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RAMADAN THOUGHT

Allah increases the provision for whom He wills, and straitens (it for whom He wills), and they rejoice in the life of the world, whereas the life of this world as compared with the Hereafter is but a brief passing enjoyment. (Qur'an 13:26)

Prayer times

Fajr.....4.16; Zuhr.....11.40; Asr.....3.07; Maghrib.....5.50; Isha.....7.20

Fasting times

Iftar today5.50pm
Imsak tomorrow4.05am



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Qatar condemns Israeli policies

Qatar strongly condemned the Israeli occupation's declaration of establishing an agency to displace Palestinians from the Gaza Strip, and endorsing the dismantlement of 13 unlawful settlement outposts in the West Bank, as a prelude to their legalisation as colonial settlements. It stressed that displacing the Palestinians in any form constitutes a flagrant violation of international law, while expanding the settlements represents an underestimation of international legitimacy resolutions, especially UN Security Council Resolution 2334. **Page 2**

Conservatives target Trump as Canada campaign begins

Canada's Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre argued yesterday that he is the strongest candidate to take on US President Donald Trump, whose annexation and tariff threats have shaken the once promising chances of a Tory-led government. The leading candidates ahead of Canada's April 28 election fanned out on the first full day of campaigning in a vote certain to be dominated by Trump. Liberal leader and Prime Minister Mark Carney, who replaced Justin Trudeau earlier this month, was in the eastern province of Newfoundland, saying Canadians needed to view the United States as "a friendship lost." Poilievre built significant support as a relentless critic of an unpopular Trudeau government, but Trump's return and Trudeau's departure have forced the Conservatives to pivot.

Greenland leaders slam US team's trip

US President Donald Trump yesterday doubled down on his suggestion that the US should take over Greenland as leaders from the semi-autonomous Danish territory criticised a planned trip there this week by a high-profile US delegation. "I think Greenland is going to be something that maybe is in our future," Trump told reporters. Greenland's outgoing Prime Minister Mute Egede called plans by the US delegation to visit an American military base and attend a dog sled race a "provocation". **Page 15**

New deal under study to restore Gaza truce

Reuters
Cairo/Jerusalem

Egypt has floated a new proposal aimed at restoring the Gaza ceasefire deal, security sources said yesterday, as Palestinian health authorities said Israeli strikes had killed at least 65 people in the enclave in the previous 24 hours.

The proposal, made last week, follows an escalation in violence after Israel resumed air and ground operations against Hamas militants on March 18, ending a two-month period of relative calm after 15 months of war.

Gaza health officials said Israeli air strikes and shelling have killed nearly 700 Palestinians since then, including at least 400 women and children.

Among those killed yesterday were two local journalists, Mohammad Mansour and Hussam Shabat, medics said. The Palestinian Journalist Syndicate said at least 206 journalists have been



A paramedic assists an injured child as she exits an ambulance upon arrival at the Indonesian hospital in Beit Lahia in the northern Gaza Strip yesterday.

killed by Israeli fire in Gaza since early October 2023, when the conflict erupted. There was no immediate Israeli comment.

Palestinian resistance movement Hamas said several of its senior political and security officials had also been killed.

Later yesterday, the Israeli military said it had intercepted a missile launched from Yemen before it crossed into Israel. Warn-

ing sirens had sounded in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and other areas.

The Egyptian plan calls for Hamas to release five Israeli hostages each week, with Israel implementing the second phase of the ceasefire after the first week, two security sources said.

Hamas is still holding 59 hostages, with 24 thought to be still alive.

Both the US and Hamas have agreed to the proposal, the security sources said, but Israel has not yet responded.

A Hamas official did not confirm the proposed offer, but told Reuters that "several proposals are being discussed with the mediators to bridge the gap and to resume negotiations to reach common ground that would pave the way to start the second phase of the agreement".

The sources said the Egyptian proposal includes a timeline for a full Israeli military withdrawal from Gaza, backed by US guarantees, in exchange for the release of remaining hostages.

Al Jazeera journalist killed in Israeli attack on Gaza

Separate Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip have killed two media workers, including an Al Jazeera journalist.

Hossam Shabat, a journalist who worked for Al Jazeera Mubasher, was killed in northern Gaza yesterday. Witnesses told the network that his car was targeted in the eastern part of Beit Lahiya.

Reporting from Deir el-Balah in central Gaza, Al Jazeera's Tareq Abu Azzoum said Shabat, 23, had been previously wounded in another Israeli attack "but he insisted on continuing news reporting" in Gaza.

"The Israeli military targeted his vehicle" without giving "any prior warning", Abu Azzoum said.

The colleagues of Shabat, have shared his final words.

In a post on X, prewritten by Shabat, his team wrote, "If you're reading this, it means I have been killed — most likely targeted — by the Israeli occupation forces." Shabat wrote that over the last 18 months of war, he has dedicated "every moment" to his people.

"I documented the horrors in northern Gaza minute by minute, determined to show the world the



truth they tried to bury. I slept on pavements, in schools, in tents — anywhere I could. Each day was a battle for survival. I endured hunger for months, yet I never left my people's side."

"I ask you now: do not stop speaking about Gaza," Shabat added. "Do not let the world look away. Keep fighting, keep telling our stories — until Palestine is free."

Earlier yesterday, an Israeli army attack on Khan Younis, in southern Gaza, also killed journalist Mohammad Mansour, who worked for Palestine Today. (Courtesy Al Jazeera)

Israel strikes on Syria, Lebanon 'risk escalation'

EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas warned yesterday during a visit to Jerusalem that Israeli strikes on Syria and Lebanon threatened to worsen the situation. The most intense escalation since a November ceasefire, which ended the war between Israel and the Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah in Lebanon, occurred on Saturday. Lebanon's health ministry said eight people have been killed, with Israel saying it attacked in response to rocket fire, which Hezbollah denied responsibility for. Despite the ceasefire, Israel has continued to carry out strikes on Lebanon, and both sides have repeatedly accused the other of violating the truce. "Military actions must be proportionate, and Israeli strikes into Syria and Lebanon risk further escalation," Kallas said at a news conference.

PM, Kurdistan leader discuss ways to enhance relations



QNA
Doha

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani met yesterday with Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Masrour Barzani, who is visiting the country. The meeting discussed co-operation relations and ways to support and develop them, along with a number of topics of mutual interest. During the meeting, HE the Prime

Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs stressed Qatar's keenness to enhance the prospects of co-operation with the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in various fields, in a way that serves mutual interests. HE Sheikh Mohammed also highlighted the strong historical fraternal relations that bind Qatar with the sisterly Republic of Iraq, praising in this regard the level of consultation and co-ordination between the two countries on regional and international issues in order to strengthen international peace and security.

QC committee discusses insurance pricing process

Qatar Chamber chairman Sheikh Khalifa bin Jassim al-Thani has presided over the first meeting of the chamber's Insurance Committee for 2025. The meeting was attended by Abdullah bin Ahmed al-Malki al-Johani, vice-chairman of the Committee, along with other committee members representing various insurance companies. The agenda discussed enhancing co-operation among local insurance companies to better serve the national market and competition between Qatar Financial Centre-licensed companies and national insurance

firms within the Qatari market. It also reviewed the participation of the Insurance Committee in determining pricing mechanisms for compulsory health insurance. Furthermore, it re-examined commissions paid on compulsory car insurance. The committee recommended arranging visits to relevant entities to further discuss the key topics raised during the meeting. Members also agreed to refer these issues to the technical team for automotive and compensation matters, who will submit their technical proposals for the committee's review.



Qatar Chamber chairman Sheikh Khalifa bin Jassim al-Thani has presided over the first meeting of the chamber's Insurance Committee for 2025.

US, Russia hold Ukraine ceasefire talks in Saudi

AFP
Riyadh

Talks between Russia and the US on Ukraine in Saudi Arabia yesterday have ended after around a dozen hours of negotiations, with a joint statement expected today, Russian news agencies reported.

The TASS news agency reported its source saying that the meeting had ended after "more than 12 hours of consultations" and that a "joint statement" on results will be published today.

As US and Russian officials met in Saudi Arabia to discuss a partial ceasefire in Ukraine, dozens of people were wounded in a



A serviceman of 39th Separate Coastal Defence Brigade of the Ukrainian Armed Forces prepares to fire a 2S1 Gvozdika self-propelled howitzer towards Russian troops in a front line.

missile strike on a Ukrainian city.

With Ukrainian negotiators waiting nearby, a day after they sat down with the US team, the Americans and Russians met in Riyadh with a Black Sea ceasefire top of the agenda.

President Donald Trump is pushing for a rapid end to the three-year war and hopes the latest round of talks will pave the way for a breakthrough.

While the talks took place at a luxury hotel in the Saudi capital, 65 people were wounded in a missile attack on Sumy in northeastern Ukraine, officials said.

The attack on a "densely populated residential area" damaged apartments and an educational facility, the regional prosecutor's

office said. The city's acting mayor earlier said a hospital had been affected.

The Ukrainian negotiating team was expecting a second meeting with the US delegation, a source in Kyiv said, a sign that progress may have been made.

This month in Jeddah — days after President Volodymyr Zelensky's White House dressing-down by Trump — Ukraine agreed to a US-proposed, 30-day ceasefire that was then rejected by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Officials are now studying a possible resumption of the Black Sea Initiative, a year-long agreement that allowed millions of tonnes of grain and other food exports to be shipped from Ukraine's ports.

Shura Council strongly condemns Israel’s brutal aggression on Gaza

QNA
Doha

The Shura Council held yesterday its regular weekly session, chaired by HE the Speaker Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanem.

At the beginning of the session at the Tamim bin Hamad Hall at the Council’s premises, the legislature expressed its strong condemnation of the Israeli occupation’s resumption of its brutal aggression on the Gaza Strip and its continued perpetration of crimes against the Palestinian people, killing innocent victims, including children and women, in flagrant violation of all international and humanitarian laws and conventions.

The council affirmed that these brutal attacks represent a blatant challenge to international efforts seeking to achieve peace and a deliberate undermining of all efforts aimed at achieving a ceasefire and protecting civilians.

It stressed that the occupation’s aggressive policies will only escalate the situation and increase the suffering of the Palestinian people, which requires urgent and decisive action to ensure the protection of the Pales-



tinian people and halt the ongoing violations against them. The Shura Council reiterated Qatar’s firm and supportive position on the just Palestinian cause and the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the establishment of their independent state on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative and relevant international legitimacy resolutions.

During the session, the council approved a draft law on ministers and referred it to the esteemed government, after debating the Legal and Legislative Affairs Committee’s report.

Separately, the session reviewed a report on the council’s participation in the meeting of the General Assembly and the Administrative Board of the Coalition of Women MPs from Arab Countries to Combat Violence against Women, which was held via videoconference in June 2024. The council also discussed a report on its delegation’s participation in the Fourth Parliamentary Policy Dialogue on Countering the Use of AI and New Technologies for Terrorist Purposes and the Sixth Meeting of the Counter-Terrorism Coordination Mechanism for Parliamentary Assemblies, both held in Rome in December 2024.



Qatar denounces Israel’s unlawful settlement outposts in West Bank

Qatar strongly condemned the Israeli occupation’s declaration of establishing an agency to displace Palestinians from the Gaza Strip, and endorsing the dismantlement of 13 unlawful settlement outposts in the West Bank, as a prelude to their legalisation as colonial settlements. It stressed that displacing the Palestinians in any form constitutes a flagrant violation of international law, while expanding the settlements represents an underestimation of international legitimacy resolutions, especially UN Security Council Resolution 2334. In a statement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stressed that it is imperative for the international community to stand in strong solidarity to compel the occupying power to comply with the will for peace and to immediately end the brutal war on the Gaza Strip. The ministry reiterated Qatar’s unwavering support for the Palestinian cause and the resilience of the brotherly Palestinian people, based on international legitimacy resolutions and the two-state solution to ensure the establishment of the independent Palestinian state on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. **(QNA)**

Official

Minister meets CEO of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance

HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad met yesterday via videoconferencing with CEO of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance Dr Sania Nishtar. During the meeting, they discussed collaboration in the field of vaccination and the delivery of essential vaccines to children worldwide.

Qatar welcomes statements from DRC and Rwanda on de-escalation of situations in Eastern Congo

Qatar welcomed the statements issued by the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the Republic of Rwanda on their commitment for de-escalation and reducing tensions in the eastern region of Congo, in regards to the M23 statement on their withdrawal from the Walikale area. Qatar viewed this as a significant positive step towards achieving stability and peace in the region.

In a statement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed Qatar’s full appreciation to both DRC and Rwanda for their commitment to dialogue aimed at calming the situation in Eastern Congo, and commended their positive engagement and efforts to resolve the crisis through peaceful initiatives. The ministry also expressed its hope for the continuation of this constructive approach and positive spirit to ensure the protection of civilians as well as to achieve security and development.

The ministry reiterated Qatar’s support for the Nairobi and Luanda process, which were integrated into the framework of the East African Community and the Southern African Development Community (EAC-SADC), and its firm position calling for resolving disputes through dialogue and peaceful means, and respecting the principles of international law, in a way that enhances stability and consolidates international peace and security.

Qatar strongly condemns bombing targeting mosque in Niger

Qatar has expressed its strong condemnation and denunciation of the bombing that targeted a mosque in southwestern Niger, resulting in dozens of deaths and injuries, affirming its full solidarity with the government of Niger in all measures taken to maintain security. In a statement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reiterated the State of Qatar’s firm stance rejecting violence, terrorism, and criminal acts, regardless of motives or reasons. The ministry also emphasised Qatar’s absolute rejection of targeting places of worship and terrorising peaceful civilians. The ministry extended Qatar’s condolences to the families of the victims and the government and people of Niger, wishing the injured a swift recovery. **(QNA)**

UNIDO praises Qatar’s role in supporting ITF



QNA
Vienna

Ambassador of Qatar to Austria and its Permanent Representative to the United Nations and international organisations in Vienna, Jassim bin Yacoub al-Hammadi announced Qatar Fund for Development’s (QFFD) contribution to the Innovation and Transformation Fund (ITF) of the United Nations Industrial Development

Organisation (UNIDO) during his meeting with Director-General of UNIDO, Gerd Muller.

The contribution will enable UNIDO to enhance its capacities in the areas of innovation, advisory services, digitalisation and talent development, as to foster sustainable industrial development and promote inclusive economic growth in developing countries. Ambassador al-Hammadi reaffirmed Qatar’s commitment to supporting international organisations and

strengthening multilateral co-operation, highlighting the country’s interest in UNIDO’s activities and its readiness to further expand co-operation in the future.

For his part, the director-general of UNIDO expressed his gratitude to QFFD for providing the necessary funding that will help strengthen UNIDO’s core functions and increase the scale and impact of its operations, encouraging other partners to follow the Qatari pioneering model.

CRA issues policy to protect postal services consumers

The Communications Regulatory Authority (CRA) has issued the Consumer Protection Policy for the Postal Sector and the Regulation for Postal Consumer Protection, reinforcing its commitment to safeguarding postal consumers’ rights and ensuring a fair, transparent, and accountable postal service sector.

These regulatory instruments align with the Law Regulating Postal Services (Law No. (15) of 2023), and the broader regulatory framework, setting a new benchmark for consumer rights and Service Provider obligations in this sector.

The Consumer Protection Policy outlines the guiding principles for consumer protection in postal services, ensuring that consumers receive clear, accurate, and accessible information about the services offered.

It establishes a robust foundation for consumer rights, ensuring that postal services are fit for purpose and that service providers adhere to fair and transparent practices.

The Regulation for Postal Consumer Protection establishes a detailed framework of rules and obligations for postal service providers. This framework encompasses vital aspects such as service quality standards, consumer rights, procedures for handling complaints, and mechanisms for resolving disputes.

The regulation sets rigorous benchmarks for transparency in billing, fairness in contracts, and safeguards against deceptive advertising or unfair business conduct. Furthermore, it guarantees consumers have access to effective means of resolving complaints with service providers, thereby promoting a postal service environment characterised by balance and accountability.

Commenting on this, Director of Consumer Affairs Department at CRA, Amel Salem al-Hanawi, stated: “The protection of postal consumers is at the core of CRAs regulatory efforts. The policy and regulation contribute to ensuring that consumers have access to fair, transparent, and high-quality postal services, aligning with the objectives of the Third National Development Strategy 2024-2030, which prioritises improving residents’ quality of life. These measures enhance Qatar’s postal regulatory framework, aligning with global standards and the objectives of CRAs strategy and Qatar National Vision 2030.” **(QNA)**

Qatar, Uzbekistan parliamentary dialogue




The Qatari-Uzbek Parliamentary Friendship Group of the Shura Council yesterday held a virtual meeting with its counterpart in the Uzbek Senate. The meeting was chaired on the Qatari side by Chairman of Qatari-Uzbek Parliamentary Friendship Group of the Shura Council Eng Ahmed bin Hitmi al-Hitmi, and on the Uzbek side by head of the Uzbek-Qatari Parliamentary Friendship Group of the Senate Abdulhakim Eshmuratov. The meeting focused on discussing existing parliamentary relations between Qatar and Uzbekistan and ways to strengthen and enhance them to serve the interests of the two countries and peoples. **(QNA)**

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DECADES IN QATAR

Writing Palestine

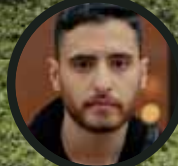
SPEAKERS




Ahmed AlNaouq
Author of *We Are Not Numbers*



Ibtisam Azem
Author of *The Book of Disappearance*




Mohammed el-Kurd
Author of *Perfect Victims* and *Rifqa*




Kamila Shamsie
Inaugural Writer-in-Residence
Georgetown University in Qatar

Writing Palestine, an evening of conversation with leading Palestinian writers and journalists. Organized in collaboration with the Palestine Festival of Literature (Palfest)—the cultural initiative that since 2008 has staged an international literary festival across historic Palestine—this discussion brings together three powerful voices who write against forgetting.



March 26, 2025
7:00 pm
Auditorium
Georgetown University Qatar

ORGANIZED IN
COLLABORATION WITH



ICC Eid Bazaar 2025

QFFD, Qatar Charity sign agreement to support flood victims in Pakistan

QNA
Doha

Chief Global Programs Officer at Qatar Charity Nawaf Abdulla al-Hammadi stated, "At Qatar Char-



ExxonMobil



Endangered dolphins spotted in Qatar’s waters



A scientific team from the Wildlife Development Department at the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change has spotted a group of Indian Ocean humpback dolphins in the northern waters of Qatar, including newborn calves, which is considered a positive indicator of the good health of the local marine ecosystem. This is also considered a significant discovery as these dolphins are classified as endangered. The Department has stressed the importance of protecting marine habitats, reducing pollution, and curbing overfishing to ensure the continued presence of these creatures within Qatar’s environment.

Health minister visits Sidra Medicine

HE Mansoor bin Ebrahim al-Mahmoud, Minister of Public Health, visited Sidra Medicine, a member of Qatar Foundation. During the visit, the minister was accompanied by Dr Iyabo Tinubu Karch, CEO of Sidra Medicine, and briefed by the hospital teams on the tertiary healthcare services provided to women, children, and young people, as well as medical education and its key role in conducting innovative medical research. Sidra Medicine provides essential services across its various clinics, including adolescent medicine, anaesthesia, cardiology, child and adolescent mental health, developmental paediatrics, endocrinology and diabetes, gastroenterology, general paediatrics, general surgery, genetics and genomics, haematology and oncology, infectious diseases, internal medicine, pulmonology, nephrology, neurology,



maternal-fetal medicine, fetal diagnostics, menopause clinic, and gynaecology. This visit is part of the minister’s field visits to public and private health facilities to check the progress of the healthcare provisions. It also underscores the Ministry of

Public Health’s commitment to supporting health facilities in delivering the best services for the people of Qatar according to top standards and in line with the National Health Strategy, the Third National Development Strategy of Qatar, and the Qatar National Vision 2030.

QIC expects outbound travel surge during Eid

Qatar Insurance Company (QIC) is expecting a significant increase in outbound travel during the Eid al-Fitr break. QIC’s internal analysis of travel insurance purchasing behaviour indicated a 50% increase in the number of outbound travellers who have already purchased travel insurance from QIC for their trips during the Eid holiday period until the end of the first week of April 2025, compared to the Eid al-Fitr holiday in 2024. Europe is the preferred destination among QIC policyholders this Eid, with over 55% considering at least one of the 29 Schengen countries. Poland is the top trending Schengen destination this Eid, followed by France, Germany, Croatia, and Portugal. Outside the Schengen zone, the UK remains the preferred destination for QIC-insured travellers this Eid. As for visitors arriving in Qatar this Eid, QIC’s data shows that nationals from Saudi Arabia, India, Algeria, Turkey, and the US are among the top purchasers of travel insurance for visiting



Ahmed al-Jarboey, QIC chief operating officer - Qatar Operations. Qatar this Eid, including both inbound travel insurance and QIC’s mandatory visitors’ health insurance. Ahmed al-Jarboey, QIC chief operating officer - Qatar Operations, said: “The Eid al-Fitr break is a preferred travel period for many citizens and residents of Qatar, and an ideal occasion for international visitors to come and experience Qatar’s festive celebrations during this joyous time. At QIC, we take pride in offering a diverse range of insurance plans that cater to every traveller

segment, ensuring worry-free journeys for everyone. “Our travel insurance solutions are carefully designed to protect travellers against unexpected financial burdens, and we are confident that Qatar-based travellers and international visitors will once again enjoy worry-free trips this Eid with QIC.” QIC offers a range of travel insurance plans, including the Worldwide Plan, which provides coverage for medical emergencies, flight delays, lost luggage and passports during global travel. The Fly Europe Plan provides up to \$50,000 in medical coverage for Schengen and other European countries, while the Regional Plan covers travel accidents, medical expenses, and legal costs for trips to the Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia, and the GCC. For international visitors, QIC offers the fastest way to obtain a mandatory visitor’s health insurance in just two minutes, starting at QR50 per month and ensuring financial protection for emergency medical treatments in Qatar.

GRSIA to reveal enhanced services for retirees soon

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter During a meeting organised by the General Retirement and Social Insurance Authority (GRSIA) with new retirees, Ahmed al-Hammadi, director general of the GRSIA, has confirmed that details of several new programmes to support retirees in the health, financial, and social sectors will be announced soon. In a speech during the meeting organised by the Authority, al-Hammadi said: “The total amount that retirees benefited through discount programmes during 2024 amounted to 140mm riyals, reflecting the importance of this programme in alleviating the financial burdens on retirees.” He pointed out that the meeting with more than 90 new retirees is not merely a social event, but rather a first step towards strengthening direct communication with new retirees, listening to their needs, and understanding their as-

pirations in this new stage of their lives. Al-Hammadi added: “Because the Authority believes in the importance of enhancing retiree services, it has already begun implementing a number of initiatives aimed at improving the retiree experience and making it smoother and easier.” He said: “These initiatives include improving customer service by enhancing the efficiency of the teams responsible for responding to inquiries, and developing the Authority’s digital platforms, both on the website and the app, to make services more accessible and to identify the need to visit the Authority’s offices.” He emphasised that retirement is the beginning of a new phase that requires appropriate planning and support. “Therefore, we assure you that the Authority is at your service, ready to listen to you, and working to provide the utmost possible support. We welcome your comments and suggestions and look forward to learning how we can improve to ensure you receive the best possible services.” He explained that the



meeting with retirees is just the beginning, explaining that the Authority has a clear vision to enhance communication with retirees through a series of events targeting various retiree segments. This includes organising future events such as awareness programmes, workshops, and programmes dedicated to health and financial planning. He said: “We will also seek to strengthen partnerships with various private and government entities by providing additional services and benefits to retirees. We will also continue working with retirees to improve existing programmes and launch new initiatives that meet their needs”

Renowned Filipino filmmaker among Qumra Masters 2025

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter Aclaimed Filipino filmmaker Lav Diaz, known for his slow-cinema masterpieces, will share his unique vision and cinematic philosophy at Qumra 2025, the Doha Film Institute (DFI) has said. Diaz has been announced as a Qumra Master for DFI’s 2025 event, joining four other renowned global film luminaries: Iranian-French cinematographer Darius Khondji, Brazilian filmmaker Walter Salles, award-winning Mexican costume designer Anna Terrazas, and celebrated genre-defying Hong Kong filmmaker Johnnie To. Qumra, a unique platform dedicated to nurturing talent and fostering hands-on development for filmmakers from Qatar, the region, and beyond, marks its 11th year and will run from April 4-9 for in-person sessions and April 12-14 online. DFI noted that Diaz, widely celebrated for his unflinching portrayal of socio-political issues and historical complexities in the Philippines, is known for challenging conventional cinematic

norms. His films, often running for several hours, invite audiences into a nuanced interplay of time and memory, prompting reflection on the relationship between the two. Some of Diaz’s notable works include his nearly 11-hour magnum opus *Evolution of a Filipino Family* (2004); *Norte, the End of History* (2013), selected in Cannes Un Certain Regard; and the Venice Golden Lion-winning *The Woman Who Left* (2016). Diaz, often referred to as the “ideological father of the New Philippine Cinema,” has inspired an entire generation of filmmakers to embrace bold, uncompromising approaches to storytelling, DFI said. In a press statement, DFI CEO Fatma Hassan Alremaihi stressed that the five new Qumra Masters 2025 now join the legacy of iconic storytellers who have supported DFI’s mission to empower important voices in film.



Lav Diaz



PHCC marks ‘Earth Hour’


The Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC) participated in the global environmental awareness initiative, Earth Hour 2025, on March 22 from 8.30pm to 9.30pm as the Facilities and Maintenance Department took part in the initiative by switching off non-essential external lights across PHCC buildings, supporting global efforts to raise environmental awareness.

Kia, Honda, Mazda models recalled

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry, in co-operation with Al-Attiya Motors and Trading Company, has announced the recall of KIA Telluride 3.8L, 2019-2020 models, as over time, the headlamp projection unit (high beam) shield gear mechanism in the headlamp assembly, can independently become damaged due to heat generated from the halogen bulb.

If this occurs, the high beam(s) is/are no longer operable. The ministry, in co-operation with Domasco (Doha Marketing Services Company), announced the recall of Honda CRF1100, 2024-2025 models, as Wheelie Control does not work based on the catalogue or owner’s manual due to a malfunction in the setting value of the wheelie ECM control

program, affecting its proper function. The ministry, in cooperation with National Car Company, has announced the recall of Mazda 3 and CX3, 2013-2020 models, as the rear-view camera may sometimes display intermittent images and blurred or distorted vision due to the rear-view camera wiring harness not being properly closed.



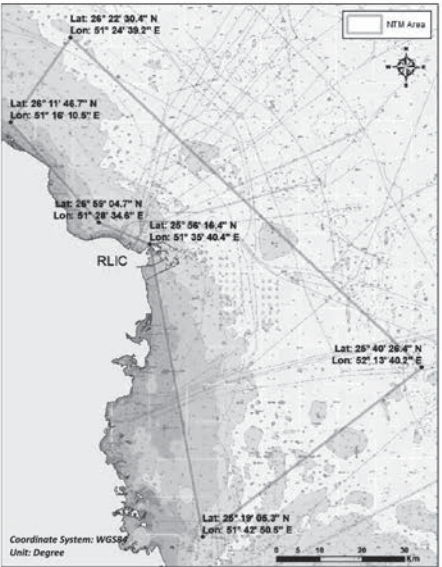
Public Announcement
To all Ships, Fishermen and Mariners
Seismic Survey Acquisition by Vessels AOS Glory, Stanford Hawk, GMS Apollo, Voyager Explorer, BGP Innovator and Safa Searcher
Seismic Survey Works Offshore Qatar from 27th November 2024 – 27th November 2025

Pursuant to and under directives from the Department of Seafarers Affairs & Registration, Ministry of Transport, State of Qatar, this announcement is to inform all Vessels, Mariners and Fishermen that QatarEnergy LNG intends to perform Ocean Bottom Node Seismic Survey Works with Vessels AOS Glory, Stanford Hawk, GMS Apollo, Voyager Explorer, BGP Innovator and Safa Searcher in the locations bound by the coordinates shown in the diagram below.

All Vessels, Mariners and Fishermen are expected to keep clear of the survey locations during the operations.

QatarEnergy LNG takes no responsibility for any loss or damage caused to outside parties in association with this operation, following publication of this notice.

Point	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE
1	26° 22' 30.4"N	51° 24' 39.2"E
2	25° 40' 26.4"N	52° 13' 40.2"E
3	25° 19' 05.3"N	51° 42' 50.5"E
4	25° 56' 16.4"N	51° 35' 40.4"E
5	25° 59' 04.7"N	51° 28' 34.6"E
6	26° 11' 46.7"N	51° 16' 10.5"E



Any further inquiries should be addressed to: Tel. +974 44531797

FP7McCANN marks 30 years in Qatar

FP7McCANN, the region's "most awarded and globally recognised" advertising agency, has marked 30 years of "creative leadership" in Qatar, a statement said yesterday.



Moustapha Mikaty

"As the only international network agency with an unbroken presence in the country, FP7McCANN has played a pivotal role in shaping Qatar's advertising landscape, delivering campaigns that elevate brands, drive engagement, and set industry standards," the statement said.

From launching Qatar Foundation (QF) and introducing McDonald's to Doha in 1995, to pioneering Qatar's first mobile Internet campaign for Ooredoo in 2008, FP7McCANN has continually redefined how brands connect with their audiences.

Its portfolio spans Qatar's most influential organisations – Ooredoo, the QF, Aspire, Qatar Airways, QNB, Qatar Islamic Bank, Qatar Development Bank, Alfardan Group, and more – delivering campaigns that resonate locally and impact globally.

"Thirty years in Qatar is not just a milestone; it's a testament to our commitment to innovation, creativity, and deep-rooted partnerships with the nation's leading brands," said FP7McCANN Doha founding partner Tariq al-Jaidah, a pioneer in Qatar's marketing industry.

FP7McCANN is also the first agency to bring home a Cannes Lions award to Qatar, positioning the nation's creative industry on the global stage.

The agency remains committed to nurturing the next generation of talent, having trained students from VCUarts Qatar and contributed to developing Qatar's creative economy.

Looking ahead, FP7McCANN is accelerating its digital and AI transformation, embedding Qatari values into its creative DNA, and forming strategic partnerships to drive the future of social media, digital marketing, and creative commerce.

A long-term client, Hassan Abdulla al-Ali, manager of the Ooredoo Creative Studio, praised the agency's dedication.

"FP7McCANN consistently delivers fresh, innovative ideas that help us achieve our marketing goals," he said. "Their execution across hundreds of campaigns each year is remarkable, and their attention to detail sets them apart."

QF marketing director Rafay M Abbasi echoed similar sentiments.

"FP7McCANN has been a trusted partner, supporting our marketing efforts for the past four years," he said.

General manager Moustapha Mikaty shared insights into the agency's future vision.

"At FP7McCANN, 30 years is not a legacy – it's a Launchpad," he said. "We've built the foundation, shaped the narrative, and now, we're redefining the future."

"With artificial intelligence (AI)-driven creativity, digital-first strategies, and an unshakable commitment to innovation, we're not just keeping pace with the industry – we're setting the agenda for what's next, and we invite organisations to join us in doing so," Mikaty added.

All-new Nissan Magnite makes regional debut

Nissan has announced the availability of the all-new Nissan Magnite for the Middle East – the first region in the world to receive the left-hand-drive (LHD) model.

Launched at an event in Riyadh, the Magnite is tailored to meet the diverse needs of customers across multiple markets, with its dynamic design, advanced features, and robust performance, a statement said yesterday.

For its compact size, the all-new Magnite stands out with its assertive and imposing grille, high ground clearance, diamond-cut alloy wheels, eye-catching design and two-tone colour options.

The five-seater Magnite has a contemporary and sleek cabin with 360 leather treatment and supported by intuitive technology features, in-

cluding a 7" fully digital instrument cluster, 8" touchscreen with wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, remote engine start, air ioniser, and a cooled glovebox.

The Magnite offers efficient performance, thanks to a turbocharged 1.0-litre engine, delivering 100 PS power and 152Nm of torque.

The safety features include Around-View Monitor, ABS, VDC, Auto Headlamps, 3-point seatbelts all around, and side curtain airbags.

Thierry Sabbagh, divisional vice-president and president – Middle East, KSA, CIS – Nissan and Infiniti, said: "Magnite shows Nissan and our strategy at its very best – dynamic eye-catching design, with Japanese DNA and engineering, produced in Nissan's India plant, and available in regions across the world."

"This SUV enhances our leader-



The Nissan Magnite.

ship in the segment and reflects Nissan's dedication to shaping the future of mobility with modern, practical vehicles," he said.

Nassim Mourani, general manager of the Automotive Group at Saleh Al Hamad Al Mana Co, said: "The introduction of the all-new Nissan Magnite marks a significant milestone in our commitment to delivering exceptional value to our customers."

"With its bold design and dynamic performance, the Magnite is crafted to ignite your character," he said. "It offers a perfect blend of advanced technology, robust performance, and safety features, making it an ideal choice for urban adventurers seeking excitement and reliability on the road."

Produced at Nissan's Alliance Plant in Chennai, the Magnite has already proven popular in India and beyond, having sold over 150,000 models since its launch in December 2020.

Previously exported to just 20



countries, world-class manufacturing capabilities have allowed the New Magnite to cater to left-hand drive countries too – opening availability to over 65 markets where the latest model will be available, starting with the Middle East region.

The all-new Nissan Magnite is now available through Nissan's partner in Qatar at Saleh Al Hamad Al Mana Co. showrooms – the exclusive agent of Nissan in Qatar – located across Qatar.

For more information or to book your test drive, visit showrooms on Salwa Road, The Pearl, Al Sadd, Bin Omran, Barwa, and Al Khor or call 8000505.

Filipino voters in Qatar urged to enrol on Comelec's portal

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

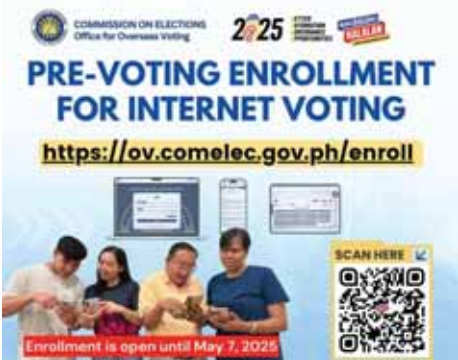
The Philippine embassy in Doha has urged all registered Filipino overseas voters to enrol on the Commission on Elections (Comelec) portal to take part in the online voting system for the 2025 national (senatorial) elections.

In a post on its Facebook page, the embassy said that the Comelec is offering three convenient methods for enrolment.

First is self-enrolment where registered voters can enrol from the comfort of their homes using their mobile phones, laptops, or desktop computers by visiting ov.comelec.gov.ph/enroll

Second is Embassy Enrolment Kiosk for those experiencing slow Internet connections or encountering technical issues with their device; and third is Field Enrolment Activities in various locations across Qatar.

Details on the schedule and locations of these activities will be announced soon.



The Comelec stressed that only registered and successfully enrolled overseas Filipino voters will be eligible to cast their votes online in the elections this year.

Filipinos in Qatar are encouraged to contact the Office for Overseas Voting PH or visit the Philippine embassy website for further information.

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Nasser Bin Khaled Automobiles presents Special Offer on Mercedes-Benz cars celebrating the Holy Month of Ramadan

The offer is valid on Mercedes-Benz electric and ICE vehicles



Celebrating the Holy Month of Ramadan, Nasser Bin Khaled Automobiles, the authorized general distributor of Mercedes-Benz in Qatar, launched a special offer on Mercedes-Benz electric and ICE vehicles cars in various categories.

Valid from 1 to 31 March 2025, the offer is presented in partnership with Qatar Islamic Bank (QIB). It allows new buyers to own their new Mercedes-Benz at a flat rate starting from 2.63% on ICE cars, and 2.58% on electric cars, 1.7% comprehensive Auto Takaful Rate, with a grace period up to 6 months. Other benefits include optional 0% down payment and Trade-in option in addition to a complimentary Credit Card for the first year.

The offer allows the customers to buy new Mercedes-Benz ICE or electric car at affordable monthly installments, starting from QAR 2,739 for the Mercedes-Benz A-Class and QAR 3,789 for the all-electric Mercedes-Benz EQA.

HE Sheikh Faleh Bin Nawaf Al Thani, General Manager of Nasser Bin Khaled Automobiles said: "We are pleased to extend our warmest congratulations to our valued customers on the occasion of the blessed month

of Ramdan and to announce the launch of exclusive special offers on a wide range of Mercedes-Benz vehicles, including both ICE and electric models. We remain committed to providing the best services and privileges to our customers in appreciation of their continued trust and in celebration of this special occasion. NBK Automobiles will continue to offer exceptional deals, providing our customers with a variety of options to own one of the best vehicles from this distinguished brand".

Customers can visit NBK Automobiles showroom on Salwa Road in Doha and leverage the opportunity to own one of Mercedes-Benz vehicles with special monthly installments and a package of special benefits.

Nasser Bin Khaled Automobiles has built its success by establishing solid, longstanding relationships with its customers, and by offering a wide range of quality products. As a brand name, Nasser Bin Khaled Automobiles is deeply associated with a history of premium quality service and market leadership. Established in 1957, Nasser Bin Khaled Automobiles is Qatar's exclusive distributor of three of the world's most respected, iconic brands: Mercedes-Maybach, Mercedes-Benz and Mercedes-AMG.

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Glimpses of Divine Mercy

Allah, The Almighty, is the Most Merciful, Most Compassionate, and He is the most Merciful of those who show mercy. His Mercy encompasses all things. Allah, The Almighty, Says (what means): {...and My Mercy embraces all things....} [Qur'an 7:156]

Allah, The Almighty, extends His Mercy to all His creation, for He knows that man was created weak and is prone to fall into sin. After promising His Mercy to humanity, Allah, The Almighty, informs them that as long as they call on Him and put their hope in Him, He will forgive them. This statement alone can convince one to have hope and never despair.

When a person calls out to Allah, The Almighty, or supplicates to Him, he is displaying his need of and dependence on Allah, The Almighty. He is demonstrating his weakness to the fact that he has no power to do anything by himself. It is the essence of submission and servitude. It is also a recognition of the Attributes of Allah, The Almighty, associated with Mercy, such as kindness, generosity, forgiveness and His unlimited power and knowledge. Human beings are always in need of Allah, The Almighty, at all times and in all circumstances. A believer always turns to Allah to ask for guidance as well as to seek forgiveness for sins and shortcomings.

In fact, The Mercy of Allah, The Almighty, extends to all His creation, not just humanity. Abu Hurairah, may Allah be pleased with him, narrated that the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Allah has one hundred parts of Mercy, of which He sent down one between the jinn, mankind, the animals and the insects; by means of which they are compassionate and merciful to one another, and by means of which wild animals are kind to their offspring. And Allah has kept back ninety-nine parts of mercy with which to be merciful to His slaves on the Day of Resurrection." [Muslim]

It was narrated that 'Umar ibn al-Khattaab, may Allah be pleased with him, said: "Some prisoners were brought to the Messenger of Allah, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, and there was a woman among the prisoners who was searching (for her child). When she found her child she embraced him and put him to her breast. The Messenger of Allah, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said to us: 'Do you think that this woman would throw her child in the fire?' We said, 'No, by Allah, if she is not obliged to do so.' The Messenger of Allah, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: 'Allah is more merciful to His slaves



than this woman is to her child." [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

One aspect of the Mercy of Allah to His slaves is that He sent them Messengers and revealed the Books and laws to organize their lives in a wise manner, far from hardship and difficulty. Allah, The Almighty Says (what means): {And We have sent you (O Muhammad) not but as a mercy for the 'Alameen (mankind, jinn and all that exists).} [Qur'an 21:107]

The Mercy of Allah, The Almighty, is the means through which His believing slaves will be admitted to Paradise on the Day of Resurrection. No one will ever enter Paradise because of his deeds alone, as the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "No one will enter Paradise thanks to his deeds." They said, "Not even you, O Messenger of Allah?" He, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said, "No, not even me, unless Allah shower me with His Mercy. So try to be close to perfection. And no one should wish for death; if he is doing good deeds, he will do more of them, and if he is sinning, he may repent." [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

Thus, the believer must remain in a state between hope and fear, hoping for the Mercy of Allah, The Almighty, and fearing His Punishment; Allah, The Almighty Says (what means):

- {Declare (O Muhammad) unto My slaves, that truly, I am the Oft-Forgiving, the Most-Merciful. And that My Torment is indeed the most painful torment.} [Qur'an 15:49-50]

- {Say: O My servants who have transgressed against their own souls, despair not of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins. Truly, He is Most Forgiving, Most Merciful.} [Qur'an 39:53]

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

Commercial Bank embraces Holy Month with CSR initiatives across Qatar

Commercial Bank has launched a series of initiatives to celebrate the Holy Month of Ramadan across Qatar.

Commercial Bank has always been a driving force in the world of Corporate Social Responsibility. Having kept the community's well-being at the top of its priorities, the Bank was driven to give back, foster positive change, and ignite hope.

To fully embrace the spirit of generosity and compassion during Ramadan, the bank distributed Iftar to the less fortunate and partnered with Qatar Charity to host 'Iftar Jawal' where staff members distributed Iftar boxes to individuals.

The bank also partnered with the Centre for Empowerment and Elderly Care (Ehsan) and hosted a Suhoor event for the elderly. The event took place at Bayt Al Waldah Restaurant in Old Doha Port, where the elders passed on their life experiences, particularly regarding tradition and culture, to their staff members.

Moreover, Commercial Bank hosted its annual staff Suhoor on March 18, 19, and 23 at St. Regis Hotel, bringing employees together, with the presence of the Chairman, Board Members, Exco Members, and Group CEO. The event aimed to connect employees and celebrate the spirit of Ramadan. The bank also expanded its



range of initiatives to celebrate Garangao with a series of school visits and branch festivities where gifts were distributed to kids.

Customers were also invited to join the staff for fun, gifts, and celebrations at its Vendome CB Premium Branch.

Hussein al-Abdulla, executive general manager (Marketing and CB Real Estate) at Commercial Bank said, "Commercial Bank's longstanding commitment to

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has been an inbuilt element of the bank's structure and its commitment to giving back to the wider community is in support of Qatar National Vision 2030.

"Every endeavour we undertake is driven by one single goal and that is to give customers an enriching experience. During the Holy Month, this mission becomes even more significant because we strive to not only spread joy but bring the spirit

of Ramadan to everyone."

Alanoud Abdulaziz al-Emadi, manager, Sponsorship and Events at Commercial Bank said: "Throughout Ramadan, we reinforced our dedication to Corporate Social Responsibility, striving to make a lasting positive impact on our community. "We remain committed to driving continuous change in Qatar, with the aim of offering every individual the chance to embrace a brighter, more hopeful future."

2,700 attend Ramadan lecture by Mufti Menk at Msheirib

As part of its advocacy efforts aimed at promoting Ramadan values and instilling Islamic morals, the Abdullah bin Zaid Al Mahmoud Islamic Cultural Centre (Fanar), affiliated with the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs, has organised a lecture.



Titled 'Why Ramadan?', the lecture delivered by noted preacher Mufti Ismail Menk, was attended by approximately 2,700 people at the Eid prayer area in Msheireb Downtown Doha, an Awqaf state-

ment said.

The aim was to understand the wisdom behind Ramadan fasting.

The lecturer said Ramadan comes every year in a Muslim's life to renew his pledge to various Islamic worship and rituals including fasting, standing in prayer and connecting with the Holy Qur'an.

"Ramadan teaches us patience and trains us on it through our abstaining from the permissible things we are familiar with, such as food, drink and other things that are permissible in other months from sunrise to sunset," he said.

He pointed out that the month of Ramadan is thus an intensive course in various acts of worship, coming every year in a Muslim's life to renew his pledge to the various Islamic values and renew his connection with Allah through the spiritual atmosphere that is not available during other months.

"Ramadan comes to change the life of a Muslim for the better and prevents him from the negative things that he has become accustomed to. It is an opportunity for all of us to change our behaviour for the better by adhering to Islamic etiquette," he said.



He pointed out that fasting is intended to change a Muslim's entire life including his daily habits. "Ramadan was prescribed to make us more aware of the value of time and the value of life through intensive training in worship. This is achieved by subduing our desires, achieving the piety desired by the prescription of fasting, enhancing our self-worth, and elevating our goals to attain

the pleasure of Allah," he said.

Dr Saleh bin Ali al-Marri, Fanar director, said that preacher Mufti Ismail Menk enjoys widespread acceptance. "He has a great influence and a distinctive style in preaching and speaking to people. He explained that his preaching style combines scientific foundations and the ability to deliver information to all segments of society," he said.

KMC provides tips for easing joint pain

Experts at the Korean Medical Center (KMC) in Lusail provide specialised guidance on stretching exercises that can be performed before and after prayer to help alleviate joint and lower back pain, a statement said.

By incorporating practical physiotherapy-backed techniques, individuals can reduce strain and improve mobility, allowing for a more comfortable and fulfilling prayer experience.

Dr Youngwoong Back, head of the Spine & Joint Centre at KMC, explains: "Simple stretching exercises and strengthening the supporting muscles can help reduce joint stress, enhance mobility, and make prayer movements more comfortable and fluid."

Experts at KMC's Spine & Joint Centre emphasise that practising stretching exercises before and after prayer can significantly contribute to alleviating joint pain and enhancing comfort during the movements.

Maintaining body flexibility, improving prayer posture, and strengthening supportive muscles are essential factors for joint health and preventing chronic strain.

One of the most effective ways to prepare the body for prayer is through gentle stretching before and after each session. A few minutes of targeted movements can improve



flexibility, reduce stiffness, and support smoother transitions between standing, kneeling, and prostration.

Dr Back emphasises the importance of flexibility in preventing pain. "When the joints are stiff, movements become more difficult and force other areas of the body to compensate, increasing strain." Several simple stretches can be particularly effective. A seated knee stretch, where one leg is extended forward while flexing the foot, helps relieve pressure from the knees. A gentle forward bend from a standing position can ease lower back tension, while a hip-opening stretch, where one ankle is placed over the opposite knee while seated, can improve mobility and reduce stiffness in the hips.

Correcting posture during prayer can significantly reduce joint strain. Ensuring proper

alignment in sujood helps distribute weight evenly across the knees and toes, preventing excessive pressure on a single area.

When performing ruku, the back should remain straight, avoiding overextension or excessive arching of the lower spine, which can cause pain over time. Many people unknowingly put too much strain on their lower back during bowing by leaning too far forward. Maintaining a neutral spine can prevent long-term discomfort.

Strengthening the muscles that support the joints is crucial for maintaining pain-free movement. The quadriceps, lower back, and core play an essential role in supporting the body's weight during prayer. When these muscle groups are weak, the joints bear the brunt of the pressure, increasing the

risk of pain and inflammation. Building muscle strength through simple, low-impact exercises can provide additional stability and improve endurance for prolonged standing or kneeling. Wall sits, where an individual leans against a wall and lowers into a squat, can strengthen the quadriceps without putting excessive pressure on the knees. Leg raises, performed while lying down, engage the quadriceps and improve knee stability. Core activation, including gentle abdominal bracing, can help reduce pressure on the lower back and improve posture.

For individuals experiencing chronic discomfort, additional joint care strategies can enhance mobility and reduce pain. Applying heat therapy before prayer can help relax muscles and improve circulation, making movement easier. Cold therapy after prayer can reduce inflammation and prevent soreness, especially for those with arthritis or joint sensitivity. For some, joint pain persists despite making these adjustments. If discomfort worsens over time or begins to interfere with daily activities, seeking medical support may be necessary.

At KMC's Spine & Joint Centre, specialists provide non-surgical treatment options tailored to each individual's needs.

MDD sees 30% surge in visitors, growing cultural engagement in Ramadan

Msheireb Downtown Doha (MDD) saw record-breaking Ramadan attendance, welcoming more than a million visitors from March 1 to 19 - a 30% jump from last year - fuelled by popular cultural events, spiritual gatherings, and luxury dining experiences.

"The growth in visitor numbers and engagement this year reflects how the downtown brings together tradition and modernity, offering meaningful experiences to all who visit," Msheireb Properties' Corporate Communications senior director Dr Hafiz Ali Abdulla said in a press statement.

The Garangao celebrations on March 14 and 15 attracted thousands of families, with 1,800 children and parents enjoying a themed tram ride featuring traditional drummers and Garangao songs. Children received sweets and visited MDD residents in traditional attire to share the festive spirit.


Hosh Msheireb's Garangao event on March 15 witnessed more than 2,000 visitors, doubling last year's attendance. A highlight was the Kids' Fashion Show, where children showcased traditional attire, and the winner received a family staycation at a prestigious Msheireb hotel.

Hosh Msheireb remained a prominent community space, receiving 12,000 visitors. The venue hosted a variety of cultural and educational activities, including 1,000 visits to the Company House. The Kids' Zone saw more than 8,000 children engaged in its activities, while the "Back to Msheireb" exhibition attracted over 1,500 visitors, further contributing to the area's significance as a hub for cultural exchange and learning.


MDD also reinforced its status as a spiritual hub, hosting esteemed scholars and reciters, including Sheikh Raad al-Kurdi, Sheikh Mohammed al-Awadhi, Sheikh Abdulaziz Sahim, and Mufti Ismail Menk, whose special sermon attracted over 3,000 attendees at the Eid Musala.

Attendance at Isha and Tarawih prayers reached 70,000 worshippers, marking a 75% increase from 2024. At Mandarin Oriental, Doha, Ramadan dining exceeded expectations, with Suhoor and Iftar drawing an exceptional turnout. Approximately 9,000 guests were served, marking a 54.5% increase and highlighting the growing demand for luxury dining in MDD.







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A Transformational Eid Escape at Zulal Wellness Resort by Chiva-Som

Reconnect, rejuvenate and rediscover wellness and holistic health at Zulal Wellness Resort this Eid Al Fitr with a family-friendly kids on us offer and wellness plus, an experience designed for couples



As the GCC prepares for the long Eid Al Fitr break, which is set to start on 30 March, Zual Wellness Resort by Chiva-Som invites guests to embrace the holiday with a transformative escape, designed for ultimate relaxation and family connection.

Nestled in a private coastal sanctuary in northern Qatar, Zula Wellness Resort is the Middle East's largest and most immersive wellness destination which offers bespoke experiences tailored to individual needs. This Eid, guests can choose between two distinct stays including Kids On Us offer at the family-friendly Zula Discovery resort or Wellness Plus at the adults-only Zula Serenity, ensuring a holistic wellness experience for all ages.

With personalised wellness consultations, nourishing Traditional Arabic and Islamic Medicine (TAIM) cuisine and an unmatched selection of treatments and therapies, the resort provides an idyllic sanctuary in a serene coastal setting to reconnect with loved ones or embark on a solo journey of transformation this Eid.

Kids On Us

Families looking for a restorative getaway can take advantage of the Kids On Us offer. When two adults book one room with a full retreat each, Zulal Wellness Resort provides a complimentary room and three meals per night of stay for two children up to the age of 16. Children also enjoy access to scheduled age-appropriate daily activities at Discovery Oasis, creating the perfect environment for family bonding and wellness.

Offer Inclusions:

- Complimentary accommodation for two children (up to the age of 16)
 - Family consultation with a Health and Wellness Advisor upon arrival
 - Three wellness meals per night of stay, served in the resort's signature dining outlets
 - Access to scheduled family activities at Discovery Oasis
- This offer applies to families of two adults with up to two children (16 or under). Enjoy a complimentary children's room for every paid adult's room when both adults book a full retreat at Zula Discovery. Connecting family rooms are subject to availability and additional children can be accommodated at an extra cost.

Wellness Plus

Designed for guests seeking an extended retreat, the Wellness Plus offer allows guests to enjoy more rejuvenation for less with a five night retreat for the price of just four nights.

**Offer Inclusions:**

- Personalised health and wellness consultation
- One additional daily treatment per night of stay, choosing from:

- « Invigorating massage
- « Signature full-body Tadleek massage
- « Oriental scalp massage
- « Signature Al Qadam foot massage
- Three wellness meals per night of stay, served in the resort's dining outlets (breakfast, lunch, and dinner)
- Access to scheduled wellness activities and fitness sessions
- In-room daily replenished wellness minibar

These offers are valid throughout 2025, subject to availability, and applicable to new bookings only. It cannot be combined with any other promotions or offers.

Zulal Wellness Resort continues to lead the way in holistic wellness, blending Traditional Arabic and Islamic Medicine (TAIM) with modern wellbeing practices. Whether seeking relaxation, family bonding, or a transformative wellness journey, Zulal provides an unparalleled Eid experience for each member of the family to cherish and remember.



For more information or reservations, please email Zula Wellness Resort by Chiva-Som at reservations@zula.com, call/WhatsApp +974 4477 6555 or visit www.zula.com.



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Amina Qutba (centre) with women from the diplomatic and business communities.

Ramadan gathering with diplomatic touch

Amina Abdullah Qutba, wife of Counsellor Ali al-Zainal, hosted a Suhoor banquet for women from the Qatari and Arab society, as well as women from the diplomatic corps accredited to the country.

The event was attended by women of the diplomatic community from Arab countries, North America, Latin America, Europe, and Africa. This heritage event also included businesswomen from the Qatari community, as well as social media influencers and Qatar TV.

As part of its Ramadan Majlis, host Qutba highlighted the Garangao event and its continuity in the history of Qatari society as a societal legacy and an annual Ramadan tradition. Qutba explained that the goal of this event is to connect with friends and loved ones during the blessed days. In addition, it is also to introduce women from different countries and continents to the Garangao celebration and to reveal what it means to Qatari society.

She added: "This night marks the middle of the holy month, so that those who are fasting can sharpen their resolve to complete the remainder of it through fasting, prayer, reading the Qur'an, giving charity, and other acts of worship."

Qutba explained that Garangao



Amina Qutba

night represents a special social occasion that promotes the spirit of heritage and community cohesion. Children wear traditional costumes and roam the neighbourhoods singing folk songs, as well as receiving sweets and nuts from residents.

She pointed out that the name originates from the sound of nuts clashing inside the cloth bags that children carry as they move from house to house. The pronunciation of the word varies between Gulf countries.

Qutba emphasised that Garangao Night also contributes to introducing new generations to the customs of their ancestors

and strengthening Qatari national identity. The host explained that Garangao Night remains one of the most beautiful Ramadan occasions that children in Qatar eagerly await, as it brings a blend of joy, generosity, and authenticity. Despite the developments of modern life, Qataris are still keen to revive this beautiful tradition. Reflecting the depth of their connection to their heritage and identity, Qutba concluded her remarks by saying that this event, which brought together women from different continents, is part of "Our Majlis" initiative, founded by Amina Qutba and her husband, adviser Ali al-Zainal.

They have transformed their Majlis into a place for cultural exchange and an oasis for showcasing Qatari culture to residents of Qatar, in a family-friendly atmosphere that is free of pretentiousness.

The women in attendance praised the important initiative, which allowed them to learn about many aspects of Qatari society that were previously unknown to them. This included Ramadan customs and the daily lives of Qatari women. The focus was on traditional Qatari women's clothing, Ramadan chants, and traditional Ramadan dishes, such as thareed, harees, makbous, and other dishes.

Qatar Charity launches '27th Night Challenge' to rebuild Syrians' homes

As part of its Ramadan campaign 'Giving Lives On', Qatar Charity (QC) will host the '27th Night Challenge', the largest YouTube fundraising event, under the slogan 'Rebuilding Hope' tomorrow (Wednesday).

The event aims to raise QR40mn to support the rebuilding of 1,500 homes in Syria, enabling displaced families to return and restoring essential services for a safer, more stable environment, a statement said yesterday.

The '27th Night Challenge' event will take place at Wisdom Square in the Katara Cultural Village, featuring social media influencers Abdulla al-Ghafri, Dr Abdulrahman al-Harami, and Mohammad Adnan.

The event will also include live video calls with several Syrian influencers and media figures from displacement camps in Syria. The challenge will run for three days, starting on the 25th night of Ramadan and ending Wednesday (the 27th night of Ramadan) at midnight.

The challenge takes place during the Last Ten Days of Ramadan, the most auspicious nights, reflecting QC's dedication to raising awareness of humanitarian issues and mobilising support for impactful charitable projects that make a difference in the lives of



beneficiaries, especially in crisis-stricken regions.

Ahmad Yousef Fakhroo, chief marketing officer at QC, called upon Qatar's benefactors – individuals, companies, and organisations – to maximise the blessings of Ramadan by contributing to vital reconstruction efforts in Syria. He urged them to give their Zakat and Sadaqah to rebuild homes for displaced Syrians, ending their camp suffering and restoring dignified living conditions after 14 years of crisis.

The reconstruction project, funded by the 27th Night Challenge, will be implemented in the Hama countryside, an area devastated by bombings. This initiative aims to restore 1,500 homes, enabling families to return, while also rebuilding vital infrastructure, in-

cluding a health centre, mosques, primary, preparatory, and secondary schools, a kindergarten, and 50 commercial shops. Upon completion, the project will help close displacement camps, ending years of hardship, and allowing families to return to their homes, revitalising their communities.

QC has urged benefactors in Qatar to take advantage of these blessed nights and support the '27th Night Challenge' by donating to the reconstruction project in the Hama countryside, Syria, offering displaced families hope and stability. Donations can be made via qch.qa/27, through the "Home Collector" service on the QC app (<https://qch.qa/appen>), by calling 44290000, or at QC branches and collectors in shopping malls.

Qatar Charity's Ramadan food baskets benefit orphans in Sudan

Continuing the charitable efforts of the people of Qatar, field teams from Qatar Charity (QC) in Sudan distributed Ramadan food baskets to the mothers of sponsored orphans in Sheikh Aisha bint Hamad Al-Attiya City, 'Rafaqa,' in the River Nile State.

This distribution is part of the larger 'Giving Lives On' campaign carried out across 40 countries worldwide.

Dr Tahani Mirghani, the Minister of Social Affairs for River Nile State, appreciated the generous support provided by the people of Qatar for the Iftar project run by QC. The project focuses on supporting vulnerable families, orphans, and widows.

She highlighted QC's proactive role in aiding families affected by the war, offering support in the form of food, shelter, and health supplies.

Mohamed Ahmed Hamdo, executive director of the Damer locality, noted that QC has made significant contributions, providing high-quality support to



families in need, especially during these challenging times.

The Iftar project, which QC has been running in Sudan for nearly three decades, aims to distribute Ramadan food baskets to 14,280 beneficiaries this season. This includes families of sponsored and unsponsored orphans, displaced families, and others in need due to the ongoing conflict.

Several mothers of orphans sponsored by QC in Sheikh Aisha City, expressed their gratitude for the Ramadan food baskets. Huda al-Amin said that the food basket she received contained all the necessary items and arrived at a crucial time. "We pray that Allah rewards the generous donors from Qatar for their kindness," she added.



Sheikh Abdulla bin Zaid Al Mahmoud Center holds lecture on Ramadan

The Sheikh Abdulla bin Zaid Al Mahmoud Islamic Cultural Center of the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs (Awqaf) held an educational lecture in English entitled "Why Ramadan," as part of its efforts to bolster religious values during the holy month of Ramadan and consolidate Islamic ethics.

Delivered by preacher Ismail Menk, the lecture brought together approximately 2,700 individuals at the Msheireb Eid prayer ground in Doha, with the intent of understanding the wisdom behind imposing fasting on Muslims.

Menk highlighted that Ramadan is annually observed by Muslims to renew their pledge to

worship and perform a variety of Islamic rituals, such as reading the Holy Qur'an. He emphasised that the holy month teaches people about patience, which is repeatedly practiced through fasting from dawn to dusk.

Ramadan is an intensive course in various types of worship in the life of Muslims each year, strengthening their connection with Allah, the Almighty, as well as rejuvenating faith in the spiritual atmosphere unique to this holy month. He added that Ramadan is meant to transform lives for the better and dissuade Muslims from engaging in negative acts, providing an opportunity for all to change behaviours and adhere to

the Islamic precepts as ordained in the sacred Hadiths.

In addition, Menk spoke about the negative habits associated with Ramadan worship, which sometimes overshadow the spiritual essence of the acts, turning them into mere routines. He emphasised that fasting is meant to transform the entire life of a Muslim, including daily habits, as Ramadan was prescribed to make Muslims more aware of the value of time and life. Through intensive training in worship, Ramadan elevates them above desires, achieving the piety intended by fasting, while enhancing self-worth and striving towards divine approval. (QNA)

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Burkina journalists held after defending freedom of speech: media body

Authorities detained two journalists in Burkina Faso yesterday after the media body to which they belong denounced attacks on freedom of expression under the country's military rulers, the association said.

The Journalists' Association of Burkina Faso said on Facebook that its president Guezouma Sanogo and deputy president Boukari Ouoba were detained at a national press centre in the capital Ouagadougou and taken to an unknown destination.

Burkina has seen numerous kidnappings of people viewed as critical of the junta under its chief Ibrahim Traore since he led a coup in 2022.

In remarks to the association's congress on Friday, Sanogo criticised "attacks on the freedom of expression and the press", saying that they had "reached an unprecedented level".

Other journalists spoke at the congress of the abductions of seven colleagues last year, some of whom are still missing.

Media rights group Reporters Without Borders (RSF) demanded the authorities "make known where they are detained" and "release them without delay", in a statement sent to AFP.

The style of arrest – by individuals presenting themselves as intelligence police – "resembles numerous other arrests and abductions organised by the military authorities since their arrival in power", said RSF's sub-Saharan Africa director, Sadibou Marong.

Last week, a political group said five of its members including a journalist had been abducted after the group denounced civilian massacres blamed on the army and allied militias.

The group, SENS, had criticised videos posted on social media over the past week showing dozens of bloodied bodies with hands and feet bound, many of them appearing to be women, children or elderly.

Burkinabe authorities have denied the accusations of mass killings by its soldiers and allied militias.

International non-governmental organisations (NGOs), including RSF and Amnesty International have condemned several of the kidnappings of journalists.

RSF said in its statement yesterday that the arrests were "part of a strategy aiming to systematically silence all critical voices in the country".

NGOs have also reported cases of people being forcibly recruited into the security forces to be sent to fight religious militants, following a mobilisation order in 2023.

The campaigners say the order targets figures critical of the country's leaders.

The military authorities in Burkina Faso have also suspended several international media organisations, accusing them of publishing false information about the conflict. – **AFP**

Tunisia probes ride-hailing apps for money laundering

Tunisia has launched an investigation into alleged money laundering and tax fraud involving ride-hailing applications, the interior ministry said yesterday.

Authorities also said that they are suspending the apps. "The financial division of the National Guard has uncovered suspicions of money laundering and tax evasion among operators of private taxi ride-hailing apps," the ministry said in a statement.

The statement did not name the apps, but a source familiar with the matter told AFP the main company under scrutiny was the Estonia-based Bolt.

The ride-hailing app, operating in more than 500 cities from over 45 countries, is widely used in Tunisia, where public transportation infrastructure is inadequate.

Tunisian authorities said they have seized about 12mn dinars (\$3.8mn) from accounts linked to multiple ride-hailing apps.

They said the companies had been removed from the commercial registry and their offices shut for allegedly operating without proper licences and using fraudulent authorisations.

They were also accused of using bank accounts to illegally funnel funds abroad. – **AFP**

Bosnian community in Qatar provides over 1,000 Iftar meals to workers

The Bosnian community in Qatar has provided over 1,000 Iftar meals to workers in the Abu Nakhlah area, in collaboration with Wahab, a local organisation devoted to minimising food waste and promoting sustainability.

"Ramadan teaches us the importance of empathy, kindness, and community," Dr Vahid Suljic, a founding member of the Bosnian community initiative, said in a statement.

"We are honoured to contribute to a country that has embraced us, and we hope to pass on that warmth to others," he said.

"Qatar's welcoming, multicultural spirit encourages us to grow not only as individuals but as a community," Suljic added. "It inspires a collective sense of purpose – where acts of kindness multiply and everyone feels seen, supported, and empowered."



Over the past three years, the Bosnian community has distributed more than 4,500 Iftar meals to those in need.

East Congo ceasefire in trouble as rebels stay in strategic town

Reuters/AFP
Johannesburg

Ad facto ceasefire between Congolese forces and Rwandan-backed rebels in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo) town of Walikale appeared to have broken down yesterday, with the rebels going back on a pledge to withdraw and accusing the army of violating its own commitments.

The prospect of a ceasefire in the strategic town of Walikale, which the M23 rebels captured last week, had briefly fuelled hopes of reviving stalled diplomatic efforts to resolve eastern DR Congo's biggest conflict in decades.

The conflict, rooted in the long fallout from the 1994 genocide in Rwanda and competition for control of mineral riches, has led to rebel control of eastern DR Congo's two largest cities, thousands of deaths and fears of a wider regional war.

However, less than 48 hours after the rebels announced their intention to withdraw from Walikale and DR Congo's army responded by saying it would refrain from attacking them, the arrangement risked going the way of a string of prior failed ceasefires.

Lawrence Kanyuka, the spokesperson for M23's Congo River Alliance (AFC) rebel coalition, accused the army and allied militias of not withdrawing their attack drones from Walikale.

"This situation delays the repositioning of AFC/M23 forces in the zone," he wrote



This picture taken last month shows members of the M23 rebel group standing guard at a rally in Bukavu. – **Reuters**

on X. "It should be noted that this act constitutes a major obstacle to respecting the ceasefire and thus compromises peace initiatives underway"

Army spokespeople did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Residents of Walikale, which marked the farthest west M23 had reached since escalating their offensive in January, said rebel fighters were still in town yesterday morning.

"They haven't moved. They are still visible in the centre of town," said one, speak-

ing on condition of anonymity.

Attempts to bring the DR Congo and the rebels to the negotiating table have repeatedly failed.

The two sides were scheduled to hold direct talks for the first time in Angola last week after Kinshasa dropped its longstanding refusal to speak to the rebels, but M23 then pulled out in protest of European Union sanctions against its leaders and Rwandan officials.

Angola meanwhile said yesterday that it was pulling back from efforts to mediate in

the conflict and that another African state would take its place.

President Joao Lourenco, the current chairperson of the African Union (AU), had been trying to facilitate a lasting ceasefire but his office said in a statement that Angola needed to devote itself more to the AU's overall priorities.

Lourenco was named mediator by the AU in 2022 in an attempt to pacify the protracted conflict in mineral-rich eastern DR Congo.

"Angola recognises the need to free itself from the responsibility of mediating this conflict ... in order to more comprehensively focus on the general priorities established by the continental organisation," the presidency said in a statement.

The southern African country took up the rotating presidency of the AU two months ago.

Luanda added that "necessary steps" would be taken with the AU Commission to "find the country whose head of state ... should take over the mediation".

"Angola has always believed in the need for direct negotiations between the DR Congo government and the M23," the presidency said.

The DR Congo, the United Nations and Western countries all accuse Rwanda of providing arms and troops to the ethnic Tutsi-led M23.

Rwanda denies supporting M23 and says its military has been acting in self-defence against the DR Congo army and a militia founded by perpetrators of the 1994 genocide.

S Africa, DR Congo discuss boosting 'defence capabilities'

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo)'s defence minister began a visit to South Africa yesterday aimed at strengthening "strategic defence capabilities" between the two countries, South Africa's government said.

The visit, due to last until Thursday, comes against the backdrop of an escalating conflict in the mineral-rich east of the DR Congo, where South African troops deployed with a mission of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) have suffered severe losses.

"This visit aims to further strengthen and enhance the longstanding bilateral defence relations between South Africa and the DR Congo," South Africa's defence ministry said in a statement.

The talks between Congolese Defence Minister Guy Kabombo Muadiamvita and his South African counterpart Angie Mot-

shekga will focus on "key areas of defence cooperation and bolstering strategic defence capabilities", it added.

The partnership is "crucial for fostering peace, security and stability across the region", the ministry said.

Fourteen South African soldiers were killed in January in eastern DR Congo, where the Rwanda-backed M23 armed group has launched a lightning offensive, seizing large swathes of land and key cities.

Most of the soldiers were from the SADC mission sent in December 2023 to help the government of the DR Congo – also a SADC member – to restore peace and security.

At least two of the troops killed were deployed as part of a separate United Nations peacekeeping force.

Following the deaths, a row erupted between South African President Cyril Ramaphosa and his Rwandan counterpart Paul

Kagame, with the latter tweeting that the southern African troops were "not a peacekeeping force" but were "engaging in offensive combat operations to help the DR Congo government".

"If South Africa prefers confrontation, Rwanda will deal with the matter in that context any day," Kagame posted on X.

The SADC announced mid-March that it would end its military deployment, of which the bulk of the troops are from South Africa.

On March 18, Qatar unexpectedly announced it had hosted the Rwandan and Congolese presidents for talks in which they "reaffirmed the commitment of all parties to an immediate and unconditional ceasefire".

However, despite the announcement, the M23 last week took control of the mining hub of Walikale, the farthest west the group has advanced into the interior of the DR Congo since 2012. – **AFP**

'Bandits' kill 10 members of militia backed by Nigeria govt

Criminal gangs in northwest Nigeria's Zamfara state killed at least 10 members of government-backed militia forces in an ambush at the weekend, the state governor said.

Zamfara is one of several states in northwestern and central Nigeria terrorised by criminal gangs – called bandits by locals – who raid villages and kill and abduct residents across the country's rural hinterlands, where government presence, infrastructure and security has long been scarce.

Last year, Zamfara state government set up the Zamfara Community Guards, comprising 5,200 personnel to secure communities.

The militia members were returning from a "hugely successful" joint operation with military troops against bandits in their Sunke forest stronghold in Anka district when they fell into an ambush, Dauda Lawal Dare, Zamfara state governor said in a statement.

"On their way back from the operation ... they were ambushed by bandits in Bagega village where they killed six community protection guards and four vigilantes," Dare said.

Vigilante groups, unlike the community guards, are unpaid volunteers.

Three militiamen were still missing, Dare said.

A large number of bandits were killed and a huge arsenal was recovered in the Sunke forest raid, he added.

Nigeria's various bandit gangs, who maintain camps in a huge forest straddling Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna and Niger states, are notorious for mass kidnappings.

In January, 21 government militiamen were killed in an ambush by bandits in neighbouring Katsina state while returning from a condolence visit to the family of their dead colleague.

In 2023, Katsina state established Katsina Community Watch Corps (KCWC) comprising around 2,000 militia members to assist the military and police in fighting bandits. – **AFP**

South Sudan suffers worst cholera outbreak in 20 years: Unicef

AFP
Nairobi

South Sudan is suffering its worst cholera outbreak since it became an independent nation in 2011, the United Nations warned yesterday, reporting almost 700 deaths in six months, including many children.

The organisation's children's fund Unicef said that 40,000 cholera cases were reported from the end of September to March 18, "including 694 deaths country-wide, its worst outbreak in 20 years".

"This is the worst outbreak South Sudan as an independent country has ever faced," Unicef emergency specialist Verity Rushton told AFP, speaking from the capital Juba.

Half the cases were children under 15 years old, the Unicef said, with Rushton adding that "a third of the deaths that have been reported are children under the age of 14".

Deeply impoverished despite its major oil deposits, the nation has been plagued by insecurity since declaring independence.

Parts of the country have lately seen fresh waves of violence, with clashes between forces allied to President Salva Kiir and his long-time rival, First Vice-President Riek Machar, displacing tens of thousands.

Of South Sudan's 10 states, Rushton said, nine have been impacted by cholera with the majority of cases in Jonglei in the east.

South Sudan and Angola face the most severe of several outbreaks across eastern and southern Africa, the agency said.

Angola reported over 7,500 cases, including 294 deaths, from January 7 to March 18, the Unicef said, warning there were "high risks for further escalation".

Doctors Without Borders (MSF) warned yesterday that cholera was spreading rapidly as people in South Sudan fled for safety.

The medical charity has treated 400 cholera patients in one county alone in Upper Nile State in the northeast, it said, warning the disease had spread to neighbouring Jonglei state where the MSF runs a 100-bed treatment unit.

"With cholera spreading rapidly and violence ongoing, the need for medical care in Upper Nile State is more critical than ever," said Zakaria Mwata, MSF head of mission in South Sudan.

Earlier this month, the UN Office for the

Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in South Sudan said that 50,000 people had been displaced since February as violence flared in Upper Nile State.

It said a cholera treatment unit in the state's Nasir county had closed, with 23 humanitarian workers forced to leave.

The region has been the main focus of clashes that threaten a fragile power-sharing agreement between Kiir and Machar.

South Sudan has seen a steady increase in cholera over the past three years.

It is an acute form of diarrhoea that is treatable with antibiotics and hydration, but can be deadly if untreated.

In 2022, the country suffered its first cholera resurgence in five years, following an outbreak between June 2016 and December 2017 that killed 436 people.

12 prisoners escape in early morning jailbreak in central Nigeria

AFP
Lagos

Twelve prisoners escaped in an early morning jailbreak in central Nigeria yesterday, authorities said.

The escape is the latest in a country where old infrastructure

and overcrowding are often faulted for such incidents, although Femi Fanwo, the Kogi State Commissioner for Information, blamed the breakout on "internal compromise and collaboration".

"The circumstances surrounding the escape, including reports suggesting that the inmates fled through the tower without caus-

ing structural damage to the facility, raise serious concerns that necessitate a thorough investigation," Fanwo said in a statement.

One of the prisoners has been apprehended, he said.

With deteriorating infrastructure and an overpopulation rate of 147%, according to the UN, many prisons in the west African nation

are vulnerable to escapes.

The UN blames excessive use of pre-trial detention for the overcrowding, with prisoners often waiting years before their trials are held.

Earlier this month, Interior Minister Olubunmi Tunji-Ojo said that some 4,000 prisoners were pardoned in 2024 to help

ease congestion in the prisons and cut government spending.

Yesterday Tunji-Ojo ordered an investigation into the Kogi state jailbreak.

Last year, nearly 120 people escaped after torrential rains brought down buildings and a perimeter wall in Suleja prison, near the capital, Abuja.



Trump takes challenge to judge’s rehiring order to Supreme Court

Reuters
Washington

President Donald Trump's administration brought its bid to purge the federal workforce to the US Supreme Court yesterday, challenging a judicial directive to rehire thousands of fired government employees and arguing that the judge overstepped his authority.

The Justice Department in a filing asked the Supreme Court to block a March 13 order by San Francisco-based US District Judge William Alsup for six federal agencies to reinstate thousands of probationary – meaning recently hired – employees dismissed as part of Trump's campaign to downsize and reshape the government.

The judge faulted the administration for improperly terminating en masse the probationary workers and cast doubt on the

justification presented by the government that the firings were the result of poor employee performance.

In its filing, the Justice Department said that Alsup's order lets the plaintiffs in the case “hijack the employment relationship between the federal government and its workforce”, violating the separation of power between the judiciary and executive branches of the government.

These two branches as well as the legislative branch – Congress – were established as coequal in the US Constitution in order to provide checks and balances to the power they wield.

“This court should stop the ongoing assault on the constitutional structure before further damage is wrought,” the department added.

Probationary workers typically have less than one year of service in their current roles, though some are longtime federal

employees serving in new roles.

They have fewer job protections than other government workers, but in general can be fired only for poor job performance.

The actions by the judge represented a significant blow for a high-profile effort by Trump and billionaire adviser Elon Musk to drastically shrink the federal bureaucracy.

Unions, nonprofit groups and the state of Washington claimed that the US Office of Personnel Management (OPM) exceeded its authority for the mass firings.

Alsup, an appointee of Democratic former president Bill Clinton, agreed.

“It is a sad day when our government would fire some good employee and say it was based on performance when they know good and well that’s a lie,” he said.

Alsup's ruling applied to probationary employees at the US Department of Defence, Department of Veterans Affairs,

Department of Agriculture, Department of Energy, Department of Interior and the Treasury Department.

In a separate case, a Baltimore-based federal judge ordered the administration to reinstate probationary workers at 18 federal agencies, including the Environmental Protection Agency, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and the US Agency for International Development, in a lawsuit brought by 20 Democratic-led states.

Trump, US Attorney-General Pam Bondi and other members of his administration have accused federal judges who have issued orders impeding the Republican president's actions of judicial overreach at the expense of presidential authority.

Trump last week called for impeachment by Congress of the judge presiding over a legal challenge to deportation flights, drawing a rebuke from US Chief Justice John Roberts.

Trump has also called for an end to nationwide injunctions.

“If Justice Roberts and the United States Supreme Court do not fix this toxic and unprecedented situation IMMEDIATELY, our Country is in very serious trouble!” Trump wrote in that post.

The Justice Department told the Supreme Court in yesterday's filing that lower courts have issued more than 40 judicial orders impeding its policies “without sufficient regard for limits on their own jurisdiction or to defects in plaintiffs’ representations about the law and the underlying facts”.

“This situation is unsustainable,” the filing stated.

Trump, along with Musk, has moved to eliminate thousands of federal jobs, dismantle agencies and remove the heads of independent agencies despite congressionally authorised job protections as he seeks to remake the federal government.

Conservatives target Trump as Canada campaign kicks off

AFP
Ottawa

Canada's Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre argued yesterday that he is the strongest candidate to take on US President Donald Trump, whose annexation and tariff threats have shaken the once promising chances of a Tory-led government.

The leading candidates ahead of Canada's April 28 election fanned out on the first full day of campaigning in a vote certain to be dominated by Trump.

Liberal leader and Prime Minister Mark Carney, who replaced Justin Trudeau earlier this month, was in the eastern province of Newfoundland, saying that Canadians needed to view the United States as “a friendship lost”.

Trump's return, while potentially devastating for Canada's economy, appears to have boosted the Liberals, with several polls showing them as a slight favourite, a stunning turnaround from early January when the Conservatives looked headed for a landslide.

Poilievre built significant support as a relentless critic of an unpopular Trudeau government, but Trump's return and Trudeau's departure have forced the Conservatives to pivot.

Flanked by his wife and two young children at a packaging plant outside Toronto, Poilievre fought back against perceptions that Carney was the better counter to Trump.

“There's a reason why Donald Trump wants the weak, out of touch Liberals in power. They have handed him control of our economy,” Poilievre said, an apparent reference to Trump's recent comment that he would “rather deal with a liberal” in Canada.

“I know that people are scared, they feel threatened ... and now they are facing these unjustified threats from President Trump who quite frankly needs to knock it off,” Poilievre said.

He pledged tax cuts to boost the economy so Canada can “confront Donald Trump and the Americans from a position of strength”.

Political analysts have argued that Poilievre may need to re-centre the campaign on non-Trump issues that made the Liberals vulnerable after a decade in power, like soaring housing costs.

However, given Trump's primacy in Canadian politics, Poilievre has increasingly taken aim at the president.

For Conservative supporter Valerie Orr, 81,



Pierre Poilievre



Prime Minister Mark Carney

Carney says he's 'available' for call with Trump, but on Canada's terms

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney said yesterday that he is available for a call with US President Donald Trump but would do so “on our terms as a sovereign country”.

Carney was elected leader of the ruling Liberal Party on March 9, automatically becoming prime minister.

Calls with the US president traditionally take place soon afterwards but the two men have yet to speak.

“I'm available for a call, but you know, we're going to talk on our terms as a sovereign country, not as what he pretends we are,” Carney told reporters in Newfoundland on the second day of a general election campaign.

Trump has threatened tariffs on Canadian exports and often muses about annexing Canada, comments which Carney says are disrespectful and unhelpful.

Carney also said he assumed Trump is waiting to see the result before calling the winner. **- Reuters**

Trump's dominance is unhelpful.

“This threat from the south has diverted too much attention,” she told AFP in a parking lot outside the Poilievre event.

“Who ever heard of a state the size of Canada ... come on, be real,” she said, praising the Conservative leader for focusing on the challenges people face trying to “make it through the week”.

Carney, who previously led the central banks in Canada and England, has tried to position himself as a departure from Trudeau and a seasoned economic crisis manager.

He spoke yesterday in Gander, a town that sheltered thousands of Americans whose trans-Atlantic flights were abruptly forced to land there after the September 11 attacks.

“Canadians did extraordinary things for Americans when they needed it. Now, we need to do extraordinary things for ourselves,” he said. “In this crisis caused by the US president and those who are enabling him, we lament a friendship lost, or at least a friendship strained.”

In a jab at Poilievre, who Liberals charge is ideologically aligned with Trump, Carney said that the president is watching to see if the next

prime minister will be someone “who's in sync with him, or is it someone who will stand up for Canadians”.

Carney, Poilievre and other party leaders will face off in two debates – one French, one English – on April 16 and 17.

Trump has threatened, withdrawn and imposed a dizzying array of tariffs on Canadian goods, with more levies expected next week, triggering a trade war economists say could plunge Canada into a recession.

His tariffs and repeated threats to turn Canada into the 51st US state, combined with Trudeau's departure have upended Canadian politics.

On January 6, the day Trudeau announced his plans to resign, the Liberals held 20.1% support with the Conservatives at 44.2%, according to aggregated polling data from the public broadcaster CBC.

Yesterday the Liberals were at 37.8% and the Tories stood at 37.2%.

The data shows the Carney-led Liberals have eaten into support for the left-wing New Democrats, whom progressives may not trust to take on Trump.

Colombia’s lonely chimp Yoko finds new home in Brazil

AFP
Pereira, Colombia

Kidnapped from his family as an infant, then raised by a drug lord before ending up in a Colombian zoo, Yoko the chimpanzee has lived the last two years of his life alone.

He lost his last friend, Chita, in 2023 when she escaped from the zoo with Pancho – Yoko's rival – and the pair was shot dead by soldiers out of human safety concerns.

On Sunday, 38-year-old Yoko was flown to Brazil to finally join others of his kind at a sanctuary there.

However, will he make friends?

Yoko is in many ways more human than chimp, his caregivers say.

He uses a knife and fork, plays ball, watches television and makes artwork with crayons on paper and canvas. He is fond of eating sweets and chicken.

Fed junk food by his captor – a narco trafficker whose name has not been divulged – Yoko has only four of his teeth left.

Chimps, like humans, are meant to have 32.

It was common for narco bosses such as Pablo Escobar in the 1990s to keep exotic animals as pets, including tigers and lions, and even hippos and giraffes.

Yoko was taught to smoke and dress up in human clothes – causing him to develop a skin disease and lose part of his fur.



Yoko, the only known great ape in captivity in Colombia, rescued after suffering animal abuse, is transported in a container inside El Dorado International Airport in Bogota, Colombia, before being relocated to Brazil's Sorocaba Sanctuary. **- Reuters**

“Yoko ... is a highly humanised chimpanzee, the degree of tameness is very high ... he basically behaves like a child,” said veterinarian Javier Guerrero.

The vet accompanied Yoko on the first part of his journey, dubbed “Operation Noah's Ark” from Ukumari Biopark, a zoo in the Colombian city of Pereira.

Experts fear that Yoko may find it hard to adapt to life with other chimpanzees at Sorocaba in the Brazilian state of Sao Paulo – the largest great ape sanctuary in Latin America.

There are more than 40 other chimps there, but vets and animal behaviourists worry Yoko may not fit in.

“Yoko ... is not a chimpanzee in the strict sense ... he is an animal that identifies much more with human beings,” said Cesar Gomez, Ukumari's animal training co-ordinator.

“To give you an example, a smile is something positive” for humans, “but for chimpanzees, it is something negative and Yoko does not understand these types of communication”, he said.

Yoko was seized from his owner's lair by police in 2017 after spending an unknown amount of time there, then taken to a refuge that flooded before he became a resident of the Pereira zoo.

“He was denied the chance to be a chimpanzee and grow up with his family,” assistant vet Alejandra Marin told AFP.

In the wild in their natural home in Africa, chimpanzees die at about 40 or 45 years of age.

They are social, group animals, and with good care in captivity, they can live up to 60.

The chimpanzee is listed as an endangered species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

With Yoko's transfer on Sunday, Colombia became the first country in the world to rid itself of entirely captive great apes, said the Great Ape Project, an non-governmental organisation (NGO).

“The great apes are chimpanzees, orangutans, gorillas, and bonobos – none of these species are endemic to our country, and they have no reason to be here,” said Andrea Padilla, a Colombian senator of the Green Alliance who oversaw Yoko's “deeply symbolic” transfer.

“From a very young age, Yoko was a victim of trafficking and trade, passed from one drug trafficker to another,” she added.

Padilla posted on X yesterday morning that Yoko had landed in Brazil, and was “safe and sound and about to start a new life with his peers”.

Nazis got better treatment than Venezuelans deported by US administration: judge

A US appeals court judge said yesterday that Nazis were given more rights to contest their removal from the United States during World War II than Venezuelan migrants deported by the Trump administration.

In a contentious hearing, US Circuit Judge Patricia Millett questioned government lawyer Drew Ensign on whether Venezuelans targeted for removal under a little-used 18th-century law had time to contest the Trump administration's assertion that they were members of the Tren de Aragua gang before they were put on planes and deported to El Salvador.

“Nazis got better treatment under the Alien Enemies Act than has happened here,” Millett said, to which Ensign responded: “We certainly dispute the Nazi analogy”.

Prior to the Trump administration's invocation of the Alien Enemies Act, the law had been used just three times in US history, most recently to intern and remove Japanese, German and Italian immigrants during World War II.

The Trump administration was asking the appeals court to halt Washington-based US District Judge James Boasberg's two-week ban, imposed on March 15, on the use of the 1798 Alien Enemies Act to justify deportation of alleged Tren de Aragua members without final removal orders from immigration judges.

In a 37-page ruling yesterday, Boasberg said the people that Republican President Donald Trump's administration is seeking to deport under the law must be given the chance to challenge the government's assertion that they are indeed members of Tren de Aragua.

Family members of many of the deported Venezuelan migrants deny the alleged gang ties.

The case has emerged as a major test of Trump's sweeping assertion of executive power.

With Republicans holding a majority in both the House of Representatives and Senate and largely falling in line behind the president's agenda, federal judges often have emerged as the only constraint on Trump's wave of executive actions.

After Boasberg temporarily halted the deportations, Trump called for the judge's impeachment in a process that could lead to his removal.

In response, US Supreme

Court Chief Justice John Roberts issued a rare statement rebuking Trump and stating that appeals, not impeachment, are the proper response to disagreements with judicial decisions.

Boasberg is also weighing whether the Trump administration violated his order by failing to return deportation flights after his order was issued.

In yesterday's ruling, the judge wrote that the administration appeared to have “hustled people onto those planes” to avoid a potential court order blocking the deportations.

The judge rejected the Trump administration's request to set aside the two-week deportation ban.

Trump has argued that it is the judiciary, not his administration, that is overreaching.

Ensign later told a three-judge panel of the US Court of Appeals for the DC Circuit that Boasberg's order must be paused because the judge had no right to second-guess the president's decisions on foreign affairs matters.

“The district court's order represents an unprecedented and enormous intrusion upon the powers of the executive branch,” Ensign said.

US Circuit Judge Patricia Millett said Trump's actions in this case were unprecedented as well.

The Trump administration on March 15 deported more than 200 people to El Salvador, where they are being detained in the country's massive anti-terrorism prison under a deal in which Washington is paying President Nayib Bukele's government \$6mn.

Boasberg cited accounts of poor conditions in the prison as one justification for maintaining the ban on deportations.

El Salvador's presidential office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Boasberg's ruling yesterday applied to five plaintiffs represented by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) involved in a prior more narrow ruling, as well as other Venezuelans in the US who may be targeted for removal under the Alien Enemies Act.

The judge did not address the migrants held in El Salvador.

ACLU lawyer Lee Gelernt told reporters after a hearing on Friday that Boasberg has the authority to order those migrants be returned to the US, and said he may raise that issue in court. **- Reuters**

23andMe files for bankruptcy

Pioneering US genetic testing company 23andMe has filed for bankruptcy and is looking for a buyer two years after hackers gained access to millions of profiles.

23andMe, which sells a mail-back saliva test to determine ancestry or certain health-related genetic traits for less than \$200, said late on Sunday that it had “filed a voluntary petition for reorganisation” with a state bankruptcy court in Missouri.

At its height years ago, the DNA testing craze saw millions of consumers rushing to discover their ancestry and health information with tests from 23andMe becoming popular holiday gifts.

The Silicon Valley-based company, which went public in 2021, claims 15mn customers and has seen its sales decline as the testing craze faded and the company suffered a data breach.

23andMe said that it rejected a takeover offer from its co-founder and chief executive Anne Wojcicki who has resigned from her position but will remain on the company's board of directors, according to the statement.

On X, Wojcicki posted that “While I am disappointed that we have come to this conclusion and my bid was rejected, I am supportive of the company and I intend to be a bidder”.

Wojcicki, who co-founded 23andMe 19 years ago, acknowledged the company's challenges but emphasised her “unwavering” belief in its future.

With the bankruptcy announcement, Geoffrey Fowler, a tech columnist for the *Washington Post* warned: “If you're one of the 15mn people who shared your DNA with 23andMe, it's time to delete your data.”

He cited the risk “that your data could get sold or transferred to a new company, which might want to use it for new purposes” **- AFP**

HEALTH

UK detects first case of bird flu in a sheep

Bird flu has been detected in a sheep in northern England, the first known case of its kind in the world, Britain's government said, adding to the growing list of mammals infected by the disease and fuelling fears of a pandemic. Many different mammals have died of the H5N1 bird flu virus across the globe including bears, cats, dairy cows, dogs, dolphins, seals and tigers. "The case was identified following routine surveillance of farmed livestock on a premises in Yorkshire where the highly pathogenic avian influenza (H5N1) had been confirmed in other captive birds," Britain's government said in a statement.

AVIATION

Heathrow defends decision to shut airport

Britain's Heathrow defended its decision to shut down operations at Europe's busiest airport last Friday as the blame game intensified over an 18-hour closure. As questions mounted over how such a critical part of Britain's infrastructure could fail and whether all Heathrow's four terminals needed to shut, both National Grid and Heathrow agreed that the failure of the transformer was an unprecedented event. But the airport was forced to defend its closure after the boss of National Grid told the *Financial Times* that the electricity transmission network remained capable of providing power to the airport throughout the crisis.

CONTROVERSY

Japan, China in new spat after three-way talks

Japan and China became embroiled in a spat with Tokyo accusing Beijing of misrepresenting its position after weekend talks also involving South Korea. The discussions in Tokyo were billed as a chance to improve historically frosty relations. But Japan took exception to a Chinese statement that Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba told Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi that he "respects the positions elaborated by the Chinese side". Chief government spokesman Yoshimasa Hayashi said Japan had "protested to the Chinese side... and asked to immediately remove the inaccurate statement".

UNREST

Myanmar clinic air strike kills 11 including doctor

A Myanmar junta air strike on a remote village medical clinic killed 11 people including a doctor and his wife, locals said. A 2021 military coup has plunged Myanmar into a civil war between the junta, anti-coup guerillas and ethnic armed groups. Locals said the air strike hit the village of Hnan Khar in the western region of Magway, in a zone currently held by anti-coup forces. A spokesman for Myanmar's military could not be reached for comment. "It flew very low and I heard a loud bomb blast when we were hiding," said a villager. "When I went to clear up the area I saw only pieces of human bodies," he added.

UN seeks nearly \$1bn in aid for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

AFP
Geneva

The United Nations yesterday announced it was seeking nearly \$1bn to provide life-saving aid this year for some 1.5mn Rohingya refugees and their hosts in Bangladesh.

The UN and more than 100 partners launched a two-year 2025-26 Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya crisis, amid what it called "dwindling financial resources and competing global crises".

The appeal seeks \$934.5mn in its first year to reach some 1.48mn people including Rohingya refugees and host communities. Around a million members of the persecuted and mostly Muslim minority live in squalid relief camps in Bangladesh, most of whom arrived after fleeing the 2017 military crackdown in neighbouring Myanmar. "In its eighth year, the Rohingya humanitarian crisis remains largely out of the international spotlight, but needs remain urgent," the UN said in a statement. Launching the appeal in Geneva, UN migration agency chief Amy Pope said drastic foreign aid cuts were putting lives on the line.

US President Donald Trump imposed a freeze on foreign aid in January pending a review, after which Washington announced the cancellation of 83% of programmes at the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

"If we face cuts as organisations, the Rohingya don't eat, or they don't

have protection, or they don't have basic life-saving needs met," Pope said.

She said the international community had failed to create the conditions whereby the Rohingyas would be able to go home safely.

"If we do not provide other options for the Rohingyas, we are leaving them completely dependent on humanitarian aid. And so cutting that aid, without giving them other options, means that people will die," she said. "When you deprive people of hope and opportunity, you create conditions for more despair," added Pope, and "the problem gets much, much worse".

The overcrowded settlements around Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh are reliant on aid and suffer from widespread malnutrition.

UN chief Antonio Guterres visited the area earlier this month, in a show of solidarity.

Khalilur Rahman, Bangladesh's high representative on Rohingya issues, said he was cautiously optimistic that a cessation of hostilities in neighbouring Rakhine State in Myanmar - a pre-requisite for the return of refugees - was now "within the realm of possibility".

The Arakan Army, an ethnic minority rebel group in Myanmar, is engaged in a fierce fight with the military for control of Rakhine, where it has seized swathes of territory in the past year.

"We look at it with cautious optimism that there are some fleeting lights at the end of the tunnel," he said - adding that it was therefore not the time for donors to back out.

Crane collapse at Ahmedabad bullet train project works



Employees of National High Speed Railway Corporation Ltd work on restoration after a slab-launching crane collapsed between two pillars near a massive gantry that was being used to install concrete girders between pillars on the Ahmedabad-Mumbai bullet train project, on the outskirts of Ahmedabad, India, yesterday.

US trade officials arrive in India today for talks

Reuters
New Delhi

A delegation of officials from the US will visit India from today until March 29 for trade talks with Indian officials, a US embassy spokesperson said yesterday.

Assistant US trade representative for south and central Asia Brendan Lynch will lead the group. "This visit reflects the US' continued commitment to advancing a productive and balanced trade relationship with India," the spokesperson said.

US President Donald Trump is expected to impose reciprocal tariffs from April 2 on vari-

ous nations, causing alarm among Indian exporters. India has an "obvious expectation", a government source said, that the Trump administration could exempt it from reciprocal tariffs as the two nations continue talks on a bilateral trade pact.

The source said US Vice-President J. D. Vance is also likely to visit India in April.

Several industry groups have cautioned the Indian government that reducing tariffs on industrial products under US pressure could lead to an influx of cheaper Chinese goods, resulting in dumping and harming domestic manufacturers.

Trade Minister Piyush Goyal spent nearly a week in the US earlier this month in trade

talks. During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the US last month, both nations agreed to work on the first phase of a trade deal by autumn 2025, with a target of reaching \$500bn in bilateral trade by 2030.

India and the US are engaged in discussions to resolve tariff-related issues and finalise a framework for a bilateral trade pact, Randhir Jaiswal, spokesman for India's external affairs ministry, said last week.

"We value our ongoing engagement with the government of India on trade and investment matters and look forward to continuing these discussions in a constructive, equitable, and forward-looking manner," the US embassy spokesperson said.

Show venue ransacked after Maharashtra politician ridiculed

A mob ransacked a club in India's financial capital after a stand-up comedian ridiculed one of the city's leading politicians from the stage, prompting a police investigation into the performer. Kunal Kamra, one of India's leading comics, is known for his acerbic commentary on Indian politics. His Sunday performance in Mumbai included a parody song referring to Eknath Shinde, the number two figure in the state government, as a "traitor". Soon after the show finished, supporters from Shinde's Shiv Sena party stormed The Habitat comedy venue and began wreaking havoc. Footage widely shared on social media showed dozens of men throwing chairs, smashing light fittings and breaking apart paintings mounted on the wall. At least 20 people were being sought in relation to the vandalism at the club, local media reported.

Almond blossom in Kashmir



A Kashmiri girl walks amidst almond blossom trees in Kashmir's Budgam district, India, yesterday.

Sri Lanka to host India PM Modi next month

AFP
Colombo

Sri Lanka will host Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi next week, an official said yesterday, as Colombo grapples with the competing interests of its powerful northern neighbour and China, its largest lender.

A member of leftist President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's office said Modi will be the first foreign head of government to visit the island nation under the new administration.

"It must be recalled that President Dissanayake's first foreign visit after his election in September was to New Delhi in December," the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said.

He said Modi was due to hold bilateral talks on April 5 and travel to the northern Buddhist

pilgrimage city of Anuradhapura before returning the following day.

Dissanayake travelled to Beijing in January for his second foreign visit as president, underscoring Sri Lanka's delicate balancing act of maintaining ties with the two regional rivals.

New Delhi has been concerned about China's growing influence in Sri Lanka, which it considers to be within its sphere of geopolitical influence.

China has emerged as Sri Lanka's largest single bilateral creditor, accounting for more than half of its \$14bn bilateral debt at the time the island defaulted on its sovereign debt in 2022.

Beijing was also the first to restructure its loans to Sri Lanka, a move that cleared the way for the island to emerge from that year's worst-ever economic meltdown.

S Korea court reinstates impeached PM as acting president

Reuters
Seoul

South Korea's Constitutional Court yesterday reinstated Prime Minister Han Duck-soo to the post of acting president, striking down his impeachment as he pledged to focus on steering Asia's fourth-biggest economy through a US "trade war".

The ruling, which comes amid months of political turmoil in the country, returns Han to power immediately. He took over as acting leader from President Yoon Suk-yeol, who was impeached over his imposition of martial law in De-

cember. "I believe the people are making it very clear, in one voice, that the extreme confrontation in politics must stop," said Han, who thanked the court for its "wise decision" and the cabinet for their hard work while he was suspended.

"As acting president, I will do my best to maintain stable state administration, and devote all wisdom and capabilities to safeguard national interests in the trade war," Han said in televised comments.

South Korea, one of the world's top exporters, has been bracing for the potential impact of a range of threatened tariffs under US President Donald Trump.

South Korea has already seen

US tariffs on steel and aluminium and has been seeking an exemption from reciprocal US tariffs next month. Earlier this month, Trump singled out South Korea for applying high tariffs on US exports.

Yoon's martial law declaration plunged the key US military ally into its greatest political crisis in decades, and sparked a leadership vacuum amid spiralling impeachments, resignations, and criminal indictments for a range of top officials.

Han had initially lasted less than two weeks in the post and was impeached and suspended on December 27 after clashing with the opposition-led parliament by refusing to appoint three more jus-

tices to the Constitutional Court.

The justices on the court ruled yesterday seven to one to strike down the impeachment.

Finance Minister Choi Sang-mok had assumed the position of acting president while the cases of Yoon and Han were before the Constitutional Court.

Han, 75, had served in leadership positions for more than three decades under five presidents, both conservative and liberal.

In a country sharply divided by partisan rhetoric, Han is a rare example of an official whose varied career transcended party lines.

Still, the opposition-led parliament accused him of not doing

enough to thwart Yoon's decision to declare martial law, an accusation he denied.

Lee Jae-myung, head of the opposition Democratic Party, urged the Constitutional Court to swiftly make a decision on President Yoon's impeachment.

The court is expected to rule within days. Yoon also faces a separate criminal trial on charges of leading a revolt by declaring martial law. If Yoon is removed, a new presidential election will be held within 60 days. "The court's continued delay in ruling is fuelling concern and conflict," said Lee, who opinion polls suggest would win an election if Yoon is removed.

South Korea has seen huge, mostly peaceful, rallies both in support of Yoon and calling for his removal in recent months. Lim Ji-bong, a law professor at Sogang University, said he expects the court to remove Yoon. The justices will want to show they can be "united to make a bold decision to stop deepening national divisions," he said.

The unexpected imposition of martial law on December 3 and the ensuing political upheaval sent shockwaves through South Korea, and raised concern among allies such as the US under former president Joe Biden, who had seen Yoon as a key partner in efforts to counter China and North Korea.

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GULF TIMES

Top Asian countries may struggle to fill aid gap left by US

China is best placed to replace the United States as a key foreign donor in Asia but may be reluctant to fully fill the void, while South Korea and Japan may struggle to give enough, experts said.

From critical maternal healthcare to funding disaster relief, life-saving projects in Asia hang in the balance after President Donald Trump paused foreign aid and moved to dismantle the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

While China is the world's second-largest economy, its foreign assistance looks very different from that of the United States, as Beijing primarily provides loans that need to be paid back and focuses on infrastructure projects, experts said.

"China is very unlikely to step up to fill gaps in areas such as democracy promotion, media freedom, civil society or women's rights," said Melissa Conley Tyler, executive director of Asia-Pacific Development & Defence Dialogue, a think tank in Australia.

"It is vital that other donors don't let these vital areas be a casualty of the US foreign assistance cuts."

The United States disbursed a total of \$56bn globally in foreign assistance in 2024, \$32.48bn of which was managed through USAID, US government data showed.

About \$7bn of the United States' total global foreign aid in 2024 was given to South, Central, and East Asia, as well as Oceania, the data showed.

While China does not make its foreign aid data readily available, the Lowy Institute said in its 2023 report that China disbursed about \$5.5bn a year in official development finance (ODF) to Southeast Asia between 2015 and 2021, three-quarters of which went to infrastructure.

While China's priorities differ from those of the US, some say China would not miss the opportunity to gain more influence

The vast majority of China's financing is disbursed in the form of non-concessional loans, the report said.

Alexandre Dayant, deputy director of the Indo-Pacific Development Centre at the Lowy Institute, said the United States' retreat represented "an opportunity (for China) to redefine its role in global development" but he did not expect China to take that opportunity.

"China has historically focused on infrastructure financing - don't expect it to step in for US funding on democracy, health, or education," said Dayant.

The report said "China has been Southeast Asia's single largest source of official development finance" but that its financing has been in decline in recent years.

Experts said South Korea and Japan could also step up to help, but that they would need to substantially increase their aid budgets to make a difference.

Once a foreign aid recipient, South Korea had an official development assistance (ODA) budget of \$4.8bn in 2024 - a record for the country - and aims to more than double that by 2030, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

"South Korea has been stepping up its efforts as an aid provider in recent years and its income level should enable them to do even more," said Ian Mitchell, senior policy fellow at the Center for Global Development (CDG), a think tank.

But South Korea and Japan's combined aid budgets were over \$22bn in 2023, OECD data showed. That was less than a third of the \$80bn the United States said it spent on foreign assistance that year.

"So replacing US support would require a substantial increase," said Mitchell, adding that Japan's aid efforts were already focused on the region.

While China's priorities differ from those of the United States, some said China would not miss the opportunity to gain more influence in the region.

"In the past, its assistance had mostly come in loans to help other countries build various types of projects, but I think China will dramatically increase grants across Asia - it is an obvious opportunity for China to further diminish the United States' influence in the region," said Joshua Kurlantzick, senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.

Mitchell said there were already some signs that China is breaking new ground.

"China acknowledged that it provided climate finance for the first time last year; and this may signal it is more comfortable being seen as a provider of development support," he said. - Reuters

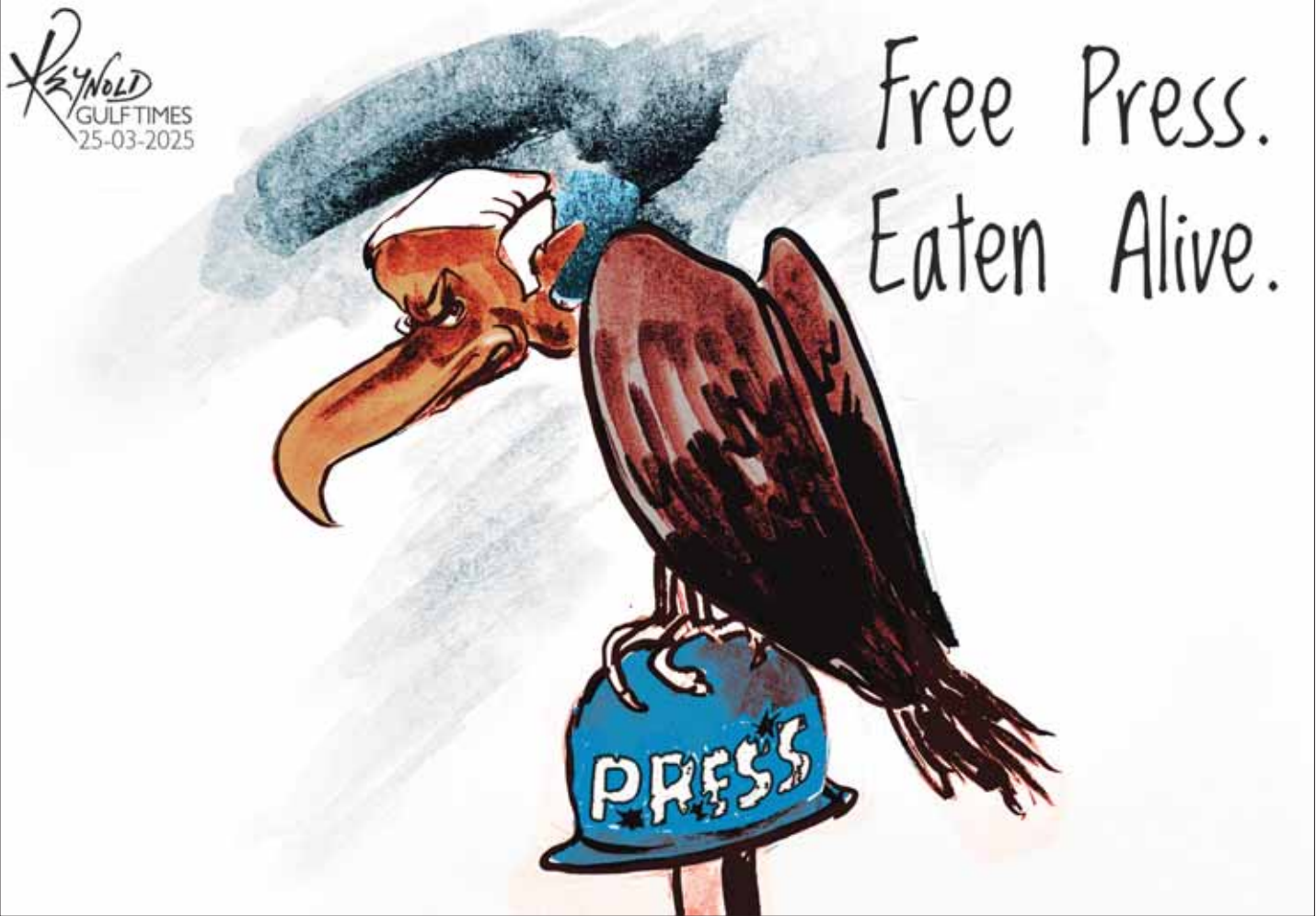
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China's foreign policy in 2025: Anchoring stability in a world of uncertainty



By Cao Xiaolin
Ambassador of China to Qatar

We are now in a world where changes and turbulence are intertwined. As the world's largest developing country, how will China navigate the increasingly volatile international landscape? At the press conference held on the margins of China's Two Sessions on March 7, 2025, Member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and Foreign Minister Wang Yi elaborated on China's foreign policy and external relations.

China's diplomacy will bring much-needed stability to a changing and turbulent world

In today's world, certainty is becoming a scarce resource. China's diplomacy will stand firm on the right side of history and on the side of human progress. We will provide certainty to this uncertain world.

China will be a just and righteous force for world peace and stability. We will continue to expand our global partnerships featuring equality, openness and co-operation, and actively use the Chinese approach in resolving hot-spot issues.

China will be a progressive force for international fairness and justice. We will uphold true multilateralism, and bear in mind the future of humanity and the well-being of the people. We will observe the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, and build more consensus for an equal and orderly multipolar world.

China will be a constructive force for common development of the world. We will continue to expand high-standard opening up, and share the vast opportunities of Chinese modernisation with all countries. We will safeguard the multilateral free trade system, foster an open, inclusive and non-discriminatory environment for international co-operation, and advance a universally beneficial and inclusive economic globalisation.

In the West, they say, "There are no eternal friends, only permanent interests." But we in China believe that friends should be permanent and we should pursue common interests. President Xi Jinping has proposed building a community with a shared future for mankind, and called on all countries to transcend disagreements and differences, jointly protect our only planet, and develop together the global village as our common home.

We are pleased to see that more and more countries have joined the cause of building a community



Chinese President Xi Jinping addresses visiting dignitaries during a Belt and Road Forum in Beijing. (Reuters file photo)

with a shared future; more than a hundred countries support China's Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative, and Global Civilisation Initiative; and more than three quarters of countries across the world have joined the family of Belt and Road co-operation. History will prove that a real winner is the one that keeps in mind the interests of all, and that a community with a shared future for mankind will ensure that the world belongs to every country, and that everyone will have a bright future.

China stands firmly in safeguarding the interests of the Global South

The hallmark of our era is the prominent, growing strength of the Global South. Accounting for over 40% of global GDP and contributing as high as 80% of global growth, the Global South is a key force for maintaining world peace, driving world development, and improving global governance, and it holds the key to bringing stability to the world and making it a better place.

The Global South should strengthen themselves. Since the beginning of the year, Indonesia has become a full member of Brics, and nine partner countries have joined the Brics family. Brics is emerging as a backbone of co-operation and an engine of growth in the Global South.

The Global South should stand together in unity. This year, China will host the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO) summit. The SCO has grown through the past 24 years from a six-member organisation to a big family consisting of 26 countries. It has become a regional co-operation organisation with the largest geographical area and population. The Global South should speak in one voice to the world, safeguard our common interests, and steadily increase our representation and voice in global governance.

The Global South should strive for development. Last November, President Xi Jinping announced eight actions China would take in support of global development, generating new energy for faster Global South development. We should keep development as a

central international agenda item, build up the momentum, enhance our capacity, and advance hand in hand toward modernisation.

China is naturally a member of the Global South, because we have fought colonialism and hegemonies together in history and we are committed to the common goal of development and revitalisation. No matter how the world changes, our heart will always be with the Global South, and our root will grow deeper in the Global South. China will work with all Global South countries to add a new chapter to the annals of the history of the world.

China is a sincere friend of our Arab brothers and will resolutely support for peace and stability in the Middle East

The Palestinian question has always been at the heart of the Middle East issue. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict takes place again and again simply because the two-State solution is only half achieved: The State of Israel has long been a reality, but the State of Palestine is still far beyond reach. Going forward, the international community should focus more on the two-State solution and give more support to independent statehood for Palestine. Only then could Palestine and Israel truly coexist in peace, and the Arab and Jewish peoples live side by side in enduring amity.

Gaza belongs to the Palestinian people. It is an inseparable part of the Palestinian territory. Changing its status by forceful means will not bring about peace, but only new chaos. We support the plan for restoring peace in Gaza initiated by Egypt and other Arab countries. The will of the people must not be defied, and the principle of justice must not be abandoned.

If some major country truly cares about the people in Gaza, it should promote comprehensive and lasting ceasefire, ramp up humanitarian assistance, observe the principle of Palestinians governing Palestine, and contribute to the reconstruction in Gaza.

China is a strategic partner of Middle East countries. We will continue to strive resolutely for justice, peace and development for the Middle East people, and

support countries in the region in taking their future in their own hands, independently exploring their development paths, and realising the dream of peace and revitalisation at an early date.

China will realise reunification and this is unstoppable

Taiwan is an inalienable part of China's territory. This is the history and the reality. This year marks the 80th anniversary of the recovery of Taiwan. Both the Cairo Declaration and the Potsdam Proclamation, issued by major victorious nations of WWII, stated in explicit terms that Taiwan is a territory that shall be restored to China. All these have confirmed China's sovereignty over Taiwan, and formed an important part of the post-WWII international order.

Resolution 2758 adopted in 1971 by the UN General Assembly with an overwhelming majority decides to restore all the lawful rights of the People's Republic of China at the UN and expel forthwith the representatives of the Taiwan authorities from the UN and all the organisations related to it.

The only reference to the Taiwan region in the UN is "Taiwan, Province of China." Taiwan is never a country, not in the past, and never in the future. Realising China's complete reunification is a shared aspiration of the Chinese nation. It is an inevitable trend, and it is what the greater national interests entail.

China-Qatar relationship is now at its best in the history and has set a role model for the state-to-state relationship in the world

In 2014, President Xi Jinping and His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani announced that China and Qatar would establish a strategic partnership. Over the past decade, under the strategic guidance of our two heads of state, China-Qatar strategic partnership has seen a golden decade of comprehensive and rapid development.

The mutual trust between China and Qatar continues to deepen as we support each other in safeguarding our core and major interests. Our co-operation in various fields becomes increasingly close as China has consistently been Qatar's largest trading partner and largest export destination over the past years. Our people-to-people exchanges grow vibrantly with the number of Chinese tourists visiting Qatar reaching 97,000 in 2024, marking a 77% increase year-on-year. China and Qatar have become close partners in striving for our respective national development and rejuvenation.

China stands ready to work with Qatar to synergise our development strategies, promote win-win co-operation to a higher level, jointly uphold international fairness and justice, safeguard regional peace and development, and create greater well-being for our peoples.



The star-spangled-banner flies in front of the consulate of the United States in Nuuk, Greenland, yesterday. (AFP)

Trump intent on having Greenland as territory flays uninvited US delegation

Reuters
Washington/Copenhagen

President Donald Trump yesterday doubled down on his suggestion that the US should take over Greenland as leaders from the semi-autonomous Danish territory criticised a planned trip there this week by a high-profile US delegation.

"I think Greenland is going to be something that maybe is in our future," Trump told reporters after a meeting with officials in his cabinet, saying it was important for US national security.

Greenland's outgoing Prime Minister Mute Egede called plans by the US delegation to visit an American military base and attend a dog sled race a "provocation", and said his caretaker government would not meet with the group.

Trump said his administration was working with "people in Greenland" who want something to happen, but did not elaborate.

"They're calling us," he said. "We're not calling them."

The US visit, which runs from Thursday to Saturday, will be led by Usha Vance, wife of Vice-President JD Vance, and include White House National Security Adviser Mike Waltz and Energy

Secretary Chris Wright.

Trump has made US annexation of Greenland a major talking point since his eldest son, Donald Trump Jr, paid a private visit to the vast, mineral-rich island in January.

"Until recently, we could trust the Americans, who were our allies and friends, and with whom we enjoyed working closely," Egede told local newspaper *Sermitsiaq*. "But that time is over."

Naalakkersuisut, the Greenlandic government, is now in a caretaker phase following a March 11 parliamentary election won by the Democrats, a pro-business party that favours a slow approach to independence from Denmark.

Jens-Frederik Nielsen, leader of the Democrats, called for political unity and criticised the timing of the US visit during coalition talks with municipal elections due next week.

"We must not be forced into a power game that we ourselves have not chosen to be a part of," Nielsen said yesterday.

Similarly, Danish Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen said yesterday the visit was "problematic" and showed "a lack of respect".

"These are not random tourists. And you sense it is a signal. It is a

charm offensive to pull Greenland towards the United States," Lokke Rasmussen told public broadcaster DR.

"There is no appetite for this neither in Greenland nor in the Kingdom (of Denmark) and it is therefore not good timing."

Brian Hughes, spokesman for the White House National Security Council, said the visit aimed to "build on partnerships that respect Greenland's self-determination and advance economic co-operation".

"This is a visit to learn about Greenland, its culture, history, and people and to attend a dogsled race the United States is proud to sponsor, plain and simple," Hughes said.

Two US Hercules military transport planes arrived in Greenland's capital Nuuk late on Sunday, carrying security personnel and bulletproof vehicles, Greenlandic online news outlet Sermitsiaq reported.

Around 60 police officers from Denmark also arrived in Nuuk on Sunday, state broadcaster KNR reported.

Waltz and Wright plan to visit the Pituffik space base, the US military base located along the shortest route from Europe to North America, vital for its ballis-

tic missile warning system.

They will then join Vance to visit historical sites and attend the national dog sled race.

Vance said in a video posted by the US consulate in Greenland that her visit was meant to "celebrate the long history of mutual respect and co-operation between our nations".

Trump, who first floated the idea of buying Greenland in 2019, has renewed his calls for the US to take over the island since his return to the White House in January, and he has not ruled out using force to achieve this objective.

Greenland is rich in raw materials, including minerals critical to advance new technologies.

The governments of both Greenland and Denmark have voiced opposition to any US takeover.

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said in a written comment reacting to news of the US delegation's visit that "this is something we take seriously".

She said Denmark wanted co-operation with the US, a Nato ally, but on the basis of "the fundamental rules of sovereignty", adding that Copenhagen and Greenland's future government would both be involved in any talks with the US regarding the island.

Mainland Europe's first orbital rocket launch postponed

AFP
Oslo

A German start-up yesterday postponed a test flight of its Spectrum rocket from Norway's Andoya Spaceport in the Arctic, seen as a key step in Europe's new space economy.

The Munich-based company Isar Aerospace said in a statement it had cancelled yesterday's flight "due to unfavourable winds" and that it was working to find a new launch date.

A re-scheduled launch would be the first flight of an orbital launch vehicle from the European continent, excluding Russia.

It would also be Europe's first flight financed almost exclusively by private actors.

Measuring 28 metres high and two metres in diameter, with a payload capacity of one tonne, the Spectrum will not carry any cargo on its first launch, nor is it expected to reach orbit.

"Every second we fly is good, because we collect data and experience. Thirty seconds would already be a great success," said Daniel Metzler, co-founder and chief executive of Isar Aerospace.

"We do not expect to reach orbit with this test. In fact, no company has yet managed to put its first orbital launch vehicle into orbit," he said ahead of the planned launch attempt.

Europe has had no access to Russian space stations and launchers since Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Its space industry has also seen delays in the development of the Ariane 6 rocket and the suspension of the European Vega-C satellite launcher after an accident.

It wasn't until March 6, when the first commercial flight of an Ariane 6 rocket took off from Kourou in French Guyana, that Europe was able to regain its own space independence after several months without its own access to space.

While the US already has giants such as Musk's SpaceX and Blue Origin, "New Space" — commercial space activities driven by private companies — is still in its infancy in Europe.

The Spectrum launch "is the first real and serious attempt in Europe to have a New Space launcher," said Maxime Puteaux, a consultant at Novaspaces.

Small launchers like the Spectrum can be used to put miniature satellites — used for Earth observation or Internet coverage, for instance — into orbit.

In addition to Isar Aerospace, Europe is home to Germany's HyImpulse and Rocket Factory Augsburg (RFA), French groups Latitude and MaiaSpace and Spain's PLD Space, all racing to establish themselves as key players in the sector.

"The rise of these new actors and new European launch services is part of a common objective: to guarantee independent and sovereign access to space. Their role is expected to strengthen in the coming years," Toni Tolker-Nielsen, director of Space Transportation at the European Space Agency (ESA), told AFP.

90 hurt in Sumy, including 17 kids: Zelensky

Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky said yesterday that the number of wounded in a Russian strike on the city of Sumy yesterday rose to almost 90 people, including 17 children.

The strike hit the day Russia is holding talks with the US in Saudi Arabia on a potential ceasefire.

Ukrainian officials earlier said the strike hit residential buildings and educational facilities in the north-eastern city that lies close to the Russian border.

"There are a lot of wounded — as of now, we know about almost 90 people, including 17 children," Zelensky said in his daily evening address on social media, adding that rescue operations were still ongoing.

He said that a "school and residential buildings are at the epicentre" of the strike.

"Fortunately, the children at the school were in a shelter," he said.

"Every day like this, all the nights with Russian missiles and drones against our country, every day of the war means losses, pain, and destruction that Ukraine never wanted," the wartime leader added.

Despite US President Donald Trump's push for a rapid end to the conflict, attacks have continued unabated in Ukraine, including on the region of Sumy that borders Russia.

The attack damaged apartments and an educational facility, prosecutors said.

The city's acting mayor Artem Kobzar earlier said a hospital had been affected.

The regional administration published videos showing damaged high-rise residential buildings, with many balconies blackened and smoke billowing out. It also showed debris on a basketball court and firefighters working to put out a blaze.

Chaos as cyberattack hits Ukraine rail service

Reuters
Kyiv

A powerful cyberattack knocked out the on-line ticketing system for Ukraine's state railway service, causing long queues at stations yesterday in what Kyiv officials said looked like a Russian attempt to "destabilise" the situation.

The rail system is a vital way for civilians and freight to travel round wartime Ukraine — a country twice the size of Italy — where air travel had been grounded due to regular missile and drone strikes since Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022.

There was no comment from Moscow about the attack.

Blaming the cyberattack on the "enemy", shorthand usually used by Kyiv to mean Russia, officials said rail travel had not been affected but that work was still under way to restore the online ticketing system more than 24 hours after the hack.

An outage was first reported on Sunday when the rail company notified passengers about a failure in its IT system and told them to buy tickets on-site or on trains.

"The latest attack was very systemic, unusual and multi-level," rail company Ukrzaliznytsia wrote on the Telegram app.

Long lines had formed at Kyiv's central train station last morning as people waited to buy tickets. Booking offices said tickets were only available for travel until Tuesday.

The Ukrainian rail company, which has grappled with Russian



People arrive at the main train station in Kyiv yesterday. (Reuters)

missile strikes at various points during the war, did not explicitly say who it thought was behind the attack.

A Ukrainian security official and a senior government source, both of whom were speaking on condition of anonymity, said the attack looked like it had been carried out by Russia.

The security official said the attack appeared aimed at exerting psychological pressure on Ukrainians and destabilising the social and political situation.

"It was some hacker group. We think that they are Russians. It is a strong strike but not critical," the government source said, also saying that it looked aimed at "destabilisation".

Trains have been the main mode of transportation for domestic and international passengers since 2022, as well as a key route for weapons and equipment deliveries.

The system transported around 20mn passengers and 148mn tonnes of freight last year, Deputy Prime Minister Oleksiy Kuleba said at the end of 2024.

Oleksandr Pertsovskiy, Ukrzaliznytsia's board chairman, said on national television that the company had handled the fallout from the attack well.

"Operational traffic did not stop for a single moment. The enemy attack was aimed at stopping trains, but we quickly switched to backup systems."

AIDS pandemic risks surge after US funding halt

AFP
Geneva

The world risks returning to the worst days of the global AIDS pandemic following the sudden halt to US foreign aid funding, the UN's top AIDS official said yesterday, warning millions would die.

The United States has historically been the world's biggest donor of humanitarian assistance, but President Donald Trump has slashed international aid since returning to the White House two months ago, putting the entire humanitarian community into a tailspin.

UNAIDS executive director Winnie Byanyima said that if the US funding is not reinstated or others do not step in to fill the

gap, "there will be an additional... 6.3mn AIDS-related deaths", a 10-fold increase, in the next four years alone.

"You're talking of losing the gains that we have made over the last 25 years. It is very serious," she told reporters in Geneva.

"It is reasonable for the United States to want to reduce its funding over time, but the sudden withdrawal of life-saving support is having a devastating impact," she said.

"The US cuts mean that today, 27 countries in Africa and Asia are experiencing shortages of staff, disruptions of diagnostics treatment and surveillance systems are collapsing."

Looking beyond the next four years, if aid funding is not restored, "we see the AIDS pandemic... resurging globally", grow-

ing in Eastern Europe and Latin America, Byanyima said.

"We'll see it come back, and we'll see people die the way we saw them in the '90s and in the 2000s." She hailed US leadership in the fight against AIDS as "the greatest acts of humanity in global health".

She highlighted the US anti-HIV initiative PEPFAR, which is considered one of the world's most successful public health efforts, having saved an estimated 26 million lives over two decades.

Now, thanks to US innovations, the world is "at the cusp of another revolution in prevention treatment", Byanyima said, pointing to a new drug called lenacapavir, developed by US pharmaceutical giant Gilead.

Trials have showed the drug to be 100% effective, and Byanyima

said tests were under way towards providing it as a single injection per year — far more affordable for low-income countries.

"That is almost like a flu vaccine," she said. "If this could be rolled out ambitiously... we could cut down new infections to close to zero. We could see the end of AIDS."

Byanyima appealed to the "deal-maker" Trump directly, insisting that rescuing the global HIV response was "an amazing deal": lenacapavir is able to "make profits for Gilead, to create good jobs for Americans and to save lives".

She suggested that when PEPFAR is brought back online, UNAIDS could work with the United States and other donors to help low-income countries become self-sufficient in the fight against HIV.

Freeze frame



A drone view shows Crap da Sass castle and the frozen lake in Silvaplana near St Moritz, Switzerland, yesterday. (Reuters)

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