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A group of Qatar Emiri Air Force personnel in blue camouflage uniforms and black backpacks are boarding a military aircraft. One person is standing on the aircraft's stairs, while others are walking up. The aircraft's fuselage features the text "القوات الجوية الأميرية القطرية" and "Qatar Emiri Air Force" in black. A large engine intake is visible on the right side of the aircraft.

A large group photograph of military personnel in various uniforms, including blue, brown, and white, standing in formation on a stage. A man in a white thobe stands prominently in the center foreground. The group is arranged in multiple rows, filling the stage.

Speaking during the joint meeting, Chairman of the General Authority of Customs Ahmad bin Abdullah al-Jamal said that the new package was the result of strong institutional co-operation between the two authorities. **To Page 11**



Interior minister takes part in Police Academy graduation



HE the Minister of Interior Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, who is also the commander of the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya) and chairman of the Supreme Council of the Police Academy, attended yesterday the graduation ceremony for the second cohort of students in the Master of Law and Master of Security Studies programmes at the Police Academy's College of Graduate Studies. The ceremony also marked the graduation of participants in the 11th mandatory qualifying course for graduates of civilian universities at the Police College, as well as the fourth mandatory qualifying course for female graduates of civilian universities at the Women's Police Institute. On the margin of the ceremony, HE Sheikh Khalifa honoured the graduates and officially launched the Police Academy's new website as part of ongoing efforts to enhance the academy's digital services and online platforms. Following the graduation ceremony, the minister attended the graduation of the sixth group of participants in the seventh edition of the Police of Tomorrow programme (Summer 2026), held at the academy in the presence of senior officials, officers, and the graduates' families. - **QNA**



Amir, Deputy Amir congratulate Morocco's king

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani sent a cable of congratulations yesterday to Morocco's King Mohammed VI on the occasion of Throne Day. His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani sent a similar cable of congratulations to King Mohammed VI. - **QNA**

Al-Khulaifi holds phone call with Guyana minister

HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi held a telephone conversation yesterday with Guyana's Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation Hugh Hilton Todd. During the call, they discussed bilateral co-operation, relations and ways to support and strengthen them, and explored the latest developments in Latin America, in addition to other topics of mutual interest. - **QNA**

MoCI unveils new digital service for consumers

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) has launched a new digital service that enables consumers and businesses to access general regulatory indicators about companies.

The ministry said that this service helps them make informed decisions before entering into contracts while ensuring compliance with applicable legal and regulatory requirements that protect consumer rights and the regulatory rights of companies.

In a statement issued yesterday, the MoCI said that this launch is part of its efforts regarding digital transformation and enhanced oversight, as well as fostering transparency and safeguarding the rights of all parties through having an official information source in place.

This official source, the ministry assured, would prevent reliance on unreliable sources and contribute to strengthening confidence in the business environment and enabling consumers to better evaluate their options before entering into contracts.

The ministry further noted that the report produced by the service gives a combination of core introductory data, such as company name, licence number, commercial activity, and licence status, as well as showcasing an array of oversight indicators.

These indicators, the MoCI noted, include the number of complaints and infractions, administrative enforcement actions, complaint categories, and company response rates.

Access to the report is provided through two mechanisms: the first allows companies to provide prior consent for displaying their regulatory information, with the consent documented and archived in accordance with approved procedures.

The ministry statement further explained that the second mechanism requires obtaining company consent when a report request is submitted, meaning the report is only made available to the consumer after the company has been notified and approval has been completed.

The MoCI outlined that beneficiaries can submit a request to obtain this report through its website by accessing Digital Platform Services, signing in through the National Authentication System "Tawtheeq", selecting "Services", navigating to "Inquiries", and choosing "Regulatory Record Report". - **QNA**

Qatar attends inauguration ceremony of Peru president



Qatar, represented by HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi, participated in the inauguration ceremony of Peru's President Keiko Sofia Fujimori. - **QNA**

National Planning Council set to host HMC managing director on AlTanmiya podcast

The National Planning Council (NPC) is set to host Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) managing director Mohammed bin Khalifa al-Suwaidi (pictured) in the fourth episode of Podcast AlTanmiya, to discuss the readiness of HMC and its role in Qatar's development journey.

The episode covers the HMC's readiness and continuity of care, as well as the patient's journey within the corporation's hospitals, including how patients move from

health centres to the corporation's network of hospitals or are referred to specialised care.

It also explores the future of healthcare and the corporation's role in achieving the goals of the Third National Development Strategy and Qatar National Vision 2030.

Podcast AlTanmiya is a dialogue platform that highlights key aspects and developments of Qatar's national development journey.

Through it, the NPC hosts a

select group of decision-makers, including ministry undersecretaries and chief executives, shedding light on government entities working as one integrated system to achieve the outcomes of the Third National Development Strategy.

Viewers can watch the episode across the NPC's social media platforms, and can also submit their questions for upcoming episodes' guests through Podcast AlTanmiya page on the council's website:



Arabic version: <https://www.npc.qa/ar/pages/altanmiya.aspx>
English version: <https://www.npc.qa/en/pages/altanmiya.aspx>



Qatar attends 31st ISA Assembly session

Qatar participated in the 31st session of the International Seabed Authority (ISA) Assembly, held in Kingston, from July 27-31.

Representing Qatar at the session was Secretary of the Standing Committee of the Convention on the Law of the Sea Omar Ali al-Ali.

During Qatar's statement under item (9) of the agenda, concerning the annual report of the ISA secretary-general, al-Ali reaffirmed Qatar's support for the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the legal framework it established for managing the international seabed area as the common heritage of humankind.

In this context, he stressed the importance of achieving a balance between the responsible utilisation of marine resources and the protection of the marine environment.

Al-Ali noted that the current phase requires enhanced dialogue and co-operation among states par-

ties, contributing to the strengthening of trust and the improvement of decision-making processes.

He stressed the importance of relying on credible scientific knowledge, comprehensive environmental assessments, and transparency in the ISA's work.

Al-Ali called for continued dialogue on the development of non-binding strategic tools that would help assess the scientific, environmental, and institutional readiness of decisions under consideration by the ISA.

He stated that such tools would enhance transparency and support more informed decision-making without affecting the existing legal framework or the mandates of the authority's organs.

Al-Ali also renewed Qatar's readiness to co-operate with all member states in support of the work of the International Seabed Authority and to enable it to carry out its mandate in accordance with the UNCLOS, in a manner that serves the interests of all humanity. - **QNA**

Al Khor Cultural Centre holds 'Al-Ardha' training

Al Khor Cultural Centre, affiliated with the Ministry of Culture (MoC), held a training session on the traditional Al-Ardha dance at Al Khor Sports Club, in co-operation with Nomads Centre.

Presented by Omran al-Kuwari, the session aimed to instill pride in national identity at a young age and promote traditional Qatari art, aligning with the MoC's vision in passing tradition to current generations.

The session is part of Al Khor Cultural Centre's summer calendar, which started June 28 and will last until August 12.

The training session includes a varied package of educational and creative events.

Al Khor Cultural Centre director Mariam al-Muhammadi stated that the centre focuses on presenting workshops and programmes that target different groups and aims to encourage the youth to invest in rewarding experiences during their summer vacation. - **QNA**

With Qatari participation, Unesco World Heritage Committee inscribes 25 new sites



The World Heritage Committee wrapped up its 48th session in Busan, Republic of Korea, with the addition of 25 new sites to Unesco's World Heritage List.

At the close of its 10-day meeting, in which Qatar participated, the committee announced that the Unesco World Heritage List now comprises 1,273 sites across 173 countries.

The committee reviewed the conservation status of 148 properties and placed six on the List of World Heritage in Danger, including Lebanon's ancient port city of Tyre and the historic inner city of Paramaribo in Suriname, citing threats to their integrity.

Delegates also discussed ways to boost rep-

resentation for Africa and Small Island Developing States (SIDS), a group of low-lying island nations that are extremely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

Following lengthy discussions, delegates voted to remove the Historic Centre of Vienna from the List of World Heritage in Danger after protracted debates over tensions between urban development and the protection of the city's historic and cultural landscape.

Among the new inscriptions were the "Asuka-Fujiwara: Archaeological sites of Japan's Ancient Capitals and Related Properties", a collection of Asuka-period ruins in Japan, and the "Beaches of the D-Day Landings, Normandy,

1944" in northwestern France, which groups together the beaches where the Allied landings that helped turn the tide of World War II took place.

Korea secured an extension of the boundaries of its 2021-listed "Getbol, Korean Tidal Flats" to include additional tidal flat areas on the western and southern coasts.

Including the Korean tidal flats, two sites had their boundaries expanded during the session, and a separate case involved a change of criteria.

The next World Heritage Committee session is scheduled to take place in the Turkish capital Istanbul.

Qatar Nassau Stakes caps a day of top-class racing at Qatar Goodwood racecourse

The Group 1 Qatar Nassau Stakes featured a competitive field of high-quality fillies, combining proven older runners with rapidly improving three-year-olds over the 1m2f (one mile, two furlongs, or about 2.012km) distance.

The race lived up to expectations as contenders battled for victory in one of the festival's most eagerly anticipated events.

The Goodwood Racecourse set the stage for a high-calibre clash between rising three-year-old prospects and experienced Group 1 winners, confirming the race's status as one of the meeting's most anticipated.

Victory went to Diamond Necklace, under jockey Ryan Moore, for trainer Aidan O'Brien.

The trophy was presented by Visit Qatar senior manager (Partnerships) Abdulhadi al-Marri, in the presence of the guest of honour, Visit Qatar public relations and communications director Jassim al-Mahmoud.

Momentum continues to build at the Qatar Goodwood Festival presented by Visit Qatar, with several key races still to come.

Among the highlights is the King George Qatar Stakes, leading up to a fitting finale with the Qatar Lillie Langtry Stakes on the closing day.

Visit Qatar's exclusive naming and ownership of the event highlights its dedication to promoting elite-level racing, while reinforcing Qatar's position on the international tourism stage.



Warning issued against slimming product

The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) has warned the public against buying, trading, or consuming an unlicensed slimming product, as it has undeclared pharmaceutical substances.

The ministry warned in a statement that "Eatless - Natural Slimming Formula" has two undeclared pharmaceutical substances, sibutramine and phenolphthalein, making it a counterfeit product and potentially posing a risk to public health.

The MoPH affirmed that the product, which is promoted on social media platforms, is not licensed in Qatar.

Sibutramine is a controlled medicinal substance which was withdrawn from the market in October 2010 due to safety concerns.

This compound poses a significant hazard to consumers, as it is known to cause a marked increase in blood pressure and heart rate in some patients.

It may also pose severe risks to individuals with a medical history of coronary artery disease, congestive heart failure, arrhythmias, or stroke.

Furthermore, sibutramine may interact with other medications the patient is taking, potentially leading to serious and life-threatening complications.

Phenolphthalein is a chemical compound that is not considered an active substance in any currently approved drug.

Studies have shown that this compound may be associated with an increased risk of cancer.

The MoPH urged the public not to purchase unregistered products or from unlicensed sources, particularly those advertised on social media with labels such as "100% natural", "safe", or "pharmaceutical-free".

The ministry stressed that such claims do not guarantee the product's safety or confirm the absence of undeclared pharmaceutical substances. - QNA

Ministry launches National Referral System to combat human trafficking

The Ministry of Labour, represented by the National Committee for Combating Human Trafficking, has launched the National Referral System for Combating Human Trafficking, a comprehensive national framework designed to unify efforts, strengthen institutional coordination among relevant stakeholders, and ensure an effective and co-ordinated response that places victim protection at the forefront.

The establishment of the National Referral System forms part of Qatar's ongoing efforts to combat all forms of human trafficking and address the humanitarian and legal challenges faced by victims of exploitation.

The system is based on a co-ordinated national approach that brings together relevant stakeholders to ensure the protection

of victims, prevent further harm, and support the identification, investigation and prosecution of perpetrators in accordance with national legislation and international standards.

The National Referral System is supported by broad national partnerships involving government and non-government stakeholders, including the National Committee for Combating Human Trafficking, the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Interior, the Public Prosecution, the Supreme Judiciary Council, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Public Health, the National Human Rights Committee, the Aman Centre, as well as embassies, relevant diplomatic missions, and local and international organisations.

The National Referral System adopts a victim-centred approach guided by the principles of non-discrimination, respect for human dignity, confidentiality and the protection of personal data.

It also ensures that victims are not held responsible for acts committed as a direct result of their exploitation.

The system further guarantees victims a protection period that enables them to make informed decisions freely, without pressure or coercion, and without requiring their co-operation with investigations or judicial proceedings as a condition for receiving protection or assistance.

Beyond these protection guarantees, the National Referral System establishes an integrated pathway covering the identification and early detection of suspected cases,

reporting procedures, initial protection measures and risk assessments.

The system also provides comprehensive assistance services, supports investigation and prosecution efforts, and promotes durable solutions that bring exploitation to an end while supporting victims' recovery and reintegration.

The National Referral System for Combating Human Trafficking represents a co-ordinated national model founded on partnership and institutional co-operation.

It reflects Qatar's commitment to strengthening a justice framework that extends beyond law enforcement to encompass victim protection, care and support, while enhancing prevention efforts, upholding human dignity and reinforcing the rule of law. - QNA

Hessa Kalla brings Qatar's artistic voice to Egypt's Jamssa Forum

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

Qatari visual artist Hessa Kalla represented Qatar at the second edition of the Jamssa International Fine Arts Forum, held in the coastal city of Jamssa in Egypt's Dakahlia Governorate, from July 25-29.

Held under the theme *A Tribute to the Sea, Colour and Light*, the forum is considered the first visual arts gathering of its kind in the Nile Delta and Mediterranean coast, seeking to establish Jamssa as a cultural platform bringing together artists and creative talents from across the region and beyond.

The five-day event was hosted at the Police Officers Club in Jamssa under the patronage of Dakahlia governor Major-General Tarek Marzouk, and was headed by visual arts critic Dr Khaled al-Baghdadi, with artist Iman Abu al-Gheith, president of Awan Foundation for Culture and Arts, serving as general co-ordinator.

Qatari artist is honoured at international fine arts gathering that celebrates the sea, colour and light



Artist Hessa Kalla working on one of her paintings.

The forum attracted broad Arab and international participation, including a notable presence from Qatar by artists Mohammed al-Atiq and Kalla, alongside artists representing Egypt, the Gulf, the

wider Arab world and other countries.

Kalla was honoured during the event by Dakahlia Governor Marzouk in the presence of Jamssa City head Dr Amr Abdelaty, Dr al-

Baghdadi and Abu al-Gheith.

Speaking to reporters, Kalla expressed pride in representing Qatar at an international gathering that brings together artists from diverse cultural and artistic backgrounds.

"I feel immense pride in representing Qatar at this international forum, which brings together artists from diverse cultures and creative experiences under the umbrella of art and creativity," she said.

She said that the participation offered an opportunity to showcase her artistic experience while discovering new visions and approaches that could enrich her creative practice.

"Art is a universal language capable of crossing geographical and cultural borders," Kalla said. "Such forums underscore the importance of visual dialogue among artists and allow us to exchange experiences and ideas in

an atmosphere of creativity and collaboration."

She highlighted the role of art in reflecting Qatar's cultural identity, noting that her work draws inspiration from the country's environment, heritage and human traditions.

Kalla began her artistic journey in 1980 with the Free Atelier, gradually developing from realism towards an expressive abstract style rooted in national identity.

She is a member of the Souq Waqif Art Centre and the Qatari Fine Arts Society, and has participated in numerous local and international exhibitions.

Commenting on the forum's theme, Kalla described the sea as a powerful source of inspiration because of its historical and cultural symbolism, while colour and light remain fundamental elements in shaping the visual language of an artwork.

Her recognition at the Jamssa forum adds to a career marked by artistic participation and honours in Qatar, the Arab world and internationally.

Qatar Museums reveals public programme for August

Qatar Museums (QM) has announced its public programme for August 2026, featuring a dynamic lineup of indoor workshops, family-friendly activities, youth initiatives, cultural celebrations and sporting experiences taking place across its network of museums and creative centres throughout the month.

Among the programme's highlights are the Tasweer Awards, held as part of the celebration of World Photography Day, and the month-long Summer Sports Fun Factory at the 3-2-1 Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum, alongside a wide range of activities designed to inspire visitors of all ages.

The National Museum of Qatar (NMQ) will host the Museum Memory Game on August 10 and 17, in both Arabic and English.

Inspired by a curated selection of the museum's most iconic objects, the interactive game challenges participants to test their memory while encouraging observation, teamwork and discovery through play.

Designed for children aged 5-16, the activity offers a fun and engaging way to explore the museum's collections.

The Museum of Islamic Art (MIA) will present a programme of family and cultural activities throughout August.

On August 29, the museum will mark International Youth Day with International Youth Day Posters, inviting young visitors to contribute to a large-scale collaborative artwork by drawing self-portraits on a giant poster using colourful markers.

Earlier in the month, on August 1 (tomorrow), the MIA Library will host "Story Time: Following My Paint Brush" by renowned artist and author Dulari Devi, offering children an engaging storytelling session followed by creative colouring activities.

On August 8, families are invited to participate in "Family Day: The Life of Plants", an interactive session exploring

the significance of plants in Islamic art through museum objects and the natural world.

The programme includes hands-on activities introducing visitors to botanical symbolism, decorative motifs and plant care.

On August 18, "Planet Teens Club: Quilts and Recycling Fabric" encourages teenagers to repurpose old clothing through quilting and sustainable design, transforming fabric scraps into creative new works while promoting environmental awareness.

Children aged 5-11 can take part in "Planet Kids Club: Kalila wa Dimna" on August 25, where they will discover themes from the legendary animal fable through storytelling and a related craft activity using recycled materials.

The museum's programme continues on August 30 with the "Majlis Film Club", featuring a screening of *Jodhaa Akbar*, directed by Ashutosh Gowariker, offering cinema enthusiasts an opportunity to explore Islamic art, culture and history through film.

The following day, August 31, the MIA Library will host its "Book Club", discussing *The Blue Manuscript* by Sabitha al-Khemir, a richly layered novel centred on the search for a legendary Fatimid Qur'an that brings together history, art and cultural heritage.

Throughout August, the 3-2-1 Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum will keep families and young visitors active through interactive educational experiences and practical sporting activities that combine learning, teamwork and play.

Running from August 1-29, the 321 Summer Sports Fun Factory invites children, young people and families to enjoy daily sessions featuring activities like basketball, football, gymnastics, athletics, boxing, hockey, rugby and a variety of other sports.

Delivered in collaboration with sports federations and clubs, the programme promotes teamwork, healthy lifestyles,

confidence and physical literacy through coaching sessions, games and engaging sporting challenges.

On August 3, 4, 10 and 12, young visitors can participate in "Museum Explorer", an interactive gallery challenge designed to develop observation and discovery skills.

Participants search the galleries for featured objects, record details about their discoveries and earn an official "Museum Explorer" stamp upon completion.

To celebrate World Photography Day, Tasweer, in collaboration with the Fire Station, will bring together photogra-



phers, creatives and the wider community throughout August to celebrate the impact of photography and contemporary visual storytelling.

The programme culminates on August 19 with "Together with Tasweer: World Photography Day & 2026 Awards Winners Announcement", an evening at the Fire Station Cinema featuring the announcement of the winners of the Tasweer 2026 Project Award and Single Image Award, recognising outstanding photographic work selected from this year's submissions.

The celebration will also be livestreamed across Tasweer's social media platforms, enabling audiences around the world to participate.

Meanwhile, Teen Hub will deliver a vibrant programme of creative workshops, leadership initiatives and community events throughout August, providing young people with opportunities to develop new skills, express themselves creatively and connect with their peers through hands-on learning and interactive experiences.

Running from August 1-31, the "Teen Hub Scouts - Qatar Museums" programme will focus on leadership development, teamwork and community service through an open day on August 2, the launch of a design competition on August 3, and a leadership workshop on August 17.

During the same period, the month-long "Future Falcons Camp" will take place at the Doha Air Base Officers Club, bringing together young participants for activities centred on leadership, teamwork and national values.

Teen Hub volunteers will participate alongside the Qatar Emiri Air Force under the guidance of experienced leaders and trainers.

From August 2-6, Teen Hub, in partnership with Qatar Foundation's Qatar Career Development Centre, will present "My Career, My Future 2026", a five-day job-shadowing programme offering high school students practical workplace experience, opportunities to meet professionals and insight into a range of career paths.

The initiative helps participants connect their academic studies with future careers, build confidence in their educational and professional choices, and receive an official training certificate upon successful completion.

The programme is delivered in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Sports and Youth,

and the Civil Service and Government Development Bureau.

On August 6, youth advocate and Fursa Foundation founder Iman Saeed Ali will lead "My Story, My Identity", an interactive storytelling workshop encouraging teenagers to explore their identities and confidently share their personal stories while developing communication and creative thinking skills.

Marking International Youth Day on August 12, Qatar Museums will present a lively programme of workshops, discussions and project showcases, featuring sessions on accessory design, painting and robotics, as well as a nostalgic Spaceton-themed music session that brings young people together to connect and exchange ideas.

On August 15, Teen Hub, in collaboration with the Qatari Women's Association, will host "Soul Elegance", a full-day summer event celebrating creativity, wellbeing and community through a diverse programme of interactive workshops and enriching activities.

Artist Yasser Asaadi will lead "Fundamentals of Watercolour Painting" on August 18-19, introducing participants to essential watercolour techniques, colour blending and brushwork while guiding them in creating their own artwork.

As part of the Years of Culture initiative, and in collaboration with Qatar Museums, "Family Weekend" will take place from August 20-22, celebrating the cultures of Qatar, Canada and Mexico through three evenings of interactive activities, cultural experiences and family-friendly programming.

The month concludes with the Lumen Printing Workshop on August 25 and 26, led by expert printmaker Paribesh Sitoula.

The practical workshop introduces participants to the fundamentals of Lumen printing, combining creative experimentation with hands-on learning to produce distinctive photographic prints. - QNA

Hamas moving towards Gaza disarmament deal: sources

AFP/Reuters
Cairo/Gaza City

Hamas is progressing towards a deal involving the decommissioning of its weapons, sources familiar with the on-going talks with mediators in Cairo told AFP yesterday.

A Hamas source added, however, that they were still in the process of making amendments to the proposal.

The thorny issue of Hamas's disarmament has been one of the key sticking points in the advancement of the ceasefire deal that has been in place between Israel and the group in Gaza since October.

Under US President Donald Trump's 20-point peace plan for Gaza, the second phase of the ceasefire was to involve Hamas's disarmament and a gradual withdrawal of Israeli forces from the territory.

The plan also provides for a group of Palestinian technocrats, the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza (NCAG), to assume day-to-day governance during Gaza's transitional phase out of war.

"We continue to advance the implementation roadmap that offers a balanced and pragmatic path forward, with all weapons decommissioned and a phased transition of responsibilities taking place to hand over full authority to the technocratic government," a diplomatic source told AFP.

The source, who spoke on condition of anonymity as he was not authorised to speak publicly on the matter, said there would be "no exceptions for certain weapons or certain people. One authority, one law, one weapon".

The roadmap would create "a process for the elimination of all tunnels, depots of weapons and any weapons production facilities", the source said.

"All weapons, heavy and light, will be under full control of the NCAG in co-ordination with



A child lies on a damaged mattress at the site of Wednesday's Israeli strike on a house in Gaza City, whose residents were pre-warned by the Israeli military to evacuate. - Reuters

and with the support of the ISF," the source added, referring to the International Stabilisation Force, a fledgling body envisaged to comprise multinational troops operating under Trump's Board of Peace.

The source said a verification mechanism would ensure compliance by each side.

A Hamas source familiar with the talks told AFP that the movement is "awaiting the Israeli response to the amendments we recently submitted to the mediators".

The source said the amendments concerned two articles in the roadmap presented by the Board of Peace.

Regarding the article concerning weapons, the Hamas source said that "some points were removed, and alternatives were proposed".

The source said that the group was coming with a "positive and good" response, but did not say whether the group had agreed to fully disarm – a key sticking point in the talks over the past four months.

The Palestinian movement wants Israel to commit to ending attacks on Gaza and withdrawing its forces.

Sources close to Hamas said that the group was willing to "confine and store" heavy weapons under a Palestinian body, not hand them over to Israel.

Hamas did not officially comment on the matter.

"There is broad understanding on the definition of heavy weapons, and a formula has been developed that emphasises the concept of restricting and storing heavy weapons, disbanding armed groups and a simultaneous Israeli withdrawal," the Hamas source added.

Despite the ceasefire, violence has continued in Gaza, with Israeli strikes killing at least four people including two children on Thursday, according to health officials.

The latest deaths add to a toll of more than 1,200 Palestinians, mostly civilians, killed by Israeli attacks since the ceasefire took effect, according to Gaza health officials.

Four Israeli soldiers have been killed in Gaza since the ceasefire.

The Israeli military has continued to expand its military occupation of Gaza, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu saying that Israel intends to expand the area under its control to 70% of the enclave.

So far, the NCAG has been based in Cairo without announcing a timeline for its entry into the Strip.

It remains unclear how many forces would be available to deploy with the planned ISF, and whether Israeli troops would withdraw from the enclave.

With fields and hives lost, Gaza's beekeepers struggle to start over

By Ebrahim Hajjaj, Dawoud Abu Alkas and Nidal al-Mughrabi
Reuters

Standing on the roof of a war-damaged building overlooking the ruins of Gaza City, beekeeper Ibrahim al-Dabba gently lifts a honeycomb frame as bees buzz around him.

"Bees require trees, we are raising bees amongst rubble," he said.

For Gaza's beekeepers, the struggle to rebuild their livelihoods after more than two years of war is about much more than honey.

It is also about preserving one of nature's most important pollinators in a territory where farmland has been devastated and access to orchards near the border with Israel has been cut off.

Before the war, the beekeepers kept around 30,000 hives, according to agricultural engineer and beekeeper Rateb Sammour.

Honey production had already been declining from some 400 metric tonnes annually several years ago to roughly half that amount as climate change affected the flowering seasons.

The conflict dealt a far greater blow, however.

Sammour, a well-known Gaza beekeeper and honey producer, estimates around 700 hives remain, with beekeepers dividing hives to help maintain the numbers.

He puts the honey production at only 10% of what it was before the war.

Across much of Gaza, where vast neighbourhoods remain reduced to wreckage, beekeepers

are salvaging what they can.

Some have placed hives on rooftops because agricultural land is inaccessible or destroyed.

Others are using sugar supplements to increase the food for their bees in places where there is no meaningful forage.

Israel effectively controlled an estimated 64% of Gaza by late April.

Nearly all of the territory's roughly 2mn residents are concentrated in a narrow coastal area under Hamas control, living largely in damaged buildings or makeshift shelters and facing dire humanitarian conditions.

After the ceasefire last October, Dabba, 49, hoped to return to a trade passed down through generations. Instead, he found almost nothing left.

"We couldn't find bees, we couldn't find equipment, we couldn't find anything to get us back to bees," he said.

"We are even forbidden from entering agricultural areas," Dabba said, explaining how they are within the yellow line military demarcation established under the ceasefire.

Starting over came at a steep cost.

Dabba said he paid 10,000 shekels (\$3,245) for just three hives, excluding equipment.

In the central Gaza camp of Nuseirat, beekeeper Fahd al-Dahdouh, 32, spends his days repairing shattered hive boxes recovered from destroyed farming areas.

"I collected these beehives, as you can see, I brought them and put them together," said Dahdouh. "I collected the lids, the boxes, and even the flooring."

Sudan president removes central bank governor

South Sudan's President Salva Kiir has dismissed the country's central bank governor, the latest in a series of sackings and reshuffles in senior ranks of his government.

Kiir announced the removal of Johnny Ohisa late on Wednesday. Kiir, who did not give a reason for the sacking in the decree read on the state broadcaster, replaced Ohisa with Addis Ababa Othow, who held the same position between June and November last year.

In recent months Kiir has made a series of sweeping changes in senior ranks of his government, which analysts say signal an effort to consolidate power amid succession uncertainty.

Ohisa, an economist who has served multiple terms as central bank governor in the past, was reappointed earlier this year after previously holding the position on two separate occasions.

South Sudan's economy has faced mounting pressure from declining oil revenues, recurring cash shortages, high inflation and currency depreciation. - Reuters

Lebanon delays ailing ex-central banker's hearing

Lebanon's judiciary postponed a hearing yesterday for former central bank governor Riad Salameh over alleged embezzlement after he failed to show up due to illness, a judicial official told AFP.

Salameh, who headed the central bank from 1993 to July 2023, is accused of having amassed a fortune during his time in the job and has faced numerous accusations including embezzlement and tax evasion in probes in Lebanon and abroad.

The 76-year-old has consistently denied any wrongdoing and has insisted he is being made a "scapegoat" for the country's economic collapse, which began in 2019. - AFP

Cyanide poisoning likely killed 15 elephants in Kenya: investigators

Fifteen elephants found dead over the past month in one of Kenya's best-known wildlife parks were likely poisoned by cyanide, possibly from pesticides used on nearby farms, wildlife officials said yesterday.

The deaths occurred in Amboseli National Park near the Tanzanian border, home to some of Africa's most famous elephant herds.

A preliminary investigation found the animals had ingested cyanide, "a toxic substance... which is very lethal, very poisonous", Kenya Wildlife Service spokesman Duncan Juma Wanyama told AFP.

"And whenever the elephant consumed it, it affects their lung and the liver," he added.

Investigators suspect the elephants ate tomatoes contaminated with "very strong pesticides", Wanyama said.

Tomatoes were found in the stomachs of several elephants from the same herd, which may have been attracted to unripe plants growing on nearby farms, he added.

The investigation was still under way and it was not yet clear whether the poisoning was accidental or deliberate.

At least one elephant died on the farm where the tomatoes were growing.

Others staggered towards a water source before dying days later, despite treatment by vets.

Nine female elephants and their calves, along with an adult male, had shown similar symptoms, including partial paralysis that left them unable to stand.

The remaining five carcasses were too decomposed or had been scavenged, so investigators were unable to determine the cause of death.

Wildlife officials are now checking whether other farmers in the area use the same chemicals.

The International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) charity called the loss "a major setback for one of Africa's key elephant populations and highlights the devastating impact toxic substances can have on wildlife, livestock, people and ecosystems".

"Those responsible must be held fully accountable under the law," said IFAW Kenya director Ben Wandago. "This tragedy also underscores the urgent need for the strict control and responsible handling of highly toxic substances to prevent them from entering the natural environment."

Amboseli is world-renowned for its herds of elephants and its savannah landscapes, with Mount Kilimanjaro visible across the border in Tanzania. - AFP

US map of Africa mislabels every country at global conference

Reuters
Washington

A US government map of Africa mislabeled every country during a State Department presentation at a global conference taking place in Brazil this week, causing a stir among attendees who took screenshots and posted them online.

Reuters viewed a video of the presentation given at the Aids 2026 conference in Rio de Janeiro, which shows the errant map displayed halfway during a presentation about the US State Department's new health agreements.

A Reuters analysis found the image of the map included in the presentation contained an artificial intelligence watermark that signals it was made with OpenAI tools.

The company said it was investigating the report.

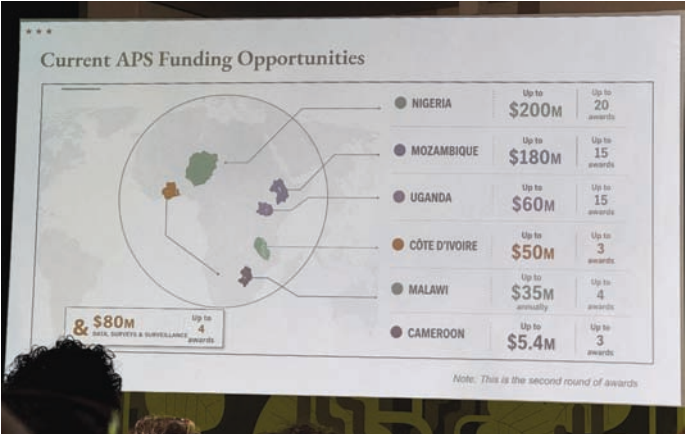
The State Department said it took "full responsibility" for the confusion caused and that the map had been produced by a team member who hastily changed the slide deck before the event.

The map showed Nigeria, where the US currently has several hundred troops deployed, as landlocked in the Sahara Desert.

Mozambique, which is in southeastern Africa, was relocated to the Horn of Africa, while Ivory Coast in West Africa was placed on the other side of the continent.

Screenshots of the map first appeared in a Substack post by Aids expert Emily Bass and were widely shared on LinkedIn, with one post garnering some 40,000 views.

"Whoever created and approved this slide did not know where countries in Africa are and did not care to check their work," wrote Matt Petit, who focuses on



A screen shows a US government map of Africa with mislabeled countries during a State Department presentation at a global conference on Sunday in Rio de Janeiro. - Reuters

AI and geopolitics at the Atlantic Council, in the post.

In a statement, the State Department said: "We take full re-

sponsibility for the confusion and misrepresentation it caused for attendees, including our African partners."

South Africa pushes migration talks following xenophobic violence

AFP/Reuters
Johannesburg

Pretoria called yesterday for an Africa-wide conference to address migration on the continent after weeks of deadly anti-migrant violence and tensions over undocumented foreign workers in South Africa.

The meeting would revisit a decade-old African Union (AU) decision to tackle migration as an issue of economic development, regional integration, peace and governance, the foreign ministry said.

It would also address the root causes

of anti-migrant sentiment and develop a continent-wide response to xenophobia, discrimination and violence.

"The need for this dialogue has become increasingly urgent. Migration is a continental phenomenon whose consequences extend beyond the jurisdiction of any single state," the foreign ministry said in a statement. "Although Africa has participated in discussions on migration with other regions of the world, the continent has yet to convene a comprehensive forum of its own at which member states can collectively examine Africa's migration challenges and opportunities."

South Africa, the continent's wealthiest

nation, has long been a magnet for migrants.

However, it has seen recurring bouts of anti-migrant violence for nearly two decades, with protests intensifying this year after vigilante groups ordered undocumented foreigners to leave by June 30.

More than 176,000 people have left in recent weeks, according to an AFP tally based on figures provided by African countries that have repatriated their nationals.

At least four migrants have been killed in the violence, according to the South African police, though some foreign governments say the death toll is higher.

Ghana, which has been an outspoken

critic of the fatal attacks, has called an AU debate on the anti-migrant violence at the next AU summit early next year.

Nigeria, which has also clashed diplomatically with South Africa over recurring attacks on its citizens, has likewise pushed to put the issue on the AU's agenda.

South Africa said the AU's executive council, which met this week in Ethiopia, decided not to include migration on the agenda for the bloc's mid-term review meeting in Egypt in October.

Clayson Monyela, a South African foreign affairs official, said on X that Pretoria had defeated an attempt to "single out & isolate" the country.

"The AU will discuss the migration issue broadly & look at the 'Pull & Push' factors," he wrote, referring to conditions that drive people to leave their countries and those that draw them elsewhere.

Local media reported that the African Union had rejected a proposal from Ghana that would have meant xenophobic violence in South Africa was discussed as a stand-alone agenda item at the body's mid-year co-ordination meeting in October.

Neither South Africa's Department of International Relations and Co-operation nor a spokesperson for the Ghanaian government had any immediate comment.

Renewed Iran war raises US missile supply concerns

AFP
Washington

Tehran's forces have carried out frequent missile and drone attacks in the Middle East since the breakdown of the US-Iran ceasefire, raising renewed concerns about Washington's supply of the weapons needed to intercept them.

Highlighting the issue, the US military said it shot down multiple ballistic missiles fired by Tehran in an "attempted surprise attack" this week, following a deadly Iranian strike on American troops in Jordan earlier this month.

Some lawmakers have raised questions about whether the US has sufficient munitions since early in the war, which began with US-Israeli strikes in late February before the fighting largely halted under an April ceasefire, only to resume in recent weeks.

"We have depleted our interceptors... which are, obviously, necessary to protect American



US Patriot missile defence systems at a US army base in Pyeongtaek, South Korea. (Reuters/File photo)

troops," US Senator Chris Van Hollen said on Sunday on ABC's *This Week*.

"We are depleting these every day, despite the fact that we could face other potential conflicts around the world," the Democrat added.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has previously dismissed fears about Washington's weapons supplies, and the US military has not publicly released details about

how many interceptors it has.

But US media outlets have reported that General Dan Caine, the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, has raised concerns about falling US interceptor supplies.

President Donald Trump was asked about the issue on Monday and said that while stocks are sufficient, he wants more.

"We have a lot of ammunition, different types," Trump told journalists aboard Air Force One, while

adding: "For some of the more sophisticated stuff, we'd certainly like to have more."

Trump took aim at Joe Biden, saying "so much was given to Ukraine" by the Democratic president, who sought to help Kyiv's forces defend against repeated Russian missile and drone attacks. But Trump's war against Iran has resulted in major reductions in US weapons supplies.

An analysis by the Center for

Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) think tank released this week found that US stocks of key Patriot and THAAD air defence missiles have been slashed by the conflict.

Before it began, the US had more than 2,300 Patriot and more than 450 THAAD interceptors — figures that CSIS estimated have been roughly halved or more in the subsequent five months of war.

"The air defence campaign has been largely successful with high — though not perfect — interception rates," but "this has required extensive use of interceptors," CSIS said.

The US is pushing hard for defence companies to increase the pace at which weapons including interceptors are produced.

Trump referred to these efforts on Monday, saying: "Plants are being built. A lot of equipment is being built. The Patriots, in particular, are being built."

The Defence Department announced a \$58.6bn, seven-year deal with Lockheed Martin for

Patriot missile production this week that the company said will deliver "critical interceptors into the hands of warfighters at unmatched speed."

But the US still faces dangers from interceptor shortfalls, CSIS said in its analysis.

"Diminished stockpiles may force the US and its coalition partners to take more risks with interceptions," while "expended munitions create a near- to medium-term risk for US readiness to fight a war against China in the western Pacific," it said.

Asked if the Pentagon was concerned about current munitions supplies, chief spokesman Sean Parnell said the US military "has everything it needs to execute at the time and place of the president's choosing."

"We have executed multiple successful operations across combatant commands while ensuring the US military possesses a deep arsenal of capabilities to protect our people and our interests," he said.

15 years in prison for father of US teenage school shooter

AFP
Washington

A man whose teenage son shot dead four people at a US high school was sentenced to 15 years in prison yesterday in a rare case of a parent convicted over a shooting carried out by their child.

Colin Gray, 55, gave his son Colt the AR-15-style rifle used in the shooting as a Christmas present in 2023 despite warnings that the boy had threatened to carry out a school shooting.

Colt Gray, who is now 16, pleaded guilty to the September 2024 attack at Apalachee High School in the Georgia town of Winder and was sentenced yesterday to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

Colin Gray, his father, was convicted by a jury in March of second-degree murder, involuntary manslaughter and other offences in connection with the shooting carried out by his son, which left two 14-year-old students and two teachers dead and nine people wounded.

"It is clear you failed as a parent," Superior Court Judge Nicholas Primm told Gray at his sentencing hearing. "You did not provide a stable household. You didn't have him in school.

"None of those failures helped your case," Primm said. "But those aren't why you were convicted. You were convicted because the warning lights were flashing brighter and brighter

and you didn't get him help and you didn't remove his access to the guns."

School shootings are a shockingly regular occurrence in the United States, where guns outnumber people and regulations on purchasing even powerful military-style rifles are lax.

Parental responsibility in mass shootings has come increasingly under the spotlight in recent years.

"You were convicted because the warning lights were flashing brighter and brighter and you didn't get him help and you didn't remove his access to the guns"

The parents of a teenager who shot and killed four people at a Michigan high school in 2021 were convicted on manslaughter charges in 2024 and sentenced to 10 to 15 years in prison in an unprecedented and closely watched case.

Jennifer and James Crumbley were the first parents of a school shooter convicted of involuntary manslaughter in the United States for the actions of their child.

Colin Gray is believed to be the first parent to be charged and convicted of murder over a shooting carried out by their child.

By Richard Cowan and Bhargav Acharya
Reuters

President Donald Trump indicated yesterday that he could temporarily withdraw his nomination of Todd Blanche to serve as US attorney-general and then later re-nominate him after two senators from his own party who have been holding up the nomination leave office in early January.

"I have no objection to temporarily withdrawing Todd's name, if they do not do the right thing, and putting him back after Cornyn and Tillis are out of office," the Republican president said in a social media post, referring to Senators John Cornyn of Texas and Thom Tillis of North Carolina. Blanche formerly served as Trump's personal lawyer and has stepped in as acting attorney general since Trump fired his appointee Pam Bondi in April. If Trump withdraws the nomination, Blanche could continue serving indefinitely as acting attorney general.

The two senators have been seeking written assurances from the Justice Department that a \$1.8bn "anti-weaponisation fund" Trump sought would not be made operational. That fund could benefit Trump allies who



US Senator John Cornyn (R-TX) speaks to reporters outside the Senate chamber in the wake of US President Donald Trump saying he may temporarily drop the nomination of Todd Blanche to be US attorney-general, at the US Capitol yesterday. (Reuters)

say they were unfairly targeted in the past by the federal government for their involvement in the January 6, 2021, attack on the US Capitol.

The senators also have objections to a deal that would prevent tax audits of Trump and his associates.

Cornyn said yesterday that talks over Blanche's nomination were over, likely through the weekend, after Trump's remarks that he could withdraw the nomination.

"I don't discount the possibil-

ity that this is just part of a negotiating technique," Cornyn said of Trump's comment.

Both Cornyn and Tillis are not running for re-election and are due to leave office in early January, which gives them more latitude than other Republicans to defy Trump. But Cornyn said on social media that other senators also shared their concerns.

Blanche met with Republican Senator John Curtis of Utah to try to shore up support.

Cornyn told reporters earlier

yesterday that he was still waiting for the Justice Department to formalise assurances that it would not implement the fund.

"I don't know whether they think they can wait us out or we'll cave. But I can assure you we won't," Cornyn told reporters.

Trump has expressed support for federal payouts to supporters who he has portrayed as being targeted by a "weaponised" US government under his Democratic predecessor Joe Biden.

But the "anti-weaponisation" fund, crafted as part of a legal settlement between Trump and the Justice Department to resolve his \$10bn lawsuit against the IRS over allegedly mishandling his tax records, was put on hold amid fierce opposition from Republicans in Congress. Trump critics derided it as a slush fund to reward supporters with taxpayer money.

Trump last year gave executive clemency to his supporters who were prosecuted for their roles in the January 6 riot.

The president ousted Bondi over her frustrations with her performance, especially over the release of files relating to the late financier and sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. Trump also felt Bondi was not moving quickly enough to prosecute critics and adversaries whom he wanted to face criminal charges, according to sources.

'Grynspar ahead in process to pick next UN chief'

AFP
United Nations

United Nations insider Rebeca Grynspar was leading in the first round of the process to pick the next UN chief that began yesterday, diplomatic sources told AFP.

Grynspar, the former vice-president of Costa Rica and head of the UN Conference on Trade and Development, was followed by former Guyanese foreign minister Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett, according to two diplomatic sources briefed on the results.

Argentina's Rafael Grossi, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), was in third.

The UN Security Council met yesterday for the first so-called "straw poll" to gauge support for the seven candidates for the secretary-general role.

Some have criticised the polling as opaque. It began in the early 1980s in an attempt to break a deadlock between two candidates whose bids were shut down by vetoes.

Four women and three men are so far in the running to succeed Antonio Guterres of Portugal, who will complete his second five-year term on December 31, 2026. Nominations are still open, raising the prospect of late entrants.

The other nominees are Michelle Bachelet of Chile, Maria Fernanda Espinosa of Ecuador, Olara Otunnu of Uganda and Macky Sall of Senegal.

Although IAEA chief Grossi has arguably the best name recognition, observers say there is



Candidate for the position of United Nations secretary-general, Rebeca Grynspar Mayufis, speaks during the "UN Town Hall: The Next Secretary-General" event at United Nations headquarters in New York City. (Reuters/File photo)

no clear favourite in the race that could last several months.

The Security Council president, Zenon Ngay Mukongo of the Democratic Republic of Congo, confirmed a second round of the straw poll would be announced in the coming days.

Diplomats are reluctant to predict the outcome because the council's five permanent members — the US, Russia, China, France, and the United Kingdom — have yet to indicate their preferences.

Even if a candidate bags the

required nine votes from the 15 available in the council, they must also avoid a veto by the five major powers, which are deeply divided.

Once a candidate clears those bars, their name will go to the General Assembly of all UN member states for confirmation.

In the straw poll, each council member was required anonymously assign each candidate one of three labels: "encourage," "discourage," or "no opinion."

That would give those with no support the opportunity to withdraw, though they are not obliged to.

Initially, all ballots are the same colour but eventually, after an unspecified number of votes, the ballots of the five permanent members will be a different colour from those of the elected members. That will make it possible to identify potential vetoes but not which country blackballed any given candidate.

"The straw polls may show that some candidates are just not viable, and allow them to bow out in a dignified manner," Richard Gowan of the International Crisis Group told AFP.

"I would be surprised if any one candidate emerges with a decisive numerical advantage."

Traditionally, the UN's top job rotates between different regions. On that basis it is Latin America's turn, and there are many candidates from the region.

Panama's Ambassador to the UN Eloy Alfaro de Alba said it was a priority that the winner be a woman from Latin America.

Many other states are also pushing for a woman to lead the UN for the first time.

Trump administration unfreezes \$600mn for Gavi for vaccine effort

By Ismail Shakil
Reuters

The Trump administration said on Wednesday it will immediately release \$600mn in congressionally appropriated funds for vaccines for the world's poorest countries after Washington withheld the money over unsubstantiated safety concerns raised by US Health Secretary Robert F Kennedy Jr US Secretary of State Marco Rubio had said in June that it was time to re-engage with the Geneva-based global alliance Gavi, which helps the world's poorest countries buy vaccines to protect children from diseases such as measles and diphtheria, citing both congressional concerns and "our goals on global health."

The previous month, Gavi's chief executive Sania Nishtar had said Gavi was moving away from vaccines that included a mercury-based preservative about which Kennedy had raised concerns.

The US State Department said in a statement on Wednesday the decision to release funds was taken after Gavi committed "to work towards transitioning mercury-containing vaccines and expanding access to newer, mercury-free alternatives."

Representatives for Gavi did not immediately respond to a request for comment sent late Wednesday night in Geneva. Anti-vaccine groups, including one founded by Kennedy, have for decades claimed that thime-

rosal, a mercury-based preservative used in vaccines, is linked to autism and other neurodevelopmental disorders, despite many studies showing no related safety issues.

Kennedy, a longtime vaccine skeptic, said in June 2025 the US would no longer provide any funding — representing around \$300mn a year — because Gavi ignored safety. He did not provide evidence to support his claim.

The US previously contributed around 13% of Gavi's funding, and the organisation has embarked on a series of cost-cutting measures to try to address the shortfall, which has been exacerbated by cuts from other high-income nations.

On Wednesday, the State Department said the US expects to resume its place on the Gavi board and that it will evaluate any future US support to the group based on "demonstrated performance, accountability, and implementation" of reforms."





Five killed as fierce winds bring chaos to Rio, Sao Paulo

AFP
Rio de Janeiro

Five people have died after powerful gusts of wind in Brazil brought chaos to Rio de Janeiro and parts of Sao Paulo state, cutting power and bringing public transport to a standstill.

Residents of Rio de Janeiro were taken by surprise when winds of up to 100kph hit just before rush hour, felling dozens of trees and leaving thousands stranded as the city's three subway lines ground to a halt.

The fire department said in a statement that two people had died when a wall collapsed in the city of Rio de Janeiro, and a fisherman was missing in the coastal town of Tarituba.

In Santos, in the state of Sao Paulo, wind gusts of up to 111kph caused widespread damage, and a homeless person was killed by a fallen tree, local authorities said in a statement.

Operations were affected at several major airports in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo.

Santos Dumont Airport, Rio's downtown airport serving most-

ly domestic flights, told AFP in a statement that it had suspended operations for about two hours.

According to Rio firefighters, more than 90 trees had fallen due to the gusts. Many areas of the city suffered blackouts before power was restored.

In the middle-class neighbourhood of Botafogo, two large trees fell on either side of the newsstand where Patrick Diego, 39, has worked for over 20 years.

"Fortunately, they came down slowly and didn't hurt anyone. The only damage was that the newsstand was shifted out of place," he said.

"Chaos has taken over," building manager Paula Rubim, 53, told AFP, as the whole street was blocked to traffic, complaining that the "subway was at a standstill."

The city hall's operations centre said the winds were the result of "the approach of an oceanic cold front."

The gusts came on a hot, sunny day, and videos showed people leaving Ipanema and Copacabana beaches en masse as gusts whipped up sand and swept away umbrellas and beach chairs.



A drone view shows a damaged gas station that collapsed during strong winds in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, yesterday. (Reuters)

Mexico's economy grows at fastest pace since late 2020 in second quarter

Reuters
Mexico City

Mexico's economy rebounded in the second quarter from the previous three-month period, growing at its fastest pace since late 2020, a preliminary estimate from national statistics agency INEGI showed yesterday.

Latin America's second-largest economy expanded 1.5% in the second quarter, INEGI said in a report, with all three main sectors posting growth. GDP rebounded from a 0.6% contraction in the first quarter and exceeded the 1.3% increase expected by economists in a Reuters poll.

"The data does suggest that the communications are likely to become a bit less dovish and we

think the balance of probabilities is tilted towards a rate hike over the next six months or so," Capital Economics analyst Kimberley Sperrfechter said in a note. Mexico's central bank, also known as Banxico, took a dovish stance in its latest meetings, cautioning about persistent inflation and Mexico's economy amid global tensions.

The economic expansion was mainly fuelled by primary activities, which include farming, fishing and mining, which expanded 3.3% on a sequential basis.

The secondary sector - which includes manufacturing and construction - increased 1.6%, and services activity rose 1.5% in the period.

Compared with the same quarter last year, the Mexican economy grew 2.2% in the period, also above a 1.5% year-on-

Brazil withholds approval of Trump's ambassador pick

Reuters
Washington/Brasilia

The Brazilian government has for weeks withheld the formal diplomatic approval needed for the next US ambassador to take up his post, angering US officials and deepening a rift between the Western Hemisphere's two largest democracies.

The dispute could leave Washington without an ambassador in Brasilia ahead of Brazil's October election, adding to bilateral tensions that have affected trade flows and resulted in accusations of interference in domestic affairs. Daniel Perez, a Florida state representative and close ally of Secretary of State Marco Rubio, was nominated by US President Donald Trump on June 1. The nomination occurred before the US sought Brazil's approval, a common diplomatic step known as "agrément," said four people familiar with the matter.

Officials in Brasilia viewed that omission as a disrespectful breach of protocol, according to two officials who requested anonymity to describe private diplomatic conversations. Perez's nomination is awaiting a full Senate vote after passing committee last week, though he will not be able to take up the post until Brazil approves.

In recent days, some Trump officials have grown increasingly exasperated about what they interpret as Brazil's slow-walking, according to two of the sources. One of the people added, without elaborating, that the administration may take punitive action



Vice-President Geraldo Alckmin smiles as Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva speaks during the national convention of the Brazilian Socialist Party in Brasilia on Wednesday. (AFP)

against Brazil as soon as Friday if the matter is not resolved.

The administration of President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, a leftist, has long had a tense relationship with Rubio's State Department due to what it sees as efforts to influence Latin American politics in favor of conservatives.

The Trump administration, conversely, has accused the Brazilian government of at times censoring conservatives or tilting the scales against them in judicial proceedings.

Asked about Brazil's delay in granting agrément for Perez, a State Department spokesperson said: "President Trump has the right to determine who represents the American people and interests around the world. President Trump is assembling an America First diplomatic A-team across his administration, subject to the advice and consent of the Senate.

We reject any effort by foreign countries to interfere in our domestic processes."

Brazil is investigating Perez in keeping with standard procedure, two Brazilian officials said. One of them added that agrément will probably not be granted before Brazil's election on October 4.

"We are not saying we won't give the agrément, but there is no deadline," one of the officials said. "It is up to the host country to decide when the appropriate time is."

Brazil's Foreign Ministry said in a statement that it would not comment on the matter "as the process is covered by the principle of confidentiality established in the Vienna Convention."

Perez's Florida House office did not respond to an email.

National sovereignty has become a key rallying cry for Lula, as he seeks his fourth non-consecutive term in October's election. His

main opponent is Senator Flavio Bolsonaro, the son of former President Jair Bolsonaro, who has sought to portray Trump as a key ally.

In June, the State Department designated two Brazilian organised crime groups as terrorist organisations, despite opposition from the Brazilian government. Washington imposed a 25% tariff this month on several Brazilian products, citing what it described as unfair trade practices. Last week, it announced an additional 12.5% levy linked to concerns over forced labour. At an event on Wednesday, Lula said Brazil had denied visa requests for two Trump administration officials who, according to him, planned to travel to the country "to meddle in Brazil's election," confirming a Reuters report from last week. A US State Department spokesperson at the time rejected any suggestion of a "ploy" to undermine Brazil's elections.

"Trump sometimes seems to want to pick a fight with me. I don't want a fight with him ... I'm not stupid," Lula said on Wednesday. "I want to defeat them in the battle of narratives."

Polls show Lula with a slim but steady lead over Flavio Bolsonaro. At his committee hearing this month, Perez told senators that Brazil's October election would be an early priority if he is confirmed, saying that the US should support conditions for free and fair elections while strengthening trade and security cooperation with Brasilia. "We do have a trade surplus with Brazil," Perez said. "Nevertheless, there are some industries that have a significant gap," referencing energy and agriculture.

Cuba says three quarters of hotels shuttered

AFP
Havana

Nearly three-quarters of Cuba's hotels have been shuttered and the island's tourism sector has been brought to "almost total paralysis" by US sanctions and fuel shortages, Prime Minister Manuel Marrero said yesterday.

Detailing the scale of the tourism

crisis for the first time, Marrero said seven international chains, responsible for about half of all hotel rooms, had left the island.

Tourism had been Cuba's second-largest source of foreign currency earnings, employing more than 300,000 people before the crisis deepened this year.

Today, Old Havana's streets, once clogged with tourists seeking sun, salsa and stirred cocktails, are quiet.

Some 73 percent of hotels have been closed, Marrero said, and about 25,000 workers have been left "in a vulnerable situation."

Following Havana's announcement in February of an aviation fuel shortage, Canadian, Russian and European airlines suspended flights to the island.

The sector's troubles accelerated after Washington imposed sanctions in May on the military-run conglomerate GAESA,

prompting several international operators to end hotel management agreements to avoid US penalties.

Although Spanish groups Melia and Iberostar continued operating hotels in partnership with Cuba's Tourism Ministry, Washington widened its sanctions in July.

Official figures show tourist arrivals dropped 58 percent between January and June compared with the same period a year earlier.

Bolivia prosecutor orders arrest of ex-leader Morales over protests

AFP
La Paz

Bolivian prosecutors on Wednesday issued an arrest warrant for former socialist president Evo Morales, accusing him of fomenting recent protests that paralysed the country.

Enormous anti-government demonstrations choked the Andean nation in May and June, causing severe fuel, food and medicine shortages in some cities.

The movement started with workers and Indigenous communities voicing their grievances over Bolivia's worst economic crisis in decades.

But protests escalated to demand the resignation of US-backed President Rodrigo Paz, who has accused Morales of orchestrating the unrest.

Wednesday's warrant was re-

lated to an investigation into dozens of roadblocks erected during that period, Attorney General Roger Mariaca said.

The probe stemmed from an "armed uprising" and "terrorism" complaint filed by a right-wing conglomerate of civic leaders and businesses against Morales, trade unionist Mario Argollo and Indigenous figure Vicente Salazar.

A section of the government later joined the complaint.

The president has also accused Morales, who hails from the coca-growing Chapare region, of drug trafficking - without providing evidence.

"They will not intimidate us," Morales said in reaction to the arrest warrant on X.

"They seek to hold us responsible for the social mobilisations to conceal the true drama in Bolivia: a profound social and economic crisis," he added.

Morales, Bolivia's first-ever

Indigenous leader, is in hiding in his political stronghold Chapare to escape separate charges of trafficking a minor.

He is accused of having relations with a 15-year-old girl, with whom he is alleged to have fathered a child while in power.

The teenager's parents allegedly consented to the relationship in exchange for benefits. Morales denies the allegations.

Paz previously said he was planning an operation in the former president's political bastion, without specifying when.

The conservative leader managed to quell public unrest by declaring a state of emergency in June, allowing him to deploy the army and outlaw demonstrations.

He took office last year on a promise to revive the economy after two decades of socialist rule.

His cost-cutting program has however run into stiff opposition from trade unions, farmers and Indigenous organisations.

Crime-weary Peruvians put faith in Fujimori

AFP
Peru

For fervent Keiko Fujimori supporters living in neighbourhoods that bear the Peruvian president's name, the tough-talking leader cannot start fighting crime soon enough.

Conservative Fujimori won the presidential run-off by a mere 50,000 votes and has sworn to get a grip on the crime wave sweeping the Andean nation.

Extortion is a primary concern among many Peruvians, with recorded cases ballooning in recent years. Peru is facing its worst security crisis in decades, fuelled by the spread of both local and foreign criminal gangs that oversee contract killings and extortion.

Roxana Quispe, a baker living in the port city of Callao near Lima,

has received multiple threats from extortionists via phone calls.

The 42-year-old has fixed her hopes on Fujimori to resolve the issue.

"I hope she comes here and sees our needs," she told AFP. "I have a lot of faith in her."

Quispe lives in a section of the Ventanilla neighbourhood named after the president, who served as first lady in her father Alberto Fujimori's government in the 1990s.

The disgraced ex-leader was eventually jailed for corruption and crimes against humanity committed in the name of fighting what he considered terrorism.

But this legacy does not perturb his loyal followers in Quispe's neighbourhood, where the pharmacy, soccer pitch and community kitchen also serve as namesakes.

The area has a peculiar past: it began as an illegal settlement

in 1996, but the 100 or so settler families gained legitimacy when then-president Fujimori granted them property titles.

They named it for Fujimori as "a way of showing gratitude," said original settler and staunch supporter Cesar Garcia, 52.

Most locals openly endorse the new president, but there are some sceptics too.

"I don't think she will fulfil 100% of her promises," said 36-year-old food vendor Luzmari Anaya.

Over in Carabayllo, a hilltop Lima community some 20km (12 miles) away, a neighbourhood with the same name shares similar origins - and sentiments - with Ventanilla's Fujimori district.

"We used to live on rocks, on abandoned land," community kitchen coordinator Elsa Lorena, 48, told AFP.

"We lived in darkness because

there was no electricity and we bought water from tank trucks," she said.

"Now we have streets thanks to Alberto Fujimori."

Arturo Maldonado, a political scientist at the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru, said these "urban-marginal sectors" will support the Fujimori name as long as "land titles, public works and infrastructure" remain a possibility.

"It is likely that (Keiko Fujimori) has an attitude very similar to her father's, making gestures - let's not call them populist, but definitely for the 'audience,'" Maldonado told AFP.

Her surname is toxic to other parts of Peruvian society, however, and her father's reputation contributed to three former electoral losses.

But on her fourth attempt, she has parachuted into power by



Peru's President Keiko Fujimori alongside Prime Minister Luis Galarreta during the first session of the Council of Ministers in Lima on Wednesday. (AFP)

drawing on widespread fears of rising crime rates.

Last year saw the number of homicides rise to 2,600 compared to 1,000 in 2018.

Reports of extortion meanwhile jumped from 3,200-26,500 over the same period.

Fujimori proposes fighting crime by expelling undocumented people, setting up courts with

anonymous judges and making prisoners work for their food.

"What they are asking for is order and security, and that is the first thing we are going to do," she told reporters last week.

"I hope that after so many governments that have disappointed us, she keeps the promises she's making," says Herbert Pagan, 63, a security guard from Ventanilla.

Japan quake toll hits 34 as survivors struggle in heat

AFP
Kumamoto

Japanese emergency workers searched tirelessly for survivors at a wrecked shopping mall yesterday, as the death toll from a major earthquake hit 34 and tens of thousands were left without power in punishing heat.

The Kumamoto disaster management office issued the new tally for Tuesday's quake, with seven bodies now extracted from the mass of rubble, steel and wires of the Aeon shopping mall after a suspected gas blast.

Eight people were also confirmed dead at the Nippon Paper Industries factory in Yatsushiro city, where part of a red-and-white smokestack collapsed, according to the office.

Five others were in a critical condition after the 7.1-magnitude tremor, while almost 9,500 locals were in evacuation centres in the region of southwestern Japan on the island of Kyushu.

The quake caused widespread damage, flattening homes, damaging bridges, triggering fires and leaving tens of thousands of residents without power and water in temperatures forecast to hit 38C this weekend.

Some 13,520 households remained without electricity yesterday.



Rescue officials work at the site of a house that collapsed following the earthquake, in Yatsushiro, Kumamoto prefecture, yesterday. (AFP)

Hundreds of elderly people – Japan has the world's second-oldest population – slumbered on thin mats on the hard lobby floor at one community centre in Uki city as they sought relief from the searing sun.

"Thank God for these shelters," said one woman, who declined to give her name, as people slept between chairs and tables or gathered around a television.

At home or in the car "it's too hot and there are too many mosquitoes," she told AFP.

"In this heat, if you don't have electricity and air conditioning, it's very tough," father-of-four supermarket employee Hiroyuki Matsushima, 53, told AFP.

With no power and running water, Retiree Kenji Ota, 72, has been sleeping inside his car at night.

"This quake was so strong. It was horrible... I can only sleep for two hours or so at night," he said.

The town of Hikawa was one of the areas worst hit, where many older structures crumpled in the quake and where residents still

had no water or power yesterday.

"The biggest problem is that there is no toilet... I had to go to a nearby school," said Kinuko Uemura, 85, who told AFP she and her husband were lucky to survive the collapse of their traditional house.

Soshiro Okawa, 59, was at the back of his roadside souvenir shop when the quake struck.

"It was my first time experiencing an earthquake that literally made the ground rise," he said.

The 59-year-old heard items breaking inside his store while the



An emergency worker uses a tap at a park to cool down in Yatsushiro, Kumamoto prefecture yesterday. (AFP)



Local residents take shelter in an open building in Hikawa, Kumamoto Prefecture yesterday. (AFP)

ground swelled in the parking lot, shattering its asphalt surface and a series of cracks stretched into the foundation of his shop.

The store will suspend operations, but Okawa said that "we need to ensure the livelihood of our growers and job security for my staff".

The Aeon shopping mall was evacuated after the earthquake but around 50 minutes later the facility was gutted by the massive blast with an unknown number of employees still inside.

Footage from inside showed rescue workers in orange overalls and white helmets picking their way through a mass of twisted steel, dangling cables and chunks of ceiling.

A total of 25 felines from a "cat cafe" were however rescued, triggering widespread relief on social media.

TV footage showed people queueing for petrol and drinking water. Authorities have sent hundreds of air conditioning units to shelters.

Myanmar repatriation would risk Rohingya lives: Malaysia group

AFP
Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia's main Rohingya rights group urged the government yesterday to halt the planned deportation of some 5,000 stateless asylum seekers to Myanmar, saying their lives would be at risk.

The appeal came a day after Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said Myanmar had agreed to take back 5,000 Rohingya, in a rare repatriation push announced days after authorities detained dozens of refugees.

Malaysia hosts more than 215,000 refugees and asylum seekers registered with the UN refugee agency, including more

than 126,000 members of Myanmar's persecuted Rohingya minority, making them the country's largest refugee community.

The Myanmar Ethnic Rohingya Human Rights Organisation in Malaysia asked Anwar and his home minister to consult the UN refugee agency and Rohingya representatives before any repatriation.

Sending Rohingya back to Myanmar would violate "the core international law principle of non-refoulement, which bans returning people to a place where their lives are threatened", the rights group said in a statement.

"The Rohingya are stateless... There is no way we can return home safely when we face ongoing genocide back home," it said.

"How can stateless Rohingya be safe in Myanmar?"

According to the statement, repatriated Rohingya could be forced to join the Myanmar military without training and be used as human shields in fighting with other ethnic groups.

The group also urged the international community to intervene without delay.

Malaysian authorities this week detained more than 100 Rohingya refugees who had gathered outside the UN refugee agency's office in Kuala Lumpur after being threatened with eviction from an informal settlement in northern Penang state.

Officials later confirmed that the detainees had valid documentation issued by the UN agency.

The group was released on Wednesday and sent to various locations around Malaysia after undergoing final verification, local media reported.

Malaysia, which shelters one of Southeast Asia's biggest refugee populations, is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and does not formally recognise refugee status.

AFP fact-checkers have found that Rohingya refugees in Malaysia have been targeted by online disinformation campaigns that rights advocates say are fuelling xenophobia and intimidation.

Many of the Rohingya, a mostly Muslim group, escaped Myanmar during a brutal military crackdown in 2017.

Indonesia court bars use of education budget to fund free meals from 2028

Reuters
Jakarta

Indonesia's top constitutional court ruled yesterday that the government cannot continue to finance its multibillion-dollar free meals programme with funds sourced from the education budget, delivering another blow to President Prabowo Subianto's main campaign promise.

The free meals programme was launched in 2025 with the aim of feeding 83mn school children and expectant mothers to combat under-nutrition. But its sheer size, as well as the logistical challenges of operating across an archipelago of 280mn people, has left the government with a heavy price tag, dwarfing most other programmes, sparking fears that it could drive up the fiscal deficit. Chief judge Suharto said yesterday that the free meals budget must be separated from the budget for operational spending on educa-

tion from 2028 at the latest, with judges recommending that the split should take place as early as next year.

Indonesia will present its 2027 state budget next month. The ruling came after students and educators filed petitions against the country's state budget law for 2026, which counted the free meals programme as an "educational provision" that required operational funding. The finance ministry earmarked 769tn rupiah for education, 223tn of which was part of the budget for the free meals programme.

The government has defended the allocation in court, arguing that improving nutrition should be part of the education process. But last month, witness Iman Zanatul Haeri, a history teacher, told the court through tears that the programme had coincided with the termination of teacher contracts as well as salary cuts.

The judges said the free meals programme was a "real solution" to address stunting "so that the

court feels it must have its own allocation within the state budget."

"Adding nutritious meals as one of the education provisions... creates imbalances in the proportionality of the education budget," Judge M Guntur Hamzah said.

Indonesia's finance ministry declined to comment on Thursday. Thursday's court verdict is the latest in a growing list of troubles plaguing Prabowo's flagship scheme.

The beleaguered agency in charge of the programme has already seen two changes of leadership in the last few weeks. Authorities arrested the agency chief last month for corruption allegations linked to the programme. The government also reduced the 2026 budget on two occasions, and said more cuts were possible. In a July survey by an independent pollster, only 33.8% of respondents said they were satisfied with the programme, falling by some 30 percentage points compared to last November.

Korea to appoint special prosecutor over ballot shortage

Republic of Korea's parliament passed a bill yesterday to appoint a special prosecutor to investigate irregularities at June 3 local elections, which raised questions about the competence of the National Election Commission and whether fraud was committed.

Voters at some polling stations, including in a district in Seoul, were made to wait for hours until ballot papers were delivered after they ran out. Dozens were found to have been unable to cast votes.

The special prosecutor, who will be nominated by a bipartisan committee, will be appointed by the

president and form a team of prosecutors and investigators to conduct a probe for 90 days. The team can bring indictments.

The parliament also passed a bill to extend a parliamentary inquiry into the National Election Commission by 30 days over the ballot paper shortages.

A team of police and prosecutors has been conducting an investigation. The shortages of ballot papers drew an outcry from the public and from politicians on both sides of the aisle, including President Lee Jae Myung, who said the incident was a serious blow to the country's reputation as a model democracy. (Reuters)

China landslide death toll rises to 51

The death toll from a landslide in southwestern China's Chongqing earlier this month rose to 51, with 10 people still missing, authorities said yesterday. "In this disaster, a total of over 1,100 people were safely evacuated; 10 people were rescued (three people have recovered and have left the hospital)," officials in Pengshui County, where the disaster occurred, said in a social media post updating the toll. (AFP)

Northwest China on high alert as heavy rain raises risk of floods

Authorities in northwest China's Shaanxi and Gansu provinces issued emergency alerts and closed dozens of tourist sites yesterday as heavy rain raised the risk of floods and landslides, state media reports showed.

Xian, the capital city of Shaanxi province, in early evening upgraded its rainstorm warning to the highest red level after heavy downpours caused flooding in some urban areas, state broadcaster CCTV reported.

Authorities closed all valleys along the Qin Mountains range in Xian and shut down several forest parks temporarily, the report said.

Gansu's meteorological authorities upgraded their emergency response level for heavy

rain to Level III from Level IV on Thursday, warning of heightened risks for disasters such as flash floods, landslides and urban flooding, state-run news agency Xinhua reported.

Gansu authorities issued a red alert yesterday morning for geological disasters in some districts and counties of Longnan, warning of high risk of landslides and mudslides over the next 24 hours, CCTV reported.

A total of 61 tourist attractions in Longnan had been shut temporarily by 4pm, according to CCTV.

In Gansu, a landslide in a valley in early July killed 21 people. On Sunday, 10 people died after a scenic area was hit by heavy rain that triggered flash floods. (Reuters)

USS George Washington in Vietnam on five-day visit

Reuters
Hanoi

The US Navy's nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS George Washington arrived in Vietnam's Danang yesterday for a five-day visit, the latest sign of growing ties between Washington and Hanoi.

The port call comes nearly three years after the US and Vietnam upgraded relations to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in September 2023.

The visit is the fourth by a US aircraft carrier since the end of the Vietnam War and the first since USS Ronald Reagan called at Danang in June 2023.

"The visit by the US Navy carrier strike group contributes to maintaining and developing Vietnam-US relations," Vietnam's defence ministry said in a statement.

The ministry said the visit also reflected Vietnam's policy of supporting logistics and technical services for foreign naval vessels making port calls in the country.

The visit reinforces the US Navy's "commitment to a shared



The USS George Washington aircraft carrier arrives at the port in Danang yesterday. (AFP)

vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific," the US Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City said in a

separate statement. Vietnamese The USS George Washington was accompanied by the guided-

missile cruiser USS Robert Smalls (CG-62) and the destroyer USS Shoup (DDG-86).

Britain announces £8bn investment in submarines

AFP
London

Britain announced Wednesday £8.4bn (\$11.2bn) investment for the next phase of its Dreadnought Class nuclear submarine programme, which the government claims will support 22,000 apprenticeships over the next decade.

“A major £8.4bn investment in the UK’s nuclear deterrent, delivering jobs and opportunity for young people for years to come,” was set to be announced by Prime Minister Andy Burnham, his Downing Street office said in a press release.

UK defence contractor BAE Systems has been tasked with delivering four Dreadnought Class nuclear-powered submarines as part of Britain’s nuclear deterrent.

Of the £8.4bn, BAE was set to receive £5.9bn, with the remaining going to the wider supply chain.

The investment was set to help the first of four submarines, the HMS Dreadnought, complete its sea trials and “be ready to enter



Britain’s Prime Minister Andy Burnham meets an apprentice during a visit to BAE Systems, Submarine Academy for Skills and Knowledge (SASK), in Barrow in Furness, yesterday. (AFP)

service with the Royal Navy in the early 2030s”, Downing Street said.

It will also see the second vessel in the programme, HMS Valiant, reach the sea trial phase, and the third and fourth boats progress through the construction stage.

The programme will support 47,000 jobs and apprenticeships according to Burnham, who has made tackling growing youth unemployment a priority of his nascent administration.

The submarines “will protect

Britain for decades to come, and the 47,000 jobs and apprenticeships will change lives both in this town and in dozens of places like it,” Burnham was set to say on a visit to the BAE shipyard in Barrow, north-western England yesterday.

Burnham says he will use North Sea oil pragmatically after Trump comments

Reuters
London

British Prime Minister Andy Burnham said he planned to take a “pragmatic” approach to developing and using oil and gas resources in the North Sea, setting out his position after US President Donald Trump said the basin would be opened up.

Burnham became Britain’s prime minister on July 20, and shortly afterwards spoke to Trump, who told reporters on Wednesday that the new Prime Minister was planning to press ahead with more drilling in the North Sea.

“I indicated in the phone call [with Trump]... that I would take a pragmatic approach when it comes to the North Sea, and that is my intention as we go forward,” Burnham told reporters when asked about Trump’s remarks.

“There is a resource there. When people are struggling, you can’t ignore that, and hence me indicating that to the president.”

Burnham has said that he will stick to the Labour manifesto from his predecessor Keir Starmer’s election win in 2024, but indicated that he might be more flexible in the area of oil and gas licences.

Trump had been sternly critical of Starmer’s North Sea approach, which was for the development of existing licences to go ahead but to not issue any new licences for exploration.

Burnham has repeatedly said he wants to reindustrialise Britain, and some trade unions and business groups have called on him to use the North Sea as a way to boost jobs and help lower energy prices.

Two large fields, Rosebank and Jackdaw, are ready to be developed but have been on hold after legal challenges.

The projects were granted licences before the Labour government came into power but developers including Equinor and Shell had been blocked from extracting oil and gas until fresh government consent is granted, which is still pending.

Indian police file charges against 13 people over exam paper leaks

Reuters
New Delhi

India’s Central Bureau of Investigation has filed charges against 13 people in connection with leaked question papers for the national medical college entrance test, days after youth-led protests over the scandal forced the education minister to quit.

About 2mn students had taken the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) in May before it was cancelled following allegations of test paper questions being leaked. A re-test was held on June 21.

Those charged include three subject experts from the federal National Testing Agency, several middlemen who sourced and distributed the leaked questions, and two people associated with coaching institutes who obtained them, federal police agency CBI said in a statement late on Wednesday, adding that all of them were detained in custody.

“The Central Bureau of Investigation has filed charge sheet ... against 13 arrested accused for offences of criminal conspiracy, cheating, criminal breach of trust, destruction of evidence and others,” it said.

The 13 people could not be reached for comment as they are in custody.

Exam question paper leaks are fairly common in India and the NEET questions themselves were similarly leaked in some parts of the country in 2024, although no re-test was ordered at the time.

The weeks-long demonstrations, which were called off after the education minister resigned on Saturday, saw thousands of people converging in the capital, with protests spreading to other cities after a march on parliament was met with tear gas and baton charges.

India’s top court on Wednesday ordered that no coercive action be taken against protesters, directed all under-18s arrested during the protests to be released, and said authorities must preserve surveillance footage, after petitioners alleged police brutality against demonstrators.

The protests have also prompted Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government to introduce a bill in parliament to amend the legislation governing public examinations, proposing longer prison terms and heavier fines for violators.

Under the amended law, the 13 people could be punished with prison terms of five to 10 years, and fines of up to 50mn rupees (\$522,000).

The protests were Modi’s biggest political challenge in his third term in office that began in 2024.

More than 750 migrants cross Channel in 2026 daily record, says UK govt

AFP
London

Britain’s government said yesterday that 752 migrants were detected arriving in small boats across the Channel the previous day, a daily record for this year.

The figure, released by the interior ministry, broke a previous 2026 record set in June of 710 arrivals in a single day.

The issue of tens of thousands of irregular migrants arriving in small boats each year has vexed successive British governments and fuelled support for the hard-right Reform UK party led by Nigel Farage.

However, the number of migrants crossing the Channel fell by 41 percent in the first half of 2026 compared with the same period the previous year, according to interior ministry figures.

Britain’s ruling centre-left Labour has insisted its policy of trying to stem the flow of arrivals through better law enforcement co-operation with European neighbours is working. Reform has claimed the drop in crossings was primarily due to adverse weather earlier in the year.



A damaged zodiac boat left behind by migrants trying to cross the English Channel is seen at the Blockhaus du Crabe in Ecault beach in Saint-Etienne-au-Mont, near Boulogne-sur-Mer, France. (Reuters/File Photo)

In a bid to deter the arrivals, UK authorities have also started criminally prosecuting migrants who help navigate the small boats, a perilous journey across one of the world’s busiest shipping routes.

A teenager from South Sudan appeared in court in southeastern England earlier this year, accused of endangering lives by piloting one such overcrowded dinghy carrying 167 people this month. He has denied being in charge of the vessel.

Meanwhile, French authorities said yesterday that four migrants had died in two separate attempts to cross the Channel early yesterday and late Wednesday.

Sri Lanka seeks six suspects in Chinese national’s murder linked to cybercrimes

Reuters
Colombo

Sri Lankan police are searching for six people regarding the murder of a Chinese national suspected of links to computer-related scams, an official said yesterday, in a crackdown on cyberscam centres tied to transnational fraud networks.

Authorities have arrested about 700 foreign nationals this year, Indian, Chinese, Nepalis and Vietnamese among them, or nearly double the 2025 figure, from hotels, rented houses and apartments nationwide, police data showed.

Police believe the Chinese national, whose body was retrieved a week ago from the town of Eheliyagoda, about 60km from Colombo, was abducted in the island nation’s commercial capital.

“Three suspects linked to the murder are believed to be in Sri Lanka and we have imposed a travel ban on them,” police spokesman Frederick Wootler told Reuters.

“Three suspects who managed to leave the country are being traced with support from Interpol.”

Two Chinese nationals linked to the murder have been arrested and will be presented in court on August 4, he added, while declining to reveal the identity of the victim.

He is suspected to be part of a larger group of Chinese nationals linked to computer-related scams, two police sources told Reuters, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The Chinese foreign ministry and the Chinese embassy in Colombo did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The nationwide raids turned up hundreds of mobile telephones, laptops and desktop computers, leading authorities to suspect the foreign nationals had ties to cybercrime networks, they said.

Most of those arrested appeared in court before being deported for overstaying their visas or for working on tourist visas.

Massive land art demands UK aid restoration



A drone view of a 4,000sq m land portrait depicting British Prime Minister Andy Burnham is displayed in a campaign commissioned by humanitarian organisation Concern Worldwide, near Hebden Bridge, Britain, yesterday, calling for the restoration of humanitarian aid after what the organisation says was a decline in British aid spending to its lowest level in more than 25 years. (Reuters)

Bangladesh ex-premier Hasina vows to return despite fearing for life

AFP
New Delhi

Bangladesh’s fugitive ex-premier Sheikh Hasina told AFP she was determined to return to her country by December despite fearing for her life.

“I may be killed. I may be arrested. I may be sent to prison,” Hasina, 78, said in an e-mailed response to questions by AFP.

“I am fully aware of my fate. Still, I want to go back because my people are calling me.”

Toppled in August 2024 by a student-led uprising that ended her 15-year, iron-fisted rule, Hasina fled by helicopter to India as crowds stormed her palace.

The UN says up to 1,400 people were killed in crackdowns as she tried to cling to power.

In November, Hasina was found guilty by a Dhaka court of crimes against humanity and sentenced to be hanged — a verdict she described as “political vengeance dressed up as law”.

The former prime minister, who has been living in a secret location in India, insisted there was no pressure for her to return.

Relations between India and Bangladesh, strained under the interim administration that took power after Hasina’s fall, have stabilised since Bangladeshi Prime Minister Tarique Rahman took office in February.

Dhaka has formally requested Hasina’s extradition — a request New Delhi has said is “under examination”.

Hasina said the issue had “no connection” with her decision to return.

“I can say that I am staying in India with

due respect and dignity,” she said.

“Indian authorities have not discussed extradition with me. I myself have decided to return to my country”

The Bangladeshi government has said it will ensure Hasina receives due legal process in all cases against her should she return.

Rights groups have long accused Hasina’s former administration of abuses including the murder of rivals, suppression of opposition parties, rigged courts and one-sided elections.

But Hasina defended her record, saying many of the allegations were “politically constructed campaigns”.

“Every time allegations were made, investigations were opened and those involved in crimes were brought to justice.”

Human Rights Watch said on Tuesday that Bangladeshi authorities were failing

to uphold international legal standards.

“Those responsible for the many abuses committed under the Sheikh Hasina government should be appropriately held to account, but many prosecutions are falling short of international fair trial standards,” said its deputy Asia director Meenakshi Ganguly.

Hasina dismissed allegations that she sanctioned excessive force during the student protests that led to her ouster.

“My government showed the highest level of patience and tried to guide the student movement towards a peaceful solution,” she said.

She characterised the uprising as more than “merely an ordinary student protest”.

“It had become a planned operation driven by hidden instructions, organised violence, propaganda and the objective of overthrowing the government,” she said.

She refused to comment about the nationwide youth-led protests in India that forced the education minister to resign last week.

Asked if she planned to resume political activity upon her return — with her Awami League party effectively banned in Bangladesh — Hasina did not offer a direct answer.

“Power is not my destination. Service to the people is.”

Hasina said she had “sympathy for every family that lost a loved one” but stopped short of offering an apology.

She also sidestepped questions about whether she regretted any of her decisions during the uprising.

“Decisions of state are not made by one person alone, and they cannot be judged honestly by isolating one moment from the whole crisis,” she said.



A perfect example of moderation

Muhammad (sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam – may Allah exalt his mention) was a perfect example of moderation to his followers in every walk of life. In expenditure, he advised them to spend within their means, neither to be so lavish as to make themselves destitute, nor to hold back their wealth from those who had a claim on their resources. “Do not hold back altogether out of miserliness and render yourself blameworthy, nor spend without restraint and exhaust your wealth, thus becoming yourself destitute.” [Qur’an 17:29]

He gave mankind a golden rule of moderation between the two extremes of lavish expenditure and miserliness; neither to be extravagant in ordinary spending as well as in charity, nor to be niggardly. The people who practice this rule in their lives are praised in these words “Who are neither extravagant nor miserly in their spending, but keep a just balance between the two extremes?” [Qur’an 25:67]

He taught, by his own example, the same rule of moderation in eating, in dressing and in worship (‘ibaadah). Abdullah ibn Amr ibn al-‘Aas said that once he decided to engage himself in worship all the time; to fast during the day and read the whole Qur’an during the night. His father married him to a young woman. Once his father asked his wife about him, and she replied, “He is a very pious man and never comes to his bed for sleep nor keep any relationship with anyone.” His father became very angry with him and said that he had married him to a very gentle woman and that he had kept her in suspense all this time. But in his enthusiasm for worship, he did not take notice of this. His father complained to Allah’s Messenger, sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam, who said to him, “I have heard that you fast during the day and pray all night.” He replied that that was right. Then Allah’s Messenger said, “Don’t do that, but instead fast sometimes and eat sometimes; pray during the night and sleep as well, for your body has a claim on you; your eyes have a claim on you; lack of sleep will weaken them; your wife and children and relatives have a claim on you, too.” Abdullah bin Amer tells that the Prophet said, “Allah likes to see the marks of His bounty on his servant.”

A similar hadith is reported by Al-Bukhari. Some companions of Allah’s Messenger, sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam,



resolved to engage in worship; one said that he would pray all night; another said that he would always fast and never stop; the third said that he would never marry and never have any relations with women. Allah’s Messenger heard about them and said, “I swear by Allah that I fear Allah and realise my responsibilities to Him more than you, but this is my way: I fast sometimes and sometimes I do not fast; I pray during the night and sleep as well; and marry women. Anyone who does not like my way has no relation with me.”

Anas reported Allah’s Messenger, sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam, as saying, “Don’t be too cruel to yourselves, certain nations adopted severity towards themselves so Allah punished them. You can see their remnants in churches and monasteries.” Muhammad forbade asceticism and renunciation of the normal pleasures of

life, nor did he like perpetual and formal prayers in isolation. He told people to live the normal lives of ordinary human beings, for service to Allah was done through pure lives in the turmoil of this world. He wanted men to mix with other men, so that they could discipline themselves and learn resistance to evil and uphold the standard of Truth and Justice against heavy odds, wherever necessary.

Abu Hurairah, may Allah be pleased with him, reported Allah’s Messenger as saying, “Religion is easy, but if anyone overdoes it, it gets the better of him, so keep to the right course, approximate to perfection and rejoice.” Ibn Abbas, may Allah be pleased with him, reported Allah’s Messenger, sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam, as saying, “A good manner of conduct and moderation are a 25th part of Prophet-hood.” Allah’s Messenger is also reported

to have said, “Moderation is the best of actions.” He lived the moderate life of an ordinary person, though he was Allah’s Messenger and ruler of a state. He enjoyed the ordinary pleasures of life, worked like an ordinary man in his house and in public, upheld the principles of Truth and Justice in his private well as public life and always abstained from the extremes of life. All his life, in Makkah as an ordinary trader and in Madinah as a ruler, he led a simple life, avoiding extremes, and taught his followers by his personal example to live a similarly moderate life.

The following hadiths (Prophet sayings) are just examples of what Prophet Muhammad, sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam, ordered the people to follow:

1. Narrated ‘Aishah, may Allah be pleased with her: The Prophet came in when a woman was sitting beside me. He asked me, “Who is she?” I said: “She is the one whose performance of Salat (prayer) has become the talk of the town.” Addressing her, he (sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam) said, (What is this!) You are required to take upon yourselves only what you can carry out easily. By Allah, Allah does not withhold His Mercy and forgiveness of you until you neglect and give up (good works). Allah likes the deeds best which a worshipper can carry out constantly.” [Al-Bukhari and Muslim] Commentary: a. This Hadith prohibits ‘ibaadah (worship) beyond one’s capacity lest one gets tired and renounces it altogether. One should be, therefore, moderate in this respect. b. Allah likes that good action which is done regularly, even if it is a small one. Any deed, which is done continuously, will also have an everlasting reward. On the contrary, a good deed, which is done for a short period, will have a short return.

2. Narrated Anas, may Allah be pleased with him: Allah’s Messenger, sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam, came into the mosque and noticed a rope stretched between two poles. He enquired, “What is this rope for?” He was told: “This is Zainab’s rope. When during her voluntary prayer, she begins to feel tired, she grasps it for support.” Allah’s Messenger said, “Untie it. You should offer prayers so long as you feel active. When you feel tired, you should go to sleep.” [Al-Bukhari and Muslim] Commentary: This Hadith deals with the following three points: a. First, it forbids undue strictness and taking support of an-

anything in the course of Salat. b. If anything forbidden can be checked by hand, it must be stopped immediately. c. One should be moderate in ‘ibaadah and select such times for optional and voluntary prayers when one feels real pleasure in them.

3. Narrated Jabir Ibn Samurah, may Allah be pleased with him: I used to observe prayer with the Prophet, sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam, and his Salat (prayer) was of a moderate length and his (Khutbah) sermon too was moderate in length. [Muslim] Commentary: This Hadith tells us that Imam should neither lengthen the Salat nor give long sermon in the congregational Salat because both these things are against the practice of the Prophet.

4. Narrated Ibn ‘Abbas, may Allah be pleased with them: While the Prophet, sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam, was delivering Khutbah (religious talk), he noticed a man who was standing, so he asked about him and was told that he was Abu Israel who had taken a vow to remain standing and not sit, or go into the shade, or speak while observing fasting. Thereupon Allah’s Messenger said, “Command him to speak, to go into the shade, to sit and to complete his fast.” [Al-Bukhari] Commentary: a. This Hadith makes it abundantly clear that one cannot attain the Pleasure of Allah by means of self-invented methods. It can only be achieved by ways and means prescribed in the Qur’an and Sunnah. b. One should never vow for anything which is smeared with sin or which is not permitted by religion. An instance of this is quoted in the above mentioned Hadith. c. The majority of ‘Ulama’ (religious scholars) who do not think the expiation of such vows necessary, quote this Hadith in support of their view. They argue that the Prophet has not prescribed expiation in such cases as is evident from this Hadith.

At the time the Prophet, sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam, ordered the people to perform acts of worship, he warned them against going to extremes (in practising religion). He did so in order to prevent them from harming themselves physically or spiritually and from neglecting their other responsibilities and activities. The Prophet asked people to do good actions regularly, no matter how small. He said, Allah likes the deeds best, even if it is a small, which a worshipper can carry out constantly. If the Prophet saw any one of his companions being immoderate, he would be displeased and would then instruct him to moderation.



Islam – a comprehensive way of life

To understand the essence of Islam is to understand the very essence of humanity. More than a religion, Islam is a complete and comprehensive way of life leading to a balanced way of living. Islam brings civilization and happiness to man. Islamic principles and teachings can provide realistic, fair and objective solutions to the prevention of individual, familial, social and international problems which are threatening the existence of human communities throughout the world.

A spiritual belief that does not deal with social behaviour, economic relations and international organisations is as erroneous as the social doctrine that does not consider spiritual belief, morality and behaviour. Such social doctrines are abortive attempts, incapable of total human guidance or of achieving any coherence or accord among human beings.

Both the individual and the society are in dire need of a belief that accommodates and directs all their vital activities towards construction and growth. When the individual and society adopt such a belief and apply it to life, humanity can accomplish seemingly miraculous achievements which can only occur when man unites himself with the Eternal Power that channels his personality -potential in the right direction.

History has shown that Islam is unique in its ability to provide guidance for the entire range of human activity. It does not separate spiritual and secular life as unrelated entities.

Islam integrates all domains of human life, just like the different systems in the human body integrate to provide a complete human being. If one system does not work properly, it has got to affect the whole body. Likewise, Islam proposes systems of laws that integrate all parts of human society to bring happiness and peace to all its members.

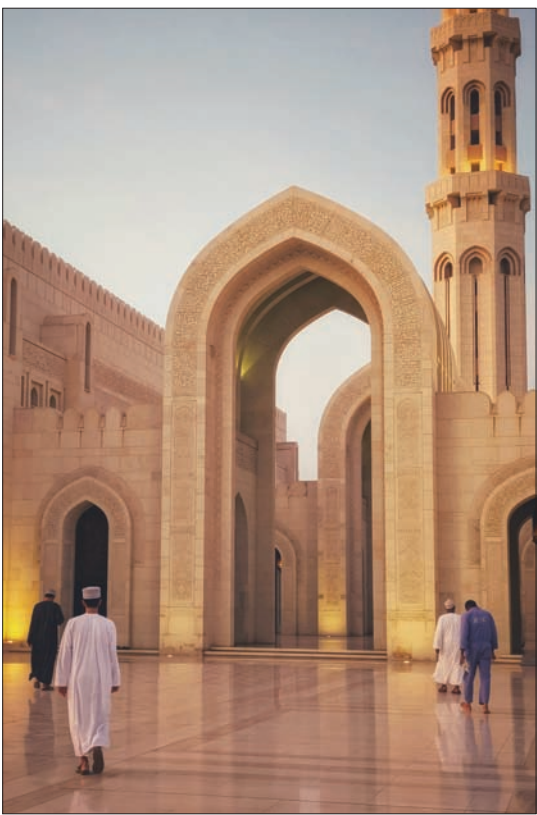
There is no other way or system that urges the active worship of Allah in its general and most comprehensive sense other than Islam. For example, Islam teaches that Muslims should fast for a month every year (i.e. Ramadan) in order to acquire piety and self-discipline and to develop awareness of the needs and problems of others who are starving or are in desperate need of food. Such an awareness of the needs of others is not enough on its own. Therefore, Zakat (obligatory charity) is prescribed to be distributed among the segments of society that are in need of individual and communal assistance.

A very important universal concept in Islam is “Ummah” (Nation). Ummah transcends all limitations implied by the term ‘nation’ by encompassing all people regardless of race, colour, or sex. Allah emphasised this great Islamic principle in the verse (which means);

“Mankind was [of] one religion [before their deviation]; then Allah sent the prophets as bringers of good tidings and warners and sent down with them the Scripture in truth to judge between the people concerning that in which they differed. And none differed over it [i.e. Scripture] except those who were given it -after the clear proofs came to them-out of jealous animosity among themselves. And Allah guided those who believed to the truth concerning that over which they had differed, by His permission. And Allah guides whom He wills to a straight path.” [Qur’an 2:213]

Moreover, Islam has a unique understanding for the concept of Ummah. Ummah is the field for knowledge, ethics, government and positivism. Ummah in Islam is a system in which people integrate, even if they belong to different belief systems. It is a system of universal justice and peace that accommodates everyone who believes in freedom of thinking and in calling people to the truth-whether they are individuals or communities.

The Prophet Muhammad, sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam, proposed a constitution for the city of Madinah during the first days of his emigration from Makkah. He included the rights of both Jews and Christians, thereby safeguarding their freedom and beliefs. History has never known a constitution that represented minorities as this constitution of the Islamic state did. Ummah as



an Islamic concept will, Allah willing, bring the advent of universal peace as well as an internal social system. Ummah is the field-ground for civilization to take place. Such an Ummah can be integrated and united, if it derives its doctrines, constitutions, morals, values and the whole perspective of life from the same united source: belief in the only true Allah. This is known as the concept of Tawheed (Monotheism).

Islam is the way of life that should be implemented in all spheres of life.

May Allah let the Muslim World never forget that Islam provides a complete and comprehensive way of life. Islam creates harmony in the mind, the soul and the body in a marvellous way. The need for Islam emerges from the humanity’s search for a constitution that provides guidance and satisfaction in all spheres of life. It is a code of life that is not limited to partial needs, but rather a way of life that penetrates all barriers to interact with people’s needs in this life and beyond. It is a way of life where there is no discrimination between what is sacred and what is secular.

Islam is unique among the religions and civilizations the world has known. In contrast to the other religions of the world, Islam defines religion itself as the very business of life, the very matter of space-time, the very process of history, and the gift of Allah. Therefore, all these work together to constitute them.

Islam is a divine guidance wherein humans of all nations, colours and tongues feel linked to a Supreme Power and Justice. Its teachings are kept intact and authentic. It is the only way to happiness, dignity, and universal peace. Islam is so unique in its method for solving the problems of humanity. The everlasting miracle of Islam, THE QUR’AN, is a standing challenge to the intellect of all peoples at all times. In Islam’s four abiding principles -- equality, tolerance, promotion of science, and solution to the world’s problems -- its universality asserts itself. It calls to all mankind, if only mankind will listen.

“Then do they not reflect upon the Qur’an? If it had been from [any] other than Allah, they would have found within it much contradiction.” [Qur’an 4:2]

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

A glimpse of paradise

Allah the Almighty has created Paradise for His believing slaves; He has created in it pleasures that no eye has ever seen, no ear has ever heard of, and no mind could ever comprehend. Abu Hurairah, may Allah be pleased with him, narrated that the Messenger of Allah, sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam, said: ‘Allah, the Exalted, has said: ‘I have prepared for my righteous slaves (in Paradise) what no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and the mind of no man has conceived.’” [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

There are many verses in the Qur’an that describe Paradise and some of what it contains; the following are a collection of some of them:

- ♦ It is a wide space: {‘And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord and a garden [i.e. Paradise] as wide as the heavens and earth, prepared for the righteous.’} [Qur’an, 3:133]
- ♦ It is an eternal abode: {‘Wherein they abide eternally. They will not desire from it any transfer.’} [Qur’an, 18:108]
- ♦ It contains gardens beneath which rivers flow: {‘Allah has promised the believing men and believing women gardens beneath which rivers flow, wherein they abide eternally, and pleasant dwellings in gardens of perpetual residence; but approval from Allah is greater. It is that which the great attainment is.’} [Qur’an, 9:72]
- ♦ Its food and shade are everlasting: {‘The example [i.e. description] of Paradise, which the righteous have been promised, is [that] beneath it rivers flow. Its fruit is lasting, and its shade. That is the consequence for the righteous...’} [Qur’an, 13:35]
- ♦ Its drinks and foods are delicious and varied: {‘...the description of Paradise, which the righteous are promised, wherein are rivers of water unaltered, rivers of milk the taste of which never changes, rivers of wine delicious to those who drink, and rivers of purified honey, in which they will have from all [kinds of] fruits and forgiveness from their Lord...’} [Qur’an, 47:15]
- ♦ Its inhabitants are adorned with gold and pearl jewellery: {‘[For them are] gardens of perpetual residence, which they will enter. They will be adorned therein with bracelets of gold and pearls...’} [Qur’an, 35:33]
- ♦ Its furniture is extremely beautiful from the exterior, and it is lined with silk that is decorated with gold: { {‘[They are] reclining on beds whose linings are of silk brocade and the fruit of the two gardens is hanging low.’} [Qur’an, 55:54]
- ♦ In Paradise, men are given Hoor, the special women of Paradise, in addition to the wives to whom they were married in this life: {‘And with them will be women limiting [their] glances, with large, [beautiful] eyes, As if they were [delicate] eggs, well protected.’} [Qur’an, 37:48-49]
- ♦ The people of Paradise will be served by beautiful youths who will never die: {‘There will circulate among them young boys made eternal. When you see them, you would think them [as beautiful as] scattered pearls.’} [Qur’an, 76:19]
- ♦ Its utensils are made of gold and silver: {‘“Enter Paradise, you and your kinds, delighted.’ Circulated among them will be plates and vessels of gold. And therein is whatever the souls desire and [what] delights the eyes, and you will abide therein eternally.’} [Qur’an, 43:70-71]
- ♦ The climate in Paradise is both moderate and pleasant:

{‘[They will be] reclining therein on adorned couches. They will not see therein any [burning] sun or [freezing] cold.’} [Qur’an, 76:13]

♦ The children of the dwellers of Paradise will be raised to their rank, even if they were to fall short of it. This is so that the joy of the dwellers of Paradise will be completed by the presence of their children: {‘And those who believed and whose descendants followed them in faith – We will join with them their descendants, and We will not deprive them of anything of their deeds. Every person, for what he earned, is retained.’} [Qur’an, 52:21]

Abu Hurairah, may Allah be pleased with him, said: “The Messenger of Allah, sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam, said: “The first group (of people) to enter Paradise will be shining like the moon on a full-mooned night. Then will come those who follow them, who will be (shining) like the brightest planet in the sky. They (i.e., all the people of Paradise) will not stand in need of urinating, defecating, spitting, or blowing their noses. Their combs will be of gold and their sweat will smell of musk. Their wives will be large-eyed maidens. All the men (in Paradise) will be alike and in the form of their father Adam -- 60 cubits tall.”” [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

The greatest pleasure of the dwellers of Paradise will be the sight of their Lord. When the dwellers of Paradise see Him, they will forget everything, including all the types of pleasure that they had previously enjoyed.

The bounty of seeing Allah in Paradise is one of its distinct features, and is a means of Allah The Almighty honouring its dwellers: {‘[Some] faces, that Day, will be radiant, Looking at their Lord.’} [Qur’an, 75:22-23]

Meaning that the faces of the believers will be beautified and joyful as a result of their looking at the Face of their Lord, as was stated by Imam al-Hasan, may Allah have mercy upon him. Allah The Almighty also Says: {“For them who have done good is the best [reward] – and extra...”} [Qur’an, 10: 26] The ‘best reward’ in this verse refers to Paradise and the ‘extra’ is to be given permission to look at the Face of Allah. The Prophet, sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam, clarified in the following narration: Suhayb, may Allah be pleased with him, reported: “The Messenger of Allah, sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam, said: “When the inhabitants of Paradise enter it, Allah, the Glorious and Exalted, will say to them: ‘Do you wish for me to give you anything more?’ They will reply: ‘Have You not made our faces bright? Have You not brought us into Paradise and delivered us from Hell?’ Then, Allah will remove the Veil (that screens Him from the believers); the (dwellers of Paradise) will then feel that they have not been awarded anything dearer to them than looking at their Lord.” [Muslim] Then he, sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam, recited the verse (i.e., the 26th verse of Chapter Yonus):

Having known the greatest bounty and pleasure which the dwellers of Paradise will attain is looking at the Face of their Lord, it becomes evident how deprived the sinners are and how great their loss is. They will be prevented from seeing the Face of their Lord, as Allah The Almighty Says (what means): {“No! Indeed, from their Lord, that Day, they will be partitioned”} [Qur’an, 83:15]

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

FIFA's plan to create a \$20bn subsidiary to run the World Cup and sell minority stakes to external investors has highlighted the balance of power within world soccer. While FIFA is the sport's global governing body, much of football's commercial strength lies elsewhere — particularly in Europe, where UEFA controls many of the game's most valuable competitions. Here's how the sport is organised.

FIFA sits at the top of world soccer's governing structure. Founded in 1904 and based in Zurich, it has 211 member associations, each with one vote at the FIFA Congress, the body's supreme legislative authority. The Congress elects the FIFA president and approves major statutory changes, while the 37-member FIFA Council is the main decision-making body between Congress meetings.

Every national football association also belongs to one of FIFA's six continental confederations: UEFA in Europe, CONMEBOL in South America, CONCACAF in North and Central America and the Caribbean, the AFC in Asia, CAF in Africa and OFC in Oceania.

National associations govern football within their own countries, while the confederations administer

FIFA, UEFA and the balance of power

the game at regional level. FIFA organises global competitions, including the men's and women's World Cups, the Club World Cup and youth tournaments. It also oversees the international match calendar, which determines when clubs must release players for national-team duty.

The governing body sets the global regulatory framework for international football through rules covering areas such as player eligibility, transfers and disciplinary matters in FIFA competitions, while distributing development funding through programmes such as FIFA Forward.

Politically, FIFA's structure gives every member association an equal vote, regardless of the size or wealth of its football industry. That makes coalition-building across Africa, Asia, the Americas and Oceania central to FIFA elections and major policy decisions.

The six confederations are not simply FIFA's regional offices. They are independent governing bodies with

their own congresses, executives, competitions and commercial programmes.

They organise continental national-team tournaments, including the European Championship, Copa America, Africa Cup of Nations, Asian Cup, Gold Cup and OFC Nations Cup, while also running the leading club competitions in their respective regions.

FIFA's statutes recognise the confederations' right to organise continental competitions, subject to FIFA's regulations and the international match calendar.

Although UEFA has only 55 of FIFA's 211 member associations, it generates substantially more commercial revenue than any other confederation, organising many of football's most valuable competitions. These include the Champions League, Europa League, Conference League and the European Championship competitions that generate billions of euros through broadcasting rights, sponsorship and commercial partnerships. Europe is also home

to many of the world's biggest clubs, leagues, broadcasters and sponsors.

That commercial strength extends UEFA's influence beyond its own competitions. The confederation redistributes billions of euros through prize money, solidarity payments and development funding, reinforcing its importance to clubs, leagues and national associations across Europe.

FIFA has the governing authority over world football, but UEFA oversees much of its economic engine. Although Europe's 55 national associations account for just over a quarter of FIFA's membership, the confederation organises the sport's richest club and national-team competitions and represents many of its biggest leagues, clubs and broadcasters.

That commercial weight gives UEFA significant influence whenever FIFA proposes changes affecting competitions, the international calendar or the commercial structure of the game.

The relationship is one of mutual dependence: FIFA needs Europe's participation to maximise the value of its flagship tournaments, while UEFA operates within FIFA's global regulatory framework. — Reuters

Dip in Danube levels



People walk along the banks of the Danube River during a period of low water levels in Budapest, Hungary, yesterday. (Reuters)



Can Beijing restrain Iran?

By Samia Nakhoul and Timour Azhari
Beirut/Riyadh

As the Iran war escalates again, Gulf Arab states are looking to China — not Washington — to use its economic leverage over Iran to open up the Strait of Hormuz and Red Sea, testing how far Beijing is able and willing to pressurise Tehran.

The Gulf push for a bigger Chinese role is driven by growing frustration, Gulf sources say. The war launched with US-Israeli attacks on Iran on February 28 has hurt Iran but also restricted their vital energy exports and, to varying degrees, put them in the firing line. With Iran and its allies threatening the Bab el-Mandeb waterway in the Red Sea as well as Hormuz, Gulf states have sought Beijing's help, conscious that the war has exposed the limits of American power, three regional sources say.

China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi has held dozens of calls and meetings with counterparts seeking a new ceasefire, while special envoy Zhai Jun has held talks in Gulf Arab capitals as well as Iran. "China has maintained close communication with all parties, and has consistently worked to stop the fighting and promote peace," its foreign ministry said in response to a request for comment.

China's position as both a major buyer of oil from across the Gulf and Iran's biggest trading partner presents opportunities but also sensitivities. "There's huge respect between the Gulf and China and they are a big trading partner, so any issue is raised in a very quiet manner," one Gulf source said.

Iran says it will maintain control over the Strait of Hormuz, noting it was attacked during negotiations over the nuclear programme the US and Israel have vowed to destroy.

Gulf governments ultimately hope that Beijing will steer Tehran toward a negotiated settlement, said the source, adding that China often moves slowly and cautiously. But they are aware that a prolonged war may also serve China's interest by piling pressure on the United States.

China has developed close trade and investment ties with the six states in the Gulf Cooperation Council — Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates — since a Gulf-China summit in 2022. Another summit is planned this year in Riyadh but not yet confirmed. But Beijing has refrained from publicly challenging Tehran's threats to shipping, fuelling doubts about how far China is prepared to go to secure the Gulf and its exports.

"The Chinese are trying to be more involved, they are trying to be more helpful," a second Gulf source said. "But China has turned out not to be as influential as we thought — whether that is a lack of will or a lack of capacity is debatable. What seems to happen when America enters the fray is that superpower calculations dominate over everything else."

Henry Tugendhat, a China specialist at the Washington Institute, told Reuters Beijing's overriding priority is preserving relationships across the region rather than risking diplomatic fallout by openly siding with either camp. Once Washington became directly involved, Beijing's calculations extended beyond the Gulf itself to encompass its wider ties and rivalry with Washington.

"Governments can buy Chinese technology, investment and drones, but what they cannot buy is Chinese leverage that operates independently of (its relations with) Washington," a source with direct knowledge of China's discussions

said. China's President Xi Jinping is expected in the United States for talks with President Donald Trump on September 24. China's foreign ministry said Xi had put forward a four-point proposal to safeguard and promote peace and stability in the Middle East and also proposed backing countries in the region to advance development, security and cooperation.

China has leveraged its deep economic ties to push into Middle East diplomacy, brokering a surprise diplomatic rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran in 2023 that is now being put to the test. Beijing is pushing Pakistan to mediate between Washington and Tehran for a resumption of peace talks, three Pakistani sources told Reuters last week.

China will continue to "play an active role in restoring peace and tranquillity in the Middle East Gulf region as soon as possible," its foreign ministry said then. China has also held direct talks with Yemen's Houthi movement to enable its tankers to sail through the southern Red Sea without being attacked after the Iran-aligned militia pledged to prevent access to Saudi ports, six sources with knowledge of the matter said this week. China's transport ministry did not respond to a request to comment on that.

Anna Borshchevskaya, a senior fellow at the Washington Institute said narrow bilateral arrangements that helped shield Chinese-linked shipping were the only visible outcome of its diplomatic efforts so

far. "Beyond that, it's hard to see what else China has been able — or willing — to achieve," she said, arguing that the war had allowed China to protect its interests while increasing voter pressure on US and European leaders from energy price rises.

China has benefited from a steep discount on Iranian oil resulting from international sanctions on Iran. Over the years, it has increased support for Iranian security through dual-use components, chip equipment and satellite navigation systems, while not overtly providing military aid since the war began.

Since the Iran war broke out, Beijing has consistently denied media reports that it offered chip equipment, intelligence support or defence systems to Iran, saying that Beijing's position was "above board and straightforward" and it "never added fuel to the fire."

Beijing's response to the crisis reflects a longstanding strategy of avoiding binding security commitments far from its core interests in East Asia, analysts say. Unlike the United States, whose alliances rest on mutual defence obligations, China prefers partnerships built on trade, investment and arms sales — with any closer military involvement confined to its immediate vicinity, they add.

The source with direct knowledge of China's discussions said Beijing's transactional understanding with the Houthis has largely kept Chinese-linked ships out of harm's way, but not created pressure to end all attacks, acting in the same way as it did during Houthi attacks on ships in 2023-4.

Unlike the United States, China has no defence commitments in the Gulf, no military mandate to safeguard regional waterways and little appetite to assume either, the source said.

Beijing has said China is not prepared to use military force to reopen the Strait of Hormuz and does not believe other parties can do so.

It instead calls for diplomacy and dialogue and for safety and free flow of international shipping routes. — Reuters

Inequality best predicts how nations handle pandemics, says study

Economic inequality is the clearest way to predict how countries will fare during a pandemic, a high-profile panel said, calling for a rethink in how governments prepare for the next global health crisis. The research, which was published in a prestigious journal and will be presented at a major Aids conference in Brazil, pushed back against traditional measures of pandemic preparedness.

"For decades the world judged how ready a country is for a pandemic by counting its laboratories, stockpiles and response plans," study co-author and economics Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz said. "This research shows that this is not enough," he added in a statement. "High economic inequality can leave even wealthy, well-equipped nations dangerously exposed."

The United States and United Kingdom topped pandemic preparedness indexes, yet during the Covid-19 pandemic both recorded significantly more cases and deaths than the global average. Brazil and South Africa, considered the most prepared countries in their regions, also fared particularly badly. However, countries with lower levels of inequality considered to be less prepared such as Vietnam, Mauritius, Ethiopia, Uruguay and Norway were significantly better off, the research said.

The new paper, published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, found no association between a country's technical capacity — for example labs to test for viruses or trained emergency healthcare workers — and how well it handled the Covid and Aids pandemics. However it found a clear and consistent link between a nation's level of economic inequality and how it performed during both crises.

"The deeper the inequality in the country is, the deeper that pandemic is going to be," lead study author Matthew Kavanagh of Georgetown University in the US told AFP. "We're not talking about reaching utopia — we're talking about what would it look like for the whole world to reach the level of inequality of South Korea." Stiglitz said that "the encouraging news is that inequality is not inevitable — it is the result of policy choices, and we know how to change them."

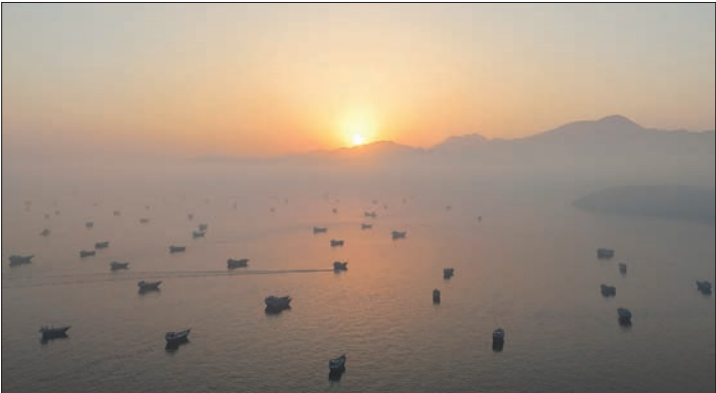
The panel urged nations to consider "inequality-informed pandemic preparedness". This included social protections such as paid sick leave, unemployment support and cash transfers in times of crisis.

During pandemics, this money can mean people are able to stay home "without having to worry: am I going to be able to feed my family?" Kavanagh explained. The researchers called for low-income countries to receive debt relief when a pandemic is declared. Life-saving new technology should also be made available to the entire world during such emergencies, they added. After Covid spread across the world, wealthy nations hoovered up the most early vaccine doses, provoking outrage among the developing countries left behind.

Exactly how vaccines, drugs and tests developed to fight future pathogens will be shared remains the biggest sticking point in negotiations to finalise the world's first global pandemic treaty. Protesters at the annual Aids conference being held in Rio de Janeiro this week called for more Latin American countries — where HIV rates are rising — to get access to generic versions of a breakthrough HIV drug called lenacapavir.

The paper called for patents on such drugs to be replaced with prizes that reward "innovators while allowing medicines and vaccines to be produced anywhere".

Kavanagh said that letting pharmaceutical companies choose who can access these drugs was "a recipe for continued pandemics". — AFP



A drone view shows vessels in the Strait of Hormuz, as seen from Musandam, Oman. (Reuters)

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Pakistan: US-Iran talks ongoing

From Page 1

“Negotiations between parties are ongoing, particularly on (the) Strait of Hormuz and to de-escalate,” Pakistani foreign ministry spokesman Tahir Andrabi told reporters in Islamabad.

Pakistan had helped to broker a deal between the warring sides laying the groundwork for negotiations on a permanent resolution, and Andrabi said it was doing its “utmost to bring all parties back” to technical talks under the agreement.

Previous talks between the two parties following an April truce

stalled, with the ceasefire collapsing earlier this month and Iran again slamming shut the Strait of Hormuz, a vital conduit for Middle Eastern oil and gas.

Iran’s Revolutionary Guards said yesterday that two oil tankers attempting to transit the strait with US support turned back after one of them caught fire.

Earlier, the US military said it had “successfully completed a heavy wave of strikes against Iran”, hitting dozens of Revolutionary Guard targets including military command centres.

US President Donald Trump had

vowed to hit Iran “hard” after Tehran’s previous attack on Jordan, its first in the region in days.

The Guards’ branch in the northwestern province of Zanzan said three of its members were killed in a US attack there.

Iran’s state news agency IRNA also reported hits on several cities in the southwestern Khuzestan province, as well as on Qeshm island in the Gulf. Areas around the cities of Abadan, Shadegan, Arvandkenar and Ahvaz — all in Khuzestan — were struck, the agency said, citing provincial authorities.

The Jordanian army reported a

new volley of Iranian missiles last morning, saying five had been shot down, causing no casualties.

In a statement, the Guards confirmed the attack, saying the US “used the occupied bases in your country (Jordan) to launch an airstrike” that killed local residents in Qeshm.

Kuwait’s defence ministry, meanwhile, denounced a “heinous” Iranian attack that “targeted a building belonging to a Chinese company in the north of the country, resulting in the death of one worker and causing severe material damage”.

Customs, Tax authorities in new joint digital services

From Page 1

He noted that it reflected the shared commitment to building an interconnected digital government ecosystem that simplifies procedures, accelerates transaction processing, and enhances data quality and accuracy. He added that this supports more effective decision-making, strengthens compliance and transparency, and positively contributes to the business environment.

HE President of the General Tax Authority Khalifa bin Jassim al-Jaham al-Kuwari praised the ongoing institutional integration cooperation with the General Authority of Customs. He noted that it embodies the principle of interconnected government services, facilitates business

procedures in the country, and improves data quality to support planning and risk governance. He added that the partnership forms part of the Authority’s strategy to strengthen coordination with national public- and private-sector institutions, enabling more efficient and effective services. The joint meeting also included a presentation on the new services and their operational mechanisms. Both authorities reaffirmed their commitment to implementing further digital initiatives and integrated projects that strengthen their partnership and contribute to building a digital government capable of delivering proactive services based on institutional integration and high-quality data. **(QNA)**

Attack on checkpoint kills 9 police in northern Pakistan

AFP
Peshawar

Armed fighters killed nine police officers in an attack on a checkpoint in northern Pakistan on Wednesday that also left 15 of the gunmen dead in ensuing fighting, police said.

The attack took place in Hangu district in Pakistan’s northern border province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where authorities are fighting a growing insurgency.

“Nine police personnel were killed and 26 others injured in the attack... Police killed 15 fighters and wounded dozens more,” Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police said in a statement.

“An armoured personnel carrier and several other police vehicles were also badly damaged during the clash,” it added.

The Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) group, which has intensified its insurgency in the region, claimed responsibility for the attack in a video statement circulated on social media.

Unidentified militants attacked on Friday another checkpoint in the Tank district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

In Friday’s attack, fighters rammed an explosives-laden ve-



A police officer visits an injured policeman at a hospital, after an armed attack on a checkpoint at Hangu district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province yesterday. **(AFP)**

hicle into a security checkpoint, killing 15 people, including soldiers, police officers and government personnel. Security forces killed 12 militants, according to the military.

Pakistan has previously blamed the increase in attacks in Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa and the southern border province of Balochistan on militancy emanating from Afghanistan, whose Taliban government denies Afghan involvement.

The accusations have sparked a bitter rift and armed conflict between the neighbouring coun-

tries, and Pakistan has carried out deadly air strikes it says target militants on Afghan soil.

The Taliban government and the United Nations said dozens of civilians were killed in the latest Pakistani strikes on eastern Afghanistan in June.

House collapse during monsoon kills 11 in Lahore

AFP
Lahore

A house in Pakistan’s eastern city of Lahore collapsed during heavy monsoon rains, killing 11 people, an official said yesterday.

“All of the victims belong to the same family,” says Amir Butt, the assistant commissioner in the area. He said six people had also been injured.

Rescue services in the tightly packed neighbourhood sifted through the damaged site and retrieved bodies and residents comforted each other nearby, AFP journalists saw yesterday.

Ali Ahmed, 37, who lived near the collapsed home said his family had been jolted by a loud bang “like an explosion” the previous evening.

“We then saw one section of the building collapsed from one side, while the two sections on the other side also came crashing down onto the ground floor,” he told AFP.

“Moments later, people began screaming and shouting.”

Flood-related incidents, including by drowning and from house collapses, have killed 121 people in Pakistan since June 26, according to official disaster agency figures.

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.

The flooding from heavy monsoon rains also inundated around a dozen villages near Lahore this week, pushing residents to flee their homes by boat over fields turned into vast swathes of water.

Russia hits Ukraine with N Korean missile

Reuters
London

Russia used a North Korean missile for a strike on a village that killed five members of the same family, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said yesterday, in what would be the first time such a weapon has been fired in the war in nearly a year.

Russia has launched North Korean missiles at Ukrainian targets before, but their first deployment since August points to a fresh stock of weapons that Moscow can draw on as it steps up missile attacks, a military source told Reuters.

Russia pounded Ukraine with dozens of missiles and hundreds of drones in an overnight attack that killed at least nine people, officials said, at a time when the Ukrainian military is grappling with an acute shortage of high-end air defences.

The use of North Korean missiles would fit a pattern in which Russia has been shifting to using more ballistic missiles like its Iskander 9M723, which can only be intercepted by US-made

Patriot air defence systems, the military source said. Zelensky said one missile flattened a home in the village of Radushne near the Ukrainian city of Kryvyi Rih, killing two parents and three of their children.

The fate of their remaining four children was unclear, as was that of their 1-1/2-year-old grandson, he said. In his evening address, Zelensky said preliminary data showed the missile used to hit Radushne was North Korean. Reuters had reported earlier that the missile used for the strike was likely North Korean, according to two sources.

The Russian Defence Ministry and Ukrainian Air Force did not immediately respond to requests for comment. The North Korean embassy in London did not answer a phone call to request comment outside office hours.

A military source, who requested anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter, said Ukrainian radars had picked up two missile tracks characteristic of North Korean KN-23 or KN-24 short-range ballistic missiles flying towards Kryvyi Rih during the attack.

Two radar tracks typically indicate four missiles were fired, the source said, adding that other impact sites were not known to him.

For a conclusive assessment, investigators needed to study missile fragments found at the site, a process still under way, the source said, adding that he was nonetheless confident it was a North Korean missile.

Russia began firing North Korean KN-23 and KN-24 missiles at Ukraine towards the end of 2023. The North Korean missiles have a larger warhead and longer range than Russia’s Iskander short-range ballistic missiles, although they are less accurate, the military source said.

In 2024, North Korea sent 14,000 troops to help Moscow’s forces repel a Ukrainian incursion into Russia’s Kursk region. It has also supplied millions of artillery shells for the Russian war effort.

Last week, Zelensky warned the Kremlin wanted North Korea to send another 30,000 troops and said Russian preparations were under way to receive them in Voronezh region.



A firefighting plane drops fire retardant as efforts to battle wildfires continue, in Blagon, Gironde department, yesterday. **(Reuters)**

France, Spain eye wildfire reprieve as other blazes start up in Europe

AFP
Lège-Cap-Ferret, France

France and Spain yesterday glimpsed a reprieve from some of the worst wildfires seen in living memory, which have sent hundreds of thousands of people fleeing in recent days — among them Hollywood star George Clooney and his wife Amal.

But other blazes have broken out in different parts of Europe as the forest fire season takes hold, including deadly ones in Greece, as well as in Britain, Portugal and Türkiye.

The prefect of Gironde, the French region worst hit by the fires, said yesterday had offered some hope.

“It is the first somewhat optimistic day, because we have the feeling that we are beginning to return to normal life and that things are starting to improve significantly,” said Sophie Brocas.

French firefighters have been battling a massive wildfire west of Bordeaux, which forced the evacuation of 220,000 people.

Earlier yesterday, their service also said they were “reasonably optimistic” the blaze was no longer progressing.

Firefighting chief Marc Vermeulen said hotspots in the wildfire zone had dropped from six to three since the morning.

The wildfire has destroyed more than 200 homes and 42,000 hectares (104,000 acres) and killed two firemen.

Smaller fires were affecting other parts of southern France, including one in Brignoles Wednesday that forced Clooney, his wife Amal and their nine-year-old twins to flee their estate.

“We have no idea whether our beautiful home makes it through this terrible moment,” the couple said in a letter to the mayor of Brignoles quoted by *People* magazine.

They added that they were “part of this community” and pledged to “be part of making it whole” again.

Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez lifted a state of emergency over a wildfire west of Madrid, after the prefect’s office said there were no longer any “active fronts”.

More than 60,000 people had been evacuated during the worst of the fire, but by yesterday most had been allowed to return home.

In the adjoining Avila region, another inferno raging since last week has become the biggest since Spain’s records began in 1961, burning 50,000 hectares.

Spain is experiencing a new heatwave this week, which officials warned could reignite fires in the Madrid region.

Near Spain’s border with Portugal, a new fire broke out on Wednesday in Fermoselle, forcing the evacuation of more than 600

people, emergency services said.

Three firemen have died in Greece battling blazes there: two on the island of Crete, and the other near Gythelo on the mainland.

Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis warned of “difficult days” ahead as the summer heat persists and Greece’s usual forest fire season comes into full force.

The fires in southwest Crete, forced the evacuation of 8,000 people, some by coast guard vessels, as it threatened the village resort of Agia Galini. Three hundred firefighters were combating them.

UK firefighters were battling a “difficult and dangerous” wildfire on England’s eastern coast that was threatening properties, including a holiday park for caravans, leading to evacuations.

Regional chief fire officer, Jon Lacey, said it was the largest he could remember.

In northern Portugal, in Valpaços, nearly 800 firemen were battling a forest fire in the north of the country, the civil protection service said.

Five people have been lightly injured, including three firemen and a police officer, it added.

Burning since Tuesday, it has consumed more than 6,00 hectares, said the service.

Firefighters in Türkiye were battling forest fires near the popular tourist regions of Antalya and the Dardanelles.

Tusk says Russia missile appears to have come down in eastern Poland

Reuters
Tarnawa-Kolonia

An object that came down in eastern Poland overnight appears to be a Russian missile, Polish PM Donald Tusk said yesterday, after authorities found a crater and scattered debris in a field following reports of an explosion. It was the latest in a series of airspace incursions in countries on Nato’s eastern flank, including Romania and the Baltic states, that have fuelled fears of the war in Ukraine spilling over the alliance’s borders.

Poland scrambled fighter jets to secure its airspace after Russian airstrikes killed at least eight

people in neighbouring Ukraine, in attacks that extended as far as the western city of Lviv.

Tusk told an emergency meeting that everything suggested the object was a Russian Kh-101 missile, but Warsaw wanted to be 100% certain about the type of missile and who launched it.

“There was no direct threat because the missile landed in an uninhabited area; we were ready to shoot it down had it continued its flight,” he added.

The Kh-101, an air-launched cruise missile that can fly more than 2,500km, according to military experts, has been a workhorse of Russian missile strikes on Ukraine since the full-scale invasion in 2022.

Tusk later visited the site where

the object fell, near the village of Tarnawa-Kolonia, just over 100km from the Ukrainian border.

“There is no reason to think the target was Poland,” he said, adding that Ukrainian fighter pilots had attempted to shoot down missiles approaching the Polish border.

Tusk vowed to maintain support for Ukraine, saying his government would consider providing further aid including additional Patriot systems. Bilateral relations have recently been strained by disputes over history.

The object left a crater about 10m wide, the interior ministry added on X. According to local authorities, it was located in farmland about 2km from residential buildings.

QF, University of Granada name winners of second cycle of Radwa Ashour Award

QNA
Doha

Qatar Foundation (QF) and the University of Granada have announced the winners of the second cycle of the Radwa Ashour Award – a prestigious accolade recognizing exceptional contributions to Arabic literature. The recipients of this year's award showcase the creativity and depth of contemporary writing in two categories: '40 and Under' and 'Over 40'.

The winners of the second cycle of the award are: Aya Mansour from Iraq, honoured in the '40 and Under' category for her work 'Women of the Long River' which is a project built on the oral memory of women concerning the war on Iraq and its occupation, while in the 'Over 40' category, the award was given to Gerges Shokry from Egypt for his work 'About a Poet from Troy' noted for the rewriting of the epic of

Troy through a series of poetic texts that adopt a different perspective, embodied in "an unknown, historically marginalized Trojan poet," so as to offer "the wisdom of the vanquished" against the Greek victor's narrative, steeped in hubris.

These winners reflect the award's commitment to supporting and celebrating diverse voices within the Arabic literary landscape.

Reflecting on his win, Gerges Shokry said: "Winning an award that bears the name of the writer Radwa Ashour is a source of joy. It is not just an award given to a writer, but a prize tied to the production of a creative work, which sets it apart from other awards. Winning the prize for a project a writer proposes also pushes them to complete it with greater enthusiasm - when the committee selected the project 'A Poet from Troy' from among many submitted projects, I became determined to finish it. Likewise, the residency in Granada, with all the city's history in the



Arab imagination, will surely be a source of inspiration."

Speaking about her experience, writer Aya Mansour said: "My project is dedicated to the stories and testimonies of Iraqi women who lived through decades of war, sanctions, violence, and profound social transformations. This award offers a genuine opportunity for these stories to move beyond the boundaries of private memory and enter the public sphere. I am also convinced that this award will give the

book the opportunity to reach new readers and open a broader conversation about what women lived through and the lasting impact those years have had on their lives."

Vice-Rector for Outreach, Heritage and Institutional Relations at the University of Granada Margarita Sanchez Romero said: "The Radwa Ashour Award is vital in connecting contemporary Arabic literature with a global audience from the heart of Andalusia. It celebrates the work of writers who embody the spirit of heritage and innovation that Radwa Ashour herself championed, reviving the region's historic role as a bridge between cultures."

Project Expert at Qatar Foundation Vice Chairperson's Office Fatima Mohamed Moussa said: "The Radwa Ashour Award exemplifies our commitment to nurturing exceptional literary talent. Recognizing these writers is vital to enhancing the appreciation of Arabic literature on a global scale."

The award is part of a partnership between Qatar Foundation and the Univer-

sity of Granada. Through this collaboration, the two institutions are working to strengthen academic and cultural co-operation through initiatives related to the Arabic language and Andalusian heritage. The Radwa Ashour Award is intended to do more than honour individual writers. It seeks to sustain a living literary conversation across borders and provide recipients with the necessary time and environment in Granada to advance their work. Composed of writers, critics, and scholars with extensive engagement in Arab letters, the award's jury is dedicated to recognizing works that embody these principles.

The award was launched in 2024 in tribute to the legacy of the late Egyptian novelist, literary critic, and academic Radwa Ashour, commemorating her outstanding contributions to literature. The inaugural edition concluded with the award being jointly given to Lebanese novelist Mohamad Tarazi and and Egyptian writer Nora Nagi.



The Public Works Authority (Ashghal), in collaboration with Al Khor and Al Dhakhira Municipality, introduced a smart irrigation system at Al Tawasul Traditional Park and Al Khor Municipality Park, reducing irrigation water consumption by 25% through the use of treated wastewater, soil moisture sensors and automated control technologies.



Ashghal taps smart tech for greener public parks

By Joey Aguilar
Doha

The Public Works Authority (Ashghal) has introduced an intelligent irrigation system at two major parks in Al Khor, marking another step in Qatar's drive towards smarter water management.

Ashghal, in its post on X, said the project has reduced irrigation water consumption by 25% compared with conventional methods by optimising the use of treated wastewater through soil moisture sensors and smart control technologies.

Implemented in collaboration with Al Khor and Al Dhakhira Municipality, the project covers Al Tawasul Traditional Park and Al Khor Municipality Park. The automated system supplies water only when needed, improving irrigation efficiency, lowering operational costs, and supporting the country's digital transformation and sustainability goals, in line with Qatar National



Vision 2030. Ashghal said the initiative also promotes more sustainable water resource management by reducing losses and wastage, lowering demand for treated wastewater used for irrigation, decreasing the carbon footprint associated with park maintenance, and cutting the operating hours of pump-

ing equipment to improve energy efficiency.

The authority added that the project enhances operational performance by reducing maintenance time and costs, extending the lifespan of irrigation assets, and improving the quality of services provided to park visitors.

The smart irrigation system has been introduced at two of Al Khor's best-known public parks, each serving a distinct recreational and environmental role.

Al Tawasul Traditional Park, inaugurated in 2015 under the Ras Laffan Industrial City Community Outreach Programme, covers about 25,800sqm and combines recreation with Qatari heritage and environmental education.

The family-oriented park features children's play areas, sports facilities, walking and jogging tracks, landscaped green spaces, and traditional architectural elements inspired by Qatar's cultural identity. It also includes a small environmental section housing birds and animals and has hosted the Ministry of Culture's "Al Baraha" heritage events.

Al Khor Municipality Park, also known as Al Khor Family Park, is one of Qatar's oldest and largest public parks. Opened in 1983 and extensively redeveloped before reopening in 2020, the 240,000sqm park attracts around half a million



visitors annually. Its attractions include expansive green areas, an artificial lake, a zoo, a museum, a miniature train, an amphitheatre, children's playgrounds, and picnic facilities, making it one of the country's leading family destinations.

Curtains on Aspire Summer Camp after five weeks of sport, learning and fun

Aspire Summer Camp 2026 officially concluded its activities after five weeks filled with sports, educational activities, and interactive experiences. From the camp's launch at the Ladies Sports Hall to the closing activities at Aspire Dome, children aged 6 to 14 enjoyed a rewarding experience that enabled them to discover new sports, enhance their skills, and spend time in an engaging, energetic environment.

The closing ceremony, held yesterday at

Aspire Dome, brought together the children to celebrate the successful conclusion of the activity-packed programme. The ceremony began with recognising the participants' achievements, followed by honouring the camp sponsors and expressing appreciation to the dedicated volunteers who supported the programme throughout the summer. The children also received gifts and certificates of appreciation for their efforts, and the celebrations concluded with enjoyable entertainment and interactive perform-

ances. Throughout the summer, campers took part in an array of activities, ranging from sports and educational workshops to weekly field trips across Doha to discover cultural landmarks. Outings took campers to Creative Arts in Msheireb Downtown Doha, where they explored co-working spaces, labs, and community networking opportunities for designers and artists; to the 3-2-1 Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum, located beside Khalifa International Stadium, to learn about the region's rich

sporting heritage; and to Bounce Doha, an indoor trampoline park offering wall-to-wall trampolines and exciting challenges for all ages. When they weren't exploring the city, the programme kept every camper active and engaged with a full roster of sports and activities, from football, basketball, and volleyball to self-defence, arts and crafts, gymnastics, swimming, and much more. Ahmed Mohammed al-Hasan, Events and Venues director, stated: "At Aspire Zone, we believe that building an ac-

tive and healthy community starts with our youth. This summer was about giving boys and girls of all ages and abilities the opportunity to move, grow, and thrive. From the sports courts to educational workshops, to the locations around Doha, we wanted every camper to leave inspired, and we are proud to celebrate them today."

This year's camp is supported by its official sponsors: Jetour, Qatar Sports for All Federation, Qommunication, Baladna, and AlHadaF

