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BUSINESS | Page 1

QIIB wins 2 Global Business Magazine awards for innovation, mobile banking

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Tit-for-tat: Trump seeks Iran war compensation

Reuters
Washington

US President Donald Trump yesterday demanded Iran pay compensation for the people he said it had killed in wars, attacks and protests, raising the rhetorical stakes with Tehran as hopes faded for an imminent deal to reopen the Strait of Hormuz. Trump said he was responding to Iran's earlier call for Washington to meet conditions, including recompensing Tehran for the damage caused since the US and Israel launched strikes on its territory more than five months ago. "I am likewise demanding compensation from Iran, for all of the people that they have killed and gravely wounded with their roadside bombs and many conflicts, for which they are famous," Trump wrote on his Truth Social service. Oil prices, which had risen earlier on the Iranian comments, extended gains after Trump's post, with Brent crude up 4.25% at 1720 GMT. Trump's demand had not previously been raised by the US in talks or statements. The president said it would be part of all future negotiations with the Iranian leadership, and would include calls for payments to the families of hundreds of thousands of protesters whom he said Iran had killed.

2,500 Qatar projects tap Gord energy platform

Simulation tool now used by over 100 organisations

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

More than 100 organisations have deployed a Qatari-developed simulation tool across 2,500 projects – from mosques and hospitals to high-rise offices and industrial plants – to measure and cut the energy consumed by buildings, which account for 40% of the total.

Energia Suite, built by the Gulf Organisation for Research and Development (Gord), was designed "to make energy performance measurable, understandable, and actionable," said founding chairman Dr Yousef Alhorr. It has been used on offices, retail and residential space, mosques, sports and fitness facilities, educational institutions, industrial environments, health-care centres and hospitality developments.

"As 40% of energy is consumed in building operations, reducing energy usage within buildings is crucial for lowering the carbon footprint, whether locally or globally," Dr Alhorr said. "There are many strategies and techniques to improve the energy efficiency of buildings. However, to assess the impact of such solutions, you need assessment tools."

Dr Yousef Alhorr.
PICTURE: Shaji Kayamkulam.

The platform, he said, is the first of its kind in the region. It allows developers and project owners to test in advance whether a proposed energy-saving product or intervention will deliver the savings claimed for it.

Energia Suite evaluates energy demand and estimates usage in both new and existing buildings, analysing passive design strategies, building performance and the performance of electro-mechanical systems. It then converts that data into benchmarks, energy performance labels and practical options for reducing consumption and carbon emissions.

Rather than relying on traditional and time-consuming

3D modelling, the tool uses advanced mathematical algorithms and a normative calculation framework aligned with international standards including CEN-ISO, ASHRAE and GSAS. It can be operated from anywhere in the world and is backed by a sophisticated calculation engine.

"Energia Suite can be used to assess energy patterns of complex high-rise buildings as well as smaller projects," Dr Alhorr said. "It is among our latest initiatives to support energy efficiency in the built environment."

Gord, based at Qatar Science and Technology Park, treats innovation as a continuous lifecycle, he added – "where innovation is treated as a continuous lifecycle that begins with ideation and extends all the way to regional and international scaling."

Through the Gord Institute, the organisation researches and incubates proprietary low-carbon intellectual property tailored to the harsh climate of the Mena region and the Global South. Its patented advances include eco-friendly cements, carbon-negative plasters and ultra-efficient cooling software architectures, while its 3D printing facility offers low-waste additive manufacturing and digital inventory solutions.

Outward remittances hit QR12.9bn in Q1

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

Workers' remittances from Qatar reached QR12.9bn in the first quarter of 2026, up 21.7% from QR10.6bn a year earlier and 7.8% higher than the QR12bn recorded in the previous quarter.

The rise means an additional QR2.3bn was transferred abroad in the latest quarter compared with the same period of 2025, with a quarter-on-quarter increase of around QR0.9bn – indicating that the growth was not merely a comparison against a low base a year earlier but continued from the preceding quarter.

The figure places outward re-

mittances among the notable movements within Qatar's balance of payments during the opening quarter. Remittances are recorded under the secondary-income account, which captures current transfers between residents and non-resi-

dents. For Qatar, the category is closely associated with the large number of foreign workers living and working in the country and transferring part of their earnings to families and beneficiaries abroad.

Expatriate workers are spread across construction, hospitality, services, transport, domestic work, retail and professional services, reflecting the breadth of business activity in the country.

Although remittances represent an outflow from Qatar, they form an important part of the economic relationship between the country and the labour-supplying economies from which its expatriate workforce originates.

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Jobs landscape is set for a decade of AI-driven change

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

An academic degree alone will no longer guarantee a career in Qatar within a decade, experts say, as artificial intelligence absorbs routine work and employers begin hiring for skills rather than job titles.

Roles built on data entry, routine administration, basic customer service and some accounting and translation tasks are expected to decline or change substantially, while demand rises for specialists in AI, data science, cybersecurity, software development, cloud computing, robotics, digital health, clean energy and technical education.

Experts in economics, education, training and entrepreneurship say the next decade is unlikely to be defined by job losses. Instead, many existing roles will evolve as routine and repetitive tasks are automated, with hybrid, flexible and project-based working models gaining ground and performance measured increasingly by results rather than hours spent at work.

The shift aligns with Qatar's drive to strengthen economic competitiveness and invest in human capital, in line with the objectives of Qatar National Vision 2030.

Alongside technical expertise, skills such as creativity, critical thinking, leadership, communication and problem-solving will become increasingly valuable.

Jobs built around human interaction, emotional intelligence, professional responsibility and decision-making – including education, healthcare, management,

diplomacy and mentoring – are expected to remain more resistant to full automation. In these fields, AI is likely to serve as a supporting tool rather than a replacement for human expertise.

Freelance and specialised employment models are also expected to expand as the workplace itself changes.

Education expert Hussain al-Yafei said preparing for the future requires more than introducing new technologies. It also requires retraining national talent and aligning education with emerging labour-market needs.

He said roles involving data entry, routine administration, basic customer service and some accounting and translation tasks could decline or change substantially as AI takes over repetitive functions.

"Future success will belong to those who know how to work alongside artificial intelligence, not compete directly with it," al-Yafei said.

He stressed that continuous learning is becoming essential, alongside AI literacy, data analysis, communication, teamwork, creativity, adaptability and English-language proficiency.

Economic and finance expert Youssef Abu Haliqa said Qatar is rapidly strengthening its capacity to adopt AI through investments in digital infrastructure, data systems and cloud computing, alongside strategic partnerships supporting innovation.

He noted that AI is already embedded in everyday services, from navigation and social media to chatbots and email management, while also improving government services and productivity in sectors such as energy and construction. To Page 2

Rain falls in parts of Qatar; thundery showers elsewhere

By A Staff Reporter
Doha

Rain fell in parts of northern and western Qatar yesterday, with showers reported in areas including Guwairiya and along the Jumailiya-Guwairiya road, as the Qatar Meteorology Department (QMD) had previously warned that some of the rain could be thundery. In its post on X yesterday, QMD reported rain in parts of the northern and western areas and advised the public to exercise caution, particularly in areas affected by thunderstorms and strong winds. Social media posts and videos also showed rainfall in Guwairiya

yesterday afternoon and along the Jumailiya-Guwairiya road in northern Qatar. Other posts reported thundery rain and lightning in southwestern parts of the country, while rain was also reported around the Al Atouriya area. The reports came as QMD forecast a chance of thundery rain in some areas, accompanied by strong winds. Qatar News Agency also published a weather graphic based on the QMD forecast for yesterday, highlighting the possibility of thundery showers and strong winds along the coast. The rainfall was localised; however, no confirmed reports of rain were found in Doha, Al Khor, or Al Wakra.

The combined might of Makkah defence pact

GT Report
Doha

On Friday, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan signed a trilateral collective-defence agreement that treats an armed attack against any one of the three states as an attack against all, establishing a new security framework spanning the Arabian Peninsula, South Asia and the eastern Mediterranean.

The Makkah Joint Defence Agreement was signed by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. The agreement is intended to strengthen collective deterrence and expand defence co-opera-

tion across multiple military domains.

The pact follows the Saudi-Pakistan Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement signed in 2025 and provides for closer co-operation in areas including military readiness, training, intelligence,

logistics, counterterrorism and defence industry. Its language, however, does not specify an automatic military response or the force contributions that would be required in the event of an attack.

Officials from the three countries have described the arrange-

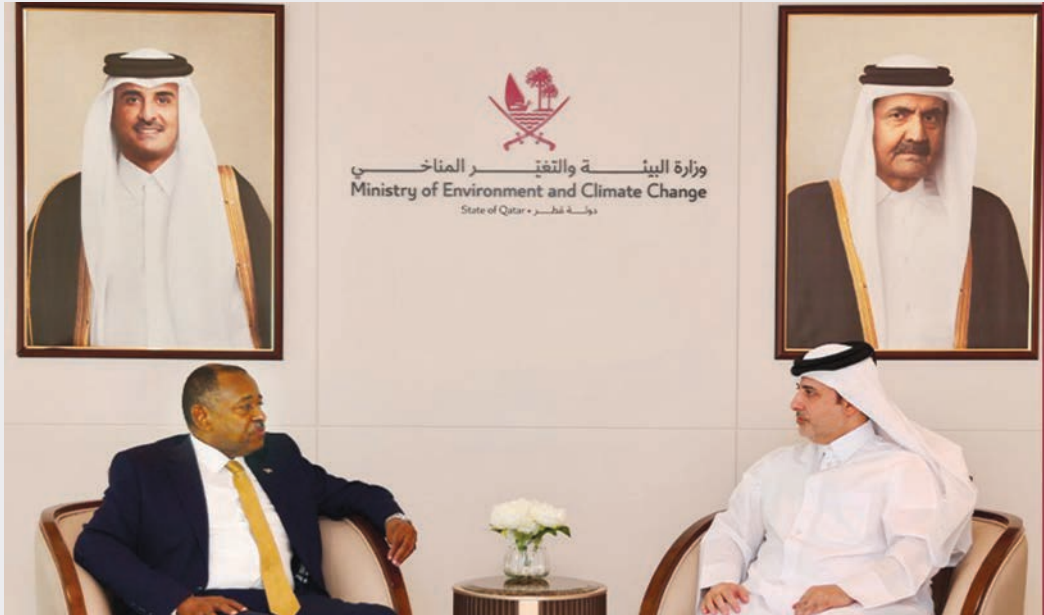
ment as defensive and said it is not directed against a particular state. They have also rejected suggestions that it is intended to form a sectarian bloc or trigger a regional arms race.

The agreement brings together three militaries with markedly different strengths.

Pakistan contributes the largest standing force in the grouping, with approximately 660,000 active personnel, more than 2,500 main battle tanks and more than 420 combat-capable aircraft, including JF-17, F-16 and J-10C fleets. Its navy operates a growing submarine force, assessed at about eight boats, while the country retains extensive experience in high-intensity operations and in training and advising Gulf armed forces. To Page 11



Minister meets Sudan's ambassador



HE the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Dr Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki al-Subaie met yesterday with Sudan's ambassador to Qatar Badreddine Abdullah Mohammed Ahmed. Their discussion during the meeting focused on the Qatar-Sudan co-operation, relations and ways to boost them, primarily in the spheres of environment and climate change. - **QNA**

Amir congratulates Ecuador's president

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani sent a cable of congratulations yesterday to Ecuador's President Daniel Noboa on the anniversary of his country's Independence Day. HH the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani and HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani sent similar cables of congratulations to Noboa on the occasion. - **QNA**

Qatar's envoy holds meeting with Indonesia's parliament speaker

The Speaker of People's Consultative Assembly of Indonesia Dr Ahmad Muzani has met Qatar's ambassador Dr Sultan bin Mubarak al-Dosari. During their meeting, co-operation and relations between the two countries were reviewed. - **QNA**



QRCS unveils 'Back to School 2026'



Under the slogan #MakeStudentsHappy, the Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) has launched its "Back to School 2026" fundraising campaign, designed to help students pursue their education and provide the educational supplies and opportunities that will enable them to build a better future.

According to its 2026 action plan, the QRCS has a comprehensive package of proposed initiatives to support education services in many countries, with a total cost of more than QR12mn.

These projects include support for poor students, provision of school bags and stationery, school maintenance and furnishing, and scholarships for certain university majors.

In addition to Qatar, the education-focused interventions will encompass eight other countries: Palestine (Gaza), Jordan, Sudan, Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, Afghanistan, and Niger.

More than 24,000 students will be reached, as detailed in the campaign's brochure and online (<https://qrsc.qa/BSC2>).

The public can also find more details and donate to the campaign via QRCS's mobile app, donor service (66666364), home do-

nation collection (33998898), or donation collection agents/desks at malls and shopping centres.

"Education is every child's dream and a fundamental human right," said Acting QRCS secretary-general Abdullah Sultan al-Qatan. "However, humanitarian crises, disasters and difficult living conditions still deny millions of children around the world access to stable educational opportunities."

"The 'Back to School' campaign aims to give students the chance to pursue their education and enhance their ability to build a better future for themselves, their families, and their communities," he said.

"Through this annual campaign, the QRCS transforms donations by the generous people of Qatar into a sustainable educational and humanitarian impact, by providing educational needs and supporting the continuity of students' academic journey," al-Qatan continued. "The drive promotes the values of social solidarity and opens wider horizons up for students to learn, develop, and contribute to their communities."

Different donation options are available to cater to the diverse preferences of donors. The options are Starter Share (station-



Abdullah Sultan al-Qatan

ery and school supplies for one student at a value of QR100), Bag Share (QR250), Group Share (QR1,000), Class Share (QR2,500), Scholarship Share (QR5,100), and School Share (QR70,000).

Al-Qatan called on donors to contribute their zakat and charity to such a noble drive, which would make a real difference in the future of children and help build their lives.

"Every contribution, no matter how small, can give a student the opportunity to pursue their education and move one step closer to achieving their ambitions," he said.

Outward remittances hit QR12.9bn in Q1 of 2026

From Page 1

The transfers provide income support to families overseas and contribute to household consumption, education, housing and other expenditure in recipient countries.

The Qatar Central Bank (QCB) identifies balance-of-payments statistics as an important measure of the country's economic relationship with the rest of the world.

Its Balance of Payments and International

Statistics Section collects and analyses data on international transactions in co-ordination with financial institutions and government entities, publishing the resulting statistics in accordance with established international standards.

The QCB has also reported substantial growth in domestic digital payment activity in 2026, including strong increases in instant transfers and other electronic payment channels.

Its April 2026 payment statistics showed

that the value of transactions through the Instant Payment System rising from QR2.106bn in April 2025 to QR5.964bn a year later, while transactions through the bank-account transfer system increased from QR40.483bn to QR83.283bn.

The expansion of digital financial services has considerably enhanced remittance flows, as faster and more accessible payment channels facilitate international transfers and reduce reliance on traditional cash-based mechanisms.

Jobs landscape is set for a decade of AI-driven change

From Page 1

"This transformation will directly affect the labour market, increasing demand for software engineers, data scientists, machine-learning specialists, robotics engineers and business intelligence professionals," Haliqa said.

At the same time, jobs centred

on routine and repetitive tasks would face pressure, making digital skills, creativity, critical thinking and adaptability vital.

Universities, training institutions and employers, experts said, must work together to update curricula, retrain staff, and ensure that the workforce is prepared not merely to adapt to technological change, but to lead it.

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

Experts raise concerns over digital marketing growth, urge more consumer protection

Still, he said, this expansion has not been accompanied by sufficient mechanisms to guarantee the credibility of advertisements and protect consumers.

Al-Saqtari explained that individuals can sometimes publish advertisements on social media without adequate verification of their identity or authorisation from the owner of the advertised product or service.

He noted that many platforms currently rely heavily on user reports to identify violations before taking action such as removing or blocking content.

Al-Saqtari considered such a system to be insufficient on its own to establish the accuracy or credibility of advertisements.

He added that artificial intelligence (AI), particularly AI agent systems, could provide an additional layer of

According to DataReportal's Digital 2026: Qatar report, Qatar had 3.1mn Internet users at the end of 2025, representing a 99% Internet penetration, while social media user identities reached 2.95mn

protection by verifying the identity of advertisers, checking whether they have the legal authority to promote a product or service and examining links attached to advertisements for malicious software or fraudulent websites.

However, al-Saqtari stressed that such systems require careful training to distinguish among different types of content, assess their reliability, and respond appropriately to advertising requests, whether originating domestically or through external agents.

Economic expert Dr Bader bin Dalham al-Fahheid al-Hajri said that digital marketing has become an integral component of the modern economic system because of its direct influence on consumer behaviour and supply-and-demand dynamics.

"The danger of this type of marketing does not lie in its digital nature, but rather in the absence of controls governing it," he said, noting that some platforms provide broad space for practices that may amount to deception, including exaggerating product characteristics, manipulating prices or using misleading advertisements that influence purchasing decisions.

Dr al-Hajri warned that such practices extend beyond individual consumer losses.

They can weaken confidence in digital markets, disadvantage compliant companies and create market distortions that ultimately restrict genuine economic growth.

When consumers feel unsafe or uncertain about online transactions, Dr al-Hajri continued, they may reduce their spending or return to traditional purchasing channels, undermining the very foundations on which the digital economy depends.

He stressed that stronger controls could instead promote economic stability by requiring greater transparency and clearer disclosure of the nature of advertising content, including whether material is sponsored or promotional, while ensuring that information presented about goods and services is accurate.

"Regulation is not an obstacle to commercial activity; on the contrary, it can be a factor in attracting investment," Dr al-Hajri said, arguing that a trustworthy digital environment encourages innovation and supports the growth of digital enterprises.

However, the existing consumer-protection framework already establishes several of these principles.

Law No. 8 of 2008 on Consumer Protection guarantees consumers the right to obtain correct information about goods and services, while requiring suppliers to provide price information and dated invoices.

The law also prohibits the sale, display, provision, promotion or advertising of adulterated or expired goods.

Maryam al-Dosari, owner of a tailoring business, said that digital marketing has fundamentally changed how small and medium-sized enterprises manage their businesses and reach customers.

She noted that online marketing allows entrepreneurs to reach wider audiences more quickly and at lower cost than many traditional marketing methods.

Al-Dosari said that digital platforms also enable businesses to target potential customers based on interests and purchasing behaviour, and to use digital analytics to understand customer responses.

This immediate feedback, she added, can help entrepreneurs improve prod-

Lawyer Khalid al-Harami says Qatar already has a legal framework governing advertising and marketing and protecting consumers, which applies to digital platforms

ucts and services and make more informed business decisions.

However, al-Dosari identified misleading advertising as one of the most serious challenges facing legitimate businesses.

Such practices undermine trust between consumers and traders and create unfair competition for companies that invest in product quality and honest communication.

She stressed that credibility, product quality and clarity of information are fundamental to the success of any business because trust encourages customers to return and maintain a long-term relationship with a brand.

Clear digital marketing controls, al-Dosari added, would benefit serious entrepreneurs by discouraging unethi-

cal practices, strengthening consumer confidence, and creating a competitive environment based on quality and compliance.

Lawyer Khalid al-Harami meanwhile said that Qatar already has a legal framework governing advertising and marketing and protecting consumers, including activity conducted through digital channels, even where specific legislation does not always use the term "digital marketing".

He explained that consumer-protection legislation establishes a fundamental prohibition against selling, displaying, promoting or advertising adulterated or defective goods and provides penalties for violations.

The legal framework, al-Harami said, applies to advertising regardless of whether it is delivered through traditional media or digital platforms.

The lawyer also pointed to Qatar's Cybercrime Law, Law No. 14 of 2014, which criminalises a range of fraudulent activities committed through information networks and technology.

For example, he said, Article 11 provides for imprisonment of up to three years and/or a fine of up to QR100,000 for specified forms of identity impersonation and electronic fraud.

Al-Harami noted that the regulatory framework extends to specialised sectors such as real estate.

Qatar's Real Estate Development Law, the expert said, requires specific information to appear in advertisements for off-plan property sales, including the developer's commercial name and headquarters, project location and description, unit specifications, prices, payment arrangements and other prescribed details.

"Many disputes, from my practical experience, begin with inaccurate advertisements or unrealistic promises," al-Harami said, advising consumers and contracting parties to consult qualified legal and professional specialists before making significant purchases, verify the credibility of advertisers and retain copies of advertisements, conversations and invoices.



Commercial Bank's 'Blood Donation Initiative' saw participation from around 100 bank employees and members of the executive management.

Commercial Bank holds annual blood donation campaign with HMC

Commercial Bank held its annual "Blood Donation Initiative" in collaboration with the Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) at the Commercial Bank Plaza recently.

The initiative saw participation from around 100 bank employees and members of the executive management.

Organised every year by Commercial Bank in collaboration with the HMC, the blood donation campaign is part of the bank's broader Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives, supporting Qatar National Vision 2030 objectives by contributing to human and social development and initiatives that benefit society.

"At Commercial Bank, supporting the community goes beyond providing banking services," said executive general

manager and chief communications and marketing officer Eiman al-Naemi.

"With CSR embedded in the bank's values and the unwavering support from Hamad Medical Corporation, together we continue to support initiatives that promote health, wellbeing, and social responsibility, encouraging collective action and strengthening our role as a responsible corporate citizen," he said.

The Blood Donation Initiative highlights the value of donation and the impact that can be achieved when national institutions come together in support of a common cause.

Commercial Bank is proud to stand alongside the HMC in advancing initiatives that contribute to the wellbeing of the community.

Alfardan Automobiles celebrates 30 years of driving BMW and MINI excellence in Qatar

Alfardan Automobiles, the official importer of BMW and MINI in Qatar and a long-standing pillar of Qatar's premium automotive sector, is celebrating 30 years as the official importer of BMW and MINI in Qatar, marking three decades of delivering premium vehicles, exceptional customer service and award-winning aftersales support.

Since 1996, Alfardan Automobiles has worked alongside BMW Group to shape Qatar's premium automotive landscape, continually investing in world-class facilities, technical expertise and the latest technologies to deliver an exceptional ownership experience.

"Celebrating 30 years is a proud milestone for Alfardan Automobiles and a reflection of the trust our customers have placed in us over the past three decades," said Alfardan

Automobiles general manager Ayman Berjawi.

"Together with BMW Group, we have remained committed to delivering exceptional products, outstanding customer service and industry-leading aftersales support," he said. "As we look ahead, we will continue investing in our people, our facilities and new technologies to ensure we remain at the forefront of premium mobility in Qatar."

Today, customers benefit from a network of state-of-the-art service centres across Doha, including the Industrial Area, Lusail Boulevard and Jery Al Samur, supported by manufacturer-trained technicians, advanced diagnostic technologies and dedicated service advisers.

Reflecting the continued evolution of the automotive industry, Alfardan Automobiles

also operates the region's first dedicated "BMW i" workshop, providing specialist support for the growing portfolio of BMW electric vehicles.

The company's commitment to quality has been recognised by both BMW Group and the wider automotive industry.

In 2025, Alfardan Automobiles achieved the highest possible Grade A rating in the BMW Warranty Services evaluation, following highly commended recognition for its Bodyshop at the 2024 Automechanika Dubai Awards.

As Alfardan Automobiles celebrates this milestone, the company remains focused on the future, continuing to invest in innovation, electrification and customer experience while building on a legacy that has defined BMW and MINI ownership in Qatar for the past 30 years.

Safariyonam... Sammanamonam...! Safari unveils promotion offering prizes worth QR100,000

Retail chain Safari Hypermarket in Qatar has announced a massive prize scheme for customers this Onam season.

Under the theme *Safariyonam... Sammanamonam...!*, customers stand a chance to win prizes worth QR100,000, equivalent to 2.5mn Indian rupees.

This mega promotion is from August 10 to October 2.

Winners will be selected via e-affle coupons provided with every QR50 purchase at any Safari outlet in Qatar, benefiting a total of 41 lucky winners.

The prize package includes a first prize of QR15,000 for one winner, a second prize of QR10,000 each for two winners, and a third prize of QR5,000 each for three winners.

Additionally, three winners will



receive Samsung S25 Ultra smartphones as the fourth prize, five winners will get Asus laptops as the fifth prize, and two winners will receive Samsung front-load washing machines as the sixth prize.

The seventh prize features 65" Samsung TVs for five winners, followed by Lenovo tablets for 10 winners as the eighth prize, and Safari gift vouchers worth QR500 for 10 winners as the ninth prize.

The mega draw for this promo-

tion will take place on October 4 at Safari Mall in Abu Hamour.

Safari management welcomes all customers to enjoy an exceptional shopping experience alongside attractive prizes during the Onam celebrations.

The Safari Group has designed extensive plans to make this year's Onam unforgettable.

Without compromising on quality, Safari is offering Indian vegetables at the lowest prices, along with a grand traditional

Sadya and various gifts in the Bakery and Hot Food section.

Furthermore, the Garments and Readymade department features a new Onam collection catering to adults and children across all outlets.

The Household section offers native home appliances and other essentials, while the Grocery, Fresh Food, and Frozen departments will also showcase products at major discounts in the coming days.

QSL and EAA partner up

The Qatar Stars League (QSL) has announced the signing of a partnership agreement with Education Above All (EAA) Foundation, making the EAA the league's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) partner for two seasons (2026-27 and 2027-28).

The partnership comes under the QSL's CSR programmes and stems from a shared belief in the importance of education as the cornerstone of building societies, empowering children and youth, and enhancing their opportunities for a better future.

The EAA believes that education is the most important means to combat poverty, build more just and peaceful societies, unlock the full potential of children and youth, and contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the United Nations.

"We are pleased to sign this agreement, which comes under the QSL's Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives," said QSL executive director (Sales, Marketing and Communication) Hassan Rabiah al-Kuwari.

"The Education Above All Foundation plays a pivotal role in this field through its programmes and initiatives that extend across the globe, contributing to supporting the most vulnerable children and providing them with educational opportuni-



ties," the official explained.

"We believe that education is a fundamental pillar for achieving human, social and economic development," al-Kuwari added. "At the QSL, we're committed to supporting all initiatives that promote the values of development and excellence, and we look forward to this partnership contributing to achieving the shared goals of both entities."

"We are pleased to sign this partner-



ship with Qatar Stars League, reflecting our shared belief in the role of sport in supporting education and empowering youth," said EAA chief operations officer Ali Turki al-Sobai.

"Through this collaboration, we look forward to leveraging the immense popularity of football as a platform to inspire children and young people, raise awareness of the importance of access to education, and help build their skills, confidence



and ability to contribute positively to their communities," he said. "Education and sport both play a vital role in preparing a more ambitious generation capable of leading a more inclusive and sustainable future."

The Qatar Stars League's announcement of the partnership agreement with the EAA Foundation coincides with its announcement of a sponsorship agreement with Zoom Live, a leading creative produc-

tion and live event management company.

Zoom Live will be the Doha Bank Stars League's business partner and the official partner of the Qatar Cup for the 2026-27 and 2027-28 seasons.

The QSL also announced the renewal of its partnership with The Look Company, which will continue to serve as the foundation's visual identity partner for three seasons (2026-27, 2027-28, and 2028-29).

- QNA



The project provided 161 food baskets to families identified as being among the most in need.

Qatar Charity supports vulnerable families in Tanzania's Pwani region with food assistance

Qatar Charity (QC) has distributed food baskets to vulnerable families in Tanzania's Pwani Region, providing essential food assistance to 1,127 people as part of its continued humanitarian efforts to support communities facing difficult living conditions.

Implemented by the QC's office in Tanzania, the project provided 161 food baskets to families identified as being among the most in need.

The assistance was designed to help households meet essential food requirements while easing some of the financial pressures affecting low-income families, orphans, and other vulnerable groups.

Amjad al-Tahhan, the director of the

Qatar Charity office in Tanzania, said the food assistance provided in Pwani forms part of the QC's broader humanitarian efforts to stand alongside vulnerable communities and respond to their most pressing needs.

"Meeting the needs of vulnerable people cannot be limited to a single project or temporary intervention," he said, emphasising that such initiatives form part of a broader and sustained humanitarian approach aimed at supporting communities according to their priorities and needs.

Al-Tahhan noted that Pwani is among the areas experiencing the effects of climate change-related challenges, which have placed additional pressure on people's livelihoods and living conditions.

The food distribution project, he added, therefore represents one of Qatar Charity's efforts to help alleviate these pressures and provide timely support to affected families.

Al-Tahhan said that the initiative is not intended as a one-off intervention, but rather as part of Qatar Charity's ongoing humanitarian engagement in support of vulnerable communities, guided by needs identified through field assessments.

The food baskets contained a range of staple items commonly required by families for their daily nutritional needs.

By providing these essential supplies, the project helped families cover part of their immediate food needs and reduce household expenditure on basic commodities.

The initiative was implemented through close co-ordination with the local community, helping ensure that assistance reached those most in need.

Beyond addressing immediate food needs, the intervention helped ease household financial pressures and promoted solidarity, compassion, and social responsibility.

Beneficiary families expressed their appreciation to Qatar Charity and its donors for the assistance, noting that the food baskets provided meaningful support at a time when meeting basic household needs remains a significant challenge.





Oman moves to contain oil spill near marine reserve

AFP/Reuters
Muscat

Oman said yesterday that it is working to contain an oil spill off its southern coast after a tanker ran aground in June inside a protected marine area, triggering calls for action by environmentalists.

It follows an investigation by AFP that found the ship had been stranded for weeks near al-Qibliyyah island after it was rocked by explosions.

The ship has been identified as the Caroline Bezenqi.

The Oman Environment Authority said yesterday that the ongoing spill had affected roughly 390sq km, according to its most recent analysis.

The slick was concentrated around Oman's Hallaniyat archipelago off the country's southern coast, where a marine reserve was established last year to protect sensitive ecosystems home to diverse marine life, including rare sea turtles.

The country's environment authority said rapid action is needed to protect the area's biodiversity, including "coral reefs, turtle nesting areas, marine habitats and coastal areas of ecological importance".

A report in the state-backed Oman News Agency quoted an official with the transport ministry as saying that authorities were conducting aerial surveillance and had deployed divers.

The official said authorities are in the early stages of developing a plan to transfer the vessel's oil cargo "to reduce the risks arising from the incident, ensure navigational safety and protect the marine environment".

A spill of this scale requires dispersant be sprayed across the affected area by aircraft and the use of booms and other equipment to collect the oil before it reaches the shore or sinks to the sea floor, said Tony Gutierrez, professor of environmental microbiology and biotechnology at Edinburgh's Heriot-Watt University.

"If this oil is kept offshore, the impact will be much less than if the oil reaches shallower waters and the actual coastline," he said, citing the impact on diverse marine life such as coral, birds and fish.

"You could find oil still there years later. And that's what happened with Exxon Valdez," Gutierrez said.

"Ten years down the line, there still were remnants of oil," he said, referring to a 1989 spill in Alaska.



A satellite image shows the damaged vessel Caroline Bezenqi (lower left) and an oil slick off the Hallaniyat Islands, off the coast of Dhofar Governorate, Oman. - Reuters

Right: This picture taken in 2014 shows the SCF Altai tanker, anchored near Israel's port of Ashkelon. The tanker is currently named the Caroline Bezenqi. - Reuters



Omani authorities have not yet identified the cause of the spill.

However, British maritime security company Vanguard told AFP last week that the tanker was rocked by explosions in early June as it sailed off the coast of Yemen, causing water to enter several sections of the vessel.

Advocacy groups Greenpeace and PAX told AFP that the spill was on the verge of causing an "environmental disaster", saying the tanker was carrying around 1mn barrels of crude.

Last week Greenpeace estimated the slick at around 600sq km, citing analysis of satellite imagery.

An analysis by Reuters of satellite imagery and shipping specialists showed the spill from the stranded 274m (900') tanker was still spreading at the end of last month, raising concern about possible environmental damage.

The Caroline Bezenqi loaded at Russia's Black Sea port of Novorossiysk in April and passed

through the Suez Canal at the end of May, ship-tracking data shows.

Built in 2001, it is part of the so-called shadow fleet of older oil tankers used by Russia which lack Western insurance cover and sail under the flags of various nations to obscure their true ownership.

It was listed on public shipping databases as flying the Cameroon flag but was among 39 vessels de-listed from Cameroon's ship registry in June.

The ship is subject to sanctions imposed by the European Union, Ukraine, the UK, Canada and Switzerland.

Its registered owner is Rentoor Shipmanagement Ltd and its manager is Villar Shipmanagement Ltd, according to LSEG data.

Reuters could not immediately reach those firms, which appear to be based in China.

Tankers have been frequently targeted in the Gulf region over recent months as the US exchanged fire with Iran and its allied proxies.

Rockfall at Egypt's largest gold mine kills worker, injures five

AFP
Cairo

A rockfall at Egypt's largest gold mine killed one worker and injured five others, officials have said, with operations in the affected area suspended pending an investigation.

The accident occurred on Sunday "inside a tunnel at an underground working section" of the Sukari gold mine in Egypt's eastern desert region, according to a statement released by the petroleum ministry.

The injured workers were taken to a hospital in the Red Sea resort town of Marsa Alam.

The ministry said initial medical assessments indicated their

conditions were stable.

Petroleum Minister Karim Badawy ordered the formation of a committee to investigate the incident, determine its causes, review health and safety procedures at the mine and recommend measures to prevent similar accidents, the statement said.

Located about 30km southwest of Marsa Alam, the Sukari mine is operated by Sukari Gold Mines Company, a joint venture between the Egyptian government and AngloGold Ashanti, which acquired the mine's previous operator, Centamin, in 2024.

Mining accidents are relatively rare in Egypt, where large-scale modern mining activity is largely concentrated at the Sukari gold mine.

Iranians are 'professional chess players', says Tehran in response to Trump analogy

Tehran said yesterday that Iranians had shown "they are professional chess players" in response to remarks by US President Donald Trump comparing his dealings with Iran to the board game.

On Sunday Trump signalled that he was prepared to let economic pressure mount against Iran, apparently backing away from more military strikes after Tehran issued a list of demands for opening the Strait of Hormuz.

"Lights out or lights on, Iranians showed they are professional chess players," Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei said during a weekly press conference.

Trump had earlier been quoted by news outlet Axios as saying he was "low-keying it" with Iran.

"We are only semi-negotiating with them. We are just watching Iran with its huge inflation and the fact they have no money," he said. "It will work out. It always works out. It's like a chess game."

The president's remarks came after Iran issued over the weekend a list of conditions to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, which has remained largely closed since the start of the Middle East war in late February.

On Saturday Iranian official Mohammad Bagher Zolghadr laid out Tehran's demands including an end to the "war and aggression against Iran and its allies in Lebanon, Palestine, Yemen and Iraq".

He also demanded the lifting of a US counterblockade of Iranian ports, the end of sanctions, the release of frozen Iranian assets and compensation for wartime damage, the Tasnim news agency reported.

Yesterday Baqaei reiterated that "as long as the US naval blockade continues... as long as other violations by the United States continue, the necessary conditions for saying that the Strait of Hormuz has become a safe waterway will not exist!" - AFP

Mojtaba makes six new military appointments

Iran's Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei has made six new appointments to the Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) and armed forces, including Major-General (Pilot) Ali Abdollahi as chief of staff of the armed forces and Brigadier-General Ahmad Vahidi as

commander-in-chief of the IRGC, according to a written message carried on Mojtaba's social media accounts.

Abdollahi had previously led the Khatam al-Anbiya, Iran's inter-branch central military command tasked with co-ordinating operations.

Abdollahi has issued bellicose threats over the course of the war, warning regional neighbours earlier this month that "any country serving as a defensive shield for criminal and aggressive America will be engulfed by the flames of war". - AFP/Reuters

Israeli army bars settler from most of West Bank

The Israeli army said yesterday that it is banning from most of the West Bank a settler accused of sexually abusing a Palestinian, despite an intervention his behalf by the defence minister. West Bank commander Major-General Avi Bluth published an order banning Tal Yinon Dardik from all of the occupied territory with the exception of his settlement where he will be required to report to police twice daily. Dardik is accused of sexually assaulting a Palestinian when settlers attacked shepherds in a Bedouin village in March. The army put Dardik in administrative detention, which it can do without charges or trials, but which is almost only used for Palestinian detainees. The case took on a political dimension when Israel Katz, defence minister in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's cabinet, visited Dardik and criticised his detention. Katz recently announced on live television that he was removing Bluth from his army position, sparking criticism from the opposition ahead of October 27 elections, before backtracking. - AFP

Iran appoints IRGC ex-commander as secretary of top security body

Reuters
Dubai

Iran has changed its secretary of the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), appointing former Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) commander Mohsen Rezaei as second-in-command on the body that co-ordinates the country's security and foreign policy.

Rezaei is more of an outspoken public figure than his predecessor, Mohammad Baqer Zolqadr.

The appointment was announced late on

Sunday by President Masoud Pezeshkian's deputy director of communications.

Zolqadr had only been appointed as SNSC secretary in late March, after his predecessor, Ali Larijani, was killed in an air strike during the war pitting Iran against the US and Israel.

No reason was given for the change.

The SNSC, formally chaired by the elected president, co-ordinates security and foreign policy, and includes top military, intelligence and government officials in addition to representatives of the supreme leader who has ultimate say over all matters of state.

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Invitation to Tender

Tender / Auction Number	Subject	Tender / Auction Document Fees (Non-refundable)	Tender / Auction Bond	Tender/Auction Offer	Closing Date
AL-AWALIA/TD/2026/28	Network Support Renewal and Annual Maintenance Contract (AMC) Support for Qatar Primary Materials Company ("Services")	500 QAR	54,000 QAR	Two Bids (Technical & Commercial)	18 August 2026 01:00 PM

In accordance with the following conditions:

- Tender Documents can be collected online by sending email to tender.doc@qpmc.qa along with requested documents in point No.2
- Tender Documents will be shared only after delivery of Deposit Slip Stamped by Commercial Bank along with Authorization Letter to the delegated person signed by authorized person as per Computer ID, Copy of commercial Registration (CR) (printed within the last 30 days), Business License and Computer ID.
- Bids are to be submitted in two sealed (in red wax) envelopes (Technical & Commercial) and addressed to Tenders and Auction Committee. Tender reference number and subject are to be clearly written on the envelopes, provided that the last date for submitting bids is one o'clock in the afternoon on the closing day. Any bids submitted after this date and time will not be accepted.
- Tenders shall submit the proposals to our head office located at Lusail, Building No. 108, St. No. 303, Burj Marina Tower, 17th Floor before the closing date. (To get the map of the new building, please scan the QR code below).
- Tender Fees are non-refundable and can be tendered online to Account of Qatar Primary Material Company-Bank A/C (4050-65111-006) at Commercial Bank of Qatar. IBAN No. (QA 18 CBQA 0000 0000 4050 651111 006). Tender reference number and subject are to be written on the deposit slip.
- Tender Bond (Bank Guarantee/ Manager Cheque) must be valid for 120 days after closing date and must be submitted in separate & sealed envelope along with technical bid and a photograph is to be attached with commercial bid. Bids without tender bond will be rejected.
- Bids must be valid for 90 days after the closing date.
- Any queries relating to the Tender Documents must only be raised in writing, preferably by email, to the address specified in the respective Tender Document. Any response issued by Qatar Primary Material Company will be in the form of a question and answer and will be distributed to all Tenderers without revealing the identity of the originator of the query(ies) in the Form of Tender Bulletin. Queries must be received at the address specified in the respective ITT Documentation at least the (5) calendar days prior to the Tender closing date. Any queries received after such a date will be ignored.
- The amount of the Performance Bond to be provided by the awarded bidder is (10% of the contract value) and its validity period must remain valid under the contract implementation period and the guarantee period according to the terms of the tender.
- The Technical Bids shall be opened within one week of the closing date.
- Qatar Primary Material Company has the right, during the contract period, to request an increase or decrease in the amounts of the items, works or services by a percentage not exceeding (20%) of the contract value with the same conditions and prices, provided that the increase is of the same type of contracted items, works or services.
- Qatar Primary Material Company's tendering terms and conditions apply.
- For any inquiries about the tender except collecting the documents, please contact tender@qpmc.qa
- Location of the new building

For further Inquiry, please send your queries at Fax Number: **44479559** or email to tender@qpmc.qa or visit Qatar Primary Material Company website @ www.qpmc.qa

شركة قطر للمواد الأولية (ش.م.ق.) مركزها الرئيسي: الدوحة - قطر - منطقة لوسيل، برج مارينا، رقم 108 | سجل تجاري: 33204 | ص.ب: 22095 | هاتف: +974 4447 9411
Qatar Primary Materials Company (Q.P.S.C.) Head Office: Doha-Qatar, Lusail, Marina Tower No. 108 | CR No.: 33204 | P.O Box: 22095 | Tel: +974 4447 9411
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INVITATION TO TENDER

Tender Reference	Description	Tender Fee (QAR)	Tender Bond Value (QAR)	Bid Closing Date
QF-RFQ-1396	Design, Build, Installation and Maintenance of the Family Exhibit Gallery at Lawh wa Qalam Museum	1,000.00	100,000.00	08 September 2026, 2:00 PM
QNL-RFQ-74	Supply of Archival Preservation and Storage Materials for QNL Conservation Laboratory	500.00	N/A	03 September 2026, 2:00 PM

Qatar Foundation (QF) Procurement Directorate is inviting companies to participate in the above listed public tenders. To receive the tender documents, please follow the below steps:

- Supplier Registration** It is mandatory to be registered as a supplier with QF in order to participate in the above tender(s). Only QF registered suppliers will be allowed to pay the tender fees online. Therefore, please visit QF website at <https://www.qf.org.qa/supplier-registration> to complete the Supplier Registration process.

Tender Fee: Interested bidders can Sign in by visiting this link <https://suppliers.qf.org.qa/abstract> and pay the respective non-refundable and non-transferrable tender fee online.

All Tender Fees are to be paid using credit cards only.

Tender Fee Payment Dates: Payment of Tender Fee online will be from **11th to 18th August 2026**
- All bidders, who are registered and have paid the required tender fees online to QF, will then be granted access to download the Tender Document.
- Technical and commercial bids need to be submitted and attached online in QF Supplier Portal as per instructions provided in the 'Supplier Portal' work instruction.
 - The commercial bid must be valid for **180 days** from Bid Closing Date.
 - The commercial bid must be accompanied by a bank guarantee (tender bond) issued by a local bank in Qatar and should be valid for **180 days** from the bid closing date (where applicable as per the Tender documents).
 - The successful tenderer will be required to submit a performance bond as prescribed in each of the above tender documents.
 - Qatar Foundation special qualifications, terms and conditions shall apply as stipulated in the tender document.

Note: All work instructions for Supplier registration and Supplier portal can be found in below link: <https://www.qf.org.qa/supplier-registration>

Palestinian ex-envoy’s family urges Lebanon not to extradite him

AFP
Beirut

The family of former Palestinian ambassador to Lebanon Ashraf Dabbour urged Lebanese authorities yesterday to not extradite him after authorities in Ramallah requested his transfer over corruption allegations.

Lebanon’s public prosecutor ordered the arrest of Dabbour, ambassador from 2012-2025, last week after questioning him based on a warrant from the Palestinian Authority over corruption and embezzlement during his tenure, a judicial official told AFP at the time.

The judiciary then recommended in a letter to the justice ministry that Dabbour be extradited as his case involves “Palestinian funds”, another official said yesterday on condition of anonymity.

The request must be signed by the justice minister, president and prime minister before security forces can hand him over.

“We are not asking for his protection from the judiciary, nor are we asking for charges to be dropped,” Dabbour’s daughter Israa said in a press conference in Beirut.

“Why should our father be moved from the country where he lived, and from the place

where the alleged crimes took place, in order to be tried somewhere else?” she said, calling on the Lebanese judiciary to look into the case instead of sending him to Ramallah.

Dabbour has a “critical health condition and is in intensive care”, according to his daughter, who appealed to Lebanon to “provide him with the necessary care”.

In April, Lebanese authorities detained Dabbour over the same case before releasing him with a travel ban.

He has repeatedly denied the accusations on social media, accusing Yasser Abbas, son of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, of leading a campaign against him.

Israa Dabbour said “the file includes political accusations seeking to settle personal scores” without elaborating.

Lebanon’s National Human Rights Commission asked the cabinet last week to “refrain from approving the extradition” due to “reliable information that raises serious reasons to believe that (Dabbour) is at risk of being subjected to torture, ill-treatment or arbitrary detention”.

The organisation also pointed to legal loopholes that could prevent the handover due to the lack of “an effective treaty between Lebanon and the State of Palestine that regulates extradition”.

Libya’s central bank chief quits

The governor of Libya’s central bank, Naji Issa, has resigned without giving a reason, several reports said yesterday. Private TV channel Al-Ahrar said that Issa had confirmed his resignation.

Issa and vice-governor Miree al-Barasee were appointed by Libya’s parliament, which is based in the east of the divided country, in September 2024.

His appointment was part of a deal backed by the UN that ended a standoff over Libya’s oil production and a deep financial crisis. Libya is still struggling to recover from years of conflict after the 2011 North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato)-backed uprising that overthrew longtime dictator Muammar Gaddafi.

It remains split between the UN-recognised government of Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah in the west and a rival authority in the east backed by military strongman Khalifa Haftar.

Most of Libya’s revenue comes from its oil resources, with the country’s production mainly in the east and south - areas controlled by forces loyal to Haftar. - AFP



A presidential campaign poster of Hakainde Hichilema is seen on a wall as informal vendors stand by their kiosk along Cairo Road in Lusaka. - AFP



People are seen at an opposition election campaign office in Lusaka plastered with political campaign posters of National Reconciliation Party for Unity and Prosperity (NRUP) for presidential candidate Brian Muntayalwa Mundubile. - AFP

Israeli military closes Palestinian village to non-residents

Israel’s military has closed the West Bank village of Taybeh to non-residents, saying that it aimed to prevent growing attacks on Palestinians by Israeli settlers across the West Bank.

The order, the military said, only applies to Israelis and not to Palestinians.

A spokesperson said turning Taybeh into a closed military zone was “due to some violent attacks by Israelis in the region”.

“Upon receiving any report of violations of the order, IDF (Israel Defence Forces) soldiers are dispatched to the area and operate to disperse the gatherings and detain suspects in order to protect the citizens of the area and to maintain order,” the military said in a statement.

Taybeh is one of the only Christian villages

remaining in the West Bank and was visited last year by the Greek Orthodox patriarch and the Roman Catholic cardinal of Jerusalem.

It is also home to the Taybeh Brewing Co, widely considered the Middle East’s oldest microbrewery.

Some Western countries have announced sanctions on settler groups over violent Israeli attacks on Palestinians.

In June, Israeli settlers obstructed Palestinians putting out a large blaze near Taybeh in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, according to Palestinian civil defence firefighters and a local priest who described an “ongoing pattern of intimidation and unjustified violence” that undermined the residents’ fundamental rights.

A UN inquiry released last week found that

Israeli authorities were directly involved in settler attacks that have killed, injured and displaced Palestinians in the West Bank.

The Israeli mission in Geneva rejected the report’s findings, saying that Israeli authorities including the president and prime minister had repeatedly condemned violence against Palestinians.

Parts of Taybeh are located in Area B, where the Palestinian Authority runs civil administration but where security control must be coordinated with Israeli authorities.

The West Bank and Jerusalem are home to around 50,000 Palestinian Christians, members of a religious community there stretching back to antiquity in a region that is home to many of the faith’s most important holy sites. - Reuters

Syrian Kurds heading home after years of displacement

AFP
Hasakeh, Syria

A first group of Syrian Kurds were headed for the northeastern border town of Ras al-Ain yesterday following years of displacement, months after an integration deal between the Kurds and Damascus.

The January agreement on merging Kurdish forces and civil institutions into the state included the return of displaced Kurds but residents of Ras al-Ain had still been waiting, prompting appeals to authorities for assistance.

Tens of thousands of Kurds were displaced when Turkiye and allied Syrian fighters seized an Arab-majority strip of territory along the Turkish border, including Ras al-Ain, from Kurdish control in 2019 during Syria’s civil war.

Jawan Issa, from a committee representing displaced people from Ras al-Ain, told AFP that a “first batch” of some 2,500 people were headed home yesterday.

“This step is the result of efforts by all sides and ongoing co-ordination” between the Damascus and Kurdish authorities, he said, adding that “the second batch will be transferred in the coming days”.

An AFP correspondent saw dozens of trucks loaded with furniture and other belongings waiting to set off from near the city of Hasakeh,



Security personnel stand guard as Syrian Kurds, who were living in displacement camps in the city of Hasakeh, prepare to head back to the northeastern border town of Ras al-Ain. - AFP

with men, women and children eager to depart.

“I’ve been waiting for this moment... it’s like a dream for a person to return to their home,” said returnee Nora Khodor, 37. “I’m happy for an end to this suffering”.

Human rights groups say residents’ homes and belongings were seized or looted after the offensive.

Some of the fighters subsequently settled in the area with their families, with some reportedly still living in Ras al-Ain, a formerly ethnically-mixed region in Syria’s northeast known as Sari Kani in Kurdish.

Turkiye launched successive cross-border offensives against Kurdish-led forces in northern Syria before the new Syrian Islamist authorities ousted longtime ruler Bashar al-Assad in December 2024.

The new authorities have been extending central government control across the country, including formerly Kurdish-held areas.

“We are very happy about returning,” said Rawda Mohammed, 39.

“I asked about my home,” she said. “They told me it is totally destroyed, but we didn’t get pes-



simistic because we’re happy to return, and when we get there we’ll see what we can do.”

Some 5.5mn people remain internally displaced in Syria following the more than 13-year civil war, according to the United Nations.

The committee representing displaced people from Ras al-Ain said yesterday’s transfer was “the start of a path towards a full return”, emphasising the need to protect property, housing and land rights” and provide basic services and infrastructure for returnees.

Zambian election to test Hichilema’s economic record

By Hillary Orinde
AFP

Zambians vote on Thursday in a closely watched presidential election that will test whether recent economic gains can offset frustration over the high cost of living in one of Africa’s most stable democracies.

Incumbent Hakainde Hichilema faces Brian Mundubile, a former ally of late president Edgar Lungu, who surged to the front of a fragmented opposition after being backed by a coalition of rival parties.

Up to 8.7mn voters - a majority of them women - will decide whether Hichilema’s economic reforms deserve another term or whether the opposition can turn widespread discontent into a comeback.

Hichilema, leader of the United Party for National Development (UPND), won the presidency in 2021 on his sixth attempt, inheriting a country in sovereign default after years of heavy borrowing under Lungu.

His victory marked a rare peaceful transfer of power to an opposition party through the ballot box in Africa.

The government has since secured a landmark debt restructuring agreement, restored an International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme and returned the economy to growth, winning praise from international lenders and investors.

However, many Zambians say the benefits have been slow to reach ordinary citizens.

Rising food prices, unemployment and persistent poverty remain dominant concerns in a country where more than 70% of the population lives on less than \$3 a day, according to World Bank data.

“Worldwide there has been recognition that we are doing well but he needs to bring it home,” medical student Semi Malama, 26, told AFP.

Zambia is Africa’s second-largest cop-

per producer and the government has set an ambitious target of tripling production by 2031.

Chinese firms are major players in the mining sector, underscoring Beijing’s outsized economic influence in the country.

The opposition has sought to exploit the squeeze on household finances, arguing that reforms have failed to improve livelihoods despite signs of recovery.

Until the opposition coalesced behind Mundubile, re-election had looked all but certain for the 64-year-old Hichilema, widely known as “HH”.

Although 14 candidates are on the ballot, analysts say the race has narrowed into a two-horse contest between Hichilema and Mundubile.

“The opposition alliance is bringing energy to their rallies and appealing to youth, women, and rural voters,” Joseph Siegle, director of research at the Africa Centre for Strategic Studies, told AFP.

Mundubile’s challenge is built around “mopping up” the support base of Lungu’s Patriotic Front, particularly in the north and east, where the former ruling party has historically held sway, political analyst Louw Nel said.

However, his relatively late entry into the race and association with the Lungu era could limit his ability to expand beyond that base, he said.

Nearly half of registered voters are aged between 18 and 35, making young people a potentially pivotal bloc.

“Ultimately, the election will hinge on whether voters believe continuity offers the best chance of consolidating recent economic reforms, or whether they conclude that change is needed to address immediate economic pressures,” Institute for Security Studies researcher Zenge Simakoloyi told AFP.

The campaign has been marked by pockets of violence and allegations of intimidation.

Police have used tear gas to disperse clashes between rival supporters, while Mundubile’s National Republican Party (NRUP) has accused authorities of restricting its campaign activities.

The opposition leader last week alleged that snipers were deployed at a campaign event in Mongu, about 580km (360 miles) west of Lusaka, calling the tear gas “just the tip of the iceberg”.

Polling stations open on Thursday at 0600 local time (0400 GMT) and close 12 hours later.

Zambians will also elect an expanded parliament, with directly elected members of parliament rising to 226 from 156.

Presidential results are due August 17, according to the electoral commission’s calendar.

ANNOUNCEMENT I, JOLOK MUDOK DULAL MUDOK holder of BANGLADESH Passport No. EM0878798 QID No. 29905008298 hereby change my name from JOLOK MUDOK DULAL MUDOK to JHALAK MUDOK DULAL MUDOK Any objection, please contact THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE FOR NATIONALITY AFFAIRS within 15 days from the publication of this notice.	ANNOUNCEMENT I, KRISTINE DE ASIS MANALASTAS holder of PHILIPPINES Passport No. P5709246B QID No. 29060801976 hereby change my name from KRISTINE DE ASIS MANALASTAS to KRISTINE MAGNO DE ASIS Any objection, please contact THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE FOR NATIONALITY AFFAIRS within 15 days from the publication of this notice.	ANNOUNCEMENT I, S.NIKIL PRASATH holder of INDIA Passport No. Z5720152 QID No. 30335600197 hereby change my name from S.NIKIL PRASATH to SARAVANAN NIKIL PRASATH Any objection, please contact PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT within 3 days from the publication of this notice.	ANNOUNCEMENT I, SURJIT KEWAL KRISHAN holder of INDIA Passport No. N4836778 QID No. 28835605606 hereby change my name from SURJIT KEWAL KRISHAN to SURJIT KHUTTAN Any objection, please contact THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE FOR NATIONALITY AFFAIRS within 15 days from the publication of this notice.
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111 killed as 7.4-quake hits cities in western Colombia

Reuters
Bogotá

At least 111 people were killed after a powerful earthquake struck western Colombia early yesterday, knocking down buildings across several cities and leaving others trapped in the rubble. The quake struck just days after Abelardo De La Espriella was sworn in as president, thrusting the new administration into its first major crisis, with memories still fresh of devastating twin earthquakes in neighbouring Venezuela in June.

The 7.4-magnitude quake, according to the US Geological Survey, struck at a depth of 107 km near San Jose del Palmar, in Choco, a sparsely populated province on Colombia's Pacific Coast, but was felt in major cities nationwide.

"Significant casualties and damage are likely and the disaster is potentially widespread," the agency warned. The highest reported death toll was in the western province of Risaralda in Co-



Residents and emergency personnel dig through the debris of a partially collapsed building after an earthquake, in Pereira, Colombia. **(Reuters)**

lombia's coffee-growing region, where Governor Juan Diego Patino, speaking by phone to Caracol Television, reported 42 fatalities.

In the province's capital of Pereira, social media images showed a building with a cracked facade crash to the ground, sending up a dark cloud of dust and de-

bris as onlookers darted away.

The impact also toppled one of the towers atop a Gothic-style cathedral in Manizales, and forced nurses in Cali to wheel patients outside in hospital beds, social media and television images showed.

In nearby Manizales, Mayor Jorge Eduardo Rojas announced

three people were killed. One person died in Buenaventura, Colombia's main Pacific port, when a building collapsed, trapping several people, Mayor Ligia del Carmen Cordoba said.

People remained trapped in Cali, one of Colombia's largest cities, after more than two dozen structures collapsed, Mayor Alejandro Eder said. He added that the city had asked authorities in Bogotá and Medellín to send disaster teams to support rescue efforts.

"At this point, two people have already been rescued alive, one elderly woman and one young girl. There are more people trapped," Eder told Blu Radio. "We have at least 12 critical points and 25 collapsed structures that we are responding to."

Choco Governor Nubia Carolina Cordoba-Curi said there were injuries and significant damage in Quibdo, the provincial capital, and warned residents about aftershocks.

Colombia's civil aviation authority said flights were suspended at airports in several cities.

1 woman reported dead in Bald Range wildfire

Reuters
Toronto

An 80-year-old woman died in the fast-moving Bald Range wildfire in British Columbia's wine country, Canadian police said, after the blaze nearly doubled in size over the weekend and forced the evacuation of people in the area.

The death was the first reported as a result of the wildfire in the region, which has been shrouded in smoke and fire as hot and dry conditions increased the scale of the blaze.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police said in a statement late on Sunday that the Meadow Valley resident was evacuating her home with a family member when she reportedly died suddenly. Police believe her death to be a result of the wildfire and are investigating, the statement said.

Nearby Summerland, a district municipality with about 12,000 people, has a significant senior population that was evacuated over the weekend. The senior people's homes were

given advance notice, Summerland Mayor Doug Holmes said.

Canada has experienced a hot summer this year, sparking fires in remote forests and other regions, leading to more than 4,600 fires burning 4mn hectares of land.

Officials said the Bald Range wildfire triggered the largest evacuation event in British Columbia so far this summer. More than 20,000 people across the province have been forced to leave their homes. The United States is also grappling with wildfires. Evacuees forced to flee a cluster of fires near Spokane, Washington, were allowed back to their homes on Sunday.

At the height of the conflagration, as many as 64,000 residents were under evacuation orders.

The BC Wildfire Service said yesterday it expects lightning to start new wildfires in the Okanagan region, which has been receiving limited rain. High temperatures and heightened wind gusts will continue in the Okanagan and southeastern regions of BC, which can increase fires, the agency said.

Trump administration pushes for stricter scrutiny of food ingredients

AFP
New York

The Trump administration yesterday proposed a rule that would require food companies to inform government regulators when they add new ingredients to products.

Doing so would close a decades-old loophole that food safety experts have said allowed thousands of substances including thickeners, stabilisers and flavourings to enter the US food supply with little oversight or safety assurances.

"Parents should not need a chemistry degree to understand what children are eating. Ameri-

cans deserve real transparency. They deserve real food," said Trump's health chief Robert F. Kennedy Jr in unveiling the proposed measure. For many years, food and beverage companies could introduce new ingredients without Food and Drug Administration review, thanks to a decades-old rule known as "GRAS," or "generally recognised as safe."

The rule had been intended to allow bypassing review for common ingredients such as flour or baking soda. But companies used it to self-certify a much broader class of substances. Food manufacturers have pushed against efforts at GRAS reform, along with Kennedy's efforts to craft a final-



Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F Kennedy Jr speaks during an event at HHS headquarters in Washington, DC. (AFP)

ised federal definition of ultra-processed foods, which he has long vowed to do. He said yesterday that such a definition had been developed, but did not release it.

The proposed GRAS rule, which is so far light on details and without a timeline, is sure to delight the Make America Healthy Again (MAHA) movement, which Kennedy yesterday personally thanked: “Thank you to the MAHA movement and to the millions of Americans across the political spectrum who believe that their children deserve to eat real food.”

The MAHA movement is best known for championing Kennedy's policies on rolling back vaccine recommendations, overturning

the traditional food pyramid and successfully pushing for the reduced use of synthetic food dyes.

"You built this movement from the ground up," he said. "You demanded change, and today we are transforming our food system because of you."

Kennedy for months has been leaning into food and nutrition advocacy ahead of November's midterm elections, downplaying his far more controversial efforts to upend national vaccine policy.

The health secretary has long espoused anti-vax views, and public health experts accuse him of contributing to a growing measles crisis by fuelling fears of well-studied and proven immunisations.

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Relentless heavy rainfall leaves at least 16 dead in Philippines



Rescuers sift through rubble as they search for survivors after a rain-drenched mountainside collapsed on several houses in Baguio City, north of Manila, yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Manila

Floods, landslides and accidents driven by a nine-day downpour equivalent to more than a month's worth of rain in some areas have killed at least 16 people in the northern Philippines, rescuers said yesterday.

The rains, exacerbated by tropical storms, have led to school and government office closures across the main island of Luzon and flooding in the streets of the capital Manila.

Seven of the deaths occurred

in the resort of Baguio, as a rain-drenched mountainside collapsed on three houses, city rescuer Esther Banawe told AFP. Three people remain unaccounted for. "Rescue efforts are continuing, but they are doing it manually because of the heavy rain," she said, adding that work was being supervised by a designated safety officer for fear of further landslides.

State weather forecaster Dan Villamil said rains in the vacation town, four hours north of the capital, were already 47 percent higher than normal for the whole month. "The rainfall recorded for August 1-9 was highest in Baguio, with an

accumulated 1,413.2mm," he said, adding the city's typical downpour for the month was 963.2mm. Parts of Metro Manila had recorded rain equivalent to about 90% of a typical August, he added.

Landslides killed six other people elsewhere on Luzon, while another drowned, one was hit by a falling tree, and one was electrocuted, according to a civil defence office tally.

While heavy rain continued to fall Monday evening, Public Works Secretary Vince Dizon told a news conference that floodwaters were receding.

"Our interventions are continu-

ing, but we really need to fix the years and decades' worth of faulty flood mitigation interventions," Dizon told reporters, referencing a scandal over bogus flood-control projects that have cost taxpayers billions of dollars.

The Philippines is the first major landmass facing the Pacific cyclone belt, and the archipelago is hit by an average of 20 storms and typhoons each year, putting millions of people in disaster-prone areas in a state of constant poverty.

Scientists say human-driven climate change is making extreme weather more frequent, prolonged and intense.

Dolphin weakens but disrupts nearly 950 flights in China

■ **Dolphin is the strongest typhoon to hit China this year**
■ **Beijing raises torrential rain warnings**
■ **Hong Kong weather body registers hottest day on record**

Reuters
Shanghai

Torrential rain and storms in Typhoon Dolphin's wake inundated several provinces in China's east, drenching the coastal region and flooding streets in Shanghai, where around 40% of flights were grounded on Monday due to the weather.

Dolphin packed maximum sustained winds of 151kph near its centre when it made landfall in Zhejiang, the province to the south and west of Shanghai, on Sunday evening before weakening to a tropical storm.



A person uses a bucket to remove water Shanghai.

Its remaining rain clouds continued to soak the eastern provinces including Anhui, Jiangsu and Shandong on Monday.

Many streets in Shanghai, the country's second most populous city, were flooded, including in the main commercial centres. The city's two airports cancelled a total of 943 flights due to the typhoon, reducing capacity by nearly 40%, state broadcaster CCTV said. China Eastern Airlines said on Monday it was trying to resume flights to Shanghai, Zhejiang and other destinations in an "orderly manner."

Many streets in Shanghai's suburban Jiading and Qingpu districts around the city centre remained waterlogged, according to live-streams shared by residents on social media. The live videos, not verified by Reuters, showed people wading through knee-high murky water.

"It rained almost all night last night. When I woke up this morning, I found the neighbourhood flooded, and the streets were severely flooded," said 39-year-old Hou Lina, who works in sales in Jiading in Shanghai.

"I've lived in Shanghai for 10



A drone view shows a flooded village following heavy rainfall brought by Typhoon Dolphin, in Dajing town, Yueqing, Zhejiang province, China. PICTURES: Reuters

years, and this is the first time I've experienced such inconvenience from a typhoon. This is the first time I've encountered such widespread flooding," she told Reuters. In Shanghai's Jinshan, the district authority said non-essential businesses and organisations could temporarily halt operations, classes, outdoor events and transit services, amid forecasts of continued strong winds and heavy rain on Monday.

Powerful winds and lashing rain flipped over a truck in Zhejiang's Wenzhou, a video posted on TikTok on Sunday showed. It was not clear what happened to the driver. Authorities warned that 74 rivers in the Taihu Lake basin and the coastal areas of eastern Zhejiang have exceeded warning levels, and that flood risks for small and medium-sized rivers in heavy rainfall areas are high. The strongest typhoon to hit China this year, Dolphin is

forecast to move deeper inland to the central provinces of Hubei and Henan in the coming days while also pushing moisture north.

Authorities in the capital Beijing raised warnings for torrential rain and said the city was prepared to activate its flood control response on Tuesday morning.

Beijing is expected to experience "significant rainfall" from Tuesday until Thursday, with authorities warning of the risk of flash floods in the city and landslides in the surrounding mountainous areas. The typhoon had already travelled 6,000 km (3,728 miles) before it made landfall, giving it a life-cycle three times longer than an ordinary typhoon, and bringing with it an ultra-large cloud system that enveloped China's east, CCTV said in another report.

Dolphin's impact was also being compared to Doksuri in 2023. That typhoon crossed the country

after causing destruction in southeastern Fujian province, unleashing record-breaking rainfall in Beijing.

As the storm clouds meet colder air in the north, Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei will need to brace for heavy rain into Thursday, CCTV said.

Hong Kong, on China's southern coast, has seen extreme heat due to Dolphin, recording its hottest day ever on Sunday at 36.9C, the highest since records began in 1884, according to the Hong Kong Observatory, the territory's weather body.

TSR (Tropical Storm Risk) said it expected the 2026 northwest Pacific typhoon season to be one of the most active on record and to include 28 tropical storms, 20 typhoons and 13 intense typhoons. TSR said the ongoing strong El Nino event, high activity to date and weaker-than-normal trade winds across the northwest Pacific basin, were key reasons for the intensity of the typhoon season.

Former Thai MP shoots dead local official over money row

AFP
Bangkok

Former Thai MP yesterday shot dead a local government official in broad daylight over a financial dispute before being arrested and confessing to journalists at the police station.

The attack took place outside a government building in Nonthaburi province, north of Bangkok, just days after a school shooting in the same region that raised questions over gun control in Thailand.

Flanked by police officers following his arrest, former MP Chalong Riewrang told reporters he had tried to talk to local official Thongchai Yenprasert about money. "I followed him to his car and hit his car's window, saying I want to talk. He said he will not talk, so I pulled my gun," Chalong admitted, handcuff-free and smoking a cigarette. "I did not aim to shoot, but his driver pulled a gun and pointed it at me so I fired."

Thongchai, who was chairman of the Nonthaburi local government administration, later died of his wounds, according to a hospital director, Sakon Sukprom. He was hit in the neck and lost a lot of blood, the director said. Thongchai's driver was also shot, wounded in his right arm, but he successfully underwent surgery, Sakon said.

Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul told reporters that no one in Thailand except on-duty officials was legally allowed to carry a gun in public, noting the last gun-carry licences were issued three years ago and were only valid for one year. Anutin said authorities will pursue "full legal action" against Chalong, a former member of the prime minister's party. "No matter who he is, he is now a murderer," Anutin said.



Former MP Chalong Riewrang exhales smoke during a press conference at a police station in Nonthaburi province, Bangkok. PICTURES: AFP



Forensics police officers gather evidence at the Nonthaburi Provincial Administrative Organization (PAO) office in Bangkok.

Chalong had confessed to being the sole shooter during the incident, but "both sides had guns", regional police commander Wattana Yeechin told reporters earlier. A firearm was found in Thongchai's vehicle but had not been used, while CCTV footage showed only Chalong firing his weapon from close range, he added.

Wattana said the dispute was over several million baht (tens of thousands of dollars). "It was a private issue. According to his confession, it was about money that the... chairman borrowed from him for several years, and he asked for the return of the

money several times," he said.

Nonthaburi governor Chestha Mosikarat earlier told reporters the suspect and victim were "friends for a long time" and the incident likely stemmed from a misunderstanding.

Thailand has one of the highest rates of gun ownership in the region, with around 10mn firearms estimated to be in circulation -- roughly one for every seven inhabitants. On Friday, a 14-year-old boy shot dead the grandparents who raised him in Nonthaburi before killing six others at his school and then turning the gun on himself.

Indonesia drag car race crash kills eight: police

AFP
Jakarta

A drag car veered out of control and crashed into spectators at a weekend race in Indonesia, killing eight people and injuring nine others, police said Monday.

The crash happened late Sunday during an organised drag car race in the city of Kotamobagu on Indonesia's Sulawesi Island.

"Eight people have died, eight are in intensive care, and one person sustained minor injuries," North Sulawesi police chief Roycke Harry Langie told reporters.

Police have questioned several witnesses including the driver, he said. One witness, Areng Mokoginta, told reporters on Sunday the accident happened when a race car skidded shortly after the start.

The car swerved out of control and ploughed into spectators at the race in Kotamobagu, which lies about 180km (110 miles) southwest of the North Sulawesi capital Manado, he said.

Fatal traffic accidents are common in the Southeast Asian nation of 280mn people, where road rules are routinely ignored and vehicles are often poorly maintained.

India opens door to digital payment fees

AFP
New Delhi

India has opened the door for charging merchant fees for using the vast digital payments system central to its economy, used by nearly 555mn people to transfer trillions of dollars.

Legislation, passed yesterday by the parliament's upper house, paves the way to change its zero-fee model, with the government saying it could help pay for improving the infrastructure and bolstering cybersecurity.

The government-backed Unified Payments Interface (UPI) is the backbone of how the world's most populous country processes digital payments done through smartphones.

UPI has rapidly grown in scale since its 2016 launch, with transaction volumes rising fivefold in the past five years -- to 241bn payments worth about \$3.3tn in the last fiscal year, according to finance ministry figures.

The system, which allows payments to be sent across participating apps and banks, is "the largest real-time payment system in the world by volume" according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), processing more transactions than Visa or Mastercard does globally.

The bill by itself does not impose fees -- but provides a legal framework for banks and payment processors to allow charges on UPI transactions by businesses.

"It will support the banks and fintech to invest more on infrastructure, innovation and security," Finance Minister Nirmala

Sitharaman said, after it was passed by the lower house last week. On Monday, Sitharaman told the upper house that the bill "does not impose any tax or transaction charge on UPI users", reassuring that it will only be applied to large merchants for transactions above a certain threshold.

"The enabling provision that we are bringing in today does not impose any tax or transaction charge," she added.

The vast majority of transactions are small-ticket transfers below 2,000 rupees (\$21), according to industry figures. India's government has heavily promoted the system since Prime Minister Narendra Modi's currency purge in 2016.

This includes \$1bn in subsidies over 2021-25, according to industry figures, and encouraging small businesses to adopt UPI.

India's payments industry lobby has argued that smaller stores should remain exempt and that fees should only be levied on merchants of larger businesses in sectors such as aviation, e-commerce or food delivery.

The UPI model has also been exported, operating in at least eight countries, including neighbouring Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka, as well as the United Arab Emirates, Singapore, France and Qatar. India has signed agreements with more than 20 other countries for cooperation on its UPI system. UPI is operated by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), a not-for-profit company under the Reserve Bank of India and the banking industry.

Ukraine attack kills 13, including a child

Reuters
Moscow

A Ukrainian drone strike killed at least 13 people, including Central Asian nationals and a child, and wounded 39 others in the Russian city of Nizhnekamsk, authorities said yesterday, one of the heaviest civilian tolls in Russia in months.

Ukraine's military said it had hit Tatneft's TANECO oil refinery in the Tatarstan region, about 800 km east of Moscow, adding that a fire was recorded at the facility.

Russian investigators said they had opened a criminal case into what they qualified as a terrorist attack, saying in a statement that Ukraine had struck residential areas and that a child was among those civilians killed.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova said the strike had hit industrial facilities and residential buildings and accused Kyiv of deliberately attacking civilians. Ukraine and Russia have repeatedly said they do not target civilians, who are often victims of attacks on both sides.

Seven Uzbek citizens were among those killed in Nizhnekamsk, the Uzbek consulate in Kazan said.

A Tajik citizen was also killed, Russian state news agency TASS cited the Tajik foreign ministry as saying.

Nine out of 13 victims were in a hostel at the time of the strike, Russian state news agency RIA said, citing the press office of the head of the region. Reuters could not immediately verify the report.

In videos verified by Reuters on social media, smoke can be seen rising over the oil refinery.

The TANECO refinery, which was also hit by Ukraine in early



A woman walks past a bank building damaged during a Ukrainian overnight drone attack, according to authorities in Belgorod. (Reuters)

June, processed 17mn metric tons of crude oil in 2024, producing 2.7mn tons of gasoline and 8.5mn tons of diesel fuel.

Ukraine has stepped up its strikes on Russian oil refineries in recent months in a campaign that has caused fuel shortages in many parts of Russia, although authorities say that most of those initial problems have since been resolved.

Ukraine says it wants to bring the price of Russia's war home to ordinary Russians.

Moscow has imported fuel from overseas to help bolster supplies. On Sunday, both sides again accused each other of lethal attacks.

Three people were killed and 37 wounded in a Russian attack on the eastern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv, where a multi-storey apartment block was hit, while authorities in Russia's Belgorod said five were killed and 25 wounded by a Ukrainian drone attack.



Smoke rises from an oil refinery after what authorities said was a Ukrainian drone attack in Nizhnekamsk, Tatarstan Region, Russia. (Reuters)

Europe risks dearth of space launchers by 2030

AFP
Paris

Europe will face a shortage of own-built rocket launchers by the end of the decade, the head of the European Space Agency warned, as growing demand to launch new satellites outpaces the region's limited capabilities.

"Europe has a shortage of launchers around the 2030 timeframe," Director General Josef Aschbacher said in an interview with the *Financial Times*, a frank acknowledgement of the scale of Europe's challenge in catching up with the US and China.

"If we add up all the satellites that need to be launched from current and planned constellations and missions... we see that there's a peak of launch requirements around 2029, 2030, 2031," he said.

The US and China have launched hundreds of satellites in the past five years. Elon Musk's SpaceX alone launched 170 rockets last year, while Europe launched just eight.

Aschbacher said he planned to raise the issue with ESA's member states to "ensure that we can launch our satellites with European launchers".

Europe's major space programmes all require numerous launches in the coming years. They include the Iris2 secure communications constellation due to begin in 2029, as well as expansions of the Galileo navigation system and the Copernicus Earth observation programme. In addition, several European countries are planning their own constellations for civil or military uses.



Russia's liberal Yabloko party leader Nikolay Rybakov talks to the media outside the Supreme Court in Moscow yesterday. (AFP)

Russia bars anti-war party from elections

AFP
Moscow

Russia's Supreme Court yesterday barred the country's only anti-war party, Yabloko, from contesting September's parliamentary elections.

The court thereby upheld a suit brought by a pro-Kremlin nationalist party, stripping voters opposed to the four-and-a-half-year war in Ukraine of their last option on the ballot.

"The claims seeking to annul the registration of the federal list of candidates for the State Duma of the ninth convocation, nominated by the Yabloko political party, were granted," judge Vyacheslav Kirillov said.

About a hundred supporters, mostly young people, gathered outside the courthouse, chanting "Shame! Shame!" after the ruling was delivered.

Addressing them after the hearing, Yabloko leader Nikolay Rybakov said the party would appeal the decision.

"We have a long way ahead and we have a big and important task: to stop deaths and bring the peace back," he said.

"Everything we do should be

dedicated to that," he added.

With most of President Vladimir Putin's opponents jailed, exiled or dead, Yabloko is the only liberal party still operating in Russia.

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

A poll conducted earlier this year showed Yabloko ("apple" in Russian) at just 3% support — short of the five-percent threshold needed to enter Russia's lower house.

With the Kremlin tightening its control over elections, Yabloko has failed to win seats in the State Duma since 2003.

Since then, every parliamentary vote has been won by the ruling United Russia party, which backs Putin.

Efforts to end the Ukraine war through diplomacy have so far failed, with Putin pushing hard-line territorial demands to end the fighting and ruling out talks with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky.

Independent polls show most Russians favour peace negotiations with Kyiv.

Sweden thwarts Russian intelligence operation

AFP
Stockholm

The Swedish Security Service (Sapo) said yesterday it had thwarted a Russian intelligence operation aimed at discrediting Sweden which involved an "agent" working in a foreign diplomatic mission in the country.

The counter-espionage agency said in a statement it had "gathered information on, and taken measures against, a Russian intelligence operation aiming at influencing Swedish decision-making and discrediting Sweden, Nato and the EU". According to Sapo, the "intelligence operation has been planned and directed by the Russian foreign intelligence service SVR for some time".

Christoffer Wedelin, Sapo's deputy head of operations, told AFP that the operation had been carried out by Russian intelligence agents operating under "diplomatic immunity", who in turn had recruited another "agent" working at a different country's diplomatic mission.

Sapo did not identify the diplomatic mission where the agent al-

legedly involved worked.

"In meetings with the agent, the Russian intelligence officers... tasked the agent with obtaining information in various ways," Wedelin said. According to Wedelin, "the objectives have been to create division" within Sweden, as well as among EU and Nato allies.

Wedelin said the information concerned Swedish decision-making, but declined to give a more specific account of what information had been gathered or how long the operation had been going on. "Our assessment is that we have disrupted and prevented the activity," Wedelin said, adding that both the Russian intelligence agents and the other agent were no longer in Sweden.

Swedish Justice Minister Gunnar Strommer said that the government took the reports "seriously". "This is part of a pattern where Russia, and other state actors, act offensively to further their interests in Sweden," Strommer told reporters.

In 2024, Sweden ended two centuries of military non-alignment and joined Nato, spurred into the alliance by Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

Austria cracks scheme aiding Russian arms industry

Austria has broken up a scheme in which a Vienna-based company supplied equipment used to make engines for Russian missiles and fighter jets, in breach of European Union sanctions, the interior ministry said yesterday. The company falsified end-user certificates to supply the equipment under sanctions, including special metalworking tools and CNC machines, which can be used to make parts and tools, the ministry said in a statement. It added that its 28-year-old Belarusian head was arrested in May. The company concealed its shipments through a network of shell companies in Türkiye, the UAE, Hong Kong, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, South Korea, Poland and Lithuania. "It is unacceptable for high-precision European technology to be diverted towards the production of cruise missiles and air-defence systems," Austria's junior minister in charge of intelligence, Joerg Leichtfried, said. (Reuters)

Sunset point



People gather to watch the sunset at "El Rayo Verde" viewpoint, in San Vicente de la Barquera in the province of Cantabria, northern Spain, on Sunday, Spain, one of the few places in the world where the solar eclipse on Wednesday will be seen in totality, looks forward a phenomenon expected to shift traditional summer tourism from beaches to the countryside. (AFP)

Bleak times: Europe braces for another spell of summer heatwave

AFP
Paris

Much of Europe is bracing for yet another scorching heatwave following periods of record drought that have driven rivers to historic lows, ignited historic forest fires and contributed to thousands of deaths.

Swathes of Britain and France yesterday were already under extreme heat warnings with forecasts of temperatures around the mid-30s C, while parched conditions saw new fires erupt in Greece and Spain.

Unusually high temperatures were also forecast in the coming days across a number of countries not accustomed to the heat, such as Switzerland, Austria and Hungary.

The heatwave comes after mainland France and Switzerland saw their widest-ranging droughts for the month of July on record, according to an AFP of data released by Europe's Copernicus climate observatory yesterday.

Europe's weather warning system MeteoAlarm yesterday also said scorching temperatures are



The dried out Loire River bed in Loireauxence (Varades), western France. (AFP)

already being felt across much of Italy and coastal areas of Croatia.

The United Kingdom's Met Office warned at the weekend that the summer's fifth hot spell was about to take hold in a country whose infrastructure was built for a more temperate, cooler climate.

Nearly three-quarters of England and the whole of Wales is al-

ready officially in drought, with more than 27 mn people under water-use restrictions, and with the environment department warning yesterday that "all regions of the country are experiencing pressure on their water resources".

Next to no rain was forecast for the affected areas this week.

In France, the national weather

agency Meteo-France warned yesterday that the southeast would see temperatures as high as 35C, spreading further across the country as the week progresses.

The agency also warned that due to climate change, "future summers will generally be hotter than those experienced to date".

The environment ministry said

on Monday that "nearly 70% of French territory is subject to restrictions on water use", with the liquid reserved for priority uses such as healthcare, sanitation and drinking water in the areas most at risk. Both France and the UK have seen thousands of excess deaths during previous heatwaves this year. Greece reported its second fire this season near the capital Athens yesterday, despatching hundreds of crew and equipment.

Already, more than 10,000 hectares of pine forests were blackened by a blaze that broke out 10 days ago northwest of the capital.

Firefighters were also struggling to contain a rapidly expanding blaze in southwestern Spain that had forced the evacuation of some 800 people and counting.

The weather was offering "no respite", local officials said.

France and Spain have already seen historic wildfires so far this summer, with record levels of drought causing tinder-dry conditions.

Some 95% of mainland France and 99% of Switzerland saw drought conditions in July, both record figures since the European Drought Observatory began col-

lecting such data in 2012, according to an AFP analysis yesterday.

Heat and drought are also driving rivers across Europe to record lows. The Rhine in Germany could drop so much it becomes unnavigable, industry groups warned yesterday.

And Polish officials announced that the Vistula, the country's longest river, had matched its record low in Warsaw on yesterday — a record set only on Friday.

Low levels along the Danube river have already seen Hungary and Romania forced to consider shuttering their nuclear plants, which rely on the water for cooling, in late July — though both managed to avoid doing so for now.

Nearly 120 mn Europeans live in regions where July 2026 was the hottest ever recorded, according to an AFP analysis of national weather agencies and Copernicus climate data.

The records were concentrated in southern Britain, western France, and northern and eastern Spain.

At least 12,000 excess deaths were recorded across nine European countries during one heatwave in June, an AFP analysis suggests.

A more diversified economy ready to shape its next chapter

Qatar's latest foreign direct investment figures offer more than a quarterly snapshot of capital flows. They provide a telling measure of confidence in the country's economic direction — and a clear indication that Qatar is steadily strengthening its position as a trusted destination for investment, innovation and long-term partnership.

The National Planning Council's FDI Survey for the first quarter of 2026 shows that inward investment rose 3.3% from the previous quarter to reach QR172.2bn. At the same time, Qatari investments abroad increased 3.5% to QR221.7bn. Taken together, these figures reflect an economy that is not standing still, but expanding its connections, deepening its partnerships and widening its horizons.

The significance of this performance lies not only in the numbers themselves, but in what they reveal about Qatar's economic character. A country that attracts growing levels of foreign investment while also extending its investment presence in

international markets is demonstrating confidence in both its domestic potential and its global outlook.

Qatar's outward investment growth is particularly important. It reflects a deliberate effort to diversify assets, develop economic relationships and secure sustainable returns over the long term. In an increasingly competitive global economy, such an approach is essential. It enables national capital to participate in promising markets while creating opportunities for knowledge exchange, commercial cooperation and strategic partnerships.

The figures on inward investment also point to the foundations of Qatar's economic strength. Mining and quarrying accounted for 45.3% of inward FDI, while financial and insurance activities represented 31.9% . Manufacturing contributed 13%, followed by information and communication activities and professional, scientific and technical activities.

These figures reflect the continuing importance of Qatar's energy resources, but they also show the emergence of sectors capable of supporting a broader and more resilient economy. Finance,

manufacturing, communications and specialised professional services are not peripheral activities. They are central to the development of a modern knowledge economy and to the creation of high-value employment and innovation.

The National Planning Council is right to emphasise that the quality of investment matters as much as its volume. Capital becomes truly transformative when it raises productivity, transfers technology, develops local capabilities and supports new industries. This is the standard by which Qatar's investment performance should ultimately be judged. The country's outward FDI profile reinforces this wider picture. Financial and insurance activities, mining and quarrying, information and communication, accommodation and food services, and transport and storage together accounted for more than 90% of outward investment. This distribution suggests that Qatari capital is moving into sectors with strong global relevance and long-term growth potential.

Equally important is the quality of the data

underpinning these conclusions. The cooperation between the NPC and Qatar Central Bank, together with the survey of approximately 210 establishments, demonstrates the importance Qatar places on reliable economic statistics. Sound policy requires sound information, and regular, accurate data allow decision-makers to identify opportunities, address weaknesses and measure progress with greater precision.

The first-quarter results therefore deserve to be viewed as a sign of momentum. They show an economy benefiting from its established strengths while actively preparing for the next stage of development.

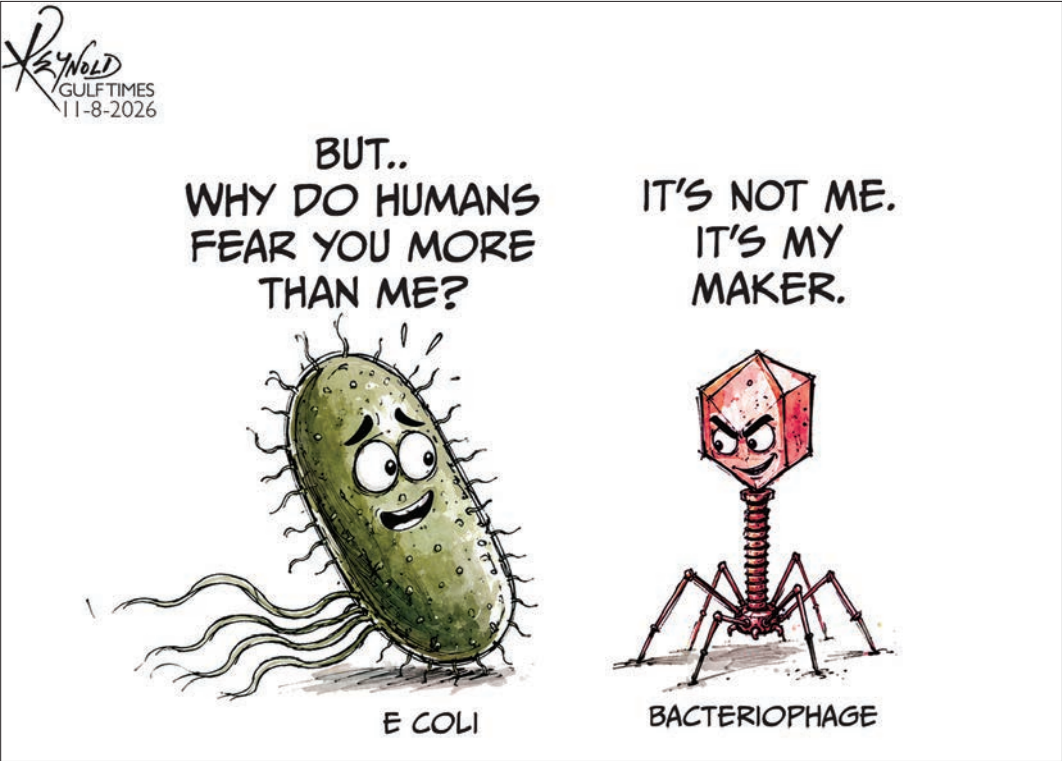
As Qatar advances the goals of its Third National Development Strategy and Qatar National Vision 2030, the challenge will be to sustain this momentum and ensure that investment reaches an increasingly diverse range of productive sectors. The latest figures suggest that the country is well placed to do so.

Qatar is not merely attracting investment; it is building confidence in a future shaped by ambition, discipline and strategic vision.

In the spotlight



People drop off and pick up travellers at the main terminal of Washington Dulles International Airport, which US President Donald Trump has proposed a \$22bn renovation plan, in Dulles, Virginia, US. (Reuters)



From Makkah with hope: Reading the defence pact



By Kamran Rehmat

Six months of war have taught the Gulf something it spent four decades arranging not to fathom: that the presence of the world's pre-eminent security provider is not the same thing as protection by it. Iranian missiles and drones have reached the soil of every Gulf state hosting American forces. Nearly 50,000 US troops across 19 sites did not stop them. Energy infrastructure has burned, Hormuz has been throttled, and the Red Sea has been turned into a second chokepoint. Against that record, the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement is not an act of pique or drift. It is a correction, and an overdue one.

Signed by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, and building on the Saudi-Pakistani accord of September 2025, the pact commits three states to treating an armed attack on one as an attack on all.

Pakistani Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar has anchored it to Article 51 of the UN Charter, the cleanest available legal footing, and both Islamabad and Ankara have stressed that it abrogates nothing and targets no-one. Those are not evasions. They are the conditions under which an arrangement of this kind can actually be built in a region where

almost every previous attempt collapsed under the weight of its own rhetoric.

Why these three?

Alliances usually fail because their members want the same things. This security framework is a decent bet because they do not. Saudi Arabia has capital, convening authority and, in Makkah, a setting no rival forum can match, but limited indigenous military-industrial depth. Türkiye has Nato's second-largest army, a defence industry now among the world's most inventive, and a need for markets and investment. Pakistan has manpower, seven decades of institutional military experience and the Muslim world's only nuclear deterrent, and needs financing and industrial partners. The three are complementary: each party's deficit is another's surplus, which is the most durable foundation an alliance can have.

Note also what the pact quietly settles. Riyadh appears to have put away the file on Abraham Accords membership without ever having to announce it. When the Trump Administration made civil nuclear co-operation contingent on normalisation with Israel, the Gulf read the message precisely, and Makkah is the response. Saudi Arabia's position — no normalisation without a credible path to Palestinian statehood — now has structure behind it rather than only sentiment.

The first probe

Two days after the signing, Houthi drones struck Aramco's Jazan refinery, and the same day missiles hit Mocha, the Red Sea port beside Bab el-Mandeb. Follow that trail carefully. Jazan is a 400,000-barrel-a-day facility, but Mocha is the strategic move: close Bab el-Mandeb and the alternative to Hormuz is lost, which Tehran is already constricting. This was a co-ordinated attempt to make Saudi exports hostage at both ends, timed to the announcement and designed to test what the ink was worth.

That the response was national rather than trilateral says less than



Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (centre) flanked by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (left) and Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif after signing the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement on Friday. (AFP)

the sceptics claim. Alliances are not born with machinery; Nato's own guarantee was a piece of paper for years before shape gave it teeth. The relevant question is what the probe accelerates. The expectation to watch is a deepened Pakistani air defence and advisory presence inside the kingdom, and faster Turkish defence-industrial transfers. Integrated air and missile defence is precisely the capability the past six months have shown the region cannot outsource, and it is precisely what these three can build together faster than any of them could alone.

For now, the pact operates through ambiguity: an adversary cannot know what a fresh attack would trigger, and must assume the worst. That is a genuine deterrent, and at this stage the sensible one. It will need to be converted into planning, exercises and command arrangements before it hardens, but conversion is a matter of political will, and the will has rarely been more evident.

Beyond one umbrella

None of this is a rupture with

Washington. All three are close American partners; all three are major non-Nato allies; the arrangement most likely proceeded with tacit acquiescence, and it sits comfortably inside an American preference for allied burden-sharing. But the honest description is that the American relationship is important while ceasing to be exclusive — and for the Gulf, that is progress, not betrayal. It is perhaps, in Riyadh's interest to hold several layers of security rather than one. Any state that has watched interceptors draw a damp squib over its own refineries would conclude the same.

The wider reading is that this belongs to a broader movement of middle powers insuring themselves — the same instinct visible in BRICS enlargement, in Gulf hedging towards Beijing, and in the fact that the mediation of this war has been conducted largely by Islamabad and Doha rather than by Washington. Whether that amounts to a new world order is a larger claim than the evidence yet carries: these are allies buying supplementary cover, not defectors.

But something real is shifting. For the first time, a serious collective defence commitment in West Asia has been drafted, signed and legitimised by regional powers on their own authority, in their own holy city, without an external guarantor holding the pen. That is a first, and its significance will grow rather than fade.

Room to grow

Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan has said the three should not remain three. Egypt is possibly the next candidate — already a partner of all three, already consulting with them, and, as Fidan puts it, a "natural partner" — although the jury is out on this given Cairo's binding arrangements in the region that may be seen as clashing with its interests. Kuwait, Qatar, Jordan and Azerbaijan have also been named as plausible.

The discipline required is calibration: a framework broad enough to give members political cover and flexibility about the form of any response will attract signatories, whereas a rigid automatic trigger would

repel them. Fidan's formula — consultation determining degree, form and format — is exactly the elasticity that permits growth without fracture.

The empty chair/s

This brings us to the argument that deserves the last word. Iran has absorbed six months of combined American and Israeli force and has not been subdued. It is highly improbable that a security architecture premised on its permanent exclusion can produce lasting stability. But this particular architecture need not be premised on that at all.

Two of its three members are Iran's functioning interlocutors. Pakistan shares a long border with Iran and a deep relationship intertwined with a huge Shia population on both sides. Türkiye has kept commercial and diplomatic channels to Tehran open through every round of sanctions. Iran has itself proposed a regional security arrangement convened without external powers — conceptually not far from what Makkah has begun. Yesterday Tehran officially said it did not fear the trilateral agreement which it sees as a regional response to taking security ownership. The difference has always been who holds the pen, and now the pen is regional.

The nuclear arithmetic is sharper still. A structure containing both a nuclear-armed Pakistan and Iran gives Riyadh a reason not to seek its own deterrent and Tehran a reason not to sprint for one. Two guarantors with warm ties to Tehran do not encircle it; they lower the temperature around it. An excluded Iran negotiates with an American-brokered containment structure. An included Iran negotiates with its neighbours.

This cannot be said in Riyadh while Houthi drones are still falling on Jazan, and Tehran must first stop treating its proxies as negotiating currency. The sequence runs through a Hormuz settlement, not around it.

• The writer is Deputy Managing Editor, Gulf Times.

From Page 1

Pakistan is also the only nuclear-armed member of the arrangement. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute estimates that its nuclear stockpile remained at approximately 170 warheads as of January 2026, although Islamabad continues to develop delivery systems and fissile-material production capacity. Saudi Arabia provides the grouping's principal financial and procurement base. Riyadh's defence expenditure is estimated at about \$88bn, while its armed forces include roughly 250,000–257,000 active personnel, a modernising armoured force and an air arm centred on the F-15 family. The kingdom also brings substantial strategic geography. Its territory covers approximately 2.15mn sq km and contains energy infrastructure of global importance, as well as the Islamic holy cities of Makkah and Madinah. Saudi financial resources could support joint procurement, industrial partnerships, basing infrastructure and sustainment programmes. Türkiye contributes the grouping's largest indigenous defence-industrial ecosystem

The combined might of Makkah defence pact

and its strongest naval capability. Its armed forces include approximately 355,000 active personnel, around 2,200–2,300 tanks, about 300 combat aircraft and 12–13 submarines, although figures vary according to whether reserve, paramilitary and legacy equipment are included. An established Nato member, Türkiye also offers experience in alliance-standard interoperability and expeditionary operations. Its defence sector produces unmanned aircraft, missiles, naval platforms and electronic-warfare systems, while programmes such as the KAAAN fighter are intended to expand national design and production capacity.

Aggregate scale

On commonly used 2026 open-source estimates, the three states together field:

- About 1.27mn active military personnel.
- Approximately 5,800 main battle tanks.
- About 14,000 armoured fighting vehicles and other armoured platforms.

- Between 1,000 and 1,150 combat aircraft, within a total military-aircraft inventory of roughly 3,350.
- Approximately 20–21 submarines, all operated by Türkiye and Pakistan.
- A combined land area of about 3.7–3.8mn sq km.
- A nominal combined gross domestic product of roughly \$3.5tn, based on 2026-style IMF estimates.

(The figures should be treated as indicative rather than definitive. Open-source inventories differ over the status of stored, reserve and legacy equipment, while aircraft totals can change substantially depending on whether trainers and light-attack platforms are counted).

The distribution of capability is uneven. Saudi Arabia dominates in defence spending and access to advanced foreign procurement; Pakistan provides manpower, operational depth and the grouping's nuclear dimension; and Türkiye

supplies much of the industrial and naval capacity. The three countries' munitions stocks and wartime logistics remain undisclosed. The agreement's immediate value is likely to lie less in the creation of a fully integrated military command than in deterrence signalling, industrial co-operation and the gradual development of interoperability. Joint exercises, common communications procedures, intelligence-sharing arrangements, shared logistics and co-production could improve the sustainability of operations over time. Saudi financing, Turkish manufacturing and Pakistani operational experience offer a potentially complementary basis for such projects. The practical limits are equally clear. The signatories operate across widely separated theatres and retain different defence relationships, command structures and procurement standards. Converting numerical strength into a credible collective response would require political agreement

under pressure, pre-planned reinforcement routes, compatible command-and-control systems and assured access to ammunition and spare parts. The pact should therefore be regarded as a strategic framework rather than an established military alliance in the Nato model. Türkiye's possible return to the F-35 programme remains unresolved following its acquisition of Russia's S-400 air-defence system. Saudi Arabia has also shown longstanding interest in advanced Western combat aircraft, but there is no confirmed imminent F-35 delivery to either country. These issues underscore the extent to which the three states will continue to depend on separate procurement channels even as they seek closer defence co-operation. The Makkah agreement gives its members a broader platform for collective deterrence. Its long-term significance will depend on whether the political commitment announced in Makkah produces deployable capabilities, rather than remaining primarily a diplomatic and strategic signal.

Finland starts train service to Sweden

AFP
Oulu, Finland

A new passenger train service linking Finland to Sweden began running yesterday, creating a rail route stretching from northern Finland to southern Europe for the first time since the 1990s. The atmosphere at the Oulu train station in northern Finland was filled with excitement as passengers boarded a train headed for neighbouring Sweden early yesterday.

Vaino Jalkanen, 37, woke up at dawn to witness the “historic” re-sumption of Finnish cross-border trains that were discontinued in 1988. “Now it will be possible to travel from Paris to Rovaniemi, for example,” he told AFP as he had found his seat, referring to a city deep in central Finland.

Services will run from Oulu on Finland's northwest coast to Haparanda, Sweden, twice a day.

From Haparanda, passengers can transfer to trains and routes that run west to the Norwegian sea or south through Stockholm as far as Portugal. The transfer is necessary because Finland uses the same track widths as in neighbouring Russia, which are wider than the European standard – a legacy of when the Nordic country was part of the Russian Grand Duchy in the 19th century.

After crossing a bridge over the Torne river from Finland's Tornio, the inaugural train Monday was welcomed by a crowd of people waving Finnish and Swedish flags at the red-brick station in Haparanda.

MPs back historic law on reintegrating Kurdish militants in Türkiye

AFP
Istanbul

Turkish lawmakers yesterday voted through a bill offering limited amnesty for Kurdish PKK militants, a key step in the peace process that seeks to end decades of deadly violence.

The law is Türkiye's first legislative step towards ending the conflict and comes 18 months after Abdullah Ocalan, the jailed founder of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), urged his followers to disarm.

The text, which passed by 468 votes in favour to 88 against, with six abstentions, envisages a return to civilian life for some of the PKK fighters who lay down their weapons without granting a total amnesty.

But crucially, it does not specify what will become of Ocalan, 77, who has spent the past 27 years being held in solitary confinement on Imrali prison island near Istanbul.

Ocalan has played a key role in efforts to end the conflict, issuing a historic call in February 2025 for his fighters to disarm and embrace democratic means to defend the rights of Türkiye's Kurdish minority.

Backed by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP)

and the pro-Kurdish DEM party, the bill suspends prosecutions and prison sentences for some offences for between five and 10 years.

The move is expected to involve the release of around 3,500 PKK-linked detainees in an initial phase, lawmakers said – around a third of the number held in Turkish prisons.

If those covered by the measure do not reoffend during that period, investigations would be dropped and sentences considered served.

But those involved in serious crimes such as murder would be excluded – with the text making no mention of Ocalan.

Last week, Türkiye's vice president Cevdet Yilmaz told CNN Turk that Ocalan's case “does not fall within the scope of this law” but said the ageing leader would be “in a position to contribute to the peace process” without giving further details.

Aware of the misgivings of the Turkish public that has been scarred by decades of bloody conflict, the government has been careful to stress that the text is not a general amnesty law.

In May last year, the PKK announced it was disbanding following Ocalan's call and two months later, its militants took part in a historic disarmament ceremony in the mountains of northern Iraq.

Spain wildfire worsens due to wind gusts

Reuters
Madrid

A large wildfire in southwestern Spain was burning beyond firefighters' ability to extinguish it yesterday, regional authorities said, as hot and windy weather fuelled other blazes raging across the country.

With consecutive heatwaves scorching much of Europe, the Mediterranean nation is facing a devastating summer wildfire season, with over 244,000 hectares of countryside burnt in 400 fires so far this year, according to estimates by the European Forest Fire Information System.

That is an area six times larger than at the same time last year, while across Europe, record heat and droughts this summer, which

scientists say are exacerbated by global warming, have wreaked havoc on power production, shipping and public health systems.

Andalusia's regional head of emergencies, Antonio Sanz, told reporters that extinguishing the fire in the southwest of the country around the medieval town of Niebla was akin to a “long-distance obstacle race” and was expected to last several days. It has already affected a surface of nearly 20,000 hectares. He added that the combination of wind gusts, the area's rugged terrain, and convective phenomena creating fire clouds was spreading flying embers in all directions, causing secondary fires to break out.

Nearly 500 people have been evacuated from the area while further precautionary measures were being assessed, Sanz said.

Other wildfires remained active in the central province of Segovia and Castellon in the east.

In Segovia, a fire that started on Saturday when a vehicle ignited on a motorway forced 176 inhabitants of two towns to leave their homes as it rapidly spread across surrounding pastures.

Local authorities said yesterday the situation was improving after humidity increased overnight, but the large number of trees dotting the granite-strewn landscape could complicate firefighting efforts.

Another fire in Castellon's Tirig that has so far burnt around 800 hectares and prompted the evacuation of 900 people was still active but close to being stabilised after “very favourable” weather overnight, according to the regional government of Valencia.

Media in Hungary trapped in transition

AFP
Budapest

One month since Hungary's state broadcaster MTVA suspended its news programmes, employees are still waiting to hear if they will return to work – and what that work may look like, as the country grapples with a new era of press freedom after the ousting of former premier Viktor Orban.

During his 16-year rule Orban targeted journalists and news outlets and tightened control of state media, leading what the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) described as “one of the most sophisticated systems of media capture ever seen in the European Union”.

But Hungary's new leader Peter Magyar, who defeated Orban in April elections after campaigning on a return to democratic norms, has vowed to change the system.

Under Orban, MTVA employed over 2,000 people and received lavish taxpayer funding, with its newsroom unquestioningly echoing the government's narratives.

But under Magyar, MTVA's main channels suspended news broadcasts on July 7, two weeks after parliament passed a media reform bill, apologising in an on-air message for “lying” for years.

“After the election, most of us felt liberated. Political control ceased; we could talk about facts, quote both sides, it felt incredible,” one newsroom employee told AFP.

Previously, they were disseminating government politicians' opinions and positions instead of news, the journalist said, speaking on condition of anonymity as staff are not allowed to give interviews. “It is undeniable that we bear responsibility... Most of us still haven't managed to reconcile this within ourselves,” the employee said, adding as “breadwinner” they “could not afford” to quit on principle.

“We feel anxious and hopeful at the same time,” another longtime public media employee told AFP.

“Even people who never served any political agenda are worried for their jobs... But we're also optimistic that we can finally serve the public,” she added.

Private media companies are also feeling the effects of the change in administration.

Mediaworks, which describes



The remainder of facade of the former Hungarian Public Radio building, Magyar Radio in Budapest, after it was demolished. (AFP)

itself as Hungary's leading conservative media company and is close to Orban's nationalist Fidesz party, announced in June it was firing 200 of its 2,000 staff.

It no longer receives the lavish government spending on adverts it enjoyed under the previous administration.

More than a dozen of the group's daily newspapers have either gone out of print or switched to weekly publication, as flagship outlet Magyar Nemzet did this month.

The independent centre-left rival Nepszava also ceased its print edition in late May due to the debt it accumulated to Mediaworks, which printed the newspaper, leaving Hungary without a political daily.

A relaunch of MTVA is slated for later this month, with several insiders anticipating a return of TV news broadcasting on August 20, the national holiday.

Interim management – appointed by the government – has been silent on the details, and multiple employees told AFP that they are relying on internal rumours and occasional press statements for updates.

Camera crews are still recording events deemed newsworthy, but the footage is archived without being broadcast.

The ministerial commissioner overseeing the current transition, Judit Grosz, told AFP that “serious and longstanding” problems with credibility and professional standards necessitated the shutdown.

Inside MTVA, reactions were mixed.

Many said it was important to

“break with the previous era”, while some viewed the blackout as pointless, since news broadcasts had already adopted what they said was a neutral tone after Orban's defeat. The current transition is seen as a mere prelude.

A new chief executive, chosen later through an open tender process, is expected to implement recommendations from an ongoing professional and public consultations.

“The goal ultimately is to have the audience see public media as a trustworthy, professionally run and genuinely public service institution,” Grosz said.

But earlier this month, MTVA faced a backlash after naming a new head of news programming who had previously been employed by media outlets and companies owned by Orban's inner circle.

The public broadcaster reversed the appointment the next day after much disapproval – including from Magyar – prompting even more criticism.

“It is not up to the prime minister to comment and decide on nominations,” Reporters Without Borders (RSF) regional director Pavol Szalai told AFP.

Orban's Fidesz party leveraged the case as part of its broader efforts to cast Magyar's ongoing reform drive as “authoritarian”.

The CPJ also issued a broader warning last month, saying that if Magyar succeeds Hungary could become “a role model... But if the reforms do not go deep enough, or one party's control is simply replaced by another's, the opportunity will be squandered.”

and becoming more dangerous as temperatures rise.

“The heat is undoubtedly extreme but when you think about the financial pressures at home, you have no option but to keep working,” Hussain said.

Fast-growing Pakistan's construction boom is increasing the demand for labour in the sector, in which workers earn around \$3 a day. Despite the scorching sun and dust filling the air, workers stay on the heated kiln surface for hours at a time. “I would describe these brick kilns as places of confinement,” said Syeda Ghulam Fatima, the General Secretary of the Bonded Labour Liberation Front Pakistan.

“Workers endure relentless heat from the sun overhead while the intense heat radiating from the kiln rises beneath them.”

The workers remain trapped in a cycle of debt, extreme heat, and deteriorating health, Fatima told AFP, adding rising global temperatures amplified the risks.

Sheikhupura is at the heart of Pakistan's massive brick kiln industry. Nationwide, more than 18,000 brick kilns employ a to-

tal of over a mn people, according to 2018 data in a Climate and Clean Air Coalition report.

Pakistan is ranked among the countries most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change globally, according to experts.

Fatima said many workers receive advance payments, making them unable to decline to work in dangerous conditions without falling into burdensome debt.

Hussain, who earns roughly 25,000 Pakistani rupees (\$90) a month, said the money barely covers rent and his children's basic needs. “No matter the situation, whether we are ill or there are family matters, we still have to work,” he said. “If I take time off, we'll be in trouble.”

There is some hope of improved conditions from the Punjab provincial government's push to convert the industry to more modern technology known as zigzag kilns, which reduce air pollution and respiratory hazards.

Health experts warn that, especially at traditional kilns, prolonged heat exposure makes brick workers more vulnerable to



An aerial view shows a brick kiln in Sheikhupura, in Pakistan's Punjab province. (AFP)

illnesses including skin disorders, respiratory problems, and kidney disease. But “extended rest breaks are not feasible... whether it is extreme heat, cold, or rain, the work must continue uninterrupted”,

said Mujeeb Ullah, 45, the supervisor at the kiln, adding its temperatures needed to be kept stable. He said they provided workers with drinking water and occasional short breaks.

Pakistan's brickmakers work under harsh conditions to make ends meet

AFP
Sheikhupura, Pakistan

As dark plumes billow from overhead smokestacks, brickmakers at a kiln in Pakistan's Sheikhupura district crush coal through small holes beneath their feet into the fiery chambers below.

Workers already have to endure extreme conditions at traditional brick kilns, which burn at over 1,000C and demand constant monitoring to ensure they remain hot enough.

But they are becoming almost unbearable as climate change makes summers even hotter in a country already used to temperatures well over 40C.

Abid Hussain, a 35-year-old labourer whose clothes were covered in dark soot, told AFP the work felt like being trapped between fire below and, increasingly, above.

He is one of hundreds of thousands working in an industry that labour advocates say is poorly regulated, badly paid

Qatar expands outdoor cooling to make public spaces summer-friendly

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

Advanced cooling technologies are being used across the country to transform outdoor public spaces, souqs, and pedestrian districts into destinations that remain accessible and attractive during the country's intensely hot summer months.

According to a report by Qatar TV, the emerging network of outdoor cooling systems is reshaping how residents and visitors experience public areas while supporting retail activity, tourism, and the broader development of climate-resilient urban environments. The initiative combines underground cooling networks with specialised outdoor air-conditioning engineering to create more comfortable microclimates in open-air areas.

According to officials from the Qatar General Electricity and Water Corporation (Kahramaa), selected locations can reach outdoor temperatures in the range of about 22°C to 30°C, allowing people to walk, shop, and spend time outdoors even during periods when ambient temperatures can approach or exceed 45°C.

The hot summer months often extend from June to September, with temperatures reaching 45°C or higher, while summer humidity can reach 40-60% at times. Such conditions have traditionally made prolonged outdoor activity difficult during the daytime and contributed to the concentration



West Walk: a fusion of comfort and modernity.
PICTURE: Shaji Kayamkulam

of tourism and retail activity in air-conditioned indoor venues.

However, outdoor cooling represents a shift from simply providing enclosed air-conditioned environments towards creating more usable public spaces. Such cooling systems have been deployed or incorporated into several prominent developments and destinations, including Lusail Boulevard, Lafayette Street, Msheireb Downtown Doha, Al Hazm Mall, West Walk, Gewan Island, Souq Waqif, and several parks, including Al Gharaffa, Umm Al Seneem, and Rawdat Al Hamama.

Eng Jamal Yousef al-Derbasti, director of the District Cooling Department at Qatar General Electricity and Water Corporation (Kahramaa), stressed that at Kahramaa decisions where to introduce cooling infrastructure are based on technical studies

and established criteria, including cooling density and population density. The approach is intended to ensure that investment in cooling networks is directed towards locations where they can generate the greatest social and economic benefit.

The technology is closely linked to Qatar's broader adoption of district cooling. Unlike conventional individual air-conditioning systems, district cooling uses central plants to produce chilled water, which is distributed through underground insulated pipelines to connected buildings and facilities.

Kahramaa says district cooling can reduce power demand by around 30% to 40% compared with conventional cooling technologies, while also reducing the infrastructure required for electricity generation and distribution. This efficiency is particularly



Umm Al Seneem Park in Ain Khaled.

important for Qatar, where cooling accounts for a major share of energy demand due to the country's prolonged hot season. Centralised cooling also allows operators to optimise plant performance and load management, while potentially reducing greenhouse gas emissions, refrigerant leakage, and noise associated with numerous individual cooling units. Kahramaa identifies improved reliability, lower energy consumption, reduced peak power requirements and enhanced user experience among the principal benefits of district cooling.

Meanwhile, Eng Hamad Bawazir, head of the District Cooling Services Planning Section at Kahramaa, highlighted the performance of Qatar's cooling infrastructure against international efficiency benchmarks.

He pointed out that international standards generally target an efficiency level no more than 1 point below the relevant performance measure. At the same time, some Qatari plants have recorded levels of about 0.9, with longer-term objectives of reaching 0.8 and 0.7.

Accordingly, for businesses operating in outdoor commercial areas, comfortable public spaces can increase the time consumers spend walking between shops, restaurants, and attractions. Re-



Place Vendome

tailers and traders at Souq Waqif have reported that outdoor cooling has contributed to stronger visitor flows and helped reduce the seasonal slowdown that traditionally affected outdoor commerce during Qatar's hottest months.

Visitors have similarly described the availability of cooled outdoor areas as making summer walking and sightseeing more practical and comfortable.

The effect is particularly significant for destinations such as Souq Waqif and Msheireb Downtown, where the pedestrian experience itself forms an important part of the attraction.

In the meantime, Qatar has already developed substantial expertise in district cooling as part of its modern urban infrastructure. The technology has been applied not only to commercial and residential developments but also to major public facilities.

In 2023, Kahramaa reported that Hamad Medical Corporation had adopted district cooling at its facilities, with the West Energy Centre currently providing a cooling capacity of 12,500 tonnes and a planned capacity of 20,000 tonnes. What began as a solution for sporting venues is now finding applications in everyday urban life.

Back-to-school shopping picks up

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

As the 2026-2027 academic year is set to begin on August 30, local markets, bookstores and school-supply outlets across the country are witnessing a noticeable increase in activity as families prepare for their children's return to the classroom.

The back-to-school season is considered one of the most important commercial periods of the year for local retailers, as demand rises significantly for a wide range of educational and personal supplies.

Many stores have responded by expanding their selections and introducing seasonal promotions aimed at attracting families seeking a balance between quality, price and design.

Bookstores and stationery shops have become increasingly busy in the weeks leading up to the new academic year, with parents and children shopping early to purchase their school needs and take advantage of promotional offers. Consumers also have a wide choice of locally produced and imported goods, giving families greater flexibility based on their budgets and preferences.

Sales and customer service representatives at various bookstores said the back-to-school period is among their busiest seasons, with particularly strong demand for stationery, school bags and other classroom essentials. Imported products from coun-



tries including India, China, Türkiye and Pakistan continue to account for a significant share of the market.

At the same time, retailers have noted growing consumer interest in locally made products, which are gaining wider acceptance among shoppers because of their competitive prices and suitable quality.

Notebooks remain among the most sought-after items, with a good-quality 80-page notebook priced at around QR12. A pack of 12 notebooks, each containing 60 pages, is available for about QR14, bringing the cost per notebook to approximately QR1.50.

Coloured pens, erasers, rulers and other stationery items are also seeing strong demand. Their increasingly colourful designs, cartoon characters and themed patterns have made them particularly attractive to younger students.

One retailer said demand for watercolours and oil colours increases among primary-school students taking art-related subjects, while secondary-school students more commonly purchase calculators, engineering rulers, graphing tools and technical-drawing equipment.

Schoolbags are also among the most sought-after items on many families' shopping lists, with re-

tailers offering a wide range of sizes, designs and prices to suit different age groups. Younger children continue to favour imported bags featuring popular cartoon characters and superheroes such as Spider-Man, Batman and Wonder Woman. Prices for these products generally range from QR80 to QR110, depending on their quality and design.

Older students, meanwhile, are increasingly drawn to bags featuring internationally recognised football stars such as Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi, as well as designs carrying the logos of major international football clubs and other popular personalities.

Tips for students to kickstart a new academic year

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

With the new academic year about to start this month, a group of experts from Weill Cornell Medicine in Qatar (WCM-Q) has shared valuable tips to empower children start the year with confidence and determination. Dr Sohaila Cheema, Karima Chaabana and Anupama Jithesh, all at the Institute for Population Health at WCM-Q, highlight in an article that a strong start begins with simple, healthy daily habits that support regular attendance, emotional wellbeing, and academic success. They have also underlined the role of parents in making children more comfortable in their daily routine.

The experts note that a consistent bedtime routine helps children feel rested, calm, and ready for the next day ahead. "Good quality sleep supports emotional wellbe-

ing, concentration, learning, and school attendance. Encourage children to switch off electronic devices at least one hour before bedtime and follow a calming routine, such as reading, preparing their school bag, or spending quiet time with family," they said.

The next aspect, according to them, is the right type of food. "Healthy meals help children concentrate and maintain energy throughout the school day. Children need the same types of nutrients, such as carbohydrates, protein, fats, minerals, and vitamins, as adults, but in different amounts. Encourage them to include colourful fruits and vegetables in meals and lunch boxes."

The experts also advised limiting sugary breakfast cereals, juice drinks, salty processed foods, processed meats, and frequent treats such as cakes, biscuits, and ice cream, while healthier lunch box options may include whole-grain sandwiches, fresh fruit, vegetable sticks, yoghurt, eggs, cheese, hummus, or nuts. Another aspect is physical activ-

ity, as it supports brain health, academic performance, strong bones, emotional wellbeing, and long-term health. "Children should be active every day through activities such as running, jumping, playing active games, cycling, swimming, dancing, or sports such as football. Aim for at least 60 minutes of movement daily," the article said. Children, the experts said, should also be given regular opportunities to talk about their day, friendships, worries, and feelings. "Some children may face challenges such as bullying, exclusion, or difficulty connecting with teachers. These experiences can affect behaviour, sleep, schoolwork, and attendance. Listen actively, validate their emotions, offer reassurance, and communicate with school staff when needed."

Another important aspect is to help children manage anxiety and fear. "It is normal for children to feel nervous at the start of a new

school year. Support them by modelling healthy coping strategies and discussing practical ways to deal with stressful situ-

ations. This can help them relax and regain control when they feel anxious or overwhelmed." The best way, according to experts, to help children face challenges is to encourage them to think through them and explore possible solutions. They noted: "Instead of solving every problem for them, guide them with questions such as, 'What do you think you could try?' or 'Who could help you with this?' This helps build confidence, independence, and resilience."

The experts also advised the students to be organised to reduce stress and manage daily routines more effectively. They added: "Parents can support them in preparing their school bag the night before, keeping a tidy workspace, following regular morning and bedtime routines, and using planners or calendars for homework and activities. These simple habits can make school days feel smoother and more manageable."

Summer tour explores Qatar's history, heritage, cultural legacy

The Youth Committee of Al Arabi Sports Club has taken participants in its summer programme on an educational journey through Qatar's history, with a field visit to the National Museum of Qatar (NMoQ) designed to deepen their cultural awareness and strengthen their connection with the country's national identity.

The visit formed part of the club's wider efforts to enrich its youth programmes by connecting younger generations with Qatar's history, heritage and cultural legacy. Participants explored the museum's galleries, embarking on a journey that begins with the geological history of the Qatari Peninsula, moves through prehistoric times and traces the

country's transformation into the modern state it is today.

The exhibits offered the young visitors an opportunity to discover Qatar's story through internationally significant artefacts, historical manuscripts and detailed displays depicting traditional life on land and at sea. The collections also shed light on the customs, occupations, and ways of life that helped shape Qatari society and its identity across generations.

The visit provided more than a historical overview, allowing participants to engage with the country's heritage through an immersive museum experience and gain a deeper appreciation of the forces that have shaped Qatar's social and



cultural development. NMoQ, with its world-class collections and distinctive architecture inspired by the desert rose, provided an especially fitting setting for the visit. Its design and exhibitions offer visitors a visual and educational representation of Qatar's relationship with its natural

environment, heritage, and rapid transformation. Through initiatives such as this field trip, Al Arabi Sports Club seeks to ensure that its summer programmes extend beyond sports and recreation to include learning, cultural discovery and community engagement.