



Amir meets chairman of Alliance of Rabbis in Islamic States

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani met the chairman of the Alliance of Rabbis in Islamic States (ARIS), Rabbi Mendy Chitrik, and the accompanying delegation yesterday. During the meeting at HH the Amir's office at Lusail Palace, Chitrik offered condolences on the passing of His Highness the Father Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani. HH the Amir thanked Chitrik for his kind words. HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani and HE the Chief of the Amiri Diwan Abdullah bin Mohammed al-Khulaifi were present at the meeting. - **QNA**



Bhutan's environment dept, Global Carbon Council sign accord

The Global Carbon Council (GCC), an independent, internationally recognised carbon standard in the Global South, has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Bhutan's Department of Environment and Climate Change (DECC). The MoU aims to strengthen Bhutan's institutional and technical readiness for participation in international carbon markets, with a focus on capacity development, carbon market governance, methodologies, project development, registration and issuance processes, and digital registry infrastructure. "Bhutan has demonstrated exceptional environmental leadership through its enduring commitment to net zero," said Global Carbon Council founding chairman Dr Yousef Alhorr. "This collaboration will support the country in translating that ambition into credible and scalable carbon market action." "By combining strong national ownership with high-integrity standards, methodologies, and in-



teroperable infrastructure, we aim to help mobilise climate finance while safeguarding environmental integrity and sustainable development," he added. "This collaboration represents an important step in strengthening Bhutan's institutional and technical readiness for international carbon markets," said Bhutan's Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources Karma Tshering. Under the MoU, the GCC will

conduct capacity-building workshops and training on GCC standards, rules and requirements, the project development cycle, registration and issuance processes, registry infrastructure, and methodology development. The parties will also explore co-operation to support the adoption of relevant GCC standards, governance arrangements, and methodologies for Bhutan's carbon market. - **QNA**

QU develops needle-free glucose watch

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The research team said the device could eventually support remote healthcare services and integration with digital health platforms. Abu al-Saud explained that the project began as a graduation project by computer engineering students before evolving into a specialised research initiative. Development stages included designing the prototype, creating the artificial intelligence (AI) algorithms, building the companion mobile application and conducting initial validation tests against reference measurements. The researcher highlighted the key role played by the student team throughout the project, from identifying the problem and designing the system to processing data, developing AI models, building the prototype and carrying out initial testing. The team is now working on further development and wider validation, including expanding the database, improving the AI models and creating an advanced version of the wearable device. Future plans also include partnerships with healthcare and industrial organisations to transform the technology into a market-ready product, while ensuring it can be provided at an affordable cost. Abu al-Saud said investment in healthcare research and innovation supports Qatar National Vision 2030, adding that the team aims to complete the required scientific validation and regulatory steps

before bringing the technology to patients in Qatar and beyond. Diabetes continues to pose a significant public-health challenge in Qatar, with recent national and international estimates pointing to a high burden among adults. The Ministry of Public Health, citing the 2023 WHO STEPwise survey, put diabetes prevalence at 18.1%, alongside an obesity rate of 33.4%. Public Health Care Corporation (PHCC) data earlier identified 126,983 adults with Type 2 diabetes among its registered population in 2021, representing 11.4%, with the rate among Qataris considerably higher at 19.2%. The International Diabetes Federation offers a higher estimate. Its 2024 figures suggest that 409,300 adults aged 20-79 in Qatar were living with diabetes, with an age-adjusted prevalence of 24.6%. The variation does not necessarily indicate conflicting evidence. Prevalence estimates can differ because surveys, clinical records and international models cover different populations, age groups and undiagnosed cases. Prevalence describes the proportion of people already living with diabetes; incidence measures only new cases arising during a specified period. Qatar has more comprehensive prevalence data than directly recorded national incidence figures. A peer-reviewed modelling study led by Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar researchers estimated about 25,000 new Type 2 diabetes cases in 2021.

Trump touts 'good talks' with Iran

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Officials on both sides acknowledge that messages are being exchanged via intermediaries. Trump said mediating countries had urged him to hold fire to give diplomacy a chance, while Washington maintains pressure for guarantees on freedom of navigation through Hormuz. Iran, meanwhile, insists it retains control over the strait and the right to regulate transit. State media reported that six vessels were turned back yesterday for using routes Tehran does not recognise. Hours after Trump's remarks, Saudi Arabia said it intercepted drones targeting oil facilities in the Eastern Province and Riyadh, blaming Iran-backed groups operating from Iraq and reserving the right to respond. Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthis movement separately claimed attacks on Saudi oil infrastructure,

including the East-West pipeline to the Red Sea, in what it described as retaliation for Saudi actions in Yemen. Israel also reported intercepting two drones near its border with Jordan, highlighting the risk of spillover despite the US-Iran pause. Pakistan, which has been involved in mediation efforts, condemned the attacks as a "grave threat" to regional stability, while Gulf states have repeatedly accused pro-Iran militias in Iraq of launching cross-border strikes during earlier phases of the conflict. The halt in US strikes and tentative diplomatic signals eased market fears, sending oil prices sharply lower. Brent crude fell between 6%-8% yesterday to the mid-to-high \$80s a barrel after briefly topping \$100 last week. Global equities also rallied on hopes the worst of the disruption to energy supplies may be avoided,

offering relief to Gulf producers and shipping lanes rattled by weeks of escalation. Despite the lull, major obstacles remain. Washington and Tehran are at odds over the interpretation of a June framework that envisioned talks by late August, particularly regarding access through Hormuz. Iran has also held discussions with Oman on managing traffic through the strait, including potential transit fees - an idea the United States opposes. The recent violence has killed scores in Iran and left US service members dead in retaliatory strikes on American bases in the region, while Gulf infrastructure has also been hit. With both sides signalling openness to diplomacy but continuing to assert red lines, the current pause offers no clear pathway to a lasting settlement - and risks unravelling quickly if attacks persist.

Minister meets United Kingdom ambassador



HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad met yesterday with the United Kingdom's ambassador to Neerav Patel. They discussed bilateral co-operation between the two countries and ways to deepen and expand it, in addition to a range of matters of mutual interest. - **QNA**

Minister meets Uganda's acting foreign minister

HE the Minister of State for Foreign Trade Affairs at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al-Sayed met yesterday with Uganda's Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs Haruna Kasolo Kyeyune, who is visiting Qatar. They discussed aspects of co-operation between the two countries and ways to enhance them, particularly in the areas of trade and investment, in addition to a range of topics of mutual interest. - **QNA**



DAAM signs funding agreement with Qatar Social Work Foundation

The Social and Sport Contribution Fund (DAAM) has signed a funding agreement with the Qatar Social Work Foundation to support the Social Researcher Award. Under the agreement, DAAM will provide financial support for the organisation and launch of the award, which aims to promote a culture of scientific research in the social sector and encourage the production of scientific research that contributes to the development of social services and supports evidence-based policymaking. The award targets school and university students, researchers, academics, and professionals working in the social sector. It seeks to identify and nurture research talent, develop research skills, and encourage participants to propose innovative scientific solutions to societal challenges. The sirector of Shared Services at DAAM, Yousef Mohammed al-Nuaimi, said: "DAAM's support for the Social Researcher Award reflects the Fund's commitment to supporting national initiatives that contribute to advancing social work and strengthening its role in serving the community." "The award represents an important platform for encouraging scientific research, supporting the production of high-quality studies that contribute to the development of social services, and generating the knowledge that informs social policies and community programmes," he said. The director of Strategic Planning at the Qatar Social Work Foundation, Shaima Ahmed al-Jannah, said: "The launch of the Social Researcher Award, supported by DAAM, reflects the Fund's role as a strategic partner in empowering the Foundation and its affiliated centres to implement impactful initiatives and high-quality projects that contribute to social development and strengthen their positive impact on society." - **QNA**

Ecuador's foreign minister meets Qatar's ambassador

Ecuador's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility Roberto Kury met yesterday with Qatar's ambassador Fahad Ahmed Jassim al-Hamar. They discussed bilateral co-operation and relations. - **QNA**



Istanbul governor meets Qatar consul-general



Istanbul's Governor Davut Gul has met with Qatar's Consul-General Dr Nayef bin Jassim al-Abduljabbar. During the meeting, co-operation and relations between the two countries were reviewed. - **QNA**

Mada coding camp 2026 aims at digital inclusion of people with disabilities

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

Mada Assistive Technology Centre has opened the Mada Coding Camp 2026 to promote digital inclusion of children and youth with disabilities by focusing on their potential and active role. The Mada Coding Camp 2026, run by Mada Academy, features three educational tracks to meet the needs of the targeted children and youth with disabilities through accessible teaching methods, inclusive learning environments and technology-supported activities. The camp is an educational and interactive summer programme targeting children and youth with disabilities between the ages of 10-18 to develop their digital skills and open new horizons in programming and artificial intelligence (AI). Noora al-Marri, head of the Innovation Section at Mada, said: "Mada Coding Camp 2026 represents an investment in the abilities of children and youth with disabilities by providing them with an early opportunity to acquire the digital skills that have become fundamental to the future of education and employment." "At Mada Centre, we are committed to ensuring that this experience is educational, enabling, and accessible," she said.

Track one is a coding camp for persons with disabilities between the ages of 10-18. It focuses on the fundamentals of programming, robotics, STEM activities, AI, and innovation through practical activities that help participants develop creative-thinking and teamwork skills. While the session for boys started yesterday, the girls' sessions will be held from August 3 at Mada Lab, Mada Centre. Track two targets children and youth with visual disabilities between the ages of 10-18 and offers a specialised educational experience using accessible assistive technology tools and solutions, including Code Jumper and LEGO Braille Bricks. These tools enable participants to learn programming concepts and computational thinking through tactile, auditory, and practical methods. The camp will take place from August 10-12. Track three targets deaf and hard-of-hearing children and youth between the ages of 10-18. It provides an educational experience based on accessible visual methodologies, including sign-language-supported instruction, visual demonstrations, robotics projects, and hands-on activities. The boys' sessions will take place from August 17-19, while the girls' sessions will be held from August 24-26.

Commercial Bank, VCUarts Qatar renew partnership to advance leadership via creative learning

Commercial Bank has once again partnered with the Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts in Qatar (VCUarts Qatar) to host an educational initiative focused on leadership development through creative learning.

The session took place at Commercial Bank Plaza as part of the Barzan Leadership programme, building on the success of last year's collaboration.

The initiative continued the ongoing partnership between Commercial Bank and VCUarts, which explores leadership development through experiential and creative learning approaches.

This year's session, "Leadership through Art", encouraged participants

to engage with new methods of critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving skills.

It also fostered a dynamic session of cultural exchange, innovation, and professional growth.

"Investing in our people has always been at the core of our culture," said Nasser Abdulla al-Harmi, executive general manager and chief human resources officer at Commercial Bank.

"We want to see them grow beyond execution and into leadership, not just in title, but in mindset," he said.

"Building on the success of last year's session, we're proud to continue this collaboration, which pushes our teams to think differently and reinforces a culture



The session took place at Commercial Bank Plaza as part of the Barzan Leadership programme.

of shared growth," al-Harmi added.

"Our continued collaboration with Commercial Bank reaffirms the value of creativity as a driver of leadership and innovation," said Lejla Niksic, the director of Strategic Engagement at VCUarts

Qatar. "Through art- and design-based learning, VCUarts Qatar's Continuing Education Programme equips participants with new tools for critical thinking, collaboration, and adaptive problem-solving."

"This year's session is a strong example of how creative education can shape confident, forward-thinking leaders, while supporting Qatar National Vision 2030's commitment to human development and innovation," she added.



Ashghal advances sustainability by recycling construction waste

The Public Works Authority (Ashghal) has achieved significant sustainability milestones across its building projects since 2022 by implementing an integrated system to manage, reuse, and recycle millions of tonnes of construction and demolition waste.

These efforts have enhanced resource efficiency, reduced waste generation, and promoted circular economy principles, in line with the Qatar National Vision 2030 and the Third National Development Strategy.

As part of these efforts, Ashghal has reused or transferred approximately 2.5mn cubic metres of excavation materials

to the recycling yards of Qatar Primary Materials Company (QPMC), in addition to recycling more than 300,000 tonnes of construction and demolition waste.

The authority has also reused around 80,000 tonnes of timber waste within project sites, while sending 7,000 tonnes of plastic waste, 3,000 tonnes of paper waste, and 1,000 tonnes of scrap metal to approved recycling facilities.

In addition, nearly 8,000 tonnes of food waste have been recovered by converting them into organic compost or processing them at dedicated treatment facilities.

Livestock breeders are free to decide on marketing: Anaam

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

The Qatar Livestock Association (Anaam) has stressed that its recently signed memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Widam Food Company does not oblige livestock owners and breeders to sell their sheep, goats or camels to Widam.

Anaad chairman Mubarak Rashid al-Sahouti has said that participation in the arrangement as entirely voluntary and governed by supply, demand and mutually agreed market prices.

The agreement, he added, is primarily designed to address a long-standing challenge facing some local livestock breeders, including finding reliable marketing channels and obtaining fair market prices for their production.

Al-Sahouti emphasised that breeders who can market their livestock independently and achieve the prices they consider satisfactory remain free to continue doing so.

The MoU, signed this month between Anaam and Widam, which operates Al Wakrah Central Abattoir and private abattoirs in Qatar, establishes a structured marketing channel for locally produced livestock.

Under the arrangement, Widam will purchase livestock from participating breeders at prices agreed according to prevailing market



conditions and subsequently market the animals to consumers through its sales network, applying an agreed profit margin.

Al-Sahouti said that the initiative is particularly important for breeders who have local production but lack the necessary expertise, resources or market access to market their livestock themselves.

Rather than replacing existing sales channels, the partnership provides an additional option for breeders who need assistance in reaching consumers.

The locally produced sheep, goats and camels covered by the initiative will be offered through Widam's livestock yards at Al Wakrah Central Abattoir, Umm Salal Central Market, Al Shahaniya Central Abattoir and the Abu Nakhla sales area.

For the first time under the expanded arrangement, locally

produced meat and livestock will also be made available through Widam's electronic application, giving consumers an additional digital purchasing channel.

The products are expected to be offered throughout the year, subject to availability, production seasons, livestock varieties and prevailing market prices.

Anaam will serve as the co-ordinating link between breeders and Widam, helping identify available production and co-ordinate supplies according to the specifications and weights required by the market.

The arrangement is, al-Sahouti said, therefore intended not simply to create another point of sale, but to connect local production more closely with actual consumer demand.

According to the official, the concept was initially tested during

Ramadan and Eid al-Adha, when demand for livestock and red meat traditionally rises significantly.

The experience produced positive results and encouraged the two sides to move from a seasonal initiative toward a permanent, year-round marketing programme.

The 2026 Eid al-Adha national initiative provides a useful indication of the scale of livestock demand in Qatar.

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI), in co-ordination with the Ministry of Municipality, allocated 12,500 head of livestock for the 2026 programme, covering both locally bred and imported animals.

Widam reported that it had approximately 10,000 head of livestock available during the initiative to meet rising consumer demand.

The government initiative also set the price of a locally bred sheep at QR1,000, equal to the price of an imported sheep, demonstrating the role of local livestock in national seasonal supply programmes.

Animals were made available through Widam facilities in Al Shamal, Al Khor, Umm Salal, Al Wakrah, Al Shahaniya and Abu Nakhla, as well as through the company's electronic application.

The new partnership comes against the backdrop of Qatar's long-running efforts to increase the contribution of domestic agricultural and livestock production to national food security.

Mangrove ambassadors honoured as Environment Centre marks International Conservation Day

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

The Friends of the Environment Centre (FEC) marked the International Day for the Conservation of the Mangrove Ecosystem by awarding participants in a youth dialogue session the "Mangrove Ambassador" card, together with a pledge to protect the environment and preserve Qatar's mangrove forests.

The initiative is part of the centre's annual observance of the international day, celebrated on July 26, and aimed to encourage young people to take an active role in environmental conservation.

Participants were also invited to join upcoming environmental initiatives, including beach clean-up campaigns, educational field visits to mangrove forests, and mangrove seedling planting activities, reinforcing the values of environmental citizenship and community engagement.

Organised as part of the FEC's "Summer of Sustainability for Boys" camp, the dialogue session, titled "Mangroves: A Natural Heritage and a Sustainable Future", sought to deepen environmental awareness, promote sustainable practices, and empower young people to safeguard Qatar's natural resources and coastal ecosystems.

The session was led by Dr Mohammed Saif al-Kuwari, environmental and sustainability expert at FEC, who highlighted the ecological, economic and social importance of mangrove forests.

He explained that mangroves play a vital role in protecting coastlines from erosion and storms, supporting biodiversity, providing habitats for marine life and migratory birds, improving water quality, sustaining fish stocks, and absorbing carbon to help mitigate climate change.

Dr al-Kuwari also outlined the distribution of mangrove forests globally and across Qatar, particularly in Al Thakhira Nature Reserve, Bin Ghannam Island,

and sections of the Al Khor and Al Udaid coastlines.

He discussed the challenges facing these fragile ecosystems and stressed the need for sustainable management to ensure their long-term protection.

"Mangrove forests are among the country's most valuable natural assets, serving as integrated ecosystems that protect coastlines and preserve biodiversity," Dr al-Kuwari said.

He added that the centre's programmes are designed to nurture a new generation of sustainability ambassadors by combining scientific knowledge, practical experience and volunteerism in support of Qatar National Vision 2030 and



Dr Mohamed Saif al-Kuwari (left) with a presenter.

the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Observed annually on July 26, the International Day for the Conservation of the Mangrove Ecosystem was established by Unesco to raise awareness of the critical role mangroves play in protecting

coastlines, conserving biodiversity and combating climate change.

The observance also underscores the need to conserve and restore these coastal forests, which continue to face growing threats from human activities and environmental degradation.



Qatar customs foils tobacco smuggling bid

General Authority of Customs officials at Doha Port and the Northern Ports have foiled an attempt to smuggle 1,650kg of tobacco (tambaku) and 22,005 packs of cigarettes into the country. The smuggled items were concealed in underground compartments within a marine transport vessel, reportedly intended to evade customs duties. The seizure constitutes a violation of Qatar's applicable customs laws and regulations.

UDST concludes IMO-certified STCW instructor training course

The University of Doha for Science and Technology (UDST) recognised 12 participants who successfully completed the training course for instructors, based on the Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping (STCW) and International Maritime Organisation (IMO) Model Course 6.09, during a certificate presentation ceremony held at the university's Maritime Simulation and Training Centre (MSTC).

The graduates represented various public and private maritime entities across the country.

The STCW Instructor Training Course equips maritime professionals with the instructional knowledge, teaching methodologies, and practical assessment techniques required to effectively plan, deliver, and evaluate competency-based training in accordance with international STCW standards.

The programme supports the development of qualified instructors capable of delivering high-quality maritime education while promoting safety, operational excel-



lence, and global best practices across the industry.

"At UDST, we are committed to developing highly skilled professionals who contribute to the advancement of strategic sectors that support Qatar's national priorities," said MSTC director Alessio Redina. "Through internationally recognised training aligned with IMO standards, we are

empowering maritime professionals to become effective instructors who will transfer critical knowledge, strengthen workforce competencies, and leverage a culture of safety and excellence throughout the maritime industry."

"We are proud to collaborate with our national partners in building sustainable capacity that supports the continued growth

and competitiveness of Qatar's maritime sector," he said.

The UDST's MSTC is one of the region's leading facilities for maritime education and professional training, offering internationally accredited programmes and state-of-the-art simulation technologies that prepare professionals to meet the evolving demands of the maritime industry. - QNA



QSTP, YEC kick off Summer Bootcamp 2026

The Qatar Science & Technology Park (QSTP), a member of Qatar Foundation, and the Young Entrepreneurs Club (YEC), which operates under the umbrella of the Ministry of Sports and Youth, has launched the “QSTP x YEC Summer Bootcamp 2026”, a hands-on programme in technology and startup building designed to turn ideas into companies.

The first session attracted 124 attendees from across Qatar, with 60% female participation, bringing together university students, fresh graduates, aspiring entrepreneurs, and technology enthusiasts.

Running from July 27 to August 19, the bootcamp brings participants through 13 sessions covering every stage of building a company.

Early sessions introduce participants

to how the startup world works and help them reframe their thinking around real problems worth solving, before moving into business models and revenue, and a structured critique process that pushes participants to stress test their ideas.

Later sessions cover how investors evaluate opportunities, the local deep tech landscape, and how to build ventures around measurable impact, followed by product development, go to market strategy, storytelling, and pitching in front of an audience.

The programme closes with an introduction to what comes next through the QSTP’s incubation offering, and a rehearsal presentation ahead of the Hackathon.

Sessions are led by founders, investors, and industry experts from organisations

including Alchemist Doha, TeKnowledge, QLAB, Ibtechar, and HostX, alongside the QSTP’s own programme team.

Participants will also take part in a QSTP ecosystem tour and a rehearsal Demo Day ahead of the programme’s closing Hackathon, set for August 20-21, where teams will pitch their startup concepts to a live panel of judges.

The closing keynote will focus on how artificial intelligence (AI) is changing the way startups are built and scaled.

“Every year, the Summer Bootcamp shows us just how much talent is out there, waiting for the right platform,” said QSTP business development director Eng. Ahmed al-Said. “Our role is to equip these participants with the tools, mentorship, and access to Qatar’s innovation ecosys-

tem they need to turn a rough idea into something real.”

“We look forward to seeing what this cohort builds over the next four weeks,” he added.

“This bootcamp reflects the Club’s ongoing efforts to empower young people and equip them with the practical tools needed to transform innovative ideas into scalable and sustainable ventures,” said YEC vice-president Abdulrahman al-Emadi.

“We are proud of our partnership with Qatar Science & Technology Park and of the support and collaboration of our partners in delivering an experience that combines knowledge, practical application, and direct engagement with industry experts,” he said. “Through this initiative, we aim to contribute to preparing a generation



YEC’s Abdulrahman al-Emadi.

capable of leading the future of innovation and entrepreneurship in Qatar.”

Following the bootcamp, participants will be introduced to the QSTP Incubation Pathway, offering a clear route to continue developing their ventures beyond the programme. – QNA

Qatar Charity opens cotton thread production workshops in Mali

Qatar Charity (QC) has opened four specialised cotton thread production workshops in Mali, benefiting women from four co-operatives.

The initiative forms part of Qatar Charity’s efforts to promote women’s economic empowerment and support sustainable livelihoods through productive projects that harness local resources and provide beneficiary families with stable sources of income.

The project involved equipping the workshops with the machinery and tools required to process cotton fibres and produce thread.

It provided beneficiaries with training in operation, production, and workplace management, helping strengthen their professional skills, enhance the sustainability of economic activity, and generate steady returns for the participating co-operatives.

The project is expected to create job opportunities and sustainable income for women, increase the value added to locally produced cotton, support textile and handicraft industries, and improve the income levels of beneficiary families.

It is also expected to stimulate local economic activity and strengthen women’s role in economic and social development.

The initiative comes amid economic challenges facing many families, particularly in rural areas, where income-generating projects are among the most effective ways to reduce poverty and unemployment while enhancing the economic stability of local communities.

Cotton is one of Mali’s most important strategic crops and a vital source of income for thousands of families.

The initiative seeks to maximise the value of this national resource by transforming raw cotton fibres into thread for use in the textile and handicraft industries, strengthening local value chains while creating broader economic opportunities for beneficiaries.

Beneficiaries expressed their appreciation for the project, noting that it will enable them to acquire new skills and open broader opportunities to participate in income-generating economic activities.

Some said the project allows locally grown cotton to be used more effectively by processing it within the community instead of selling it as raw material, contributing to improved household income and helping families meet their basic needs.

Beneficiaries also emphasised that the



The project would create job opportunities for women and stimulate local economic activity.



project has fostered co-operation and teamwork within women’s co-operatives, while boosting their self-confidence and reinforcing their ability to contribute effectively to the development of their communities.

The project reflects the QC’s commitment to sustainable economic empowerment by helping vulnerable groups move from reliance on aid toward productivity and self-sufficiency, through the tools and skills needed to build a more stable and prosperous future.

Liwan, Qatar Tennis Federation open entries for Qatar ExxonMobil Open poster competition

Liwan Design Studios and Labs, in partnership with the Qatar Tennis Federation (QTF), has opened submissions for the second edition of the Qatar ExxonMobil Open Poster Design Competition.

Following the success of the inaugural edition in 2024, this year’s initiative invites creatives across Qatar to design the official poster for the men’s tournament, which will take place in February next year.

As part of Qatar Museums’ network of Creative Hubs, Liwan nurtures artistic talent, fosters innovation, and strengthens the country’s creative and cultural industries.

Open to designers, illustrators, artists, photographers, and digital creatives residing in the country, the competition provides a high-profile platform to create the official visual identity of one of the region’s most prestigious international sporting events.

The winning artwork will become a defining element of the

tournament’s visual identity, appearing across promotional, digital, print and on-site experiences throughout the event.

The application window is open until August 10.

Submissions are welcome from both emerging and established creatives, including individuals and collaboratives.

Entries will be evaluated by a jury of professionals from the fields of design, art, and sport, with the winning submission selected based on originality, artistic quality, conceptual strength, relevance to the tournament, and adaptability across multiple platforms.

The winning designer will receive a cash prize of QR15,000, in addition to a one-year membership to Liwan Design Studios and Labs.

The Qatar ExxonMobil Open is an elite ATP 500 tennis tournament in Doha, attracting top players from around the world. – QNA



QRCS announces enrolment of 13th batch of Amiri Medical Scholarships Programme

As part of its ongoing efforts to back the Palestinian health sector, the Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) has completed the signing of contracts with the 13th batch of Palestinian doctors enrolled on focused medical training programmes in Qatar for 2026-27.

The new contracts fall under the annual Amiri Medical Scholarships Programme, co-implemented by the QRCS, Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC), Palestine’s ministry of health, the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS), and the programme’s advisory committee.

“This is a new episode of the QRCS’s exceptionally successful Amiri Medi-

cal Scholarships Programme, launched in 2003 as a long-term strategic initiative that demonstrates Qatar’s vision of standing up for the Palestinian people and upgrading the health system there in a solidly scientific and professional manner,” said acting QRCS secretary-general Abdullah Sultan al-Qattan.

He described the programme as one of the memorable deeds of His Highness the late Father Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, thanks to whom the programme came into existence 23 years ago.

By enabling Palestinian doctors to pursue their academic and clinical postgraduate studies, the Amiri Medi-

cal Scholarships Programme serves as a capacity-building mechanism to bridge the medical staffing gap.

The new cohort comprises 10 doctors from Gaza and the West Bank, who have successfully met the requirements and passed the placement tests.

Upon their arrival in Doha, the doctors will embark on an advanced training programme in key medical specialisations such as internal medicine, emergency medicine, and anaesthesia.

They are then expected return to their jobs at Palestinian healthcare facilities, to provide top-quality medical care and improve the healthcare services offered to Palestinians. – QNA



Doha Golf Club
Qatar

INVITATION TO TENDER

Doha Golf Club ("DGC") is pleased to announce the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Bond (OAR)	Tender Fee (OAR)	Last Date to Issue RFP	Tender Closing Date	Email Address
DGC/TC/26/005	Medical & Life Insurance	5% of RFP Value	QAR 2000	11 th Aug 2026	16 th Aug 2026	Doha Golf Club To: zaib@dohagolfclub.com Aon Qatar LLC Cc: Zeina.najjar@aon.com.qa shahid.areekkadan@aon.com.qa

DGC is keen to invite reputable companies to Tender for Medical & Life Insurance for Doha Golf Club through the appointed broker; Aon Qatar LLC.

Who should respond to this invitation?
Local companies that have relevant experience in aforementioned insurances.

Tender Process:

- Applicant/s should register and submit their Expression of Interest letter, along with accompanying copy of valid Commercial Registration and Computer Card by email to the relevant email address listed in the table above.
- Upon receipt, the applicant/s will receive an email with the attached Confidentiality Agreement (CA).
- The Applicant/s should then pay the non-refundable tender fee to below DGC Bank Account.
DOHA GOLF CLUB
Bank: Commercial Bank of Qatar
Account No.: 4580-583247-004
IBAN: QA24CBQA000000004580583247004
- Applicants will return a completed CA and Tender fee payment slip with bank stamp to DGC by email to the relevant email address, and submit a hard copy of the CA (in 2 copies) and Tender fee payment slip to the address below:
DOHA GOLF CLUB
West Bay Lagoon
P.O. Box 13530
Doha, Qatar
- Upon Receipt of a conformant CA and proof of payment of the tender fee, the applicant will be issued a copy of the Request for Proposal (RFP) through the appointed broker, Aon Qatar LLC.
- Requests for RFP documents after **11th Aug 2026** will be rejected.
- The decision to issue RFP documents to an applicant rests solely with DGC.
- Technical and Commercial Offers should be submitted by hand in separate sealed envelopes with two (2) copies of each to Doha Golf Club as per the above mail address.
- Tender Bond must be included in a separately sealed envelope and submitted along with technical and commercial offers, otherwise Doha Golf Club will not consider documents for further review.
- Any queries in relation to this tender should be addressed in writing to the email addresses above.

Settler violence, military raids roil Palestinians to the limits

Reuters
Tal, West Bank

Palestinian villagers in the occupied West Bank said yesterday the area was coming close to breaking point after increasing incursions by Israeli settlers and violent stand-offs, such as one that left six people shot dead last week.

The Israeli military made dozens of arrests and blocked roadways through the West Bank after Friday's incident in the village of Tal, southwest of Nablus, where four Palestinians and two Israelis were killed.

Early yesterday, most entrances to Tal, neighbouring villages and Nablus were either partially or fully shuttered, creating long lines of residents seeking to pass the checkpoints.

Friday's shootings occurred after villagers from Tal confronted a large group of armed settlers they said tried to enter houses in the village. The Israeli military said there was a "violent confrontation" between dozens of Palestinians and Israeli civilians in which shots were fired on both sides. While Palestinians say villagers were defending themselves against the latest in a series of attacks by settlers seeking to drive them off the land.

Ahmed Ramadan, 71, the father of one of the Palestinians killed on Friday, said settlers have continually harassed their home on the edge of Tal overlooking the rolling hills of the West Bank.

"They say we are terrorists. We are not terrorists," said Ramadan. He said the settler killed on Friday, Benayahu Mellet - an army reservist who was serving as security coordinator for the nearby settlement of Havat Gilad - had previously come to his home and yelled at him to leave and go to Syria or Jordan.

Ramadan said he had no intention of leaving, "Even if we die, we'll die here on our land. We're not prepared to leave this country"



A general view of the village Tal near Nablus in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. (Reuters)

Sitting at home with his surviving sons, he said if settlers return in force the village was ready. "If they come, we'll meet them head-on, even if they kill us," he told Reuters.

Israeli authorities initially portrayed Friday's incident as an attack by Palestinians on hikers walking near the village, located in Area A of the West Bank, a zone under Palestinian control that Israelis are generally prohibited from entering.

Video widely circulated on social media showed settlers carrying rifles and pushing residents as they approached the village. Reuters was not able to independently verify the video.

Palestinians from Tal said settlers attacked them first before one of the villagers wrestled a gun from one of the settlers.

The incident followed a pattern seen repeatedly around the West Bank, with large groups of settlers appearing near Palestinian communities, threatening and harassing their inhabitants, often as security forces stand by.

Such shows of force have become more frequent over recent months, while ministers in Netanyahu's government talk openly

about annexing the West Bank, which Israel occupied following the 1967 Middle East war.

Yesterday, Reuters reporters could see freshly cut tree trunks in fields at the edge of the village. Residents said that after the violence on Friday, settlers had come and cut down olive and fig trees.

According to United Nations figures, 18 Palestinians have been killed in incidents linked to settler attacks so far this year, compared with 17 in the whole of 2025. The Palestinian Authority says at least 20 Palestinians have been killed by settlers since the start of the year. Since Friday, residents said there have been daily military raids on Tal, with between 60 and 80 people detained. About 30 remain in detention according to the deputy head of the village council Munther Shtayya.

In the early hours yesterday, residents said the military threw a man out of his house on the edge of the village. Reuters observed two soldiers standing on the roof of the man's home. "All of the military is here in the streets," Kamal Shtayya, 55, a resident of Tal, said.

As Netanyahu's government approaches elections in October, it

has stepped up authorisation for new settlement building in a drive ministers say is intended to tighten Israeli control over the West Bank.

The United Nations, Palestinians and most countries regard settlements as illegal under international law. Israel disputes this, saying the West Bank, which it captured in the 1967 war, is disputed territory, and citing biblical ties to the land.

"I'm patient, we'll be patient and patient and patient, but at the end of the day, patience runs out. It just flies away, it doesn't work," 72-year-old Tal farmer Ahmed Shtayya said. "Any human being defends himself," he told Reuters.

Like many Palestinian farmers, Shtayya, who grows tomatoes, figs and eggplants, has seen settlers come ever closer. He said settlers have come up to him as he has been working, telling him the land was Israeli.

Just a few hundred metres up the road lies a burned-out home attacked by settlers a week ago, according to the vice head of the village council. "I've come to this point. If they want to continue like this, there must be an explosion, what else?" Shtayya said.



Heavy machinery that was burned inside a Palestinian quarry during Israeli settlers attack yesterday, near Ramallah. (Reuters)

West Bank woman delivers stillborn baby after Israeli army blocked ambulance

AFP
Ramallah, Palestinian Territories

Palestinian health workers said a woman delivered a stillborn baby in an ambulance after the vehicle was allegedly delayed by Israeli soldiers at a checkpoint in the occupied West Bank yesterday.

The 28-year-old woman was six months pregnant and unconscious when medics collected her from her home in the village of Qaryout, south of the city of Nablus, medic Bashar Qaryouti told AFP.

"She was suffering from very heavy bleeding and her condition was extremely critical," Qaryouti said.

The woman was placed on oxygen and the ambulance set off for Rafidia hospital in Nablus, but soon found itself desperately searching for an open route, Qaryouti said.

The entrance to one nearby village was closed, forcing the ambulance to take dirt tracks through olive groves before reaching the Awarta checkpoint, where a gate was shut and a long queue of vehicles had formed.

Qaryouti drove to the front of the line and activated the ambulance siren. He said soldiers emerged from a nearby watchtower about 10 minutes later and ordered him to switch off the ambulance.

Qaryouti said he explained that the vehicle's medical equipment was being used to keep a

patient alive. "They forced me, at gunpoint, to switch the vehicle off," he said, adding that the soldiers confiscated the crew's identity cards.

The Israeli military did not immediately respond to an AFP request for comment. As the ambulance remained stranded, the woman's condition worsened. The nurse accompanying her was forced to deliver the baby inside the vehicle, Qaryouti said. "The baby was stillborn," he said.

After waiting for more than 30 minutes, the soldiers returned the crew's identity cards and allowed the ambulance to continue, according to Qaryouti.

When they reached hospital, "the mother was rushed into surgery to stop the bleeding", Qaryouti said.

Rafidia hospital director Fouad Nafaa said the woman had been "prevented by the Israeli army from reaching the hospital".

Her bleeding had since been brought under control, and she was now in a stable condition, he said. The Israeli military has launched an operation across the West Bank, creating several road closures throughout the territory.

The operation followed a deadly clash on Friday between Israeli settlers and Palestinians in the village of Tell that left two Israelis and four Palestinians dead.

Violence in the West Bank, occupied by Israel since 1967, has surged since the Gaza war began.

Palestinian official warns of worst displacement crisis in West Bank

Palestinian National Council President Rawhi Fattouh has warned of the risks posed by Israeli government statements suggesting that the evacuation model used in some refugee camps could be expanded to other areas of the occupied West Bank.

Fattouh said the remarks represented an open declaration of plans to escalate military actions and extend policies of forced displacement.

In a statement yesterday, he described the reported plans as part of a broader program aimed at altering the demographic and geographic situation in Palestinian territories, similar to the destruction of residential areas and displacement of residents in Gaza and refugee camps in the northern West Bank.

Fattouh emphasised that forced displacement, property destruction and attacks on civilian communities constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity that require interna-



A building belonging to Palestinians demolished by Israeli forces in Anzah, occupied West Bank. (AFP)

tional accountability.

He called on the UN, the Security Council and the European Union to take urgent action to provide protection for Palestinians, warning that continued inaction could further threaten regional stability and weaken the international legal order. (QNA)

Israel's deal breaches unacceptable: Aoun

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun has stressed that Lebanon would not accept Israel's violation of the terms outlined in the framework module, noting that his country, which signed it during the Washington negotiations, is committed to implementing it.

Aoun showed his trepidation about the Israeli actions affecting the efficiency of this framework, asserting that Lebanon won't accept the persistent breach of this framework, nor will it accept the ignorance of international cuntenance that demands respecting this deal, either.

During his meeting with UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk in Beirut, Aoun said the relentless home and village razing operations by the Israeli forces in the southern occupied areas directly violate human rights, as well as overtly run afoul of international laws and norms.

He called the international community's attention to these actions, demanding global action to prevent Israel from continuously pursuing the destructive plan that it had already pursued in Gaza.

Aoun reaffirmed that the Is-



First responders deploy near a heavily-damaged mosque in the village of Zawtar al-Gharbiyeh in southern Lebanon. (AFP) /

raeli war has hampered progress towards accomplishing further reforms, pointing out that the Lebanese government is committed to enacting more overhauls as long as they're essential and not to appease the international community.

Reciprocally, Turk emphasised that the UN agency is interested in the situation unfolding in Lebanon, affirming that it monitors the rapid developments there, particularly the Israeli assaults that have

been continuing since March 2, to put out a detailed report on human rights violations.

He stressed that the agency would consistently help Lebanon and secure the essential assistance for the country. Overall, the framework deal contemplates security arrangements, disarmament of armed groups, redeployment of the Lebanese military, and reconstruction of areas affected by war with international support. (QNA)

Libyans struggle during heatwave, power cuts

Temperatures in Libya soared yesterday, a day after hundreds of residents protested in Tripoli and its suburbs against power cuts resulting from the intense heat.

The national meteorological centre announced temperatures ranging from 39C to 48C in the country's north, where temperatures are generally milder than in the desert areas.

Scientists say climate change is making extreme weather events more frequent and intense.

Power outages used to be a regular occurrence in the north African country, but the last three years have brought marked improvement.

The return of power cuts is all the harder to bear because it affects the water supply, economy and telecommunications networks.

"The power cuts last between six and seven hours. We are forced to use the generator and boost the refrigeration of goods, to prevent them from spoiling," butcher Anas Al-Deeb told AFP.

Libya holds Africa's largest oil reserves but its power grid suffers from a lack of investment and from the country's political divisions.

In Tripoli and its suburbs, hundreds of residents protested on Sunday evening in front of government offices, ministries and state-owned companies, blocking entrances by dumping rubble or sand. Images circulating on Facebook showed young people setting tyres on fire and blocking roads in the city centre, as well in the towns of Tajura, Janzur and Ain Zara.

As in neighbouring Tunisia, which has also experienced long outages this year due to heatwaves and greater use of air conditioning, the General Electricity Company of Libya has resorted to rolling blackouts, sometimes implementing them twice in one day. (AFP)

Drone strikes rock Sudan's El-Obeid after army secures highway

AFP
El-Obeid, Sudan

Drone strikes blamed on paramilitary forces shook the Sudanese flashpoint of El-Obeid yesterday, hours after the army regained control of the city's highway to the capital Khartoum.

The army's rival, the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), have for months amassed troops around El-Obeid, attempting to encircle it ahead of an apparent large-scale assault.

Following a days-long advance across North Kordofan state, the Sudanese army on Sunday managed to push the RSF west, off the 400-kilometre highway that connects Khartoum with the embattled Kordofan region's largest city, two army sources told AFP yesterday on condition of anonymity.

Drone strikes were reported on the city at dawn, with local officials attributing them to the RSF.

The local lawyers' association and a branch of the Agricultural

Bank of Sudan were left in ruins, an AFP reporter saw, though no casualties were reported.

Since the start of the year, drone strikes by both forces have killed more than 1,000 people in Kordofan alone, according to the UN.

Since April 2023, the war between Sudan's army and their one-time allies the RSF has torn the country apart and killed more than 200,000 people, aid workers estimate. It has also created the world's largest displacement and hunger crises, with over 33 mn people in need of humanitarian aid.

For months, each side has sought to cut off the other's supply lines around El-Obeid, which sits at an important crossroads.

Its north-south highway runs from Khartoum through Kordofan to the southern border, while its east-west axis connects RSF strongholds in the Darfur region to army-controlled central and eastern Sudan. "Now the militia has to turn to defend West Kordofan, which is the front line for Darfur," a



Damaged interior view of the Agricultural Bank of Sudan after it was reportedly targeted by RSF in El-Obeid. (AFP)

retired army officer told AFP.

The highway to Khartoum remains closed to civilians, who have for most of the war relied entirely on the eastern road to the White Nile, where the RSF regularly launches deadly drone strikes.

The army advance "opens a second supply route to El-Obeid and beyond", said one of the army sources. Inside the city, where the

UN says hundreds of thousands are in need of aid, relieved El-Obeid native Sabreen Mohamed told AFP that "the highway opening means goods can flow".

Praising the army's advance in North Kordofan, Mohamed brushed off the RSF's dawn drone strikes as "death throes".

"We're used to it, every time the army advances, they retaliate

against North Kordofan," she said.

Though both sides have reportedly committed war crimes including indiscriminate bombing, the army is generally regarded more favourably by civilians who have faced a litany of horrors at the hands of the RSF.

As the RSF mobilised on El-Obeid, the UN has for weeks warned of a repeat of atrocities committed during the RSF's takeover of the Darfur city of El-Fasher in October last year, which a UN inquiry found bore the "hallmarks of genocide".

A city of about half a mn people, which the UN says has doubled in size because of displacement, El-Obeid has been caught in the crossfire since the war began.

It was under paramilitary siege from April 2023 until February of last year, when the army broke through. Ever since, RSF attacks on roads, neighbourhoods and critical infrastructure have worsened a humanitarian crisis, where the UN says only a fraction of the city has reliable access to food.



Trump pushes economic message in Michigan before midterms

Reuters
Washington

President Donald Trump travelled to a General Motors test site in Michigan yesterday to tout his trade and industrial policies, seeking to refocus attention on the economy even as an escalating conflict with Iran clouds the political outlook and stokes inflation concerns.

With less than 100 days before the US midterm elections, Trump hopes to change the political conversation after months dominated by the conflict with Iran.

While the White House plans to highlight what it says is a manufacturing revival marked by new factory investment and job creation, the broader economic picture remains mixed, with higher gasoline prices, stubborn inflation and growing public unease over the Middle East crisis threatening to erode voter support.

Michigan voters have become more skeptical about Trump's handling of the economy and trade, according to Bernie Porn, president and pollster at Epic MRA. Trump's job approval rating in the state has fallen to 33%, with 61% disapproving, while most voters say consumers — not foreign countries — are bearing the cost of tariffs.

"He's got a serious problem going into the midterms because people don't believe him and they



GM CEO Mary Barra gives a tour to President Donald Trump at General Motors' Milford Proving Grounds in Michigan. (AFP)

don't think he's telling the truth," Porn said of Trump's problems in Michigan, where Epic MRA is based.

White House spokeswoman Liz Huston said the president's "America First" agenda has driven automakers to invest, hire and expand, calling it a pace of growth "not seen in decades."

She added Trump is "delivering on his promise to bring manufacturing back to America and rebuild the auto industry"

Trump and Republicans hold a sizable fundraising advantage, powered by strong donor support

and campaign infrastructure, but polls show Democrats with an edge in voter enthusiasm and motivation. The gap could prove significant in midterm elections, where turnout often determines the outcome.

Trump defeated former Vice President Kamala Harris by roughly 1.4 percentage points in Michigan in 2024, flipping it back to Republicans after Joe Biden won the state in 2020.

Michigan will be a critical battleground in the fight for control of Congress, with an open Senate seat drawing national attention. The

state's Republican and Democratic voters will choose their nominees in an August primary.

The Senate race will test whether Trump's strength among working-class voters can translate into broader political gains. Republicans are rallying behind former Congressman Mike Rogers, while Democrats are holding a competitive primary featuring Representative Haley Stevens and former public health official Abdul El-Sayed.

During his Michigan trip, Trump was given a tour of GM's Milford Proving Ground, the company's

vehicle testing facility, by the CEO Mary Barra.

Located about 65 km northwest of Detroit, the site covers thousands of acres and includes test tracks, laboratories and specialised facilities for simulating real-world driving conditions.

Trump has used tariffs to push US manufacturers to move production to the US, including on GM, which plans to move production of the Chevrolet Blazer from Mexico, while adding Equinox production in the US to supplement existing capacity.

Automakers and their suppliers have been navigating tariffs and shifting policy changes, particularly around emissions rules, forcing companies to adjust their long-term strategies.

With encouragement from the Obama and Biden administrations, GM invested heavily in an electric vehicle future.

But EV sales in the US have weakened since the expiration of a consumer tax credit last fall, and automakers have taken billions of dollars in write-downs as they scale back EV plans, including \$10.9bn in charges by GM to restructure its electric vehicle business.

Yet the US market looks robust for GM.

The company last week raised its 2026 profit forecast for the second time this year, citing in part continued American demand for pricey pickup trucks and SUVs.

Shots fired near US consulate in Toronto

AFP
Montreal

Shots were fired early yesterday near the US consulate in Toronto but no one was injured, Canadian police said, the second shooting near the diplomatic compound in four months.

"Officers heard a firearm being discharged in the area," and "a white sedan was seen fleeing the scene," Toronto police said on X.

The area was cordoned off and shell casings were found. No one was injured and no suspects have been identified, police said.

The US consulate thanked the police for "their response" to yesterday's shooting.

On March 10, two men fired multiple shots at the consulate in what police described as a "national security incident," prompting beefed-up protection for US and Israeli diplomatic buildings in the Canadian city, as war gripped the Middle East.

Two men, aged 18 and 19, were arrested in June as part of the investigation into that shooting. Police said the men were recruited to carry out violent acts but did not provide further details.

Police also said they were investigating shootings with a recurring and similar modus operandi, such as the shooting at a Toronto synagogue on March 2.

Lula holds lead over Bolsonaro in Nexus poll

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva leads Senator Flavio Bolsonaro in a simulated second-round runoff for October's presidential election, a Nexus poll by lender BTG Pactual showed. Lula would defeat the son of former right-wing President Jair Bolsonaro in a potential runoff by 47% to 43%, survey suggests. A July 13 poll had Lula ahead by 47% to 44%. In a first-round scenario, Lula would lead with 42% of the votes, followed by Bolsonaro (33%), Ronaldo Caiado (6%), Renan Santos (5%), and Romeu Zema (3%). In Brazil, if no candidate gets more than 50% of valid votes in the first round, the two frontrunners advance to a runoff. Nexus surveyed 2,004 people July 24-26; margin of error 2 percentage points. (AFP)

Machado says won't take part in US-backed talks

Venezuelan Nobel Peace Prize laureate and opposition leader Maria Corina Machado said Sunday she will not participate in US-backed talks with the de facto government of Delcy Rodriguez that are scheduled for August.

In a statement co-signed by Edmundo Gonzalez Urrutia, who ran for president in Venezuela's 2024 elections, Machado said the opposition would "not participate" in the "design, development and operation" of the talks.

In mid-July, Rodriguez's interim government and a group of former opposition members of parliament from the 2015-2020 term announced a work plan for "strengthening democracy" in the country.

"It is not our place to explain its scope and decisions. Those promoting it must inform the country of its objectives, its method, and its timeline," reads Machado's statement, which was shared on social media.

Washington — which ousted former president Nicolas Maduro in a midnight military raid in January — had hailed the initiative as an important step towards political reconciliation in Venezuela.

With US support, exiled opposition figure Dinorah Figueroa made a quick visit to Venezuela in June and met with National Assembly President Jorge Rodriguez.

Machado defended Gonzalez Urrutia's victory in the disputed 2024 presidential elections, in which Maduro was declared the winner amid allegations of fraud.

But she said Sunday she would not stand in the way "of any initiative that would produce real progress," and vowed: "We will return to Venezuela."

Rodriguez has accused the interim government of blocking her return to Venezuela following devastating twin earthquakes last month that left more than 5,000 dead. (AFP)

AFP
Beijing

Chinese President Xi Jinping told his Brazilian counterpart yesterday that he supports the country in "opposing external interference," Beijing's state media said, reporting a call between the leaders.

The conversation between Xi and President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva comes less than three months before a tense election in Brazil pitting the incumbent against right-wing candidate Flavio Bolsonaro.

"China highly values Brazil's international status and important influence," Xi told Lula, according to state news agency Xinhua.

Beijing "supports Brazil in safeguarding its sovereignty and independence, opposing external interference, and contributing to maintaining regional and world peace and stability," Xi added.

According to a statement issued by the Brazilian presidency, both Lula and Xi also "agreed on the importance of speeding up negotiations for a Mercosur-China agreement", referring to a regional trading bloc.

During the call, which lasted "more than one hour", Lula said he was "committed to diversifying markets and trade partners", amid tariff pressure on Brazil from the US, its second-largest trading partner.

Washington imposed two rounds of tariffs this month on various Brazilian products, after an initial major tariff hike in 2025 as retaliation for a coup-plot trial

that sent former president Jair Bolsonaro to prison.

Lula has denounced Washington's over its persisting tariff pressure as an attempt to exert political influence in an election year.

In another recent development, Brazil denied visas for two officials from the US who sought to meet

this week with election authorities in Brasilia ahead of the October vote citing integrity of the whole process, a diplomatic source told AFP on Saturday.

Flavio Bolsonaro — son of the former president and a current senator — has recently renewed unfounded claims that the coun-

try's voting system is insecure, while US President Donald Trump continues to make false claims about American elections.

The Brazilian statement on the call between Lula and Xi did not mention whether the issue of "external interference", mentioned by Xinhua, was raised.

Brazil, Korea agree for further trade deal talks

Brazil and Republic of Korea agreed to accelerate talks on a potential trade deal between the Asian nation and the South American bloc Mercosur, their presidents said yesterday during a ceremony in Brasilia.

Brazil has been seeking to expand deals — alone or through Mercosur, which also includes Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay — to diversify trade at a time when it is being hit by tariffs from the US, one of its key commercial partners. Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said his country and Korea agreed to create a working group to accelerate the talks, while his Korean counterpart Lee Jae Myung called a potential deal with Mercosur an urgent matter. Mercosur has closed deals in recent years with partners including the European Union and the four members of the European Free Trade Association, Switzerland, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. During the ceremony on Monday, Lula said Brazil will receive next month Korean mission for a



Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and Korean President Lee Jae Myung shake hands on the day of their joint press statement at the Alvorada Palace in Brasilia yesterday. (Reuters)

sanitary evaluation of Brazilian meatpackers. The leaders also agreed to expand co-operation in the critical minerals sector,

Lee said. The event took place five months after Lula attended a summit with Lee in Seoul. (Reuters)

Architectural poetry



View of the skyline during the sunset in Panama City. (AFP)

Colombia's president-elect vows to break ties with Cuba, Nicaragua

AFP
Bogotá

Colombia's hard-right president-elect Abelardo de la Espriella vowed yesterday to break off diplomatic relations with Cuba and Nicaragua when he takes office on August 7.

De la Espriella said he will also close 15 consulates and 14 embassies in countries including Algeria, Barbados, Ethiopia, Haiti, Hungary, Senegal and South Africa.

"In my government, there will be no ties with tyrannies," De la Espriella said in a social media post, referring to the leftist governments of Cuba and Nicaragua.

However, he said the decisions "do not mean breaking off diplomatic relations" with the other countries.

"With the rest of the countries and organisations, Colombia will maintain its international relations and will guarantee attention for its nationals through other embassies," he said.

The president-elect, whose election campaign centered on "iron fist" security policies, said closing embassies would allow the government to redirect money to security. De la Espriella announced plans



President-elect Abelardo de la Espriella. (AFP)

to open an embassy in Jerusalem in July as he seeks to restore ties with Israel.

Outgoing President Gustavo Petro severed ties with Israel in 2024 over its Gaza offensive.

De la Espriella said he also plans to open an embassy in Nigeria, which "will make it possible to reorganise and make more efficient" Colombia's presence in Africa.

IMF chief visits Argentina as 2027 debt hurdle looms

Reuters
Buenos Aires

The International Monetary Fund's managing director was in Argentina yesterday as investor confidence in President Javier Milei's reforms grows, despite worries about a debt repayment crunch that could coincide with his reelection bid. Argentina's exports are rising, foreign reserves are accumulating, and once-galloping inflation is decelerating.

Last week, Moody's upgraded the country's sovereign rating, following earlier upgrades by S&P Global and Fitch, adding to investor optimism around Milei's efforts to stabilise an economy long associated with boom-and-bust cycles. Yet investors are keeping a close eye on what lies ahead.

An IMF report had put Argentina's 2027 foreign-currency debt bill at \$32.3bn, including interest, before the central bank pushed \$6bn in repo financing into 2028 earlier this month.

The government has said it plans to meet those obligations through a combination of multilateral financing, privatisations and local debt issuance, while avoiding a return to international capital markets.

The timing is sensitive because the repayments will come due as Milei is widely expected to seek a second term. Any perception that Milei could struggle to win reelection, or that a successor might change course on economic policy, could weigh on confidence and complicate financing.

Kristalina Georgieva's trip, her first to Argentina as IMF chief, is set to include meetings with Milei and Economy Minister Luis Caputo as well as a visit to Patagonia's Vaca Muerta shale formation, a cornerstone of the government's strategy to boost energy exports and generate the dollars needed to strengthen the country's finances.

Her two-day visit comes ahead of a third review of Argentina's



Argentine Economy Minister Luis Caputo with IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva in Buenos Aires, yesterday. (Reuters)

\$20bn IMF program. Since Milei took office in late 2023, the Fund has consistently backed the government's fiscal discipline, legal reforms and efforts to lower monthly inflation, which dropped from 25.5% in December 2023 to 1.9% in June.

The IMF's latest staff report nevertheless warned of "exceptional risks," saying that while Argentina's debt is sustainable, there was not a high probability that it would remain so.

Next year looms as a crucial test not only for Milei's legislative agenda, but also for the IMF, which has heavily backed Argentina's economic turnaround.

Argentina remains the Fund's largest debtor and the two sides have a complex history after a succession of programs failed to prevent repeated economic crises.

Investors' focus is shifting from Milei's success in stabilising the

'The great challenge is that this reorganisation process, which in the eyes of investors and the macroeconomy is very satisfactory, has to be validated electorally.' – Economist Gustavo Ber

economy to whether the recovery can endure, analysts say.

The challenge now is to generate enough dollars, investment and voter support to sustain his belt-tightening reforms beyond the initial turnaround.

Stronger exports and improving financial indicators alone will not guarantee electoral success if many Argentines are burdened by high household debt and precarious employment, analysts said.

"Milei's problem is no long-

er whether the macro story is believable abroad. It is whether voters can feel it at home," said Mariano Machado of risk consultancy Verisk Maplecroft.

Government policies easing import restrictions have led to steep job losses in inefficient manufacturing sectors, said Aldo Abram, director of the Fundación Libertad y Progreso.

Moody's, while upgrading the country's rating this month, warned that political risks remain a key constraint and that any reversal of reforms could undermine recent gains.

That makes the 2027 election almost as important as the debt repayments themselves.

"The great challenge is that this reorganisation process, which in the eyes of investors and the macroeconomy is very satisfactory, has to be validated electorally," said economist Gustavo Ber.

Amazon's Leo proposes satellite constellation for direct-to-phone service

Reuters
Washington

Amazon's Leo yesterday proposed a constellation of up to 5,105 satellites to provide direct-to-device voice and data connectivity, joining a growing race among satellite operators to beam cellular services directly to smartphones.

The proposed network would provide voice, messaging, data and emergency services in areas beyond the reach of terrestrial cellular networks, with satellite deployment beginning in 2028.

The company has filed an application with the Federal Communications Commission seeking quick approval for the plan.

The FCC did not immediately comment. The service would partner with mobile network operators globally and use the mobile satellite spectrum of Globalstar which Amazon agreed to acquire earlier this year.

Globalstar provides device-to-device connectivity for millions of Apple device users by enabling emergency messaging, location sharing and roadside assistance while out of the reach of terrestrial networks.

The move will expand Amazon's satellite ambitions be-

yond broadband Internet and will intensify competition in the direct-to-device market with SpaceX, AST SpaceMobile and Lynk Global, which are also developing satellite-to-phone services.

A growing shortage of rocket launch capacity has, however, become one of the biggest constraints to deploying a wave of next-generation satellite constellations.

Amazon Leo has announced partnerships with Vodafone, DirecTV, Herotel and Australia's National Broadband Network.

Amazon Leo is deploying its first-generation broadband satellite system and has about 390 satellites in orbit.

It plans to begin rolling out fixed service across initial bands later this year.

In March, FCC Chair Brendan Carr dismissed criticism from Amazon of Elon Musk's SpaceX plan to launch a constellation of up to one million satellites.

"I think Amazon should focus on getting Amazon's house in order with their own launches and their own satellite constellation, rather than worrying about other people that are actually out there launching satellites at the pace and cadence that SpaceX is," Carr said.

UN mission says Venezuela's ICC withdrawal undermines accountability

A United Nations fact-finding body on Venezuela said yesterday it was "gravely concerned" over the country's withdrawal from the International Criminal Court (ICC) and urged it to rejoin.

Venezuela's government said on Friday it had made an "irrevocable" decision to leave, justifying the move by alleging a "geographical bias" within the court. The UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela was formed by the UN Human Rights Council in 2019. By withdrawing, the Venezuelan government seeks to evade international processes designed to ensure accountability, the mission said. Venezuela has taken no meaningful action to investigate gross violations and international crimes committed over more than a decade, it added. The mission called on Venezuela to rejoin the ICC and co-operate fully with international justice mechanisms.

The exit "serves only to reinforce impunity for human rights violations," the mission said in a statement. (Reuters)



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Marcos says ‘perhaps time to revisit nuclear energy’

AFP
Manila

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos, who declared a national energy emergency this year, said yesterday that nuclear power might hold answers for a country paying the highest electricity prices in the region.

Marcos made the suggestion in a wide-ranging State of the Nation speech that placed spiralling energy costs and inflation, driven by the war in the Middle East, centre-stage.

“Perhaps it is time for us to revisit nuclear energy production,” Marcos told the joint session of Congress.

“We will ensure it is safe. We will ensure the good benefits of nuclear energy will be explained properly to the public.”

The Bataan Nuclear Power Plant – the only nuclear power plant in the Philippines – was completed in the 1980s but never launched due to corruption issues and safety concerns.

The Philippines has conducted exploratory talks about nuclear energy with numerous countries including Japan, France, Russia and the US.

Marcos offered no specifics about his atomic energy plans, the Philippines announced a deal with the US in May 2024 to train Filipinos how to build and operate nuclear power plants.

Carlo Arcilla, former director of the Philippine Nuclear Research Institute, told AFP reintroducing nuclear energy into the conversation was a “no-brainer”.

“While it’s true that we have hydro and geothermal, these are



Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr delivers his fifth State of the Nation Address (SONA) as Senate President Sherwin Gatchalian and House Speaker Faustino “Bodjie” Dy clap, at the House of Representatives, in Quezon City, Metro Manila, yesterday. (Reuters)

not enough. We’ve experienced a lot of brownouts, especially in the Visayas,” he said, referencing a region of the central Philippines that is home to more than 20mn.

“I hope the president follows this up with concrete action,” Arcilla said.

Energy Secretary Sharon Garin said in March that the import-dependent archipelago planned to boost the output of its coal-fired power plants to keep electricity costs down as the war wreaked havoc with gas shipments.

Marcos separately unveiled a raft of measures aimed at providing relief for the country’s embattled middle class, including exempting those earning up to 350,000 pesos (\$5,670) from in-

come tax entirely. The previous threshold had been 250,000 pesos.

Three kilometres away, a crowd of about 3,000 protesters unable to approach the House of Representatives waved banners and called for accountability over a corruption scandal tied to bogus flood control projects believed to have cost taxpayers billions of dollars.

A year removed from a speech that first put the issue in the spotlight, Marcos – whose approval rating sits at 38% according to recent polling – insisted that the wheels of justice were turning, confirming that his own cousin would soon face charges.

“Even though this is painful for

me, we need to do what is right,” he said of charges the country’s ombudsman are preparing against former House of Representatives speaker Martin Romualdez.

But critics have bemoaned the lack of arrests over the past year.

To date, the scandal has seen just one sitting politician arrested on charges tied to the scandal. A second was charged after first resigning his position, then fleeing the country.

Iya Trinidad, a 25-year-old activist among the protesters, slammed the pace of investigations, saying “no big fish have been caught”.

“Last year, Marcos said, ‘Have some shame,’ but up to now, no one is ashamed,” she said.

China opposes US ‘forced labour’ tariffs, calls for them to be cancelled

Reuters
Beijing

China’s commerce ministry said yesterday that new US tariffs imposed on Chinese goods over alleged forced labour were unjustified and amounted to protectionism, and urged Washington to remove them. On Friday, the US imposed new tariffs of 10% and 12.5% on goods from 60 trading partners, including the EU and China, alleging those countries failed to curb imports made by forced labour. China was assigned a 12.5% rate. The new US duties could risk undermining a fragile trade truce reached between the world’s two largest economies last year and came as the two sides prepare for a possible visit to the US by Chinese President Xi Jinping in September.

The commerce ministry in a statement accused Washington of long manipulating the issue of forced labour, calling the new tariffs a typical act of unilateralism and protectionism, but also signalled willingness to continue dialogue “based on mutual respect, equality and mutual benefit” to address concerns.

“This time, it (Washington) has again initiated a Section 301 investigation and imposed uni-

lateral tariffs on the grounds of ‘forced labour,’ which is a typical act of unilateralism and protectionism, and China firmly opposes it,” the ministry said.

“China has consistently opposed forced labour and has established a comprehensive system of labour laws and regulations to resolutely prevent and combat forced labour practices. In contrast, the US has not only failed to ratify the 1930 Forced Labour Convention, but has also long manipulated the issue of “forced labour”.”

It said Washington had pledged during trade talks that replacement tariffs on Chinese goods would not exceed 20%, noting that the new 12.5% tariff imposed under the forced-labour probe remained within that limit.

“China urges the US to correct its erroneous practices and completely remove the relevant unilateral tariff measures,” the ministry said. It said it reserved the right to take all necessary measures as it assessed further US actions.

“It’s hoped the US will work with China in the same direction to implement consensus reached in bilateral trade talks, narrow differences, continuously reduce the problem list and lengthen the co-operation list,” the ministry said.

Tourists evacuated from Jiuzhaigou World Heritage site after mudslides, heavy rain

Reuters
Hong kong

China evacuated stranded tourists from the Unesco World Heritage site of Jiuzhaigou yesterday after mudslides triggered by heavy rain, state broadcaster CCTV reported, as authorities issued the highest flash-flood alert for parts of the country in the wake of Typhoon Noul.

Jiuzhaigou, in southwestern Sichuan province, is famous for its fairyland landscape with blue, green and purple pools, snow capped peaks, lakes and multi-tiered waterfalls.

CCTV said some of the key tourist sites had been closed and stranded tourists were being safely evacuating.

The closures come as China issued its highest alert for flash-floods across multiple provinces after Typhoon Noul, the strongest typhoon to hit the country this year, brought widespread torrential rains across southern and central regions.

“Due to mudslides, starting July 27, the area above Arrow Bamboo Lake (including Arrow Bamboo Lake) in Rize Valley and the entire Zechawa Valley in Jiuzhaigou Scenic Area will be temporarily closed to tourists,” local authorities said.

China’s Ministry of Water Resources and the China Meteorological Administration jointly issued a red warning for flash floods from Sunday night through yesterday, warning of high risks in parts of Jiangxi, Hunan, Guangdong, Sichuan, Shaanxi, Gansu and southeastern Xinjiang.

Mudslides and soil erosion are common in China’s mountainous regions, particularly where steep river valleys intersect, especially during the peak summer rainy season. At least four deadly landslides have occurred across China this month.

In the southwestern city of Chongqing, a massive landslide following torrential rain killed 11 people, with 50 others still missing.

Korea’s ex-president found guilty of election disinformation

AFP
Seoul

A Korean court handed jailed ex-president Yoon Suk-yeol an 18-month suspended sentence yesterday for spreading disinformation in his 2022 election campaign before his martial law bid.

The Seoul Central District Court ruling could see Republic of Korea’s main opposition People Power Party (PPP), which Yoon represented, forced to pay 39.7bn won (US\$29mn) to the election commission if it is upheld on appeal.

It could also see Yoon’s 2022 electoral win nullified, a largely symbolic blow for the disgraced ex-leader who is already serving a

life sentence for insurrection.

Yoon declared martial law in December 2024, ordering troops to shut parliament, before MPs rallied to vote it down after just six hours and oust him.

The 65-year-old and his close cohorts have since been prosecuted in a hail of criminal cases.

Yesterday’s sentence, suspended for three years, was handed down by judges who found Yoon guilty of twin violations of polling legislation by making false statements on the 2022 election trail.

Yoon won the vote with a margin of just 0.7%.

However, the court found he had been dishonest about his ties to a shaman and lied during an interview at a Buddhist conference to cover up a 2019 meeting with the mystic in a bid to skirt controversy.

Yoon wore a neutral expression as judges also ruled he had lied about introducing a lawyer to a tax official who was investigated for alleged bribery.

“The defendant, a leading candidate in the presidential election – a procedure for selecting the nation’s highest public official – publicised false information regarding his specific actions to his advantage,” said the ruling, read aloud on a livestream.

“There are sufficient grounds to determine that the voters’ ability to make informed decisions – a value the offence of disseminating false information seeks to protect – was compromised by these incidents.”

Yoon’s legal team said in a statement to AFP there were “significant errors” in the judgment and

said they would lodge an appeal.

Under Korean law, the election commission reimburses parties for all their campaigning costs if they win more than 15% of the vote – legislation designed to limit the influence of money in politics.

Candidates sentenced to prison for election offences – including airing false information – are mandated to be removed from office, with their campaign funds returned to the National Election Commission.

The PPP spent 39.7bn won contesting 2022’s presidential election, a spokeswoman told AFP, and expects to be forced to pay back the cash if the ruling is upheld.

That amount would total roughly one-third of the beleaguered party’s assets, according to election commission filings.

Kim Jong-un marks war anniversary with daughter by his side

Reuters
Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un paid respects at war memorials marking the 73rd anniversary of the Korean War armistice, state media KCNA reported yesterday, with his daughter joining him for the first time at the commemorations.

Kim visited cemeteries, met veterans and laid flowers at the graves of first-generation guerrilla fighters, while reiterating Pyongyang’s claim of a “great victory” in the 1950-1953 war, according to KCNA.

The Korean War ended with an armistice rather than a peace treaty.

North Korean state media photographs and video showed Kim’s daughter, known as Ju-ae, walking beside him during the visits, positioned at the centre of ceremonial

formations and greeting elderly veterans alongside her father, underscoring her increasingly prominent public profile.

Republic of Korea’s Unification Ministry said it was the first time Ju-ae had attended the armistice anniversary commemorations and her first visit to either the Fatherland Liberation War Martyrs Cemetery or the Revolutionary Martyrs Cemetery.

Republic of Korea’s National Intelligence Service (NIS) believes Ju-ae has been positioned as Kim’s successor, based on “credible intelligence,” according to briefings by lawmakers this year.

The assessment comes as Ju-ae has been periodically shown in state media accompanying her father. In March, images showed her driving a new tank, following earlier photographs of her firing a rifle at a shooting range and using a handgun.



North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, accompanied by his daughter Kim Ju-ae and his wife Ri Sol-ju, visits the Fatherland Liberation War Martyrs Cemetery, in Pyongyang, in this photo released by North Korea’s official Korean Central News Agency yesterday. (Reuters)

Malaysia detains Rohingya refugees seeking shelter at UNHCR

Reuters
Kuala Lumpur

Malaysian authorities detained more than 100 Rohingya Muslim asylum seekers yesterday who had gathered outside the UN refugee agency in Kuala Lumpur, saying they were seeking protection after being evicted from their homes.

All of the refugees outside the UNHCR were taken away with their belongings in four police trucks at around 8:30pm (1230 GMT), according to Reuters witnesses at the scene.

A police official, who declined to be identified, said they were be-

ing taken to police headquarters in Kuala Lumpur for further checks.

The refugees, who included women and children, said they were driven out of their homes by local residents in the northern state of Penang on Sunday and had travelled to the Malaysian capital on buses overnight to seek assistance on resettlement from the UNHCR. Penang police said the Rohingya “voluntarily moved” to Kuala Lumpur with the assistance of state and federal authorities, including the national security council. “This transfer was carried out due to economic and territorial competition that arose following an increase in the Rohingya population in the area,” Se-

berang Perai Utara district police chief Anuar Abdul Rahman said in a statement. The evictions came amid a rise in online hate speech and misinformation targeting the Rohingya since May that has led to greater harassment and scrutiny of the community, including widespread school closures.

Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said yesterday the gathering outside the UNHCR building had raised concerns from the public, and warned that anyone without proper permits would be detained by immigration authorities.

“No one has the right to take over any part of the city,” he said in a video posted on social media.

Bryony Lau, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch, said Rohingya refugees in Malaysia live under constant threat of arrests and raids in a climate of fear that has only gotten worse due to the surge of online hate directed towards them. “The Malaysian government should prioritise protecting refugees who have been evicted from their homes instead of terrifying them further by detaining them,” she said.

Around 126,000 Rohingya Muslims were registered with the UNHCR in Malaysia as of the end of February, according to the agency’s website, though rights groups say many more remain undocumented.



Rohingya refugees gather in front of the office of the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) after being evicted from their homes, in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. (Reuters)

Burnham meets Zelensky, pledges ‘Stone Cloak’ for drones

AFP
Portsmouth

British Prime Minister Andy Burnham held his first meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky at a UK naval base yesterday, pledging new “Stone Cloak” jamming technology to help safeguard Ukraine’s drones on the battlefield.

The meeting on the dockside and on board an aircraft carrier in the southern city of Portsmouth was Burnham’s first bilateral with a foreign leader and comes ahead of a visit by Zelensky to Washington today aimed at ending the four-year war with Russia.

“We are with Ukraine 100%. I am personally with you 100%, Mr President,” Burnham assured Zelensky after the two men, both wearing similar dark casual clothes, shook hands on the dockside.

Zelensky thanked Burnham for an “important signal of support” and said he had invited Burnham to visit Ukraine, after the leaders spoke by phone within hours of the new prime minister taking office.

Vowing to “honour every commitment this country has made to Ukraine,” Burnham said Britain was “going further” and was “providing new, home-grown jamming technology to protect Ukrainian drones” as both Moscow and Kyiv intensify drone and missile strikes.

“It will help them to hit their targets and help save Ukrainian lives. It also shows the kind of innovation our industries can deliver together,” Burnham said.

Afterwards, Zelensky wrote on X he was “grateful” to Britain for “today’s decision to provide Ukraine with electronic warfare technologies” that would “certainly be useful on the battlefield”.

The leaders met on board Britain’s flagship aircraft carrier HMS



Britain’s Prime Minister Andy Burnham and Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky view Ukrainian equipment and meet Ukrainian personnel during their visit to HM Naval Base in Portsmouth yesterday. (AFP)

Queen Elizabeth and spoke to armed forces personnel involved in training Ukrainian service members.

“Britain stands with Ukraine, shoulder to shoulder, and our support remains unwavering,” Burnham said in a statement.

“Russia should be in no doubt of our resolve, and we will not back down until we achieve long-lasting and just peace for Ukraine.”

London announced it will share with Kyiv information on a new battle-tested electronic jamming capability dubbed “Stone Cloak”.

When attached to drones, the tablet-sized, military-grade jammers can hinder Russian air defence systems from tracking and targeting such weapons in-flight, Downing Street said.

Thousands of the jammers, developed under a 100-year partnership pact between the countries, have already been gifted to Kyiv, according to London.

Following their roll-out and potential mass production in Ukraine, Stone Cloak will be built into the next generation of UK deep-strike capabilities, it noted.

“Stone Cloak is the best of homegrown British innovation and proven on the frontline, and it will be vital to protecting our security in both our countries,” Burnham said.

In a sign of Ukraine’s deepening defence ties with Britain, Zelensky wrote on X that the leaders “discussed the development of joint defence production”.

“Together, we can achieve even more in the field of drones and other technologies”, he said.

Burnham and Zelensky met some of the roughly 200 Ukrainian military personnel who have been in Britain for the past three weeks participating in a maritime security and counter-mine exercise.

It was held to prepare for future missions in the Black Sea.

Downing Street noted the UK’s total support for Ukraine has reached 25bn pounds (\$33bn) since Russia’s full-scale invasion in February 2022, including 16bn pounds in direct military assistance.

Zelensky is due to meet today with US President Donald Trump in Washington, a White House official said, while US-led negotiations to

end the war are stuck with US attention diverted to the Iran war.

The Ukrainian leader is also expected to attend the funeral of US senator Lindsey Graham, a supporter of Ukraine who died earlier this month.

Trump and Zelensky have had a fraught relationship that has veered from a shouting match in the Oval Office in February 2025 to warmer ties in recent months.

The US president told Zelensky on the sidelines of a Nato summit this month that he was giving Ukraine permission to build US-designed Patriot air defence systems capable of downing ballistic missiles.

Washington has also advanced bipartisan legislation targeting countries buying Russian energy – potentially clearing the way for stronger pressure on Moscow.

Trump’s support for Ukrainian defence comes as the president faces domestic pressure to end the Middle East war.

“I understand the US is focusing on the Middle East,” Zelensky told Sky News on Sunday, saying it was “a big challenge”.

Burnham vows to reform social care system

AFP
London

British Prime Minister Andy Burnham vowed in an interview aired yesterday to overhaul the country’s social care system to ease pressure on the beleaguered National Health Service.

Unlike the publicly funded NHS, which is struggling with long waiting lists and stretched resources, social care for elderly and disabled people is largely privatised in Britain.

“Whatever political capital I have, I will put into fixing broken social care and I would not want to leave office without having brought in the substantial change,” Burnham told the BBC in an interview one week after taking office.

Burnham, whose father has Alzheimer’s, has campaigned to fix the social care system for years, including as a health secretary under Gordon Brown between 2009 and 2010.

He had proposed the creation of a publicly funded National Care Service, which would be free at the point of use like the NHS, when he was health secretary, but those plans fell through.

“I will go as quickly as I can on the reform of social care,” said Burnham, adding that while bringing in a new system would “take time” he still hoped to achieve “substantial change” while in office.

Currently, the system for home and residential care is means-tested and local authorities, who are responsible for providing the services, are struggling to keep up with the demands of an ageing population.

The NHS’s chronic bed and staff shortages stem partly from its inability to discharge elderly and dependent patients who don’t have social care in place.

The prime minister also acknowledged the need to reduce Britain’s ballooning welfare bill and suggested tightening conditions for accessing benefits to encourage people to return to work.

“It’s about changing the nature of the support and making some of the support conditional upon people taking opportunities that are presented in front of them,” said Burnham.

His predecessor Keir Starmer had attempted to reform the welfare system but was forced to scale back the changes after facing opposition from within his own party.

Australian politician loses appeal in racism case

AFP
Sydney

A popular far-right Australian politician failed yesterday to overturn a racial vilification finding that was handed down after she told a Muslim senator to go back to Pakistan.

Senator Pauline Hanson has emerged as one of Australia’s most popular politicians, wooing voters with calls for strict immigration curbs, mass deportations of “illegal migrants” and enhanced free speech protections.

Hanson took aim at Pakistan-born Australian lawmaker Mehreen Faruqi in 2022 over comments made in the wake of Queen Elizabeth II’s death.

Faruqi, a left-leaning Greens senator, said she could not mourn the “leader of a racist empire built on stolen lives, land

and wealth of colonised people”.

Hanson replied on social media: “When you immigrated to Australia you took every advantage of this country.”

The Federal Court of Australia found in 2024, in response to a complaint from Faruqi, that Hanson’s comments amounted to a “strong form of racism”.

Hanson’s appeal against that decision on free speech grounds was dismissed yesterday.

“I was incensed by the incredible disrespect that I felt was shown to our late Queen on the day of her death by Senator Faruqi and others,” she said after the court’s decision.

“I simply wanted to call that out.”

For years a political outsider, Hanson’s One Nation has surged this year to become one of the country’s most popular parties, according to opinion polls.

India summons Ukraine envoy over Black Sea ship attack

AFP
New Delhi

India summoned Ukraine’s top envoy in New Delhi yesterday to protest against an attack on a commercial vessel transiting the Black Sea that killed an Indian national.

The Indian foreign ministry said it had summoned Ukrainian ambassador Oleksandr Polishchuk to convey its “serious concern” over the July 18 attack on the MV Omfori.

The ship had three Indian nationals on board, one of whom was killed.

“The ministry conveyed its serious concern over the incident and condemned such attacks on commercial shipping in

the strongest terms,” it said in a statement.

Polishchuk was asked to tell Kyiv that such actions, “which endanger the lives of innocent civilian seafarers, are unacceptable and must be avoided”.

New Delhi had also summoned the Russian envoy last week to protest against an attack on a cargo ship leaving Ukraine’s port of Odesa that killed four Indian nationals.

New Delhi has issued a string of security warnings for ships heading into the Black Sea that are locally flagged or employ its seafarers in the wake of the recent attacks.

Fourteen Indian seafarers have also been killed in attacks on ships during the Middle East war, according to the foreign ministry.

India activists demand release of detained protesters

AFP
New Delhi

India’s youth-led “cockroach” movement, whose nationwide protests forced the resignation of the education minister, urged authorities yesterday to release all detained demonstrators.

The online Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), which organised protests over exam paper leaks and other irregularities, said they had received reports of students held in detention, particularly in the states of Assam, West Bengal and Bihar.

The CJP accused the government of backtracking after authorities had assured them that no punitive action would be taken against protesters.

“If the government does not honour the agreement and release everyone detained or arrested, we will be compelled to resume the protest,” Ashutosh Ranka, a spokesperson of the CJP told reporters.

It comes two days after Dharmendra Pradhan resigned as education minister over repeated failures in the conduct of competitive exams that have fuelled anger among millions of young Indians.

The Indian government have not issued an official statement on the issue but Bihar police late yesterday evening said “no adverse legal action” would be initiated against any protester.

The police also announced the immediate release of those arrested or detained in connection to the protests in Bihar state.

At least 100 people have been arrested, many of them on stringent non-bailable charges, across the country, according to the CJP.

The CJP has set up a legal fund to help meet



Cockroach Janta Party spokesperson Saurav Das speaks at his co-spokesperson Ashutosh Ranka and Kapil Sibal, an Indian lawmaker, look on during a press conference in New Delhi, yesterday. (Reuters)

the expenses of protesters implicated in criminal cases by the police, Saurav Das, another spokesperson for the youth-led movement, said.

The movement has won millions of followers on social media since it was launched in May by 30-year-old public relations graduate Abhijeet Dipke.

Tens of thousands of protesters, mainly students, rallied last week in New Delhi and other cities, demanding Pradhan’s resignation and broader reforms of the examination system.

Demonstrations in the Indian capital turned

violent on July 20 when huge crowds attempted to march towards parliament from the Jantar Mantar protest site.

Police fired tear gas and used batons to disperse the protest, triggering clashes and a wave of detentions.

The Chief Justice of India called for an independent investigation after a petition was filed in the Supreme Court alleging police brutality.

The “right to peaceful, lawful protest is absolutely guaranteed” under the Indian constitution,” local media reports quoted Surya Kant as saying.

Modi faces challenge from activists over surveillance at India youth protest

Reuters
New Delhi

Indian activists are challenging Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government over the use of AI-powered surveillance at the largest youth protest in decades, with one court case set to become a test of federal powers even after agitation ended.

The surveillance controversy erupted during last week’s student protests over exam paper leaks, when demonstrators posted pictures on social media of a mobile police surveillance van equipped with cameras on a telescopic mast providing a 360-degree view of the gathering.

One protester, student activist Aishe Ghosh, has asked the Delhi High Court to declare mass surveillance of protesters unconstitutional and direct the destruction of all personal data collected during the protest, as well as order the framing of guidelines on how sur-

veillance technology can be used.

Ghosh is pressing on with the case even though the protest ended after Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan resigned in a rare setback for Modi, who has since announced a panel to overhaul the cheating-prone exam system.

India has no law governing the use of facial recognition technology by police and surveillance at the main protest site in New Delhi was a breach of the law, activists say.

The government says such checks were legal and in the public interest to ensure law and order.

During a hearing on Friday, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta defended the Indian police conduct, saying privacy claims at a public gathering were “ironical” and the checks were “absolutely necessary” and “in legitimate state interest.”

In a brief hearing yesterday, judges heard arguments from Ghosh that intrusive mass surveillance of protesters was disproportionate, as she sought broader disclosures on the state’s surveillance

policies during protests. The court will hear the matter today.

Internet Freedom Foundation, a New Delhi-based digital advocacy group, wrote to Delhi’s police commissioner on July 24 demanding the deletion of biometric data collected at the protest site.

Delhi police did not respond to a Reuters request for comment. In a post on social media platform X on Sunday, the force said it had not “restricted anyone’s freedom through the use of facial recognition technology”.

“We need proportionality even if we are to claim national security risks. Accountability must flow both ways,” said Akash Karmakar, a technology law partner at Indian law firm Panag & Babu.

He said if India used facial recognition to track protesters, it must also be used to identify police officers who allegedly acted without name badges during the crackdown.

The surveillance van parked at the site was emblazoned with the Delhi Police crest and the branding



Police officers move past Ikshana, a mobile surveillance van, parked at the protest site, days after thousands of the supporters of India’s Cockroach Janta Party marched towards parliament, at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi. (Reuters)

“Ikshana,” Hindi for “vision”.

There is little detail online about Ikshana, barring one post from its development partner, Indian CCTV company CP Plus,

which said they were equipped with “Advanced AI-powered” cameras, mobile cameras and “Varifocal Bullet Cameras” with adjustable lenses.

The 2023 post on CP Plus’ website was removed over the weekend and was no longer accessible. CP Plus did not respond to a request for comment.



The measure of a nation is what it does with what it has

There is a particular kind of praise that carries more weight than the diplomatic variety, and Qatar received it this week. The UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, Rania al-Mashat, came to Doha and spoke not of communiqués or summitry but of data governance, social protection, digital public services and the machinery by which the Sustainable Development Goals are actually monitored and met. She described Qatar as a key partner in advancing sustainable development across the Arab region, commended its ranking among the top performers in the 2025 GEMS maturity index, and looked ahead to co-operation in statistics, artificial intelligence and emerging technologies.

It is worth pausing on how unglamorous most of that is. Nobody builds a national reputation on

SDG reporting platforms or the timely availability of statistics. Yet these are the unseen foundations on which every serious development effort rests, and a country's willingness to invest in them says something about whether its commitment to the region is a posture or a practice.

The same instinct runs through Qatar's better-known work. Mediation in conflicts far beyond its neighbourhood, sustained humanitarian relief where politics has failed, the steadfast support for the Palestinian cause that al-Mashat singled out, decades of investment in education for children who would otherwise have none — these are not separate policies. They are expressions of a single conviction: that a country's capacity to help creates an obligation to help, and that the obligation does not lapse when the cameras leave or when the beneficiary has nothing to offer in return.

That conviction deserves to be stated plainly, because it has become unusual. Much of the world now treats assistance as an instrument — aid budgets calibrated to influence, humanitarian access traded for concessions, development finance shaped by the strategic returns it might one day yield. There is nothing new in this, and no country is entirely innocent of it. But something has been lost in the openness with which it is now practised, as though generosity requires an alibi and the only respectable justification for helping a stranger is that it serves you.

It should always have been the other way round. The capacity to relieve suffering was never a form of leverage awaiting deployment; it was, from the beginning, a responsibility that arrived with the means. A country that can feed the hungry, shelter the displaced, school the illiterate or broker a ceasefire and chooses instead to price that capacity

has not been shrewd. It has simply mistaken the nature of what it holds.

Al-Mashat's broader argument reinforces the point. The challenges confronting this region — water and food security, employment, the skills the coming economy will demand, the financing gap that shadows every development plan — transcend borders and cannot be solved by any state acting alone. Regional integration is not charity dressed up as strategy. It is the recognition that prosperity built in isolation, in a neighbourhood this interconnected, is prosperity built on sand.

Qatar has understood this and acted on it, often at cost and rarely with fanfare. The lesson on offer is not for the region alone. Every country in a position to help faces the same question, and answers it daily whether or not it admits as much: is our capacity something we hold, or something we owe?

A Brazilian welcome



South Korea's President Lee Jae Myung (second left), Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva (third left), South Korea's First Lady Kim Hye-kyung (left) and Brazil's First Lady Rosangela "Janja" Lula da Silva attend a welcome ceremony at the Alvorada Palace in Brasilia yesterday. (AFP)



Trump in the crosshairs over fast depleting munitions



By Kamran Rehmat

For a week, Washington was told to expect the heaviest bombardment of the war. The president himself trailed it. "I am considering a massive attack. Bigger than ever before. I am close to making a decision. We are all set for it," Donald Trump said on Thursday. Aircraft and munitions moved into the region. Central Command had options on the table running to a fortnight of sustained strikes. Then, on Friday, nothing happened. Ditto for Saturday and Sunday.

What changed in the interim is not Iranian behaviour, and it is not a diplomatic breakthrough. It was arithmetic. The most consequential fact of this war is no longer anything happening over Iranian airspace; it is a number on a Pentagon inventory sheet that the White House would prefer nobody published.

The number concerns Patriot interceptors — the missiles that shoot down other missiles, the things standing between an Iranian ballistic salvo and a barracks block in Jordan. By late April, more than 1,200 had been fired in this war, each costing north of \$4mn. Independent analysts at the Center for Strategic and International Studies now put the figure at 1,500 or more, leaving the United States with fewer than a thousand in hand worldwide. The chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Gen Dan Caine, has

told the White House privately that a return to major combat operations is doable, but that it would draw the Middle East magazine down to a level he is not comfortable with.

The president's public answer is a denial: "we have far more munitions than anyone in the world, and far more than we need." Both halves of that sentence can be true and still leave him stuck. Having more interceptors than any other country is irrelevant if the rate at which you are firing them exceeds the rate at which you can build them — and it does, by a wide margin.

Patriot production is measured in hundreds a year. Iranian launches are measured in nights. This is the asymmetry that has quietly beaten American strategy in this war. Iran fires something that costs a fraction of a million dollars; the United States expends several million to stop it. Tehran does not need to win that exchange, only to keep it going. And it is getting better at it: US officials say Iranian missiles are now flying varied profiles, altering speed and approach, forcing defenders to burn two or three interceptors where one might once have sufficed.

Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth's assurance that Iran's missile programme is "functionally destroyed" sits awkwardly beside the intelligence estimate that thousands of ballistic missiles remain, and beside the wreckage of nine American sites hit in a fortnight — living quarters, hangars, drone shelters, and a radar array in Kuwait destroyed six months after it was switched on. Three American soldiers died in Jordan when a missile got through. Nearly a dozen more were hurt badly enough to be flown to Germany.

There is a dissenting view inside the military, and it deserves airing. Admiral Brad Cooper, who runs Central Command, reportedly believes the shortage is manageable precisely because a heavier campaign would suppress Iran's ability to launch in the first place — spend interceptors now



IN A BIND: US President Donald Trump delivers remarks at the White House Correspondents' Association dinner in Washington, DC, on Friday. (Reuters)

to avoid needing them later. It is a coherent argument. It is also a bet, and the president has just declined to take it. That refusal tells you how much confidence the system has in its own suppression estimates after five months of claims that Iranian capability had been broken, followed each time by evidence that it had not.

The depletion problem does not stop at American stockpiles. Gulf states have been firing their own interceptors at the same tempo, defending the same bases and the same cities, and their magazines are draining too. This is the part Washington should find most alarming. The Gulf partners are the platform on which the entire American position in the region rests — the airfields, the ports, the basing rights, the overflight. They are also the states absorbing the retaliation, from struck desalination plants to Houthi fire

on Saudi oil infrastructure. Ask them to keep standing exposed while the shield thins, and the political cost of hosting the United States starts to exceed the security benefit. Gulf countries mediating between Washington and Tehran are not doing so out of sentiment. They are mediating because a war fought over their heads with a shrinking supply of defensive missiles is an intolerable proposition, and because the Strait of Hormuz is not an abstraction to them.

Then, there is the audience nobody in the room mentions. Every interceptor spent over Jordan is one unavailable to Taiwan, to Poland, to Korea. American officials are right to worry that Moscow and Beijing are reading the same inventory reports and drawing conclusions about what Washington could sustain elsewhere, and for how long. A war launched partly to

demonstrate American resolve is quietly demonstrating the opposite: that the world's strongest military has a finite number of nights it can fight at this intensity, and that the number is knowable.

The domestic clock is running just as fast. Hegseth has put the bill at \$37.5bn and asked for more. Oil has crossed \$100. Only 29% of Americans approve of the president's handling of the war, and support has begun eroding inside his own coalition, where enthusiasm among self-identified MAGA voters has fallen sharply since May. Speaker Mike Johnson's assessment — "We got to wrap it up" — is not the language of a party settling in for a long campaign three months before an election. Democrats have found their message, and it is not foreign policy: it is that the war costs money that voters would rather

spend on petrol and groceries.

So the president has three doors, and each one is bolted. Escalation risks the interceptor supply, mass civilian casualties, and — by his own advisers' assessment — no return to the table anyway, since bombardment has tended to consolidate the Iranian leadership rather than split it. Sanctions and blockade work slowly, and eight years of predicting Iranian economic collapse have produced an Iran that is poorer, more isolated, and still there. Declaring victory and leaving means accepting an Iran with buried enriched uranium and effective veto power over the world's most important shipping lane — the exact problem the war was meant to solve, plus a new one.

Which is why the pause should be read for what it is. The president's own framing on Friday was unusually candid: "There's a military exit where we just keep going just the way we are, and we can even make it a heavier dose... Or there's a smarter strategy that you make a deal." A leader with escalation dominance does not think out loud about the smarter strategy. He uses the dominance.

Expect, therefore, a period of managed ambiguity: strikes suspended but not renounced, envoy traffic through Muscat and Doha, and a search for language that lets both capitals call the Strait of Hormuz question settled without either conceding it. Benjamin Netanyahu arrives in Washington today to argue against precisely this. He may find, for once, that the constraint on American action is not political will but a supply chain.

Trump has spent a decade insisting his power was limited only by his own choices. It turns out it is limited by how many interceptors are in the racks — and by how quickly the Gulf, watching its own racks empty, decides that its interests and Washington's have stopped pointing the same way.

• The writer is Deputy Managing Editor, Gulf Times

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France, Spain race to curb wildfires before new heatwave arrives

Reuters
Bordeaux/Madrid

Firefighters sought yesterday to take advantage of more favourable weather conditions to subdue massive wildfires threatening the French city and tourist region of Bordeaux and a number of sites in neighbouring Spain.

They were racing against the clock as another heatwave is expected to hit both countries later this week in what has been a blisteringly hot and dry summer across Western Europe.

Authorities have evacuated about 220,000 people, including holidaymakers and local residents, in France, while further south in Spain around 100,000 have been told to leave their homes or seek shelter.

In Bordeaux, French President Emmanuel Macron thanked firefighters for their hard work, warning the coming weeks would remain difficult. "We must hold on. We are going to win this battle together. The whole nation is behind you," he said.

Prime Minister Sebastian Lecornu said France was going through an unprecedented wild-



Firefighting helicopters drop water on a wildfire near the village of Cebreneros, Avila province, yesterday. (AFP)

fire season, with the area burned already having surpassed the previous record year of 2022.

"The fight against wildfires begins with prevention. Nine out of 10 fires are human-caused and most arise from carelessness: a cigarette butt, a barbecue, work carried out without precaution," he wrote on X.

Firefighters faced an especially dangerous situation in Vall d'Uixo, in the eastern Castellon

province, where the ground contains old ordnance from the Spanish Civil War that explodes when the flames reach the area, Chevi Bolumar, fire chief of the Valencian regional government, told public broadcaster TVE.

The French blazes, which broke out last week near the Atlantic coast, were only 15 kilometres (9.3 miles) from entry points to the main metropolitan area of Bordeaux. Eighty firefighters had been



Firefighters work to battle wildfires amid drought conditions following a heatwave and water shortages across much of France, in Marceprime, Gironde department, yesterday. (Reuters)

injured tackling the blaze, according to local officials.

The spread of the large fires converging in central Spain slowed overnight, authorities said, but the blaze in the Castellon province raged out of control as the weather agency warned of another potential heatwave this week.

"What we're experiencing isn't a succession of isolated events. It's the most painful expression of a climate emergency that is making sixth-generation wildfires more ferocious, heatwaves more frequent, and our territory more vulnerable," Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said yesterday.

The so-called sixth-generation fires are the most extreme and uncontrollable category of forest blazes. Many scientists blame such fires and heatwaves on human-driven climate change.

Maria Angeles Serrano, an evacuee in Castellon, said she was particularly upset about the im-

pact on nature. "Material damage is one thing, but that can be repaired, so to speak. What really hurts is the emotional loss."

The wildfires in southwestern France have delivered a shock to the regional tourism-dependent economy, Finance Minister Roland Lescure said yesterday.

In central Spain, three separate fronts remained active in the mountains northwest of Madrid in the provinces of Madrid, Toledo and Avila. The one in Avila has been classified as the biggest wildfire in recent Spanish history.

"Today and tomorrow are absolutely crucial days in tackling this wildfire. From Wednesday onwards, weather forecasts become significantly more unfavourable," said Spanish Interior Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska.

France faced a similar situation, with slightly easier conditions

yesterday before temperatures rise again to as high as 37 degrees Celsius (98.6 degrees Fahrenheit) later this week in the Bordeaux area, according to France's weather office.

In both Bordeaux and Avila, July high temperatures have averaged 32 degrees Celsius (90 degrees Fahrenheit), almost 6C above the month's normal high between 1961 and 1990, according to the Reuters Climate Monitor.

The scale of this summer's wildfires in Europe is putting pressure on firefighting resources and raising questions about how to respond.

Aircraft from Turkiye, Italy and Greece, as well as a Portuguese wildfire intervention team, are joining the firefighting efforts in Spain.

Switzerland is supporting France by sending two Super Puma helicopters and their crews after a request from Paris.

Merz completes chaotic cabinet reshuffle

AFP
Berlin

Chancellor Friedrich Merz yesterday named a new transport minister, completing a chaotic cabinet reshuffle sparked by a senior party member resigning over a surrogacy scandal.

Steffen Bilger, 47, of Merz's conservative CDU party, will be formally appointed tomorrow to replace Transport Minister Patrick Schnieder, Merz told a press conference after a meeting of the party leadership.

Merz's intention to sack Schnieder leaked last week but according to German media no

formal announcement was made because Merz's original pick for his replacement pulled out at the last minute.

Having been left in post for several days regardless, Schnieder then asked to be released from the job on Sunday.

Merz told reporters yesterday he was "sorry for the situation that resulted" from Schnieder's botched dismissal and said that he has "no problem" with him.

Schnieder had faced months of criticism over his lack of effectiveness in improving Germany's ailing rail infrastructure, despite the country loosening its traditional aversion to debt to make way for a defence and infrastructure spending boost worth hun-

dreds of billions of euros.

Merz yesterday said he expected Bilger to "demonstrate that this enormous borrowing is justified by swift implementation - in transport projects, rail, roads, the entire infrastructure".

The cabinet reshuffle was set in motion last week when Jens Spahn, the chairman of the CDU parliamentary group, resigned amid controversy over contracting a surrogate mother to have a child.

Spahn will be replaced by Merz's chief of staff Thorsten Frei, who in turn will be replaced by current Health Minister Nina Warken.

CDU general secretary Carsten Linnemann will be the new health minister.



An aerial view shows residential buildings partially submerged in floodwaters after heavy monsoon rains induced a rise in the water level of the river Ravi on the outskirts of Lahore yesterday. (AFP)

Flooding forces residents to flee homes by boat in Pakistan

AFP
Muridke

Flooding from heavy monsoon rains inundated villages in eastern Pakistan, pushing residents to flee their homes by boat over fields turned into vast swathes of water yesterday.

AFP journalists witnessed small motor boats chartered by volunteers ferrying residents to safety, but many more were left stranded in Muridke district in Pakistan's most populous province of Punjab.

"It has been four days, and no rescue team has reached us," said 32-year-old Iqra Salman.

"We have no electricity, no clean water, and now we have completely run out of food supplies," she said. "We are surrounded by floodwater on all sides."

Flood-related incidents, including by drowning and from house collapses, have killed 109 people in Pakistan since June 26, according to official disaster agency figures.

Around a third of the deaths are in Punjab.

Volunteer rescuers said they had launched an effort to rescue people and recover their belongings from around a dozen villages.

"Four rescue boats... are actively conducting rescue operations, evacuating people stranded by the

flooding," said Haris Dar, a volunteer rescuer, standing by a huge lake-like body of brown water.

But even when brought to safety, residents faced difficult conditions, sleeping in small tents in humid heat, nestled between the huge body of water and the road.

Muhammad Ramzan, 45, recalled water rushing in during the early hours of the morning shortly before his family's house collapsed.

"The water rose so rapidly that we had no opportunity to save or remove any of our belongings," he said.

"We have lost everything and have nothing," he added.

Pakistan is vulnerable to the effects of climate change, with limited resources for adaptation.

While South Asia's seasonal monsoon brings rainfall that farmers depend on, climate change is making the phenomenon more erratic, unpredictable and deadly across the region.

In neighbouring Afghanistan, flash floods and heavy rainfall killed 34 people between July 20-26, according to disaster authorities, including a deluge in eastern Nuristan province that left around 100 missing.

In 2022, what UN chief Antonio Guterres called a "monsoon on steroids" caused havoc across Pakistan, killing around 1,700 people and submerging huge areas of the country.

Romania expels Russian diplomat over drones

AFP
Bucharest

Romania yesterday ordered a Russian embassy employee expelled from the Nato member bordering Ukraine as "a firm response" to drones repeatedly breaching the country's airspace.

Russia denounced the move and warned it "will not go unanswered".

Romania shot down three drones on three consecutive days at the end of last week, with a new drone incursion reported by the country's defence ministry yesterday as the war in Ukraine rages on.

Romania yesterday summoned Russian ambassador Vladimir Lipayev.

In the meeting, it notified Lipayev "of the decision to declare a member of the Russian Federation's mission in Bucharest undesirable, with the requirement that he leave Romanian territory within five days," the foreign ministry said in a statement.

Lipayev was also shown fragments of the first drone that was shot down on Friday by an F-16 fighter jet.

An investigation identified the drone as a Russian "Shahed model", according to Romanian authorities. Investigations into the two oth-

er drones shot down Saturday and Sunday are ongoing.

One of them also appeared "to be of Russian origin", a senior Nato military spokesperson said on Sunday.

Russia's foreign ministry, in a statement, said it "categorically rejects these baseless accusations", calling Romania's move "new staged propaganda".

"No proof of Russian origin of these drones has been presented," the statement said, adding criticism of Romania's "intolerable" support for Ukraine.

"This baseless expulsion of a Russian diplomat will not go unanswered," the ministry said.

Police announce seizure of 2.6 tonnes of drugs

Italy's financial police said yesterday that Portuguese counterparts had intercepted a speedboat carrying more than 2.6 tonnes of cocaine with a street value of more than \$550mn. Four people - two Spaniards, one Albanian and one man from Gibraltar - were arrested, it said.

"The boat was intercepted off the coast of Lisbon by the Portuguese maritime police," said the financial police, which had conducted the investigation.

Italian police said the cargo had a street value of approximately 500mn euros (\$570mn). The interception took place on

Thursday about 90 kilometres (50 nautical miles) southwest of Cape Espichel, Portuguese police said. Italian police said that organised crime gangs were increasingly using "go fast" boats, which measure between 10-16 metres, and can travel at more than 70 knots, to collect their illegal cargos. (AFP)

Austria plans to extend military service in light of Ukraine war

Reuters
Vienna

Austria's coalition government plans to extend military service to nine months from six to adapt to a security landscape changed by the war in Ukraine, it said yesterday.

Neutral Austria's armed forces have for decades served mainly as a kind of civil protection force, assisting the emergency services during natural disasters such as floods and wildfires, or performing border patrols to intercept illegal immigrants rather than stop advancing foreign troops.

The country has for years been trying to strengthen and better equip its military, which the authorities have long said would be unable to defend the homeland against serious attack by an outside power.



From left: Austrian Defence Minister Klaudia Tanner, Vice-Chancellor Andreas Babler, Chancellor Christian Stocker and Foreign Minister Beate Meisl-Reisinger wait for the start of the summer cabinet meeting in Salzburg, yesterday. (Reuters)

"The security conditions have changed fundamentally in the past years, months and weeks. The dream of a lasting peace in Europe shattered at the latest with

the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine," Chancellor Christian Stocker told a press conference at a military barracks outside Salzburg.

New threats have also emerged including hybrid attacks and cyberwarfare, he said while standing alongside the leaders of the two other ruling parties after a cabinet meeting.

"These developments show clearly that Austria must take charge to a greater extent of its own capabilities for self-reliance and protection of the population," he added.

Austria is surrounded by eight countries, all but two of which - western neighbours Switzerland and Liechtenstein - are part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. It borders Germany and the Czech Republic to the north, Italy and Slovenia to the south, and Slovakia and Hungary to the east.

Austrian boys and men currently have the choice, usually around their 18th birthday, between military service and a nine-month civilian alternative in which

they typically work at institutions such as an ambulance service or retirement home.

The government said it planned to make it possible to extend so-called civil service by two months on a voluntary basis.

It also plans to switch to a reservist model for military service in which conscripts must carry out follow-up exercises within 10 years of their initial service. To make military service more attractive, perks are planned, such as holiday days and almost doubling pay to 1,000 euros (\$1,140) a month.

Making those changes will, however, require passing legislation with a two-thirds majority in parliament, for which the government needs the support of the opposition Greens or the far-right Freedom Party. Those talks have yet to start.



Diabetes Qatar supports newly diagnosed children with Type 1 diabetes through summer programmes



Diabetes Qatar (also known as the Qatar Diabetes Association) organised a dedicated support programme for children newly diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes and their families at Diabetes Qatar's headquarters, with the participation of 13 families.

The programme was designed to provide psychological support for children and their parents during the early stages of diagnosis, helping them adapt to the challenges associated with this new phase.

It also aimed to foster a sense of belonging among the children by giving them the opportunity to meet and interact with peers who are going through similar experiences.

The programme featured a variety of educational and recreational activities tailored for children, helping them learn how to live confidently with Type 1 diabetes in an engaging and enjoyable way.

Through interactive activities, children learned about insulin injection sites, while participating in games and group activities that promoted self-confidence and created a supportive environment.

Running alongside the children's activities, Diabetes Qatar introduced parents to its services and

programmes, highlighting its role in providing health education, psychological support, and community-based services, as well as explaining how families can benefit from the association's resources.

The programme included a specialised psychological support workshop for parents delivered by Sanabel Akef from Al Sanabel Specialised Mental Health Centre.

The session focused on the emotional impact of a child's diagnosis and provided practical guidance on supporting children and helping families successfully navigate the initial stages of living with diabetes.

This initiative forms part of the Qatar Diabetes Association's wider summer programme, which aims to raise health awareness and encourage healthy lifestyles across the community.

As part of these initiatives, the association also participated in the Qatar Sports For All Federation's Summer Activity Programme and delivered several online educational workshops, including "Our Children's Health Starts at Home", which emphasised the family's role in building healthy habits and promoting the prevention of chronic diseases.

Cinema experience continues to draw audiences in Qatar

By Joey Aguilar
Doha

Despite the rapid rise of streaming platforms, cinemas in Qatar continue to attract large audiences, highlighting the continuing appeal of the big-screen experience and the social atmosphere that many moviegoers say cannot be replicated at home.

While streaming services such as Netflix, Disney+, Prime Video and Shahid have reshaped entertainment by giving viewers instant access to films and television shows, they have not displaced cinemas.

Instead, theatres have adapted by offering premium experiences, advanced technology and immersive environments that continue to draw audiences.

Official figures show the sector's resilience: according to the Planning and Statistics Authority (PSA)'s Qatar Open Data Portal, cinema attendance rose to 3.54mn visitors in 2023, up from 3.04mn in 2022 and 1.91mn in 2021, marking a strong recovery following the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

Attendance had dropped sharply to about 580,000 in 2020 amid restrictions on public gatherings.

The same PSA data shows that the number of films screened increased to 5,497 in 2023, compared with 4,421 in 2022, while the number of cinema halls expanded to 167, up from 109 in 2019, reflecting continued investment in Qatar's exhibition sector despite the growing popularity of home streaming services.

Instead of competing with streaming platforms on convenience, it is learnt that cinemas differentiate themselves by delivering experiences that cannot be recreated at home.

Large-format screens, immersive surround sound, IMAX, 4DX motion technology, luxury recliners and VIP concepts have become key attractions for audiences seeking more than simply watching a film.

For Kenyan expatriate Zacchaeus Njuguna, it is the shared experience that keeps bringing him back.

"My most memorable cinema experience in Qatar was watching *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* at O1 Mall," he told *Gulf Times*. "The theatre was packed, and everyone was fully engaged in the movie."

"We cheered our team and applauded during the emotional and action-packed scenes," Njuguna recounted. "Watching it with such an excited audience made the experience unforgettable and reminded me that some

while streaming subscriptions have increasingly become complementary rather than substitutes for cinema-going.

The report notes that blockbuster franchises, animated features and event films remain the primary drivers of cinema attendance.

Industry observers say audiences are becoming more selective about what they watch in cinemas.

While dramas, documentaries and television series are increasingly consumed at home, action spectacles, science-fiction epics, animated

would go out and watch a movie at the nearest mall."

"Here in Doha, it has become our evening date with my husband," Lyn continued. "There's something about the popcorn, nachos and the excitement of being surrounded by a crowd that makes watching a movie at the cinema feel special."

"It is part of the whole experience, not just the movie itself," she added.

She also recalled one of her most memorable cinema moments.

"One of my funniest cinema memories was when my friends and I watched a horror movie. I was screaming at the top of my lungs when, suddenly, one of the lights fell. Thankfully, no one was hurt," she said, adding that the communal atmosphere remains one of the strongest reasons she continues visiting cinemas despite having multiple streaming subscriptions.

Doha resident Janus T shares a similar view.

"Well, I love watching good movies on a big screen, and that surround sound effect is just amazing," he said. "You often don't experience that at home when you have a smaller screen."

"It's also nice to see fellow moviegoers getting excited during certain scenes," Janus added.

She said major releases continue to motivate audiences to visit cinemas instead of waiting for streaming availability.

"I simply like watching 007 movies, and just recently I watched *The Odyssey*," she said. "I think many movie lovers would book and watch them right away because they don't want to be left behind. It usually takes time before they'll be available on streaming platforms."

Research published by the MPA and other industry analysts suggests that theatrical exhibition and streaming services are increasingly complementing one another, with studios adopting release strategies that maximise both box-office performance and digital audiences.



Shared experience keeps Zacchaeus Njuguna returning to cinemas.

movies are simply better enjoyed on the big screen."

He believes the enduring popularity of cinemas in Qatar lies in the atmosphere they offer.

"I think the main reason people in Qatar still love going to the cinema is the unique experience - watching a movie on a giant screen with powerful sound," Njuguna said.

The trend is consistent with global developments.

According to the Motion Picture Association (MPA)'s 2024 Theme Report, cinema attendance worldwide continues to recover as audiences return for major theatrical releases,

features and other visually ambitious productions continue drawing crowds because of their scale, immersive sound and the excitement of experiencing them alongside fellow moviegoers.

For many residents, cinema visits also form part of a broader leisure experience that includes dining, shopping and spending quality time with family and friends.

Filipino expatriate Lyn J said going to the cinema remains a cherished family tradition.

"Cinema is still a bonding moment for me and my family back in the Philippines," she said. "Every week, we

Qatar's retail, leisure boom reshapes weekend habits, expat life

By Shaima Sherif
Staff Reporter

Qatar's rapidly expanding retail, dining and leisure sector is reshaping how residents spend their weekends, with a growing mix of shopping destinations, restaurants and attractions encouraging more people to explore locally while helping many expatriates feel increasingly at home.

For long-time residents, the country's evolving commercial landscape has transformed routine outings into opportunities to discover new experiences without leaving Qatar.

Shaista, an Indian expatriate who has lived in Qatar for 25 years, said that the steady stream of new retail outlets, restaurants and family attractions has made weekends more engaging for her family.

"Whenever we go shopping, there is always something new we explore," she told *Gulf Times*. "Apart

from offers or lovely new stores to visit, there is always something new to experience."

She said the appeal goes beyond the opening of new establishments, pointing to quality, customer service, competitive pricing and experiences tailored to people of different ages and interests.

"It is not just about opening and giving it to us, but also about the quality, the services, the offers and the prices," Shaista said. "There is something for everyone."

The expansion of Qatar's food scene has also contributed to the changing lifestyle, she noted, with an increasing variety of international cuisines allowing residents to enjoy familiar flavours while discovering new ones.

For Shaista, the country's retail and hospitality sectors also reflect Qatar's multicultural character.

"Qatar is all about sharing, understanding, diversity, love, care and culture," she said. "You can see that through its shops, restaurants, hotels, malls and markets."

Lucia, a Lebanese expatriate who has lived in Qatar

for four years, said the country's ability to respond to residents' changing preferences has become increasingly evident.

"Whenever there is a need, or something that customers and people like, Qatar and the people in Qatar make sure it comes to their people," she said.

Lucia added that residents do not need to travel abroad to enjoy many international brands, dining concepts or entertainment experiences.

"Qatar has always proven that you do not always have to travel to experience things," she said.

Lucia attributed the growing variety of experiences to continued business expansion, investment and international partnerships that have introduced new concepts to the local market.

For many expatriates, she said, these developments have also strengthened their sense of belonging.

"You can miss home, but very quickly Qatar makes you feel at home," Lucia said. "It is a shared experience, and we enjoy it a lot."

Visit Qatar unveils Hala Summer Shopping Festival

As part of the Hala Summer campaign, Visit Qatar is launching the Hala Summer Shopping Festival, a month-long shopping and dining activation running from August 1-31.

The festival brings together Qatar's leading shopping malls with restaurants from the Taste of Qatar network, offering residents and visitors exclusive promotions, set menus, value-added experiences and special discounts throughout the campaign period.

Taking place at Place Vendôme, Doha Festival City, Mall of Qatar, Villaggio, City Center, Landmark, Doha Mall, West Walk, Gewan, Hyatt Plaza and Al Hazm, the festival unites the destination's retail and dining scene under one seasonal celebration, giving participating restaurants and retailers greater visibility and the opportunity to attract new customers throughout the summer.

The festival is complemented by a programme of family-friendly experiences designed for children, offering complimentary themed experiences, live performances, and engaging challenges.

This allows parents to enjoy discounted shopping and dining while their children are entertained, creating a complete shopping and entertainment experience for the whole family.

Shoppers spending a minimum of QR200 at participating destinations can have their receipt stamped and visit one of the dedicated redemption booths to exchange it for a raffle coupon.

Stamped receipts may only be redeemed once.

Throughout August, four major raffle draws will take place, with a new draw hosted at a different participating mall each week, including Doha Festival City, Mall of Qatar, Place Vendôme and Villaggio.

Winners will be announced weekly and awarded a range of exciting prizes, including five cars.

Running throughout the summer until the end of September, the Hala Summer campaign brings together a diverse programme of events, promotions and experiences across Qatar, offering residents and visitors even more reasons to enjoy the destination throughout the season while reinforcing its position as a family-friendly hub for entertainment, hospitality, shopping and dining.

