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Iran has warned that any new US attack on its territory would trigger retaliation against critical energy infrastructure across the region, according to five sources, as Tehran seeks to raise the cost of military action by threatening Washington's closest regional allies. The warning was delivered through a flurry of high-level diplomatic contacts after President Donald Trump threatened on July 28 to strike Iran's energy network and infrastructure, the sources said. Two senior Iranian officials, two Gulf sources and a senior regional diplomat with knowledge of the discussions said Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi spoke with his Saudi and Turkish counterparts, as well as Pakistan's army chief. All spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter. Araghchi urged Washington's Gulf allies to use their influence with Trump to dissuade him from launching renewed strikes, the senior diplomat said, warning that any attack on Iran would prompt retaliation against US assets and energy facilities across the Gulf. His message was consistent in every conversation, the diplomat said: "We're ready to retaliate, but finding a diplomatic solution is the best way to avoid wider escalation and destruction across the region."

"The Iranian warning was unequivocal: if America targeted Iran's infrastructure, they would retaliate by striking Gulf energy facilities and other regional targets," one Gulf source said. The diplomatic manoeuvring underscores how Iran is attempting to use the threat of wider regional destruction as leverage against further US strikes, putting Gulf states that host US military bases and depend on energy exports in a difficult position between Washington and Tehran.

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman subsequently spoke with Trump, urging him to delay military action, return to negotiations, secure a ceasefire and pursue a diplomatic settlement, the senior diplomat and Gulf sources said.

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani took part in a meeting held by King Abdullah II bin al-Hussein of Jordan with participants in the Arab ministerial committee tasked with mobilising international action against illegal Israeli policies and measures in occupied Jerusalem. The meeting was held in Amman yesterday. They discussed the latest developments in Palestine, particularly the Israeli escalation in occupied Jerusalem and joint efforts to preserve the city's Islamic and Christian identity, along with a number of topics of common interest. **Page 3**

approval to back those claims. According to Mudhi al-Hajri, a therapeutic and community nutrition expert, who spoke exclusively to *Gulf Times*, the recent warning issued by Qatar's health authorities over a slimming product found to contain undeclared pharmaceutical substances is a stark reminder that many so-called natural products may conceal serious health risks. **To Page 6**

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

MoPH said the digital service is designed to speed up procedures and improve the user experience while maintaining the highest standards of phar-

For anyone unsure whether their prescription falls within scope, the ministry has issued a guidance booklet explaining in plain terms how to use the service, what is required and how to apply, together with supporting guidance and documents – including the full list of controlled medicines.





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Qatar attends meeting of Arab Ministerial Committee

Qatar Participated in the meeting of the Arab Ministerial Committee tasked with mobilising international action in response to illegal Israeli policies and measures in occupied Jerusalem, held yesterday in Amman, Jordan.

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani led the State of Qatar's delegation at the meeting.

The meeting dealt with the dangerous and unprecedented Israeli escalation in the occupied city of Jerusalem and its Islamic and Christian holy sites. In addition, a joint action was launched to address all illegal Israeli measures that are pushing the region toward further conflict. (ONA)



Environment minister meets Maldives ambassador



HE the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Dr Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki al-Subaie met yesterday with the ambassador of the Republic of Maldives to the State of Qatar Adam Shareef Umar. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed co-operation relations and discussed ways to strengthen and develop them in areas of common interest, particularly in the areas of environment and climate change. (ONA)

Mada Center promotes inclusion, digital accessibility for the elderly

As part of its ongoing efforts to advance digital accessibility and empower older persons to independently access and benefit from digital services, Mada Assistive Technology Center delivered two specialised training workshops in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Public Health for participants of the “Our Summer is a Blessing” programme, organised by the Ehsan Center for Empowerment and Care of the Elderly, and coordinated with the Center. The workshops aimed to enhance the digital skills of older persons and enable them to use essential digital service applications efficiently and safely.

This participation reflects Mada Center's strategy to promote universal accessibility and empower persons with disabilities and the elderly to access and benefit from digital services without barriers by building digital capacities and raising awareness of best practices in the use of technology and digital services, thereby enhancing their independence and improving their quality of life.

The two workshops were held as part of the "Our Summer is a Blessing" programme in co-ordination with Ehsan Center, with the participation of 23 female trainees in each workshop. Participants received practical, interactive training focused on the effective and secure use of government and healthcare digital services, encouraging them to confidently integrate technology into their daily lives.

The first workshop, delivered in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior, was titled “How to Use the New Metrash Application”. It aimed to enable participants to use the application independently and efficiently while introducing them to its key digital government services. The workshop also focused on strengthening participants’ digital literacy and raising awareness of cybersecurity best practices and personal data protection.

The second workshop, delivered in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Health, focused on the “Labbeh” healthcare application. It aimed to empower participants to access and benefit from digital healthcare services with ease, thereby supporting their digital independence and contributing to an improved quality of life.

The training introduced participants to the application's key features and included practical exercises on its use.

Commenting on the initiative, Al-Anood al-Ansari, Head of Capacity Building Section at Mada Assistive Technology Center, said: “Empowering older persons with digital skills is a key pillar of Mada Center’s efforts to promote universal accessibility. We are committed to equipping them with the knowledge and practical skills needed to confidently and independently access government and healthcare digital services, in line with Qatar’s ongoing digital transformation.” **(QNA)**

QRCS medical division secures diamond-level accreditation

The Medical Affairs Division of the Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) has achieved the diamond level of Accreditation Canada accreditation after successfully finalising the survey at the four Workers' Health Centres it manages and operates in strategic partnership with the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH).

The achievement marks an upgrade from the platinum level it obtained in 2023 to the highest level of accreditation.

This milestone crowns a three-year journey of implementing institutional quality and safety standards, verifying compliance with evidence-based practices and policies, standardising procedures, and engaging patients and staff in designing healthcare services.

Acting Secretary-General of QRCS Abdullah Sultan al-Qatan said obtaining the diamond level reflects QRCS' unflinching commitment to excellence, quality and operational discipline, and confirms the efficiency of the Medical Affairs Division in delivering healthcare services based on the highest international standards.

This accreditation enhances confidence and credibility among state institutions, al-Qatan pointed out, noting that the partnership with MoPH in managing and operating Workers' Health Centres has spanned nearly 16 years, during which QRCS has demonstrated outstanding efficiency in providing primary healthcare services to expatriate workers.

For his part, Dr Mohamed Fawzi al-Abiad, Assistant Chief Medical Officer (CMO) of the Medical Affairs Division, highlighted that this achievement requires fulfilling all requirements of the gold and platinum levels, in addition to reaching an advanced level in quality, patient safety and institutional excellence standards, and applying the best international practices in healthcare delivery.

He pointed out that the assess-



QRCS Acting Secretary-General
Abdullah Sultan al-Qatan.



ment was based on nine standards covering governance, leadership, infection prevention and control, medication management, service excellence, in addition to primary healthcare services, medical laboratories, diagnostic imaging and dental services.

Dr al-Abidi further noted that the Division also completed the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) survey on patient safety culture, which was reviewed during the evaluation team's visit.

Head of Quality Monitoring at the Division, Joanna Marie Alfaro, affirmed that this milestone was made possible by combining leadership, teamwork, and technical and clinical competence, stressing that work will continue to maintain this level and further enhance the patient experience.

The Accreditation Canada team commended the consistency of the operating system among the four Workers' Health Centres, the low turnover rate among medical staff, which strengthens continuity of care, as well as the presence of patient advisory



committees that contribute to developing care plans and health education materials in multiple languages.

In partnership with MoPH, QRCS operates four workers' health Centres in Al Hemaila, Mesaimmer, Fereej Abdul Aziz and Zekreet, providing services across more than 20 specialities, including round-the-clock services.

These centres received around 1,460,696 visitors in 2025 and 823,362 visitors during the first half of 2026.

The average patient experience rating stands at 90%, while 99% of patients receive comprehensive health screenings and follow-up

care plans, and 100% of dental patients receive comprehensive treatment plans.

The Division provided around 208 training courses in 2025 as part of continuing professional development programmes after obtaining accreditation from MoPH as an approved provider for this kind of program.

Accreditation Canada is an independent non-profit organisation that has worked for more than six decades to assess healthcare organisations according to evidence-based standards, and its international program is considered one of the world's leading healthcare accreditation programs. **(ONA)**

[illegible]

UDC launches Astroverse at Gewan Island as part of Visit Qatar’s Hala Summer campaign

United Development Company (UDC), the master developer of The Pearl and Gewan Islands, is participating in Visit Qatar’s Hala Summer campaign through Astroverse, a dedicated family entertainment activation at Crystal Walk on Gewan Island.

Astroverse offers an immersive family experience that has already enthralled visitors during its opening weeks. Running until September 30, the activation features interactive games, activity corners, family entertainment, and appearances by popular Astroverse characters, creating a lively, climate-controlled outdoor destination for residents and visitors throughout the summer.

Astroverse welcomes visitors daily from 2pm to 10pm on weekdays, and from 2pm to 11pm on weekends, creating a vibrant setting for families to enjoy summer activities while exploring Gewan



Island’s retail and leisure offerings.

As part of the activation, customers spending QR100 at participating outlets will be eligible to access the activity corners free of charge, take part in games, and stand a chance to win vouchers sponsored by participating retailers.

Through taking part in the Hala Summer campaign, UDC continues to enhance the visitor experience across The Pearl and Gewan Islands by supporting engaging family activations, retail participation, and destination-wide initiatives that contribute to a dynamic summer atmosphere.



The activation reflects UDC’s ongoing commitment to positioning The Pearl and Gewan Islands as leading lifestyle, retail, and leisure destinations, while offering residents, visitors, and shoppers memorable experiences throughout the summer season.

Evolution Nation: Witnessing the rise of Qatar’s cultural renaissance

QM Board of Trustees member Abdulla al-Najjar reflects on helping build the nation’s museum sector and explains how art has become a bridge for cultural dialogue

By Joey Aguilar
Doha

Before Qatar’s cultural renaissance gained global recognition, Abdulla al-Najjar was among those who helped lay its foundations. Now, as a Member of the Board of Trustees of Qatar Museums (QM), he has witnessed first-hand the growth of the country’s museum sector and its rise as a leading space for cultural exchange.

Speaking at the latest Evolution Nation video series, which forms part of the wider Qatar Creates cultural movement by QM, al-Najjar, places significant emphasis on the collaborative and visionary efforts that developed the country’s creative sector.

“I hope that I have contributed even in small way, to achieving the vision of His Highness the Father Amir, may God protect him, at that time, and also His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, the Amir of the country, in supporting the cultural movement, as well as the vision adopted by HE Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, Chairperson of the Board of Trustees in the cultural renaissance that our beloved country, Qatar, was witnessing,” he said.

For al-Najjar, the true value of cultural institutions lies in their capability to cultivate understanding across different backgrounds. He added that this cultural renaissance was never about construct-



Abdulla al-Najjar’s journey is closely linked to the Museum of Islamic Art.

ing buildings, it was fundamentally about encouraging dialogue.

“There is no doubt that art is considered one of the bridges that bring people closer together,” al-Najjar said, highlighting his conviction in universal connection. He added: “I think everyone knows and agrees that the bridges extended through art bring people closer in a faster and simpler way without any complications.”

His journey is closely linked to the Museum of Islamic Art (MIA), an institution founded in 2008 and home to one of the world’s greatest collections of Islamic art, spanning 1,400 years of history across three continents. Al-Najjar was among the key figures who helped shape the museum’s early direction, as Qatar’s cultural landscape began to expand on the global stage.

“In the beginning, I was responsible for the opening of the Museum of Islamic Art in Qatar. After that, I was appointed CEO of

the Museums Authority, so the responsibility grew from being director of a group of museums, as well as projects that were still being established at that time,” he explained.

Amidst overseeing vast museum networks and grand visions, al-Najjar retains a strong appreciation for individual artefacts. One specific item resonates intensely with him: the Shah Jahan Jade Pendant. Produced in India in 1632, this carved Mughal amulet is delicately inscribed with verses from the Qur’an. Manufactured from jade, which was historically ascribed curative properties, it was created during a period of imperial mourning.

“One of the pieces that is close to my heart is the amulet piece displayed at the Museum of Islamic Art, it belonged to King Shah Jahan, who had it made when his wife Nur Jahan passed away. He would wear this amulet, which carried Ayat Al-Kursi [The Throne Verse] to ease his



The Shah Jahan Jade Pendant, which belonged to King Shah Jahan. (Photo courtesy of QM)

sorrow. This is one of the pieces that is very close to my heart at the Museum of Islamic Art,” al-Najjar said.

The Evolution Nation video series forms part of the wider Qatar Creates cultural movement by QM. The campaign was launched to mark 50 years since the establishment of the original National Museum of Qatar in 1975, celebrating the people, institutions and ideas that have shaped Qatar’s cultural development.

Through its stories, Evolution Nation highlights individuals who have contributed to Qatar’s artistic and historic landscape over the past five decades. The series is available on the Qatar Creates YouTube channel and across QM’s social media platforms, offering audiences a closer look at the people behind the country’s continuing cultural, creative and sporting evolution.

Qatar Airways named Official Travel Partner of Boat Show 2026

Old Doha Port announced that Qatar Airways, the Official Travel Partner of Qatar Boat Show 2026, is offering exclusive discounted fares for visitors travelling to Doha to attend the third edition of the event, taking place from November 4 to 7.

Available across Qatar Airways’ global network of more than 160 destinations, the offer makes it easier for regional and international visitors, industry professionals, exhibitors, yacht owners, marine enthusiasts, and luxury travellers to experience one of the region’s leading maritime events.

Qatar Boat Show continues to build on its momentum by cultivating strategic partnerships that enhance the overall event experience.

With each edition, Old Doha Port expands the show’s network of collaborators, introducing partnerships that make the event more seamless and rewarding for visitors from around the world.

Guests can access the special offers by entering a unique promo code at the time of booking. The code applies on applicable fares in Premium and Economy class, on one-way and return flights to Doha, originating from any airport in the Qatar Airways network.

Bookings can be made until November 7, for travel between October 25 and November 17, giving visitors flexibility to plan their stay around the show and explore Qatar before or after the event.

The partnership reflects a shared commitment to elevating the international visitor experience by combining world-class connectivity with one of the region’s most anticipated maritime events, underscoring Qatar’s position as an accessible tourism gateway for major events across business and lifestyle.



Heartfelt Condolences



Abdul Sathar
05 August 2026

We deeply mourn the sad demise of our beloved Founder, Mr. Abdul Sathar.

His vision and dedication will always be remembered.

Our heartfelt condolences to his family. May almighty grant his family the strength ,courage and patience to bear this irreparable loss, and may He bless his with eternal peace

Management & Staff of Tubecare International





Novikov Doha joins LIC hospitality for Formula 1 Qatar Airways Qatar Grand Prix

Lusail International Circuit (LIC) has partnered with Novikov Doha to introduce an exclusive hospitality offering, further enhancing its premium guest experience and setting a new benchmark for Formula 1 hospitality in Qatar.

Renowned for its fusion of Pan-Asian and Italian cuisine and a heritage rooted in London’s Mayfair, Novikov will bring its signature style to the Formula 1 Qatar Airways Qatar Grand Prix 2026.

Guided by the brand’s philosophy of bold flavour and refined presentation, the experience will showcase Novikov’s celebrated dishes that are crafted with the finest ingredients and impeccable standards, making Novikov a global



name in contemporary dining. The Novikov experience will be hosted in Pre-

miere Hospitality, located at the end of the Main Straight with direct views of Turn 1. Guests will enjoy climate-controlled indoor seating alongside an outdoor terrace, overlooking one of the circuit’s main overtaking areas.

As the F1 cars race down the straight and brake into the first corner, guests will be able to follow the action from one of the best viewing points at Lusail International Circuit.

The experience will be complemented by premium cuisine, along with a selection of Novikov’s classics and signature dishes. Exclusive live entertainment, including cultural performances and professional DJs, creating an elevated atmosphere.

QC supports 1,200 flood-affected families in The Gambia

Qatar Charity (QC) has implemented an integrated relief project to support flood-affected families in the Republic of The Gambia, as part of its humanitarian mission and ongoing efforts to respond to natural disasters and assist vulnerable communities.

The project was carried out in co-ordination with the National Disaster Management Agency and local authorities in the affected areas to ensure that assistance reached eligible beneficiaries in an organised and effective manner.

The project, valued at QR670,000, aimed to alleviate the suffering of families whose homes, belongings, and livelihoods were affected by the floods. It provided food and non-food assistance, as well as construction and shelter materials to support recovery and rehabilitation efforts.

The project benefited 1,200 families in some of the hardest-hit areas. The intervention included distributing 1,200 food baskets containing essential items to strengthen food security and meet



the urgent daily needs of beneficiary families.

The project also included the distribution of 1,200 blankets as part of its non-food assistance, helping improve shelter conditions and provide protection and comfort for affected families, particularly amid the difficult humanitarian conditions that followed the floods.

These materials enabled families whose homes were fully or partially

damaged to begin repair and rehabilitation work, helping them restore stability and secure safer shelter.

Part of the construction materials was also allocated to the most vulnerable households, including families caring for orphans.

Mahmoud Shaker, director of QC's office in the Republic of The Gambia, said the project reflects QC's commitment to continuing its humanitarian role in supporting communities affected by dis-

asters and crises. He added that co-operation among charitable organisations, government entities, and local communities is essential to ensure that aid reaches those most in need and creates a sustainable impact on the lives of affected families.

Several local officials emphasised that QC's intervention came at a time when many families were facing difficult humanitarian conditions caused by the floods. They noted that the assistance provided not only met basic needs but also helped restore stability and reassurance to thousands of affected people.

The Governor of the Central River Region praised QC's humanitarian and development efforts in The Gambia, affirming that the project had a direct and tangible impact on affected families and helped restore hope to many households that had lost their homes and sources of income.

The Governor of the Lower River Region also commended QC's swift response to urgent humanitarian



needs, noting that the project helped affected families make a fresh start and gave them a real opportunity to resume their normal lives.

The executive director of the National Disaster Management Agency expressed appreciation for Qatar Charity's efforts, stressing that the

organisation is one of the key humanitarian partners supporting the Gambian government's response efforts. He added that the project helped preserve the dignity of affected families, support their recovery from the floods, and enable them to work toward a better future.

Confessions marks a new chapter for Qatari cinema

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

Qatari actor and director Ali al-Khalaf has completed filming *Fadfada* (*Confessions*), a new psychological drama that delves into the emotional burdens carried in silence and the resilience required to overcome them.

Produced by Al-Hanin Art Production Company, the film marks the first instalment of an ambitious three-part cinematic series exploring deeply human themes through a distinctly Qatari lens.

Starring actress and director Hanan al-Sadiq alongside Khaleel al-Tamimi, *Fadfada* follows an emotionally charged narrative that examines the psychological pressures individuals face and the toll these can take when left unaddressed.

Through its suspenseful storytelling, the film highlights the importance of emotional support, inner strength and the human capacity to confront adversity.

Speaking to reporters about the project, al-Khalaf said the production reflects his belief in cinema's power to foster empathy and meaningful dialogue.

"The Arab film industry needs



Ali al-Khalaf

cinema that opens a space for reflection on the emotions and experiences people live through away from the public eye. Human stories deserve to be told with honesty, compassion and depth," he said.

The film launches a new trilogy by Al-Hanin Art Production Company, with each instalment set to explore the complexities of human emotion and shine a light on those who quietly struggle with psychological challenges. The series aims to encourage conversations around mental well-being while presenting compelling stories rooted in authentic human experiences.

Al-Sadiq said the company's productions seek to challenge conventional storytelling through original narratives and a distinc-



Hanan al-Sadiq in a shooting sequence.

tive cinematic vision, an approach that has helped attract recognition for Qatari cinema at regional and international film festivals. *Fadfada* builds on the success of the company's previous feature, *Another Day*, directed by al-Sadiq and starring al-Khalaf and Ali al-Sharshani.

The film earned international acclaim, winning the Golden Award at the Casablanca International Feature and Cultural Film Festival and screening at the Cannes Film Festival, further highlighting the growing presence of Qatari filmmaking on the global stage.

Al-Khalaf, who began his artis-

tic career in 2003, has contributed to more than 22 theatrical productions as an actor, director and set designer. A recipient of the Best Actor Award in Theatre Education, he has established himself as one of Qatar's versatile creative talents, balancing performance with directing and artistic development.

Al-Hanin Art Production Company is preparing the final production stages of its next feature, *The Illusion*, continuing its commitment to producing thought-provoking films that place the human experience at the heart of contemporary Qatari cinema.



Sustainability awareness lectures at Barzan youth centre summer camp

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change's Green Development and Environmental Sustainability Department participated in the Barzan Youth Centre Summer Camp by delivering a series of educational lectures and interactive workshops designed to enhance environmental awareness and promote sustainable practices among young people.

The programme covered a range of key topics, including environmental sustainability, the responsible use of natural resources, recycling, renewable energy, and the circular economy.

Participants were also introduced to Qatar's flagship environmental initiatives and

projects that support sustainable development and advance the country's long-term environmental goals.

Through practical, hands-on activities, participants had the opportunity to apply environmentally responsible practices while developing a stronger appreciation of environmental stewardship.

The sessions encouraged active participation and aimed to instil sustainable habits that can be integrated into everyday life.

The ministry said its participation forms part of its broader efforts to promote environmental awareness across society, particularly among young people, through partnerships with youth centres and community institutions.

Community cats find lifeline in dedicated volunteer network

By Joey Aguilar
Doha

Every evening, long after offices have emptied and shopping malls begin to wind down, another network quietly springs into action across Doha. There are no uniforms, official schedules or government rosters, yet every day, hundreds of community cats depend on these dedicated volunteers for their survival.

Volunteers fan out across The Pearl Island, West Bay, and other parts of the capital carrying bags of dry food, containers of fresh water, medicines and cat carriers.

Some visit only a few feeding stations; others make dozens of stops. Along the way, they know exactly which cats should be waiting, which need medication, which are recovering from surgery and which have suddenly disappeared.

To a passer-by, it may appear to be a simple act of feeding stray cats. In reality, it is a co-ordinated welfare effort built almost entirely by volunteers who have transformed individual acts of kindness into organised colony management.

Across Qatar, animal welfare groups and independent rescuers are increasingly adopting Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR), an internationally recognised method of humanely trapping, sterilising and returning community cats to their territories. They say feeding relieves immediate hunger, while sterilisation offers the most effective long-term way to stabilise community cat populations.

Together, they have created an informal safety net that extends well beyond feeding. Every evening involves monitoring colonies, checking for injuries, arrang-



ing veterinary treatment, rescuing vulnerable animals, fostering cats awaiting adoption and encouraging responsible pet ownership.

A COMMITMENT THAT NEVER PAUSES

For volunteers with The Pearl Animal Welfare (The PAW), caring for community cats is a year-round responsibility.

Across The Pearl Island, designated colonies are managed by volunteers who provide food and water while monitoring the health of the cats in their care. Some look after only a handful of animals, while others oversee much larger colonies.

"The community cats depend on us every single day of the year," the volunteers told *Gulf Times*.

"There are no weekends or holidays for them. They are fed 365 days a year regardless of the weather or our personal commitments."

That consistency, they say, is what allows trust to grow.

The cats quickly learn the sounds of approaching vehicles and footsteps, often gathering at familiar feeding spots before volunteers arrive. Many greet their



Community cats get dry food from volunteers. **PICTURE:** Thajudheen



Fresh water offers welcome relief to a community cat at a parking lot, where volunteers replenish food and water daily throughout the summer. **PICTURE:** Joey Aguilar

carers with excited meows, while others weave between their legs before stopping to eat.

"There is something incredibly rewarding about earning the trust of animals that have often had difficult starts in life," they said.

For some, that trust has eventually led to adoption and permanent homes.

THE HIDDEN PRICE OF COMPASSION

The emotional rewards come with a substantial financial commitment.

At The Pearl Island, volunteers estimate that feeding a single colony costs around QR230 every evening. Over the course of a month, the expenses become significant because they are largely covered by volunteers themselves.

Community support has therefore become increasingly important. Recently installed cat food donation boxes by United Development Company (UDC) now allow residents to contribute sealed bags of dry cat food, helping sustain the programme.

Elsewhere in Doha, the financial demands are even greater.

TNR Qatar (TNRQ), established in 2014, estimates that just four volunteers collectively feed around 400 community cats across 40 managed colonies. Food alone costs approximately QR11,000 each month.

Yet feeding represents only part of the expense.

"A vital part of what we do is bringing cats to the vets to be sterilised. Feeding alone only increases the cycle of pain because the popu-



Cats quickly learn the sounds of approaching vehicles and footsteps, according to The PAW. **(supplied picture)**

lation continues to grow. What can really blow our finances are vet bills for sick or injured cats," Charlotte from TNRQ told *Gulf Times*.

For the organisation, success is measured less by the number of meals served than by the number of kittens never born.

"The more cats you see with an ear tip – the universal sign of a sterilised street cat – the more you know someone cared," the group said.

MORE THAN FEEDING STATIONS

In West Bay, Streets of Stray has developed a similarly comprehensive approach.

For six years, the volunteer-run initiative has cared for around 200 community cats across managed colonies while simultaneously looking after another 50 to 60 rescued cats in foster homes or undergoing veterinary treatment.

Its work extends beyond cats. Over the years, volunteers have rescued abandoned dogs, rabbits, birds and even roosters, with many eventually finding homes in Qatar and abroad, including the United States, Canada, Europe,

Brazil, the United Arab Emirates and the Philippines.

Maintaining that operation requires around QR18,000 each month for food, water and basic supplies alone, excluding veterinary treatment, emergency rescues, foster care and sterilisation.

Every visit also serves as a health inspection. Volunteers replenish fresh water, identify cats in need of treatment, note animals that fail to appear, and rescue those requiring urgent care. Every cat is known individually.

"Every animal has a name," the volunteers said. "They know our voices, our routines, our vehicles and even the sound of the food bags."

Sometimes, they added, the strongest reminder of that bond comes before a single bowl is filled.

"The most touching moments are often the quietest ones. Some walk straight past the food simply to ask for affection first."

In those moments, the volunteers say, the work becomes about far more than feeding. It becomes about trust – earned night after night through patience, consistency and care.



WISE Prize for Education focuses on solutions in learning outcomes

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

With the process of selecting the next WISE Prize for Education winner already underway, the World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE) has emphasised a key challenge for applicants: identifying global solutions that improve learning and life outcomes.

WISE, a global education initiative of Qatar Foundation, is offering \$1mn in prize money for the top three winners of WISE Prize for Education, which will be given away at the WISE Summit in 2027.

The finalists of the WISE Prize will be announced towards the end of this year. Each finalist will receive support to design and refine their solution.

WISE Prize for Education is a global award programme that identifies outstanding education innovations and provides funding, mentorship, and development support.

“The WISE Prize for Education 2026-2027 cycle centres on a single, unified challenge. The core challenge is to develop a practical solution that delivers significant and measurable improvements in learning and/or life outcomes.”

“The solution should strengthen learners’ ability to gain, retain, and apply essential knowledge and skills, leading to better opportunities for education, work, and wellbeing,” WISE said on its website.

“The solution should represent an MVP (Minimum Viable Product) of an already suc-



WISE Prize trophies from the last edition of WISE Summit.

cessful approach, ready to be adapted, tested, or scaled in new contexts and meet the WISE Prize selection criteria,” added the statement.

WISE has specified that applicants should have a demonstrated track record supporting their ability to address the challenge, and it assesses the credibility of the team and organisation behind the solution. It highlights that the solution addresses the education challenge through an evidence-based approach that has not been widely tested or implemented before, focusing on the novelty of the method.

As for its feasibility, WISE has noted that the proposal sets out a credible plan for developing the solution, with clear resource allocation, timelines, and manpower planning over the 12-month MVP development period.

As for scalability and sustainability, WISE suggests that the solution demonstrates realistic potential to expand over time, taking into account both the nature of the innovation and

the team’s capacity to enable and sustain that growth. The solution should also have the potential to adapt to different geographic and social contexts beyond its original setting, making it relevant to a diverse global audience.

Each finalist receives funding to develop their solution into a minimum viable product over 12 months, alongside tailored mentorship and coaching with intensive development support to help the solutions grow from MVP to scale. It includes one-to-one coaching, bi-monthly check-ins and in-person workshops to refine solutions and facilitate peer learning with other finalists.

Through its network of local partners, including Education Above All and Qatar Science and Technology, winners may access additional opportunities to scale their solutions globally. This will also lead to connections to WISE’s local innovation partners that can further support the piloting and growth of solutions.

In addition, it provides access to WISE’s 60,000+ global education innovators, leaders, and community, and great visibility at the WISE Summit next year, as the finalists present their solutions to a global audience of leading educators and policymakers.

The application phase for the WISE Prize for Education is closed, and eligibility screening and shortlisting are currently underway. Each cycle, WISE works with an independent jury and expert committee drawn from government, civil society, the private sector, international organisations, and academia. The finalists for the award are expected to be announced towards the end of this year.



QF’s ABP to host Harvard Model Congress Middle East 2027

The Academic Bridge Programme (ABP), part of Qatar Foundation’s Pre-University Education, will host Harvard Model Congress Middle East 2027 from January 14-16, 2027 at Education City, following the success of its inaugural Qatar edition in 2026 and early registration for the Congress is open until August 15.

Held under the theme “Progress Under Pressure”, the 2027 conference will challenge participants to take on the roles of policymakers and diplomats, debating today’s most pressing global issues while developing innovative perspectives and practical solutions.

Organised by Harvard University, the conference offers students an exceptional op-

portunity to engage in a world-class educational experience, develop leadership, negotiation, and decision-making skills, and build meaningful connections with peers from around the world.

The conference provides high school students from Qatar and across the globe with an immersive learning experience in government, public policy, and international relations through legislative committee simulations, debates, and negotiations.

Participants will also take part in workshops, seminars, and leadership activities designed to strengthen their leadership capabilities while enhancing their critical thinking and public speaking skills.

Jerusalem escalation risks religious conflict: joint body

From Page 1

A free, independent and sovereign Palestinian state on the lines of June 4, 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living in security and peace alongside Israel on the basis of the two-state solution and in line with international law, relevant UN resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, was described as the only path to a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.

The statement also reaffirmed the New York Declaration on the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Implementation of the Two-State Solution.

The ministers condemned all Israeli violations at Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif and attempts to alter its historic and legal status quo or impose temporal and spatial division – including escalating incursions by extremist settlers, Israeli ministers and officials, facilitated and protected by the occupation authorities; provocative practices and inflammatory statements; restrictions on worshippers’ access and assaults against them; obstruction of the work of the Jerusalem Awqaf and Al-Aqsa Mosque Affairs Department; and continued illegal excavations beneath the mosque and in its vicinity.

They affirmed that Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif, across its entire 144 dunums, is a place of worship exclusively for Muslims, and that the Jerusalem Awqaf and Al-Aqsa Mosque Affairs Department, affiliated to the Jordanian Ministry of Awqaf, Islamic Affairs and Holy Sites, is the sole legal authority with exclusive jurisdiction over its administration and entry to it.

Violations targeting Christian holy sites and threatening the historic Christian presence in Jerusalem were also condemned, including restrictions on access to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and on religious rites there, interference in church affairs, restrictions on their institutions and properties, and attacks on clergy, worshippers and religious symbols.

The statement backed the historic Hashemite custodianship over the Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem and its role in protecting them, safeguarding their Arab Islamic and Christian

identity and preserving the historic and legal status quo.

It called for support for the resilience of Jerusalemites through development assistance and the strengthening and protection of Palestinian institutions in the city, and recognised the role of the Al-Quds Committee and its executive arm, the Bayt Mal Al-Quds Al-Sharif Agency.

Participants warned that Israeli attacks on Islamic holy sites in occupied Jerusalem amount to a blatant provocation to the sentiments of around two billion Muslims worldwide and risk driving a religious conflict whose repercussions would extend beyond the region.

They called on the international community and the Security Council to act immediately to halt Israel’s illegal measures in occupied Jerusalem and its holy sites, describing them as part of a systematic policy to entrench the occupation through settlement expansion, land annexation, the suffocation of the Palestinian economy, the targeting of Palestinian national institutions, escalating settler terrorism and the targeting of UNRWA – all while Israel’s violations of the Gaza ceasefire agreement continue and the humanitarian catastrophe there worsens.

The statement rejected any unilateral decision violating the legal status of occupied Jerusalem, including the establishment or relocation of diplomatic missions to the city, and called on the states concerned to reverse such decisions.

Participants agreed to launch joint action to mobilise an effective international response compelling Israel, as the occupying power, to respect the historic and legal status quo in Jerusalem, and to establish a sustainable, institutional and operational mechanism – including a media platform – to document and expose Israeli violations against the holy sites and worshippers before international organisations and global public opinion.

They called for a joint ministerial meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and the Arab League during the high-level week of the UN General Assembly in New York next month to discuss the escalation in Jerusalem and ways to confront it, and thanked Jordan for hosting. (QNA)

Hidden dangers lurk in ‘natural’ weight-loss products: expert

From Page 1

Laboratory testing revealed the product contained sibutramine and phenolphthalein, two pharmaceutical compounds that were not disclosed on the label, effectively making it adulterated and potentially dangerous to consumers.

Sibutramine was once prescribed as an anti-obesity medication but was withdrawn from many international markets after studies linked it to higher risks of high blood pressure, rapid heart rate, heart attacks and strokes in vulnerable patients. Phenolphthalein, formerly used as a laxative, has also been discontinued in numerous countries over safety concerns and its possible association with an increased risk of certain cancers after prolonged use.

Al-Hajri warns that the greatest danger lies in the fact that these substances are deliberately omitted from ingredient labels. As a result, consumers may unknowingly ingest prescription-strength drugs, exposing themselves to dangerous drug interactions and potentially life-threatening complications, particularly people with cardiovascular disease, hypertension, diabetes and older adults.

She explains that some unscrupulous manufacturers intentionally add these pharmaceutical compounds to trigger rapid appetite suppression or dramatic weight loss. Consumers, believing the results come from herbal ingredients, are misled into trusting products whose apparent effectiveness is driven by concealed medications rather than natural formulations.

Al-Hajri urges consumers to exercise caution by following several essential precautions: avoid purchasing weight-



Mudhi al-Hajri

loss products through anonymous social media accounts or unverified online advertisements; ensure that any product is officially registered and licensed by the relevant health authorities; be wary of marketing claims such as “100% natural,” “no side effects” or “guaranteed results within days”; and consult a physician or qualified nutrition specialist before using any weight-loss supplement.

While legislation imposing penalties on those who import, sell or promote adulterated or unlicensed products is an important safeguard, al-Hajri stresses that legal action alone cannot fully protect public health.

An effective consumer protection system, she argues, must combine strong legislation, rigorous regulatory oversight, sustained public education and close cooperation between government authorities and digital platforms.

She advocates tougher penalties against anyone involved in importing,

distributing or advertising products containing undeclared pharmaceutical ingredients, alongside the confiscation and destruction of offending products. Repeat offenders, she says, should face stricter sanctions, especially when violations lead to serious health consequences or fatalities.

Equally important, she says, is closer coordination with social media platforms to ensure the swift removal of illegal advertisements and accounts promoting unlicensed products once notified by the relevant authorities, thereby reducing public exposure to potentially harmful supplements.

Public education remains the cornerstone of prevention. Al-Hajri calls for wider circulation of the names and images of non-compliant products, greater awareness of the risks posed by hidden pharmaceutical ingredients and stronger encouragement for consumers to buy only from trusted, regulated sources rather than relying on misleading ads or celebrity endorsements that lack scientific credibility.

“Human health should never become a testing ground or a vehicle for quick profit,” she says. “Every product introduced to the market must be safe, licensed and subject to rigorous regulatory oversight.”

She concludes that safeguarding consumers is a shared responsibility involving regulators, legislators, digital platforms, the media, healthcare professionals and consumers themselves. Ultimately, awareness prevents harm before it occurs, effective oversight keeps dangerous products off the market and strong legislation ensures accountability for those who endanger public health.

Arab Parliament condemns Israeli escalation in Gaza, West Bank

The Arab Parliament condemned yesterday the crimes that the Israeli occupation continues to commit in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including the city of Jerusalem, calling for urgent international action to stop the escalation and hold those responsible accountable. In a statement, Speaker of the Arab Parliament Mohammed bin Ahmed al-Yamahi indicated that the targeting of hospitals, health facilities, residential homes, and

tents of displaced people, which led to the death and injury of dozens of civilians, most of whom were women and children, comes within the framework of the continuation of the war of extermination and the policy of starvation and total destruction pursued by the occupation, in violation of international law, international humanitarian law, the Geneva Conventions, and United Nations resolutions. (QNA)

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Iran, Oman agree route through Hormuz: source

From Page 1

Any agreement conceding Iran a role at the gate would mark a decisive shift in the regional balance of power in Tehran’s favour. Before the war the strait was open to all shipping without charge, and carried roughly a fifth of the world’s oil and LNG exports. Iran has held de facto control since the US and Israel launched their offensive on February 28, insisting vessels hug its coastline; many have run the southern route close to Oman instead, and some have come under fire.

Military pressure has failed to loosen that grip. A two-week

campaign of strikes in July did not dislodge Iranian forces, and US commanders advised Trump that stocks of some munitions were running low, with the army having used up nearly all its long-range precision missiles. Trump, who promised that Operation Epic Fury would end in Iran’s unconditional surrender, now faces an electorate opposing the war two-to-one.

He told Fox News that talks were moving along nicely and that an all-day negotiation had taken place on Tuesday, adding that the strait would be open very soon. At the weekend he called off “massive attacks” on Iran, citing the negotiations – a pattern repeated

throughout the conflict. Tehran denies it is talking to Washington at all.

Oil prices edged lower yesterday, having ticked up after Yemen’s Houthis said they had fired on a Saudi-flagged tanker in the Red Sea. Crude has fallen sharply over two days since Trump called off fresh strikes.

At the United Nations, deputy spokesperson Farhan Haq said no first-hand information had been received about a reopening, but encouraged the parties towards a negotiated solution.

“The devil is in the details,” an Iranian source said. “A single tweet from Trump could cause the whole thing to collapse.”

Court rulings refute Trump’s ‘freedom of speech’ advocacy

Reuters
Washington

US President Donald Trump repeatedly campaigned for his second term as a champion of free expression, vowing in his January 2025 inaugural address to stop what he described as years of “government censorship.”

Since then, a wave of court rulings has concluded his administration has done quite the opposite. Reuters identified 75 federal-judge rulings finding Trump’s government infringed on First-Amendment rights including freedoms of speech, religion, and the press.

The unprecedented pushback on constitutional grounds has included repeated findings that the administration chilled or squelched the speech of citizens and groups opposing the Republican’s agenda.

“The President’s palpable misunderstanding that the government simply cannot seek retribution for speech he disdains poses a great threat to Americans’ freedom of speech,” US District Judge William Young wrote from Boston.

The judge, appointed by Republican President Ronald Reagan, ruled in September that the administration illegally detained, deported and revoked visas of foreign students and faculty because of their pro-Palestinian advocacy. Other judges found federal agencies terminated grants awarded to universities including Harvard for refusing to align with his ideological agenda; retaliated against law firms based on their legal advocacy; and thwarted protests.

Trump administration officials have repeatedly called federal judges ruling against them “activists” who are interfering with the president’s executive authority. White House spokeswoman Abigail Jackson criticised the First-Amendment rulings in a statement, saying “the federal judiciary has repeatedly endangered and obstructed the election choices of the American people with its unlawful rulings.”

The 75 cases that produced lower-court rulings against the Trump administration were among 93 total cases during his second term in which judges addressed First-



Donald Trump exits Air Force One at the Morristown Airport. (AFP)

Amendment arguments, Reuters found. Trump’s losing streak mostly came from judges appointed by Democratic presidents, but Republican appointees also delivered decisions in 10 cases.

By comparison, during Democratic President Joe Biden’s presidential term, Reuters identified just 27 cases in which lower-court judges weighed First-Amendment challenges to his agenda. Judges ruled against his administration in 13 of those. Most of the lower-court rulings against the Biden administration involved its vaccine mandates, which were challenged on religious-freedom grounds.

Some of the rulings are preliminary, meaning that the judge acted on a request for speedy action before hearing the full merits of the case. The lawsuits were frequently filed by Trump’s ideological foes or by news outlets, such as when the *New York Times* and Associated Press asked judges to halt restrictions on their ability to cover the White House or the Pentagon.

The AP and the NYT won at lower courts, though some rulings are on hold pending appeal.

The Trump administration launched appeals in about two-thirds of the cases while electing to let other rulings stand. It chose not to challenge rulings that,

for instance, prevented it from interfering with what academics can discuss in classrooms and from slashing longstanding grants awarded to legal and medical organisations that have opposed the administration’s agenda.

In appeals of 15 of the 75 rulings that went against Trump, his administration successfully persuaded courts either to put a district court judge’s First-Amendment ruling on hold or overturn it entirely. In significant victories for the administration, two appeals courts this year have overturned lower-court rulings that had led to the release of pro-Palestinian campus activists who had attended Columbia University, Mahmoud Khalil and Mohsen Mahdawi.

The appellate judges found the lower courts had no jurisdiction to hear those cases, without ruling on the lawsuits’ merits. Khalil’s lawyers have said he plans to appeal to the US Supreme Court.

Trump rode to his second-term win after railing against an “online censorship regime” that he said the Biden administration imposed when it required media companies to suppress alleged misinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic and after the 2020 election.

He echoed themes from his first presidential campaign, including

opposition to what he called “cancel culture,” as some conservatives complained that social and professional pressures discouraged the expression of their political views.

Hours after his 2025 inauguration, Trump signed an executive order titled “Restoring Freedom of Speech and Ending Federal Censorship,” which directed that no federal agency or employee would unconstitutionally abridge Americans’ speech rights.

Critics say that promise was almost immediately undercut by a flurry of other executive orders and policies seeking to exact retribution against foes or targeting warring viewpoints.

Timothy Zick, a professor at William & Mary Law School, who authored *Trump 2.0: Executive Power and the First Amendment*, said no president has taken such sweeping action to suppress speech since President Woodrow Wilson, early last century, oversaw the thousands of deportations and arrests during the First Red Scare, a period of anti-communist and anti-immigrant fervour.

At that time, Zick said, court precedents were far less clear on whether the First Amendment protects speech critical of the government. “Trump is operating in this situation where the First Amendment’s boundaries are very clear,” he said.

A Washington federal appeals court appears poised based on arguments it heard in May to uphold lower courts’ decisions that Trump’s campaign against law firms and lawyers infringed upon free speech.

Among those decisions was a May 2025 ruling by US District Judge Beryl Howell, an appointee of Democratic President Barack Obama, who castigated Trump for targeting the law firm Perkins Coie through an executive order that suspended its lawyers’ security clearances and barred them from entering federal buildings based on its past work for his political opponents.

“Settling personal vendettas by targeting a disliked business or individual for punitive government action is not a legitimate use of powers of the US government or an American President,” he wrote.

Democrat El-Sayed urges unity after narrow win in Michigan primary

AFP
Detroit

Left-wing insurgent Abdul El-Sayed called for Democratic unity yesterday after narrowly defeating the party establishment’s candidate in Michigan and claiming the nomination for one of November’s most important US Senate races.

“The things that unite us are so much bigger than the things that divide us,” El-Sayed told supporters.

“You know, in the words of Muhammad Ali, we shook up the world,” he said of his win over four-term congresswoman Haley Stevens after a bitter and expensive primary that became a national test of the Democratic Party’s left wing.

The former public health official overcame tens of millions of dollars in outside spending supporting Stevens, including a record intervention by groups aligned with the influential pro-Israel lobby AIPAC.

He will face former Republican congressman Mike Rogers in November for a seat considered essential to Democratic hopes of regaining the Senate, where the party must defend Michigan while gaining four Republican-held seats.

The midwestern state backed Trump in the 2024 presidential election. El-Sayed said Republicans would seek to portray him as too radical for the battleground state and use his Muslim identity against him.

“They understand that the only way that they think they can win is to drag us into the mud,” he said. But he argued that voters who disagreed on politics could unite around affordability, health care and opposition to corporate influence.

“My name is not raising your gas prices. My name is not taking us to war. My name is not the reason you can’t afford your groceries,” he said.

El-Sayed then turned his fire on Rogers, calling him a “coward,” challenging him to five debates and accusing him of loyalty to Trump and corporate donors.

“If you want a senator who’s going to lick some boots, fine, go vote for Mike Rogers,” he said. “But if you want a senator who’s going to stand up to Donald Trump, then you’ve got your option right here.”

El-Sayed was backed by progressive leaders including Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Elizabeth Warren, as well as the United Auto Workers union.

His platform includes health care for all, higher taxes on billionaires, ending unconditional US military aid to Israel and reducing the role of corporate money in elections.

Stevens had the support of Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer and Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer, who argued that her moderate record and experience winning a suburban congressional seat made her the safer general-election choice. She conceded yesterday and pledged to support El-Sayed against Rogers.

“This was a thorough and rigorous campaign that brought out the full span of views within the Democratic Party — and that is why we have primaries,” Stevens said. The primary was shaped heavily by divisions over Israel.

El-Sayed has accused Israel of genocide in Gaza and demanded an end to US military aid. Stevens defended the US-Israel relationship and benefited from more than \$50mn in spending by AIPAC’s political arm.

His win gives progressives their biggest success yet in a year of anti-establishment Democratic wins. In his victory remarks, El-Sayed sought to reassure the Jewish voters after a campaign marked by accusations of antisemitism and Islamophobia.

Republicans welcomed his nomination, believing his positions on Israel, immigration and health care could make him vulnerable in November.

Trump called the result “great news for the Republican Party,” while Michigan Republicans said they would portray El-Sayed as far outside the state’s political mainstream.

US pressing on with Ukraine talks on Patriot missiles

The US is pressing ahead with talks on allowing Ukraine to make Patriot interceptor missiles, which Kyiv urgently wants to defend against Russian attacks, even after President Donald Trump cast doubt on such a deal, four sources familiar with the discussions said.

The discussions include an option for Ukraine to build some components for final assembly elsewhere in Europe, the sources added.

Kyiv has been seeking more PAC-3s, the newest type of Patriot missile and one of the few weapons capable of downing the ballistic missiles Russia has been launching into Ukraine in growing numbers.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Saturday warned that the country had run out of Patriot interceptors, and

that only one of 27 ballistic missiles fired by Moscow that day had been shot down.

During a meeting with Zelensky in Ankara last month, Trump said the US would grant Ukraine a license to manufacture PAC-3s in a boost for Kyiv. But last week, Trump appeared to reverse course after what was described as a challenging meeting with Zelensky at the White House. He told reporters that the US had not agreed to letting Ukraine build Patriot missiles and the US must be “very careful.”

Zelensky’s calls for domestic production of interceptors, needed for the Patriot system, had been largely set aside by Washington as the war continued, given security concerns raised by industry executives and US military officials, three of the sources said. (Reuters)

US announces \$242mn in new Ebola funding

The US announced yesterday that it had allocated more than \$242mn in additional funding to combat the worsening Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The new funding brings direct US financial assistance in response to the outbreak to more than \$500mn, the State Department said, underlining that the US remained “the largest financial contributor to the Ebola response.” Washington called on other countries to increase their contributions to efforts to combat the disease. The US has faced criticism over its strict travel restrictions put in place to prevent Ebola. (AFP)

Bolsonaro Jr unveils surprise running mate

Reuters
Brasilia/Sao Paulo

Brazilian Senator Flavio Bolsonaro, the leading right-wing challenger to leftist President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva in October’s presidential election, named conservative Congressman Alfredo Gaspar as his running mate yesterday in a surprise choice that underscored his campaign’s challenges.

The announcement follows weeks of uncertainty over Bolsonaro’s choice, as the senator struggled to build alliances beyond his own Liberal Party (PL) and failed in an attempt to add a woman to the vice-presidential slot to broaden support.

A PL member, the 55-year-old Gaspar has represented the northeastern state of Alagoas in the lower house of Congress since 2023. He previously served as Alagoas’

secretary of public security.

“I am a simple person, but one willing to fight. I will have the courage for us to confront corruption, organised crime and this shattered economy,” Gaspar said at an event in Brasilia.

“We will move beyond rhetoric and tackle the nation’s problems,” Gaspar led a probe in Congress into the National Social Security Institute (INSS), the government agency responsible for Brazil’s public pension and social security system. Lula’s son, Fabio Luis Lula da Silva, is being investigated over allegations he received improper payments linked to a scheme involving deductions from pensions administered by the INSS.

“He has the authority to discuss a subject that makes Lula uncomfortable. He also talks a lot about public safety,” said Lucas de Aragao, a partner at political consultancy Arko Advice, adding that Gaspar was a surprise pick.

Gaspar on Tuesday launched a Senate campaign in Alagoas. The lawmaker emerged as an internal PL pick to be Bolsonaro’s running mate after others touted by the senator for the role, such as Senator Tereza Cristina and Daniella Marques, the former head of state-owned savings bank Caixa Economica Federal, failed to secure support from their parties to join the ticket.

Despite leaning to the right, some major Brazilian parties, including Cristina’s Progressives and Marques’ Republicans, have declined to nationally endorse Bolsonaro, the son of far-right former President Jair Bolsonaro. Those parties have calculated that remaining neutral in the presidential race is the best strategy to maximise their representation in Congress, hoping to appeal to voters who oppose Flavio Bolsonaro in northeastern Brazil and other Lula strongholds.

Lithium mining for green power triggers eco-outcry from S African farmers

Reuters
Magog, South Africa

Mining lithium for batteries is a growing part of South Africa’s plan to use the global shift towards green energy to revive its economy, but now it faces a challenge from thousands of angry farmers who fear losing productive land to open-pit mines.

On the southeast coast, where a lithium mine operates and more than a dozen prospecting licences have been granted since 2023, scores of generations-old farming communities are relocating.

A coalition of activists is launching objections to the prospecting, which according to one group, the South Coast Guardians Association (SCGA), threatens 30,000 jobs in farming, labouring or services in this sugar-exporting and tourism hub. Data from South Africa’s mines department reviewed by Reuters show lithium prospecting licences laying claim to some 73,000 hectares, an area slightly larger than the city of Pretoria.

Most of it is farmland spanning 117 farms, but also beaches.

The existing lithium mine, which also plans to expand, covers 150 hectares of pits and 180 hectares of waste dumps.

“Should all these prospecting licences be granted mining licences, the impact would be catastrophic,” SCGA General Manager Heather McLeod said.

“It affects the small-scale farmers directly, their communities, their shops, and... the sugar mill” handling their harvests, she said at the mill, which crushes 2 mn metric tons of cane a year from 2,000 small-scale and 600 commercial growers. As the climate crisis and disrupted oil shipments from the U.S.-Iran war propel investment in clean energy, South Africa has made critical minerals key to its economic revival plans.

President Cyril Ramaphosa in February told parliament South Africa had 40tn rand (\$2.39tn) worth of critical minerals, describing them as a “sunrise industry” with potential to create jobs and strengthen the industrial base.



A drone view shows the SA Lithium Mine in Magog. (Reuters)

On an afternoon in June, Albert Mthembu, 62, was examining the fissures in his brick bungalow in the hillside village of Magog, in the eastern KwaZulu-Natal province, the largest of the country’s three lithium hotspots. He told Reuters the fissures were caused by blasting from the mines.

An excavator on the adjacent hill was kicking up clouds of dust as it

shifted rocks; Mthembu had visited the doctor twice for lung issues.

Having lived in Magog since he was 6, he wanted his children to inherit the house and neat lawn occupied by chickens. Now, he sees no option but to move.

“The blasting isn’t good. We’ve got kids, we’ve got animals, the trees are even being damaged,” he said on the slopes of the village,

where dying trees drooped.

Mthembu’s friend has already left, his house reduced to rubble by workers expanding the mine, according to three villagers. Seven other houses were visibly dismantled. Reuters interviewed 11 farmers in the area, all of whom shared similar concerns.

The privately owned mining company was relocating villagers, but many were unhappy with the new land, Mthembu said, as it was remote and less suitable for planting. SA Lithium Director Ian Harbottle said it had relocated 150 farmers, all willingly. “If there’s one challenge, I’m unable to move them fast (enough) because everybody is significantly better off,” he said. Clean energy requires less material extraction than the fossil fuel industry it is replacing.

A 2024 Breakthrough Institute paper showed that coal, South Africa’s power-generation staple, extracts 1,180 tons of material per gigawatt, on average, compared with 59 tons for wind and 45 tons for solar, including all the minerals for battery storage in an average in-

stallation. Yet landscape-scarring mining remains a contentious part of the transition several countries. Rock waste can degrade land quality, as in Australia and China.

“Yes, it... does make a hole. Yes, there are dumps, but we’ve done extensive (anti-pollution) work. We are more than compliant,” Harbottle said, adding that the mine had created over a thousand jobs.

According to one farmers’ submission on SA Lithium’s plans to expand over 6,000 hectares, the mine could “permanently degrade water quality, soil quality and reduce the long-term viability of farming.” Harbottle disputes that. “No water from the mine ever goes into any of the rivers” but into dams to be used for processing or dust suppression, he said.

SA Lithium’s operations are tiny compared with the area being prospected, where farmers grow an annual million tons of cane and macadamia nuts. That worries locals. “The future of farming here is gone,” said Joe Nkala, 51, a cane-growing farming consultant. “My kids will have to find a new life.”



China launches two satellites



A Jielong-3 carrier rocket carrying two satellites, the Dongfang Huiyan Hyperspectral 01 and 02, lifts off from a launch ship off the coast of Haiyang in eastern China's Shandong province yesterday. (AFP)

China sentences former defence industry regulator to 10 years for bribery

A Chinese court yesterday sentenced Zhang Jianhua, a former deputy director of its defence industry regulator, to 10 years in prison for bribery in part of a wider anti-graft shake-up in China's defence sector and military.

From 2008-2025, Zhang illegally took in over 55mn yuan (\$8.15mn) during his tenure at the State Administration of Science, Technology and Industry for National Defense (SASTIND) as well as after retirement, state-run Xinhua news agency cited the court's first-instance verdict as saying.

He leveraged his positions, including as director of the military

project review centre at SASTIND, to "provide assistance to relevant individuals in matters such as administrative approvals and equity investments," the court said.

Zhang was indicted earlier this year.

Zhang had served as SASTIND's deputy director under Ma Xingrui, who was purged from the elite Politburo in July. Ma had headed the defence industry regulator in 2013.

Zhang "admitted guilt and expressed remorse in court," Xinhua said.

At a Politburo group study session last week, Chinese President Xi Jinping urged senior leaders to deepen the fight against corruption in the military. (Reuters)

China's northern power grids hit record loads

A heatwave pushed power demand across northern, northeastern and eastern China to record highs earlier this week, the State Grid Corp of China said in a statement on Tuesday, as soaring temperatures boosted air-conditioning use. The hot weather has driven a rapid increase in electricity demand, according to State Grid.

The regions impacted include northern province Hebei and the port city of Tianjin, as well as northeastern Liaoning and eastern Shandong provinces. The State Grid has begun to optimise grid operations and prepare for the cross-region transmission of power to address the increased demand. (Reuters)

North Korea warns of 'military options' over Japan rearmament

AFP
Seoul

The powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un accused Japan yesterday of "transformation into a war state" as Tokyo beefs up its military stance in the Pacific.

Japan has been gradually moving away from its post-World War II pacifist status - increasing military spending, ramping up defence pacts and deploying missile launchers to its outer islands.

Tokyo's Defence Minister Shin-jiro Koizumi said on Tuesday the military needs to be boosted with a "sense of urgency and crisis", as a new government assessment warned of growing threats from China, Russia and North Korea.

In a statement carried by North Korean state media, Kim Yo Jong said Pyongyang's "leadership will set up additional military options which are obviously due to Japan's transformation".

"Japan, a war criminal state, is accelerating its transformation into a war state," said her state-

ment published by the Korean Central News Agency.

Kim cited Tokyo's recent test-firing of Tomahawk long-range cruise missiles and its May participation in US-led drills in the Philippines as evidence of Washington's support for "dangerous military moves" in the Pacific.

Tokyo is moving "to formulate the possession of the capability for preemptive attack", she said. "We will never remain a passive onlooker to the military evolution of Japan which may pose a grave threat."

Japan's defence ministry declined to comment directly on Kim's diatribe but told AFP that the country's defence capabilities "remain bare minimum" and "are not meant to threaten other countries".

"Ours isn't the defence meant to wage wars, but to prevent new wars, strictly kept to self-defence and within the scope of our (pacifist) Constitution and international laws," it said in a statement.

The ministry also confirmed that the Tomahawk experiment last week was Japan's first, adding

Korea to revive stalled rail project that could connect to North Korea

Reuters
Seoul

Republic of Korea will restart work on a railway section that could eventually link to North Korea's eastern city of Wonsan, the Unification Ministry said yesterday, reviving a project halted for a decade despite frozen relations with Pyongyang.

Unification Minister Chung Dong-young said in a presidential briefing the government would resume restoration of a disconnected section of the Gyeongwon Line near the Demilitarised Zone along the border with North Korea, a project launched in 2015 and suspended the following year.

A ministry press release said the railway, which begins in Seoul, could serve as a future connection to Wonsan, a key city on North Korea's eastern coast.

North Korea has poured resources into developing the Wonsan-Kalma coastal tourist zone, a sprawling beach resort that opened last year with capacity for about 20,000 visitors and which Kim has described as a model for expanding the country's tourism industry.

The Unification Ministry's announcement comes despite North Korea's move in 2024 to blow up road and rail links across the

Malaysia says will not repatriate Myanmar refugees if lives are at risk

AFP
Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia will not send 5,000 refugees back to Myanmar if authorities conclude their lives would be at risk, a government spokesman said Wednesday, while preparations continued for the potential repatriation.

Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim announced last week that Myanmar had agreed to take back 5,000 members of the persecuted Rohingya minority, in a rare repatriation push that has prompted concern from rights groups.

Communications Minister Fahmi Fadzil, without specifying the refugees' ethnicity, told a news briefing that "Malaysia, as a responsible country, will not send them back if they would either be persecuted or their lives would be threatened".

"The junta government in Myanmar is ready to receive them,

but we will examine what the criteria are. And if appropriate, we will implement" the repatriation plan, he said. "We cannot send them back if their lives are threatened. So there are several matters that are being looked into by the foreign ministry".

Myanmar authorities have made no public comment on the plan.

The repatriation plan was announced after Malaysian authorities last week detained more than 100 Rohingya who had gathered outside the UN refugee agency's office in Kuala Lumpur.

The refugees were being threatened with eviction from an informal settlement in northern Penang state.

They were later released after officials confirmed they held valid UN documentation.

Malaysia's home ministry has since begun documenting and screening refugees ahead of the planned repatriation, according to state news agency Bernama.

The news agency quoted Home Minister Saifuddin Nasution Ismail as saying 4,000 people in immigration detention identified for the process "will undergo screening and be placed at one depot instead of being spread across 19 depots, to facilitate the process".

Malaysia's main Rohingya rights group urged the government to halt the plan, saying their lives would be at risk if returned.

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

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

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



A Korean soldier stands guard next to the rails which leads to North Korea, inside the demilitarised zone separating the two Koreas in Paju, Korea. (Reuters/File Photo)

little opportunity to spend it, saying: "So the idea is to revise the enforcement decree and broaden its uses. That sounds reasonable."

Chung said the ministry would also seek regulatory changes allowing the fund to support border-area projects, peace economy initiatives, reunification activities and North Korea studies.

Separately, Korean Foreign Minister Cho Hyun said at a press conference yesterday that multilateral talks involving North Korea, the US and China were "realistically difficult" under current circumstances, highlighting the

continued diplomatic deadlock with Pyongyang.

Cho said North Korea-related issues would be a top priority in upcoming discussions with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

He also said Indonesia had at one point attempted to arrange dialogue between the two Koreas, but North Korea did not take up the proposal.

His remarks came after Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto said last week that Lee had asked whether he could visit North Korea to help open dialogue. Cho said he was not aware of Prabowo's comments.

Myanmar civil war nears a rare opening for talks as diplomacy gains ground

Reuters
Bangkok

After more than five years of fighting, a rare window for talks over Myanmar's devastating civil war is appearing, driven by a shift on the battlefield where the military has regained ground and mounting regional pressure to engage.

Analysts say the change is most visible in the position of an umbrella body that brings together several major ethnic armed organisations and the shadow government that includes remnants of the last elected administration. The Steering Council for the Emergence of a Federal Democratic Union (SCEF) said after a meeting last month with Thai and Philippine foreign ministers, who separately also met with Myanmar's military negotiation committee, that it is committed to pursuing a political settlement. Myanmar's junta chief turned president Min Aung Hlaing has yet to accept the SCEF as a negotiating partner, but his visit this week to Thailand, which is pushing for the gradual re-engagement of the regional Asian bloc with its war-torn neighbour, highlights wider efforts for a truce.

"It therefore seems that they have abandoned their previously stated public objective of overthrowing the Tatmadaw," said Morgan Michaels, research fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, referring to the SCEF and the Myanmar military. "Still, political dialogue between the Tatmadaw and SCEF groups may be quite a way off. The more near-term prospect is

that we'll witness a movement towards 'talk of talks'".

The SCEF's objective is to secure civilian supremacy and push Myanmar's military out of any political role, said spokesperson Saw Nimrod.

"That's our final call but for now, we are committed to achieving a negotiated political solution," he told Reuters. "We are open to dialogue and open to political negotiation."

To create conditions for meaningful dialogue, the SCEF has called on the military to end attacks on civilians and release all political prisoners. Myanmar's new government, which took office following an army-engineered election that allowed Min Aung Hlaing to take a civilian role, had also called on armed groups for talks by July 31. "Peace is our desire, our greatest wish," Min Aung Hlaing told parliament last week, although a conflict monitor flagged a sharp escalation in military attacks on civilians since the leadership transition.

Sparked by a February 2021 coup the conflict in Myanmar has so far killed over 100,000 people, displaced millions and devastated the economy. After a series of setbacks, the military initiated a conscription scheme, secured critical support from key allies such as China and deployed new battlefield tactics to help turn the tide. Beyond strategic border areas that the military is seeking to retake, armed groups in Myanmar's central Bago and southern Dawei regions have retreated from some areas due to intensive offensives by government troops, two fighters told Reuters.

Reuters
Taipei

Taiwan began major military drills yesterday to test commanders' ability to fight on the fly when enemy movements defy expectations, while temporarily limiting internet access for the first time, senior Taiwan officials said.

The 10-day annual Han Kuang exercise began early in the morning after an underground command centre in Taipei issued the drill order, triggering combat-readiness moves that will include fighter jet dispersals and emergency naval deployments, two

senior Taiwan officials briefed on the matter told Reuters.

Taiwan will also incorporate for the first time a so-called "back-brief" approach modelled on US military practice, in which junior officers receiving orders restate mission details to commanders - a move aimed at improving coordination, the officials added, requesting anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter.

The move, one of the officials said, is to "ensure commanders and subordinates are in sync on operational intent".

The drill will also focus on a key wartime concern: that China, which claims Taiwan as its own despite the island's objections, would

try to paralyse command centres, ports, logistics and defence industry sites early in an attack.

China's defence ministry did not respond to a request for comment. China has never renounced the use of force to bring Taiwan under its control.

Held annually since 1984, the drills will include for the first time the deliberate slowing of mobile internet speeds to test how civilians would communicate if bandwidth became scarce. The military will simulate the wartime relocation of a major arsenal, mobilise civilian factories and run escort drills off Taiwan's Pacific coast, as concern grows that Beijing may be rehearsing how to sever the is-

land's Pacific supply lines from allies as Chinese military pressure intensifies.

"These are all part of a series of toughening exercises - this is no longer a laboratory-like exercise in a vacuum," said a third senior official, speaking on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the operation.

"You are entering a real field environment, facing real bottom-line conditions. We hope the final phase of training reaches that state," the defence official said.

That is part of Taiwan's ongoing effort to make its exercises more realistic, following past criticism that some drills were too highly staged.

India floods, landslides kill more than 100 since July

AFP
New Delhi

Floods and landslides triggered by monsoon rains have killed more than 100 people across India since July, official data showed yesterday, with thousands forced to flee their inundated homes.

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

India's northeastern state of Assam is among the hardest hit by the annual rains, with at least 87 people killed, according to Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

In the state's worst-affected Sivasagar district, 47 people have been killed, and several areas are flooded.

State authorities have appealed for financial donations from the public to help.

"The devastation here is unlike anything these areas have witnessed before," Sarma posted on X.

"Material losses can be restored, but no compensation can replace a loved one."

AFP images showed residents using rafts and inflatable boats to reach higher ground.

In India's southern state of Kerala, Chief Minister VD Satheesan



People wade through a water-logged road after heavy rains in Kolkata, yesterday. (Reuters)

said at least 15 people have been killed and another seven were missing, after heavy rains over several days.

More than 300 relief camps have been set up in the state, sheltering over 10,000 people, after rains triggered landslides and swollen rivers breached their banks.

Lightning strikes, common during monsoon, killed at least 22 people in the eastern states of Bihar and Jharkhand since Tuesday, local disaster response officials said.

The dead, mostly farmers work-

ing in paddy fields and cattle grazers, included four children, the officials said on Wednesday.

Monsoon-related disasters are an annual occurrence across India after the region's long summers when many parts of the country face water scarcity and drought.

Some 12,000 people have been driven out of their flooded homes in the central region.

At the same time, the country's eastern regions were in the grip of a severe drought, with authorities having to transport drinking water

for residents in tanker trucks.

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The government last month said the severe weather events were due to this year's El Nino weather phenomenon, which warms surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean.

Meta apologises to India for restricting Modi's post

Reuters
New Delhi

Meta Platforms' Chief Global Affairs Officer Joel Kaplan apologised to India's information technology minister for briefly restricting a post by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in July, he said in a statement yesterday.

"I apologised to the minister on behalf of Meta for the error restricting PM Modi's post," Kaplan said.

Last month, India's information and technology ministry summoned Meta executives after Facebook briefly restricted a post by Modi. Meta said the post had been blocked inadvertently because of an operational error.

Police in the southern Indian city of Hyderabad also registered a case against Meta India head Arun Srinivas over videos posted on Facebook that allegedly depicted Modi in an "abusive manner", Reuters reported last week, citing a senior police officer.

The videos spread as Modi contended with the biggest wave of youth-led protests India has seen in more than a decade. The protests were over leaked papers in national examinations that led to the

resignation of his education minister.

The incidents are part of a recent run of tensions between Meta and Modi's government over content related to the prime minister. Modi has faced a barrage of online criticism, jokes and ridicule from protesters in recent weeks.

Separately, Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg apologised to the Indian government over child abuse material, deepfake content and other operational lapses on the company's platforms, local media reported earlier in the day.

Zuckerberg apologised during a meeting between Meta executives and Indian government officials, financial news publication Moneycontrol and other local outlets reported.

Meta did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

In July, the Indian government ordered Meta to remove adverts and content promoting child abuse material on Instagram, the BBC reported, citing a senior Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology official.

Meta said at the time it had a zero-tolerance policy on child sexual abuse material and was continuing to strengthen its detection systems, according to the BBC.

Sri Lanka bans major online gambling sites

Sri Lanka has blocked access to some of the world's largest online betting sites as part of a crackdown on unauthorised gambling, the Digital Economy Ministry said yesterday.

Online gambling is legal in Sri Lanka, but operators must register with the authorities and pay licence fees.

The government ordered local Internet providers to bar access from Sri Lanka to

24 major gambling sites — although VPN software could still bypass restrictions. Authorities also warned Sri Lankans that investing in those sites was illegal.

The banned sites include stake.com, bet365.com, betway.com and 1xBet.com.

"All telecom service providers have been ordered to implement the ban with immediate effect," the ministry said in a statement. (AFP)

Ex-PM Hasina says ban on her party should be lifted

Reuters
New Delhi

Bangladesh's former prime minister Sheikh Hasina said yesterday that the ban on her Awami League party should be lifted and reiterated that she would return to her country in December.

Hasina's comments were made during a media interaction hosted by the Foreign Correspondents' Club of South Asia in New Delhi — on the second anniversary of her ouster in 2024.

Hasina had been expected to address the event virtually by video but delivered only an audio message. It was not immediately clear why she did not appear on video, unlike her par-

ty colleagues and her son, who spoke before her.

It was her first such interaction with the media since her ouster. "I will return to my people," Hasina said, speaking from behind a blank video screen, adding that she would share the exact date of her return and other details when the time was right.

"They may try to implicate me with fabricated cases, but fear cannot decide my duty to the people, my life or beyond," she said.

Hasina, 78, told Reuters in an interview last month that she plans to return to her country by the end of the year and surrender to authorities there. Hasina fled Dhaka two years ago after protests ended her 20 years as prime minister across multiple terms.

The country's war-crimes court sentenced

her to death in her absence in November 2025 for ordering a deadly crackdown on the student-led uprising. She has denied the charges from exile.

Bangladesh's new government of Prime Minister Tarique Rahman — which took office after elections in February — warned the country's media on Tuesday not to publish her statements, saying that doing so would violate a 2024 court order that prohibits the publishing or broadcasting of her speeches and statements.

There was no immediate comment from the government in response to Hasina's latest remarks. Dhaka has repeatedly asked for Hasina's extradition from India. New Delhi has said that it is in receipt of the request and that it is being examined.

Burnham's social media strategy counters populists

Reuters
London

From discussing the merits of various pub snacks to making fun of his own appearance, Britain's new prime minister is taking on populist parties such as Reform UK on the social media platforms where they have built a huge following.

Andy Burnham's natural ease in communicating with voters was one of the main reasons why his Labour Party unceremoniously dumped its previous leader and prime minister, ex-lawyer Keir Starmer, and replaced him with the mayor of Greater Manchester.

After just two weeks, Burnham's quirky posts are getting millions of views on TikTok, X and Instagram, with a message designed to be positive, rather than polarising click-bait, experts say.

While it does not in itself address the immense challenges of kickstarting a stagnant economy and improving living standards, they say he has seized the opportunity to build up a following, knowing that soon enough his messages may have to be more uncomfortable.

James Lyons, former director of strategic communications for Burnham's predecessor Keir Starmer, who also used to work for TikTok, said Burnham was taking a different approach from the left-wing Greens or Reform UK.

"Instead of being polarising, he's just seeking to be popular and inclusive," said Lyons, now at the corporate advisory firm Penta Group.

"He's pulling off the very, very difficult trick of being very serious about what he's doing as prime minister, but not taking himself too seriously."

That gives him hope of being able to better take on Reform UK, whose leader Nigel Farage has spent years delivering arresting videos on immigration, crime and social issues to his 2.3mn followers on X, 1.5mn on TikTok and 1 mn on Instagram.

Winning the communication battle against Starmer helped give Reform a significant lead in opinion polls, though initial surveys after Burnham became PM show Labour has closed that gap, albeit around three years before the next election is due.

In the relaxed segment, in which prime minister and finance minis-

ter ranked various snacks, Burnham confessed to a weakness for the less-than-mainstream pickled-onion flavour "Monster Munch", and wondered aloud whether anyone outside northern England put crisps — 'chips' in North America — into their 'butties' — a northern term for sandwiches.

When opposition Conservative party leader Kemi Badenoch dismissed Burnham as "a pair of eyelashes and a black T-shirt", he posted a video of himself blinking hard, looking down and saying, "It's dark blue, actually".

Burnham's return after nine years out of parliament and 16 out of government is giving him "a second chance at a first impression", Lyons said.

Academics said Burnham's ability to communicate online — as relaxed as his predecessor Starmer was stilted — was vital for Labour, which has been heavily criticised for failing to communicate its strategy and the promises it has fulfilled since it won a landslide election victory in 2024.

Rosalynd Southern, senior lecturer in political communication at the University of Liverpool, said where Labour had previously produced "fairly random memes" on

TikTok and some interesting policy posts, Burnham had delivered a "more coordinated and integrated strategy".

Burnham is still far short of Farage, with about 730,000 followers on X, 450,000 on TikTok and 600,000 on Instagram, but he has been gaining rapidly, adding 50,000 on TikTok and Instagram on one day alone last week.

Katy Parry, professor of media and politics at the University of Leeds, said Burnham had recognised "a disconnect between politicians and the public" but had managed to find a different approach from Farage.

"He's not anti-politics in the way that some right-wing populist politicians are."

The videos not only help Burnham to reach voters where they spend much of their time — staring at their phones — but have also been covered positively by traditional media, amplifying the impact.

Some videos have tapped into online trends, such as a montage in the style of the American version of the TV comedy series *The Office*. But even a straightforward summary of five achievements in his first week got 5mn views on TikTok.



Police community support officers (PCSOs) stand behind cordon tape at Endell road in Covent Garden, central London yesterday. (AFP)

Woman arrested as four men stabbed in central London

AFP
London

A woman was arrested after four men were stabbed in Covent Garden, a busy area of central London popular with tourists, in a suspected "mental health related incident", police said yesterday.

"A 47-year-old woman was arrested on suspicion of possession of an offensive weapon and assault," London's Metropolitan Police said in a statement posted on X.

The victims were four men aged 34, 39, 42 and 52, the force added.

London Ambulance Service said the four patients had been taken to a major trauma centre after having been treated at the scene.

The Met said in its statement: "While at an early stage of the investigation, this is believed to be a mental health related incident."

Officers seized a pair of scissors at the scene, they added.

Emergency services were called around 12:30pm local time (1130 GMT).

Striking images published by media showed an air ambulance helicopter in Trafalgar Square and a street lined with stores and patio seating cordoned off by police tape.

Drought-hit Britain heads for worst cereal harvest in four decades



A drone view shows a solar farm surrounded by parched fields after Britain's Environment Agency declared seven areas of England to be in drought, near Andover. (Reuters)

Reuters
London

Britain's cereal harvest is on track to be the worst since comparable records began in 1984, according to an analysis published yesterday, as crops wither after one of the driest and hottest spring-summer periods on record.

England saw its warmest June on record and the UK its second warmest, while England and Wales experienced their driest July on record, according to Met Office data.

The Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit said the tough growing conditions may have knocked as much as 2.5 million metric tonnes off Britain's cereal and oilseed harvest compared to earlier forecasts, costing UK arable farmers up to £390 million (\$524 million) in lost revenue.

It cited provisional yield estimates produced by the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board suggesting wheat, spring barley and oat yields will all be down, with the estimated wheat yield well below the ten-year average at 6.8 tonnes per hectare.

It noted that with 54% of the wheat crop harvested, if these average yields hold, the UK cereal and oilseeds harvest would be 19.5 million tonnes, surpassing 2020 as the worst harvest on record since detailed records began in 1984.

This was even after accounting for good yields forecast for oilseed rape, it said.

"Even if yields are revised up, 2026 is now likely to be one of the five worst harvests since 1984, which would mean that four out of five of the worst harvests on record had occurred this decade after periods of extreme weather made worse by climate change," the ECIU said.

Earlier this week, the National Farmers' Union warned Britain could face shortages of certain foods due to the drought and called for the industry to be given tax breaks to improve water storage.

Last week more than 100 organisations wrote to new Prime Minister Andy Burnham urging him to make food a national priority alongside defence and energy.

Farmers across Europe have also warned of a slump in production and rising prices due to the extreme weather.

Why Ebola outbreak is spreading faster than previous epidemics

The Ebola epidemic in Democratic Republic of Congo is on track to surpass 4,000 cases this week and has been described as the fastest spreading on record since it was officially declared in May. It is already the world's second-largest epidemic after West Africa's 2014-16 outbreak in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, when the World Health Organization recorded more than 28,000 cases and 11,000 deaths.

Delayed detection, overwhelmed surveillance, military conflict and a lack of vaccines and treatments for the species of the virus involved have allowed the disease to outrun containment efforts this time. Health officials say the current epidemic is spreading five times faster than previous outbreaks did at this stage.

A 2018-2020 outbreak in Congo was previously the largest on record in the country, ending with 3,481 cases and 2,299 deaths recorded over two years. It took more than 10 months for eastern Congo to surpass 2,000 confirmed cases in that outbreak. The current epidemic reached that figure in roughly two months and by

late July had become the largest Ebola epidemic ever recorded in the country, less than three months after it was officially declared.

The rare Bundibugyo species of the virus spread undetected for months before the outbreak was declared in May.

Reuters reported that early cases were missed, some being diagnosed as peritonitis. Local funeral practices helped the virus spread before any alarm was raised, and continue to undermine the response. Later, health workers initially relied on tests for the wrong species of Ebola and samples sent to Kinshasa were mishandled, allowing the virus to spread undetected for months and making it difficult to regain control. A July report published in 'Science', a peer-reviewed academic journal, concluded that the outbreak had begun at least as early as January on the outskirts of the mining town of Mongbwalu.

World Health Organization officials estimated in July that around 80% of new infections emerged

outside known transmission chains, suggesting most cases are identified only after the virus has spread rapidly through communities. A Reuters visit with stretched surveillance teams in Ituri Province found contact tracers lack resources and are overwhelmed by case loads while investigating alerts and monitoring contacts. Health officials say the result is a vicious cycle: undetected transmission creates more cases, which further stretches already overburdened surveillance teams. Aid cuts have affected both surveillance efforts that might have caught the disease earlier and the ongoing effort to contain it.

USAID was awarding a five-year contract in 2025 to carry out health surveillance in Congo when the agency was abruptly shuttered last year, Tom Van Boven, the global health security team lead, told Reuters. Reuters reported in June that key parts of the Ebola response were facing funding and staffing shortfalls. As of mid-July, WHO had received less than half the funding needed to fight the eastern

Congo outbreak. Health workers have also protested over unpaid salaries. Those challenges have been compounded by broader cuts to humanitarian assistance such as programs to provide water and sanitation, to which the US was also the top donor.

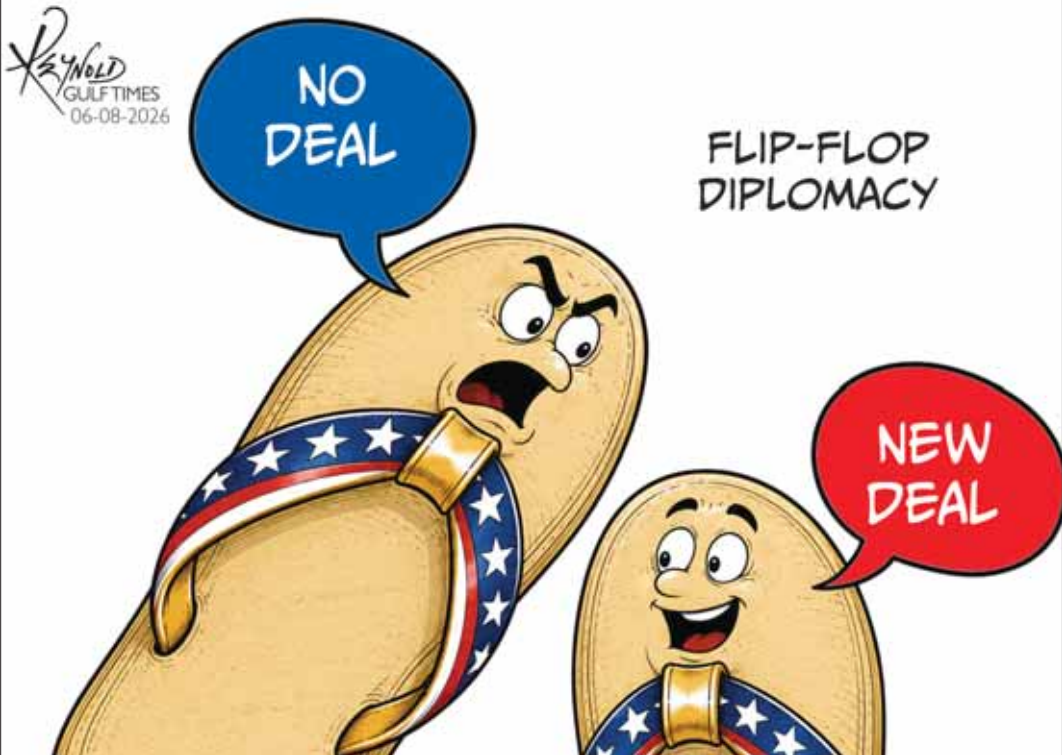
Unlike the more common Zaire species behind the 2018-2020 outbreak, for which vaccines and treatments exist, there is no licensed vaccine or proven treatment for the Bundibugyo species driving this epidemic. One infectious disease expert noted that most vaccines developed over the past decade focused on the Zaire species, leaving responders with fewer powerful tools this time.

The outbreak is concentrated in eastern Congo, a region affected by violence for decades, where conflict has delayed access to communities, disrupted the movement of personnel and supplies, and complicated contact tracing. Attacks on hospitals and health teams continue and have further complicated the response. — Reuters

Heat wave alert in Korea



An aerial view shows green algae bloom spreading across Soyang Lake during a heat wave warning in Inje, Korea, yesterday. (Reuters)



The rising importance of regional security alliances for small states

By Rory Miller

On its launch last week, the Saudi-led Maritime Defense Alliance immediately gained the backing of 14 countries. This enthusiasm underscores the real concerns across the international community over the threat posed by Houthi targeting of Red Sea shipping. But it also points to something much bigger: The rising importance of informal multinational coalitions for regional actors looking to respond to emerging threats in a growing security vacuum.

Over the last decade, such coalitions have become an increasingly central component of regional security across Africa and the Middle East. In Africa, these have included the G5 Sahel Joint Task Force and the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), established in 2014 and 2015 respectively to address the threat of Islamist terror in West Africa. More recently, the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF) was launched in 2022 to stabilize the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) amidst a resurgence of numerous armed factions including the M23 rebel group. In the Middle East, these coalitions have included two other Saudi-led initiatives: the Arab Coalition in Yemen and the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition both established in 2015.

All of these coalitions differ in mandate, sophistication and size – from the 5-member G5 Sahel Joint Task Force to the 43 member Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition. But they also share several key characteristics that distinguish them from traditional alliances like NATO or other formal regional organizations like the EU and the GCC. Firstly, they do not have strict conditions for admission.

Membership does not require participants to agree up front to financial or other material



contributions. Members also usually agree to join without any resort to formal arrangements such as treaties that set down rules and other obligations. This flexibility and a lack of binding commitments removes the need for drawn out negotiations among prospective members before the coalition can be launched.

But the improvised nature of these coalitions and their lack of formal rules means that their success depends on the willingness of participants and other stakeholders to work together on an ad hoc basis to achieve the coalition's mission. The first of these relationships that matters is the one between coalition members and the major external actors outside of it, primarily the US and China.

The second is the relationship between the coalition's middle power leader, in this case Saudi Arabia, and other local middle powers who join the coalition as subordinate members. In the Maritime Defense Alliance this includes Pakistan, Turkiye, Nigeria and Egypt. The third is the relationship between the middle power leader (Saudi Arabia) and smaller states. These are the majority of coalition members, and so far in the Maritime Defense Alliance include Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Jordan and Djibouti.

Small state participation in these coalitions is in itself evidence of the increasingly multicomplex security

environment we inhabit. In the past, smaller actors preferred to join security alliances led by global superpowers because they offered stability and predictability and could, in some cases, even entail security guarantees enshrined in a treaty. Informal coalitions, like the Maritime Defence Alliance, do not offer any of that. On the contrary, in informal coalitions the concrete mission takes priority over any potential security commitments to coalition partners in so far as they even exist.

This is a reality that member states of all sizes face. However, because the security of smaller states usually depends on some form of security assurances from allies, it impacts on them far more than larger states.

While the financial costs of entry into informal coalitions is minimal or non-existent, membership brings other costs for small states. Firstly, these coalitions only exist for a specific mission or task. This makes the contributions of each member more visible and subject to scrutiny, which in turn makes outright non-participation in return for benefits – known in the academic literature as “free-riding” – much more difficult for a small state to achieve than in a formal alliance. Small states in informal coalitions cannot hide in the shadows; membership always entails some level of active participation – the very definition of being part of a coalition.

The informality of these coalitions also means that there are few formal institutional mechanisms that allow

for debate and discussion and offer small states an opportunity to have a say in decision-making. At the same time, participation in an informal coalition can draw a country further into the realm of the leading actor and therefore affects longer-term relations with the respective regional rivals. Smaller states need to be aware of this, especially in the current regional context of dynamic multipolarity, where several middle powers compete for regional influence.

This does not mean that there are no potential advantages for small states who participate in informal coalitions like the Maritime Defence Alliance. Firstly, small states are usually incapable of countering major regional challenges on their own and, in these terms, tend to be enthusiastic supporters of whatever collaborative frameworks are available to address specific security threats.

Moreover, the non-binding nature of cooperation also reduces the risk of entrapment – a scenario feared especially by weaker partners in formal alliances, whereby they are forced into fighting the battles of bigger members. If military or other security interventions escalate in ways that a small state in a coalition does not support, the exit option is always available.

Finally, small states can have influence in, or through, an informal alliance if they can exercise leverage over, or at least work in partnership with, the coalition leader. In this situation, the coalition can be a vehicle for smaller members to achieve more regional influence than their size would normally allow.

The Maritime Defence Alliance is in its infancy, but all of these factors are likely to have big implications for the management of its operational tasks and the levels and nature of cooperation between member states in coming months.

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A ship off the port of Aden. Maritime traffic was affected after Houthis said their forces had carried out missile and drone strikes on Saudi oil tankers, in Aden, Yemen. (Reuters/File Photo)

Europe's established tech firms emerge as unexpected AI winners

The AI boom was widely expected to favour the new companies building the models. Recent earnings suggest it is some of Europe's biggest, well-established technology groups that are emerging as AI beneficiaries. SAP, Capgemini, Sopra Steria and OVHcloud have all reported stronger demand, faster growth or upgraded outlooks as companies move from experimenting with artificial intelligence to deploying it across their operations.

In the process, they discover that making AI productive inside a complex organisation is proving harder than gaining access to the technology. Large organisations are unlikely to rely on a single AI provider. Instead, they are expected to use different models for different tasks depending on performance, security and regulatory requirements. The challenge increasingly lies not in choosing a model, but in making AI work with the software, data and business processes companies already use. 'AI applications are the battleground, and that is where most value will be created,' UBS said in a recent note.

That plays directly to the strengths of Europe's established software, consulting and infrastructure groups, many of which built their businesses helping large organisations integrate complex technologies long before generative AI emerged. Most large organisations do not start with a clean technological slate. AI systems must work with software built up over decades, fragmented databases, customised applications and increasingly complex governance requirements. They must also access live company information, while respecting permissions, preserving audit trails and fitting into workflows employees already use.

The complexity of that task is becoming one of the biggest constraints on AI adoption. Boston Consulting Group said deployment was advancing faster than companies' ability to manage it, with more than 70% of investors expressing concern about whether organisations have the technical and operational capabilities needed to succeed with AI. As companies move from experimentation to application, spending on implementation, integration and governance is becoming an increasingly important part of the AI value chain. SAP's cloud backlog rose 26% at constant currencies to €22.9bn as companies continued moving critical finance, procurement, supply-chain and human-resources systems onto platforms that increasingly serve as the foundation for AI deployment.

The company's acquisitions of data specialist Dremio and AI company Prior Labs underline the growing importance of making enterprise data accessible to AI applications. Capgemini raised its annual growth target after bookings climbed 9.2%, while Sopra Steria upgraded its outlook after organic growth accelerated to 5.3%.

The two Paris-listed companies are benefiting from the work that follows AI adoption: integrating models into workflows, managing data and building governance systems. That work is particularly valuable in sectors such as defence, aerospace, healthcare and critical infrastructure, where AI must be fitted around specialist software and tightly controlled operational processes. Recent results, however, suggest the biggest beneficiaries of AI may not be limited to those building the models. Increasingly, they may be the companies that make those models usable inside the world's largest organisations. — Reuters



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Russian barrage kills 17 in ill-equipped Kyiv

AFP
Kyiv

Russian missile and drone strikes killed at least 17 people and wounded dozens more in Kyiv and the surrounding region overnight, authorities said yesterday.

Kyiv was unable to shoot down any of the missiles launched by Russia, whose intensifying attacks have prompted Kyiv to plead for more US-made Patriot interceptors. Russia has significantly upped its attacks on the Ukrainian capital in recent months, typically firing salvos of hard-to-intercept ballistic missiles in short blitzes that rock buildings and send booms echoing across the city.

“Ballistic interceptors are what could have saved the lives of those killed today,” Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said, announcing the 17-person death toll.

A cloud of smoke hovered over the capital at sunrise, AFP journalists saw, after the attacks sparked fires in several locations in the region. Over 40 people were wounded in the capital and its surrounding areas, local authorities said.

AFP journalists heard explosions in Kyiv after midnight, following Ukrainian air force warnings of incoming ballistic missiles.

One journalist reported seeing dark smoke and the acrid smell of burning lingering in the air hours later. “The night was so terrifying, so hard,” Kyiv resident Natalia Reutska told AFP in the morning after the attack. “We’ve gotten used to waking up thinking, ‘we were lucky today,’ and that’s very scary,” she added.

Ukraine did shoot down 98 of the 115 drones fired by Russia overnight, the air force said. But it was unable to shoot down any of the missiles, preliminary statistics from the air force showed.

EU chief Ursula von der Leyen slammed “horrible atrocities” while French President Emmanuel Macron said France would “not give into intimidation” and called to increase sanctions on Russia.



A view of tanks in St Michael's Square during Britain's Defence Secretary Wes Streeting's one day visit to Kyiv yesterday. (Reuters)

Kyiv can intercept the vast majority of drones, but still relies on supplies from allies to counter missiles. Zelensky said the number of air defence missiles supplied from allies had dropped threefold compared with 2025.

He has repeatedly warned about critical air defence shortages, as Moscow fired a record number of missiles at Ukraine in July, an AFP analysis of Ukrainian air force data published Saturday showed.

There has been an uptick in civilian deaths in the conflict throughout 2026, the UN has reported, as the four-and-a-half-year war grinds on with no sign of a peace deal.

In Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region, a key target for the Kremlin, local authorities yesterday ordered hundreds of families with children to leave the major Ukrainian-held city of Kramatorsk.

“This is a difficult but necessary decision. The security situation is deteriorating, so it is unacceptable to leave children under the constant threat of Russian attacks,” Donetsk region governor Vadym Filashkin said.

The Russian attacks overnight mainly targeted warehouses, Kyiv said, with some strikes on infrastructure and a railway station.

Eight people were killed in a

strike on a train station on the eastern edge of Kyiv, where an AFP journalist saw several bodies covered with white sheets next to the train tracks.

Logistics centres of the general merchandise chain Epicentr were struck, burning one hub completely to the ground and killing an employee, the company said.

Three people working at a postal sorting centre were also killed, and online retailer Rozetka also said it suffered its third attack this week.

Moscow said it hit “transportation, logistics, and distribution centres in the city of Kyiv and the Kyiv region that were involved in the storage, delivering various weapons and military cargo, as well as in the production and distribution of unmanned aerial vehicles.”

The network of Russian online retailer Wildberries has been hit around a dozen times since mid-July by Ukrainian forces.

The series of strikes killed at least eight people and have knocked out a large chunk of the company's storage capacity.

Kyiv accuses the e-commerce giant – which employs tens of thousands of people and is sometimes referred to as “Russia's Amazon” – of storing drone parts and helping the Russian army.

Ceuta to transfer Moroccan minors to Spain

Reuters
Ceuta

Spain's Ceuta, still reeling from a rush of 72,000 migrants arriving on its shores in one week, is seeking the transfer of hundreds of unaccompanied minors still in the enclave to mainland Spain, local leaders said yesterday. Though the vast majority of migrants have since returned to Morocco, roughly 1,100 unaccompanied minors who arrived before and during the influx – and cannot be summarily deported – remain, according to the local government. Many are lodged in makeshift accommodation in warehouses or sleeping on the streets as Ceuta's reception centres are full. Charities and residents' groups said they



A migrant minor from Morocco is escorted by Spanish security forces last week amid recent migrant rush. (Reuters)

were trying to help children sleeping rough, along with pregnant women. Hamza Sitouni Moreno, a 40-year-old local, said he had taken children to the authorities but been turned away, so he had a young girl sleeping in his car for safety, and had built makeshift shelters for other

children and provided them with food and blankets. “So many people arrived ... the authorities cannot handle this,” he said. About 75 people died during last week's border rush across one of the European Union's two land borders with Africa, which triggered alarm across the bloc.

Austria swelters during heatwave in Europe

Reuters
Budapest/Mallakaster/Albania

The temperature in Austria climbed to a record high yesterday, while Hungarians curbed power use as the latest heatwave and drought took their toll central and southern Europe.

Europe, the world's fastest warming continent, has been ravaged by record-breaking heat and destructive wildfires this summer, with France and Spain particularly hard hit in recent weeks.

The focus of the heatwave has shifted further east, with Italy placing its major cities under a red heat alert as temperatures climbed to around 40 degrees Celsius in some areas. In Albania, emergency services battled a wildfire in the southern region of Mallakaster.

The heat prompted the Vatican to move Pope Leo's first weekly general audience after the July break indoors rather than hold it in St Peter's Square. Visitors to Rome welcomed the decision as they sought relief from the sweltering conditions.

“I suppose it's better to hold it indoors because of the heat,” a tourist from Mexico, Diego Amaya, said.

The temperature hit a record 41.2C in the Austrian town of Bad Deutsch-Altenburg near the border with Slovakia, national weather service GeoSphere Austria said. The previous record of 41.0C was set on Tuesday in nearby Vienna.

Across the border in Hungary, companies and households cut power consumption this week after a government appeal to ease pressure on the grid amid the severe drought. The capital Budapest is facing the peak of the heatwave over the next two days, with temperatures rising close to 40C on yesterday afternoon.

Greeks survey damage left by fires near Athens

AFP
Athens

Greek officials and residents of a region west of the capital Athens yesterday began to assess the damage suffered by homes, businesses and farmland scorched by a wildfire. According to his office, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis chaired a cabinet meeting yesterday to determine compensation for fire-stricken victims and to ascertain environmental damage.

Meanwhile, teams from the Environment and Civil Protection ministries arrived to assess communities about 50 km northwest of Athens, where residents have been returning after preventive evacuations, public broadcaster Ertnews reported.

The blaze blackened more than 14,000 hectares in just five days but “the situation in the region is much better,” fire services spokesman Vassilis Vathrakoyannis told AFP yesterday. “Firefighters remain on maximum alert to deal with areas

where there is still smoke.”

According to an initial investigation by the fire service, the blaze started on Friday with a spark on power cables managed by a private company in Agios Vasileios, a seaside village at the foot of a mountain 85 km north-west of Athens.

The smell of smoke was still present around the resort of Porto Germeno, a seaside resort where a large part of formerly forested land has been devoured by the flames and dozens of houses have burnt down, AFP reporters observed.

Fanned by wind gusts of up to 130 km per hour, the fire quickly spread towards the southern slopes of Mount Kithairon and reached Megara, an industrial and agricultural town 40 km from Athens. Following devastating fires in Spain and France, Greek authorities have been fighting since the end of July against dozens of fires across the country that have killed five people, including three firefighters and the two members of the crew of a helicopter that was battling the flames.

Explosive drone found at air cargo hub in Germany

Counterterrorism investigation were opened in Germany yesterday after an explosive-laden drone was found at Leipzig/Halle airport near a runway overnight, prompting partial closure of one of Europe's biggest cargo hubs.

Investigators were also examining what a DHL cargo plane had struck in the air after being diverted from the airport in eastern Germany during the disruption. Airport workers discovered the drone in a restricted cargo area near the southern runway. Flights were suspended and several aircraft, including some owned by German logistics firm DHL, were diverted.

Authorities said there had been no danger to passengers or airport staff and most operations resumed by morning after

one runway was reopened.

The diverted plane hit an unidentified object while climbing away from the airport. Minor damage was discovered after it landed in Hanover, authorities said. A source familiar with the incident said the plane belonged to DHL. The southern runway of the airport, a major hub for DHL and Ukraine's Antonov Airlines, remained closed while explosives experts examined the drone, according to authorities.

Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt scheduled an emergency meeting with the heads of security services yesterday.

German airports are on high alert after a series of unauthorised drone overflights at sites. Federal police said the overflights could have been Russian agents' doing. (Reuters)

Climber Purja's body reaches base

AFP
Skardu

A search team has transported the bodies of renowned climber Nirmal Purja and three of his team members to the base camp of the mountain on which they were killed by an avalanche, the Alpine Club of Pakistan said yesterday.

The avalanche struck on July 30, cutting off contact with the 10-member international expedition led by 43-year-old British-Nepali climber Purja on Broad Peak, one of the world's highest mountains. His company confirmed there were no survivors.

“On behalf of the Alpine Club of Pakistan, it is announced with great sadness to confirm that, following an exceptionally challenging and technically demand-

ing recovery operation on Broad Peak, the bodies of Nirmal Purja, Zhong Wang, Nima Sherpa, and Kilu Sherpa have been successfully recovered and have now arrived safely at Base Camp,” the ACP posted on social media, referring to a Chinese mountaineer and two other Nepali climbers.

“While today marks an important milestone, three climbers remain missing,” the club said.

“We remain committed to supporting all possible efforts to locate and recover them, whenever conditions allow, so that they too may be returned home to their loved ones,” it added.

The remains of three other members of the team – an American woman, an Omani woman and a Nepali man – had already been flown off the mountain to the northern Pakistani city of Skardu.

The bodies of two Nepali na-

tionals and a Pakistani citizen have not yet been recovered.

Shock and grief have hit members of the alpine climbing community with the President of Nepal's National Mountain Guide Association Tul Singh Gurung saying they had “lost a generation of accomplished mountaineers.”

The ACP said the recovered bodies of the four climbers would be returned to their families.

“We hope this recovery brings them a measure of peace and the opportunity to lay their loved ones to rest with the dignity they deserve,” the club said.

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. It was first summited in 1957 by an Austrian team.

‘Lost’: Migrants despair after Britain expels them back to France

AFP
Paris, France

Former Afghan soldier Haidary Hamedullah risked his life to cross the Channel hoping for a brighter future for his family in Britain, but just weeks later UK authorities expelled him back to France.

“People like me have nowhere in the world to live in safety,” said the 28-year-old with chubby cheeks and jet-black hair, whose wife and two children – who turn eight and 10 this year – await in Pakistan. “Where should we go?”

He is one of 1,087 people who the United Kingdom has forcibly returned to France, as part of a so-called “one in, one out” deal with France.

Under the treaty, which came into force on August 6 last year and has been extended to the end of September, the UK can reject migrants who crossed the Channel illegally if they are deemed ineligible for asylum. In return, London accepts an equal number of migrants from France who have not taken the small boat route.

By the end of June, London had in exchange for its forced removals admitted 1,117 other migrants who had requested entry in France.

London and Paris say the accord helps crack down on people smuggling and limits the number of migrants attempting the often deadly crossing to England's south coast.

More than 41,000 migrants landed last year – the second-highest annual number since records began in 2018.

But more than 20 charities in both countries have said the French-British deal inflicts “further harm on people who have already survived war, torture, persecution, violence, human trafficking, and a treacherous sea journey.”

Hamedullah, who spoke to AFP in Paris, said he was forced to flee Afghanistan to neighbouring Pakistan with his family after the Taliban seized power in August 2021.

Departing alone from Pakistan, he tried a dozen times to cross into Europe via Greece then Bulgaria before succeeding.

He was twice refused asylum in Austria after police stopped him there in June 2022.



Michael, an Ethiopian man sits on a mattress at the makeshift camp mainly occupied by migrants at La Chapelle metro station in Paris. (AFP)

Once he had exhausted all means of appeal in February for his EU request for protection, he decided to try his luck outside the bloc – by crossing the Channel from France to the UK.

He paid €1,500 (\$1,700) to people smugglers in the French port

city of Dunkirk to cross one of the world's busiest shipping lanes to England on a dinghy. French police thwarted a first attempt.

But in April, after eight hours of lying in wait on the beach then standing in the water, he and others boarded a small vessel unspot-

ted, and headed across the sea.

When they landed in the British town of Dover, officials sent women and children to hotels, but arrested men travelling alone like him. “Authorities who interviewed me told me that I ‘shouldn't be here,” he said.

He ended up with around 350 other people at a detention centre near Heathrow airport outside London.

“We were all depressed,” he said. “We ate, waited, doing nothing.” He said there was “only one television with one channel.”

Hamedullah said he was assigned a lawyer, with whom he spoke for 30 minutes.

But 51 days later, he was flown back to France, where he now fears he could soon be sent back to Austria. He said he hadn't committed any crime.

“I fought with your armies,” he said, referring to the Western armies that battled the Taliban.

“I'm lost, completely lost.”

Yemeni brothers Yunes, 33, and Yassin, 24, say they fled Houthi rebels in 2023, after they overran their country's capital eight years earlier. Yunes said the siblings,

who both have a genetic eye condition and asked not to use their family name for fear of reprisals, spent 18 months in Egypt before travelling to Europe.

He said they received death threats from drug dealers after they arrived in France, and decided to instead cross the Channel to be reunited with their sister, who has British nationality.

At first, when their boat of some 60 passengers landed in April after 15 hours on the water, they were taken to a reception centre and given cake and orange juice.

Then they were questioned. “The employee of the interior ministry told me I was a criminal and I came illegally,” he said.

“I told her I tried to ask for a visa but I never succeeded, and I didn't have any other choice.”

Their sister's best efforts to help them failed, he said, and after several weeks' detention, they were sent back to France on a plane in late May.

“I'm so sad,” he told AFP via telephone from a refugee shelter in central France, where they are now waiting to hear if they can stay.

“I feel like an object.”

Ministry rolls out Hader app to facilitate mosque operations, administrative services

The Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs (Awqaf) has launched 'Hader', an innovative digital platform catering to imams and callers to prayer nationwide as part of its wider digital transformation strategy.

The platform is part of the ministry's endeavour to leverage digital technology in workplaces, which would ultimately enhance institutional performance efficiency and streamline procedures and services offered to workforces operating in mosques. The move further fosters the ministry's role in undertaking its Dawah mission and serving society based on the most advanced administrative and technological practices.

The application in question is an advanced executive tool to bring a paradigm shift in the work system at mosques, intending to replace conventional paperwork procedures and rely on an almost entirely automated digital operation.

This transition would significantly save time and effort, accelerate the accomplishment of administrative transactions and official communications, as well as ensure further operational efficiency and flexibility when it comes to daily business management. In addition, the application fosters effective engagement between mosque operators and their onsite workforces, particularly imams and callers to prayer, through a direct and reliable communication channel that enables the swift exchange of information and administrative guidance. It will likewise support governance and transparency by ensuring data accuracy, expediting information monitoring and verifying it electronically.

Intriguingly, the application serves a broad network covering 1,456 mosques across Qatar and targets 3,435 imams and callers to prayer, underscoring its expected impact and role in standardizing procedures, boosting communication efficiency and optimizing services provided to mosque personnel. Moreover, the application is customised to a digital system that monitors hygiene levels at mosques periodically, thereby strengthening field surveillance and upgrading service quality afforded to mosques. It enables workforces to record comments and operational reports related to the performance of sanitation companies instantly and reliably.

QNA

Fresh catch boosts sales at Old Doha Port fish market

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

The resumption of the local fishing season has significantly revitalised business at Jabrat Al Mina Fish Market in the Old Doha Port, with abundant supplies of freshly caught local seafood driving stronger consumer demand for premium domestic fish. The renewed influx of local catches has helped restore market balance, broaden consumer choice, and keep retail prices relatively stable, while supporting the continued growth of Qatar's domestic fisheries sector.

The market is currently witnessing brisk daily activity as fishing boats unload fresh catches directly at the port before they are offered for sale.

Popular local species, including hamour, kingfish, sheri, safi, Sultan Ibrahim (red mullet), faskar, as well as shrimp and oysters, are attracting strong demand from both Qatari nationals and expatriate residents. Several high-demand varieties reportedly sell out before the end of the trading day, reflecting consumers' strong preference

for freshly landed local seafood. Vendors attributed the strong sales to the reopening of the fishing season, which has substantially increased domestic supply and helped stabilise prices amid the usual seasonal fluctuations. The greater availability of locally caught fish has expanded purchasing options and further strengthened Jabrat Al Mina's reputation as Qatar's premier destination for fresh seafood.

Traders also noted that the market continues to offer a wide selection of imported seafood to cater to diverse consumer preferences, including tilapia starting at QR10 per kilogram. They added that prices may vary daily depending on normal fluctuations in supply and demand.

According to the latest data, Qatar's fishing fleet comprises thousands of licensed vessels operating along a coastline stretching approximately 563km. Continued investments in sustainable fisheries management and modern fishing infrastructure are also supporting domestic seafood production. The Ministry of Municipality has further intensified efforts to regulate fishing seasons, protect fish stocks,

and promote sustainable harvesting practices to preserve marine biodiversity and ensure the sector's long-term productivity.

Meanwhile, Jabrat Al Mina has enhanced the overall shopping experience through a range of modern retail services. Fish cleaning, filleting and preparation services, high hygiene standards, electronic payment facilities, and well-organised trading areas have significantly improved convenience for customers.

These value-added services have also reduced waiting times and increased customer satisfaction, transforming what was once a traditional fish market into a modern retail destination.

Consumers at the market praised the combination of high-quality products, competitive prices, and efficient service, emphasising that locally caught seafood remains their preferred choice for its freshness and superior taste. "Besides its excellent location and modern facilities, the market offers a truly rewarding shopping experience. It features a wide variety of local fish brought in fresh from the sea every day, many of which are difficult to find elsewhere," said Ahmed, a



Vendors attributed the strong sales to the reopening of the fishing season, which has substantially increased domestic supply and helped stabilise prices amid the usual seasonal fluctuations.



shopper, who also commended the market's contemporary design and world-class facilities.

Located within the redeveloped Old Doha Port waterfront, Al Mina district has evolved into more than just a commercial marketplace. It has become a popular destination that blends Qatar's rich maritime heritage with modern amenities, attracting residents, visitors, and tourists alike.



Its growing popularity is also contributing to the broader revitalisation of Old Doha Port as a cultural, leisure, and commercial hub. With fishing activity expected to remain strong in the coming

months, traders anticipate continued price stability and a steady supply of key seafood varieties. They believe this will attract even more customers to the market and further boost business activity.

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٦-٨-٢٠٢٦ في جميع منافذ سفاري
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لحم بقري بالعظم باكستاني ١ كجم
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Banana Ecuador 1 kg



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Watermelon Oman 1 kg



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برتقال فالنسيا مصري ١ كجم
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