

Amir condolences with Saudi king

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani sent a cable of condolences yesterday to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud of Saudi Arabia, on the passing of the mother of HH Prince Bandar bin Mansour bin Abdullah bin Jalawi al-Saud. HH the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani and HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani also sent cables of condolences to the king. – **QNA**

Applications to military colleges now open for General Secondary School Certificate holders

The unified standing committee for the selection of military officer candidates has announced an application window to join military colleges (Diploma – Other Ranks). Running from August 8-29, the application period targets male and female holders of the General Secondary School Certificate or its equivalent. The eligibility criteria, as outlined by the committee, specifies that applicants must

be Qatari nationals, holders of the General Secondary School Certificate or its equivalent, and not be older than 26 years when applying. They must also have a good reputation and conduct, and must not have been previously convicted of a felony or a crime that violates honour or integrity unless fully rehabilitated. Also, intending applicants must not have been dismissed from public service

by a final disciplinary ruling. Moreover, they must be medically fit, to be determined by the competent medical committee. Applicants are required to successfully pass the prescribed physical fitness tests, in addition to a personal interview conducted by the selection committee. The unified standing committee listed the required documents for applying, which include: a certified copy of the ap-

plicant's General Secondary School Certificate, or an equivalency certificate for private schools; a copy of the applicant's ID card; a copy of the applicant's birth certificate; and a certificate from the Civil Service and Government Development Bureau attesting that the applicant is not employed by any other government entity. The committee reserves the right to add further requirements or tests if deemed necessary. – **QNA**



Dukhan Bank launches offer giving cardholders cash bonus at Harrods UK

Dukhan Bank has announced an exclusive promotional campaign, offering customers a 10% cash bonus on qualifying purchases made at Harrods UK. Running until September 30, 2026, the campaign is available exclusively to Dukhan Bank Retail and Private Banking customers who hold Visa Infinite credit cards, Visa Infinite debit cards, or Privilege credit cards. To qualify for the cash bonus, eligible cardholders must achieve a minimum cumulative spend of £1,000 at Harrods UK by September 30, 2026. Qualifying transactions include all eligible purchases made at Harrods, whether through in-store point-of-sale transactions or online purchases. To ensure customers receive the greatest benefit from the campaign, each customer will be eligible for one reward only, calculated based on their highest qualifying spend during the campaign period, up to a maximum reward of £500. For more information about the campaign and the full range of banking products, services, and solutions offered by Dukhan Bank, visit www.dukhanbank.com or call 8008555.

5 days remain for in-person registration for govt schools

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

Government school registration system moves online as summer centres near closure date

A few days remain to complete government school registration and transfer procedures through the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE)'s summer registration centres, as the ministry moves towards the final stage of preparations for the 2026-27 academic year. The summer registration centres, set to conclude their work on August 13, have provided in-person support throughout the school holiday, complementing the ministry's expanded digital registration system and giving families an additional channel to complete applications, update information and resolve cases requiring direct assistance. The MoEHE said the registration and transfer process for the new academic year began on April 12 through the Maaref Public Services Portal, and will continue until August 13. Registration will reopen from August 25 to October 1 to provide an additional opportunity for eligible applicants. The latest registration cycle has placed particular emphasis on reducing paperwork, improving the accuracy of student and residential data and enabling parents to complete more procedures remotely. A key development has been the introduction of the Parent Profile service on the Maaref portal, allowing parents to review and update essential information, including residential details and the electricity number associated with their home. The service is intended to ensure that student records reflect current information when registration, transfer and automatic promotion procedures are carried out. The ministry has said that accurate residential information is particularly important because school allocation is linked to students' geographical areas of residence. The data therefore supports the more accurate distribution of students and helps determine the appropriate school when students

A key development is the introduction of the Parent Profile service on the Maaref portal

move automatically to the next educational stage. According to the MoEHE, the automatic transfer process covers students completing kindergarten, Grade 4 in boys' model schools, Grade 6 and Grade 9. Schools carried out the internal transfer process in February, while parents were notified of the destination schools between March 29-31. The Parent Profile service also enables parents to follow registration and school-transfer requests electronically, reducing the need to visit ministry offices or service centres except where physical attendance is required. Assistant Undersecretary for Educational Affairs Maha Zayed al-Ruwaili described the Parent Profile initiative as more than a technical upgrade, stressing its role in making school-related administrative procedures easier for families. "We believe that the family is our first partner," she said, adding that the service was designed to "shorten procedures" and give parents greater reassurance in following their children's educational journey. While digital services have become the principal route for registration, the ministry has maintained physical support for families who require assistance. Four summer centres were designated to handle registration and transfer applications during the holiday period, operating from July 5 through August 13. Their role has been particularly important for cases requiring document verification, clarification or direct intervention. The centres provide an additional layer of support rather than replacing the electronic system, allowing parents to resolve issues that cannot be completed fully online and helping ensure that applications are proc-

essed before the start of the academic year. Under the ministry's 2026-27 registration framework, parents are required to provide documentation establishing the student's eligibility and, where applicable, proof of actual residence within the geographical area served by the school. Acceptable evidence includes a notarised tenancy contract or an electricity certificate in the guardian's name. The ministry has also established age requirements based on the child's age as of December 31, 2026. Children born by the end of 2022 are eligible for kindergarten, those born by the end of 2021 for the preparatory stage, and children born by December 31, 2020 can register for Grade 1. Qatari students and children born in January and February are exempted from the minimum-age requirement for Grades 1-4 under the applicable rules. Parents are required to prepare documents including the identity card, birth certificate and student health file. Additional employment documentation is required for certain categories of resident students. The ministry has also recommended the use of its "Where Is My School?" electronic service to help families identify the school appropriate to their residential location. The ministry's official public school registration service confirms that eligible categories include children of Qatari men and women and Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) citizens, as well as specified categories of residents, including children of government-sector employees and holders of permanent residency, subject to the applicable admission rules. In the meantime, the ministry has expanded electronic services supporting registration for students with disabilities, while registration procedures differ according to the nature of the student's needs.

The MoEHE recommends using the 'Where Is My School' service to identify the right school

QC launches cochlear implant programme for children in Khartoum

Qatar Charity (QC) has launched a cochlear implant programme for children at Doha Hospital in Khartoum, marking the resumption of this specialised service in Sudan for the first time since the outbreak of the war. The launch ceremony was attended by Sudan's federal minister of health, the governor of Khartoum State, and the ambassador of Qatar to Sudan, alongside health and humanitarian officials. Sudan's Federal Minister of Health Dr Haitham Mohamed Ibrahim said that the restoration of cochlear implant services represents an important milestone in rebuilding specialised healthcare in Khartoum. "Restoring cochlear implant services in Sudan is not an ordinary event, but a major achievement and a milestone in the return of specialised services in Khartoum," he said. Dr Ibrahim said that the resumption of the service reflects renewed support for Sudan's health sector at a critical time. Khartoum Governor Ahmed Osman Hamza thanked Qatar, its government and people, and supporting organisations for their assistance to Khartoum State and Sudan more broadly. He said that the programme will provide an important service for families in need of specialised hearing care. Qatar's ambassador to Sudan Mohammed Ibrahim al-Sada said that the programme reflects Qatar's continued commitment to supporting the Sudanese people. He noted that Qatar-backed medical campaigns and camps have been launched in several Sudanese states, including initiatives in ophthalmology and urology, with further programmes planned in co-ordination with the federal health ministry. Dr Abdul Majeed al-Humaidi, the QC's international programmes and development expert, said that the initiative aims to help children access sound, communication, education, and social integration. "We are certain that investing in children's health is an investment in the future of an entire nation," he said. Dr Ibrahim Ali Omar, acting director of Doha Specialised Hospital, said that 300 children had applied for electronic cochlear implant surgery, while 10 operations



are planned under the programme. He said that the statistics underscore the need for additional support to expand access for children for whom hearing aids are no longer sufficient, particularly as many families cannot afford the high cost of the procedure. The cochlear implant programme builds on Qatar Charity's recent specialised health initiatives in Sudan. These include four eye-care and surgery camps that examined 6,000 people with visual impairments and performed 600 operations in co-operation with Makkah Hospital in Port Sudan, Sennar, Wad Madani, and River Nile State. The QC also conducted a medical camp for children with congenital heart conditions at Madani Heart Centre, where 60 procedures were performed through cardiac catheterisation and open-heart surgery. In addition, it has supplied hospitals with medical equipment and materials, including kidney dialysis machines, laboratory equipment, intensive care devices, and neonatal incubators, with support from donors in Qatar.



Cool solution



A chicken stands in a shallow bowl of water to cool itself amid Qatar's sweltering summer heat, as daytime temperatures continue to exceed 40° Celsius. According to the Qatar Meteorology Department, hot weather is expected to persist over the coming days, with humidity increasing at night and during the early morning. **PICTURE:** Joey Aguilar



QCDC eyes largest national training programme

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He said the QCDC's role goes beyond instruction. "We are experts in this area," al-Kharki said. "What we are doing is not just training the participants

but involving them to realise their future by enabling them with employability skills, and we have experts to support and deliver this training." The programme includes a university fair, giving students direct

access to admissions staff. "Generally, most universities in the country participate in the programme," he said. "What we are doing is taking the students through this experience to see where they are and

what their interest is," al-Kharji said, adding: "The university officials provide the details of their programmes and discuss all the requirements for admission and various aspects of campus life in the universities."

QNB Group awards McLaren Artura Spider grand prize in Mastercard debit card campaign

QNB Group has celebrated the successful conclusion of its Mastercard debit card campaign by presenting a brand-new McLaren Artura Spider 2026 grand prize to Nasser Abdulhadi al-Hajri during a handover ceremony attended by senior management from both QNB and Mastercard. The campaign rewarded customers for using their QNB Mastercard debit card for their everyday purchases. The official draw to select the winner was conducted under the supervision of representatives from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI). "We are thrilled to hand over the keys of this spectacular McLaren Artura Spider to Nasser Abdulhadi al-Hajri," said QNB senior executive vice-president (Group Retail Banking) Adel Ali al-Malki. "This campaign was designed to deliver exceptional value to our customers and reward them for their continued loyalty," he said. "At QNB, we are constantly striving to elevate the banking experience by offering not only world-class services but also life-changing rewards." "At Mastercard, we are committed to making digital payments as exciting as they are



Nasser Abdulhadi al-Hajri, the winner of a brand-new McLaren Artura Spider 2026 grand prize from QNB Group's Mastercard debit card campaign, with QNB and Mastercard officials.

seamless," said Mastercard country manager (Qatar and Kuwait) Erdem Cakar. "Building on our long-standing collaboration with QNB, our joint campaign aimed to turn day-to-day spend into extraordinary possibilities," he said.

Pact 'technically same as Nato's Article 5'

Reuters
Ankara

A defence pact signed between Turkiye, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia is technically the same as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato)'s Article 5 mutual defence agreement, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said yesterday, adding the accord was not targeting Iran. He also said Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan wanted to see the alliance expand, and that Egypt was a potential candidate to join, among others. The regional powers signed the "Makkah Joint Defence Agreement" on Friday, forging US allies alarmed at a regional conflagration that has brought Iranian missile fire onto Gulf oil exporters. In a joint statement, they said

the accord intended to strengthen collective deterrence against any act of aggression and stipulates that an armed attack against any of the three would be regarded as an attack on all. Speaking to the state-run Anadolu news agency, Fidan said the new alliance was not directed against Iran or any other country, but rather served as a general pledge to support the three allies' security. He added that the allies would decide through consultations what degree, form, and format of support they would ask for in the event of an attack, but that no country would be considered a threat as long as a member state is not attacked. Turkiye, which has Nato's second-largest army, has said the pact was open to expansion to other regional countries and did not seek to replace any existing alliances.

"Nato is a giant military alliance where there are 32 countries. We have started here as three countries and we have to take very humble but concrete steps," he said, adding efforts to finalise the pact had been underway for two years and eight months. He added that a committee of ministers similar to that within Nato would be formed as part of the alliance, as well as a general secretariat based in Saudi Arabia, but that operational details would be set at the first committee meeting. "Our president's vision is that we don't remain limited to three countries, that we grow and bring together all (regional) countries under this roof," he said, adding Egypt could potentially join the pact once certain technical matters are resolved. In recent months, Turkiye, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Egypt formed



Fidan: Our president's vision is that we don't remain limited to three countries.

a group to address regional issues, namely the war on Iran. Turkiye has said that the group - dubbed the R4 - aims to solidify its partnership through concrete mechanisms. Fidan also said Turkiye should be involved in an international coalition to protect shipping in the Red Sea from Houthi attacks because shipping safety concerned Ankara's interests.

What to expect from Saudi-Turkiye-Pakistan pact

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Since the onset of the war, Saudi Arabia has grown closer to Turkiye, with whom it previously had fraught ties, as well as Egypt and Pakistan. The four nations have supported mediation in the conflict. "The three countries are unusually complementary," said Andreas Krieg, a lecturer in security at King's College London. Oil-rich Saudi Arabia has wealth "but limited indigenous military-industrial depth," he told AFP. Turkiye and Pakistan, meanwhile, face finance constrictions, but have powerful militaries. "Turkiye has technology and manufacturing capacity but needs markets and investment," he said. "Pakistan has manpower, military institutional depth and nuclear deterrence, but needs financing and industrial opportunities." The trio cannot replace the United States, but they are bridging a gap because Washington will not "restrain Israel or insulate Gulf infrastructure from Iranian retaliation." It is in Saudi Arabia's interest to seek "sev-

eral layers of security rather than one American umbrella", Krieg said, with the kingdom at the centre of this new alliance. With these resources combined, the alliance packs a powerful punch, in theory at least. The trio are unlikely to attack Iran should it repeat its strikes on Saudi Arabia. Pakistan, for one, has not hit its neighbour despite signing a similar defence pact with the kingdom last year. "Turkiye and Pakistan will not fight Iran," wrote Asli Aydintasbas, a fellow at the Brookings Institution. "These countries view themselves as 'stabilisers' and want to create a political momentum to push for that." Hesham Alghannam, a Saudi security analyst and researcher, agreed that neither country was likely to engage offensively in the short term, but drew a distinction between what the agreement "can deliver now versus what it aspires to become." "If proxy attacks on Saudi territory continue and escalate, I would expect Pakistan to deepen its air defence and advisory role inside the kingdom, and Turkiye to accelerate defence-industrial transfers," he said. The minister added that the "pact changes the calculus for anyone considering continued

strikes on Saudi infrastructure". Saudi Arabia has grown closer to Pakistan and Turkiye as deep divisions plague the Gulf, even as it reels from repeated attacks by Iran and its allies. Saudi Arabia and the UAE were embroiled in a public rift before the war, and though they recently appeared to reconcile, the UAE is likely to be wary of the new pact, analysts say. The US has long sought to build on the Abraham Accords that saw the UAE, Bahrain and others normalise relations with Israel, pushing for a regional alliance that integrates its close ally. However, the new defence pact consolidates major US allies into an alternative security architecture that rejects Israel's hegemony, analysts said. Pakistan and Turkiye have been vocal against Israel, while Saudi Arabia has insisted it will not normalise unless Israel agrees to a path to Palestinian statehood. "Washington would have wanted a security architecture that includes Israel and they're still keen for Saudi Arabia to normalise ties," said HA Hellyer of the Royal United Services Institute. "This alliance doesn't point to that in the slightest." - AFP

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

What happened in Makkah on Friday was more than the signing of a defence agreement. It could mark the emergence of a new strategic equation in the Middle East, with Saudi Arabia, Turkiye and Pakistan signalling a stronger determination to shape their own security architecture. At Al-Safa Palace, following Tawaf around the Kaaba, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif signed a pact carrying a clear message: an attack on one partner would be treated as a threat to all. Formally, the agreement is a defence pact. Strategically, however, it could signal a significant shift in the region's balance of power. The timing is particularly important.

The Makkah Agreement: A new equation for Gulf security

Saudi Arabia's confidence in Washington as its ultimate security guarantor has increasingly been tested. Since February, Iran has targeted Saudi Arabia with missiles and through allied groups, including the Houthis in Yemen and militias in Iraq. Attacks on oil facilities and disruption around the Strait of Hormuz, through which around 20% of the world's oil passes, have further intensified concerns over Gulf security. Against this backdrop, Riyadh has increasingly looked beyond its traditional security arrangements. Pakistan brings decades of military co-operation with Saudi Arabia and, crucially, is the only Muslim-majority nuclear-armed state. Turkiye, meanwhile, possesses the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato)'s second-largest military and has

emerged as an important defence partner for Riyadh. The agreement therefore carries three important strategic messages. First is deterrence. By bringing Islamabad and Ankara closer to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia is signalling that any future attack could have consequences extending well beyond its borders.

COMMENT

Second is strategic autonomy. The pact demonstrates that Saudi Arabia is increasingly prepared to strengthen its own defence capabilities and diversify its security partnerships rather than relying exclusively on Washington. Third is symbolism. The decision to sign the agreement in Makkah gives it a

significance that extends beyond conventional military co-operation, linking the alliance to the protection of Islam's holiest sites and reinforcing its political and religious symbolism. The development could have repercussions well beyond the three signatories. A stronger Saudi-Turkish-Pakistani alignment may push Iran to deepen its strategic and military ties with China and Russia. Beijing and Moscow, in turn, could justify a greater role in the Gulf to preserve regional balance and prevent any single power from controlling vital energy routes. The result could be increased military co-operation, advanced weapons transfers, satellite capabilities and naval exercises, gradually turning the Gulf into a new arena of global strategic competition between competing power blocs. From the perspective of Henry Kiss-

inger's realpolitik, such a development would represent a delicate challenge for Washington. His emphasis on balance-of-power politics suggests that the United States would have an interest in neither fully embracing nor directly confronting the emerging alliance, but rather in using it as leverage for diplomacy while preventing its military dimension from escalating into a wider confrontation. Ultimately, the Makkah Agreement may not resolve the Gulf's longstanding security dilemma. Instead, it could transform it, from a predominantly regional confrontation between Iran and Saudi Arabia into a broader strategic contest involving the US and its allies on one side, and China, Russia and Iran on the other. What appears today to be a defence agreement could therefore become an early indicator of a new strategic order taking shape in the Gulf.

Obesity 'is an economic, productivity, health issue'

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

Obesity is a major public health concern in addition to having economic repercussions due to the involved cost of addressing the related issues, a number of experts have warned. Health, education, management and economic specialists noted that prevention must become a shared societal priority, stressing that promoting physical activity, healthy eating habits and health awareness from childhood is more effective and less costly than treating the chronic conditions associated with obesity. Dr Mohamed Jeham al-Kuwari, consultant in bariatric and metabolic surgery, said that Qatar has made substantial efforts to address obesity through awareness campaigns, lifestyle programmes and advanced treatment options, but the condition remains a significant health challenge, particularly among young people.

Prevention is the most effective and least costly option to address obesity

"Prevention is the most effective and least costly option," he said, noting that the roots of obesity often begin in childhood and that early intervention can reduce the risk of chronic diseases later in life. Dr al-Kuwari pointed out that the Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) performs 700-800 bariatric procedures annually, alongside expanding the use of modern medications and other treatment options. He stressed that treatment must be tailored to each patient according to body mass index (BMI) and overall health.

The health consequences of obesity are extensive, as experts linked it to type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure and cholesterol, fatty liver disease, joint and spinal problems and an increased risk of certain cancers. Qatar Diabetes Association (QDA) executive director Dr Abdullah al-Hamq said that obesity is among the most significant risk factors for type 2 diabetes, alongside physical inactivity and unhealthy dietary habits.

Treatment can begin with dietary changes and more physical activity

He noted that losing 5% to 10% of body weight, combined with regular physical activity, significantly cuts diabetes risk. "The complications of obesity accompanied by diabetes affect patients' quality of life and their ability to work," Dr al-Hamq said, pointing to kidney disease, impaired vision, nerve problems and diabetic foot complications. Dr Mohamed al-Kubaisi, a strategic management expert, described obesity as an economic and development issue capable of affecting institutional efficiency and national competitiveness. Citing World Health Organisation (WHO) data, he said that 43% of adults worldwide are overweight, while around 16% live with obesity. Dr al-Kubaisi said that obesity among employees can contribute to lower energy and concentration, greater fatigue, slower

task completion, increased errors and weaker decision-making and innovation.

He noted that international reports indicate malnutrition and excess weight can reduce productivity by up to 20% in some workplaces, while some European studies have found that people with severe obesity may be around 2.5 times more likely to take sick leave than those at a healthy weight. Economic expert Mubarak al-Khayareen said obesity has become a national economic issue because it increases health-care expenditure while reducing workforce efficiency.

"The economic return of prevention programmes can be measured through lower health-care spending, fewer sick days and higher employee productivity," he said, stressing that investment in prevention delivers health and economic benefits. Meanwhile, the workplace itself can also contribute to unhealthy behaviours, according to Tahani al-Hajaji, an administrative trainer specialising in professional behaviour.

"Employee physical and psychological health are closely connected," the expert said. Al-Hajaji called on institutions to move beyond awareness campaigns and sports activities towards broader workplace wellbeing policies. Similarly, life-skills coach Zainab al-Shemmari said that awareness alone is insufficient unless people develop practical skills that enable them to sustain healthy behaviours.

"Stress management reduces reliance on emotional eating, while good planning helps organise meals and maintain regular physical activity," she said, adding that self-discipline is key to resisting unhealthy habits.

Physical education teacher Hassan al-Khayyat also identified inactivity and unhealthy eating as major contributors to obesity among students.

"Investing in sports culture among students is an investment in the health and economy of society," he said, warning that obesity can also affect young people psychologically and socially. Dr Aisha Saqi, a clinical nutrition specialist, said that obesity should be treated as a chronic disease and a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease and premature death.

She said that treatment can begin with dietary changes and increased physical activity, followed in appropriate cases by medication or bariatric surgery after medical assessment. Mohamed Abdulrahim al-Haidous, head of the Youth Committee at Qatar Club, said youth centres and clubs play a key role in encouraging physical activity through sport, education and volunteer programmes. "Investment in sports and youth is one of the most important means of prevention," he said, stressing that greater participation in physical activity can help build a healthier and more productive society.

Israel infiltrated village held by govt troops as part of June deal: Lebanon

AFP
Beirut

Israeli troops infiltrated a Lebanese village placed under the control of Lebanon's army as part of a June agreement, building an earthen barrier there overnight, state media and the local mayor said yesterday.

An AFP correspondent saw the barrier at the village's eastern entrance, blocking the road.

The local authorities said that it is unclear if any Israeli forces remained in the area.

"An Israeli occupation army force advanced into the village of Zawtar al-Gharbiya shortly after midnight... and erected a new earthen barrier near the town square," Lebanon's state-run National News Agency (NNA) reported.

Zawtar al-Gharbiya is one of two designated "pilot zones" where the Lebanese army was to take over as part of a US-sponsored framework agreement signed with Israel.

Contacted by AFP, the Israeli military said it was "not aware of such an event in this area".

Israel invaded south Lebanon after Hezbollah entered the Middle East war on the side of its sponsor Iran in March.

Israeli forces continue to occupy a broad band of territory in the south along the border.

Its invasion and widespread bombing campaign have killed more than 4,300 people, according to Lebanon's health ministry, and displaced hundreds of thousands more.

Under the June agreement, Lebanon is meant to disarm Hezbollah while Israel is supposed to gradually pull back its forces.

Beirut's army deployed to Zawtar al-Gharbiya on July 21, and around 50 families have since returned to the village, mayor Abed Ezzeddine told AFP.

Israeli troops had been present on the outskirts of the village before the deployment.

Ezzeddine said they were surprised to see the barrier in the morning, located around 100m from the town square.



A mound of dirt put into place by the Israeli military blocks the eastern entrance of the southern Lebanese village of Zawtar al-Gharbiyah. - AFP



A Lebanese soldier inspects a home destroyed by the Israeli military in Zawtar al-Gharbiyah. - AFP

Confirming the incident, a Lebanese military source told AFP that it is a violation of the framework agreement.

Separately, the military later reported that "three soldiers were wounded, one of them moder-

ately, while dismantling unexploded ordnance" in Zawtar al-Gharbiya yesterday.

Lebanon and Israel had just completed their seventh round of direct negotiations in Rome on Thursday, with a Lebanese

source telling AFP that the Israelis refused to discuss withdrawing from more areas before making sure Beirut's military had full control over the pilot zones.

Hezbollah rejects the deal and refuses to surrender its weapons,



Right: A Lebanese soldier stands on top of his tank in the village of Zawtar al-Gharbiyah as he monitors Israeli military movement. - AFP



A Lebanese army bulldozer removes the rubble following Israeli military operations in Zawtar al-Gharbiyah. - AFP

Hamas 'still ready to go ahead with Gaza plan'

AFP
Gaza City

Hamas said yesterday that it remains ready to proceed with a United States-backed Gaza peace plan and urged pressure on Israel, which insists it did not agree to the latest part of the deal.

Hamas informed US President Donald Trump's Board of Peace that it stood by the latest stage of the plan, under which the movement's soldiers would hand over weapons to a nascent Palestinian governing committee in the war-battered territory.

"Hamas and other factions have confirmed to mediators their readiness to begin implementing the agreement and move to the second phase, provided it receives Israeli approval and that Israel begins implementing the agreement," a senior Hamas official told AFP.

"Hamas is urging the US administration to exert pressure on Israel to compel it to abide by the agreement and move to the second phase," the official said on condition of anonymity.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who faces a tough reelection fight in October and wide opposition from his right-wing base to the Gaza deal, said on Tuesday that Israel had not agreed to the "draft" presented by the Board of Peace.

Trump last week had hailed as a breakthrough that Hamas had agreed to disarmament under the plan, with the Board of Peace saying Israel would in tandem carry out a phased withdrawal from much of Gaza.

Netanyahu met on Monday with the Board of Peace's high representative for Gaza, Nickolay Mladenov, who backtracked and said Israel would withdraw only after a full disarmament by Hamas.

Israel's military also vowed to keep hitting Hamas, which carried out the events of October 7, 2023 that led to the ongoing war.

However, Israeli operations in Gaza, while ongoing, appear to have decreased in intensity in recent days.

Yesterday the Nasser hospital in Khan Yunis reported three people injured by Israeli army gunfire.

Israeli operations in Gaza have killed 1,257 Palestinians since October last year, when the two sides agreed to a ceasefire backed by Trump, according to the territory's health ministry, which operates under Hamas authority and whose figures are considered reliable by the United Nations.

The Israeli army has reported five deaths in its ranks during the same period.

Lebanon detains Assad-era Syrian officer wanted by Damascus

AFP
Beirut

Lebanese authorities have detained a former Syrian army officer following an arrest warrant from Damascus accusing him of "killing and crimes against humanity", a judicial official told AFP yesterday.

Adel Issa, a 67-year-old former officer in the Syrian army's 17th brigade under ousted leader Bashar al-Assad, headed to his country's embassy in Beirut for paperwork on Friday, the official said on condition of anonymity.

When staff learned of an arrest warrant from Damascus filed in absentia for the "crimes of killing and crimes against humanity during his time with the Syrian army", they called on Lebanese authorities to detain him, the official added.

He is still in their custody, and Lebanon's

public prosecutor has asked his Syrian counterpart to send the suspect's extradition file before Beirut decides whether to hand him over.

Since Assad's fall in December 2024, Syrian authorities have arrested dozens of people they say committed crimes during the country's 13-year civil war, and trials began in April.

Lebanon and Syria have expressed their determination to open a new chapter in

their relations since Assad's ouster and the weakening of Lebanese group Hezbollah, a key Assad ally.

Under the Assad family, Syria exercised tutelage over its neighbour for decades, and was accused of carrying out numerous assassinations there.

Since 2024, officials from the two countries have met on several occasions, agreeing to co-operate on a number of issues including security.



QATAR FERTILISER COMPANY
INVITATION TO TENDER

QAFCO ANNOUNCES THE FOLLOWING TENDER

TENDER NO.	DESCRIPTION OF WORKS	TENDER FEE (QAR)	TENDER BOND (QAR)	TENDER FEE RECEIPT SUBMISSION DATES	TENDER CLOSING DATE
RFQ 6000006041	Sustainability Reporting 2026	500/- (Non-refundable)	180,000 QR (one hundred eighty thousand Qatari Riyals)	09-08-2026 10-08-2026 11-08-2026 12-08-2026 13-08-2026 16-08-2026 17-08-2026	20-09-2026

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

- During the period this tender is offered, the interested bidders shall first deposit appropriate Tender Fee amount in cash (Cheque will not be accepted) into Company's following Account at any QNB branch:

- Account Name : QATAR FERTILISER COMPANY (QAFCO)

- Account Number : 0013-025828-058

- IBAN : QA51QNBAA000000000013025828058

- Bank Name : QATAR NATIONAL BANK
- The interested Bidders shall mention their company's name and Tender Number on the payment receipt provided by the bank and submit it as Tender Fee receipt.
- Besides the Tender fee receipt (which should have the Tender Number and bidder's name clearly mentioned on it), interested bidders shall also submit a copy of the valid Commercial Registration, an authorization letter from their company with the name, telephone, fax and e-mail ID of the focal point for this tender (***Very Important***), during the submission of Tender Fee Receipt for ensuring electronic receipt of the Tender Document.
- Tender Fee Receipt along with the specified documents shall be submitted to purchase@qafco.com.qa and ssheikh@qafco.com.qa on the dates indicated above, after payment of Tender Fee (nonrefundable).
- After submission of the above documents to the above email, Tender Document will be provided through an electronic platform separately.
- For any queries related to non-receipt of the tender documents after the submission Tender Fee receipt, you may contact at 'purchase@qafco.com.qa' and 'ssheikh@qafco.com.qa' or on 44227715.
- Technical & Commercial details and Submission Procedures will be specified in the Tender Documents.
- The Company will not consider any offer without the enclosure of the Tender Bond.
- The Tender shall be strictly submitted using the QAFCO's Supply Chain Portal – SAP / Ariba, on or before the "Tender Closing Date". Tenderers who fail to adhere to this requirement will result in the disqualification of their Tender.

Yemen's army responds to Houthi strike on Marib amid UN warning of wider conflict

Reuters/AFP
Dubai

Yemen's army said early yesterday that it had responded against Houthi forces on several fronts along the lines of contact, following the latter's launching of ballistic missiles and drones at displacement camps and residential neighbourhoods in the city of Marib on Friday, killing two people and wounding 14.

The army did not give details of the operations or say when they took place, but said it would respond to any further targeting of its units with what it called necessary military measures.

The exchanges mark a sharp escalation between the Houthis and forces of Yemen's internationally recognised government after years in which large-scale fighting between the two sides had largely subsided, raising fears of a return to a broader conflict.

With the US-Israeli war on Iran expanding to much of the region, a senior Saudi official said on Thursday that Riyadh expected co-ordinated attacks from Yemen's Houthis as well as Iraqi militias under the supervision of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

Iran and its allies in Yemen and Iraq have not responded to the Saudi claim.

The Houthis said on Friday that they had targeted Saudi-backed forces, depots, vehicles and military equipment at Yemen's Sahn al-Jinn camp in Marib with missiles and drones.

Reuters could not independently verify the claims by either side.

The attacks came a day after at least 30 Yemeni government troops were killed in strikes on military camps in



This frame grab taken from AFPTV video footage shows damage at the Mail al-Saila internally displaced camp (IDP) on the outskirts of Marib following a reported Houthi missile attack on the government-held city. - AFP

Marib and Hadramawt provinces, according to government sources, in one of the deadliest escalations in months.

The Houthis also claimed responsibility for Thursday's attacks, saying that they struck Saudi military deployments in the two provinces after detecting what they described as a large Saudi military buildup ahead of an escalation against areas under their control.

UN Special Envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg said on Friday that the latest attacks in Marib and Hadramawt, together with renewed attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, had left Yemen at its greatest risk of renewed large-scale conflict since the UN-brokered truce in April 2022.

He urged all sides to exercise maximum restraint and engage in UN-led negotiations, warning that the violence risked drawing Yemen deeper into a wider regional confrontation.

The UN Security Council also expressed concern on Friday at the heightened tensions in Yemen, saying recent

actions threatened regional security and navigational rights and freedoms, risked further escalation and undermined efforts to secure peace.

It urged the Houthis to refrain from escalation and encouraged the "use of existing channels of dialogue" to reduce tensions.

The Houthis declared a naval blockade on Saudi Arabia in the Red Sea last month in response to what they described as a Saudi siege of Yemen, an allegation Riyadh denies.

Marib province is split between the Houthis and the Yemeni government, which controls Marib city as well as the area's oil fields and facilities.

The Houthis in 2021 resumed an offensive on the energy-rich province, but the fighting largely halted with the 2022 truce.

Yemen, which has been embroiled in more than a decade of war, last month became the latest front to be sucked into the US-Iran conflict, as the Tehran-backed Houthis upended the 2022 truce.

US schools under scrutiny for admissions, diversity, pro-Palestinian protests

Reuters
Washington

President Donald Trump's administration targeted more universities last week over issues like race and diversity in admissions and pro-Palestinian protests, marking the federal government's latest crackdown against US schools.

The Department of Justice alleged admissions practices at Duke University School of Law were biased in favour of Black and Hispanic applicants, citing findings of a federal probe.

The DOJ alleged the law school “emphasised racial diversity in admissions” and that “a Black or Hispanic applicant has a substantially higher likelihood of admission to Duke Law than a white or Asian applicant with the same academic credentials.”

The DOJ said it sought a voluntary resolution agreement.

“Duke is committed to complying with the law and will continue to do so in a manner that is consistent with our academic mission,” the university said, adding it was reviewing a DOJ letter. The DOJ alleged the same this year about admissions practices in

medical schools at the University of California and Yale. The schools said their practices were rooted in merit. Trump, who casts diversity goals as anti-merit and discriminatory against white people and men, has signed orders to dismantle them. Rights advocates say diversity practices address historic inequities for marginalised groups.

The Supreme Court rejected affirmative action at colleges in 2023 when it struck down race-conscious admissions programs at Harvard and the University of North Carolina.

Separately, the Education Department said it was probing California's San Jose State University and San Francisco State University over pro-Palestinian protests.

The department said it received complaints about the universities that alleged failure to respond to antisemitism accusations on campuses. It noted reports of hostility towards Jewish students, displays of “antisemitic graffiti” and pro-Palestinian protests that it said disrupted classes.

Both universities have condemned discrimination, including antisemitism and Islamophobia, and say they treat discriminatory concerns seriously.

They said they will respond to

the department through its investigative process. San Jose State University said a quote attributed in the Education Department's press release to a former university administrator – making a distinction between “good Jews” and “bad Jews” based on support for Israel's government – was “never made by any representative of the university.”

Trump's administration alleges pro-Palestinian protesters are antisemitic and support extremists. Protesters, including some Jewish groups, say the government wrongly labels criticism of Israel's assault on Gaza and its occupa-

tion of Palestinian territories as antisemitism and advocacy for Palestinian rights as support for extremism.

Trump has targeted universities with probes and funding suspension threats over pro-Palestinian protests, diversity initiatives, and climate programs, leading to free speech, due process and academic freedom concerns.

Last week, Education Secretary Linda McMahon called on universities to commit to reforms by the end of 2026. The National Education Association, the largest US teachers' union, urged universities to reject her call.

Black voters struggle for political voice in US

AFP
Memphis

For Jadu Bin Ahmed Bin Hassan, a 76-year-old African American who grew up in segregated Memphis, a move by Republicans to split the majority-Black city among three US congressional districts smacks of the racist policies of the last century.

“As a child, you couldn't even go to certain stores... because they would not sell to you. You see, it was so prejudiced and so racist here,” he said of the southern state of Tennessee. “And it still is, and it's not changing, right? It's not changing.”

Dressed in a beige suit and a silk scarf, Bin Hassan spoke to AFP at the Memphis Islamic Center as it hosted a candidate forum, during which voters could also learn about the new districts.

Tennessee's Republican-controlled legislature redrew the congressional map in May, days after the US Supreme Court rolled back civil rights protections that had ensured at least one of the state's nine districts remained majority Black. That district had been Tennessee's 9th, which encompassed Memphis and was reliably won by Democrats.

The new map splits Memphis up among three districts stretching far out into rural Tennessee

that are all expected to be won by Republicans.

Many African Americans like Bin Hassan worry that under the new maps, their voices will not count in the November midterm elections, in which President Donald Trump's Republicans are battling to retain control of Congress.

In late April, the US Supreme Court weakened protections under the Voting Rights Act, a landmark law passed in 1965 at the height of the civil rights movement, designed to prevent former segregated Southern states from undermining the voting rights of African Americans.

After Tennessee redrew its maps, several other Republican-majority Southern states followed suit. “There's definitely some angst because (people) know that the black vote has been diluted in Memphis,” said Reverend Earle Fisher, pastor of the Abyssinian Baptist Church and founder of the advocacy group, Up The Vote 901.

Black clergy in the city, where Martin Luther King Jr was assassinated in 1968, are redoubling their efforts to mobilise voters.

“There is chaos because some people don't even know what district they might be in now,” said the pastor, who organises civic education sessions for congregants.

“There was confusion,” confirms Brenn Scott, who was going door-to-door with her daughter

to inform residents of the Black neighbourhood of Whitehaven.

She said information disseminated by local organisations and churches has helped to clarify things.

Another church pastor, Reverend Lawrence Turner of Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church, said that historically with the ninth district, “we've been able to choose” our representative, but that appears set to change. “With our interest being coupled in with persons and counties whose realities are much different than what we face in Memphis, it makes that a whole lot more difficult than has been in the past,” he said.

He founded the Black Clergy Collaborative in 2020, at the height of the Black Lives Matter movement. The organisation brings together dozens of Black churches on social justice issues, including voter education.

On the last day of early voting for the primary elections ahead of the midterms, many Whitehaven residents who opened their doors to volunteers from the group had already cast their ballots.

One resident wore a T-shirt that read, “Voting is my black job.”

For Lee Kendrick Harris, who had just voted at a polling station at a Whitehaven church, the redistricting “is a test of resiliency in how we can come together and survive.”

ICC calls on Chad, Venezuela to reconsider withdrawals

The International Criminal Court (ICC) expressed concern on Friday at the decision by Chad and Venezuela to withdraw from the body and called on them to reconsider.

“The presidency regrets these developments,” said a statement from the court's leadership, currently made up of Finland, Sierra Leone and Poland.

It said that withdrawals from the Rome statute that set up the ICC “risk undermining the collective pursuit of justice and weakening global efforts to end impunity.”

It added: “The ICC stands at the heart of the international system of accountability, and its effectiveness depends on sustained and unequivocal support from the international community.”

“The presidency calls on Chad and Venezuela to remain committed states parties to the Rome Statute.”



Israeli security forces patrol along a street during a military raid in the Qalandia refugee camp, south of Ramallah in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, on Wednesday. (AFP)

Rights organisation reports 1,666 violations by Israel on Bedouins

QNA
Ramallah

A Palestinian human rights organisation announced that it documented 1,666 violations by the Israeli occupation and its settlers against Bedouin communities in the occupied West Bank during July.

The Al-Baydar Organisation for the Defence of Bedouin and Village Rights in the West Bank explained in a report published yesterday that this figure demonstrates the expanding scope of military and settlement measures targeting Bedouin communities scattered throughout the Jordan Valley, the eastern highlands, the Jerusalem area, and the central and southern West Bank.

The organisation stated that the nature of the violations indicates a clear integration between military, security, settlement, and economic tools, making them part of a systematic policy aimed at reducing the Palestinian presence in Area C and strengthening Israeli control over areas that constitute the geographical expansion of future settlement projects.

The report documented 472 settler attacks, representing approximately 28% of all documented violations last month, confirming that settler violence has become a major tool of pressure against Palestinians.

The report also highlighted that the violations not only targeted the Palestinian population but also focused in an organised manner to significantly target the economic infrastructure upon which Bedouin communities depend.

Sick Uganda opposition leader sent back to jail: wife

Ugandan opposition leader Kizza Besigye, hospitalised for more than a week after collapsing in a court trying him for treason, was sent back to prison on Friday against medical advice, his wife said. A former personal physician to President Yoweri Museveni, who has ruled Uganda for more than 40 years, Besigye has been in the crosshairs of the Ugandan authorities since he joined the opposition more than 25 years ago.

Abducted in November 2024 during a trip to Kenya, he later appeared before courts on treason charges after being accused of plotting a conspiracy against Museveni. He had been admitted to intensive care in Kampala after collapsing on July 30 in the middle of a hearing. Just before that, he had lashed out at the court's decision to impose lawyers on him: his main counsel, Erik Lukwago, had been arrested and the other, former Kenyan minister Martha Karua, had been barred from entering Uganda.

“I am shocked and deeply distressed. After 7pm tonight, my partner @kizzabesigye1

was bundled up and taken back to Luzira Prison” in Kampala, his wife Winnie Byanyima, the UNAIDS executive director, said on X.

“Why the rush to return a seriously ill man to prison before he can walk, talk or feed himself?” she said. “Who gave this order, and why was medical judgment overridden?” she said. “Taking a helpless patient from where he can receive rehabilitation and family assistance, and returning him to a prison that cannot support his condition, is cruel.”

“Who gave this order, and why was medical judgment overridden?” she added.

Uganda has imposed a widening crackdown on opposition figures, lawyers and independent media in recent months.

Besigye has been taken to hospital three times since his detention. He was admitted briefly in February 2025 after a hunger strike and again earlier this year. His wife has repeatedly criticised his detention conditions, describing them as inhumane and alleging a plot to kill him. (AFP)

Niger bus crash kills at least 21

At least 21 people have died after two buses crashed into each other in southern Niger, the west African country's official ANP news agency reported yesterday. Friday's accident some 55 km from the town of Madaoua on the road to the city of Maradi also left 37 wounded, the ANP said.

It comes as the authorities are campaigning to raise awareness about the dangers of road accidents, a frequent occurrence on the vast Sahel nation's roads. “The provisional toll reports 21 dead and 37 wounded,” who were taken to the accident and emergency departments of the hospitals of Madaoua and Maradi, the ANP said.

According to the news agency, one of the buses was carrying soldiers.

An investigation into the causes of the crash has been opened, the ANP said.

In 2025, Niger recorded more than 7,000 road accidents which killed over 1,200 people. (AFP)

Cyclosporiasis keeps shoppers, grocers in US on the edge

Reuters
New York

Michigan health officials cleared shoppers to put lettuce back in their grocery carts, but anxiety about cyclosporiasis is lingering in the grocery aisles, with some produce sellers supplied by local farms saying customers have turned to their markets instead.

An FDA investigation has linked the outbreak, which has spread to 15 states and has hit Michigan the hardest, to iceberg lettuce sourced from Taylor Farms operations in central Mexico.

The outbreak has shaken consumer confidence in fresh produce beyond just recalled products, hitting sales at restaurant chains and supermarkets.

US unit sales for fresh lettuce in the week ending July 18 were down 9% from a week earlier, according to market research firm NielsenIQ. The cyclospora parasite can cause diarrhea, nausea and other gastrointestinal symptoms.

So far, lettuce sales have not yet rebounded at Sunrise Market in Au Gres, Michigan, despite the



Shoppers buy produce at the farmers market in New York City's Union Square, on Friday. (Reuters)

all-clear from the state, said owner Angie Bussinger.

“I didn't even know that as a store owner, so I doubt the customers are seeing it yet,” she said, predicting at least two more weeks of anxiety and a 1% to 2% drop in monthly produce sales.

Bussinger, 43, said it's not just lettuce and greens: raspberry, blueberry and strawberry sales dipped in July, too, as shoppers

latched onto online rumours that seeded fruit would also put them at risk, amid confusion about the scope of contamination.

For now, she's leaving the lettuce and salad aisle almost entirely empty. “I don't want to be Taco Bell,” Bussinger said, referring to the chain's sales dip after it was linked to the outbreak.

Foot traffic at US Taco Bell stores, owned by Yum Brands, was

down more than 11% yesterday, August 1, compared to the year-earlier period, according to researcher Placer.ai.

Salad chain Sweetgreen on Thursday said it expected a 7% to 8% decline in comparable sales for the year, citing the outbreak.

Michigan, which has reported more than 12,000 cases linked to the outbreak, including two deaths, has seen a variety of reactions.

Romaine and other lettuce sales stayed relatively stable at Steve's Country Market located in Harrison, in the central part of the state, said Tammy Hayes, the store's night manager.

“These outbreaks come and go like the weather. You become immune to it,” said Hayes, 61.

In Wisconsin, where far fewer cyclospora cases have been reported, regional supermarket chain Woodman's Markets began discounting Taylor Farms products at the start of the outbreak, said Claire, a cashier who asked to only use her first name. Roughly 30% of the carts she handles at checkout have Taylor Farms products, from green beans to pre-made salads.

“It seems like most people are

taking advantage of the sale instead of being averse to the potential health issues,” she said.

The farmers market in New York City's Union Square on Friday, which features local vendors, was bustling in the summer heat.

Shopper Melody Fifer said last week she only bought vegetables she could cook, but now she was adding back some greens. “I missed my salads,” she said, holding a bag of watercress.

Several salespeople said sales have actually improved. “Right now, people seem to prefer locally grown food,” said Samer Saleh, running a stall for Halal Pastures.

Darlene Wolnik, program director of the Farmers Market Coalition, a national non-profit, said market managers have told her sales surged 15% to 30% as concerns grew over foodborne illnesses.

Argus Farm Stop in Ann Arbor, Michigan, whose storefronts are supplied directly by surrounding farms, has felt the same bump, and local farmers are racing to keep up with demand, said Alex Blume, marketing manager.

“The lettuce is kind of flying off the shelves,” he said.

Democrats plan investigations on Trump if they win House

Reuters
Washington

US House Democrats preparing for a return to power are developing a broad investigative strategy targeting companies and financial firms surrounding President Donald Trump, instead of trying to impeach him immediately, sources said.

Senior Democrats in the US House of Representatives and committee aides have discussed using hearings, subpoenas and document requests to obtain records from entities tied to Trump's political and business orbit. It is a bet that investigating private companies and outside financial players will prove more fruitful than directly confronting a White House they expect to resist oversight, sources said.

The approach reflects both Democratic caution and a lesson many in the party say they learned during Trump's first term: that impeachment proceedings can consume Congress while allowing Trump to cast himself as the victim of a partisan campaign.

Instead, Democrats involved in the planning envision using House investigative powers after November's midterm elections to scrutinise the administration's decision-making and examine whether Trump used his power to benefit himself, allies or donors. "We're not going into this to impeach," said a senior Democratic aide, describing the thinking among party leaders and committee staff. "No one wants a failed vote on day one. The focus is on building a body of evidence through investigations that can hold Trump accountable."

Republicans with a narrow House majority have grim chances of gaining the majority in November. Winning control would give Democrats the power to issue subpoenas, compel testimony and documents, hold public hearings and pursue contempt proceedings.

Democrats expect the White House to fight or ignore requests



A view of the dome of the US Capitol in Washington DC. (Reuters)

aimed at the executive branch, making companies, contractors and financial firms working with the administration an important route for obtaining information, the sources said.

The White House said in a statement that Trump has worked to thwart the "radical left's agenda" and remains committed to preserving Republican majorities in Congress. A White House official said the administration is "prepared to respond to oversight requests, no matter who is in the House or Senate."

Three sources said Apple, Alphabet, Palantir, Blackstone, BlackRock and companies owned by Elon Musk, such as Tesla, have surfaced in discussions because of their contracts, regulatory exposure or administration dealings.

The sources said no final target list has been established and no formal investigations have begun. The sources provided no further details about the investigations.

Democrats are expected to examine Department of Homeland Security contracts, financing for Trump's planned White House

ballroom, corporate donors and alleged pay-to-play arrangements, two sources said.

They also plan a probe of Trump-linked financial vehicles including 1789 Capital — a venture capital firm where his son Donald Trump Jr is a partner — and foreign sovereign wealth funds whose investments in Trump family-linked entities could raise questions about administration influence, the sources said.

Because foreign funds may be harder for congressional committees to reach, Democrats are discussing seeking records from US-based firms and funds tied to Trump's family and other intermediaries, the two sources said.

Democrats have already begun laying the groundwork for investigations, two of the sources said.

Party leaders are sending letters to companies, contractors and other organisations connected to potential investigations, they said. The requests seek records and pave the way for subpoenas if Democrats win the House, the two sources said.

Representatives Robert Garcia

from California and Jamie Raskin from Maryland, the top Democrats on the House Oversight and Judiciary Committees, respectively, said existing investigations would expand if Democrats win the House.

"From sketchy Pentagon contracts lining the pockets of the president's sons, Trump's crypto billions, and the shady backroom deals for Trump donors, we will ensure we combat corruption when Democrats take back the House in November," Garcia said in a statement.

The letters include requests for information from media company Paramount Skydance over its dealings with the Trump administration and the proposed Warner Bros. Discovery deal as well as video platform YouTube and parent company Alphabet over the company's \$24.5mn settlement with Trump in September.

Letters have also been sent to private prison operator GEO Group and security firm Salus Worldwide Solutions for their contracts with the DHS as well as commodity traders Vitol and Trafigura over the administration's sale of Venezuelan oil, the two sources said. But the letters put potential targets on notice and signal records Democrats could subpoena.

House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries said in June on NBC's "Meet the Press" that Democrats haven't ruled out impeaching Trump if they win back the House but that the party's focus would be on pocketbook issues.

Democrats involved in the planning say impeachment remains an option if investigations uncover evidence of an impeachable offense, but not as a first move.

The calculation reflects the party's experience during Trump's first term, when he became the first US president to be impeached twice by the House before being acquitted by the Senate each time.

"If investigations uncover evidence that we believe meets the threshold, we will not hesitate to move forward," said the senior Democratic aide.



US Attorney-General Todd Blanche attends a press conference in Washington DC. (Reuters)

Senate approves Blanche as new attorney-general

AFP
Washington

President Donald Trump's former personal lawyer Todd Blanche was confirmed as US attorney-general yesterday after Senate Republicans shrugged off Democratic concerns over politicisation of the Justice Department.

Blanche, who has already been serving as the top US law enforcement officer in an acting capacity, represented Trump as his private attorney in several criminal trials before entering government. The Senate, which Republicans narrowly control, confirmed him by 50 votes to 49.

Trump, who has upended US political norms by seeking to bring nominally independent government agencies under his increasingly direct control, calls Blanche a "star".

Democrats opposed Blanche from the beginning.

"The attorney-general is supposed to be the people's lawyer," Senator Dick Durbin, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Judiciary Committee, said last week on Tuesday.

"Mr Blanche continues to operate as the president's personal lawyer, treating the Justice Department like a law firm serving one client — the president."

There were doubts over

whether the White House could persuade a handful of Republican holdouts, without whom even the narrow confirmation would have been impossible.

The main sticking point was an attempt to establish a \$1.8bn fund for what Trump calls victims of politicised prosecutions, likely including the rioters who stormed the US Capitol on January 6, 2021 in an attempted insurrection to prevent Joe Biden from being certified as president after his defeat of Trump in the 2020 election.

The other main issue was an extraordinary proposal granting immunity to Trump from tax audits.

Blanche ultimately defused the internal party opposition with a written order over the weekend scrapping the so-called political "anti-weaponisation fund" and saying that the audit immunity agreement with Trump, his two eldest sons and the Trump Organisation would only apply "retroactively" to past tax years and not future filings.

Blanche has been serving as acting attorney-general since Trump fired Pam Bondi, another political loyalist, in April. Since then, he has been closely tied to what Democrats dub a Trump "retribution" campaign against the 80-year-old president's opponents.

Trump's attack on 'birth tourism' faces uphill legal battle after SC ruling

Reuters
Washington

When the US Supreme Court in June ruled in favour of broad citizenship rights for babies born in the US, one of the most conservative justices complained that the decision was so sweeping it would even cover so-called birth tourists.

Women "who come here solely for the purpose of giving birth" would be able to get automatic citizenship for their children, Samuel Alito wrote, dissenting from the 6-3 ruling that invalidated President Donald Trump's first attempt to curtail US birthright citizenship.

Undeterred by the court's ruling, Trump tried again on Thursday, signing two executive orders largely aimed at birth tourism.

That part of Trump's action, which is certain to face legal challenges, is likely doomed, legal experts said. It targets a category of people that legal experts said the Supreme Court already addressed.

"These children are citizens based on their birth on US soil," said University of Virginia law professor Amanda Frost, who studies birthright citizenship. "Illegal

conduct by their parent can have no bearing on their status."

The Republican president has for years threatened to tighten birthright citizenship as part of his restrictive immigration agenda. On the first day of his second term in January 2025, Trump issued an order that targeted immigrants in the country illegally or even temporarily on a legal basis, including those on work visas or students.

The court's June 30 ruling striking it down held that the policy violated language in the US Constitution's 14th Amendment that confers citizenship to those born in the US who are "subject to the jurisdiction thereof."

To curtail birth tourism, one of Trump's new orders directs federal agencies not to recognise a child's citizenship if either parent is "engaged in fraudulent activity to obtain citizenship." A second executive order seeks to bar visas for foreigners suspected of birth tourism, although it was unclear how it would be enforced.

Federal regulation currently bars using temporary visas for the purpose of obtaining US citizenship for a newborn. Speaking in the Oval Office on Thursday, Trump renewed his criticism of the ruling



A view of the US Supreme Court in Washington, DC. (AFP)

and said that "people are building businesses around" birth tourism, suggesting that "hundreds of thousands" are wrongly benefiting. Some analyses cite smaller numbers, with Penn State University scholars estimating 5,000 to 10,000 births each year from 2014 to 2024. Besides birth tourism, Trump's new directive also seeks to expand historical exceptions to automatic birthright citizenship, which include children of diplomatic representatives such as ambassadors and hostile foreign troops occupying US territory.

The order would widen the cat-

egories to include foreign government employees and those deemed foreign terrorists.

Expanding the category of diplomats is potentially legal, depending on how it is done, said Frost, "though that requires giving those people significant immunity from US law."

University of California, Berkeley law professor John Yoo, who worked as a Justice Department official during Republican George W Bush's presidency, said that the order's attempt to define foreign enemy forces on US soil as including terrorist organisations "will even-

tually pass constitutional muster." Others said certain expansions may stretch too far. "Japanese immigrants to the US were deemed enemy aliens during World War II," said University of Michigan law professor Sam Erman. "Under the administration's rule, their US-born children could have been denied citizenship."

The legality of the various provisions could also depend on how agencies implement them. Some of the terms are elastic, such as the definition of an "alien enemy," or the "purpose" of a stay, said Hiroshi Motomura, an immigration law expert at the University of California, Los Angeles. This creates "huge zones of discretion that allow officials of the US government to deny visas or admission based on suspicions or a need to vet further," Motomura said.

The Supreme Court in June struck down Trump's prior order, even though the administration argued that automatic birthright citizenship encourages illegal immigration and birth tourism.

"Citizenship, then and now, was the right to have rights — to freely participate in our political community," Chief Justice Roberts wrote, adding that the authors

of the 14th Amendment extended that promise to every free-born person in the land.

"We keep that promise today," Roberts wrote.

Alito did not mince words in his dissent. "In my judgment, the court has made a mistake that will seriously affect the country's future," he wrote.

He faulted the court for ruling that "even a child born to a mother who is here for only a brief time is a citizen under the Fourteenth Amendment."

Such a view yields "grotesque results," Alito said. "While foreigners who wish to immigrate lawfully must sometimes wait for many years, a child born here to a birth tourist is automatically a citizen," he said. White House aides defended the orders on Thursday.

"There's absolutely nothing in here that runs afoul of any of the Supreme Court's opinions on the subject," White House Staff Secretary Will Scharf said.

Yoo disagreed.

"I do not see any exception to birthright, as defined by the court in Barbara, that would include parents who fraudulently violated federal law to give birth to children on American territory," he said.

ANNOUNCEMENT

I, ANWAR HOSSIN

holder of

BANGLADESH Passport No. EJ0741993
QID No. 28505010545

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from

ANWAR HOSSIN

to

MD ANWAR HOSSAIN

Any objection, please contact
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holder of

INDIA Passport No. V4010419
QID No. 28335631896

hereby change my name

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SHEREEL RAYAMARAKARVEETIL MALIYEKIL

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Sri Lanka Passport No. P1148004
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Any objection, please contact
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US resumes avocado inspections in Mexico

The US announced on Friday that it will partially resume inspections of avocado producers in Mexico's Michoacan state, two days after suspending imports of the fruit over security concerns. Michoacan is a hotspot of fighting between crime gangs, which have diversified into extorting agricultural interests. It is standard protocol for US authorities to inspect avocado orchards and packing facilities in Mexico. The US embassy in Mexico said inspections will resume in some avocado-growing areas of Michoacan as yesterday, but did not specify if shipments would also restart. The decision was made following "commitments by the Mexican government," security measures implemented in the state and its "ongoing evaluations of conditions on the ground," it said in a statement. On Wednesday, the diplomatic mission said it had suspended all activities in Michoacan since August 5 following a "threat against US interests." Mexican authorities announced later that Michoacan's security would be reinforced, with the army deploying troops to producing areas. (AFP)

The humble burrito causes indigestion for Trump’s party

Debate over the price of a burrito is causing indigestion for President Donald Trump’s Republican Party, which fears being punished for the high cost of living in November’s midterm elections. The Mexican specialty — rice, beans, meat and other toppings wrapped in a tortilla — is beloved by many Americans as a comforting, inexpensive meal.

Not anymore, argues Andrew Kolvet, a spokesperson for the conservative youth organization Turning Point USA. “One of our TPUSA college students gave

me his take on affordability: ‘A burrito shouldn’t cost \$20.’ Yeah, a lot of this is a hangover from Covid and Biden-era inflation, but the lived experience is the same: It just feels like basic things cost too much,” Kolvet said in a viral X post this week. Those comments set off what Fox News, the Republicans’ favorite channel, is describing as a “civil war” within the party.

Some conservatives questioned the cited price and accused American youth of having expensive tastes while others came to their defence — and warned of political

fallout. “Stop whining, get a job, eat Ramen like the rest of us did in college, on a budget with 4 roommates. The market doesn’t care what you think something ‘should’ cost,” Dan Crenshaw, a Texas Republican congressman wrote on X. In Washington, the price of a takeout burrito at two popular fast-food chains ranged between \$6.50 and \$13.50, depending on the ingredients.

Similarly, Marc Thiessen, a former advisor to president George W Bush turned columnist, criticised students on the same platform for being lazy and paying higher prices for food

delivery services. “When I graduated I lived on ramen noodles,” he wrote. “I didn’t whine about affordability. I worked hard so I could one day afford a better life.” That prompted a sharp rebuke from Vice President JD Vance, who called the comment surprising because “If you’ve ever met him in person, it’s quite obvious the man has never missed a burrito,” referring to the columnist’s physique.

Other conservatives also said that comments downplaying consumers’ concerns about prices was entirely the wrong response — and would have a political impact. **(AFP)**

US plans \$1bn security assistance to Colombia

The US State Department said on Friday that President Donald Trump’s administration plans to provide \$1bn in security assistance to the government of Colombia’s new right-wing President Abelardo De La Espriella.

Here are details and quotes: “As a cornerstone of this renewed partnership, the US, working with Congress, intends to announce \$1bn in assistance as part of a security package to support President De La Espriella’s Administration in achieving our shared goals,” the State Department said in a statement.

Colombia’s new president, who has promised a crack-down on crime and an economic revival, was sworn in on Friday. Trump had endorsed him during the elections.

The State Department said the Trump administration welcomed Colombia into the “Shield of the Americas,” a Trump-created military alliance of right-wing leaders pledging to fight drug trafficking. Trump has moved to increase US presence and influence in Latin America.

He ordered the seizure of ousted Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro in a deadly raid and the US military has carried out multiple strikes on boats in the Caribbean that have killed dozens.

Rights advocates, both in the US and around the world, say such actions are illegal, imperial and amount to extra-judicial killings.

Trump casts them as attempts to counter drug trafficking and illegal immigration. Trump had publicly feuded with former President Gustavo Petro, a former rebel and Colombia’s first leftist president, over a range of issues.

Petro had accused Trump of being “complicit in genocide” over US ally Israel’s assault on Gaza and called for “criminal proceedings” over American attacks on boats in Caribbean waters. He had also criticised Trump’s endorsement of De La Espriella during the elections. **(Reuters)**

US to invest \$3bn in critical minerals projects to bolster national security

Reuters
Washington

The US government will invest \$3bn in critical minerals and battery projects as part of a push to increase domestic production and boost national security and industrial policy, President Donald Trump said on Friday.

“We’re reclaiming America’s rightful place as the minerals superpower of the world,” Trump told more than 200 mining executives, educators, investors and fellow politicians at a roundtable at the State Department aimed at supporting the industry, which he said had not received enough attention from Washington in recent years.

He announced a slew of investments during his speech, including a \$1.4bn conditional loan from the Defence Department’s Office of Strategic Capital for Sila Nanotechnologies, which makes lithium-ion battery parts.

The OSC also extended a \$400mn conditional loan to scandium miner Sunrise Energy Metals and a \$150mn conditional loan to magnet developer Niron Magnetics.

The US Export-Import Bank will lend \$58mn to Westwater Resources, Global Advanced Metals and 5E Advanced Materials, which Reuters reported earlier on Friday.

“Critical minerals are the raw materials of American strength that power everything from advanced weaponry to automobiles, and we want these essential products to be mined, refined and made right here in the USA,” Trump said.

Interior Secretary Doug Burgum, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick and National Security Council official David Copley attended the announcement.

The White House needs critical minerals to replenish weapons stockpiles depleted



Chairman of the American Ocean Minerals Tom Albanese (R) listens as Senior Director of Global Supply Chain David Copley speaks during a roundtable on the American mining industry at the US Department of State on Friday in Washington, DC. **(AFP)**

during the Iran conflict and reduce US dependence on Chinese supply chains.

Several executives came with gifts for Trump. Tom Albanese, chairman of deep-sea mining firm American Ocean Minerals, gave Trump a gold replica of a nodule that the company hopes to mine from the Pacific seabed. Trump last year said he may bypass the UN-backed International Seabed Authority and issue international seabed mining licenses.

Jim Litinsky, CEO of rare earths firm MP Materials, which is financially supported by the Pentagon, gave Trump magnets that had been produced for General Motors in the company’s Texas plant.

Other attendees included executives from Lithium Americas, which is building the

largest US lithium mine, NioCorp, which is building a scandium mine to supply defence contractor Lockheed Martin, and Energy Fuels, which received a \$725mn OSC conditional loan in June.

US forces have burned through large numbers of precision-guided missiles and air-defence interceptors during the five-month-old Iran war. Defence officials and lawmakers have warned that replenishing some inventories could take years given existing production constraints. The Trump administration has disputed reports of significant shortages.

Supplies of minerals including rare earths, tungsten, germanium and scandium are essential for manufacturing precision-guided missiles, fighter aircraft, armored vehicles,

infrared sensors and other advanced weapons systems, according to Pentagon officials and defence companies.

The Department of Energy on Friday hosted representatives from all 14 accredited US mining schools to promote mining careers and encourage more students to enter the field.

The department announced \$100mn in grants to help boost educational programs and set a goal of doubling the number of mining-related graduates at the nation’s universities within two years.

“We need to work on some systemic changes to how we as a nation want to offer our brightest students an opportunity to participate in this industry,” said Assistant Energy Secretary Audrey Robertson.

The Pentagon also said it would fund \$80mn in projects at three US mining schools. Officials have pointed to China’s extensive network of mining universities as a key advantage in its dominance of global mineral production.

Since returning to office, Trump has launched a \$12bn strategic minerals stockpile, backed equity investments in companies developing US mines and processing facilities, and sought to limit defence contractors’ reliance on supplies from China.

The administration says government support is needed to counter decades of Chinese investment that left Beijing dominant in the mining and processing of many strategic minerals.

Australia’s government yesterday welcomed the Trump administration’s loan to Sunrise Energy Metals, which is developing a scandium mine in the country’s New South Wales state. “The Sunrise Scandium Project hosts the world’s largest and highest-grade known scandium resource, which has a range of vital aerospace, defence and clean energy applications,” Resources Minister Madeleine King said in a statement.

Hawaii primary pits Democratic incumbent against younger, more left-wing challenger

Reuters
Hawaii

The ideological divide rolling US Democratic politics moves to Hawaii yesterday, where voters will decide whether to nominate a seasoned lawmaker to another term in Congress or pick a younger, more left-wing candidate.

US Representative Ed Case, 73, faces a challenge for the Democratic nomination from Jarrett Keohokalole, 43, a state senator who has argued the incumbent is too close to corporate interests.

Keohokalole is also calling for expanded government healthcare and limiting aid to Israel, in line with other progressive candidates who have won Democratic primaries in Michigan, New York and Colorado this year.



US Representative Ed Case during a House Appropriations Subcommittee hearing on Capitol Hill. **(Reuters/File Photo)**

The outcome will not likely affect Democrats’ chances of winning control of the House of Representatives in the November midterm elections, as the Hono-

lulu-based district is seen as safely Democratic. Case has held the seat since 2019, and also served in the House between 2002 and 2007.

A moderate who holds a senior position on a key spending committee, Case has argued that Hawaii will attract fewer federal dollars if he is not reelected.

Keohokalole has highlighted Case’s campaign donations from businesses to argue he has lost touch with voters.

If he wins, Keohokalole would be the latest progressive challenger to capitalise on Democratic voters’ frustration with party leaders who they view as too old, too close to Israel, and unable to effectively oppose Republican President Donald Trump.

But Case could draw support from independent and Republican voters, who can vote in primary contests in Hawaii.

Colombia’s new president vows to restore order and ‘defeat narco-terrorists’

AFP
Cali, Colombia

Colombian President Abelardo de la Espriella vowed to restore order and eradicate “narco-terrorists” in a fiery first speech as leader on Friday.

The US-backed millionaire flew by helicopter to address soldiers in a military garrison after his inauguration in the southwestern city of Cali.

His mandate marks a sharp turn right for the Andean nation, with the 48-year-old keen to cozy up to Washington and come down hard on Colombia’s patchwork of armed groups.

“There will be no room for maneuvers that undermine the stability of the nation,” the president, who adopted a stiff military salute on the campaign trail, told hundreds of soldiers.

He pledged to “relentlessly defeat narco-terrorism” adding that “the option of dialogue is completely exhausted” — a reference to the former administration’s splut-

tering peace talks with guerrillas.

The first thing on his to-do list, he said, was to join US President Donald Trump’s regional anti-cartel alliance known as Shield of the Americas. The US leader now has an eager ally in Bogota.

De la Espriella, who holds dual US and Colombian citizenship, has offered to host US troops on Colombian soil and wants to bomb jungle cocaine labs, build “mega-prisons” and slash the size of the state.

In a break with tradition, his inauguration took place in Cali, Colombia’s salsa capital, not at Congress in more buttoned-down Bogota.

Among the guests was beleaguered FIFA boss Gianni Infantino, who faces scathing criticism over his now-shelved plan to open the World Cup and other competitions up to private investment.

Right-wing figures also attended, including Argentina’s President Javier Milei and Todd Blanche, Trump’s acting attorney general, who headed the US delegation.



President Abelardo de la Espriella delivers a speech during a military parade commemorating Independence Day in Medellin. **(AFP)**

De la Espriella’s leftist predecessor Gustavo Petro declined to attend the ceremony.

He earlier left the presidential

residence in the capital, bidding “farewell, freedom and life.”

Cali has suffered several guerrilla attacks in recent years, and the

city saw beefed-up security for the occasion including 11,000 troops and an anti-drone system.

De la Espriella’s narrow victory of less than one percentage point ended four years of Colombia’s first-ever leftist government.

He now has a challenge as he faces a divided Congress, where he lacks a majority. Supporters are hoping for a harsh crackdown on crime and dissident armed groups.

“This government has a lot to prove. A lot was said during the campaign,” 46-year-old Marisol Peira told AFP in Cali.

Petro tried and failed to negotiate peace with the country’s myriad armed groups.

Experts say the gangs — once ideological but now focused on making money from cocaine trafficking and other illicit trades — used government truces as cover to grow.

Petro, who has claimed election fraud without providing evidence, called for mass protests in major cities on Friday, and hundreds of people peacefully demonstrated in Bogota and Barranquilla.

De la Espriella’s victory is yet another notch in the belt for Latin American right-wingers after electoral wins from Chile to Costa Rica on the back of security promises.

The former lawyer wants to eliminate coca crops used for cocaine production “by all means,” advocates the environmentally harmful practice of fracking, and plans to lower taxes for the rich.

Calling himself “The Tiger,” De la Espriella plans to forge a military alliance with the US and Israel to aid his war on guerrillas.

His so-called “Plan Colombia II” is a nod to a multimillion-dollar agreement with Washington in the 2000s aimed at combating drug cartels and leftist groups.

“We have to support him so there won’t be so much crime,” said German Angulo, a 63-year-old contractor. “We need a complete change.”

Although the original “Plan Colombia” succeeded in weakening key combat groups, it also led to allegations of serious human rights abuses.

Thai students in disbelief after deadly school shooting

AFP
Nonthaburi, Thailand

Sobbing Thai students embraced each other tightly on Friday after a 14-year-old classmate entered their school wielding his grandfather's handgun and shot dead at least five school staff.

Tearful students in school uniforms held each other outside the Debsirin Nonthaburi secondary school while emergency workers treated injuries and parents looked for their children.

"I'm still in shock," 16-year-old Thatchai Jaiyen told AFP, expressing disbelief that a kind former teacher of his had been killed.

"She was such a good person. I thought that if she had encoun-

tered the shooter, she might have been able to reason with him.

"I never expected that the child would actually shoot her," he said, his voice trailing away.

The suspect first killed his grandparents at their home around 20 kilometres (12 miles) away with the same firearm, according to authorities.

He took his own life after killing a maths teacher, a Thai language teacher, a guidance counsellor, a student affairs administrator and a secretary at the school, according to police.

Debsirin Nonthaburi secondary is among the most prominent government schools in Nonthaburi province, just north of the capital Bangkok.

Grade 12 student Pakonkiat Sangchan was studying when he

said he saw the shooter walking towards the building.

"My friend suggested that we start running, so that's what we did. We just ran," the 17-year-old said.

Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul told reporters that the boy's dead grandmother "used to be a teacher and she was quite strict on him about studying".

Student Purin Khumchoo said he felt the suspect was "a troubled kid" but had appeared "very professional" when he had aimed the gun at him at school on Friday.

"My group of friends who knew him said he was interested in the FBI and guns, and that he was bullied by many other students," the 17-year-old said.

Purin said he felt depressed and bad for the people who were killed.

"The two teachers who were killed were lovely, and many students became better people because of them," he told AFP.

Pawarisa Maylissa, a grade 12 student, said she was in a computer lesson when her teacher told the class about the active shooting.

They shut the classroom door, locked themselves inside and hid between tables, just before Pawarisa heard multiple shots fired.

At the home of the shooter's grandparents, a neighbour said she heard two loud bangs early on Friday morning.

"I didn't know if it was firecrackers or gunshots," said the woman, who declined to give her name. "I was shocked."

She said the grandmother had taught her son. Another neigh-



A boy leaves flowers outside Debsirin Nonthaburi secondary school the day after the shooting incident, in Nonthaburi province, north of Bangkok, yesterday. (AFP)

bour said she had been his teacher at primary and secondary school.

Thriwit Sukkasampraset, 18, said the shooter "liked playing basketball in front of his house and walking his dog".

"I can't believe how a child like him could get access to a gun," Pawarisa said.

"I'm a bit worried that other kids might also have guns," she said.

Typhoon Dolphin hits Japan's Okinawa, China shuts ports

Reuters
Tokyo/Beijing

Typhoon Dolphin lashed Japan's southern Okinawa prefecture yesterday, injuring six people and cutting power to more than 50,000 buildings, while China shut ports and halted ferries ahead of the storm's expected arrival on its east coast.

Five elderly people, three of whom fell due to strong winds, suffered non-life-threatening injuries in Okinawa while another person was injured in Kagoshima prefecture, authorities said.

Nearly 39,000 buildings were without power in Kagoshima while just over 12,000 were affected in Okinawa. Domestic airlines, ANA and Japan Airlines, cancelled flights to and from Okinawa.

The typhoon had maximum sustained winds of 162kph (90mph) with gusts reaching 216kph.

Okinawa and Amami island in Kagoshima prefecture are the main areas expected to be affected in Japan.

In China, where the typhoon is expected to make landfall between late Sunday and early Monday, authorities have designated Dolphin as an orange-category typhoon - the second-highest level.



A satellite image shows Typhoon Dolphin approaching Japan's Okinawa, on Thursday. (Reuters)

Worried about the risk of flooding and landslides, authorities also raised the emergency response level for Dolphin by one notch to level III, the second-lowest level.

The typhoon is most likely to make landfall between Zhoushan city in Zhejiang province and Fuding city in Fujian province and is expected to have winds of 38-45m per second (85-101mph) near its centre, according to China's National Meteorological Center. China's National Marine Forecasting Center on Saturday maintained its highest, red-level warning for waves, forecasting 5-8m (16- to 26-foot) waves in coastal waters off Zhejiang through today afternoon.

Under an orange-level warning, waves in coastal waters off Shanghai and northern Fujian could be 3 to 5.5m.

Last evening, Chinese authorities issued five weather and disaster warnings, including orange alerts for typhoon, heavy rain, and geological-disaster risks, along with a red alert for mountain torrents.

Rain and strong winds are expected to affect eastern China through August 12, including parts of Shanghai and neighbouring provinces. Some areas could see short bursts of rainfall exceeding 80mm an hour, accompanied by thunderstorms and strong winds.

Zhejiang, one of China's biggest provincial economies and a manufacturing and export hub, raised its coastal typhoon alert to its highest level and halted port operations. Authorities in eastern and southern China also suspended ferries, halted some construction work and ordered fishing boats back to port.

Ningbo Lishe International Airport in Zhejiang said it will suspend all flights on Sunday. Shanghai's Yangshan port had been cleared of vessels by late Friday, while some rail services in the Yangtze River Delta will be suspended from today.

Beijing authorities have said they are monitoring the typhoon's path and are preparing flood-control and evacuation plans for the capital.

In Taiwan, 78 flights, mostly international, were cancelled because of the typhoon, the government said. Heavy rain was expected in northern parts of the island over the weekend, though authorities had not ordered evacuations as of Saturday. China has ordered that, due to the typhoon, ships passing through the Taiwan Strait must heed its traffic control instructions - measures that Taipei denounced as "ridiculous", saying that Beijing has no right to restrict access to international waters.

Korea recovers landmines washed from North Korea

AFP
Seoul

Korean authorities have collected 15 landmines believed to have washed over into their coastal territory from the inter-Korean border on monsoon deluges, officials said on Friday.

The Demilitarised Zone (DMZ), splitting the Koreas since their 1950-53 war ended with an armistice, is one of the most heavily mined places on Earth.

Some 800,000 are estimated to be buried around the area, according to military data cited by the Yonhap news agency, many from the war - but mine-laying has continued in recent years.

Choi Young-ran, head of civil defence for South Korea's northwestern border country of Gwangwha, said 15 "suspected North Korean landmines" were "discovered along coastal areas".

She told AFP the mines "believed to have been washed away during the monsoon season and recent torrential rains" had been found between July 23 and August 3.

"We have recovered all 15," she said.

Gwangwha, an archipelago county, sits at the mouth of the Han River estuary which is bisected by the border between North and South Korea.

Seoul's military warned last month about the risk of heavy rainfall washing explosives into rivers crossing the border and

causing "serious damage" if they explode downstream.

In 2015, two South Korean soldiers patrolling the western DMZ lost limbs when they were severely wounded by a North Korean mine, the military said.

In late July, Gwangwha county sent out alerts to residents warning them of the danger of North Korean mines along coastal areas.

County officials said Wednesday they had "not ruled out the possibility that more could arrive."

Park Heung-yeol, a Ganghwa resident, said tourist numbers fell for a time after the 2015 landmine incident, and locals fear that could happen again.

Despite the heat, "there are still around 300 people who dig for clams by hand," he told AFP.

"It seems like a dangerous activity for them" given the risk from mines, he said.

Natural disasters tend to have an outsized impact on North Korea due to its weak infrastructure. Deforestation has left it vulnerable to flooding.

Specialist outlet NK Pro said on Thursday hundreds of homes at a large North Korean border military base were washed away by heavy rains in late July after an apparent dam collapse.

Citing satellite imagery, it said "at least 380 single-story row houses were completely swept away, while the site is reportedly a key artillery command".

South Koreans living along the high-security border face frequent disruptions and danger.

Philippines says it does not condone threats of violence

The Philippine foreign ministry said it did not condone threats of violence against foreign officials after five caskets containing anti-China messages were found abandoned in Manila in the early hours of Friday morning. China filed a solemn representation to the Philippine government in protest against the incident, with its embassy in Manila describing the caskets as a "political provocation" and urging Philippine authorities to investigate and bring those responsible to justice. Philippine police discovered five abandoned caskets across the Philippine capital before dawn on Friday, including one left outside the Chinese embassy. "Such actions do not reflect the Philippine government's approach to conducting its foreign relations, nor do they represent how Filipinos express criticism or dissatisfaction, even on sensitive political matters," the Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs said in a statement. Chinese embassy spokesperson Ji Lingpeng said in a statement that the caskets sought to sow hostility between Filipinos and Chinese but would not undermine stable ties between the two countries. (Reuters)

Indonesia traps monkey to end rampage that wounded 18 people

Animal trappers have cut short the two-week rampage of a monkey that randomly attacked 18 people on Indonesia's Sumatra island, prompting dozens of schools to close in fear.

The animal, an adult long-tailed macaque, wounded 18 residents of the town of Tembilahan, biting and clawing at its victims - most of whom it targeted when they were alone.

Those hurt included children and elderly people.

"As of today, there were 19 attacks, with 18 victims. One victim was attacked twice," Tembilahan fire and rescue service head Junaidy Ismail told AFP on Friday.

Some required more than a dozen stitches and a rabies shot. The monkey was caught on

Thursday in a trap set in town, and the rescue service issued a video on Friday showing it alive, seemingly stressed, in a cage.

Town official Ari Syuria urged residents to remain cautious because the monkey could have operated as part of a gang.

"The concern is that there may be other monkeys attacking people," Ari said in an Instagram post.

Forty schools remained closed on Friday, with three days of online learning ordered for hundreds of Tembilahan pupils.

Doors will reopen next Monday if it is deemed safe, the local government said in a statement.

The monkey has been transferred to Pekanbaru, the capital of Sumatra's Riau province, where the nature conservation agency



Animal keepers examine a long-tailed macaque after it was caught in a trap the previous day, at the Animal Rescue Center for observation in Pekanbaru, Riau, on Friday. (AFP)

will carry out blood and observational tests.

"We want to establish whether the monkey is carrying any dis-

eases," agency official Ujang Holisudin told AFP.

Human-animal conflicts are common in the vast Southeast Asian archipelago, especially in areas where the clearing of rainforest to make way for palm oil plantations is shrinking the habitats of animals such as monkeys, elephants and tigers.

Puji Rianti, a biology lecturer at IPB University south of Jakarta, said some monkeys have also learnt to associate humans with food.

"It's not easy to look for food in the forest... It is easier to get food by living near humans... by stealing," she told AFP by telephone.

It was also possible that the rampaging monkey was a former pet released into the wild, Puji said. (AFP)

Indonesia's salt fields bloom under drought from El Niño's baking heat

Reuters
Cirebon, Indonesia

Salt farmers in Indonesia's West Java province are reaping the benefits of an El Niño-driven drought even as crop farmers brace for a prolonged challenge from the baking heat.

The sprawling southeast Asian tropical archipelago is grappling with an intensifying El Niño, a climate pattern that typically brings hotter, drier conditions across much of Southeast Asia, raising the risk of drought, wildfires and crop losses.

As a result, by July more than half of the country's seasonal zones were engulfed by a longer-than-expected dry season, which is expected to peak in August. The Indonesian weather agency has warned the El Niño will persist into early 2027. As of last month, more than 5,000 hotspots were detected across the country, a sharp increase compared to previous El Niño years.



A drone view shows a farmer preparing crystallised salt on the pond floors during harvest in Pengarengan village, Cirebon, West Java province, Indonesia. (Reuters)

Most of Indonesia's salt production relies on low-tech methods that evaporate seawater in shallow coastal ponds during the dry season.

Farmers in areas such as West

Java's Cirebon regency on the island of Java's northern coast spend hours scraping crystallised salt from the pond floors before gathering it into piles for collection.

Even brief rainfall can interrupt

the process, reducing production and quality.

"For us, El Niño is a blessing and a grace. It's something we should be grateful for," Dadang Darmawan, 45, the head of a local salt

farmers' group, told Reuters during a visit to a salt farm in Cirebon, which has only seen one light drizzle in over a month.

Darmawan said salt farmers wished El Niño would return every year because of the output boost.

Production in Cirebon reached nearly 600 metric tons in July, compared to just 25 to 30 tons in the same month last year, said Sudiharjo, an official at the Cirebon Regency Food Security and Fisheries Agency, who only goes by one name.

He added that, with dry conditions expected to persist through October, the region is likely to record a bumper salt harvest.

Cirebon's sprawling salt fields, spread over 1,400 hectares (3,460 acres), represent only a fraction of the 10 salt-producing regions of Indonesia, which has 17,000 islands, and plenty of coastline.

Data from Indonesia's Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries showed national production fell last year to 1 million tons amid

a shorter-than-usual dry season, followed by a La Nina climate pattern that is associated with wetter conditions. In 2023, the last El Niño period, output was 2.5 million tons.

"Production will definitely increase because the dry weather period is longer," the head of the Indonesian Salt Users Industry Association, Cucu Sutara, said of national production. However, he did not give an exact projection.

The salt farmers' windfall is in stark contrast to the protective measures the country's traditional agriculturalists are taking. The country's weather agency has warned crop farmers to adjust their planting schedules and farming activities.

Darminto, a 39-year-old salt farmer, who only goes by one name, understands that crop farmers are badly affected by the El Niño but is focusing on the boom times.

"My hope is that this summer lasts longer, so I can earn money and store salt," he said.

Irish govt plane sent to extradite cartel boss

AFP
London

An Irish government plane took off yesterday to extradite a suspected transnational cartel boss, Daniel Joseph Kinahan, from Dubai to face trial over alleged serious crime offences, local media reported.

A government jet took off yesterday morning to pick up Kinahan and was expected to return with him today, Irish national broadcaster RTE reported.

Ireland's justice ministry declined to comment and Garda police told AFP it would not comment on media reports and that Kinahan's case "remains a matter for the authorities in the United Arab Emirates at this time".

The 49-year-old Irishman allegedly ran a group out of Dubai that has been linked by US and European authorities to a vast criminal enterprise dealing in drug smuggling and money laundering.

He was arrested in Dubai in April after a warrant was issued in Ireland for "alleged serious or-

Kinahan was arrested in Dubai in April after a warrant was issued in Ireland for "alleged serious organised crime offences" and lost appeals against extradition

ganised crime offences" and lost appeals against extradition.

On arrival in Ireland, Kinahan was expected to be taken to the Special Crime Court in Dublin amid a large security operation, RTE reported.

The transnational group, known as the Kinahan Organised Crime Group (KOCG), is alleged to be the most powerful organised crime in Ireland with wealth estimated by Irish police at over 1bn euros (£856mn).

Kinahan would be the second senior figure in the cartel to be extradited from Dubai.

Sean McGovern, described by a judge as "senior lieutenant in the cartel", was the first senior associate to be extradited after his arrest in 2024.

In June, he was sentenced to

24 years in prison in Ireland after pleading guilty to directing organised crime and attempted murder.

The case related to a long-running violent feud between the Kinahan cartel and the rival Dublin-based Hutch gang.

The US government in 2022 imposed sanctions on Kinahan and other members of his family identified as leaders of the cartel.

It designated them as running a narcotics trafficking organisation active in Ireland, the United Kingdom and throughout mainland Europe, and engaging in "money laundering, firearms trafficking, and murder".

The US Treasury said Kinahan was believed to run the cartel's day-to-day operations, while his brother Christopher was also designated.

Their father, also named Christopher, "aka the Dapper Don", oversaw the gang's property, the US government said, offering up to \$5mn for information leading to the arrest of the father and sons.

Europol also designated the three men as "high value targets".

Grand Prix Centenary event in London



Historic Formula One cars are displayed during the Grand Prix Centenary event at Brooklands Museum and race circuit, in Weybridge, southwest of London yesterday. 2026 marks the 100th anniversary of Britain's first Grand Prix, held at the Brooklands race circuit. (AFP)

India's 'cockroach' youth protest movement keeps heat on Modi

AFP
New Delhi

Two weeks after youth-led protests forced India's education minister to resign, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government is grappling with the fallout from one of its toughest political challenges in years.

Led by the online Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), the demonstrations spread from New Delhi to other cities, broadening from anger over exam irregularities into a wider movement over unemployment, opportunities for young people and what critics describe as Modi's increasingly authoritarian rule.

While demonstrations are largely over after achieving key demands, AFP looks at what the protests revealed — and what could come next.

The resignation of the education minister on July 25 marked a rare climbdown for a prime minister who has spent more than a decade cultivating an image of unwavering resolve.

The authorities have since attempted to woo the youth, and parliament has hiked penalties for leaking exam papers.

Police have withdrawn cases against protestors in several cities after criticism over the excessive use of force.

The protests also exposed a rapidly changing digital landscape, with protesters using social media to spread their message.

Modi, a keen user of X, has turned to Instagram — issuing his first vertical videos to tap into the youth medium of choice.

The protests exposed how authorities are using AI-powered camera technology to monitor and identify demonstrators.

Many women say they have been receiving rape threats and abusive messages online after



Cockroach Janta Party founder Abhijeet Dipke (centre) takes part in a protest over alleged irregularities in the country's major examinations, in New Delhi. (AFP/File photo)

their videos during the demonstrations went viral.

Internet shutdown around the main protest site in New Delhi disrupted communication, forcing youngsters to find new ways to stay in touch.

India ranked second worldwide in internet shutdowns last year, according to Access Now monitor, including localised blackouts during protests, conflict and communal violence.

Exam leaks were the spark, but the anger quickly spread to deeper frustrations among young Indians over jobs, economic opportunities and a lack of faith in institutions.

For many protesters, the prospect of uncertain employment after years of study and highly competitive examinations has become a symbol of a wider struggle for economic security.

That gives the movement a potential staying power beyond the original dispute.

Even if the government addresses exam cheating, it cannot easily resolve the broader grievances that brought young people onto the streets.

The protests have left behind a youth movement with millions of followers online, but that does not guarantee lasting political influence.

The CJP has said it will organise a "nationwide listening tour" to hear the concerns of young Indians, while continuing to back protests over exam irregularities.

Demonstrations are still taking place in the eastern state of Jharkhand, suggesting the anger that fuelled the protests that began in the capital has not disappeared.

CJP founder, Abhijeet Dipke, has called for "a public movement

to restore trust and neutrality in public institutions".

"The public has become very frustrated and tired of these things. That is why our movement got such massive support," he said.

But "for now, the CJP will function as a pressure group", Dipke added, rather than a political party.

The protests could force India's political parties to focus on the needs and demands of young voters.

Young Indians make up a huge potential electoral constituency, but turning protest energy into votes is another matter.

With nearly three years to go before the next national polls, both Modi's ruling party and the opposition may try and harness the anger and frustration expressed by young people for electoral gain.

Nepal rescuers find bodies of 5 climbers killed last year

AFP
Kathmandu

Rescuers in Nepal have found the bodies of five mountaineers, including three foreigners, killed in an avalanche last year near the Chinese border, a local government official said yesterday.

"Five bodies, three foreigners and two Nepalis, who had been missing since last November, have been discovered," said Biswash Karki, chairman of Gaurishankar Rural Municipality.

The foreigners were an Italian-Canadian, a German and an Italian, he told AFP.

The avalanche hit the climbers on the lower flanks of the 5,630m (18,471-foot) Yalung Ri peak, near Nepal's border with Tibet. Locals and rescuers discovered the bodies on Thursday, Karki said, adding that the

local authority was working to recover them. "Ever since they went missing, we had been deploying the army, police and local rescue teams to search for them, but thick snow had covered their bodies," the official said.

Senior local police officer Manoj Kumar Lama said a rescue helicopter was sent to the area on Friday, but "due to bad weather, our team has not been able to reach the spot".

"Our rescue team will airlift the bodies once the weather clears," he told AFP.

Home to eight of the world's 10 highest peaks, including Mount Everest, Nepal welcomes hundreds of climbers and trekkers every year.

According to the Himalayan Database, an expedition archive, more than 1,000 people have died on peaks since 1950, with avalanches killing almost a third of them.

Tibet meet in Nepal pushed online

An international academic conference on Tibet due to take place in Nepal this month has been pushed online, organisers said yesterday, calling it a "worrying development".

Nepal's government denied that it had ordered the change, though the country is acutely aware of how sensitive the issue of Tibet is to its giant northern neighbour China.

The conference of the International Association for Tibetan Studies (IATS) was expected to draw key scholars from around the world to Kathmandu University to discuss Tibetan history, culture, religion and society. IATS acting president Francoise Robin, a Tibetan studies professor at France's

National Institute for Oriental Languages and Civilizations, told AFP it was a "very regrettable and worrying development". "We are proceeding with the conference, but it will take place online," she said. Organisers at Kathmandu University, which was convening the August 23-29 event, said they were told to withdraw from hosting it. "The government told us that this is not an appropriate time to conduct this conference," he told AFP. Nepal denied giving such orders.

"Nepal's government has not given any instructions to cancel it," Hem Raj Aryal, spokesperson at the prime minister's office, told AFP. IATS, established at Britain's University of Oxford in 1979. (AFP)

Taiwan to attend Pacific leaders meet: official

Taiwan will attend an annual gathering of Pacific Island leaders in Palau this month, the regional bloc said, overcoming protests from China that saw Taipei barred from the event last year.

China and Taiwan were important partners to the region, a Pacific Islands Forum official told reporters late Friday, after ministers from 18 member states met in Fiji to thrash out priorities.

"Taiwan is a very important development partner. It is not a dialogue partner, however it engages with members of our forum family," Baron Waqa, the forum's secretary-general, told a news conference.

Palau, host of the August 30 to September 4 meeting, as well as Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands, are among Taiwan's 12 remaining diplomatic partners.

China claims Taiwan is part of its territory and opposes the self-governed island's participation in international organisations and exchanges with other countries.

Forum members Nauru, Kiribati and Solomon Islands have all switched diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to Beijing since 2019.

Solomon Islands, the host of last year's leaders meeting, blocked Taiwan from attending, resulting in all external countries being disinclined to the meeting, despite the island states' reliance on foreign aid and investment.

"This year it is an open invitation," said Rick Hou, foreign minister in the Solomon Islands government that took office in May and has swiftly repaired ties with the United States, Japan and Australia.

A joint statement condemning China's test of an intercontinental ballistic missile in the Pacific last month was still being negotiated, Waqa said, confirming Nauru and Kiribati had held different positions to other forum members.

New Zealand's Foreign Minister Winston Peters on Friday accused two states he did not name of appeasing "outsiders" after the meeting failed to agree to the statement. "Everyone wants that statement out," Waqa later told reporters, adding the arguments centred on whether it would focus solely on the Chinese missile test, or all missile testing in the Pacific. (AFP)

India regulator won't ease 'energy drink' label deadline

Reuters
New Delhi

India's food safety regulator will not agree to demands by global beverage companies to extend to one year its 90-day deadline to drop "energy drink" labels, a government source said on Friday, a decision which is set to disrupt the industry.

PepsiCo, Red Bull, Monster Beverage and billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Reliance have locked horns with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's food regulator amid strict enforcement actions over how alcohol, beverage and food companies label their products.

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) in July privately gave the companies 90 days to drop "energy drink", or any similar description, from high-caffeine beverages, saying there were no Indian standards on such products and using that term breached regulations, Reuters has reported.

India's energy drinks retail sales are growing 12.6% annually, faster than in the US and China, Euromonitor estimates. Retail sales rose nearly 100% annually between 2018 and 2023 and stood at 907mn litres last year — roughly

over 3bn bottles or cans.

The FSSAI will not agree to a deadline extension as many Indian states have conveyed that existing stocks of such drinks can be sold out in 60-90 days, said the government source, who declined to be named as the decision is not public.

The drinks companies have sought at least one year to implement the decision, since they have millions of cans or bottles in the market, or have pending orders for imported cans, according to three industry sources.

"The companies have breached regulations by labelling them energy drinks, they should be happy (India) is not prosecuting them," the government official said.

"They have not told FSSAI how much inventory is lying in which state, which they are supposed to track to ensure traceability," the official added.

The industry sources said tallying stock across states was hard given the huge volumes.

FSSAI, as well Red Bull, Monster and Ambani's Reliance Consumer Products did not respond to Reuters queries. PepsiCo declined comment.

Energy drinks have sparked health concerns among some regulators globally who worry they contain high caffeine, sugar and



Red Bull cans on display for sale inside a shop in New Delhi. (Reuters/File photo)

taurine, an amino acid. They will be banned for under-16s in England from April next year.

The beverage giants are also pleading with the Indian government to halt seizures of energy drinks by some state governments, the industry sources added.

Last month, India's Rajasthan state seized thousands of Pepsi's Sting, Reliance's Campa Energy and Red Bull as part of its enforcement drive. In a statement to Reuters, the food safety office of the federally-administered territory of Ladakh said they will be seizing stock.

"Seizure action is an explicit part of the district-level inspection drive already underway," said

the office, adding that beverages at retailers and distributors were being checked for labelling.

The market in India boomed after Pepsi launched Sting in 2017, with its Rs20 (\$0.21) plastic bottles proving popular among 15- to 19-year-olds and in rural areas, Euromonitor says.

Industry executives from PepsiCo, Red Bull and Monster took their concerns about energy drinks labelling to Food Processing Minister Chirag Paswan on Tuesday, seeking his support, according to the industry sources.

The ministry is committed to promote "investment, innovation, and job creation" of the sector, Paswan wrote on X without elaborating.

Patriot missile system: Why are supplies depleted worldwide?

First used in the 1991 Gulf War, the US Patriot air defense system has seen demand spike sharply this year, with supplies of interceptor missiles depleted by Ukraine's war against the Russian invasion and the widening war in the Middle East. Ukraine is urgently seeking more Patriot interceptors to defend against a nightly barrage of Russian ballistic missile strikes. But the Iran war has drained arsenals in the US and the Gulf, and some European countries are holding onto missiles they may need for their own defence.

Patriot, short for Phased Array Tracking Radar for Intercept on Target, is a mobile surface-to-air missile defense system built by US weapons maker Raytheon Technologies that can be used in all kinds of weather and at long range. Developed in the 1980s, the Patriot system has been modernised over the past decades, expanding its capabilities and reach. It is slated to remain in service through 2048.

A typical battery includes radar and control systems, a power unit, launchers, and support vehicles. The system can intercept aircraft, tactical ballistic missiles and cruise missiles, depending on the interceptor used.

The system has different capabilities depending on the type of interceptor used. The earlier PAC-2 interceptor uses a blast-fragmentation warhead that detonates in the vicinity of a target, while the PAC-3 family of missiles uses more accurate "hit-to-kill" technology to physically collide with the target.

Raytheon makes the PAC-2 GEM-T interceptor, which can defeat smaller, short-range ballistic missiles, cruise missiles or enemy aircraft. Lockheed Martin, the world's largest arms maker, builds the more advanced PAC-3 Missile Segment Enhancement (MSE), which can hit longer-range ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, aircraft and also hypersonics.

In July, Lockheed introduced a new interceptor, the PAC-3 Adapted Capability Effector (ACE), which it says

will cost half as much while still be able to target short-range ballistic missiles, aircraft and cruise missiles. The system's radar has a range of over 150km and can simultaneously track up to 100 potential targets, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (Nato) said in 2015.

Although not originally designed to intercept hypersonic weapons, in May 2023 the US confirmed Ukraine had used the Patriot system to shoot down a Russian Kinzhal missile, which Moscow claims is hypersonic. Countries closely guard details about the number of targets destroyed by Patriot systems, although Ukraine said in January it had destroyed 250 targets, including 140 ballistic missiles. Patriot has also destroyed dozens of Iranian ballistic missiles in the Gulf, although details have not been released.

Raytheon has built and delivered over 240 Patriot fire units, according to its website. Raytheon and Lockheed together have manufactured thousands of interceptor missiles.

A newly produced single Patriot battery costs over \$1bn, including \$400mn for the system and \$690 million for the missiles in a battery, according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

Patriot PAC-3 interceptors are estimated at around \$4mn to \$5mn per missile. Specific inventory numbers are classified, but CSIS estimates that about 65% of US Patriot interceptors were expended between February and July, with less than 850 left on hand, down from 2,330 before the Iran war began.

The US is also pressing ahead with talks on allowing Ukraine to make Patriot interceptor missiles, even after President Donald Trump cast doubt on such a deal, sources familiar with the discussions said. The talks include an option for Ukraine to build some components for final assembly elsewhere in Europe.

Last month, the US Army awarded Lockheed Martin a contract worth up to \$58.6bn to produce Patriot interceptor missiles. Reuters

Flamingos get the cane



Volunteers use canes to guide and round up flamingo chicks at the Fuente de Piedra lagoon, 70km from Malaga, at dawn yesterday, during the annual monitoring campaign. The Fuente de Piedra lagoon, the Iberian Peninsula's main flamingo breeding site, is a nature reserve home to more than 170 recorded bird species. (AFP)



Iran's pressure campaign to force US concessions

By Samia Nakhoul
Reuters

Iran is betting it can outlast Washington by turning the Middle East's trade routes, shipping lanes and energy infrastructure into pressure points that steadily raise the cost of confrontation, according to Gulf officials and analysts. Rather than seeking a decisive military victory, Tehran is pursuing a strategy of calibrated escalation aimed at widening the conflict without triggering full-scale war.

The goal, they say, is to convince the United States and its allies that containing the crisis is more costly than accommodating Iran's demands over the Strait of Hormuz. The message from Tehran is that unless Washington accepts a new status quo that gives Iran a greater role in Hormuz, the conflict could spread beyond the Gulf.

By putting multiple maritime chokepoints and energy assets at risk, Iran believes it can strengthen its hand in any future negotiations. "Iran, from the beginning, has tried to out-escalate the United States by stretching out its escalation options so that it always has something new to bring every week -- a new geography, a new type of weapon, a new type of target," Michael Knights of the Washington Institute told Reuters. "The bigger advantage they have is not that they can hurt America or Israel," Knights added. "Their big advantage is that they can hurt the regional states and the global economy."

EXPANDING THREATS BEYOND HORMUZ

Having demonstrated its ability to disrupt traffic through Hormuz, through which about a fifth of global oil consumption flowed before the war, Tehran has signalled that no maritime chokepoint is off limits. Threats to the Red Sea and Saudi energy infrastructure suggest a broader effort to raise the cost of protecting global commerce while testing Washington's tolerance for disruption.



A woman walks past a mural depicting Iran's late supreme leader Ali Khamenei at Valiasr Square in central Tehran. (AFP)

Iran's approach reflects what one Gulf source described as a belief among Revolutionary Guards commanders that "they can get more". They see an opportunity in what they regard as President Donald Trump's reluctance to become deeply entangled in another Middle East conflict ahead of November's midterm elections.

"The Iranians ... believe that by widening the war and increasing the pressure, he will eventually give in," the Gulf source said. "Trump thinks he can hit the Iranians hard and bring them to the negotiating table, but they won't bend."

ESCALATE TO FORCE CONCESSIONS

That calculation underpins Tehran's negotiating strategy.

Trump said talks with Iran would take place on Monday after earlier saying he had called off an imminent attack in hopes of securing a deal to reopen the Strait of Hormuz. Tehran, however, said it was not currently holding talks with the United States.

A senior Iranian source said Tehran's leadership has concluded that earlier attempts at flexibility only yielded greater pressure from Washington, reinforcing the view that leverage must be established before meaningful negotiations can begin. In Tehran's assessment, the source said, Trump interprets concessions as weakness and responds only to pressure.

Michael Singh, senior fellow at the Washington Institute, said Tehran believes it still holds the initiative, partly because the

Trump administration appears uncertain how far it is willing to go militarily.

"The Iranians are trying to press their advantage," he added. "They're interested in establishing sovereignty over the strait and exercising selective control over the waterway."

Alan Eyre, a former US diplomat and Iran expert, said Tehran is pursuing a strategy of deterrence aimed at forcing Washington to lift its blockade and halt military strikes. "They don't want the US to dictate the pace of events," he said. At the centre of the dispute is the future governance of Hormuz.

Oman has presented Iran with a Gulf-backed proposal for managing the waterway, including voluntary user fees, according to regional sources. Tehran, however, is seeking administrative authority over the strait and the ability to levy service charges on vessels. Washington has rejected any fees, insisting Hormuz remain an international waterway free from Iranian control.

THE ENDURANCE GAMBIT

Iran's campaign has produced a consequence that reflects the logic of its strategy. As threats have expanded beyond Hormuz, regional and Western powers have increasingly focused on protecting trade routes and energy infrastructure rather than intensifying pressure on Iran.

The emerging Saudi-led maritime coalition exemplifies that shift. Gulf sources describe it as a defensive framework focused on escorting commercial vessels, sharing intelligence and safeguarding sea lanes rather than confronting Iran directly.

Knights compares the effort to Europe's Aspides mission in the Red Sea, which was created to protect merchant traffic rather than alter the military balance. For Tehran, that dynamic represents a measure of success. Unable to match US military power directly, Iran can still impose costs by forcing governments and navies into a defensive posture.

Each new threat, whether in Hormuz, Bab al-Mandeb -- that

connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden -- or elsewhere, increases the resources required to keep global trade flowing.

At its core, the contest is one of endurance. Iranian leaders appear to believe they can tolerate economic pressure longer than a US-led coalition can tolerate recurring disruption to global commerce and energy markets.

The strategy also carries a diplomatic objective. By demonstrating it can broaden the crisis when necessary, Tehran hopes to shape the terms of any eventual negotiations. "If there are going to be negotiations, they will define the terms," said Ray Takeyh of the Council on Foreign Relations and a former advisor on Iran at the US State Department. "Both sides are matching escalation with escalation."

Yet neither side appears willing to back down. As Washington and Tehran continue to test each other's resolve, the risk remains that a strategy designed to maximise leverage could spiral into a conflict neither can fully control.



An F/A-18E Super Hornet launching from the flight deck of Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln. Tehran has virtually blocked the vital Strait of Hormuz through which about a fifth of the world's energy supplies normally pass. (AFP)

Ukraine warns of tough winter as Russia strikes kill 4 in Kyiv

Zelensky visits Russian ally Serbia

AFP
Belgrade

President Volodymyr Zelensky warned yesterday, during a visit to Belgrade, that Ukraine was facing a winter with basically no working thermal power plants as overnight Russian strikes left four dead, including a child, in the Kyiv region.

Speaking alongside his Serbian counterpart, Aleksandar Vucic, the Ukrainian leader said Moscow's latest overnight attacks and shelling of frontline communities combined had killed 13 people in the last 24 hours.

"Russian missiles are aimed precisely at making the lives of Ukrainians unbearable," Zelensky told reporters during his first official visit to Belgrade, highlighting that the attacks often target Ukraine's energy infrastructure.

Ukraine was left with "virtually no intact thermal power plants" as it braced for the upcoming heating season, Zelensky said. Those plants are important complements to the nuclear en-



A burning building following Russian ballistic missile strikes in Kyiv region, yesterday. (AFP)

ergy which also feeds its grid.

More than four years after the start of Russia's large-scale offensive against Ukraine, the two warring countries are ramping up long-range strikes, causing a growing number of civilian casualties.

Moscow has significantly upped its attacks on the Ukrainian capital in recent months, typically firing salvos of hard-to-intercept ballistic missiles, with Ukraine plead-

ing for more US-made Patriot interceptors and other Western air-defences.

Kyiv, in turn, has been firing record numbers of drones at Russia in retaliation.

After meeting with Vucic as part of a two-day trip to Serbia, the Ukrainian leader renewed calls for tougher sanctions to prevent the flow of missile parts into Russia from "almost every continent,

including from our close partners".

"These components arrive, and then missiles strike people, killing children, civilians and soldiers," he said.

The Ukrainian leader said more access to interceptor missiles was needed in the face of increasing long-range strikes.

Serbia remains one of the only European nations not to sanction Russia, a longtime ally of Belgrade.



Serbia's President Aleksandar Vucic (right) shakes hands with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky during their meeting at the Palace of Serbia, in Belgrade yesterday. (AFP)

Vucic, whose government continues to supply non-military aid to Ukraine, said although they had discussed the war, his government policy had not changed.

"We did not discuss any military co-operation today or at present. What will happen when the war ends is another matter," Vucic said.

Zelensky — who has toured much of the world seeking support since Russia's 2022 invasion — had not visited Serbia since he became president in 2019.

The Kremlin has accused Serbian firms of selling munitions to Ukraine, a claim Vucic has repeatedly denied.

Vucic went to Ukraine for a regional summit in 2025 and visited Kyiv this year.

He has promised assistance to Ukraine but avoided signing a formal declaration of support in the war.

The Serbian leader, yesterday,

also stressed his policy of support for Ukraine's territorial integrity remained unwavering.

The visit came after Russia launched another overnight barrage of missiles and drones, hitting mainly the capital and its surrounds.

An AFP reporter in the capital heard a dozen explosions as Ukraine's air force warned of the "threat of ballistic weapon use from the north".

Zelensky said shelling had also hit across all of frontline communities, injuring dozens while a three-year-old boy was among the dead after the strike on a village outside Kyiv.

"Four more people were hospitalised: the child's parents, his 15-year-old brother, and a neighbour who came to the family's aid and was wounded in a double-tap strike," Zelensky said in an earlier post to X.

PM egged in parliament as crisis spirals in Kosovo

Kosovo's parliament had to be suspended yesterday after an opposition lawmaker pelted caretaker Prime Minister Albin Kurti with eggs, as a long-running political crisis threatens to trigger another snap election.

Europe's youngest democracy has faced three elections in less than two years, with successive parliaments collapsing under deep political divisions.

Kurti, who has been in days-long negotiations with opposition parties over a new president, attempted to delay a key vote when MP Time Kadrijaj lobbed the yolk-filled projectiles.

"Shame on you!" Kadrijaj screamed as she launched the eggs at the leader sitting in the front row of the parliament.

The chairperson of the session called for the live feed to be cut, as security rushed to protect Kurti.

But the leader appeared unshaken by the incident and said that if having eggs thrown at him was the cost of dialogue, "I am happy to pay this price".

The 51-year-old is no stranger to parliamentary disruption, with his own party members having previously set off tear gas in the chamber to protest against votes when they were in opposition.

Kurti's Vetevendosje (VV) party topped the last election in June with enough of a majority to govern, but still requires a two-thirds



Lawmaker Time Kadrijaj throws an egg at PM Albin Kurti (not pictured) during a parliament plenary session in Pristina yesterday. (Reuters)

majority to elect a new president — leaving the former activist in talks with opposition parties.

So far neither side have agreed on a candidate, leaving Kurti in a familiar stalemate.

But after a constitutional deadline to elect parliament's speaker expired Friday, Kosovo's political scene has again been thrown into further uncertainty.

Rival MPs have threatened legal action over Kurti's request for more time to negotiate, and it remains unclear whether his request to delay the speaker's election will be allowed to proceed.

Yesterday's egging, which interrupted the session before a ruling could be made, paused parliament, and another session has yet to be set. (AFP)

Ukraine denies targeting Bulgaria after drone incident

AFP
Sofia

Ukraine yesterday denied targeting Bulgaria after a drone exploded close to the strategic Trans-Balkan gas pipeline linking Turkey to Ukraine near the Romanian border.

Bulgaria's defence ministry said the drone was of a type "widely used by the Ukrainian military", and the foreign minister summoned the Ukrainian ambassador for a meeting on Monday in response, her office told AFP.

Kyiv said it was "in close contact with the Bulgarian side to clarify the circumstances" of the incident, the latest case of a drone straying into Nato airspace as Ukraine fights off Russia's invasion.

"We can say with certainty that the Ukrainian Armed Forces did not intentionally direct any assets toward Bulgaria," Ukraine's foreign ministry spokesman Georgiy Tykhyi said, blaming Russia's invasion for the incident.

While the explosion caused no casualties, Bulgarian Prime Minister Rumen Radev said the amount of explosives it was carrying was "significant".

"The drone exploded in the immediate vicinity of the Kardam border-crossing with Romania," near the Black Sea in the country's northeast, "1,000 metres from the Trans-Balkan gas pipeline's compressor station," he said in a video released by the government.

After analysing the debris from the crash, Bulgaria's defence ministry however said that "currently, nothing suggests that this was a deliberate incident".

The drone eventually crashed into a sunflower field, Radev said.

Romania border police recorded the sound

of the drone, then a Bulgarian border police patrol spotted "a loud explosion accompanied by black smoke", Radev added, speaking after an extraordinary meeting of his cabinet's security council.

"One thing is certain: the drone was carrying a significant amount of explosives, given that it could be heard from a distance and produced such black smoke," he said.

The drone had not been detected by either of the two neighbouring countries, he said, adding: "As you know, identifying and neutralising these drones poses a major challenge."

Incidents involving drones have become increasingly frequent in recent months across eastern European countries that are Nato members and supporters of Ukraine in its conflict with Russia.

Romania has faced frequent drone incursions since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 — including some crashes on its territory. It ordered the expulsion of a Russian embassy staff member in late July.

Radev said that, following the latest incident, Bulgaria had boosted its surveillance and would redeploy troops and soldiers to the borders to detect drones and employ anti-drone measures.

Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey all front onto the Black Sea, an arena of drone combat by both Ukraine and Russia.

Turkish officials on Tuesday said a drone attack the previous day on two civilian vessels in the Black Sea had injured crew members. Turkey's foreign ministry said it was "deeply concerned about the escalating conflict" in the body of water.

Bulgaria in June halted its military aid to Ukraine. Radev said the country did not belong in the coalition of Kyiv's allies supplying arms

and that he preferred to see diplomatic efforts to end the war.

Further west, a German military operational command spokesman told AFP yesterday that drones were detected this week above an army installation in western Germany known to house a large underground depot.

Among other armaments, the Meckernich special site is home to parts for US-made Patriot air-defence systems long coveted by Kyiv.

Those sightings came days after an explosives-laden drone was found near a Ukrainian cargo plane at Leipzig-Halle airport, which plays a key role in the transport of military goods by the German military and Nato allies.

Turkiye urges Russia, Ukraine to halt Black Sea strikes

Turkiye's foreign minister yesterday called for a "moratorium" on attacks by Russia and Ukraine in the Black Sea after a series of attacks on civilian ships there. Hakan Fidan called for "the setting up of a mechanism allowing a moratorium to be declared" in an interview with Turkey's state news agency Anadolu. "The conflict has spread across the whole Black Sea," he said. "To begin with, they targeted the ports and the military ships. Now, they are attacking all commercial shipping without distinction," he added. Ships belonging to Turkey or flying the Turkish flag were among those targeted, he said. (AFP)

Russia's only anti-war party eyes support boost at polls

AFP
Moscow

Sensing frustration among many Russians towards the Ukraine war, Russia's liberal Yabloko party is hoping to use parliamentary elections this September to raise its profile, casting itself as the only opposition group in favour of a ceasefire.

Elections in Russia are tightly controlled — every parliamentary vote since 2003 has been won by the ruling "United Russia" party, which supports President Vladimir Putin.

Yabloko is unlikely to win any seats. A poll conducted earlier this year showed it at just 3% support — short of the five-percent threshold needed to enter Russia's lower house State Duma.

But the party believes the campaign is helping to widen its support base, particularly among young people usually apathetic towards politics, and it has relished the opportunity to push its anti-war message on a national scale.

"If we can bring peace even a single day closer, then our participation in all of this will not have been in vain," party leader Nikolay Rybakov told AFP in Moscow.

Founded in 1993 by a group of pro-Western public officials, Yabloko enjoyed relative success in the years following the post-Soviet collapse. Since 2003 however, it has failed to win seats in the State Duma.

Its leaders are presenting the parliamentary elections in September — the first since Moscow launched its Ukraine offensive in 2022 — as "a referendum that will show those in power that millions of Russians are in opposition".

Around 64% of Russians are in favour of peace negotiations with Kyiv, a number that rises to 78% among people aged 18-24, according to a June poll conducted by Russia's Levada Centre — designated a "foreign agent" by Moscow.



A woman walks past a campaign banner announcing September 2026 elections to elect deputies of the State Duma, in Simferopol, on the Russian-annexed peninsula of Crimea. (AFP/File photo)

Yabloko is also seeking to tap into widespread anger at internet shutdowns introduced by authorities to counter Ukrainian drone attacks.

The party has received the backing of several exiled opposition figures, including Yulia Navalnaya — the widow of late opposition leader Alexei Navalny — both listed as "extremists" in Russia.

But that endorsement could yet stop Yabloko before the vote takes place, with Russia's Supreme Court on Monday to hear a case brought by a nationalist pro-Kremlin party calling for its candidates to be barred.

Efforts to end the nearly four-and-a-half year Ukraine war via diplomacy have so far failed, with Putin pushing hardline territorial demands to end the fighting and ruling out talks with Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelensky.

Speaking to AFP from his office in Moscow, Rybakov said he feared tensions over the conflict — Europe's deadliest since World War II — could spiral into a nuclear war.

"Our leading experts say we are closer to a nuclear war than we have ever been," he said.

"Why should anyone else decide whether I

live or not? We simply want to live. Give people that chance."

In recent years, Yabloko's members have come under increasing scrutiny for their opposition to the fighting.

The party's deputy leader Maxim Kruglov was jailed for seven years in June over social media posts he made critical of the conflict, while authorities arrested the head of the party's Pskov branch — Lev Shlosberg — last year.

Rybakov was himself fined in December for publishing a photo of Navalny on social media — an act that has barred him from running in the September vote.

Some have viewed Yabloko's participation in the elections with scepticism, arguing the Kremlin is using them to give the impression of plurality.

Andrey Volna, a columnist at the exiled Echo news outlet, speculated that the authorities had so far approved the party's candidacy in order to ensure "mass participation".

Yabloko poses no real threat to Putin, having had "insufficient communication channels" to broadcast its message, independent analyst Konstantin Kalachev told AFP. But the party has still managed to irritate the authorities.

Rybakov said around 40 party activists were facing prosecution. Eight members are in custody, including Rybakov's deputy Maxim Kruglov.

The party says it is growing.

Once an organisation of forty-somethings, Yabloko "is now on the rise, particularly among the under-20s", the party's social media manager Marijat Ramazanova, 28, told AFP.

Of the around 400 Yabloko candidates standing in the election, including Ramazanova, nearly a third are under 30.

"We want to live in a free and normal country and build our future there," she said.

Frustration over Internet restrictions is also driving many young people towards politics, her colleague Ivan Dorofeyev told AFP.

Hungary's ruling party wants former SC judge as president

Hungary's ruling Tisza party nominated Andras Baka, a former head of the Supreme Court, as the country's next president, the party's parliamentary group said on Facebook yesterday.

Baka is expected to be elected to the largely ceremonial position by parliament on Tuesday, a symbolic step in Prime Minister Peter Magyar's attempt to dismantle former premier Viktor Orban's bastions of power, for which Magyar says he received a strong mandate from voters in April elections which his party won by a landslide.

Tisza lawmakers said Baka had always "attached paramount importance to the principle of the separation of powers, consistently standing up for the rule of law and judicial independence." "We are convinced that Dr Andras Baka's experience and the professional independence he has demonstrated throughout his career represent a significant asset at a time when we are preparing to jointly lay the foundations for Hungary's new constitutional order," they added.

Magyar's election victory ended Orban's 16-year rule. He has vowed to restore democratic standards and has called on key officials appointed or elected by Orban's party to resign. Removing former President Tamas Sulyok was a key goal of Magyar, who called him a "puppet" of Orban. Sulyok signed the constitutional amendment passed by Magyar's



Andras Baka. (AFP/File photo)

ruling party that ended his own presidency last month.

The amendment says the new president would stay in office until a new constitution takes effect, or for a maximum of five years. Baka, a former judge on the European Court of Human Rights, was removed from his position as the head of the supreme court by Orban's government in 2011, three years before the end of his mandate. The European Court of Human Rights ruled in 2014 that Hungary had sacked Baka for criticism of the government and that his removal did damage to democratic freedoms in Hungary. Orban's government rejected those allegations.

Under Hungary's current constitution, the president is a largely ceremonial head of state with only limited powers to veto legislation or have it reviewed. The opposition Fidesz party said it would not participate in the process of electing the president, and accused Tisza of authoritarian policies, allegations which Tisza denied. (Reuters)

Alfardan Medical with Northwestern Medicine named gold sponsor for third edition of QMED

The organiser of the Qatar International Medical Devices & Healthcare Exhibition and Conference (QMED 2026), Sogha Exhibitions & Conferences, has announced that Alfardan Medical with Northwestern Medicine has joined the event as a Gold Sponsor for its third edition, following the signing of a sponsorship agreement between the two parties.

The third edition of QMED 2026 will take place from October 14 to 16 at the Qatar National Convention Centre (QNCC), under the official patronage of the Ministry of Public Health, with broad participation from healthcare institutions, medical and technology companies, manufacturers, suppliers, and decision-makers from Qatar and around the world.

Alfardan Medical with Northwestern Medicine's sponsorship reflects its commitment to supporting the continued development of Qatar's healthcare ecosystem,

strengthening collaboration between healthcare institutions, the private healthcare sector, and leading international companies, while also highlighting its latest healthcare services, solutions, and technologies that contribute to enhancing the patient experience and the quality of care.

Omar Alfardan, president of Alfardan Corporation, said: "We are pleased to support QMED 2026 as a platform that brings together healthcare leaders, innovators, and industry partners to advance collaboration and contribute to the continued development of Qatar's healthcare sector. We believe initiatives such as QMED play an important role in fostering innovation, strengthening strategic partnerships, and supporting Qatar's vision for a world-class healthcare ecosystem."

Dr Abdulla al-Ansari, chief executive officer of Alfardan Medical with Northwestern Medicine, said:



Omar Alfardan

"We are proud to join QMED 2026 as a Gold Sponsor and view the event as an important platform that brings together leading healthcare institutions, specialised companies, experts, and decision-makers, creating meaningful opportunities to exchange knowledge and explore collaboration and innovation



Dr Abdulla al-Ansari

across the healthcare sector. Our participation reflects our belief in the importance of supporting initiatives that contribute to the development of Qatar's healthcare ecosystem and strengthen the country's position as a regional hub for advanced healthcare."

Khalifa bin Salman al-Muhannadi, chairman of the Organising Committee of QMED 2026, said: "We are pleased to welcome Alfardan Medical with Northwestern Medicine to QMED 2026 as a Gold Sponsor, and we greatly appreciate their confidence in the exhibition and its objectives. This partnership represents a valuable addition



Khalifa bin Salman al-Muhannadi

to the event, given the institution's prominent position and the advanced model of healthcare it represents in Qatar." The third edition of QMED 2026 is expected to feature approximately 150 companies and institutions from Qatar and around the world, alongside international pavilions representing a number of global markets, a specialised scientific conference, workshops, and accompanying activities bringing together leading experts, specialists, and decision-makers from the healthcare sector. The exhibition will cover a wide range of key sectors shaping the future of healthcare, including medical devices and supplies, healthcare equipment, diagnostics and laboratories, pharmaceuticals and biotechnology, digital health and artificial intelligence, medical education and training, medical tourism and wellness, healthcare logistics and supply chains, as well as other related fields.

'Sustainability key factor for business decisions in Qatar'

By Shaima Sheriff
Staff Reporter

Environmental considerations are increasingly shaping what Qatar's businesses buy for offices, events and customers, as sustainable procurement shifts from an occasional campaign to a routine commercial decision across sectors nationwide.

The change is visible in demand for reusable bags, drinkware, recycled stationery, plantable notebooks and lower-waste packaging, according to Sampath Weerasinghe, operational manager at Ecosential. "Sustainability is no longer viewed as an optional initiative," Weerasinghe told *Gulf Times*. "It has become an important part of corporate responsibility, procurement and marketing strategies."

He linked the shift to the environmental development priorities

of Qatar National Vision 2030, saying everyday purchasing decisions give organisations a practical way to reduce their reliance on disposable products. Many businesses had previously struggled to translate environmental intentions into procurement because of high minimum-order quantities, limited choice and difficulty finding items that matched both sustainability goals and branding requirements, he said.

Those barriers are particularly relevant to Qatar's SMEs, start-ups and home-grown brands, which may not require large corporate volumes. More flexible quantities can allow smaller businesses to test reusable or recycled alternatives without committing to excessive stock.

The trend also has implications for Qatar's calendar of exhibitions, conferences, sporting events and community programmes. Event merchandise is often produced at



Sampath Weerasinghe

scale, making early planning important if organisers want to reduce waste without compromising branding, hygiene, quality or delivery schedules. "Sustainability should be integrated into event planning from the very beginning rather than added as an after-



Coco husk pot

thought," Weerasinghe said. He argued that organisers should prioritise products that remain useful after an event instead of items likely to be discarded immediately. A reusable tote bag, bottle or notebook can continue serving a practical purpose and extend the value



Non-woven bag white

of the resources used to produce it. However, the growing market for environmentally labelled products also raises questions about credibility. Weerasinghe said businesses should look beyond broad "eco-friendly" claims and examine a product's material, source, lifespan and whether it can genuinely be reused, recycled or composted. "Transparency is essential," he said. "Genuine sustainability is about the entire lifecycle of a product, not simply attaching an 'eco-friendly' label."

He added that certifications and clear information from manufacturers can help procurement teams distinguish responsible sourcing from greenwashing. Environmental impact, he acknowledged, also



Plantable stationery

depends on how consistently a product is reused rather than on the label alone.

The next challenge is what happens when reusable products reach the end of their useful lives. Weerasinghe said Ecosential is exploring local recycling links, responsible-disposal guidance and possible circular-economy partnerships, although these remain areas for future development.

For Qatar's business community, the wider message is that sustainability is becoming less about one-off campaigns and more about repeated choices. Their value will depend on credible materials, thoughtful purchasing and systems that consider what happens before, during and after use.

Veteran researcher traces Qatar's place memory through folk songs

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

The Cultural Council of the Majlis of Seniors, affiliated with the Ehsan Centre for Empowerment and Elderly Care, is hosting a lecture today (Sunday) by veteran Qatari researcher and cultural journalist, Saleh Gharib al-Obaidli titled 'Place Memory in Folk Songs'.

The lecture forms part of the council's cultural programme, which seeks to enrich the intellectual and cultural engagement of older people while creating a space for dialogue around Qatar's folk heritage and collective memory.

Al-Obaidli will examine the close relationship between traditional songs and the places from which they emerged, highlighting how folk music represents far more than entertainment or artistic expression. In many cases, these songs serve as an oral archive, preserving details of everyday life and documenting the social and geographical environments in which communities lived.

Drawing on his extensive research into Qatari heritage, al-Obaidli is expected to present examples of folk songs associated with specific places, exploring references to cities, neighbourhoods, the sea, markets, traditional oc-



Saleh Gharib al-Obaidli

cupations and social customs. He will examine how lyrics and melodies helped preserve images and names of places in the popular memory and transmit them from one generation to another.

The lecture will also explore how some of these places have changed over time, while their original images have remained alive in the collective consciousness through songs and oral traditions. This gives folk music a significance that extends beyond its artistic value to encompass important historical, social and cultural dimensions.

Al-Obaidli is one of Qatar's prominent figures in cultural journalism and heritage research, with a career spanning several decades. His professional journey began with the Qatari Theatre



The Cultural Council of the Majlis of Seniors building.

Troupe in Al Najma, where he was involved in theatrical activities during the summer season. He later worked for several newspapers before joining 'Al Raya' at its establishment in 1979, following the publication of a widely discussed cultural article on theatre.

At 'Al Raya', al-Obaidli became a prominent cultural journalist and headed the culture and arts page, before expanding his work into social investigations and field reporting across Qatar. In 2003, he joined 'Al Sharq', initially as an arts editor, later becoming head of both the cultural and local affairs sections, a position he held until 2020.

His major contribution, however, has been in documenting Qatar's intangible heritage. As a heritage researcher, he has written

extensively on traditional architecture, pottery, folk tales, crafts and traditional industries. Among his notable publications is 'Henna: The Adornment of Gulf Women', published in 1989, alongside numerous studies and articles on social customs, theatre and popular heritage.

Al-Obaidli has also worked since 1982 with the Popular Heritage Centre of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), further cementing his contribution to documenting and preserving the region's cultural heritage. The lecture reflects the council's broader commitment to drawing on the expertise of researchers and heritage specialists while providing older generations with opportunities to share knowledge, memories and experiences.



A Qatar Music Academy rehearsal.

QMA strikes right chord in nurturing young talent

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

The Qatar Music Academy (QMA), a member of Qatar Foundation, is reinforcing its role as a leading platform for developing musical talent and nurturing artistic expression among young people. The academy continues to offer a diverse range of music programmes and courses covering various instruments, vocal training and performing arts, providing students with a specialised learning environment under the guidance of experienced and professional instructors.

Its programmes give students the opportunity to learn a wide selection of musical instruments, alongside singing and choral training. The approach enables each student to develop their abilities according to their interests and potential, while establishing a strong musical foundation and building technical and performance skills from the earliest stages of learning.

Violinist and music professor Fathi Bayoud highlighted the academy's contribution to developing the next generation of musicians. "The academy plays a pivotal role in nurturing young talent and attracting young people to music. One of its key strengths is the diversity of its specialisations and the wide range of instruments it offers, enabling young musicians to receive practical training while developing their artistic sensibility. This multidisciplinary approach prepares them for further academic study, while also opening

opportunities to join musical ensembles and national orchestras. In this field, ambition is essential."

Among the academy's areas of specialisation is instruction in the qanun, a traditional Middle Eastern string instrument. Lessons are designed not only to develop students' musical abilities but also to strengthen creativity, concentration and self-confidence. The academy's Western music department provides a comprehensive learning experience, while guitar instruction receives particular attention, helping students develop technical proficiency and a deeper understanding of musical concepts.

Beyond individual instrument training, the academy's choir programme introduces students to the importance of collaboration and collective performance. Working as part of an ensemble enables young musicians to develop listening skills, discipline and an appreciation of the role each performer plays in creating a unified musical experience.

Across its various departments, the academy combines structured instruction with practical application, allowing students to put their skills into practice through individual and group performances. By bringing together technical training, performance opportunities and artistic exploration, the Qatar Music Academy seeks to give young musicians more than instrumental skills. It aims to build confidence, discipline and ambition, while providing a strong foundation for those who aspire to pursue music as an academic or professional career.

Riot of colours in Al Hilal

Even in the peak of summer, Linear Park in Al Hilal is a go-to place with lush green lawns, shady trees and vibrant bougainvillea. The colourful blooms transform the park into a picturesque oasis, making it a much-loved retreat for residents seeking a refreshing escape amidst nature.

PICTURE: Thajudheen

