of large-scale deaths in any animals in Queensland," the authorities said in a statement, adding that the risk to human health remained low.

The virulent strain of bird flu has spread through wild bird and mammal populations since 2021, killing millions, infecting poultry and dairy farms and even some farmworkers. (Reuters)

Heatwave effect in London



An aerial view shows the green square and parched, dry and yellow grass on the cricket field of Maidenhead & Bray CC during a game, in Bray, west of London yesterday, during the extended heatwave. Several areas of southern England were at "exceptional" risk of major wildfires, according to government advisory body Natural England, as Britain has faced unprecedented heatwaves for much of the last two months. (AFP)

Crime gangs snare more than \$88bn in scams in Asia-Pacific, UN says

Reuters
Bangkok

Scam gangs defrauded Asia-Pacific residents of at least \$88bn in 2025, a UN office said on Tuesday, with transnational crime groups rapidly evolving tactics to stay ahead of law enforcement.

Criminals in Southeast Asia, an epicentre for cyberfraud by mostly Chinese-origin syndicates, are outpacing crackdowns, diversifying revenue streams, exploiting corruption and harnessing artificial intelligence, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) said in a new report.

The report estimated scam losses across East Asia, Southeast Asia, Australia and New Zealand between \$88.3bn and \$114.1bn for 2025, a figure larger than the GDP of several of the nations in the region.

Networks that once operated within specific territories or illicit trades are increasingly expanding across multiple illegal markets while using shared services, said Delphine Schantz, UNODC Regional Representative for Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

"Their operating model looks like corporate franchising: imagine specialised departments for laundering money, trafficking people, smuggling migrants, and

The report estimated scam losses across East Asia, Southeast Asia, Australia and New Zealand at between \$88.3bn and \$114.1bn for 2025, a figure larger than the GDP of several of the nations in the region

harvesting data, all plugged into the same, service-based interconnected network," she said.

Scam centres in Southeast Asia run illegal online schemes that defraud people worldwide, generating billions of dollars of annual revenue. Many facilities are staffed by trafficked foreign nationals, confined in oppressive environments.

People from at least 80 countries and territories have been

identified in scam compounds across the region, with recruitment networks using transit hubs in Asia, the Middle East and Africa, according to UNODC.

Scam operators are increasingly seeking recruits from outside Asia as they expand into new markets, UNODC said.

Recruitment advertisements linked to the industry's communication channels have targeted people with German, Polish,

Dutch, Spanish, Italian, French, Swedish, Norwegian and English language skills, it said.

Recent pressure from law enforcement in the region has displaced but not dismantled operations, UNODC said, with gangs relocating from countries like Myanmar and Laos to East Timor, Pacific Island states, and parts of Africa.

Syndicates engage in "jurisdiction shopping" to find places with weak governance and regulation, the report said, adding that corruption was the "primary enabler" of tech-driven organised crime in the region.

Beyond using generative AI to

create content, criminal groups are expected to adopt agentic AI systems to more autonomously identify victims, conduct social-engineering campaigns and facilitate cryptocurrency theft and laundering, the report said.

The scam sector's rapid growth has fuelled an ecosystem of ancillary criminal services, including money laundering, underground banking and data trading, it said.

"The scale and complexity of this expanding organised crime economy are outpacing existing responses, which were not structured to address such sophisticated criminal activity," said Inshik Sim, a lead analyst at UNODC.

Pleasantly digital: The queue that quietly disappeared

There was a time, not so long ago, when a straightforward errand in Doha was measured not in minutes but in mornings. An attestation, a bank transfer, a specialist referral — each carried its own tax in patience, paid standing up. That this has changed so thoroughly, and with so little fanfare, is itself worth pausing over.

The numbers tell a story of steady, unglamorous improvement. Hamad Medical Corporation, redesigning patient pathways across six clinics at Hamad General Hospital, cut average waiting times from 29 days to seven. MRI waits fell from around 75 days to roughly a fortnight. A fast-track system trimmed another service area by a third. At the Communicable Disease Centre, outpatient waits compressed from about seven weeks to two or three. The 2025 annual report records 75% of Qatari patients under one initiative seen within a fortnight, with an average wait of 15 days.

None of these figures were achieved by a single grand

announcement. They are the residue of process work — scheduling reviewed, capacity reallocated, referrals rerouted — the sort of endeavour that rarely makes a headline and almost never makes a ribbon-cutting.

Scale makes the achievement more striking. The Primary Health Care Corporation recorded 5,169,998 visits in 2024, averaging more than 430,000 a month. Under that volume, 76% of patients were seen within 30 minutes. Virtual consultations accounted for 8% of the total. For a Doha resident such as Adele R, who told this newspaper her doctor now reviews test results and prescribes over the phone, leaving only a pharmacy collection, the gain is not abstract. It is a morning restored. Government services show the same pattern. Entities operating through Qatar's integrated service centres completed 46,786 transactions in June alone, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs accounting for the largest share at 18,385, followed by the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Labour. The centres themselves embody the underlying principle: bring

the counters to the citizen rather than sending the citizen from counter to counter.

Document attestation, once the archetype of bureaucratic endurance, has been rebuilt around it. Applications submitted through Tawtheeq are reviewed within one working day; approval, payment, collection and delivery can be handled without an office visit. The ministry extended electronic attestation to police clearance certificates and government-school educational documents in October 2024, and in December opened the process to users abroad. Anyone who has assembled a file of certificates from another country will recognise how much friction that single change removes.

Banking has followed. QNB's queue-management function lets customers check waiting times, book an appointment or draw a ticket before leaving home — a modest feature that quietly transfers control from the institution to the customer. Its digital account-opening and remote transaction services do the rest.

What connects these examples is not technology, which is available to everyone, but co-ordination — the willingness of separate institutions to share infrastructure and design around the person waiting rather than the desk serving. That is the harder part, and it is where Qatar's digital-government strategy has earned its results.

Candour is due on the remainder. Queues have not been abolished, nor should they be. Medical examinations, specialised consultations, biometrics, original-document verification and cases that genuinely need a human being across the desk will continue to require presence. The measure of success is not the elimination of the counter but the reservation of it for work that warrants it.

That is the standard by which the next decade should be judged: not how many services move online, but whether the ones that stay physical are worth the journey. On present evidence, Qatar is asking the right question.



Pigeons cool off at a decorative water fountain as temperatures reached 41C in Doha yesterday. (AFP)



By Jamie McGeever
Orlando, Florida

Foreign capital is flooding into Wall Street courtesy of the AI revolution. Paradoxically, however, this is intensifying the spotlight on America's chronic external deficit. How long can this massive imbalance last?

Investors around the world have poured trillions into the US stock market in recent years, lured by the juicy returns promised by the artificial intelligence boom, which has spurred the biggest capex spending spree in history. This flow of overseas money into US equities is now the key funding source for the US current account deficit, which has widened beyond pre-pandemic levels.

America's current account deficit represents the difference between the value of all the goods, services, interest, dividends, and income the US imports and what it exports. The US has been in deficit for decades. To fill that gap, foreigners must "lend" money to Uncle Sam by purchasing US assets.

The Trump administration is striving to reduce that gap, especially the goods and services trade deficit, through a range of policies around immigration, domestic investment, and, of course, tariffs. It remains to be seen how successful those efforts will be. The trade gap has been hovering around 3% of GDP for the last few years, and the current account deficit is closer to 4% of GDP.

These are big shortfalls in a \$31 trillion economy. Attracting foreign capital to fill them is necessary to prevent the dollar from tumbling or bond yields from spiking.

In theory, it doesn't matter how the gaps are covered, just as long as they are. But some sources of capital may be preferable to others.

Over the past 20 years, the composition of this funding mix has shifted - from the yield-insensitive "official" sector to return-hungry private investors - and that has arguably made America's massive foreign liabilities look a lot more worrisome.

In February 2005, then-Fed Chair Alan Greenspan noted a "conundrum": US bond yields remained low despite a series of interest rate hikes. What could explain this? A month later,

Who is funding America's widening debt with the rest of the world?

then-Fed Governor Ben Bernanke offered a potential answer. In a now famous speech, "The Global Savings Glut and the US Current Account Deficit," Bernanke noted that emerging economies had, in a turnaround from previous decades, become a source of capital lending rather than borrowing. It was this flood of capital coming into the US, especially into the government bond market, that was suppressing interest rates.

He had a point. In the decade leading up to the Global Financial Crisis, the US current account deficit was large, hitting a record 6% of GDP in 2006. This yawning deficit was financed by various sources of foreign wealth, whether from oil ("petrodollar" Gulf countries), trade surpluses (China, and much of Asia) or high levels of national savings (Japan).

What all of these funding sources had in common was a thirst for US

government debt, or Treasuries. Central banks were hoovering up Treasuries to keep their exchange rates competitive and build their foreign exchange buffers.

Bernanke argued that this foreign demand for US debt delayed the reckoning that the widening global imbalances - the large US deficits and corresponding surpluses elsewhere - portended.

While the day of reckoning may have appeared to come in 2007-08 in the form of the US subprime housing crisis, global credit crunch and Global Financial Crisis, these global imbalances are back. Now, though, the nature of US deficit financing has changed dramatically.

The increasing integration of global financial markets in recent decades and loosening of capital controls in many emerging and developing economies have helped boost capital accumulation in the private sectors of these

countries. These funds, in turn, have often found their way back into US financial assets as overseas investors have sought large, liquid markets and the prospect of high returns. As a result, private foreign capital has gradually replaced central bank capital as the primary funding source for the US current account deficit.

Consider that in 2004, Japan's official holdings of US Treasuries accounted for 18% of all outstanding US debt held by the public, and in 2010, China's equivalent share represented 14%. These holdings have evaporated to less than 4% and just 2% today, respectively.

Of course, overseas investors continue to buy Treasuries. Their total holdings stand at a record \$9.4tn, more than half of which is now held by the private sector. But overall, foreigners now hold only 30% of all outstanding, publicly

held US federal debt, compared to 50% in 2012. Foreign governments have gradually reduced exposure to US bonds for various reasons, including geopolitical, financial, and domestic economic considerations.

Equities now hold more allure. In 2010, foreign investors held a third of their US financial assets in equities, and 22% in Treasuries. In the first quarter of this year, those shares stood at 61% and 14%, respectively. Foreign ownership of US stocks now stands at a record 18%, nearly double what it was in the mid-2000s.

This shift could be a cause for concern. "Central banks tend to be 'buy and hold' investors to a large extent. Central banks typically care about safety, liquidity, then yield. In that order," says Eswar Prasad, professor of economics at Cornell University. "For private investors, to some extent the order

is flipped for them - they care about yield, liquidity and a little less about safety."

This isn't an issue when Wall Street is booming. But it's not difficult to imagine that dynamic suddenly turning, if Wall Street hits the skids or other markets suddenly look more attractive. Private capital flows could then slow, or worse, reverse, making America's current account financing much more perilous. On the other hand, foreign investors may simply be onto something.

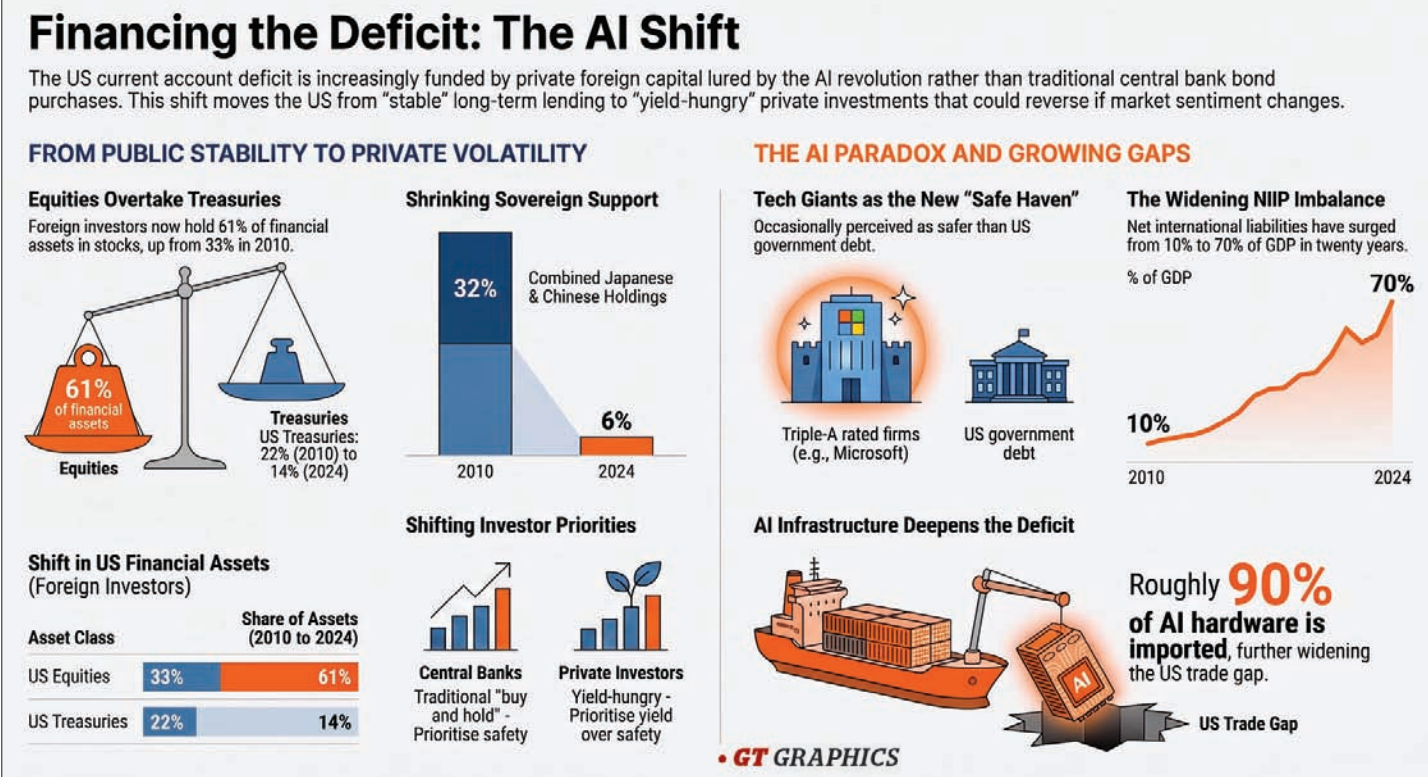
It sounds counterintuitive, but by some measures, today's US tech behemoths are just as "safe" an investment as Treasuries. Apple and Microsoft have a triple-A credit rating, unlike the US government, and the two-year yield on some corporate debt, like Microsoft bonds, is sometimes lower than the two-year Treasury yield.

Moreover, some of the Big Tech firms are now so important to the US government from an economic, strategic and national security standpoint that it's almost unthinkable that they would be allowed to fail.

It's not just private overseas sector capital that has been lured into Wall Street in recent years. Many central banks and sovereign wealth funds have increased exposures to trillion-dollar US megacaps like Apple, Microsoft and Nvidia. In essence, they've swapped the safety and liquidity of Treasuries for what many now consider the safety, if not the liquidity, of Big Tech.

According to analysts at Deutsche Bank, the gap between increasing net flows into US stocks and slowing flows into US debt has never been wider.

"The US fiscal position is weakening, while US corporate profitability is going from strength to strength," they write, adding: "AI could accelerate these dynamics as companies get richer and the redistributive pressures on governments grow." In fact, one unwelcome byproduct of the AI buildout may be a wider US current account deficit. A Fed paper this month found that investment-specific technology shocks are associated with a "persistent current account deterioration of roughly 10% relative to its historical average." That is usually because imports surge as tech investment booms.





Firefighters battle a wildfire in Cebreros area, near Avila, 80 km west of Madrid on Friday. (AFP)

Spain fights to ‘save lives’

AFP
Madrid

Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said yesterday firefighters were working to “save lives” in the blazes raging west of Madrid, as authorities said a separate fire in the east killed one person.

The fires in the parched countryside have forced 60,000 people to flee their homes, the interior ministry said, in what officials have called the region's worst fire on record. The central government delegate in Madrid had earlier given a higher estimate of around 70,000.

“Our priority, our thinking, our aim is for your lives, to save your lives and protect inhabited areas,” Sanchez told reporters in the village of Cenicientos in the fire zone.

“We are going to have some complex hours ahead because although the temperatures have gone down, we do not know exactly how the wind will develop, how strong it will be.”

Early yesterday the smell of burning reached the streets of central Madrid, forcing them to keep their windows closed. The health ministry on X advised people to avoid staying outside for long periods because of bad air quality.

Evacuees from surrounding villages were bussed in to shelter in sports halls around the capital.



Firefighters assess the area outside the El Tiemblo village during efforts to battle a wildfire affecting Castile y Leon province, Spain. (Reuters)

When flames reached the village of Robledo de Chavela, Rosa, 56, refused to leave at first because she wanted to arrange for carers to rescue the feral cats that she keeps.

“I felt very ill because I have asthma. I started coughing and I threw up,” she told AFP at a gymnasium in the northern Madrid suburb of Alcobendas.

“In the end... they (police) came to get me,” she said, asking not to be identified by her last name as she was concerned for her safety.

“They didn’t do anything for the cats, but they told me I had get out of the house one way or the other.”

The interior ministry said on X yesterday afternoon that another 30,000 people had been evacuated from villages near Madrid and nearly 30,000 from neighbouring Avila province, bringing the total who have fled to 60,000.

It said 8,000 were ordered to stay in their homes in Madrid and 20,000 in Avila.

Easing heat overnight offered a “window of opportunity this weekend to fight... this very serious fire”, Sanchez said.

Two separate wildfires in the Madrid region combined on Friday to form one huge blaze, which threatened to merge with a third near Avila in the neighbouring

Castilla y Leon region.

A separate, smaller fire in a ravine near Valencia in the east meanwhile killed one person, the local authority in the affected town of Manises said on X, without giving further details. The Madrid regional government said on X that more than 2,000 people were being looked after in 14 emergency evacuation centres.

Jacqueline Villafranca, 38, from Peru, told AFP she was evacuated in about an hour on Friday evening from the village of Navalagamella to Alcobendas with her husband and two daughters, aged 16 and two.

When the fire alerts sounded on telephones, “I thought everything was going to burn, the house and everything,” she said at the sports hall, where they sat dozing and eating snacks.

“Yesterday was unbearable. My daughter came home from holiday camp and said: ‘Mum, I can’t open my eyes, my eyes are burning’” from the smoke, she said.

“And then the alerts started to sound and I evacuated.”

So far this year fires have burned more than 168,000 hectares in Spain, according to the EU’s European Forest Fire Information System.

Spain recorded its worst wildfire season in recent history in 2025, when more than 393,000 hectares were destroyed, EFFIS said.

Ukraine strikes Siberia refinery as Kazakh leader tells Putin war should end

AFP
Moscow

Ukrainian drones struck a Siberian oil refinery yesterday and disrupted an Urals athletics competition, as Kazakhstan’s president told Russia’s Vladimir Putin the Ukraine war should end during a forum in Siberia’s Omsk.

In occupied Ukraine, Russian-installed authorities said a Ukrainian strike had killed 12 people at a seaside “tourist camp”, as well as one more in a Moscow-held town and two in Russian border villages.

Kyiv said Russian attacks killed five people in eastern and southern Ukraine.

The deaths come as the UN has warned of civilians dying in larger numbers recently in the almost 4.5-year war.

US-led talks on ending fighting have stalled and the Kremlin said it intends to seize the rest of east Ukraine.

Moscow said Ukraine – which has intensified its retaliatory strikes – launched more than 300 drones into Russia, including on far-flung regions, yesterday. The governor of Siberia’s Tyumen region said a local oil refinery was set ablaze, while Russia’s athletics federation said an all-Russian competition in Yekaterinburg was halted over drone threats.

Ukraine’s Volodymyr Zelensky claimed the Siberia strike and said Kyiv had hit a military factory in the Kirov region for a second day in a row, a day after an attack there killed five people, according to local authorities. Kyiv has said its retaliatory strikes are aimed at damaging Moscow’s war effort and forcing the Kremlin to negotiate.

In Siberia’s Omsk hours after the strikes, Kazakh leader Kassym-Jomart Tokayev told Putin the Ukraine war should end as the pair met for a Russia-Kazakh summit.

“It is a shame, young people are dying... All this has to be stopped,” Tokayev said sitting next to Putin in televised comments. Putin is rarely confronting with officials publicly telling him the fighting should stop.

Tokayev said the conflict should be “frozen” and suggested a return to Istanbul talks before moving “to a long-awaited peace.” The Central Asian leader, who is a Moscow ally but who has never condoned Russia’s of-

fensive, said the roots of the war are “not understandable”.

Putin responded that he will inform Tokayev on “the details” of the war.

The Russian leader has repeatedly said Moscow intends to take the rest of east Ukraine by force. US-led talks to end Europe’s worst conflict since WWII have stalled.

Russian occupational authorities in southern Ukraine said a Ukrainian strike on an Azov Sea town left 12 people dead, including four children, yesterday, accusing Kyiv of targeting a “tourist camp”.

Yevgeny Balitsky, the Kremlin-installed head of the Russian-occupied part of the Zaporizhzhia region, said the strike hit the seaside town of Kyrylivka.

“The whereabouts of eight people is unknown and rescue operations are ongoing,” Balitsky said.

Another person was killed in the occupied part of the Kherson region, Moscow said.

Kyiv has not yet commented on the strike.

Ukraine has upped attacks in the Azov Sea, where it has targeted Russian shipping.

Ukraine’s Zelensky said a Russian strike on the north-eastern town of Sumy – which he said included a “double-tap” attack – killed three people at a site belonging to the Nova Poshta private courier service.

Two other people were also killed in southern and eastern Ukraine, Kyiv said.

Far from the battlefield, Ukrainian drones disrupted an all-Russian athletics competition in the Urals city of Yekaterinburg. Also in Yekaterinburg, Russian online retail giant Wildberries said it evacuated its staff over a drone threat, but said its facility was not damaged. Wildberries – Russia’s version of Amazon – has been targeted by Kyiv’s drones for a week, which have caused fires and losses.

Ukrainian drones have caused nationwide fuel shortages and disrupted ordinary life in Russia more than at any point during more than four years of war.

Russia said yesterday it would extend a fuel export ban until the end of the year. Ukrainian strikes on oil depots and refineries have caused unprecedented shortages and queues at petrol stations.

Ukraine has said its strikes are aimed at damaging Russia’s war effort and force the Kremlin to negotiate an end offensive.

Chinese-origin Canadian Nato intern arrested on spying suspicions

A Canadian citizen of Chinese origin suspected of carrying out “espionage on behalf of a third country” while on an internship at Nato has been arrested in Belgium, authorities said yesterday. The intern, who worked at the US-led defence alliance’s Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) in Mons, was arrested on Thursday, the Federal Prosecutor’s Office said. “She is suspected of spying on behalf of a third country and of being a member of a criminal organisation,” the prosecutor’s office said in a statement. “The suspect had come to the attention of SHAPE’s security services, who reported the matter to the General Intelligence and Security Service,” the office added, without specifying the nature of the alleged spying. After taking up the case, the prosecutor’s office entrusted the investigation to the federal judicial police in Charleroi, which carried out searches on Thursday at the suspect’s home, as well as at her workplace. A magistrate subsequently served the suspect with an arrest warrant on Friday. (AFP)

France’s A400M plane carries out firefighting mission

A military transport plane deployed by the French government yesterday to help fight wildfires carried out its first firefighting mission, AFP journalists saw.

The A400M military aircraft, equipped with a dispensing kit that can release 20 tonnes of water or fire retardant, flew over a forest fire in Lacanau in southwest France, leaving a vivid orange plume in its wake.

According to the government, the plane’s capability represents “the equivalent of three Canadair aircraft in terms of water volume.” The deployment of the aircraft had previously been



Airbus A400M making its first-ever drop over the wildfire. (Reuters)

scheduled for the end of the month due to preparations and testing.

But Prime Minister Sebastien Lecornu ordered its immediate use yesterday due to the severity of the fires raging in southwest.

The ministries of interior and defence had signed a joint agreement with Airbus to make available and equip, on an experimental basis, an A400M aircraft with an aerial firefighting kit to help France douse the blazes.

Meanwhile, President Emmanuel Macron yesterday said his country would rebuild after the devastating fires. (AFP)

French wildfires: Disappointment, fear as tens of thousands evacuate

Reuters
Bordeaux

When raging wildfires threatened Mohammed Laabar’s hometown in southwestern France on Friday, he and his wife gathered their three-year-old son, grabbed a pre-prepared survival kit and fled to nearby Bordeaux.

Within hours, however, the winds shifted, carrying smoke and fumes from the fires into Bordeaux. For Laabar, a 35-year-old truck driver who lives in the town of Salaunes, the apocalyptic scenes that have come to define France’s scorching summer of 2026 offered a sobering glimpse of the years ahead.

“We’ll see this more often in the future, that’s for sure,” he told Reuters at a makeshift evacuation centre in Bordeaux, where hundreds spent the night on Friday.

Authorities have evacuated 197,000 people from southwestern France so far after fires encircled the Atlantic coast peninsula of Cap Ferret, a major tourist destination at the height of the summer season.

French President Emmanuel Macron has enlisted the military



Local residents rest at the Parc des Expositions de Bordeaux after being evacuated due to wildfires in the region yesterday. (AFP)

to support exhausted firefighters battling a catastrophic tapestry of fires across the country, following a record-breaking heatwave that resulted in nearly

6,000 excess deaths.

Among those gathered at the evacuation centre in Bordeaux on Friday, there was disbelief, disappointment and fear for the future,

as people waited, uncertain for how long they would remain stuck in the refuge.

Sitting with her husband and two grandsons, 71-year-old Ber-

nadette fretted about her house in Lège-Cap-Ferret, which she evacuated in the middle of the night on Wednesday with “very little time to leave”.

“I left without any of my things, with nothing, with the two little children”, she said. “I forgot plenty of things, my eye medications, everything”.

Her home is in an area where firefighters have battled to save houses and buildings from the flames.

Bernadette, who declined to give her surname, said she had moved two more times as the fires spread, and had barely slept.

“I was at Lège, after that Andernos, and after that Bordeaux. And then now there’s fire here too,” she said, referring to the smoke which could be seen and felt in Bordeaux. “I’m going to scream.”

The Cap Ferret fire moved inland yesterday, reaching an area about 30km from Bordeaux. French Interior Minister Laurent Nunez said the situation was calmer yesterday although winds were expected to pick up again during the afternoon.

Among the tourists forced to abandon their holidays was 37-year-old Henri Sauter from

Germany who had been in Cap Ferret with his extended family of nine adults, five children and a dog.

“There were ashes in our drink while we were having dinner, so it was a very weird feeling,” he said.

He said the family hit heavy traffic after abandoning their rental on Friday when they received a text message ordering them to leave.

He said they saw flames 300 metres away as they slowly exited along the one road in and out of the peninsula.

Across Europe, three successive heatwaves this season helped wildfires scorch more land already this year than the annual average of the past two decades.

Many people sheltering at the evacuation centre said they feared the wildfire threat was worsening.

Retired computer engineer Jean-Pierre, 68, from Andernos said he had lived in the region for most of his life, but this was the first time he had to be evacuated.

Fires occurred from time to time when he was young, he said, but they were unusual. Over the past eight or nine years, they had become far more frequent, with multiple blazes often burning simultaneously.

“It’s catastrophic,” he said.



11th Local Dates Festival begins at Souq Waqif

From Page 1

“It is beautiful to see how such initiatives support local businesses,” she said. “The local farmers are showcasing, exhibiting and selling their freshly organic dates directly from the farms and for a very reasonable price.”

She described the exhibition as an enjoyable family outing where visitors can discover the diversity of Qatar’s date varieties.

“You will be shocked to see how many varieties of dates exist,” Sara said. “It’s a family thing. Your kids can enjoy, your parents can enjoy, as a mother you can enjoy. These are the food items we would like to see in our daily eating routines. By taking children out and showing them everything, it is more of a fun activity.”

Last year’s festival attracted more than 100,000 visitors and recorded sales exceeding 170,000kg of dates, highlighting the event’s growing popularity.



Mohammed Abdullah al-Salem;
PICTURES: Thajudheen



Ahmed al-Yafie.



PICTURE: QNA



PICTURE: QNA



MIA, Lekhwiya partner to launch Summer Camp 2026

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

The Museum of Islamic Art (MIA) has announced its Summer Camp 2026, in partnership with the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya), running from August 2-13. The camp targets Qatari students aged 9-13, offering a programme that combines education, culture, physical activities, and leadership development.

Qatari families are so keen on these summer programmes for their practical and entertaining schedules as well as it is an opportunity to build the characters of the youth and their love to the mother land.

The camp will run daily from 9am-1:30pm and provides a comprehensive experience designed to develop participants’ skills and enhance their knowledge through a variety of educational and interactive activities. Registration is open for both boys’ and girls’ programmes.

The programme combines learning within the museum with exploration of arts, sciences, and culture, alongside hands-on experiences that enrich children’s knowledge and broaden their horizons. The partnership with Lekhwiya also includes a range of sports activities, swimming, leadership programmes, and interactive challenges that foster teamwork, discipline, and self-confidence among participants.

The camp also includes specialised educational workshops offered



(File photo)

by the Qatar Science Club and the Qatar Calendar House, providing participants with the opportunity to explore diverse scientific and cultural fields through hands-on activities and innovative teaching methods. The programme includes an educational visit to the 3-2-1 Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum, aiming to introduce chil-

dren to the history of sports and inspire them with the values of excellence and achievement, within a comprehensive programme that combines knowledge, culture, and physical activity.

The camp is organised as part of the Museum of Islamic Art’s efforts to offer high-quality summer programmes that contribute to en-

riching children’s summer break and developing their creative, intellectual, and physical abilities. This is achieved through national partnerships that foster integration between cultural, educational, and security institutions, providing a safe and stimulating learning environment that blends learning with recreation.

QNL: a million titles and counting

From Page 1

Al-Sahli said members can access the full collection either in person or digitally. “In addition to over one million physical books, it includes thousands of e-books and audiobooks, academic databases and research tools, children’s learning resources, innovation spaces and a year-round programme of events and workshops. Our 2025 figures suggest the approach is working: we recorded 1.25mn visits, the highest since the library opened,” she said.

She underlined that the way people read is changing, and that QNL’s digital offer keeps pace with the shifting patterns. “Through our mobile app and our online platforms, members can borrow thousands of e-books and audiobooks, and read digital magazines and newspapers at any hour, anywhere,” she noted. “In 2025, our public e-resources drew more than 3.1mn checkouts and views, including over 120,000 children’s e-resources.”

The official pointed out that different readers need different support, and that QNL offers specific support for each group.

“For the youngest, the Children’s Library offers early-literacy tools, storytelling sessions, and interactive digital resources that make reading feel like entertainment; our Family Reading Programme more than doubled its participation in 2025, with children taking home an average of 16 books each, and reading habits formed this early tend to last a lifetime,” al-Sahli said.

“For adults, the Qatar Reads initiative and the One Book, One Doha campaign turn reading into a shared experience, the latter engaging more than 26,000 people last year. Across every format and age group, the goal is the same: to remove the barriers between people and the books they want to read,” she continued.

The official highlighted the importance of the digital content and tools provided by the library. “Children today grow up as digital natives, and our offer reflects that. Through the app and our online platforms, families can reach thousands of children’s e-books, interactive stories, and early-learning resources that support a child’s literacy from the very first words. Our Children’s Library pairs hands-on innovation spaces with a full programme of themed activities, STEM workshops, information-literacy sessions, and creative challenges,” she said.