



All-in-One Ecosystem



Registered by QCR

GULF



TIMES

0 668039 136499

SUNDAY Vol. XXXXVI No. 13820

August 2, 2026  
Safar 19, 1448 AH

www.gulf-times.com 2 Riyals

published in  
QATAR  
since 1978

Travel connected  
with **GCC**  
Roam Like Home



Use your **local plan's data, minutes, & SMS** while roaming the **GCC** for QR 125 / week.

T&Cs apply.



vodafone

103 and requires



Interior Paint with Low VOC  
Exceptional Washability  
Superior Stain Resistant  
Obtained Qatar Quality Mark  
Obtained International Green Mark



Paints Your Home



For Complete and Satisfaction

Shop with Confidence  
16001

THE PERFECT GIFT?

THE ONE THEY CHOOSE



THE PERFECT GIFT?

THE ONE THEY CHOOSE

**BUSINESS** | Page 1

New model lets Qatar SMEs scale without owning logistics

Ready to **GUAC** AND **ROLL?**

Only on **talabat**



6THSTREET.COM  
IS NOW

AIVI

Authentic Fashion & Lifestyle Destination

Delivering In

90

Minutes



Scan the QR code & download the AIVI app

**US, Israel to target energy sites: report**

The US and Israel are planning a bombing campaign against energy infrastructure targets in Iran, with strikes possible throughout the weekend, CBS News reported, citing sources. US President Donald Trump has yet to give the final go-ahead for the strikes, according to sources cited by CBS. The campaign would be one of the harshest yet against Iranian energy infrastructure. — Reuters

## Qatar teams join Spain wildfire fight

Qatari rescue crews are on the ground in central Spain, joining Spanish emergency services in the battle against large-scale wildfires.

The International Search and Rescue Group of the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya) has begun field missions in co-ordination with Spain's Ministry of Interior and local emergency agencies, with operations centred on the municipality of Piedralaves in Avila province, in Castilla y León. The group has drawn up a strategic deployment plan and moved into the affected areas. Before deploying, the Qatari team met the secretary-general for civil protection and emergencies at the Ministry of Interior, along with representatives of local authorities, to exchange information on the latest developments and assess conditions on the ground. (QNA) **Page 2**



## US embassies urge citizens to 'consider departing' Mideast

AFP  
Dubai

US embassies in capitals across the Middle East yesterday warned their citizens to beware of "unforeseen escalation" in the regional conflict and urged them to be ready to leave.

The warning, posted online by US embassies in Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Leb-

anon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, came a day after US President Donald Trump threatened to hit Iran "very hard".

Iran and the United States have been at war since February 28. A period of calm followed a ceasefire, though that collapsed with a return of strikes.

With no end in sight, the war has for months upended the lives of people across the Middle East and rattled global energy markets.

"Americans in the region should consider departing, or be prepared to depart should there be escalation," said the security alert. The messages urged citizens to check flight details and to follow safety advice from local authorities.

"Americans currently in the Middle East should exercise caution and heightened vigilance and should be prepared for flight cancellations, periodic airspace closures, and potential travel disruptions," it said. **To Page 5**

## Expert cautions against foreign AI dependence

By Joseph Varghese  
Staff Reporter

As artificial intelligence (AI) becomes deeply embedded in healthcare, government services, cybersecurity, scientific research, and economic development and with possible restrictions on existing AI platforms, a Qatari researcher has cautioned that countries can no longer afford to depend entirely on foreign AI providers highlighting the need for sovereign AI for each nation.

"Sovereign AI is a nation's ability to build, run, and govern

its own artificial intelligence. That means owning or at least controlling the computing infrastructure, the data, the AI models and the rules that shape how the technology is developed and used. From this perspective, AI is rapidly becoming as strategically vital to nations as electricity, telecommunications, and energy," Dr Aref al-Tamimi, senior manager of the National Cyber Security Research Lab at Qatar Computing Research Institute (QCRI) told *Gulf Times*.

Dr al-Tamimi, said artificial intelligence has evolved from an emerging technology into a critical national asset. **To Page 5**



“AI is rapidly becoming as strategically vital to nations as electricity, telecommunications and energy.”

— Dr Aref al-Tamimi

ARIANE



أريان

Ariane Summer Offer

OWN NOW. PAY LATER

0%

DOWN PAYMENT

With flexible payment plans and 0% interest.

\* Offer applies to Skala North and Skala South projects.



www.arianerealestate.com

4405 9888



Shop with Confidence  
16001

تسوق بثقة  
16001



## Qatar participates in meeting of GCC directors-general of passports

Qatar has participated in the 41st meeting of the Directors-General of Passports of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) States, held at the GCC General Secretariat headquarters in Riyadh.

Qatar's Director-General of Passports Major-General Mohammed Ahmed al-Ateeq al-Dosari led the Ministry of Interior (MoI)'s delegation to the meeting. The meeting discussed multiple topics on its agenda, which included developing passport operations and improving services, enhancing integration and co-ordination among member states, and adopted appropriate recommendations thereon. - **QNA**



## Qatar's ambassador attends Mexican minister's meeting with envoys of Arab nations



Qatar's ambassador to Mexico Mohammed bin Sultan al-Kuwari participated yesterday in the meeting of Mexico's foreign minister, Secretary of Foreign Affairs Roberto Velasco, with the envoys of Arab countries accredited to his country. - **QNA**

## Qatar Tourism chairman takes part in Goodwood Summit

Qatar Tourism chairman Saad bin Ali al-Kharji, who is also chair of the Board of Directors of Visit Qatar, participated as a keynote speaker in the Goodwood Summit, held on the sidelines of the Qatar Goodwood Festival presented by Visit Qatar 2026.

In his opening remarks, al-Kharji underscored the role of sport, tourism and cultural exchange as pillars of the relationship, and reaffirmed Visit Qatar's commitment to leveraging international partnerships to drive sustainable tourism growth and new economic opportunities.

Meanwhile, momentum continues to build at the Qatar Goodwood Festival presented by Visit Qatar.

Through its exclusive naming and ownership rights, Visit Qatar proudly presents this prestigious event as part of its ongoing commitment to world-class equestrian sport and to reinforcing Qatar's position on the global tourism stage.



## Amir congratulates Swiss president

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani has sent a cable of congratulations to Switzerland's President Guy Parmelin on the occasion of his country's National Day.

HH the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani sent a similar cable of congratulations to Parmelin.

Meanwhile, HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani sent a cable of congratulations to Switzerland's Federal Councillor and Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs Ignazio Cassis on the occasion. - **QNA**

## Amir congratulates Benin's president

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani has sent a cable of congratulations to Benin's President Romuald Wadagni on the occasion of his country's Independence Day.

HH the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani and HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani also sent similar cables of congratulations to Wadagni. - **QNA**

## Amir condoles with Algeria's president

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani has sent a cable of condolences to Algeria's President Abdelmadjid Tebboune over the victims of a bus crash, wishing the injured a speedy recovery.

HH the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani sent a similar cable of condolences to Tebboune.

Meanwhile, HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani sent a cable of condolences to Algeria's Prime Minister Sifi Ghrieb over the tragedy. - **QNA**

# Experts: Safeguards vital for e-commerce

By Ayman Adly  
Staff Reporter

Strengthening consumer protection in e-commerce has become an essential requirement due to speeding digital transformation, a number of legal experts and entrepreneurs have stressed, noting that trust in online markets depends on effective legislation, robust regulatory control, transparent business practices, and greater consumer awareness.

The call comes as the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) continues to strengthen its consumer protection framework through enhanced digital and regulatory services.

During the first half of 2026, the ministry safeguarded more than QR7.9mn in consumers' financial rights, handled 13,408 complaints with a 99.7% completion rate, settled 4,395 disputes amicably, and carried out 4,287 inspection campaigns that resulted in 163 violations and legal action against offenders.

Accordingly, lawyer Abdullah al-Hajri stressed that electronic contracts carry the same legal force as traditional contracts when the essential legal elements are fulfilled.

He noted that consumers in digital marketplaces require stronger protection because they cannot physically inspect products before purchase.

"The online trader is responsible for providing accurate and transparent information about goods and services and must avoid misleading practices that could influence consumers' purchasing decisions," al-Hajri said.

He added that consumers are entitled to know the final price, product specifications, delivery timelines, warranty terms, payment methods, and return and exchange policies before completing a purchase.

Al-Hajri also stressed that effective legal penalties for fraud, misleading advertising, and contractual violations help regulate

the market and reinforce confidence in digital commerce.

Lawyer Dr Jathnan al-Hajri noted the need for legal frameworks to evolve alongside technological developments.

"Transparency and the provision of accurate information are among the most important guarantees for protecting consumer rights," he said, stressing that businesses must also prioritise cybersecurity and safeguard consumers' personal data.

He added that electronic invoices, payment records, digital correspondence, and online advertisements have become critical evidence in resolving disputes.

Businessman Habib Mohamed al-Hajri stressed that while e-commerce offers convenience and wider consumer choice, shoppers must exercise caution.

**Electronic invoices, payment records, digital correspondence, and online advertisements have become critical evidence in resolving disputes**

He encouraged consumers to verify the credibility of online stores, review customer ratings, retain electronic invoices and order records, and avoid offers that appear unrealistically attractive.

"Digital awareness has become just as important as legislation," he said, urging consumers to report violations and preserve purchase documentation to protect both themselves and other shoppers.

Lawyer Osama Abdel Ghani said that the rapid expansion of digital commerce has created new legal challenges, particularly regarding data privacy and cybersecurity.

He noted that consumers routinely share personal and financial information during online transactions, placing greater responsibility on digital platforms to implement effective technical and legal safeguards.

"Personal data protection has become an integral consumer

right in the digital environment," he said, adding that e-mails, payment records, invoices, chat conversations, and promotional advertisements now serve as valuable electronic evidence when resolving disputes.

Consumer advocate Ahmed al-Yafei emphasised that confidence in e-commerce depends on accurate product information, responsive customer service, and effective complaint resolution.

He said consumers increasingly rely on customer reviews and store reputations before making purchasing decisions.

"Fast responses to complaints and clear solutions strengthen consumer confidence and encourage wider adoption of e-commerce," he noted, while highlighting the importance of secure digital payment systems and accessible complaint channels.

Businessman Shaheen al-Muhammadi said that sustainable growth in e-commerce depends primarily on consumer trust rather than technological sophistication alone.

"Companies that invest in improving the customer experience will be better positioned to compete," he said, noting the importance of transparency in product descriptions, pricing, payment, delivery, and after-sales services.

Similarly, entrepreneur Imran al-Kuwari stressed that protecting personal data is a fundamental consumer right, particularly as shoppers share sensitive financial information during online transactions.

Lawyer Dr Ghada Karbon described consumer protection in e-commerce as a comprehensive legal framework that extends beyond product quality to include transparency, data privacy, and fair contractual practices.

She also highlighted the complexities surrounding cross-border transactions, including jurisdiction and dispute resolution, calling for stronger co-operation among regulatory authorities and continuous modernisation of legal frameworks.

## Lekhwiya team in Spain to fight wildfires

Qatar's International Search and Rescue Group of the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya) has begun field missions in Spain to help contain large-scale wildfires, operating in lockstep with Spanish authorities and local emergency agencies.

The Qatar team held a co-ordination meeting with Spain's secretary-general for Civil Protection and Emergencies at the Spanish interior ministry, alongside representatives of local authorities, to ensure an interchange of information on the latest developments and assess the situation on the ground.

The team has also established a strategic deployment plan and begun operations in affected areas, with its field activities focused on the municipality of Piedralaves in Avila province, within Castilla and Leon, central Spain. - **QNA**



## Over 330 environmental violation sites spotted

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC)'s Land Protection Department carried out an extensive field survey to monitor environmental waste in the country's northern regions during July 23-25.

The campaign resulted in the identification and documentation of over 332 sites containing various forms of environmental degradation, including illegally discarded waste, abandoned camps, and neglected vehicles.

The sites were documented in accordance with approved field procedures in preparation for the necessary remediation measures, to be carried out in co-ordination with the relevant authorities.

The ministry stated that the campaign reflects its commitment to enhancing the efficiency of environmental monitoring and identifying activities and conditions that degrade the terrestrial environment or threaten its natural ecosystems.

The initiative also supports efforts to preserve natural habitats, reduce the environmental impacts of waste, and improve the overall condition and appearance of Qatar's desert landscapes.

The MoECC stressed that such field monitoring programmes are a cornerstone of its environmental protection strategy, providing a comprehensive database of waste accumulation sites and environmental violations.

The information collected supports informed decision-making and enables the implementation of effective corrective measures, while strengthening efforts to conserve biodiversity and ensure sustainable use of natural resources.



## Fire Station announces open call for AISP 2027

QNA  
Doha

Fire Station, Qatar Museums (QM)'s contemporary art hub, has announced the Open Call for the second edition of its Artists Intensive Study Programme (AISP), inviting emerging visual artists from Qatar and around the world to apply for the fully funded nine-month programme, which will run from March to November 2027.

The programme, led by internationally acclaimed artist and Fire Station Artistic director Wael Shawky, offers a transformative opportunity for emerging and passionate artists to engage in an immersive, interdisciplinary environment where they can develop their practice through studio-based learning, critical dialogue, mentorship, and interdisciplinary exchange.

The programme brings together 25 emerging Qatari and international artists, providing participants with the chance to refine their technical skills, broaden their conceptual approaches, and expand their artistic practice through a rigorous curriculum that combines practical experience with theoretical learning.

The jury for the 2027 edition comprises distinguished figures from the international arts scene, including HE the QM Chairperson Sheikha al-Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani.

Applications close on September 5.

Shortlisted candidates will be invited to interviews in October and November, with successful applicants notified in mid-December.

Applications can be submitted online at: <https://qmforms.qm.org.qa/form/AISP-2>

## GU-Q opens admissions for Fall 2027 via 'Common App'

Georgetown University in Qatar (GU-Q) has announced the official opening of the fall 2027 admissions process, marking a milestone as the university begins accepting applications through the Common Application (Common App) for the first time.

Georgetown's Hilltop Campus in Washington, DC, will also adopt the Common App, but applicants must select the Qatar campus within the platform to be considered for the GU-Q, the university said in a press statement yesterday.

The statement added that the move was

designed to reach a broader, more diverse pool of applicants and reduce barriers for students navigating multiple applications.

"Used by more than 1mn students worldwide, the Common App is a centralised online platform that allows students to apply to multiple colleges and universities through a single application," it said. "It includes shared components such as personal information, academic history, extracurricular activities, and essays, streamlining what can otherwise be a complex and time-intensive process."

"Introducing the Common App as an additional application pathway expands access to Georgetown University in Qatar without changing what we look for in an applicant," said assistant dean (Admissions and Strategic Enrollment Management) Joseph M Hernandez. "It makes the process more accessible and manageable for students, as well as for the families, teachers, and counselors guiding them through the college search."

According to the university's statement, applicants will continue to have the option

to apply through the GU-Q's existing direct application platform.

The Fall 2027 admissions cycle opened yesterday, August 1.

Key application deadlines include November 1 for "Early Action" and January 15, 2027 for "Regular Decision" and "Transfer Applicants".

"Early Action" applicants will receive admission decisions by December 15, 2026, while "Regular Decision" and "Transfer" applicants will be notified by April 1, 2027 for studies beginning August 15. - **QNA**

## Dukhan Bank organises Next-Gen 26 Programme for children of private banking clients

Dukhan Bank has organised the Next-Gen 26 Programme, an integrated two-week learning experience spanning Doha and Geneva.

The programme was designed to equip the children of its Private Banking clients with the knowledge and expertise needed to navigate a challenging financial landscape and continue managing and growing their families' wealth across generations.

Dukhan Bank's Private Banking and Wealth Management Department combines deep local knowledge with international expertise, drawing on more than 70 years of collective market experience to provide tailored, Shariah-compliant solutions for clients and their families.

Its expertise was recently recognised by Global Finance, which named Dukhan Bank the "World's Best Islamic Private Bank" for the third consecutive year.

The Next-Gen 26 Programme combined financial education, practical learning, and international exposure to deepen participants' understanding of wealth planning, investment management, family governance, and the responsible transfer of wealth across generations.

The programme was delivered in collaboration with Lombard Odier & Co, a Swiss private bank.

During the Doha component, held at Dukhan Bank's headquarters in Lusail, participants explored wealth transfer and planning, financial knowledge, macroeconomics, risk and reward, traditional and alternative asset classes, structured products, investment management, portfolio construction, and performance evaluation.

The sessions combined theoretical learning with practical portfolio exercises and real-world scenarios.

Participants also gained direct insight into Dukhan Bank through presentations from its Wealth Management, Corporate Banking, Treasury, Strategy and Marketing, and Investments teams, followed by a guided tour of the bank's headquarters.

The Geneva component offered an international perspective through sessions led by Lombard Odier covering investment offerings, macroeconomic factors affecting market performance, discretion-

ary portfolio management and Shariah-compliant mandates, alternative investments, commodities, foreign exchange, private assets, wealth planning, and family governance.

Participants also took part in a portfolio construction workshop and a curated series of cultural and experiential activities designed to complement the programme's educational objectives.

These included a tour of Lombard Odier, as well as visits to Pascoët in Carouge and Vacheron Constantin, offering participants a closer look at two distinct business journeys: the stewardship of a centuries-old family legacy and the creation of a modern, founder-led enterprise from the ground up.

Reflecting on the experience, the participants said that the Next-Gen 26 Programme gave them a deeper and more practical understanding of wealth management, from investment decision-making and portfolio construction to family governance and long-term responsibility.

"Preparing the next generation requires more than developing technical knowledge," said Acting Dukhan Bank Group chief executive Ahmed I Hashem. "It also calls for perspective, sound judgment, and a strong foundation and understanding of the responsibilities associated with managing and preserving wealth."

"Through the Next-Gen 26 Programme, we sought to provide participants with practical financial knowledge, exposure to international expertise, and a deeper appreciation of responsible, long-term decision-making," he said.

"We are proud of their achievements and remain committed to supporting the development of future leaders who can contribute meaningfully to their families, their communities, and Qatar's continued progress," Hasem added.

Through the Next-Gen 26 Programme, Dukhan Bank reinforced its commitment to building enduring relationships with its Private Banking clients beyond traditional financial services.

The initiative also reflects the bank's focus on supporting the development of informed, responsible, and future-focused young Qataris in alignment with Qatar National Vision 2030.



## Qatar Charity starts construction of two schools in Djibouti

Qatar Charity (QC) has commenced the construction of two primary schools in Djibouti in partnership with the country's ministry of national education and vocational training.

The ceremony to begin the construction project was attended by Djibouti's National Education and Vocational Training Minister Mostafa Mohamed Mahmoud, Arta Region Governor Hassan Dableh, chargé d'affaires at Qatar's embassy in Djibouti Sultan bin Jaber al-Hanzab, the deputy of Damerjog district, ministry officials and advisers, representatives of government entities, local dignitaries, and the Qatar Charity team in Djibouti.

The project aims to provide children with a well-equipped learning environment.

It is also expected to help ease classroom overcrowding, improve the quality of educational services, and enable students to learn in modern facilities that meet essential educational standards.

Mahmoud said that the project reflects the strong fraternal relations between Djibouti and Qatar and underscores the effective partnership with Qatar Charity in supporting the education sector.

He noted that investing in education is an invest-

ment in the nation's future, adding that the new schools will create better learning opportunities for children and improve educational conditions in the target areas.

Dableh said that the initiative reflects Qatar's commitment to supporting human development in brotherly countries.

He stressed that education remains a top priority for the Djibouti government, noting that such projects contribute to building human capacity, empowering future generations, and strengthening the longstanding relations between Qatar and Djibouti.

Ghada Izzeldin Ahmed, the director of the QC office in Djibouti, said: "At Qatar Charity, we believe that education is the cornerstone of sustainable development and that building schools is a long-term investment in people and communities."

"This project reflects our mission to provide children with a safe and stimulating learning environment that enables them to continue their education and build their future," he said.

At the end of the ceremony, senior guests laid the foundation stone, marking the official start of construction work.



The Next-Gen 26 Programme combined financial education, practical learning, and international exposure for the participants, spanning Doha and Geneva.

# Doha Festival City announces mall-wide transformation programme worth up to QAR 400 million in combined owner and retailer investment

*A landmark investment introducing new retail, dining and lifestyle experiences, bringing together extensive asset enhancements and major retail partner investments, supported by AI-driven innovation and a comprehensive enhancement of the customer journey.*

Doha Festival City, Qatar's leading retail, leisure and lifestyle destination, has announced a combined investment of up to QAR 400 million by Doha Festival City and participating retail partners to deliver its most ambitious transformation since opening. The programme reflects the destination's long-term confidence in Qatar's economic growth and retail sector, reinforcing its commitment to continuously elevate the customer experience while shaping the next generation of retail destinations in the country.

The transformation will introduce a comprehensive enhancement of the mall environment, improving comfort, accessibility and convenience for visitors.

Alongside the refurbishment programme, Doha Festival City will continue to strengthen its position as Qatar's home of first-to-market retail concepts through an exciting evolution of its tenant mix. Major additions include Primark's first store in Qatar, Ulta Beauty, and Zara's flagship expansion and refurbishment, together with a curated pipeline of international and regional brands that will further enrich the mall's retail offering and reflect Al-Futtaim's role in managing the destination and leading its long-term strategy and enhancement plans.

A key pillar of the transformation will be a comprehensive evolution of the mall's dining experience, introducing new F&B concepts across casual dining, cafés and elevated culinary concepts. The new strategy will create distinctive social destinations that encourage longer dwell times while catering to the evolving lifestyle expectations of residents and international visitors alike, further positioning Doha Festival City as Qatar's leading lifestyle destination beyond traditional retail.

Complementing the physical transformation, Doha Festival City will introduce a targeted suite of AI-powered solutions improving operational efficiency and the overall visitor experience. These include an AI Concierge, AI-enabled Facilities Management (CAFM), intelligent environmental monitoring and climate



Hayssam Hajjar, Executive Director - Malls & Retail Assets, Al-Futtaim Real Estate

optimisation systems, together with a smart parking management platform providing real-time guidance, improved traffic flow and a more convenient arrival experience.

The destination will also introduce Festival Touch, a new hospitality philosophy centred around personalised service, thoughtful interactions and memorable moments that create meaningful emotional connections with every guest.



Commenting on the announcement, Hayssam Hajjar, Executive Director - Malls & Retail Assets, Al-Futtaim Real Estate, said: "The combined investment by Doha Festival City and participating retail partners represents far more than a refurbishment programme. It reflects the destination's long-term belief in Qatar's economy and the continued strength of

its retail and tourism sectors. As consumer expectations evolve, our responsibility is to continue leading the market by creating destinations that inspire people to visit more often, stay longer and enjoy richer experiences".

He continued: "Through this transformation, we are redefining every stage of the customer journey, introducing

new retail concepts, world-class dining experiences, intelligent technologies and enhanced hospitality that will set new benchmarks for destination retail in Qatar. Doha Festival City has always been at the forefront of innovation, and this investment reinforces our commitment to shaping the future of retail while supporting Qatar National Vision 2030 and the country's continued economic growth."

The forward-looking endeavour underscores Al-Futtaim's role in managing and enhancing leading retail destinations across the region, aligning them with evolving retail, leisure and lifestyle trends while staying ahead of shifting customer expectations.

In 2025, Doha Festival City welcomed 20 million visitors and was recognised as the Premier Shopping Mall Experience at the Qatar Tourism Awards for the second time. These targeted enhancements ensure that Doha Festival City remains a vibrant lifestyle hub where next-generation experiences naturally meet sustainable design.

# Katara forum examines how literary awards shape writers and culture

By Tawfik Lamari  
Staff Reporter

The Katara Library for Arabic Novels hosted a cultural evening recently, exploring the influence of literary awards on writers' careers and the broader cultural landscape.

Organised by the Liqaa Group, the event, titled "Literary Awards and Their Impact on the Writer's Journey and the Cultural Scene", brought together authors, media professionals, and literature enthusiasts for a thoughtful discussion on creativity, recognition, and the evolving role of literary prizes.

The evening opened with remarks from veteran broadcaster Rania Qaddour, who also moderated the discussion.

It began with a report prepared by Sara Awouda, narrated by Taqwa Abdullah, and directed by Kamal al-Sirr, highlighting the growing international recognition of Sudanese literature through major Arab and global literary awards.

The panel featured Sudanese novelist Mamdouh Abaro, winner of the 18th Tayeb Salih Prize for Creative Writing in 2020 for his novel *The Drowned Survivor*, alongside writer, journalist, and AJ+ Arabic content creator Tasneem Dahab, whose work focuses on translated African literature.

The discussion also spotlighted the

Tayeb Salih Prize, one of Sudan's leading literary awards.

Established in 2003, the prize commemorates the legacy of the celebrated Sudanese novelist Tayeb Salih, author of the internationally acclaimed *Season of Migration to the North*.

Created from an initiative by Salih's friends to celebrate his 70th birthday, the project evolved into a lasting award after the novelist proposed using donated funds to support fiction rather than honour him personally.

Since then, it has become a major platform for Sudanese novelists.

Guiding the conversation with a series of probing questions, Qaddour encouraged both guests to reflect on the opportunities and challenges that accompany literary recognition.

Abaro said literary awards are milestones that open doors to wider readership and opportunities but argued that their value depends on what follows.

He called on award organisers to continue supporting writers after the announcement of winners by providing opportunities that allow them to devote themselves to creative work.

He also warned against the rise of "award hunters" who write primarily to secure prizes rather than pursue meaningful artistic expression.

Dahab highlighted the influence of digital media in amplifying literary voices,



The authors, media professionals, and literature enthusiasts at the event.

es, noting that journalism and content creation have become powerful tools for connecting writers with readers.

In many cases, she said, media visibility can have an impact comparable to the award itself.

Reflecting on her experience, Dahab credited the creative writing workshops she attended before winning the Tayeb Salih Prize, particularly one led by acclaimed Sudanese novelist Leila Aboulela, with helping refine her narrative craft and sustain her literary journey.

The evening concluded by reinforcing a shared message: literary awards may open new doors, but it is sustained creativity, institutional support, and meaningful engagement with readers that ultimately define a writer's lasting contribution to culture.



# QRCS signs deal to extend mental health project

The Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) has signed a co-operation agreement with the British embassy in Doha to continue the project to provide psychosocial support for Palestinian families hosted in Qatar through March 2027.

The agreement was signed by acting QRCS secretary-general Abdullah Sultan al-Qatan and the UK's ambassador to Qatar Neerav Patel.

The signing ceremony was attended by QRCS representatives, including QRCS treasurer Ibrahim Abdullah al-Abdullah, assistant secretary-general (Relief and International Development) Mohamed Bader al-Sada, assistant secretary-general (Volunteering and Local Development) Hussein Aman al-Ali, human resources and administrative affairs director Ahmed Saleh al-Khalaf, and chief ambassador Yousef Mohamed al-Awadi.

Representatives of the embassy included first secretary (Development) Dr Kwalombota M Kwalombota, and head of Internal Political Affairs and Communications Eynas Ahmed.

"This agreement reflects our common belief that mental health and psychosocial support are essential pillars of humanitarian response," al-Sada said. "Helping people recover from trauma is not only about addressing today's challenges - it is about restoring hope, strengthening resilience, and enabling a better future."

"This agreement reaffirms the shared commitment of the QRCS and the British embassy to supporting the Palestinian families hosted in Qatar throughout their journey of healing and recovery," he added.

"Over the past two years, the partnership has delivered vital mental health and psy-

chosocial support to the Palestinian families hosted in Qatar, creating safe spaces, strengthening communities, providing therapy, and supporting those facing difficult circumstances," Patel said.

"This third phase will continue support for affected families while also investing in the future," the ambassador added. "Through psychological first aid and well-being programmes in schools, it will help equip teachers and young people with the tools to build resilience and mental wellbeing."

The third phase of the project builds on earlier achievements with two key priorities.

First, the QRCS will continue providing psychosocial support for Palestinian families, by providing a comprehensive range of mental health, psychosocial, and community-based activities that promote healing, resilience, and social connection.

Second, the QRCS will strengthen institutional capacity through psychosocial first-aid training, awareness initiatives, and a structured school-based psychosocial first-aid programme.

During Phase 2, the programme was expanded beyond direct psychosocial support to include community resilience initiatives and handicraft skills development, and the implementation period was extended to ensure continuity of services while responding to the evolving needs of beneficiaries.

Since its launch in January last year, the partnership between Qatar, the British embassy in Doha and the QRCS has continued to strengthen support for those affected by the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

## MoECC: Hawksbill sea turtle nesting season has ended

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC) has announced the successful conclusion of the 2026 hawksbill sea turtle nesting season, which ran from April 1 to August 1.

The season culminated in the release of hatchlings into their natural marine habitat as part of the ministry's ongoing efforts to protect biodiversity and conserve endangered species.

The MoECC noted that throughout the nesting season it implemented a range of specialised field programmes and dedicated beach patrols to provide suitable nesting conditions and safeguard turtle nesting sites.

Monitoring operations covered key beaches, including Al Huwailah, Al Jassasiya, Al Maroona, Al Ghariya, and Al Mufayr, besides a number of other coastal locations across the country, contributing to the season's success.

According to the ministry, the Hawksbill Sea Turtle Protection Project was launched in 2003 in co-operation with QatarEnergy and the Environmental Science Centre at Qatar University.

Over the past five years, the initiative has released more than 60,000 hatchlings into Qatar's marine environment, reinforcing national efforts to restore and sustain hawksbill turtle populations.

The ministry stressed that the project is one of Qatar's leading biodiversity conservation initiatives.

It has played a significant role in increasing the population of hawksbill sea turtles, reducing the risks facing this critically endangered species, and raising public awareness of the importance of protecting marine wildlife.

Conserving sea turtles, the MoECC noted, is essential to maintaining healthy marine ecosystems and ensuring long-term ecological balance.

The ministry also explained that the hawksbill turtle nesting season in Qatar typically extends from early April through late June, when female turtles return to nest on the country's northern beaches, including Fuwairit, Ras Laffan, Al Maroona, Al Ghariya, Al Huwailah, Al Jassasiya, and Al Mafjar, as well as on the islands of Umm Tais, Ras Rakan, Shraouh, and Halul.

The eggs hatch around two months after they are laid, after which the hatchlings instinctively make their way to the sea, marking the final stage of one of Qatar's most important wildlife conservation programmes.



OP - SASOL joint venture  
أوريكس لتحويل الغاز إلى سائل  
ORYX GTL Limited

INVITATION TO TENDER

ORYX GTL Limited is pleased to announce the following tender(s):

| S. No. | Tender Ref.      | Tender Title:                                                   | Tender Reg. Fee (QAR) | Tender Bond (QAR) | Bid Closing Date & Tender Bond Validity Period |
|--------|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| 1.     | STC-CN-013-26-FM | Call-off Contract for Cafe Lounge Services in Ras Laffan & Doha | N/A                   | N/A               | 26 August 2026 at 12.00 noon & 180 days        |
| 2.     | TC-CN-017-26-FM  | Landscaping, Irrigation and Indoor Plants Maintenance Services  | 500/-                 | 45,500/-          | 26 August 2026 at 12.00 noon & 180 days        |
| 3.     | STC-CN-017-26-FM | Call-Off Contract for Portable Water Supply Services            | 500/-                 | 45,500/-          | 26 August 2026 at 12.00 noon & 180 days        |
| 4.     | STC-MT-059-26-MT | Supply of Flange Blinds and Blind Paddles                       | 500/-                 | 45,500/-          | 19 August 2026 at 12.00 noon & 180 days        |

Companies wishing to register their interest and obtain Tender Document(s) for the above Tender(s) must pay a non-refundable registration fee and register with ORYX GTL as detailed below:

| Payable to                             | ORYX GTL Limited                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| IBAN (29 Digits)                       | QA23QNBA00000000013010705001                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Bank                                   | Qatar National Bank – HQ or any branch (cash only)                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Registration Dates                     | From 02 Aug 2026 to 06 Aug 2026                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Registration Process and Requirements: | Write an e-mail to <a href="mailto:oryxgtltenders@oryxgtl.qa">oryxgtltenders@oryxgtl.qa</a> with the following attachments:<br>1. Copy of Commercial Registration (CR)<br>2. Copy of bank deposit slip of the Tender Registration Fee.<br>3. Copy of ICV Certificate |

COMPANIES WHO HAVE PAID THE NON-REFUNDABLE REGISTRATION FEE BUT FAILED TO FORMALLY REGISTER AT THE DATE AND TIME STATED ABOVE WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED AS ACCEPTABLE TENDERER.

TENDER BOND SHALL BE ISSUED BY A BANK REGISTERED IN THE STATE OF QATAR.

Effective from 1st July 2023, bids from Local Suppliers and Contractors (companies established under the Laws of State of Qatar with local Commercial Registration) who are not in possession of an ICV score in the ICV portal by Tender Closing Date (or commercial bid submission date if separately mentioned/notified) will not be accepted. Local Company that has been established for less than 2 years are exempted from this requirement. For further details please visit ICV Digital Portal:- <https://icv.qa>

**For more information about ORYX GTL and its tenders, please visit our website: <https://www.oryxgtl.com.qa>**



Doha Golf Club  
Qatar

INVITATION TO TENDER

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

| Tender No.    | Tender Title          | Tender Bond (QAR) | Tender Fee (QAR) | Last Date to Issue RFP    | Tender Closing Date       | Email Address                                                                       |
|---------------|-----------------------|-------------------|------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| DGC/TC/26/006 | Supply of Silica Sand | 5% of RFP Value   | QAR 1000         | 13 <sup>th</sup> Aug 2026 | 18 <sup>th</sup> Aug 2026 | <a href="mailto:zaib@dohagolfclub.com">Doha Golf Club To: zaib@dohagolfclub.com</a> |

DGC is keen to invite reputable companies to supply Silica Sand to Doha Golf Club.

**Who should respond to this invitation?**  
Local companies that have relevant experience in supply of Silica Sand.

**Tender Process:**

- Applicant/s should register and submit their Expression of Interest letter, along with accompanying copy of valid Commercial Registration and Computer Card by email to the relevant email address listed in the table above.
- Upon receipt, the applicant/s will receive an email with the attached Confidentiality Agreement (CA).
- The Applicant/s should then pay the non-refundable tender fee to below DGC Bank Account.  
**DOHA GOLF CLUB**  
**Bank: Commercial Bank of Qatar**  
**Account No.: 4580-583247-004**  
**IBAN: QA24CBQA000000004580583247004**
- Applicants will return a completed CA and Tender fee payment slip with bank stamp to DGC by email to the relevant email address, and submit a hard copy of the CA (in 2 copies) and Tender fee payment slip to the address below:  
**DOHA GOLF CLUB**  
**West Bay Lagoon**  
**P.O. Box 13530**  
**Doha, Qatar**
- Upon Receipt of a conformant CA and proof of payment of the tender fee, the applicant will be issued a copy of the Request for Proposal (RFP).
- Requests for RFP documents after **13<sup>th</sup> Aug 2026** will be rejected.
- The decision to issue RFP documents to an applicant rests solely with DGC.
- Technical and Commercial Offers should be submitted by hand in separate sealed envelopes with two (2) copies of each to Doha Golf Club as per the above mail address.
- Tender Bond must be included in a separately sealed envelope and submitted along with technical and commercial offers, otherwise Doha Golf Club will not consider documents for further review.
- Any queries in relation to this tender should be addressed in writing to the email addresses above.



قطر للطاقة  
QatarEnergy  
LNG

QatarEnergy LNG  
Tender Invitation

| No. | TENDER NUMBER / DESCRIPTION                                                                                          | TENDER ISSUE PERIOD            | TENDER FEE (QAR) | TENDER BOND (QAR) | TENDER CLOSING DATE |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| 1   | LTC/C/MNT/7740/26<br>HYDRAULIC BOLT<br>TIGHTENING & TENSIONING<br>AND FLANGE FACING<br>SERVICES ON CALL-OFF<br>BASIS | 02/08/2026<br>to<br>12/08/2026 | 0                | 250,000           | 25/08/2026          |

**Scope of Work:**  
Contractor shall provide skilled manpower & equipment required for hydraulic bolt tightening and tensioning, nut splitting and flange facing services at Company's various assets in Ras Laffan and Offshore locations on call off basis. The Contract duration shall be for five years with an optional provision for two years extension at Company's sole discretion.

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

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

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

## US embassies urge citizens to ‘consider departing’ Mideast

From Page 1

US citizens in Jordan were told not to visit military bases in the country, which have recently come under Iranian missile attack, and in Israel they were urged to seek the location of the nearest bomb shelter.

“The Iranian regime is unpredictable, as seen by its recent decisions to attack areas in the region without warning or provocations as well as to expand attacks to areas not previously targeted (such as Egypt),” said a post on the US embassy Jerusalem site.

The US embassy in Beirut said the mission remained on “ordered departure status”, meaning that family members and non-essential US government personnel were still relocated outside of Lebanon.

Iran’s military yesterday accused Washington of “escalating tensions” in the region.

“Any country serving as defensive shield for criminal and aggressive America will be engulfed by the flames of war,” Ali Abdollahi, head of Iran’s military central command, said in a statement read on state television.

Mohammad Mokhber, adviser to Iran’s supreme leader, also warned against any attacks on Iranian infrastructure.

“You calculate through military equations, but we respond with the logic of history,” he wrote on X.

“Attacking Iran’s infrastructure directly awakens the fault lines on which 250 years of your hegemonic architecture have been built.”

Iran and the US resumed overnight exchanges of fire last month after a days-long lull in fighting, although there were no reported strikes overnight Friday to yesterday.

Meanwhile an “unknown projectile” struck a tanker off the coast of Oman, a British maritime agency said yesterday, as the United States and Iran vie for control of the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran has effectively maintained control over navigation through Hormuz since the outbreak of the war on February 28, requiring vessels to obtain permission and pay transit fees before using the waterway.

Maritime trade tracking firm Kpler said on Friday that traffic through the Hormuz strait has dropped “sharply”.

“With US and Iranian public positions still at odds, operators are closely monitoring traffic volumes, routing behaviour and any diplomatic developments that could reshape risk across regional shipping lanes in the days ahead,” the firm said on X.

## Expert cautions against foreign AI dependence

From Page 1

“Its importance reaches far beyond the technology itself. A country with sovereign control over its AI infrastructure is better placed to protect sensitive government and citizen data, safeguard its language and culture, strengthen its economy, and ease its reliance on technologies built elsewhere. Above all, it becomes far more resilient when geopolitics turn unpredictable, and unpredictable is exactly what the current moment has become,” he explained.

Dr al-Tamimi noted that the urgency of achieving AI sovereignty became evident following recent international developments. He described “In June 2026, the US government invoked export controls to suspend access to Anthropic’s most advanced AI models, Fable 5 and Mythos 5, for all foreign nationals. The concern was understandable; the consequences, however, were global. Because Anthropic could not verify users’ nationality in real time, both models went dark for everyone, everywhere, overnight. Although Claude Fable 5 is now officially back online after the controls were lifted in early July, the nineteen-day black-

out demonstrated how quickly access to critical AI tools can vanish.”

This incident, he said, has highlighted the risks of relying exclusively on external AI platforms. “A university running AI research, a startup building its first product, a hospital relying on AI-assisted diagnostics, or a ministry delivering digital services can all be left stranded by a decision taken in another capital, with no warning and no appeal. It does not matter how loyal a customer you are or how legitimate your use case is; if the tool is not yours, it can be taken away. For governments and institutions in the Gulf and beyond, the episode was a wake-up call: total reliance on external AI providers is not a convenience; it is a strategic vulnerability,” he cautioned.

“The message was clear,” Dr al-Tamimi continued. “If a country’s critical AI systems depend entirely on technologies owned elsewhere, they remain vulnerable to decisions made beyond their control.”

The official said that Qatar has already read the moment well. “Through its National AI Strategy, and through institutions such as the Qatar Computing Research Institute and Hamad Bin Khalifa University, the country has

made real strides in AI research, Arabic language technologies, cybersecurity, and digital transformation. A prime example is Fanar, the Arabic-centric large language model developed by QCRI, a hometown AI system built to serve the language, culture, and values of the region, and a concrete demonstration of what sovereign AI capability looks like in practice,” he highlighted.

He further recommended that diversifying AI sources—including commercial platforms, open-source models, and domestically developed systems—would improve resilience against future disruptions.

“Every year AI models get bigger, the datasets get more complex, and entire industries discover new uses for intelligent systems, from analysing security data to powering government services. Meeting that rising demand will require continued and expanded investment in high-performance computing, national AI infrastructure, skilled local talent, and sustained support for startups and researchers. The foundation is in place; the challenge now is to keep building on it at the speed the technology demands,” added Dr al-Tamimi.

## ‘Medicine warehouses’ destruction could bring medical system collapse’

Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital spokesperson Khalil al-Daqran said that the Israeli occupation forces’ direct strike on the hospital’s main medicine warehouses marks a dangerous escalation in attacks on the healthcare sector.

Al-Daqran told Qatar News Agency (QNA) that the Israeli occupation went from targeting buildings and medical personnel to targeting patients’ chances of survival.

Located in Deir Al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip, Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital was subject to an Israeli airstrike before dawn on Saturday, leading to the complete destruction of two of the hospital’s four warehouses, while causing severe damage to the two others, al-Daqran said.

He added that the strike also destroyed adjacent outpatient clinics, damaged the hospital’s perimeter wall, and nearby buildings, as well as affected tents housing displaced people in the surrounding area, causing widespread panic among patients, their companions, and medical staff.

The air strike destroyed all of the two warehouses’ contents, including medical supplies, medicines, and intravenous solutions intended for kidney dialysis and intensive care patients, al-Daqran said. Vital life-saving medical supplies intended for



Khalil al-Daqran

wounded patients and others requiring treatment were lost or destroyed.

The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital spokesperson said the destruction comes at an especially critical time, with hospitals already facing shortages of more than half of their essential medicines and medical consumables, while a quarter of laboratory equipment has become inoperable due to the ongoing blockade.

Al-Daqran said the immediate impact of the destruction of the warehouses would be the disruption of dialysis protocols and chemotherapy treatment for cancer patients, as well as increased risks in operating rooms and intensive care units, which he said now lack even the most basic treatment supplies.

He added that the loss of any additional medical supplies effectively amounts to a death sen-

tence for hundreds of patients.

The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital spokesperson said the Israeli occupation has not limited itself to enforcing a strict blockade, preventing the entry of medicines, and denying thousands of patients and wounded people permission to travel abroad for treatment, but is also continuing a broader campaign by targeting what remains of Gaza’s healthcare system and destroying its already limited capabilities.

Condemning Israel’s heinous and systematic crime of destroying the hospital’s medicine and medical supplies warehouse, al-Daqran urged the international community, the United Nations, and human rights and humanitarian organisations, to intervene immediately to stop such attacks and provide urgent protection for medical institutions and healthcare workers.

Protecting medical supplies and storage facilities is not merely a humanitarian concern but an explicit obligation under international humanitarian law, which prohibits the targeting of medical supplies intended for civilians, he added.

Israeli occupation forces carried out intensive overnight airstrikes targeting homes and residential buildings, with one of the strikes destroying two of Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital’s medicine warehouses. (QNA)

## Geekdom Bootcamp set to inspire Qatar’s next generation of Board Game designers

The Doha Film Institute (DFI) has completed preparations for the launch of its Geekdom Board Game Design Bootcamp, a hands-on training programme aimed at nurturing creativity and innovation among aspiring game designers in Qatar. The camp will run from August 11-20 at Scale7 in Msheireb, welcoming participants aged 17 and above.

Designed to introduce young creatives to the rapidly growing world of tabletop gaming, the bootcamp will offer seven interactive sessions covering every stage of board game development, from transforming an initial idea into a playable concept to designing game mechanics, crafting compelling narratives, and building strategic gameplay.

Participants will also explore the history and evolution of board games, examine major game genres and formats, and gain insights into the latest international trends shaping the industry. The programme places a strong emphasis on practical learning, guiding attendees through the process of developing and testing prototypes while refining their creative and design skills.

The bootcamp will encourage participants to create a diverse range of games, including dice, card, competitive, and cooperative games, equipping them with the tools to turn original ideas into viable projects. Throughout the programme, they will receive guidance from industry specialists, offering valuable professional insights into the design process.

The initiative will culminate



in a dedicated project showcase, where participants will present their completed board games before a panel of experts. The best design will receive a QR5,000 cash prize, sponsored by Geekdom, to support the continued development of the winning project.

Training sessions are scheduled for August 11, 12, 13, 16, 17, 18, and 20, running daily from

4pm-8:30pm. The date of the final presentation day will be announced at a later stage.

The bootcamp reflects DFI’s continued commitment to fostering emerging creative talent by providing practical learning opportunities that bridge storytelling, design, and innovation, while supporting the development of Qatar’s growing creative industries.

## Israeli strikes kill two in Gaza, destroy medicine storage warehouses

Reuters

Deir Al-Balah

Israel’s military yesterday killed two Palestinians in Gaza and destroyed two warehouses near a hospital that were said to be storing medicine in separate strikes, amid uncertainty over whether Israel has accepted a deal reached with Hamas over the group’s disarmament.

Palestinian health officials said two Palestinians were killed in the Sheikh Radwan area of Gaza City in central Gaza in an Israeli air strike. A military spokesperson said those targeted were Hamas militants but declined to provide further details.

In an earlier incident, an Israeli air strike destroyed two warehouses that were used to store medicine by the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir Al-Balah in southern Gaza, the Palestinian health ministry in Gaza said in a statement.

Several hours after the strike, the Israeli military said it had struck a Hamas hideout near the hospital which the group used to store weapons. Other sites in Gaza that it said were used by Hamas to store arms were also struck, a military statement said.

The military said the strikes were directed by the Shin Bet intelligence agency. It did not disclose any evidence to support the claim that Hamas was storing weapons at any of the sites.

Reuters footage of the Deir Al-Balah strike showed a crater several metres wide marking the site of the explosion, with debris strewn across the area, including what appeared to be medical supplies, close to a densely packed tent encampment.

Two other warehouses storing medi-



Palestinians inspect the site of an overnight Israeli strike on a medicine warehouse, according to medics, next to tents sheltering displaced Palestinians, in Deir Al-Balah, in the central Gaza Strip, yesterday. (Reuters)

cine and the hospital’s outpatient clinic were damaged in the strike, the Palestinian Health Ministry said. There were no immediate reports of any injuries.

The hospital said the warehouses had stored essential medical supplies used to treat kidney failure patients undergoing dialysis, along with other materials

like gauze used in wound care and routine treatment.

“The Israeli occupation has committed a heinous crime,” Khalil al-Daqran, a doctor at the hospital, said of the strike.

“In the middle of the night, (the military) targeted a warehouse containing medical supplies for the hospital, and the

occupation completely destroyed it,” he told Reuters.

Witnesses said the military had issued an evacuation warning for the area before carrying out the Deir Al-Balah strike.

Hospitals and other civilian sites are protected under international humanitarian law, although that protection can be

lost if they are used for military purposes. Israel’s military says Hamas and other armed groups operate from within civilian areas and facilities, including hospitals.

Fatima Sharab, 34, a displaced Palestinian mother of two living in a tent near the warehouses, said the strike destroyed tents housing 60 to 70 people who had been sheltering there.

Many people in need of medical care had been sheltering in the tents in order to be close to the hospital, Sharab said.

Israel has continued to carry out strikes on Gaza since agreeing last October to a U.S.-mediated ceasefire, killing 1,222 Palestinians in the past nine months. Palestinian health officials say many of those killed were women and children. Hamas rarely announces its casualties.

US President Donald Trump on Thursday said there had been a breakthrough in his plan to end the war, which both Israel and Hamas agreed to last year and which started with the ceasefire. Trump said that Hamas, which ruled Gaza for nearly two decades before carrying out the October 7, 2023, attack on Israel that triggered the Gaza war, had agreed to lay down its weapons.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is yet to comment publicly, while his National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir has called the agreement unacceptable and said that Israel must continue to carry out its policy of assassinating Hamas leaders.

Trump’s Board of Peace, established to implement his plan for ending the Gaza war, released a roadmap on Thursday outlining the final steps for carrying out the initiative. The document states that Israel will cease military operations as part of its commitment to Trump’s 20-point plan, which it signed last year.



Greek firefighters try to extinguish a wildfire in the area of Porto Germeno, some 70 km northwest of Athens in the region of Viotia, yesterday. (AFP)

# Firefighters in Greece ‘pushed to the limits’

AFP  
Porto Germeno, Greece

Hundreds of firefighters in Greece yesterday were being pushed to the limit to save a popular coastal resort and other areas as violent winds lashed the country, the civil protection minister said.

Evangelos Tournas said gale-force winds created “extremely difficult conditions resulting in many cases where aircraft either cannot draw water or cannot carry out drops due to extreme turbulence.” The sheer number of fires, combined with extreme weather conditions, “have pushed the (fire department) to its limits,” Tournas said in a televised address.

More than 400 firefighters were battling blazes in the area of Porto Germeno on the Gulf of Corinth, some 70km northwest of Athens, the fire department said.

Nearly 100 firefighters were fighting another blaze in Aigialia in the northern Peloponnese.

But priceless hours were lost yesterday with the wind keeping dozens of water bombers from operating.

The fire department’s deputy spokesman Yiannis Artopios told state TV ERT that the wind was so strong that firefighters on the scene “couldn’t even open their vehicle doors.” Though the winds

were expected to ease later Saturday, the greater Athens area and nearby Voiotia and the island of Evia were under near maximum fire risk on Sunday, the civil protection ministry said.

Dimos Economou, who lives close to Porto Germeno in nearby Vilia and came to help, said many homes had burned.

“Many homes have burned. As far as I know, there have been no fatalities, but many houses have been destroyed,” he told AFP in Porto Germeno as the odour of smoke hung heavily in the air.

According to meteo.gr, the weather service of the National Observatory of Athens, winds up to 130 kilometres per hour were recorded yesterday.

“The fire was too strong, and the wind was too strong. There was nothing you could do, only watch the fire,” said Minas Tsotdanis, a farmer from the village of Aspra Chomata near Porto Germeno.

“My house burned completely. Around 15 houses were burned. We are waiting for the fire to finish, and then we will go down to see what happened,” he told AFP.

The fire broke out Friday near the neighbouring coastal village of Agios Vasileios. Residents initially ignored a civil protection call to evacuate, and some 300 people had to be rescued by sea.

Up to 150 homes in Porto Germeno are believed to have been

damaged by the fire, Dimitris Pagonis, a senior civil protection official from the nearby town of Mandra, told Skai TV.

Theodore Giannaros, a wild-fire meteorologist and senior researcher at the National Observatory of Athens, yesterday said the damage to the Porto Germeno area was “inconceivable.”

“The area that has been affected appears to exceed 4-5,000 hectares,” he said in a Facebook post.

Wildfires have flared in several parts of the country this week, including on the popular island of Crete, and three firefighters have so far lost their lives.

The fires in Crete have affected nearly 5,000 hectares on the island, according to meteo.gr. Another fire on the tourist island of Paros earlier this week burned nearly 1,000 hectares, it said.

Greece’s geography, with its hundreds of islands, complicates the rapid deployment of emergency responders. Hit hard by the climate crisis like the rest of the Mediterranean region, the country is plagued by wildfires every summer due to high temperatures, frequent heat waves and drought.

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis warned on Thursday that Greece — which had been relatively spared from heat waves and major fires earlier this summer, unlike France and Spain — was headed for “difficult days”

## Venezuelan lawmakers approve rental bill to help victims

AFP  
Caracas

Venezuelan lawmakers on Friday unanimously approved a housing law that makes it easier to rent properties, after last month’s devastating earthquakes left thousands of people destitute.

Over 23,800 people in the coastal state of La Guaira are homeless following the twin tremors on June 24, which killed over 5,500 people and caused hundreds of buildings to crumble.

The measure repeals anti-rental legislation passed by former leftist Chavista administrations. It aims “to ensure that people do not feel any kind of fear about renting out their homes,” National Assembly chief Jorge Rodriguez said.

“There are up to 200,000 homes in Venezuela that are not being rented” due to “very regressive” restrictions, he told a press conference.

“Thousands of families were left without a decent home, and this law directly responds to that need,” said lawmaker America Perez.

Interim leader Delcy Rodriguez, the parliamentary leader’s sister, must now enact the bill.

She has pledged to provide 4,000 homes to quake victims by the end of the year, with the government hoping that number to reach over 10,000 in 2027.

The 7.2 and 7.5 magnitude quakes destroyed 190 buildings and damaged 856 more, according to official figures.

Venezuelan authorities began demolishing buildings in La Guaira on Thursday, with soldiers cordoning off areas before blasting the structures apart with dynamite.

Rescue workers on Friday resumed their search for victims under the rubble, following the previous day’s demolitions.

The government has not disclosed how many people are missing after the disaster, but expert projections put the figure at up to 10,000.

Delcy Rodriguez has been ruling under intense pressure from Washington after US forces abducted her predecessor Nicolas Maduro in January.



Acting US Attorney General Todd Blanche. (Reuters/File Photo)

## Blanche faces trivial vote after scrapping of anti-weaponisation fund

The US Senate Judiciary Committee has scheduled a meeting on Tuesday to consider Todd Blanche’s nomination for attorney general, after President Donald Trump said his \$1.8bn “anti-weaponisation” fund was dead despite his support for it.

Blanche’s nomination had been stalled by a clash with fellow Republicans, who withheld support while seeking written assurances that the Justice Department would not establish the fund, which critics said could benefit Trump’s allies.

“It is dead, but I wish it weren’t. I think people were horribly treated, horribly abused,” Trump said during a cabinet meeting on Friday, one day after threatening to withdraw the nomination until next year after two key opposing senators leave office.

“I’d like to see them compensated for the pain.” He urged Republican senators to confirm Blanche and warned that they “will never get anybody like him.” Trump also took aim at Senator John Cornyn for blocking the nomination, saying the Texas Republican supported Blanche until Trump endorsed Cornyn’s primary challenger.

“I’d be upset also,” Trump said. “I fully understand it. He shouldn’t be that way. I shouldn’t be that way.” Critics have derided it as a slush fund that would reward Trump supporters with taxpayer money. Blanche has previously told senators that the fund was dead, but has so far not agreed to put that in writing.

Earlier on Friday, Trump defended Blanche in a social media post, calling for his confirmation and referring to the fund in the present tense. Tillis said Trump’s post indicated he thought it was operational.

“The president made it clear today that the so-called Anti-Weaponisation Fund is still alive, which is exactly why we are attempting to formally end it,” Tillis said in a post on X.

His office did not immediately respond to a request for comment about Trump’s statement that the fund was dead. Tillis said he would keep working to break the impasse and blamed “an incompetent personal advisor” to Trump for standing in the way of a settlement.

Cornyn and Tillis, whose Senate terms end in early January, were closer to an agreement after meeting with Blanche late Thursday afternoon, according to a person familiar with the matter who spoke on the condition of anonymity. Blanche, Trump’s former personal lawyer who was named acting attorney general in April, has also met with Republican Senator John Curtis.

Despite the standoff, Blanche may not need Senate confirmation to effectively serve out Trump’s term, given that acting officials can serve as long as their nomination is pending in the Senate and their nomination is not formally rejected or withdrawn.

The “anti-weaponisation” fund was crafted as part of a legal settlement between Trump and the Justice Department to resolve his \$10bn lawsuit against the Internal Revenue Service over allegedly mishandling his tax records, but it was put on hold amid opposition from congressional Republicans.

The fund could benefit Trump allies who have said they were unfairly targeted by the federal government for their involvement in the January 6, 2021, attack on the US Capitol after Trump lost his re-election bid in 2020.

## Trump disputes his own Justice Department’s Reflecting Pool findings

United States’ President Donald Trump posted yesterday that he disagrees with his own Justice Department’s findings that a flawed installation, not vandalism, caused the lining of the newly renovated Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool in Washington, DC, to peel.

“I disagree 100% with Jeanine Pirro, the US Attorney for the District of Columbia, on the Reflecting Pool,” Trump wrote in a post on his Truth Social platform. “I don’t know what she was thinking? To me, it was a pure case of VANDALISM.”

In a court filing on Friday, Pirro and Assistant US Attorney Michael Spence asked a judge to drop the Trump administration’s case against David Hearn, 67, a former Olympian it had accused of vandalising the pool, which has become a flashpoint over Trump’s efforts to remake Washington.

The renovated pool had quickly developed blooms of algae that tinted the water green, while pieces of the blue lining had peeled off.

Trump, facing criticism over the \$14.7mn renovation, had repeatedly blamed the problems on vandals he alleged had intentionally sabotaged the project.

In their filing on Friday, federal prosecutors said the latest documents they received from the Department of the Interior “indicated a rushed and flawed installation process, with repeated failures of the lining during the installation process, and extensive peeling of the lining throughout the Reflecting Pool.” Trump suggested that prosecutors overstated the effects of a bad installation.

“There may have been some contractor difficulty, but the



Donald Trump gives thumbs-up as he walks to board Marine One following his arrival aboard Air Force One at Morristown Municipal Airport in New Jersey. (Reuters)

major damage was caused by VANDALS!” he wrote yesterday.

In a subsequent social media post, Trump included a previously released US Park Police video that he claimed showed vandals at the site while workers were in the pool removing algae.

“Look for yourselves at the VANDALISM that took place at The Reflecting Pool,” he wrote, although it is not clear in the clip whether people are merely reaching into the water to remove pieces that were already peeling.

Pirro’s office did not immediately respond to a request for comment. (Reuters)

## US mulls permanent visa bond program for 50 nations

Reuters  
Washington

The US State Department will make permanent a visa bond program that could require applicants from 50 countries, mostly from Africa, to post bonds of up to \$20,000 when seeking US visas, according to a federal notice posted online on Friday.

The Federal Register notice applies to B1 and B2 visas, which are issued for business and tourism travel.

“Consular officers may require

covered nonimmigrant visa applicants to post a bond of up to \$20,000 as a condition of visa issuance, as determined by the consular officers,” the notice said.

“The 2025 visa bond pilot, which provided a framework for the Department of State, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of the Treasury to assess the feasibility of administering a visa bond program, has provided sufficient data to suggest that a visa bond program is an effective tool for enforcing compliance among bonded visa holders.” In the pilot program, consular offi-

ers could require bonds of \$5,000, \$10,000 or up to \$15,000. The final rule eliminates the \$5,000 option and raises the maximum bond to \$20,000.

The final rule goes into effect on August 3 when it is scheduled for publication in the Federal Register. In the list of 50 countries for whose citizens this program applies, 30 are from Africa.

US officials say the policy is intended to reduce visa overstays. Immigration advocates argue it will deter legitimate travel to the US.

Rights advocates say President

Donald Trump’s aggressive immigration crackdown violates free speech and due process, while creating an unsafe environment for ethnic minorities and encouraging racial profiling. Trump has defended the measures as necessary to bolster national security.

While Trump says he wants to curb illegal immigration, his administration has made legal immigration more difficult, for example, by imposing new and expensive fees for applicants of certain visas and by enforcing social media vetting for applicants and immigrants already in the country.

## Shadows stretching on the sand



In an aerial view, people play volleyball on the beach in Huntington Beach, California. An extreme heat warning is in effect for parts of Southern California with many flocking to beaches to escape the heat. Hurricane Genevieve is also generating powerful surf and hazardous rip currents, while delivering potential tidal flooding to parts of the Southern California coastline. (AFP)

# Bombing in Colombia before presidential inauguration

AFP  
Cúcuta, Colombia

At least 11 people were injured yesterday when a truck packed with explosives detonated next to a Colombian police station near the border with Venezuela, six days before President-elect Abelerardo de la Espriella's inauguration.

AFP reporters saw the vehicle in flames, damaged building facades and police, soldiers and residents gathering around the scene of the attack in the northern city of Cucuta before local security officials confirmed the number of injured. "At this time, we have eight police officers and three civilians who have been injured," George Quintero, security secretary for the department of Norte de Santander where the attack occurred, told reporters.

"This was an atrocious, violent act... and what happened is regrettable." De la Espriella condemned the bombing "in the strongest terms," adding that "terrorism will not intimidate Colombia." Authorities are offering a reward equivalent to more than \$32,000 for information leading to the capture of those responsible.

The right-wing De la Espriella will take office on August 7 in the city of Cali, succeeding Gustavo Petro, the first leftist president in the country's history.

With the support of US President Donald Trump's government, the millionaire lawyer promised to intensify the fight against guerrillas and other drug trafficking organisations fueling the country's worst wave of violence in a decade.

Colombia is the world's largest producer of cocaine.

To achieve his objectives, De la



Damaged produce and the wreckage of a truck that was packed with explosives and detonated, lie next to a police station, in Cucuta, yesterday. (Reuters)

Espriella plans to forge a military alliance with the US and Israel.

Petro is spending his last days in office on a visit to Cuba and has so far not commented on the attack.

The Colombian president traveled Friday to Havana to speak with his counterpart Miguel Diaz-Canel about the United States' "policy of strangulation" against the island, as well as the Trump administration's attacks on vessels in the Caribbean allegedly involved in drug trafficking.

The new government will mark a political shift in Colombia following four years in which the left-wing administration unsuccessfully attempted to negotiate peace with armed groups and

promoted a paradigm shift in the fight against drug trafficking — contrary to Trump's policies.

Presidential inaugurations are traditionally held at the Congress building in Bogota, but the president-elect requested that the ceremony be moved to Cali, in the country's southwest, a region plagued by clashes between drug trafficking gangs and guerrillas.

De la Espriella's inauguration will involve one of the largest security deployments planned for the ceremony, with around 11,000 soldiers and police officers carrying out operations on land, at sea and in the air. The president-elect had initially sought to be sworn in at a military garrison in the conflict-hit department of

Cauca, but Petro did not authorize the plan.

Guerrilla groups have issued warnings to De la Espriella, who plans to end the peace negotiations Petro had been conducting with various armed organisations.

The election campaign was marked by political violence and an escalation of the armed conflict involving bombs, explosive-laden drones and attacks against security forces.

In 2025, right-wing presidential hopeful and senator Miguel Uribe Turbay was shot at an event in Bogota and later died. De la Espriella has repeatedly alleged the existence of a plot to assassinate him.



A view of a deforested area in the middle of the Yari plains, in Caqueta, Colombia. (Reuters/File Photo)

## Colombia's 2025 forest loss hits two-decade low, government says

Reuters  
Bogota

Colombia recorded its lowest deforestation levels in two decades between 2022 and 2025, with forest loss in 2025 falling to 119,483 hectares (295,249 acres), the Environment Ministry and the country's Institute of Hydrology, Meteorology and Environmental Studies said on Friday.

The 2025 figure represents a 31% reduction from the 2021 baseline of 174,000 hectares (429,963 acres), the government said, exceeding its annual 20% reduction target for the fourth consecutive year.

Nonetheless, deforestation figures in 2025 exceeded those of 2024, when 113,608 hectares (280,731 acres) of land were razed.

In the country's Amazon region, deforestation affected 77,805 hectares (192,260 acres) last year, nearly unchanged from 77,124 hectares (190,578 acres) in 2024.

The other areas with the highest levels of deforestation in 2025 were Cartagena del Chaira in the state of Caqueta with 16,983 hectares (41,966 acres), Mapiripan in Meta state with 6,782 hectares (16,759 acres), San Vicente del Ca-

**The government report found that the main drivers of deforestation are land grabbing for cattle ranching and unplanned infrastructure, not illicit crops**

guan in Caqueta with 5,976 hectares (14,767 acres), and Calamar in the state of Guaviare with 5,755 hectares (14,220 acres), according to government figures.

Deforestation within Colombia's national parks system dropped 19% to 9,388 hectares (23,198 acres), from the 11,544 hectares (28,525 acres) registered in 2024.

The government report found that the main drivers of deforestation are land grabbing for cattle ranching and unplanned infrastructure, not illicit crops.

The government of leftist President Gustavo Petro assumed power in 2022 with a green agenda centered around reducing deforestation, renewable energy, and taking a step away from fossil fuels, though he has struggled to deliver on many of those goals.

## Ex-president of Peru Humala walks free after his sentence is quashed

Peru's former president Ollanta Humala on Friday was released from prison after his 15-year sentence for money laundering, linked to a massive graft scandal involving Brazilian construction group Odebrecht, was overturned.

Humala, a former army officer who led the country from 2011 to 2016, left the prison in Lima in a vehicle at about 7:40 pm, under police escort.

A crowd of supporters was on hand to see his release.

Humala, 64, was the first Peruvian ex-leader to face trial in the Odebrecht corruption scandal, which has also tainted three other former presidents — Alejandro Toledo, Martin Vizcarra and Pedro Castillo.

All four were serving their sentences in a prison reserved especially for them, on a police base. Humala and his wife were convicted last year for receiving illegal contributions from Odebrecht and the Venezuelan government in two presidential campaigns.

"We have been victims of political and judicial persecution," Humala told reporters outside the small prison facility.

His wife Nadine Heredia sought asylum in Brazil after her conviction, and remains there.

Upon arriving at his home,

where he said his mother-in-law and a child were waiting for him, Humala said he had "never received campaign contributions from either Venezuela or Brazil." "But they dragged us into a trial; they subjected us to a criminal proceeding because of our ideology," he said.

Peru's Constitutional Court declared Humala's sentence null and void, in a ruling published Thursday. A criminal court then ordered his release.

The country's new Foreign Minister Carlos Espa called the ruling "fair." "I am very pleased" with the court's decision, Espa — who is in the government of right-wing President Keiko Fujimori, a political rival of the leftist Humala — had said earlier.

In 2016, Odebrecht agreed to pay \$3.5bn in penalties after having spent \$788 mn in bribes to foreign leaders and government officials in order to win infrastructure projects in Latin America. Odebrecht admitted to having paid at least \$29mn in bribes to Peruvian officials between 2005 and 2014. The company is considered responsible for one of the biggest foreign bribery schemes in history.

Fujimori also faced legal proceedings in connection with campaign contributions from Odebrecht and others. (AFP)

## Petro urges Trump for Cuba talks to avert US invasion

AFP  
Havana

Outgoing Colombian President Gustavo Petro, visiting Havana, called for efforts to prevent a US invasion of Cuba and urged President Donald Trump to engage in dialogue, according to remarks published Saturday by Cuban media.

Trump, who has made no secret of his desire for regime change in Cuba, has been quoted as saying the communist island located 150 kilometers off Florida's coast represents an "extraordinary threat" to US national security and has even said Washington could be "taking Cuba."

"I came to call on humanity to show solidarity with Cuba, so that there is no invasion here or missile strike, and to propose dialogue as an alternative, including to the current US government, to (Secretary of State Marco) Rubio and Trump," said Petro.

The Colombian leader arrived in Cuba on Friday for an official visit before his term ends next week.

The Cubadebate news website said Petro, the first leftist president in Colombia's history, spoke to Cuban media late Friday after he was welcomed with military honors by his counterpart Miguel Diaz-Canel at the Palace of the Revolution, where the two held talks.

"It would be good if, amid the



President Gustavo Petro gestures as he walks alongside Cuban Deputy Foreign Minister Josefina Vidal upon his arrival at Jose Marti International Airport in Havana, on Friday. (Reuters)

danger looming over Cuba, it could be transformed from a danger into a setting for that dialogue," added Petro, a close ally of Havana and a critic of Trump's maximum-pressure policy towards the island.

"Now is the time for dialogue," stressed Petro, who concludes his visit on Saturday.

Relations between Havana and the United States have deteriorated since January, following Washington's imposition of an effective

oil blockade and other sanctions which have worsened economic conditions, led to major shortages and contributed to widespread power outages.

Despite this, representatives of the two countries have held talks, but the Cuban government said there had been no progress.

Petro's successor, far-right politician Abelerardo de la Espriella, who will take office on August 7, announced last Sunday

## US bars imports from 43 Chinese companies over Uyghur rights abuses

Reuters  
Washington/Beijing

The US on Friday banned imports from 43 more Chinese companies over alleged rights abuses of Uyghur and other minority groups, targeting firms in supply chains from electronics to food and metals, a government notice showed.

The companies were added to the Uyghur Forced Labour Prevention Act Entity List, which creates a presumption that goods made wholly or partly by listed entities are made with forced labour and cannot enter the US unless importers can prove otherwise.

Beijing has regularly dismissed accusations of forced labour and other abuses against Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities in the region of Xinjiang.

The notice published by the US

Department of Homeland Security marks the first time companies have been added to the list under the Trump administration. It brings the number of mentioned entities to 187 from 144 — the largest single expansion since the act creating the list was signed into law in 2021.

China's Commerce Ministry yesterday condemned the US action as an unfounded unilateral sanction, which it said had come just a day after trade officials from both countries had what it described as a constructive video call.

China would take "necessary measures" to protect its companies, the ministry added without going into more detail. Four companies were listed over what the US government said was their work with Xinjiang authorities to recruit, transfer or receive Uyghurs and other persecuted groups.

The Federal Register notice said the other 41 were added because they source materials from Xinjiang or from entities linked to government labour programs there.

"Today's action by the Trump administration strengthens America's economy against products made with slave labour," Representative John Moolenaar, chairman of the House Select Committee on China, said in a statement.

China's embassy in Washington called such allegations "a lie" on Friday and said Chinese law prohibits forced labour and that workers in Xinjiang are free to choose their occupations.

The listings include suppliers of materials used in electric-vehicle and energy-storage batteries.

Reuters contacted 10 of the newly listed companies for comment but none responded outside normal business hours.

Those included SDIC Xinjiang

Lithium Industry, which makes lithium carbonate, and its parent, SDIC Xinjiang Luobupo Potash, which were listed over their sourcing of lithium and potassium from brine at Xinjiang's Lop Nur Salt Lake. Xinjiang Tianhongji Technology, which makes materials for lithium- and sodium-ion batteries, was also added. The US notice said it sources petroleum coke, anthracite and asphalt from Xinjiang to make battery materials.

Hunan Aihua Group, a Chinese maker of aluminum electrolytic capacitors used in consumer electronics, industrial equipment, vehicles and renewable-energy systems, was listed because the US government said it sources materials including chemical foil from a production base in Xinjiang.

Aihua sells capacitors under the AiSHi brand and has a North American sales office in Glen Allen, Virginia, according to its web-

site. Its products are also sold by US electronics distributor DigiKey.

Chacha Food, a snack-food producer, was also added. The US notice said Chacha exports products including nuts and roasted seeds to nearly 50 countries and regions and sources agricultural products from Xinjiang.

Chacha Food has previously identified the US as its largest overseas market. In a 2019 report, state-owned China Daily said the company had launched products in Walmart and Costco stores, mainly in New York and Los Angeles. Reuters could not immediately establish whether those retail arrangements remain in place.

The companies that Reuters contacted for comment did not immediately respond on their social media accounts to the US listing or the details in it.

Among the largest was TBEA Co, which makes transformers and

other transmission equipment, aluminum products and high-purity polysilicon, a material used in solar panels.

The US notice said TBEA sources aluminum and aluminum-alloy products from Xinjiang. It also listed TBEA subsidiary Xinjiang Tianchi Energy, saying the unit sources coal from the region.

The action also covers Tianshan Aluminum Group and seven affiliates. Tianshan says it has 1.4 mn tons of annual electrolytic aluminum capacity and a 2.5 million-ton alumina production line.

Shandong Gold Mining, which has assets or projects in China, Argentina, Ghana and Namibia, was also listed along with units including Shandong Gold Smelting.

The US notice said the group sources gold from Xinjiang, and one of its subsidiaries owns and operates the region's largest single gold mine.



# Search ended at mall wrecked by Japan quake blast

**Animal hospital opens doors to Japan quake survivors and their pets**

AFP, Reuters  
Tokyo/Kumamoto

Japanese officials said yesterday they had ended rescue operations at a shopping mall devastated by an explosion following a powerful earthquake that killed at least 36 people.

A total of 12 people were pulled from the site, including seven who were confirmed dead, according to the disaster management office of the Kumamoto region, hit by the 7.1-magnitude jolt on Tuesday.

“We conducted a thorough search over the past two days in collaboration with the fire service, the Self-Defence Forces, and

other regional police units,” to ensure no one remained missing, a police official told a disaster management meeting yesterday. “We found no such individual,” he added.

A spokesperson for Aeon, operators of the mall, told AFP that the seven people who died were employees of tenant stores.

On Friday, rescue operations were terminated at a paper factory where a smokestack collapsed.

A total of nine bodies were recovered, and two survivors were extracted.

The quake caused widespread damage in the sweltering southwestern region, flattening homes, damaging bridges, triggering fires and leaving many without electricity and water.

More than 9,000 people, many of them elderly, were still at shelters as of yesterday.

Power cuts were mostly re-

solved, but 59,000 households still had no water.

When the powerful earthquake jolted southern Japan this week, rattling homes and knocking out water and electricity, Tomoko Takaoka bundled up her beloved fluffy dogs and went in search of a safe place to stay.

Unable to reach her parents, Takaoka, a 31-year-old factory worker, turned to a nearby evacuation centre only to discover that her chihuahua, ‘Ku,’ and chihuahua-poodle mix, ‘Sheri,’ were not welcome.

Faced with the choice of sheltering without them or staying together, she chose the latter, spending the first sweltering night crammed into her car with her canine family.

Eventually, social media posts led her to Ryunosuke Animal Hospital in downtown Kumamoto, which had converted classrooms

in its veterinary nurse training school into temporary housing for evacuees, with separate rooms for owners of cats and dogs.

“During disasters it’s only natural for dogs and cats to stay together with their families. But people who don’t own pets don’t necessarily want to be with them,” said hospital director Ryunosuke Tokuda.

“They worry about fleas, odours, allergies, and noise. Pets are often viewed negatively, which is why many evacuation shelters often don’t allow people and pets to stay together,” he added.

The hospital learned that less than a week after the devastating Kumamoto earthquake in 2016. Since then, it has made a point of opening its doors to evacuees with pets whenever disaster strikes.

Its doors immediately opened again after Tuesday’s quake,



A man looks at a temporary shelter as a damaged home is seen in the background in Hikawa, Kumamoto Prefecture, yesterday. (AFP)

which has claimed at least 36 lives and left thousands without power and running water, although services are slowly being restored.

Clutching Ku and Sheri inside a tent set up at the hospital, Takaoka was among 26 evacuees and their pets sheltering there when Reuters visited earlier this week.

Her dogs occasionally get ex-

cited when they encounter new “friends” in the shelter’s designated dog room, Takaoka said, but she does her best to calm them. She hopes she can return home soon, but more than anything, she’s just happy they are together.

“They’re just like family to me. I’d like to stay with them as much as possible,” she said.

# China: Conducted military, coast guard drills near disputed shoal

AFP  
Beijing

China said it conducted military and coast guard drills yesterday near the Scarborough Shoal, a contested reef in the South China Sea, in a show of force after recent clashes with the Philippines in the disputed waters.

The Philippines and China contest each other’s sovereignty over the coral shoal, which is rich in fishing resources and controlled by Beijing.

China conducted “a joint naval-air training exercise” near the reef yesterday, a spokesperson from the army’s Southern Theater Command said.

“This is a necessary action taken in light of the current situation in the South China Sea and in response to the acts of certain countries within the region that have undermined regional peace and stability,” the spokesperson said.

Chinese state broadcaster CCTV aired footage of two warships patrolling the seas and a plane taking off from an airport to the soundtrack of patriotic pop music.

The Chinese coast guard also said on Saturday it had conducted “drills” near the reef during the day, focusing on operations



A Chinese Coast Guard ship (right) allegedly blocks Philippine Coast Guard patrol ship Malabrigo, near Second Thomas Shoal in the disputed South China sea. (AFP/File photo)

that included “search and seizure (VBSS), interdiction of forced entry, and forced towing”.

It said it would “resolutely safeguard China’s territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests”.

Beijing claims sovereignty over almost the entire South China Sea, a vital global trade route, despite an international ruling that found its claims have no legal basis.

Multiple nations in the region, including the Philippines, have territorial claims that overlap with China’s, and altercations

occur regularly in the heavily patrolled waterway.

China said it took “necessary measures” last week after it deployed a water cannon at a Philippine vessel, accusing Manila of “infringing and provocative actions” and condemned the presence of a television crew on board the boat.

Manila countered by saying it had been seeking to resupply fishermen and accused a Chinese vessel of a “reckless” manoeuvre.

China also released new rules on Saturday for managing what it

branded a nature reserve around the Scarborough Shoal last year, according to state news agency Xinhua.

“Without authorisation, fishing, mining, the collection of corals, coral reefs, giant clams, and other activities that damage rare marine species and the natural ecosystem are prohibited,” it said.

The rules were published a day after the Philippines said it would submit its official nautical chart of Scarborough Shoal and its surrounding waters to the United Nations this week.

## ‘Massive Attack’ banned from Singapore over Palestinian flag display

British trip-hop band Massive Attack has been barred from performing in Singapore after an investigation found two members unfurled a Palestinian flag during a concert, police said.

Two band members who held the flag on stage during a concert on Wednesday were also banned from re-entering Singapore and issued with warnings, police said in a statement late Friday, without naming the pair.

Singapore, known for its tough laws on public speech and assembly, bans the open display of all foreign flags, national emblems or banners without a permit.

A video circulating online showed two Massive Attack members on stage unfurling a Palestinian flag to loud, prolonged cheers from the audience, prompting the police probe.

After concluding their investigation and in consultation with state prosecutors, police said they “administered stern warnings to both men” and barred them from coming back to the city-state.

The media regulator is also probing possible breaches of licensing conditions.

“Notwithstanding the

event organiser’s prior acknowledgement of the licence conditions, during the performance, two band members held a foreign flag on stage, and one of them also shouted ‘Free Palestine,’ police said.

The media regulator “will also not grant any future application for performances by the band in Singapore in view of the entry ban”, police said.

The concert promoter has not responded to an AFP request for comment.

The band is known for its criticism of Israel’s military actions in Gaza and has used its popularity to support the Palestinian cause.

In April, frontman Robert Del Naja was among more than 200 people arrested at a protest in London’s Trafalgar Square in support of Palestine Action, an activist group banned by British authorities.

Affluent Singapore has established itself as a top concert hub for Southeast Asia, boasting of multi-night performances by Taylor Swift, Coldplay, Ed Sheeran and Bruno Mars.

The police urged the public, including foreigners, “to refrain from importing foreign politics as this can undermine our social cohesion and the rule of law”. (AFP)

## Nato fuel plan shows alliance preparing for war: North Korea

North Korea accused Nato yesterday of preparing for war by expanding military fuel infrastructure across Europe, saying the alliance’s plans show it is becoming a more aggressive military bloc.

In a commentary carried by state media KCNA, North Korea criticised Nato’s Fuel Supply Chain Capability Programme Plan, which it said would link a roughly 10,000km (6,200-mile) fuel network in western Europe with newer member states in eastern and northern Europe.

The KCNA commentary offered no evidence for its claims that the project was designed to support possible conflicts beyond Europe.

Nato has said it is strengthening deterrence and defence following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022. North Korea has denounced military co-operation between the United States, Republic of Korea and other countries, including Nato members. (Reuters)

# Malaysian pilot risks death penalty for smuggling in Indonesia

AFP  
Jakarta

A Malaysian pilot who tested positive for drugs after flying a passenger plane to Indonesia risks the death penalty for allegedly smuggling more than 70,000 ecstasy tablets in his suitcase, officials said on Friday.

The 39-year-old pilot, identified only by his initials, MSO, was arrested on Wednesday at Jakarta’s Soekarno-Hatta International Airport shortly after arriving from Kuala Lumpur.

The airport customs office did not say which carrier the pilot worked for, but the flight number indicated it was a Malaysia Airlines plane.

“The results of his urine test came back positive for drugs. So, at the time of the flight, he was under the influence,” Hengky Tomuan Parlindungan Aritonang, an official at the airport customs office, told reporters in the Indonesian capital.

Customs officials found 14 bags of ecstasy — more than 70,000 pills — in the pilot’s suitcase, and four grams of meth, thought to be for personal use, in his hand luggage.

Hengky said the pilot likely did not expect to be checked in the special customs lane for pilots and crew, “but the monitoring we carry out is the same” for everyone.

In a statement to investigators, the man said this was the third time he had attempted to smuggle drugs, the second to Indonesia and once in Malaysia.

Awaludin Amin, of the police’s drug crimes unit, said investigators suspected the pilot to be part of an international syndicate, and he has been charged with smuggling.

Under Indonesian law, he risks the death penalty or life imprisonment.

Indonesia has some of the world’s toughest anti-drug laws, including the death penalty for traffickers, but has maintained a moratorium on executions for several years.

The Malaysian embassy in Jakarta said in a statement on Friday that it had received a notice of arrest for a Malaysian national detained at the airport, adding that it “respects” the Indonesian legal process.

The embassy was working with Indonesian authorities to provide consular access to the Malaysian citizen, it said.

The pilot told investigators he had been promised some 50,000 Malaysian ringgit



Indonesian Customs officials prepare to display the uniform of a Malaysian pilot and drugs he smuggled as evidence before a press conference at Soekarno-Hatta International Airport in Tangerang, near Jakarta, on Friday. (AFP)

(just over \$12,000) to deliver the narcotics in Jakarta.

Malaysia Airlines, in a statement on Friday, said it took the allegations seriously and had launched an internal review.

“Malaysia Airlines will extend its full co-operation to the relevant authorities in accordance with all applicable laws and regu-

lations,” it said, declining further comment.

There are dozens of foreign traffickers on death row in Indonesia, hundreds altogether.

The southeast Asian country last carried out the death sentence for drug offences in 2016, when one Indonesian and three Nigerians were executed by firing squad.

# Myanmar president criticises Asean, sets out government agenda

Nearly four months after taking office, Myanmar’s junta chief turned president Min Aung Hlaing on Friday criticised the regional Asean bloc’s peace plan and outlined his government’s plans for the war-torn southeast Asian country. Myanmar was plunged into turmoil in February 2021 when the military ousted an elected government led by Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, sparking protests that expanded into a protracted civil war, killing some 100,000 people and displacing millions. At the turn of this year, the military engineered a widely criticised election

won by an army-backed party that allowed Min Aung Hlaing to transition into a civilian role. Following are some key points from his speech to parliament:

Dismissing Asean’s peace plan — known as the “Five Point Consensus” — Min Aung Hlaing said the 11-member bloc has discriminated against Myanmar.

“We have been patient. We will respond to non-constructive actions on a case-by-case basis,” he said, without referring to any specific member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

His administration will hold by-elections in 2027 in 172 constitu-



Min Aung Hlaing shows his inked finger after voting at a polling station during general election. (AFP/File photo)

encies unable to vote during the December-January polls because of the ongoing unrest.

The government will enhance the capacity of the military and police, while continuing to implement a conscription law, he said.

His administration has invited rebel groups for talks without preconditions and, so far, has met with 13 ethnic armed organisations (EAOs).

The government is working to stop money laundering and arms smuggling by EAOs as well as cracking down on drug trafficking and online scam centres, Min Aung Hlaing said.

The government is prioritising the 1,400km (870-mile) India-Myanmar-Thailand tri-lan-

eral highway project, as well as the 410km (254-mile) Mandalay-Muse railway project to reach the border with China.

“The goal is to export goods to international markets in a short time at low cost,” Min Aung Hlaing said.

The government is currently working on 10 power generation projects, including the controversial Myitsone dam, and efforts are also underway to build a nuclear power plant.

His government will allocate 10% of the national budget for the education sector in the next fiscal year and up to 15% in the 2028-2029 fiscal year.

The government is focusing on the tourism and agriculture sectors, and aims to boost domestic cotton production via loans and technical assistance for farmers, he said.

Large numbers of young people, aged between 18 and 34, have been leaving the country, impacting economic development, he said.

The military’s conscription law is a major factor for this exodus, Reuters has previously reported.

“I will take two years to build momentum for constructing a new nation,” he said. “I will also take three years to execute this build-up at full speed.” (Reuters)

# Indian PM says punishing student protesters will not resolve situation

Reuters, AFP  
Mumbai/New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said he wanted to forgive students who hurled expletives at him during protests last month, saying that punishing them and forcing them to appear repeatedly in court would not help resolve the situation.

The biggest political crisis of Modi's third term peaked in July after the leak of national exam papers forced a retest for 2mn students, fuelling anger over the lack of opportunities for young Indians.

Authorities filed cases against hundreds of demonstrators after some clashed with security forces and shouted abusive slogans at the prime minister.

Some protesters featured in widely circulated videos shout-

ing insults at the prime minister have since faced online abuse from Modi supporters as well as police complaints, according to local media reports.

Police have also asked social media platforms, including Meta and X, to take down what they described as abusive and manipulated content targeting the premier.

"The country and the world witnessed what happened at Jantar Mantar. Some mischievous youngsters hurled vile abuses," Modi, 75, said in a video posted on Instagram late Friday.

"Words were used that do not belong to civilised society — directed not just at me, but even at my late mother... I want to forgive them."

Modi also said "mistakes made in youth" should be corrected through guidance rather than legal action, referring to the police cases.

The protests that began last



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

month were initially sparked by anger over examination paper leaks.

culminating in the resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan.

Since the protests began, Modi has increasingly used Instagram — the platform on which the CJP built much of its support — to communicate directly with youngsters.

"These are misled children. Showing them the right path is our duty. Punishing them, making them run around courts, or tormenting them in society will not change the situation," Modi said in a video posted on social media late on Friday.

"I want to forgive them. I hope society also accepts this stance of mine."

Tensions erupted between protesters and security forces in several parts of the country during the demonstrations, including in New Delhi, where people attempting

to march on parliament were met with tear gas and baton charges.

The self-named Cockroach Janta Party, which led the movement, said on Monday that "hundreds" of students had been arrested in various states, in violation of the government's commitment to dropping police cases filed against protesters.

Indian youth protesters ended weeks of demonstrations after the education minister quit and the government accepted all demands, which included reforms in the exam system and dropping police cases.

The protests have also prompted the Modi government to introduce a bill in parliament to amend the legislation governing public examinations, proposing longer prison terms and higher fines for those involved in exam paper leaks.

# 'One inmate killed in prison riot in Lanka'

AFP  
Colombo

At least one inmate was killed and another six were taken to hospital after a riot at a prison outside Sri Lanka's capital on Saturday, police said.

The violence at the Mahara Prison outside Colombo came about a month after clashes at another overcrowded jail killed 10 guards and 21 inmates in Sri Lanka's worst prison riot in years.

Additional police units were

sent to guard the high-security Mahara Prison after rioting broke out on Saturday morning, police said.

"We sent STF (Special Task Force) commandos to guard the perimeter, but we are not deployed inside," a police official said.

The official said seven wounded prisoners were removed from the jail but one had died.

An AFP photographer outside the prison saw two truckloads of soldiers also being deployed along with the police commandos.

Rioting at the same prison dur-

ing the Covid-19 pandemic in December 2020 killed 11 inmates and wounded 117, leading the government to release hundreds of inmates from overcrowded jails.

Authorities announced plans shortly after the Negombo riot in early July to convert disused state buildings into prisons.

That violence intensified scrutiny of Sri Lanka's chronically overcrowded jails, with official figures showing prisons were operating at roughly four times their intended capacity.

The additional prisons have yet to be commissioned.



Sri Lanka's Army personnel arrives after a riot at the Mahara Prison complex on the outskirts of Colombo yesterday. (AFP)

# Former security chiefs to appeal against death penalty over Sri Lanka bombings

Two top former Sri Lankan security officials sentenced to death for failing to prevent the deadly 2019 Easter bombings will appeal against their convictions, their lawyer said yesterday.

Former defence ministry secretary Hemasiri Fernando and former police inspector-general Pujith Jayasundara were sentenced to death by a three-judge bench of the Colombo High Court in a 2-1 decision on Friday.

The attacks, blamed on home-grown extremists, killed 279 people, including 45 foreigners, and wounded more than 500.

Lawyer Chaminda Athukorale said the pair would file an appeal in the Supreme Court within

two weeks. "The dissenting judgment explains why the two accused had no motive to kill and no links with the actual perpetrators of the bombings," Athukorale told AFP.

Sri Lanka has not carried out a death sentence since 1976, maintaining an unofficial moratorium on capital punishment.

There are 817 people on death row, according to government figures shared with parliament in February, with sentences usually commuted to life imprisonment.

Fernando, 76, and Jayasundara, 66, are being held in a maximum-security prison in the capital.

They were found guilty at the special fast-track court on Friday of failing in their duties to stop

the deadly attacks on April 21, 2019, that targeted three churches and three hotels.

The two men were discharged by another High Court ruling in February 2022 that found there was no evidence to try them for murder or for aiding and abetting the crime.

However, the state appealed against that decision and the Supreme Court ordered the retrial that resulted in Friday's verdict and sentencing.

The court was told during the proceedings that an Indian intelligence agency had alerted Sri Lanka on April 4, 2019, to a possible suicide attack by Islamist extremists but authorities failed to act. (AFP)

# Bev Craig elected mayor of Greater Manchester, succeeding Burnham

AFP  
London

Britain's ruling Labour Party comfortably retained the mayoralty of northern Greater Manchester on Friday, following an election triggered by new Prime Minister Andy Burnham's return to parliament.

Bev Craig, currently the leader of Manchester City Council, was elected in a second round of counting after winning 47.15% of the votes in the first round, just shy of the 50% needed to win outright.

The anti-immigration Reform UK party, which has been riding high in national polls, came in second place with 21%.

In the second round, Labour gained over 58,000 more votes

when second preferences of eliminated candidates were taken into account, with Reform picking up 45,250 more votes, according to results published on the mayoral website.

Craig ended up with 309,525 first or second preference votes compared to 157,178 for Reform's Sian Astley.

More than 2mn people were eligible to vote in Thursday's poll. Turnout was just under 25%, according to the published results.

Burnham first won the post in 2017 and was re-elected twice, most recently in 2024 with 63% of the vote.

His staunch defence of the region earned him the nickname "King of the North".

"You are the right person to lead this great city region forward into

its best decade ever," Burnham said Saturday at a victory event in Manchester.

Burnham announced in May that he would fight a by-election in the Makerfield constituency in order to try to return to parliament.

He won the seat in June, paving the way for him to return to Westminster and successfully challenge former prime minister Keir Starmer for the leadership of the party and country.

His two-week-old government announced earlier Friday plans to allow mayors to keep a share of taxes collected in their area to empower their regions.

The initiative is part of Burnham's drive to shift power out of the highly centralised country's London seat of government.

# Singapore's govt acquires founding father's home

AFP  
Singapore

Singapore's founding father's home is now in possession of the government, officials said on Friday, ending a close to decade-long family dispute over the property.

The acquisition marks a significant conclusion to the bitter rivalry that has gripped the city-state since Lee Kuan Yew's death in 2015.

Two years after Lee's death, his children publicly clashed over whether the eight bedroom, two-storey bungalow in the heart of Singapore's shopping district should be preserved or torn down.

In a joint statement the Singapore Land Authority and the National Heritage Board said Friday that the government "took possession of the site... to preserve it in keeping with its historic significance and national importance".

The heritage board "will undertake a detailed study of the site and the options for how it can be developed into a public space in a manner that respects Mr Lee Kuan Yew's wishes for privacy," they added.

Lee, who was credited with transforming the Southeast Asian island into a wealthy city-state in just a little over 30 years, started living at the property in the mid-1940s until his death.

It has been the site of significant events in the 1950s marking Singapore's transition from a British colony to an independent nation and the venue for meetings of key leaders ahead of Singapore's independence in 1965.

Lee's oldest son, and former prime minister, Lee Hsien Loong favoured preserving the property, which estate agents in 2024 said had a prospective value of around Sg\$30mn (\$23mn) in land scarce Singapore.

But his two siblings — corporate executive Lee Hsien Yang and the late neurologist Lee Wei Ling — have pointed to language in their father's will calling for its demolition.

The younger siblings accused their brother in 2017 of trying to exploit their father's legacy for political gain.

Lee Wei Ling died in 2024. Lee Hsien Yang, has been living in self-imposed exile abroad since 2022, citing political persecution which the government has denied.

# UK's Healey tells ministers to prepare for budget cuts

British finance minister John Healey has told cabinet ministers to make cuts in their budgets to help fund the government's new spending commitments under Prime Minister Andy Burnham, *The Times* reported on Friday, citing an interview with Healey.

Healey will hold his first budget on October 28 and has pledged to stick to the borrowing rules he inherited from his predecessor Rachel Reeves.

Healey and Burnham, who moved into Downing Street less than two weeks ago, have written to every cabinet minister telling them that there was no new money available for plans to expand technical education, devolve power to regional governments and help ease cost-of-living pressures, the newspaper said.

In the joint letter, Healey said that "all new announcements must be funded from within existing budgets."

"If we are serious about our new government's priorities, we must also be serious about reprioritisation," he wrote, adding: "Each department has a responsibility to manage within its budget, to control borrowing and help get inflation down."

Healey said Britain's "inexorably rising welfare bill must be controlled," and did not rule out tax rises in the budget, the report added.

Economists say the government has little room for error in meeting its fiscal targets, while Burnham's priorities, including higher defence spending and better social care, could add pressure to public finances.

Healey said he could not yet commit to the defence spending goal but signalled it would be central to next year's spending review, *The Times* added.

"At the spending review, we will set out a clear path to meeting our 3.5% Nato commitment in 2035 and we will set a target date on that path for 3%," Healey told *The Times*. (Reuters)

# Japan probe made closest-ever asteroid flyby: space agency

AFP  
Tokyo

A Japanese probe flew 400m (1,312 feet) from a near-Earth asteroid this month, marking the closest approach ever recorded in such a mission, the space agency has said.

The fridge-sized Hayabusa2 skimmed asteroid Torifune on July 5, in a flyby mission that demonstrated the ability to deflect a potentially dangerous space rock away from Earth.

Moving at a speed of more than 18,000km (11,185 miles) per hour,

the probe reached 400m from the asteroid's surface and 744m from its centre, the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) said on Thursday.

This has beat the agency's projection of about 800m from the centre of Torifune.

"The results show that, compared with all the space probes from around the world that have carried out flyby missions, this one passed the closest" to an asteroid, JAXA scientist Yuya Yamamoto told reporters.

The previous record was set by a Chinese probe, which flew within 770m of an asteroid's surface, ac-

cording to the Nikkei business daily.

After the successful flyby, JAXA has released rare images showing the space rock resembled a snowman.

The black-and-white image, captured by a telescopic camera, showed what appeared to be two round objects joined together.

Torifune was known to have an elongated shape, but its details were unknown.

The mission follows NASA's successful 2022 test that changed the orbit of the asteroid Dimorphos by deliberately smashing it with a spacecraft.

JAXA and the European Space Agency have teamed up on another so-called "planetary defence" mission to explore the asteroid Apophis, which will pass close to Earth in April 2029.

Launched in 2014, Hayabusa2 has already thrilled scientists by landing on and gathering material from the asteroid Ryugu, some 300mn km (185mn miles) from our planet.

Six years later, it returned to Earth precious samples from Ryugu — "dragon palace" in Japanese — providing scientists with clues about what the solar system was like at its birth some 4.6bn years ago.

After the Torifune mission, the



Asteroid Torifune as seen by the Hayabusa2 probe's Optical navigation camera (telephoto) (ONC-T) on July 5, 2026. (JAXA)

space probe is expected to attempt in 2031 a "rendezvous" — a manoeuvre where it flies alongside

or touches down on a space rock to gather detailed data — with an asteroid called 1998KY26.

# Hamas agrees to disarm, but what are the challenges ahead?

Hamas said on Friday it agreed to a deal to end the war with Israel that included provisions addressing its weapons and the gradual withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip.

The text of the deal has not been released publicly, and there was no immediate statement from Israel. Here are some of the challenges the deal would face on the ground in Gaza.

US President Donald Trump announced the “complete disarmament” of Hamas, calling it a critical step towards a new Palestinian government in Gaza. He said Israeli forces would withdraw from Gaza “as disarmament is completed”.

Hamas officials told AFP a committee established by Trump’s Board of Peace to govern Gaza would oversee the process of storing the movement’s weapons. “Hamas has now accepted a text that fully complies with Trump’s plan for Gaza, one that the Board of Peace endorsed, that Trump himself publicly welcomed, and that (Benjamin) Netanyahu rejected outright,” said Muhammad Shehada, a researcher at the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR).

“As long as Israel maintains that position, there can be absolutely no progress,” he added.

Israel has so far not commented on Hamas’s decision. But hours before Hamas announced the agreement, an Israeli political source told reporters that Gaza was not even discussed during Trump and Netanyahu’s meeting this week in Washington.

“Israel demands the complete disarmament of Hamas, including the removal of weapons from Gaza and full demilitarisation of the Strip as a precondition for any process,” the source said.

“There will be no Israeli withdrawal from the yellow line in the Gaza Strip before Hamas is disarmed and the Strip is demilitarised,” they added, referring to a demarcation between the area under Hamas control and that held by the Israeli army.

Hamas said it expected mediators and the Board of Peace to ensure Israel complied with the deal’s terms, which included Israel’s “gradual withdrawal” from Gaza.

“The agreement contains a clear provision stating that Israel must commit to and implement its obligations. If Israel does not implement the agreement, neither will we,” Ghazi Hamad, a member of the group’s negotiating team told AFP. Shehada, however, said Netanyahu was highly unlikely to accept such terms with elections looming. “It would amount to political suicide,” he said, noting that Defence Minister Israel Katz had “even pledged to rebuild Jewish settlements there”.

“Our focus now turns to implementation,” the Board of Peace said, adding that the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza (NCAG), established by the board, will “soon begin a phased transition toward full authority”.

According to Hamas, Israel’s withdrawal, the deployment of an international force, the installation of NCAG and the handling of the movement’s weapons must all proceed in parallel.

“What we are seeing instead is a continued expansion of the (Israeli) occupation,” said Paris-based Hamas specialist Leila Seurat.

Israeli military officials say that the army controlled more than 60% of Gaza, more than what it did when the ceasefire was announced in October. Hamas officials say the next two weeks will be devoted to agreeing on the mechanisms for implementing the deal. “We must agree on every detail: how the agreement will be implemented, when it will be implemented and the mechanisms for carrying it out. This is what will take place in the coming days,” said Hamad.

Seurat says Hamas’s public announcements are also part of a communications strategy.

“Its main objective is to say: we are fulfilling our part of what was agreed, while Israel is doing nothing,” she said.

Nickolay Mladenov, the Board of Peace’s high representative for Gaza, said the implementation stage of the plan “matters even more” than the initial deal. “Implementation and verification have to be real,” Mladenov wrote on X. “Withdrawal must move in lockstep with decommissioning.” — AFP

Now, forest fire in Indonesia



A person rides a motorbike past an area affected by a forest fire in Ogan Ilir regency, South Sumatra province, Indonesia, yesterday. (Reuters)



# Tariff provisions could spell doom for long-awaited Russia sanctions bill

By Andrea Shalal and Patricia Zengerle Washington

A Russia sanctions bill championed by the late Senator Lindsey Graham faces a tough road in Congress as Democrats and some Republicans raise concerns about new trade powers the legislation would grant President Donald Trump. Many Democrats, some Republicans, and industry trade groups are unhappy about a provision in the long-stalled bill that would let Trump impose steep tariffs on countries that purchase large amounts of Russian oil and gas, or countries that his administration deems to be facilitating sanctions evasion.

The bill would impose sanctions on Russian officials and authorize 100% tariffs on the five largest importers of Russian crude oil or gas, or the five top countries that help Moscow evade US sanctions and keep funding its war against Ukraine, now in its fifth year. Those countries are not mentioned in the bill but would likely include China, India and potentially some European countries and Japan.

Graham, who died suddenly last month, pressed for the bill’s passage for over a year but only in the past weeks secured support from Trump as the Republican president grew more confident in Ukraine and more frustrated with Moscow. The tariff provisions became more important to the White House after the US Supreme Court in February struck down Trump’s “reciprocal” tariffs of 10% to 50% imposed last year, which sent the administration scrambling to find new authorities.

The sanctions bill would also allow the president to waive the Russia sanctions for unspecified national security reasons, a provision that pro-Ukraine Democrats oppose, given Trump’s shifting views on Russia and

Ukraine. The bill would also extend for five years Iran energy and weapons sanctions first enacted in 1996 that are due to expire this year, a measure added as a condition of Trump’s support. Trump earlier this week demanded that the bill also include tariffs on Iran, although trade between the US and Iran is virtually nil.

With polls showing that Democrats could win control of the House and possibly the Senate in November congressional elections, some lawmakers say they would prefer to wait to pass Russia sanctions until Democrats have more power over what many see as unprecedented legislation.

The legislation advanced with overwhelming bipartisan support for procedural votes in the US Senate on Tuesday and Wednesday, with lawmakers calling it a tribute to Graham. Congressional aides said it could well pass the full Senate before senators head home to their districts next week.

But the legislation, renamed in Graham’s honour, faces bigger challenges in the House of Representatives, which is on recess until August 31. Already, some senior Democrats have lined up to oppose the sanctions bill. Senator Ron Wyden and Representative Richard Neal, the

top Democrats on the respective Senate and House trade committees, have blasted the bill for granting Trump new tariff powers that they say could fuel US inflation.

“There is no question that the US government must take stronger action against purchasers of Russian energy who are fueling the unjustifiable war against Ukraine. But the latest draft of the Sanctioning Russia Act is a prescription for bedlam and higher tariffs,” they said in a joint statement.

The legislation is also driving concern among some Republicans. Mahur Patel, a former Republican congressional aide now with Hogan Lovells Cadwalader law firm, said he doubted the legislation could pass the House this year, given the coming election season and lingering Republican skepticism about the breadth of Trump’s tariffs thus far.

Patel said many Republicans in Congress remained uneasy about Trump’s previous sweeping tariffs, and some were actively lobbying for specific exemptions, such as the one granted this week that offers temporary relief for phosphate fertilizer from Morocco to avert a shortfall caused by the Iran war.

Senator Rand Paul, the sole

Republican to vote against the bill on Tuesday, has said that he will offer an amendment to put limits on the tariffs that Trump could impose, and others may follow suit. Ukraine’s ambassador to the US, Olha Stefanishyna, on Thursday said Ukraine needs quick action before the coming winter.

“You know very well that tariffs (are) a partisan issue at this point, so we hope it will not distract everyone from the real intention with the law,” she told an event hosted by the Christian Science Monitor.

Beyond concerns that the bill could raise inflation at home, sanctions and tariff experts say it would give presidents a new ability to target countries through secondary tariffs instead of just sanctioning individuals and entities found to be aiding sanctions evasion. The bill calls for those authorities to sunset in five years, but experts note that governments seldom yield back powers once held.

The expanded tariff power could upend functioning multilateral cooperation, including the 40-plus nation US-led coalition that imposed sanctions on Russia after its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, one Western diplomat said. Backers of the bill argue the sunset clause narrows the tariff language enough to hit Russian energy revenues without negative consequences.

Jess Hoversen, a former senior US government official and now chief economist at the developer platform bank Column, said the bill, if passed, would create a kind of sledgehammer that could target entire bilateral economic relationships.

“Secondary tariffs, as designed in this bill, would function as a much blunter instrument that could apply across-the-board duties to all goods from a country based on its energy trade with Russia or its role in sanctions evasion,” Hoversen said. — Reuters

Sargassum seaweed: Caribbean bets on boats, barriers and biofuel



Hundreds of Mexican hotel workers, tractor operators and specialized Navy personnel are heading out to the beach each day at dawn to clean record masses of rotting sargassum seaweed off pristine Caribbean coastlines around popular tourist resorts. The seasonal phenomenon has caused hotels across the Caribbean to cut rates and invest millions of dollars in clearing up piles of the foul-smelling algae from their beaches, while governments and businesses look for solutions.

Sargassum — a brown seaweed that forms floating mats on the ocean surface — was historically confined to the so-called Sargasso Sea in the North Atlantic, but unusually strong winds around 2010 blew sargassum into nutrient-rich tropical waters off West Africa, where it found ideal growing conditions.

The displaced seaweed turned into a self-sustaining belt that rides on ocean currents to northern Brazil and through the Caribbean, bringing masses of algae onto Caribbean island nations, the popular Riviera Maya and into the Gulf of Mexico. In the tropical Atlantic, sargassum feeds on nutrients running in from major rivers such as the Amazon, Orinoco and Congo rivers, as well as upswells from the deep ocean, Saharan dust and warming sea temperatures.

The University of South Florida’s Optical Oceanography Lab expects 2026 to be at least the second-largest year for sargassum abundance, with more seaweed likely to heap up around the Caribbean and southeastern Florida in coming months. Brian Barnes, research assistant professor at the university’s College of Marine Science, who works in the lab, told Reuters the novelty of the phenomenon and its seasonality makes predicting its future course challenging.

“Before 2010 there’s nothing, and since then we’ve gone to up to 1 million metric tons over the entire area in 2011 to 40 million last year,” he said, suggesting the seaweed could be doubling in mass every five years.

In Mexico, authorities are looking to protect key tourist destinations along its picturesque Riviera Maya — including Cancun, Tulum and Playa del Carmen — by buying more boats to pick up sargassum and floating bigger barriers off the coast. Mexico, which collects the overwhelming majority of its sargassum after it lands on its beaches, has picked up some 96,151 metric tons this year, up from 92,783 tons last year, according to government data.

“Experience has taught us the best way to face sargassum is to intercept it in the sea before it hits our coasts,” Mara Lezama, the governor of southern Quintana Roo state, told a press conference on Thursday. Federal Mexican officials are expecting a new open-sea sargassum vessel to arrive within a month, and are looking to source more ships from Japan and supply smaller Mexican-made vessels to the Dominican Republic.

Some companies have sought to obtain carbon credits for sending out boats to make bales of sargassum — which releases methane as it decomposes — and then sinking these to the sea floor, but this practice has raised concerns about potential abuses, impacts on deep-sea ecosystems and over-harvesting offshore clusters.

“It’s a balance because offshore sargassum is a natural habitat and there’s tons of turtles and fish that live among it,” Barnes said. “So if you try and sweep the Caribbean clean, you’re going to have a lot of collateral damage.” Barnes said many companies had contacted him for advice on carbon credit projects, but he was not convinced they would yield positive results.

The overabundance of sargassum has inspired a number of entrepreneurs to try to turn the seaweed into new energy sources or lucrative commercial products, overcoming challenges such as safely removing toxic metals absorbed into the algae. — Reuters

# Deadly strikes breach defences to rock Kyiv

AFP  
Kyiv

Russia rained drones and ballistic missiles on Ukraine's capital Kyiv overnight, killing at least nine people and causing damage across the city, officials said.

Of the 27 ballistic missiles launched, Ukraine could only intercept one due to shortages of air defences, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said.

Ukraine has pleaded with its allies for more supplies of US-made Patriot missile interceptors in recent months, its only line of defence against ballistic attacks.

Russia has escalated its use of the ultra-fast class of weapon since June, killing dozens of Ukrainian civilians. "It is this shortage of ballistic missile interceptors that only encourages Russia to launch such attacks that take human lives," Zelensky said in a post on X.

More than 30 people were wounded in yesterday's attack, which struck five districts of Kyiv, Ukrainian authorities said.

Among the buildings damaged was the embassy of Lithuania, with that country's foreign minister publishing images appearing to show a cracked door and damaged light fixture. AFP journalists reported hearing more than 10 explosions in a row early yesterday, triggering car alarms on the streets.

In Kyiv's eastern Darnytsky district, the attacks damaged multiple buildings and vehicles, with authorities reporting seven people killed and 14 wounded in the area.

Two people were killed and eight others were wounded in the western Solomiansky district, where strikes damaged a five-storey residential building, officials said.

"Everything was smashed, the windows, everything," 75-year-old resident Kateryna Kravchenko told AFP of her apartment.

"I can barely stand. I don't know how I'm going to get through all this." Another resident, identified



Smoke rises above residential buildings following an air attack in Kyiv yesterday. (AFP)

only as Oksana, said her plan was to leave.

"You can't stay here after something like this," the 46-year-old said.

"What guarantee is there that it won't happen again?" Russia's defence ministry said it had struck "military-industrial complex enterprises and logistics centres".

AFP reporters saw dark clouds of smoke rising over Kyiv early yesterday.

Photos posted to Telegram by Ukraine's state emergency service showed firefighters spraying water into what appeared to be a residential building. Other images showed rescue workers with flashlights sifting through rubble.

Emergency services had rescued some 105 people as of early yesterday, according to the state emergency service.

As Kyiv has faced near-nightly attacks, Ukraine has escalated its retaliatory strikes on Russia in recent months, partly to pressure Moscow to the negotiating table after nearly four-and-a-half years of war. Russian air defences intercepted and destroyed 274 Ukrainian drones overnight, the Russian defence ministry said.

Ukrainian strikes on Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine killed at least two people, Russian-installed officials said yesterday.

Both Ukraine and Russia deny targeting civilians.

The attack comes as Ukraine presses its allies for Patriot air defences. Zelensky had met with US President Donald Trump on Tuesday for talks, partly to lobby Washington for licenses to produce Patriots domestically.

The Ukrainian leader said following the meeting that Trump had agreed to license the production of the missiles to Kyiv.

But the US president appeared to express reservations on Friday, saying that Washington would have to be "very careful" about the decision.

Yesterday, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiga said Russia's attacks showed Ukraine needed the weapon urgently.

"It is the battle for the skies that will define the trajectory of this war. The stronger the air shield over Ukraine, the closer peace becomes," he said.

Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, sparking Europe's deadliest conflict since World War II.

Tens of thousands have been killed and millions forced to flee their homes due to the fighting, while Moscow now occupies around a fifth of its neighbour — including Crimea, which it annexed in 2014.

## 14 Afghan migrants found dead in desert

The bodies of 14 Afghans attempting to reach Iran were found in a scorching desert in southwestern Afghanistan, officials said yesterday, weeks after their vehicle broke down and they set off by foot.

Authorities have been searching for the group since the driver of the vehicle staggered into a village in Nimroz province, parched and exhausted, seeking help. Five bodies were found soon after, but authorities launched a hunt for 14 others who had continued the journey on foot.

Nimroz is one of Afghanistan's hottest and most arid provinces, with temperatures hovering around 45C at this time of year. The 14 bodies were found buried in sand, a source at the Nimroz provincial hospital told.

Iran is a popular destination for Afghan migrants seeking economic opportunity not available at home, but legal avenues for entry are scarce.

"These 14 young men are from our village. They had left home 23 days ago, and today we are receiving their bodies," Abdul Khaleq, a resident of Qolghi in the eastern province of Badghis told AFP before heading to for the burial. (AFP)

## Russia fired record number of missiles at Ukraine in July: Data

AFP  
Kyiv

Russia fired a record number of missiles at Ukraine in July, an AFP analysis of Ukrainian air force data published yesterday showed, as Kyiv renewed its call for anti-ballistic defences.

Both sides have escalated long-range attacks as the war drags through its fifth year, with no signs of stopping and with gains on the front line coming only at huge human cost.

Russia renewed its strikes on Kyiv yesterday, killing at least nine people, according to officials. Daily reports published by Kyiv's air force showed Russia launched 376 missiles at Ukraine during the month — more than twice the number fired in June.

Many of the attacks over the month targeted the capital Kyiv, which saw some of its deadliest strikes since the beginning of the war, with at least 30 killed on the night of July 2 alone.

Russia also fired 4,956 long-range drones at Ukraine during the month — down 14% on June.

Kyiv can intercept the vast majority of drones, but still relies on supplies from its allies

to counter missiles.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has warned that Ukraine faces critical shortages of air defences needed to counter missile attacks, particularly Russia's increasing use of ballistic missiles.

The ultra-fast missiles travel on a high arcing trajectory before crashing down into their target.

They are hard to stop and often hit with just a few minutes' — if any — warning from air raid sirens.

Russia has ramped up their use from an estimated 200-300 in the whole of 2024, according to military analysts, to 126 in July 2026 alone.

Ukraine downed under a third of them, according to the AFP tally of official data.

Zelensky travelled to the White House in late July to press for the supply of US-made Patriot interceptors, one of the only means of reliably shooting down Russia's ballistic missiles.

Trump had initially said he would allow Ukraine to produce Patriot interceptors.

But he has since expressed reservations about the plan, saying Friday that Washington had to be "very careful" about the decision.

## Majority of EU countries call for talks over migrant influx into Ceuta enclave

A majority of EU countries called yesterday for emergency talks on the sudden inflow of tens of thousands of migrants into Spain's enclave of Ceuta in North Africa. An open letter from the leaders of 22 of the EU's 27 members demanded the bloc's interior ministers have a video meeting "as a matter of urgency" to agree a speedy coordinated response, and to "prevent further uncontrolled crossings". "We have a duty to effectively deter and relentlessly combat illegal migration," it said.

EU foreign policy chief Ursula von der Leyen welcomed the move, saying the bloc needed "a lessons learned process to improve our European resilience," while adding that "not a single person reached mainland Spain or the rest of the EU" during the influx.

The EU letter was initiated by Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, whose country has temporarily suspended Schengen-area rules with Spain, and by her Danish counterpart, Mette Frederiksen, who said that the EU should consider suspending Schengen co-operation with Spain.

Meloni on X wrote that "the line that Italy has long supported is today shared by an ever-growing number of European Nations. Defending the external borders of the Union is not the interest of a single Nation. It is a shared responsibility of Europe".

Among the other signatories are German Chancellor Friedrich Merz and the prime ministers of Hungary, Sweden and Poland, but not the French and Portuguese leaders. (AFP)

### Ukrainian drones sink container ship owned by Russia in Black Sea

Ukrainian drones sank a Russian-owned container ship in the Black Sea early yesterday, forcing its 17-member crew to abandon the vessel, the ship's owner said.

Rosatom, Russia's state-owned nuclear power operator, said at least two Ukrainian drones struck the "Yanina" cargo vessel as it sailed near the Russian port of Novorossiysk. The ship — operated by Rosatom's shipping subsidiary FESCO — was carrying civilian goods including frozen food and construction materials, Rosatom said. There was no immediate indication that the vessel was carrying out activities related to Rosatom's nuclear arm or carrying nuclear material. "The ship's crew abandoned the ship in an organised and coordinated manner after it began to sink. All 17 crew members have been rescued and are in good condition," Rosatom said on Telegram in a statement. "Such an attack cannot be interpreted as anything other than piracy and robbery at sea," the statement quoted Rosatom CEO Alexey Likhachev as saying. Ukraine, which has targeted Russian-flagged ships in the Black Sea throughout the nearly four-and-a-half year war, did not immediately comment.

Kyiv has accused Russia of using the waterway to transport sanctioned goods, including oil.

Russia has launched multiple strikes on Ukrainian port infrastructure and ships approaching Ukrainian ports since the war began, attacks that Kyiv says are a war crime. (AFP)

## Search resumes for missing climbers after avalanche

AFP  
Skardu, Pakistan

Pakistan rescue teams resumed a high-altitude search yesterday for seven climbers missing after a powerful avalanche on one of the world's highest peaks, with the remains of three mountaineers recovered.

The avalanche struck Thursday, cutting off contact with the ten-member expedition led by renowned British-Nepali climber Nirmal Purja — who is not among the remains recovered so far.

Those recovered — flown by helicopter to hospital for formal identification — included an American woman, an Omani woman, and a Nepali man, the regional government said in a statement.

Police in the mountainous

northern Gilgit-Baltistan region said in a statement that high-altitude porters and rescue teams had begun a second day of the operation yesterday after the search was paused due to difficult weather conditions on Friday.

Rescuers and military helicopters had been scouring the area, and teams had stayed at the base camp overnight, according to the regional government.

"The rescue team has reported that they have spotted a few (more) dead bodies of the climbers through drone footage," the statement said.

"The rescue operation is being conducted under extremely challenging terrain and high-altitude weather conditions by the Pakistani army in coordination with local high-altitude climbers and rescuers," it added.

The avalanche struck while the mountaineers were on a mission to summit Broad Peak (8,047 metres, 26,400 feet) on Thursday while the team were ascending at an altitude of around 6,600 metres, according to regional authorities.

The expedition comprised 10 people — including Purja, five Nepalis, a Pakistani, an Omani, an American, and a climber from China.

The team were last in contact on Thursday morning, the official statement said, with reports emerging that evening of the powerful avalanche.

"Data from their tracking devices indicates that they were thrown hundreds of metres down the mountainside," Naile Kiani, from Pakistan's Alpine Club, told *Le Monde* newspaper.

Purja, 43, had written on X this

week that he was close to becoming the first person to climb all 14 "super peaks" twice without oxygen. "Broad Peak, I ask for nothing but safe passage up and back down," he wrote.

Purja, who served with Britain's Brigade of Gurkhas before joining the Special Boat Squadron of the Royal Marines, has broken multiple climbing records since becoming a full-time mountaineer and tour guide. He climbed all 14 "eight-thousanders" (peaks above 8,000 metres) in six months and six days between April and October 2019 — then a record.

Broad Peak is the world's 12th highest mountain, located in the Karakoram range in northern Pakistan, and is regarded as one of the toughest and most technical climbs of all the 8,000-metre-plus ascents.

## Spain's North Africa enclave returns to normalcy after migrants exit

AFP  
Ceuta, Spain

Almost all of the tens of thousands of migrants who entered Spain's enclave of Ceuta in North Africa had left by yesterday, officials said, as some EU countries bolstered their border controls over the sudden influx.

An estimated 60,000 migrants entered Ceuta over just a few days from neighbouring Morocco, the enclave's regional president Juan Jesus Vivas told reporters, but by yesterday Spain's interior minister said almost all had left.

"The situation has been almost entirely reversed," Fernando Grande-Marlaska told reporters.

Under the watch of Spanish soldiers and police yesterday morning, the remaining young migrants continued crossing back over the border to Morocco, AFP journalists saw.

Any who lingered too long on the coastal path were immediately ushered back out by the soldiers.

To cross into Ceuta, many swam around a small border barrier that juts out into the Mediterranean.

At least 67 people died in the attempt, said Grande-Marlaska pro-



Migrants try to make their way past Spanish police officers in Ceuta, yesterday. (Reuters)

viding updated figures yesterday.

"We hope to go to Europe to work and earn a living. That's it," Souleye Bodian, 19, a Senegalese migrant told AFP outside a migrant centre in Ceuta where dozens of other sub-Saharan African migrants waited for officials.

"We all know that in Africa there isn't much opportunity," he said.

The sudden influx of migrants

had sparked political panic in Europe.

EU said it would hold a video meeting on Tuesday after 22 bloc members issued a joint open letter yesterday calling for a meeting of interior ministers "as a matter of urgency" to agree a speedy coordinated response, and to "prevent further uncontrolled crossings".

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia

Meloni wrote on X: "Defending the external borders of the Union is not the interest of a single Nation. It is a shared responsibility of Europe." Italy suspended its Schengen agreement with Spain allowing for visa-free movement between borders as of yesterday for one month.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, in a letter to the heads of the European Commission and Eu-

ropean Council, blasted the "selfish" reaction by some EU countries. He backed a video meeting of interior ministers.

EU chief Ursula von der Leyen said on X yesterday that the bloc needed "a lessons learned process to improve our European resilience," while pointing out that "not a single person reached mainland Spain or the rest of the EU" during the influx.

Madrid had rushed security personnel and equipment to the North African outpost that it has run for centuries.

After a night of wandering the beaches and streets of Ceuta or sleeping on the sand, AFP journalists observed yesterday, some young people turned back to say "adios" or "goodbye" to officers before crossing back to Morocco.

More soldiers stood guard on the small beach next to the border fence, positioned under parasols in the morning.

Spain's interior ministry said a new pneumatic barrier 500 meters in length was installed near the border post to reinforce security.

In Morocco, Soufian, 42, told AFP that he had been planning to make a swim from his coastal town of Martil, located less than 40km from Ceuta, when a friend told him

that the border was open.

"It didn't take long — just five minutes or less, maybe three — since it was right at the border," He said he wanted to visit his mother, who is ill and lives in Madrid.

"Even though there's no food, nothing at all, I'll endure anything to see my mother," Soufian said, adding he makes just 10 euros (\$12) a day working 12-hour shifts as a security guard.

As for the others who crossed, he said, "everyone wants to move up, wants a good future — something that doesn't exist in Morocco".

What sparked the sudden massive flow of migrants remains unclear.

Morocco's authorities have not yet issued an official statement on the development.

A Moroccan source close to the border operations told AFP on condition of anonymity yesterday that those being returned by Spain were being transported home directly by bus or via the railway station in Tangier, 70km away.

The Fnideq border crossing is now "completely secure", the source added, as are the hills overlooking it, from which hundreds of people, mostly young men, had thrown stones at security forces on Friday.

Moments of joy at Qatar Toy Festival



Families flock to the Qatar Toy Festival, taking place at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre (DECC) until August 4. The event offers children the opportunity to meet their favourite cartoon and gaming characters, enjoy interactive attractions, inflatable play zones, live entertainment and immersive experiences, in addition to a wide range of activities for visitors of all ages. **PICTURES:** Shaji Kayamkulam



Qatar seeks to reinvigorate global interest in Traditional Arabic and Islamic Medicine

By Shaima Sheriff  
Staff Reporter

Traditional Arabic and Islamic Medicine (TAIM), a centuries-old healing philosophy focused on prevention and personalised care, is gaining renewed attention as Qatar works to introduce its principles to a global wellness audience. It has been practised and highlighted at Zula Wellness Resort by Chiva-Som in Qatar.

While modern wellness trends continue to introduce new approaches to health, from biohacking and cold therapy to longevity programmes, an ancient system of medicine rooted in the Islamic world is finding renewed relevance in today's search for balance and preventive care. TAIM, which draws from centuries of medical knowledge developed by scholars and physicians including Ibn Sina (Avicenna), is being reintroduced as a holistic approach that focuses on understanding the individual rather than simply treating symptoms.

Dr Mubaris Ahamed Tharamal, holistic health manager and TAIM specialist at Zula Wellness Resort said the traditional system remains one of the world's lesser-known wellness traditions despite its rich history and influence. "TAIM is one of the world's best-kept wellness traditions. It is a holistic health system that has evolved over centuries, drawing on the medical wisdom of great physicians such as Ibn Sina," Dr Mubaris said.

He explained that TAIM focuses on prevention, personalised care and restoring balance through nutrition, lifestyle, herbal medicine, therapeutic treatments, movement, rest and the healing power of nature. "TAIM is not simply about treating illness – it is about understanding the individual, identifying the root causes of imbalance, and empowering people to achieve lasting health through sustainable lifestyle changes," he said.

Although traditional medicine systems such as Ayurveda and Traditional Chinese Medicine have gained international recognition, Dr Mubaris said TAIM has not



Dr Mubaris Ahamed Tharamal, holistic health manager and TAIM specialist at Zula Wellness Resort.

received the same level of global awareness. "One of the reasons awareness of TAIM remains limited is that, unlike Ayurveda or Traditional Chinese Medicine, it has not been widely promoted on the global stage," he said.

At Zula Wellness Resort, where Dr Mubaris practises, TAIM has been incorporated into a modern wellness setting, combining traditional knowledge with contemporary approaches to health.

He noted that one of the biggest misconceptions about TAIM is that it is only a religious practice or a collection of traditional home remedies.

"While it was developed within the rich cultural and scientific heritage of the Islamic world, TAIM is first and foremost a holistic system of health and wellbeing," Dr Mubaris said. He added that the principles of TAIM closely align with many aspects of modern lifestyle medicine, including the impor-

activity and rest, sleep and wakefulness, emotional wellbeing, and the healthy elimination and retention of bodily substances.

"TAIM takes a different perspective. At its core, it recognises that every person is unique. There is no universal wellness plan that works for everyone," he said. According to Dr Mubaris, many guests who experience TAIM for the first time arrive with uncertainty but leave with a deeper appreciation of its approach.

"Many guests arrive curious but understandably sceptical because they have never heard of TAIM before or are unsure how a traditional system of medicine can be relevant in today's world," he said. He explained that guests often discover the value of personalised lifestyle changes after experiencing consultations, treatments and wellness recommendations based on their individual needs.

"One of the comments I hear most often is, 'I wish I had known about TAIM earlier,'" he said.

Looking ahead, Dr Mubaris believes education, research and collaboration will be essential to increasing global awareness of TAIM.

He said introducing academic programmes and dedicated research institutions could help preserve this medical heritage while creating stronger scientific understanding of its principles.

"Research is the bridge that connects ancient wisdom with modern healthcare," he said.

Dr Mubaris added that Qatar is well positioned to play a leading role in introducing TAIM to the world by combining cultural heritage with innovation.

"As a country that values innovation while preserving its cultural heritage, Qatar can become a global centre for TAIM education, research and wellness," he said. For Dr Mubaris, the future of TAIM lies in reconnecting with traditional wisdom while applying modern knowledge.

"It is not about going backwards, it is about rediscovering timeless principles of health and validating them through education, research and contemporary practice," he said.

Summer environmental awareness programmes continue for students

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC) Public Relations and Communication Department, has been implementing a series of environmental awareness programmes and activities as part of its summer initiative.

The programmes aim to promote environmental culture, reinforce sustainability concepts, and strengthen community partnerships with national institutions, summer centres, and clubs, contributing to the development of a generation that is more aware of environmental issues and better equipped to help protect natural resources.

These initiatives are part of the ministry's vision to expand environmental awareness efforts and reach various segments of society, particularly children and young people, through interactive programmes that combine knowledge with practical experiences. The activities are designed to encourage positive environmental behaviours through innovative approaches suited to different age groups.

Accordingly, the Environmental Awareness Section participated in several summer programmes targeting students at centres and clubs. At the Seashore Summer Club, the section delivered a lecture titled 'The Concept of Sustainability and the Ministry's Role and Efforts in Achieving Sustainable Development Goals in Qatar'.

The session highlighted the concept of sustainability, key national environmental initiatives, and the ministry's role in supporting sustainable development goals. It was accompanied by interactive environmental competitions aimed at strengthening participants' understanding of environmental concepts.

The section also collaborated with the Qatar Chess Federation as part of the Summer Chess Club activities to deliver the "Environmental Treasures" programme. The initiative provided an engaging educational experience that combined entertainment and environmental learning through a variety of competitions and activities designed to enhance participants' environmental knowledge in an innovative and enjoyable way.

At the summer centre of Amina bint Wahab Secondary School for Girls, affiliated with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, the section presented two awareness programmes. The first, titled 'The Role of Plants in the Environment', focused on the importance of vegetation and its role in maintaining ecological balance, featuring interactive activities and competitions. The second programme, 'Our Environment is our Responsibility', aimed to develop students' sense of environmental responsibility through practical activities and educational competitions that promote positive environmental practices.

