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RAMADAN THOUGHT

O mankind! Remember the Grace of Allah upon you!
Is there any creator other than Allah who provides for
you from the sky (rain) and the earth? *La ilaha illa Huwa*
(none has the right to be worshipped but He). How then
are you turning away (from Him)? *(Qur'an 35: 3)*

Prayer times
Fajr.....4:11; Zuhr.....11:39; Asr.....3:07;
Maghrib.....5:53; Isha.....7:22

Fasting times
Iftar today5:52pm

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**Qatar Airways Group,
Virgin Australia
integrated alliance
gets ACCC nod**

Qatar Airways Group and Virgin Australia have received final go-ahead from the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) for the airlines' integrated alliance. This final determination officially signals the green light for Virgin Australia's new 28 weekly flights between Australia and Doha - operated under a wet-lease with Qatar Airways - to proceed. "Today's announcement by the ACCC sends a clear signal of the appetite that exists for delivering competition, world-class service and value to Australian passengers," said Qatar Airways Group chief executive officer Badr Mohammed al-Meer.

Business Page 1

**Minaretein Centre
serves over 2,000
Iftar meals daily**

Qatar Foundation (QF)'s Minaretein Centre has been serving over 2,000 Iftar meals daily without any food waste throughout the month of Ramadan, highlighting its commitment to sustainability and community engagement. The Minaretein Centre's "Zero Waste Iftar" initiative challenges food waste by designing an Iftar that minimises excess and redirects food waste into productive use, said Abdulkarim Kuchukov, a master's student at Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU)'s College of Islamic Studies, in an article. **Page 12**

**Algerian Boxer Imane
praises training at
Aspire Academy**

Algeria's Olympic boxer Imane Kheif has praised her training experience at Aspire Academy as she concluded her training camp in preparation for the 2025 World Boxing Championships to be held in Liverpool, UK. In a statement, Kheif remarked that conducting her training camp at Aspire Academy was the best opportunity she could have hoped for. She described the institution as outstanding, having hosted numerous champions, national teams, and squads in the past, and expressed gratitude for the invaluable support and hospitality provided by the Qatar Boxing Federation. **Sport Page 1**

3 dead in Israeli raid in Lebanon



Three people were killed and 18 others injured in an Israeli raid on southern Lebanon. The Lebanese ministry of health said yesterday that an Israeli raid on the town of Kfar Tibnit resulted in the deaths of three people, including a woman, and injury to 18 others, including six children and eight women. Separately, Israeli drones launched a raid on the Hadat neighbourhood in the southern suburbs of Beirut. **Page 6**

75,000 Palestinians pray at Al-Aqsa Mosque

Thousands of Palestinians performed the last Friday prayer of Ramadan at Al-Aqsa Mosque yesterday, despite strict Israeli military measures enforced by the occupation. The Administration Department of Awqaf and Al-Aqsa Mosque Affairs/ Jerusalem estimated that around 75,000 worshippers attended the Friday prayer at the mosque. Israeli forces imposed severe restrictions on Palestinians coming from West Bank

to enter Jerusalem for the prayer at Al-Aqsa. The Israeli army heightened its presence at Qalandiya military checkpoint north of Jerusalem and the 300 checkpoint separating Bethlehem and Jerusalem, thoroughly inspecting the IDs of Palestinians. Men under 55 years of age and women under 50, who did not have special permits, were barred from entering Jerusalem. **QNA**

Israeli court's rejection of aid appeal 'legalises genocide in Gaza'

QNA
Gaza

The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor stated that the Israeli Supreme Court's decision to reject the appeal for allowing humanitarian aid into Gaza represents a central part of a comprehensive colonial system that directly contributes to the commission of genocide against the people of Gaza.

In a statement issued yesterday, the monitor emphasised that the decision, further proves that the Israeli judiciary, which has never been an instrument of justice for Palestinians, functions as part of a systematic system involving all state institu-



An aid convoy moving through Gaza. **(File picture)**

tions, including the government, military, security agencies, military prosecution, courts, and media. These institutions coordinate their roles to facilitate crimes against Palestinians, offer a false legal cover for them, and blatantly defy international legal and humanitarian standards.

The monitor pointed out that while human rights organisations warned of the accelerating famine in Gaza and the deaths of infants due to hunger due to Israel's blockade preventing the entry of humanitarian aid and basic goods for over three weeks the "Supreme Court" provided clear and direct legitimacy to this blockade, which deprived more than 2mn people, half of them children, of food, water, medicine, fuel, and electricity for 18 months.



Motorists ride past a damaged building after a strong earthquake struck central Myanmar, in Mandalay, Myanmar, yesterday.

UN mobilising to help those in need after S Asia quake

Reuters
United Nations

The United Nations is mobilising in Southeast Asia to help those in need, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said yesterday after a powerful earthquake centred in Myanmar rocked the region.

"The government of Myanmar has asked for international support and our team in Myanmar is already in contact in order to fully

mobilise our resources in the region to support the people of Myanmar," Guterres said.

"But of course there are other countries impacted. The epicentre is in Myanmar, and Myanmar is the weakest country in this present situation," he added.

Meanwhile, President Donald Trump yesterday vowed the US would assist Myanmar after it was hit by a huge earthquake that also shook Thailand, with many killed and trapped in collapsed buildings.

Trump told reporters "we will

be helping" as images emerged of flattened buildings, downed bridges and cracked roads.

Myanmar's ruling junta yesterday called for donations of blood and medical supplies to help people hospitalised by the strong earthquake.

Zaw Min Tun, spokesperson of the military government, made the appeal for medical supplies in a news bulletin on state television, which called for blood donations due to "so many" injuries in three urban centres. **Page 8**

MoECC launches probe into dugong deaths

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC), which spotted two dead dugongs (sea cows) along the country's shores, has launched a thorough investigation into the cause of death.

Preliminary assessments indicate that the animals may have been trapped in fishing nets, a statement said yesterday.

The ministry confirmed that a team from the Wildlife Development Department has initiated

verification procedures and is collecting the necessary samples.

The MoECC pointed out that the possible causes of marine animal fatalities, such as dugongs, include collisions with boats or fishing vessels.

Currently, it is the dugong mating season, during which adult males engage in battles, sometimes leading to severe injuries that may result in death.

Dugongs are herbivorous marine mammals that inhabit warm

coastal waters and primarily feed on seagrass.

Qatar is home to the second-largest dugong population in the world after Australia, as its waters host large numbers of these animals, particularly in the seagrass-rich areas of the Arabian Gulf.

Dugongs in Qatar receive special protection under environmental laws and are subject to continuous monitoring to help preserve this endangered species.

The MoECC has urged fisher-

men and sea-goers to adhere to environmental guidelines that help protect marine life.

These include reducing boat speed in areas where marine species like dugongs, dolphins, and turtles are present, using sustainable fishing gear, and avoiding the disposal of nets or waste in the sea.

The ministry also emphasised the importance of immediately reporting any marine animal found entangled in fishing nets, stranded on the shore, or floating in the water, by

contacting the hotline at 16066.

The ministry stressed the importance of joint efforts to protect marine ecosystems and maintain their balance, highlighting the crucial role of the community in mitigating threats to marine species. It also noted that significant movements of dugong herds have been observed during the winter months, particularly between January and March, especially along the country's coastal areas. **To Page 3**



GU-Q professor's research offers insight into politics of mapmaking



Dr Anne-Sophie Pratte

Dr Anne-Sophie Pratte, assistant professor of history at Georgetown University in Qatar (GU-Q) has been recognised with the Newberry Library Long-Term Residential Fellowship.

She will be delving into how Mongol Manuscript Maps produced during China's last dynasty transformed the region. Funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Mellon Foundation, the fellowship supports researchers conducting

extensive work at the Newberry Library, home to a vast collection of historical maps and travel literature.

"With the current political and ecological uncertainties around the globe, there has never been a better time to understand how societies have shaped and reimagined their worlds," said Dr Pratte.

As an undergraduate at HEC Montreal, Dr Pratte's interest in East and Inner Asian studies was sparked by a semester spent studying abroad in China. "I was fas-

cinated by the rich history, ethnic diversity, and the language," she recalled.

The experience inspired her to pursue her PhD in Inner Asian and Altaic Studies from Harvard University. It is the basis for her forthcoming book project 'Where the State Meets the Steppe: Mongol Manuscript Maps of the Qing Period,' which explores how these maps, created by pastoralist Mongols, reshaped territorial understandings and governance in Inner Asia.

"These maps show that spaces can be radically reimagined, remade, and redrawn – a lesson that resonates with contemporary global challenges," she explained.

Dr Pratte will spend the Fall 2025 semester in Chicago exploring the library's collection.

"The Newberry Library's extensive collection of historical maps is an unparalleled resource for my research. This fellowship will allow me to delve deeply into rare manuscript maps and gain new insights, while learning from

fellow map scholars," she said.

Beyond her research, Dr Pratte views the fellowship as an opportunity to learn from diverse scholars in her field, while providing material to encourage her students' in-depth research. She remarked: "As professors, a key part of our role is to teach students basic research skills. Dedicating a few months to completing a major research project will make me better equipped to teach and inspire students to do substantive research."

'Qatar carves niche as premier luxury Eid destination'

By Joey Aguilar

Staff Reporter

Qatar's 'carefully cultivated' blend of five-star accommodations, cultural landmarks, and seamless travel infrastructure is attracting a growing number of GCC and global travellers seeking a luxurious and authentic Eid celebration, an industry expert has said.

Speaking to *Gulf Times*, Outing Qatar founder and managing director Mosaad Moustafa Eleiwa highlighted the unique factors that set Qatar apart from other regional destinations, making it a magnet for tourists from the GCC and beyond.

"We are seeing a significant rise in bookings from Saudi tourists and travellers from other regions who are drawn to Qatar for its combination of luxury, cultural authenticity, and family-friendly offerings," he said.

According to Eleiwa, Qatar's commitment to cultural preservation, coupled with its lavish offerings, has carved out a distinct niche in the competitive tourism market. Heavy investments in five-star hotels and resorts, such as the iconic Raffles and Fairmont, offer exceptional service, pristine beaches, and curated experiences that cater to high-end travellers seeking comfort and exclusivity.

He noted that the legacy of the FIFA World Cup 2022, which showcased Qatar's ability to host large-scale events with efficiency and style, has further boosted its reputation as a premier luxury and leisure destination. Eleiwa underlined the importance of accessibility, saying it is a key factor driving Qatar's popularity. Hamad International Airport, paired with the extensive network of Qatar Airways, ensures seamless connectivity from GCC countries and other regions.

"Eid holidays have become peak travel periods for GCC tourists. They are drawn by Qatar's wide range of activities, entertainment



Heavy investments in five-star hotels and resorts in Qatar, such as the iconic Raffles and Fairmont, offer exceptional service, pristine beaches, and curated experiences that cater to high-end travellers seeking comfort and exclusivity.

programmes, and vibrant cultural venues like Souq Waqif, Katara – the Cultural Village, West Walk, and Lusail Boulevard, in addition to our iconic shopping malls," he pointed out. He added that Qatar's diverse year-round programming, catering to interests ranging from sports and art to culture and business, ensures there's "something for everyone". Eleiwa said the infrastructure allows visitors to experience a multitude of flavours in a single day, from luxurious sea experiences to exhilarating dune bashing or immersive cultural en-

counters, often capped off with dazzling fireworks displays.

"Global visitors are increasingly embracing the adventure activities, sea experiences, and cultural vibes," Eleiwa noted. "We are currently handling multiple bookings from GCC and international clients for luxury car rentals, yacht charters, and safari experiences. The blend of sea, sand, and city tours creates truly memorable experiences for families."

He stressed that a collaborative approach between Qatar Tourism and private tourism entities



is further elevating the bar. The unified vision is driving Qatar's tourism strategy towards the goal of acquiring more than six million visitors. The hospitality sector has meticulously curated a range of experiences, from luxury stays and gourmet dining to cultural events and planned indoor and outdoor family entertainment, ensuring Eid tourists enjoy a seamless and unforgettable celebration, Eleiwa said.

He cited the streamlined visa-on-arrival policy and improved travel infrastructure's importance, which significantly enhanced Qatar's appeal. "This simplified proc-



ess has contributed to a marked rise in hotel occupancy rates during Eid holidays."

Eleiwa said Qatar boasts also advanced and convenient public transportation: the efficient metro network that connects the airport with key tourist areas like the Corniche, Katara – the Cultural Village, Lusail Boulevard, and The Pearl-Qatar. Metrolink buses enhance accessibility by providing connections to metro stations.

The noticeable rise in private jet bookings and luxury transport

services underscores Qatar's growing reputation as a premier destination for high-end travellers during Eid, offering both convenience and exclusivity, he said.

"These guests have multiple previous experiences visiting the country during global events, whether it's economic, sport, or adventurous ones," Eleiwa said, noting the recent FIA World Endurance Championship event. "They are returning with their families to witness the beauty and luxury experiences Qatar has to offer."

Clean-up campaign



The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change's Wildlife Protection Department has launched a campaign to clean and rehabilitate Rawdat Al Wajba and Wadi Al Wajba areas. These areas serve as habitats for various organisms that contribute to enhancing the land environment. The campaign is also part of the ministry's efforts to enhance biodiversity and sustainability across the country.



Souq Waqif Boutique Hotels, Al Najada roll out Eid offers

Souq Waqif Boutique Hotels, the five-star collection of boutique hotels, and Al Najada Hotel, 'the iconic property at the heart of Doha, characterised by its sheer opulence and royal heritage,' have unveiled dining offers to mark Eid al-Fitr celebrations.

During Eid days, the properties will introduce special offers in its diverse restaurants, a statement said. 'Al Terrace' overlooking the bustling Souq Waqif, promises 'an immersive dining experience that captures the essence of Qatari culture.'

The daily Eid dinner buffet with diverse selection of traditional and authentic dishes with a modern twist and creative presentation from 6pm-9.30pm, is priced at QR99 per person.

Argan, the local and international awards winning and the Michelin Bib Gourmand 2025 restaurant at Al Jasra Boutique Hotel, will offer a rich buffet on the second and third days of Eid, featur-

ing a wide variety of Moroccan, Arabic, and international dishes.

The Eid buffet, that embodies the essence of true Moroccan cuisine, will be available from 8pm-11.30pm, for QR199 per person. Guests can use their 'Entertainer', 'My Book' and 'Urban Points' vouchers.

The strategic location of 'Al Shurfa' restaurant, and its panoramic view overlooking the city's skyline will add a special atmosphere as guests will be able to enjoy the fireworks show that will light up the Doha sky during the Eid evenings.

'Al Shurfa' will offer during the three days of Eid from 7pm-11.30pm, Arabic and Oriental dishes from the set menu, curated specifically for the occasion, with the price of QR280 for two, while including a rich diversity of options for sharing.

On the second and third days of Eid, Al Baraha restaurant overlooking the piazza area, will offer



The Al Najada Hotel.

Eid brunch buffet from 12.30pm-4pm, featuring oriental and international cuisines.

There will be multiple and fresh options, ranging from soups varieties, cold and hot appetisers, an assortment of oriental and western culinary options, live cooking station, and various types of sweets and juices options for QR199 per person. Guests will also be able

to redeem their 'Entertainer', 'My Book' and 'Urban Points' vouchers.

Additionally, all outlets at Souq Waqif Boutique Hotel and Al Najada Hotel will welcome during Eid kids under six years to enjoy the buffet and set menus for free, while those below 11 will be entitled to get 50% discount, a statement added.



The 'Al Shurfa' restaurant.



Argan restaurant at Al Jasra Boutique Hotel.

Our shortcomings are great, but His Mercy is greater

How saddened one feels at the departure of the month of Ramadan! Blissful indeed are those whose records during Ramadan abound with righteous deeds, and miserable are those who neglected those righteous deeds in this month. Who truly benefits from the month of Ramadan? The Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said:

- "Whoever observes fasting during the month of Ramadan out of sincere faith, and hoping to attain Allah's rewards, then all his past sins will be forgiven." [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]
- "Whoever stands for prayers on the night of Qadr (i.e. a night of lofty rank, during which all matters are decreed) out of sincere faith and hoping for a reward from Allah, then all his previous sins will be forgiven." [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]
- "Whoever establishes prayers during the nights of Ramadan faithfully, out of sincere faith, and hoping to attain Allah's rewards (i.e., not for show), all his past sins will be forgiven." [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

Performing any one of the three deeds mentioned in these narrations will result in the forgiveness of sins. Each one, performed individually, expiates previous sins. These three deeds are: fasting the month of Ramadan, praying the Taraweeh (voluntary night prayer) during its nights and praying the optional night prayers during the Laylatul-Qadr (the Night of Divine Decree). The forgiveness of sins in return for praying during the night of Al-Qadr occurs whether or not one recognises that it is the night of Al-Qadr, whereas the first two types of deeds do require the completion of the full month in fasting, or praying the optional night prayers every night for the entire month. The one who is negligent and careless in performing good deeds will lose out on a reward that is in proportion to his negligence. Allah The Almighty has warned those who are negligent with regards to their prayers saying (what means): [So woe to those who pray. (But) who are heedless of their prayer.] [Qur'an 107: 4-5] This warning is for those who are negligent but still pray, so what of those who totally abandon their prayers?

Similarly, what would the case be for those who did not fast at all, though they count themselves among the Ummah (Muslim nation)? Didn't the Prophet sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, say: "He who lives to see Ramadan and was not forgiven (i.e. due to his sin and negligence) - may Allah expel him from His mercy."

Jibreel, 'alaihi-salaam, had said this to the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, and told him to say 'Aameen' after saying it, and he complied. This is a supplication against the type of people who do not utilise the month of Ramadan as it should be utilised; it is a great season that simply passed them by, without their making an effort in it. Such people would therefore deserve to be expelled from the mercy of Allah The Almighty, because if they are so negligent during such a great season, then they will certainly be more so during other times. Many of us have numerous shortcomings regarding the etiquettes of Ramadan, its recommended acts, and even some of its obligations, for which we must repent to Allah The Almighty.

Shortcomings are inevitably found either in our prayers or our fasting, and we must ask the forgiveness of Allah The Almighty for these shortcomings and for not utilising the month as it should have been utilised.

Imam al-Hasan, may Allah have mercy on him, said, "Exert extra effort in asking for the forgiveness of Allah The Almighty, because man does not know when the mercy of Allah The Almighty will descend upon the people." Allah The Almighty compares Tawheed (i.e. Islamic monotheism) with asking forgiveness when He Says (what means): {So know [O Muhammad], that there is no deity except Allah and ask forgiveness for your sin...} [Qur'an 47:19] This is to reflect the importance of this act. Satan said, "I will destroy people by beautifying sins for them, and they will destroy me by frequently supplicating for the forgiveness of Allah The Almighty."

Supplicating for forgiveness is the culmination of all righteous deeds; with it one should conclude their prayers, pilgrimages, optional night prayers, and social gatherings. Thus, if the gathering included the mention and remembrance of Allah The Almighty, then it would only add to its beauty, otherwise, if people were heedless within it, then this supplication would expiate their heedlessness or the minor sins that they committed during it.

Likewise, one should conclude Ramadan with supplications for forgiveness. 'Umar ibn 'Abdul-'Azeez, may Allah have mercy on him, instructed his deputies in different regions to conclude the month with seeking and supplicating for forgiveness and paying Zakatul-Fitr, for the latter purifies the fasting person from whatever disputes he had (orally) while seeking forgiveness makes up for the imperfections that the fasting contained due to the sins that the person committed. Indeed, fasting necessitates our seeking a great deal of forgiveness; how many a time during our fast do we indulge in evil talk and wicked sins? Some of our righteous Salaf (righteous predecessors) would ask for forgiveness immediately after having performed their prayers in case they had shortcomings in them, just as a person would seek forgiveness for a sin they had committed. If this was the case with regard to their prayers, then how would the case have been regarding their sins?

Moreover, the best way to seek forgiveness is when one accompanies it with sincere repentance. Seeking forgiveness is a cure and a deterrent against repeating the sin; but those who verbally seek forgiveness yet return to their sins after Ramadan would have their repentance as well as their fasting rejected. Thus, much effort goes into seeking forgiveness sincerely, not just verbally but wholeheartedly. Article source: <http://www.islamweb.net/maimainpage/>

Public should enjoy nature responsibly during holidays

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC) has urged the public to enjoy the meadows, beaches, parks and other open natural places whether on land or marine sites responsibly and ensure they maintain the cleanliness of these vital places for the local environment. Considering that during the Eid holidays, large number of people will flock to such places, the MoECC stressed that the visitors should abide by the rules and guidelines for using such public facilities and avoid littering and the other negative practices that could negatively impact the well-being of the wildlife and environment. Plants, trees, animals and birds and other living beings are considered key components for the local environment and protecting them is a shared responsibility, stressed the ministry through a number of posts on its official X account.



Colombia, Spain envoys present credentials



HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi received a copy of the credentials of Odette Yidi David as ambassador of the Republic of Colombia to the state, and ambassador Alvaro Renedo Zalba as new ambassador of the Kingdom of Spain to the state. HE the minister wished the two ambassadors success in carrying out their duties, assuring them of all support to advance bilateral relations between Qatar and their two countries to closer co-operation in various fields. (QNA)

Qatar reiterates firm commitment to promoting values of equality, tolerance

QNA
Geneva

Qatar has reaffirmed its commitment to promoting the values of equality, combating racism, fostering tolerance, and encouraging acceptance of others. It has also emphasised the measures it has taken to ensure a safe, pluralistic societal environment free from tension, hatred, and discrimination.

This commitment stems from the country's firm belief that racism and racial discrimination are violations of all international and national charters and norms. It also noted that its population currently includes individuals from over 80 countries, representing various ethnicities, religions, and cultural backgrounds.

This came in a statement delivered by Sheikh Sultan bin Khalid al-Thani, who serves as the Second Secretary of Qatar's Permanent Mission to the United



Nations Office in Geneva, during a session commemorating the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the 60th Anniversary of the Adoption of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, held under item 9 of the agenda of the 58th session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

He noted that, even 60 years after the adoption of the Convention, the principles and standards it set forth continue to serve as a cornerstone in addressing many of the challenges the world faces today, especially as new and evolving forms of

racism and discrimination continue to affect specific segments of society based on their nationality, ethnicity, or religion.

He also highlighted the daily violations faced by migrants, refugees, and minority groups, including threats to their very right to life, due to hate speech and hostile behaviour directed at them.

He added that Qatar established the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue, which is dedicated to promoting a culture of dialogue and encouraging peaceful coexistence and mutual acceptance among followers of different religions and civilizations.

Probe launched into dugong deaths



From Page 1

The MoECC confirmed that it conducts regular monitoring operations and enforces regulations to ensure that fishermen and sea-goers comply with

guidelines aimed at protecting endangered species.

Earlier this month, the Ministry of Municipality announced a ban on fishing with certain type of nets in the western area of the country, extending from Ras Al

Brouq to Al Ashairij. This decision aligns with Ministerial Decision No 36 of 2025 and is part of efforts to protect dugong aggregation areas and maintain ecological balance in the Qatari waters.

Ooredoo offers more roaming data for Eid

With more travellers expected during the Eid holiday, Ooredoo Passport now provides three times more roaming data at no additional cost, a statement said. The Ooredoo Passport Weekly is available to both prepaid and postpaid customers, while the Ooredoo Passport Monthly is exclusively for postpaid customers.

With this upgrade, customers now get 3GB of roaming data and 100 minutes for QR100 with the weekly plan, and 12GB of data and 300 minutes for QR350 with the monthly plan. These roaming solutions are available in over 150 destinations.

In addition to the Ooredoo Passport, Data SIM+ (Premium

and Platinum) plans offer generous roaming data allowances, while Roam Like Home service allows subscribers to use their local allowances while travelling, ensuring connectivity in 35 countries including the UK, the US, France, Turkey, Thailand, and all GCC countries.

For those seeking even greater roaming benefits, Qatarnet+ Platinum provides unlimited data and minutes in 35 key destinations. Travellers can check their plan's roaming allowances by visiting <http://ore.do/travel>, Ooredoo's dedicated roaming website. Sabah al-Kuwari, senior director of Marketing Communications at Ooredoo Qatar, said: "At Ooredoo, we continu-

ously strive to meet the evolving needs of our customers. Our upgraded roaming solutions now offer greater value and flexibil-

ity. As we welcome Eid al-Fitr, we want to ensure our customers enjoy the best connectivity wherever they go."

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Amir sends cables of condolences to Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani and HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani sent cables of condolences to Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud on the death of Dr Mutleb bin Abdullah al-Nafisah.

Amir sends cables of condolences to King of Thailand

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani sent cables of condolences to the King Maha Vajiralongkorn of the Kingdom of Thailand on the victims of the earthquake that struck his country, wishing a speedy recovery for the injured. HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani also sent a similar cable to Thailand Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra, wishing a speedy recovery for the injured.

Qatar expresses solidarity with Republic of Korea amid devastating wildfires

Qatar has expressed its solidarity with the friendly Republic of Korea as it grapples with the aftermath of devastating wildfires in the country's southeast, which have resulted in multiple fatalities, injuries, and the evacuation of thousands. In a statement yesterday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs extended Qatar's condolences and deep sympathy to the government and people of the Republic of Korea over the tragic loss of life, wishing a swift recovery for the injured.

Amir sends cables of condolences to Myanmar's state administration council chairman

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani and HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani sent cables of condolences to State Administration Council Chairman and Prime Minister of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, on the victims of the earthquake that struck his country. His Highness wished a swift recovery for the injured. (QNA)



GU-Q alumnus sets unique path for others to follow

Ousman Camara's journey from The Gambia to Georgetown University in Qatar (GU-Q), and back again is a testament to his deep faith, resilience, and the power of education to transform lives.

"I memorised the Qur'an, and it shaped my whole life path, opening a way to not only pursue higher education, but to give back to communities across Africa."

With only a year left of high school, Ousman won a Qur'an recitation competition that landed him a fully paid scholarship to

the Institute of Religious Studies for Boys, run by the Ministry of Education, Qatar. It was the beginning of a meaningful journey that prepared him to pursue his life mission of improving education in Africa.

After graduating high school, an encounter while at the Masjid opened the way for him to attend the Academic Bridge Programme at Qatar Foundation, and his eventual acceptance at GU-Q.

Ousman immersed himself in initiatives that aligned with this mission of service to others: men-

toring peers, providing emotional support, and advocating for educational equity. His selfless insight into others even earned him a reputation as a matchmaker.

As his own academic dreams came true, his thoughts always returned to how to improve the underfunded schools of his home country. At the end of 2018, he heard that his Qur'an school would not last through the rainy season, and he began his first educational fundraising campaign. "My plan was to raise QR100,000 to build a brand new school." Through per-



sonal donations from friends, he collected QR60,000, more than enough to start construction.

Since graduating from Georgetown in 2019, Ousman founded the Educate a Generation Foundation in The Gambia, and serves as an educational consultant across Af-

rica, leading initiatives like "Kids in Technology" to integrate digital literacy into African schools.

He recently designed and launched a Bridge Programme at Lamin and Kadie Bah Academy in Sierra Leone. "It's a deeply personal project inspired by my own

transformative experience at the Qatar Foundation's ABP," shared Ousman. "I understood firsthand how a structured preparatory programme could empower students with the skills, confidence, and knowledge to excel in top universities."

Leadership seminar, Iftar meet conducted

District 116 Toastmasters organised a leadership seminar and Iftar meet. District logistics manager Mashhood V C, director Sabeena M K, programme quality director Alarmel Mangai, Manzoor Moideen, Rajesh V C, Raghavan Menon, Thayalan K and club growth director Sherwin Olimpo spoke. Abdul Halir and Shabir Hameed managed the event.



Qur'an competition organised



In connection with the holy month of Ramadan, Malarvadi Children Organisation conducted the 15th edition of its Qur'an competition, Qur'anic 2025. Thumama Zone bagged the championship, while Wakra Zone and Rayyan Zone claimed second and third places, respectively. The event was organised under the leadership of Malarvadi officials, including Nahya Beebi, Babeeena Basheer, Mujeeb Rahman, Nabeel, Shamsudheen, Baheej Alavi, Shabana Shafi, Sana Kareem, Rudaina and Fairuz.

Poster released for Eid meet



The poster for 'Noor al-Eid' Family Meet, an art and cultural gathering organised by the KMCC Qatar Manjeswaram Mandal Committee, was officially released by Muttom Mahmood Sahib. Mandal president Razak Kallatty, general secretary Nasser Greenland, treasurer Faisal Posot, co-officers Rahim Greenland and Ashraf Dharmanagar, along with various panchayat office-bearers including Fazal Mallankai, Siddique Manjeswaram and Irshad Bambrana, were present. The organisers stated that the gathering will be a celebration of Kerala's rich cultural heritage and a platform for fostering unity and friendship among expatriate families.

Iftar meals distributed to fishermen



Billawas Qatar distributed Iftar meals to more than 150 Indian fishermen by visiting them at their accommodation. The initiative was supported by Malabar Gold and Diamonds. Billawas Qatar president Aparna Sharath as well as management and advisory committee members were present.

Nicmar alumni meet held



Over 100 alumni of Nicmar University, Pune, India, had a reunion in Doha in the presence of vice-chancellor Dr Sushma S Kulkarni, dean Dr Jonardan Koner, alumni relations head Dr Vandana Bhavas, career services associate director Akhilesh Rathod, and assistant director Vijay Nishadkar. Voltas general manager Srinivas Murthy, Bilfinger operations manager Srinivas Guntur, Assets Group IT head Soham Desai, Qatar Ministry of Education and Higher Education's engineering services operations manager Mohammad Adil Masood, and Voltas International Operations Business Group's project control manager Anup Barsagade were felicitated. Anuj Sharma, who co-ordinated the meet, also proposed a vote of thanks. Arun Jayakumar and Tanvi Parikh were the masters of ceremony.

KSQ bids farewell to long-time Qatar residents

Karnataka Sangha Qatar (KSQ) organised a farewell event in honour of Narayan Rao and Shobha Rao, who are leaving Qatar to settle in India after 28 years.

Rao, formerly with Qatar Electricity & Water Co, has served KSQ and many other associations, utilising his expertise in auditing and financial statement preparation – a key requirement under the Indian Cultural Centre (ICC) and the embassy of India. The event commenced with an opening note by general secretary Kumar Swamy, followed by environmental and logistics secretary Shashidhar H B leading the proceedings, beginning with the ceremonial lighting of the lamp. KSQ president Ravi Shetty expressed his gratitude for Rao's dedicated service. Former president Madhu H K lauded Rao's contributions across various sectors, high-



lighting the support of Shobha Rao and their children's academic excellence. In his address, Rao thanked

KSQ and shared words of wisdom for leading a peaceful and fulfilling life.

Shobha Rao also reflected on her fruitful association with KSQ and well-wishers. Arun Kumar, ICC official Sandeep Reddy and

V S Mannangi, and Subramanya Hebbagelu offered felicitations. Arun Kumar, many well-wishers from KSQ also spoke. Vice-president Ramesha K S proposed a vote of thanks.



NIS hosts motivation talk



Renowned Indian illusionist and motivational speaker Gopinath Muthukad engaged in an interactive session with the students of Noble International School (NIS). The discussion focused on key topics essential for personal growth and social responsibility. The school finance director Shoukath Ali Taj, transportation director R S Moideen, event management director Abdul Majeed, principal Dr Shibu Abdul Rasheed, along with vice-principals, heads of sections, and faculty members were present.

Annual book donation, exchange drive held

The Kerala Women's Initiative Qatar (Kwiq), in collaboration with the Indian Community Benevolent Forum (ICBF), hosted the eighth season of Pusthakmela – an annual book donation and free exchange drive supporting parents and students of CBSE-affiliated Indian schools from Grade 4-12.

Indian ambassador Vipul inaugurated the event. ICBF president Shanavas Bava, Indian Cultural Centre president A P Manikantan, Indian Sports Centre president E P Abdurahman, Indian Business and Professionals Council president Thaha Mohammed, Kwiq patron Zareena Ahad and other dignitaries were present.

Kwiq president Anju Menon said more than 2,500 people visited the fair, which embodies the spirit of sustainability and com-



munity support, helping families reduce textbook costs through

responsible resource circulation true to its 'Reduce, Reuse,

Recycle' theme. A highlight this year was a one-year scholar-

ship secured by Kwiq through a sponsor, covering school uni-

form and book expenses for a deserving parent.

MES observes Earth Hour



In solidarity with the global movement, MES Indian School observed the Earth Hour on March 22, embracing the slogan 'Our Power, Our Planet'. The event aimed to raise awareness about energy conservation and the urgent need to combat climate change. As a part of the observance the school turned off all its non-essential lights for an hour. The students lit eco-friendly candles, symbolising hope and collective action for a greener future. Principal Dr Hameeda Kadar stressed that through the initiative, MES Indian School has reaffirmed its dedication to environmental awareness, aligning with Qatar National Vision 2030 in fostering sustainable practices within the community. Jency George and Pushyami Racherla of the Campus Care Force guided the event.

MES wins second runner-up in Ramadan football



The boys' football team of MES Indian School won the second runner-up position in the School Olympic Programme - Ramadan Cup Football Competition competing against 32 teams from both public and private schools across Qatar. Principal Dr Hameeda Kadar congratulated the team and the coaches Binoy K K and Akbar Ali.

Rajagiri Little Kingdom celebrates Graduation Day



Rajagiri Little Kingdom celebrated Graduation Day recently. The little graduates adorned in traditional graduation gowns and hats, received their certificates, symbolising the successful completion of their early education journey. The audience was treated to an action song, followed by gratitude speeches where the young graduates expressed their appreciation for their teachers and parents. "Graduation Day is a celebration of the hard work and dedication of our students, teachers, and parents," principal Joshy Abraham said.

BPS partners with IIT Madras

Birla Public School (BPS), Doha, has announced its partnership with the prestigious IIT Madras School Connect Programme.

The eight-week certification programme is designed to offer Class XI and XII students a hands-on experience of various career paths, allowing them to explore cutting-edge fields such as Data Science and AI, Electronic Systems, and Architecture & Design.

The programme combines hands-on experiences with industry-relevant case studies and interactive sessions, bridging the gap between classroom learning and real-world applications.

The IIT Madras School Connect Programme has already benefitted over 40,000 students from 2,000 schools. IIT Madras, India's top-ranked institute, is renowned for its academic excellence in engineering, technology, and research. Its legacy of producing some of the world's brightest minds in the fields of entrepreneurship is a testament to its commitment to nurturing creativity and critical thinking.

Billawas Qatar in unique Women's Day celebration



Billawas Qatar celebrated Women's Day under the leadership of the newly appointed president Aparna Sharath by inviting 40 women workers as guests. They enjoyed the evening by participating in fun games, dance, and conversations, and were also served meals and prizes. Radhika Y, from the TWA management committee, extended her best wishes to Billawas Qatar for the noble gesture. Cultural secretary Pooja Jithin hosted the event and assistant cultural secretary Shwetha proposed a vote of thanks.

IWA celebrates Iftar, Women's Day



The Indian Women's Association (IWA) hosted an Iftar and Women's Day celebration by honouring four distinguished women - Asha Shiju (educator), Neelambari Savardekar (community leader), Dr Nupur Gupta (dentist), and Nazia Ahmed (media professional) - who shared their inspiring success stories. The guests of honour were Indian Cultural Centre's cultural head Nandini Abbagouni and R Muskan. IWA president Priya Bhedi highlighted the significance of empowerment.



Iran, allies hold annual pro-Palestinian rallies

AFP
Tehran

Large crowds took to the streets in the capitals of Iran, Iraq and Yemen yesterday for the annual show of support for Palestinians and denunciation of Israel.

Quds (Jerusalem) Day commemorations were launched in 1979 by Ayatollah R Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic republic, which has made support for the Palestinian cause a cornerstone of its foreign policy.

The marches, which call for Jerusalem to be returned to the Palestinians, are traditionally held on the last Friday of the holy month of Ramadan.

Crowds gathered in the streets of Tehran after supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei urged the Iranian people to protest against "the enemies' tricks".

Demonstrators waved Iranian and Palestinian flags, as well as those of the Lebanese group Hezbollah.

Many held placards reading "Death to America" and "Death to Israel", and chanted anti-US and anti-Israel slogans, an AFP journalist reported. "I feel in the near future Gaza will be victorious and Israel, as history dictates, will face collapse and the flag of Islam's might will be hoisted in Gaza," said Ahmad Reza Pourdastan, former commander of the army's



Iranians take part in a protest marking the annual Quds Day (Jerusalem Day) on the last Friday of the holy month of Ramadan in Tehran, yesterday.

ground forces. Keffiyeh-wearing 22-year-old student Fatemeh Mohabbati said she attended the event to "condemn the crimes that are happening".

Similar rallies were held across the country, state TV images showed. "Your march on Quds Day will nullify all the enemies' tricks and false words," Khamenei said in a video message on Thursday.

The authorities had called on Iranians to come out in force for the demonstrations against Israel.

Palestinian group Hamas – part of Iran's so-called Axis of Resistance against Israel and the United States – said: "Jerusalem will remain at the heart of our battle against the occupation."

"The enemy will not succeed in breaking the will of our people, who are making sacrifices for their Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa," added the group, which has been at war with Israel in the Gaza Strip since October 2023.

Thousands also gathered in the Yemeni capital Sanaa, held by the

Houthi fighters, in demonstrations described by the fighters' TV channel as "the largest in the Arab and Islamic world".

Deminations were also held in several other cities, coming shortly after dawn air strikes by the United States hit six Yemeni provinces, including Sanaa, according to Houthi-affiliated media. In the Iraqi capital, several hundred supporters of pro-Iran armed groups marched, waving flags in the colours of their factions, as well as Palestinian and



Supporters of Yemen's Houthi fighters attend a gathering to mark annual Quds (Jerusalem) Day commemorations in Sanaa, yesterday.



Fighters from Iraq's Hashed al-Shaabi (Popular Mobilisation Forces) carry flags as they rally to mark the annual Quds Day (Jerusalem day) commemorations in Baghdad, yesterday.

tion scheduled to be held metres (yards) from a site struck by Israel yesterday.

Demonstrators had gathered on Thursday at the Burj al-Barajneh camp for Palestinian refugees south of Beirut, holding Palestinian and Hezbollah flags, as well as pictures of Qassem's predecessor Hassan Nasrallah, who was killed in an Israeli air strike last September.

Chemical weapons inspectors 'granted access to Assad-era sites in Syria'

Reuters
Amsterdam

Chemical weapons inspectors have been taken by Syria's caretaker authorities to previously unseen production and storage locations dating from the rule of Bashar al-Assad, who was toppled three months ago, sources said yesterday.

A team from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) visited Syria from March 12-21 to prepare for the task of locating and destroying remnants of Assad's illegal stockpile. Five locations were visited by inspectors, some of which had been looted or damaged.

Among them were locations that had not been declared to the watchdog by the Assad government, they said. The team was given access to documents and detailed information about Assad's chemical weapons programme, the sources said, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss confidential details.

"The Syrian caretaker authorities extended all possible support and co-operation at short notice," the agency said in a summary of the visit posted online. The OPCW was provided with security escorts and had "unfettered access" to sites and people, it said. No additional details were made public.

The co-operation signals a dramatic improvement in relations from the past decade, during which Syrian officials under Assad stonewalled OPCW inspectors.

The visit illustrates that Syria's interim authorities are making good on a promise to work with the international community to destroy Assad's chemical weapons, said a diplomatic source briefed on the matter.

The destruction of any remaining chemical weapons was on a list of conditions the US has provided to Syria if it wants to see sanctions relief, Reuters reported on Tuesday.

Three inquiries – by a joint UN-OPCW mechanism, the OPCW's Investigation and Identification team, and a UN war

crimes probe – concluded that Syrian government forces under Assad used the nerve agent sarin and chlorine barrel bombs in attacks during the civil war that killed or injured thousands.

Assad and his Russian military backers always denied using chemical weapons in the conflict, which began in 2011 and left hundreds of thousands dead.

Assad-led Syria joined the agency under a US-Russian deal following a 2013 sarin gas attack that killed hundreds. Around 1,300 metric tons of chemical weapons and precursors were destroyed.

Experts at the OPCW believe there are still undeclared stocks and want to visit more than 100 locations where they are believed to have been made or stockpiled by forces under Assad. The OPCW is preparing to open a field office in Syria, where a recent surge in violence has triggered heightened security concerns. The OPCW, a treaty-based agency in The Hague with 193 member countries, is tasked with implementing the 1997 Chemical Weapons Convention.

Getting ready for Eid amid conflict



A Palestinian woman displaced from northern Gaza makes traditional cookies for the upcoming Eid al-Fitr holiday which marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan, in Gaza City, yesterday.

AGREEMENT Syria, Lebanon sign border security deal in Saudi Arabia

The defence ministers of Lebanon and Syria signed an agreement in Jeddah "to address security and military threats" along their common border, the official Saudi Press Agency said, AFP reported from Jeddah. The accord comes after frontier clashes this month that left 10 people dead. SPA reported that Michel Menassa and his Syrian counterpart Murhaf Abu Qasra met in the Saudi port city of Jeddah on Thursday "to discuss issues of mutual interest aimed at achieving security and stability between Syria and Lebanon". It said they signed an agreement on "the strategic importance of border demarcation, the establishment of Syrian-Lebanese legal and specialised committees... and the activation of co-ordination mechanisms to address security and military threats", particularly on the border. Menassa had been due to visit Damascus on Wednesday, but the trip was postponed at Syria's request, sources on both sides said. A Syrian government source told AFP that Menassa's visit was pushed back due to "preparations for the formation of a new government" in Damascus. A Lebanese official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the postponement was "in no way related to tensions or conflicts".

AFP
Beirut

Israel said yesterday it will enforce a ceasefire in Lebanon everywhere in the country, after rocket fire prompted it to bomb Beirut for the first time during the fragile four-month-old truce with Hezbollah.

Lebanese Prime Minister Nauaf Salam described the strike on Beirut's southern suburbs as "a dangerous escalation" and French President Emmanuel Macron called it an "unacceptable" truce violation.

The health ministry reported no casualties from the Beirut attack but said Israeli strikes in the south killed five people.

It was the second time rockets had been launched at Israel from Lebanon since the November ceasefire – the first was last Saturday – and the second time Hezbollah denied involvement.

"The equation has changed," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a statement. "We will continue to enforce the ceasefire with force, strike everywhere in Lebanon against any threat to the State of Israel."

Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz had earlier said "there will be no quiet in Beirut either" if there is none in northern Israel.



People inspect the site of an Israeli strike, in Beirut southern suburbs, Lebanon, yesterday.

Israel has continued to carry out often-deadly air raids in southern and eastern Lebanon since the ceasefire, striking what it says are Hezbollah military targets that violated the agreement.

But yesterday's was the first in the capital's southern suburbs since the ceasefire. It came after the military warned residents to "immediately evacuate" the area.

It said the attack targeted a "site used to store UAVs by Hezbollah's Aerial Unit (127) in the area of Dahieh, a key Hezbollah

stronghold". Israel heavily bombed the area during its war with the group last year.

At a joint press conference with Macron in Paris, Lebanese President Joseph Aoun said an investigation will have to be conducted but all indications are "Hezbollah is not responsible" for the latest rocket fire.

An AFP photographer at the scene said the Israeli strike completely destroyed the targeted building. Black smoke rose into the sky and fire burned in the rubble.

Israel's warning sparked panic

in the densely populated area, AFP correspondents reported. Heavy traffic clogged roads as many residents tried to flee.

"We're very afraid the war will return," said Mohammed, 55, a taxi driver rushing to pick up his daughter from school and leave the area.

The Israeli military said two "projectiles" were fired towards Israel, with one intercepted and the other falling inside Lebanon.

Later yesterday, it said that over the previous few hours the military "struck Hezbollah command centres, infrastructure sites, launchers and fighters in southern Lebanon."

Hezbollah said it "confirms the party's respect for the ceasefire agreement and denies any involvement in the rockets launched today from the south of Lebanon".

Under the terms of the ceasefire, Israel was due to complete its troop withdrawal from Lebanon by February 18 after missing a January deadline, but it has kept soldiers in five places it deems "strategic".

The agreement also required Hezbollah to pull its forces north of the Litani River, about 30 kilometres from the Israeli border, and dismantle any remaining military infrastructure in the south.

South Sudan govt says VP Machar 'under house arrest'

The South Sudan government said yesterday that First Vice-President Riek Machar was "under house arrest," two days after he was detained, as a former Kenyan premier arrived in Juba to mediate the crisis threatening to end the fragile peace deal between rival factions, AFP reported from Juba. Machar's arrest by forces loyal to President Salva Kiir prompted UN Chief Antonio Guterres yesterday to call on warring parties to "put down the weapons" and "put all the people of South Sudan first," as the conflict risks plunging the world's youngest nation back into civil war. Kiir "directed the placement of Dr Riek Machar under house arrest," information minister and government spokesman Michael Makuei Lueth said in a statement, in the first official comments since Machar's arrest. Despite the arrest, Juba appeared calm yesterday, with shops open and people on the streets, an AFP correspondent said. Makuei blamed Machar for clashes in recent weeks in Nasir County, accusing him of "agitating" his forces "to rebel against the government with the aim of disrupting peace so that elections are not held and South Sudan goes back to war". He called on the public "to be calm and maintain peace."

Trump, Canada PM ease tensions with 'productive' call

AFP
Washington

US President Donald Trump (pictured) said he had an "extremely productive" first call yesterday with Canada's new Prime Minister Mark Carney, after soaring tensions over tariffs and Trump's repeated calls to annex his northern neighbour.

Trump added that the two had agreed to meet soon after Canada's April 28 general election in which Carney - who took office two weeks ago - has made standing up to the US president the focus of his campaign.

"I just finished speaking with Prime Minister Mark Carney, of Canada. It was an extremely productive call, we agree on many things," Trump said on his Truth Social network.

Trump said that they would be "meeting immediately after Canada's upcoming election to work on elements of politics, business, and all other factors, that will end up being great for both the United States of America and Canada".

Typically, a new Canadian leader makes a phone call with the US president an immediate priority but this was Trump and Carney's first contact since the Canadian was sworn in on March 14.

Carney's office said the pair had a "very constructive conversation" and agreed to begin "comprehensive negotiations about a new economic and security relationship immediately following the election".

It added, however, that Carney told Trump that his government will impose retaliatory tariffs on American goods from April 2, when sweeping US levies are set to come into place.

Trump's glowing post was still a dramatic change in tone from recent rhetoric between Washington and Ottawa, who are North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) allies and long-standing economic partners.

The US president has sparked fury in Canada by repeatedly insisting that it should become the 51st US state and by slapping or threatening tariffs on the country.

His post yesterday was notable for its diplomacy, as Trump gave Carney his official title of prime minister and made no reference to his annexation drive.

In contrast, Trump would often belittle Carney's predecessor Justin Trudeau, with whom he had a long-standing rivalry, as "governor" in a reference to his calls for Canada to join the United States.

Canada's new prime minister - who is in a tight election race to stay in the job - has meant



while stepped up his rhetoric.

The former central banker was chosen by Canada's centrist Liberal Party to replace Trudeau but has never faced the country's electorate.

Just a day before the call, Carney upped the ante by declaring that decades of close co-operation with the United States were now at an end because of Trump.

"The old relationship we had with the United States based on deepening integration of our economies and tight security and military co-operation is over," Carney said.

Carney added that he would not participate in substantive trade negotiations with Washington until the president shows Canada "respect", particularly by ending his repeated annexation threats.

While the call may have eased tensions for now, the tariffs issue in particular has not gone away.

Trump's planned 25% levy on vehicle imports to the United States is to come into force next week and could be devastating for a Canadian auto industry that supports an estimated 500,000 jobs.

The 78-year-old Republican is also set to impose reciprocal tariffs on all countries that put levies on US exports, and Canada is to be in the firing line.

Trump has warned Canada against working with the European Union to counter upcoming reciprocal tariffs on all imports that he is expected to announce next week.

If they did so, they would face "large scale tariffs, far larger than currently planned", Trump has said.

The US president's statement that he and Carney would meet immediately after Canada's elections apparently ignored the fact that the race is too close to call.

Trudeau was deeply unpopular when he announced he was stepping down, with Pierre Poilievre's Conservatives seen as election favourites just weeks ago.

Since Trump's threats, the polls have spectacularly narrowed in favour of Carney's Liberals, who hold a minority in parliament.

Judge orders 'Signalgate' chat saved

A US judge has ordered President Donald Trump's administration to preserve messages sent on the Signal messaging app discussing attack plans against the Houthis in Yemen that became public after they were shared with a journalist.

The order from US District Judge James Boasberg requires federal agencies whose leaders participated in the chat, which included Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director John Ratcliffe, to maintain all messages sent through Signal from March 11-15, the period during which an editor for *The Atlantic* magazine documented activity in the chat.

A lawyer for the Trump administration earlier said federal agencies were already working to determine what records still existed so they could be preserved.

Federal agencies involved in the Signal chat were sued on Tuesday by American Oversight, a government accountability group.

The group alleged that the use of the app, which allows for messages to be automatically deleted after a certain time span, violated a federal record-keeping law.

"We are grateful for the judge's bench ruling to halt any further destruction of these critical records. The public has a right to know how decisions about war and national security are made - and accountability doesn't disappear just because a message was set to auto-delete," Chioma Chukwu, American Oversight's interim executive director, said in a statement. - **Reuters**

Vance berates Denmark for not keeping Greenland 'safe'

Reuters
Nuuk, Greenland

US Vice-President J D Vance slammed Denmark during a visit to Greenland yesterday, saying that it has not done a good job in keeping the semi-autonomous Danish territory and its people safe from incursions by China and Russia.

Vance said that the United States does not have immediate plans to expand US military presence on the ground in Greenland but will invest in resources including additional naval ships.

"Denmark has not kept pace and devoted the resources necessary to keep this base, to keep our troops, and in my view, to keep the people of Greenland safe from a lot of very aggressive incursions from Russia, from China and other nations," Vance said.

He gave no details of the alleged incursions.

Vance delivered remarks during his visit to the US military base at Pituffik in the north of the Arctic island, which came just hours after a new broad government coalition that aims to keep ties with Denmark for now, was presented in the capital, Nuuk.

Vance greeted members of the US armed forces shortly after his arrival, thanking them for their service on the remote base located 750 miles (1,200km) north of the Arctic Circle.

The outside temperature at Pituffik was -3° Fahrenheit (-19° Celsius).

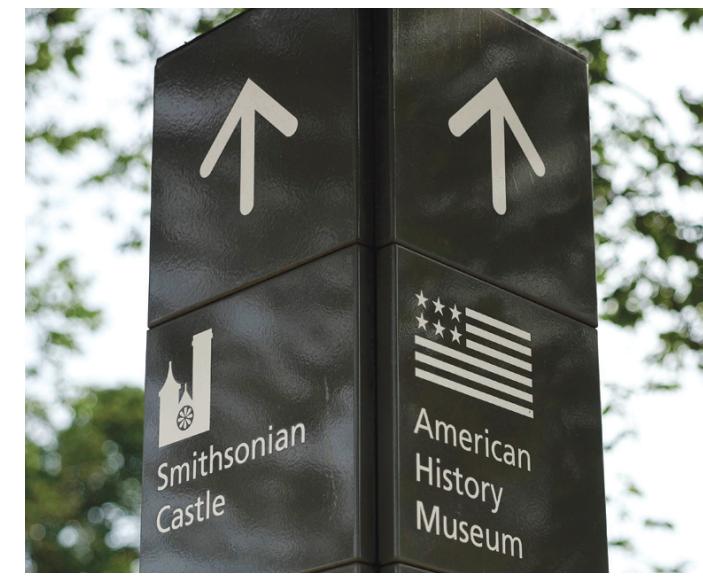
As Vance's visit was underway, President Donald Trump told reporters at the White House the United States needs Greenland to ensure "peace of the entire world".

"We need Greenland, very importantly, for international security. We have to have Greenland. It's not a question of, 'Do you think we can do without it?' We can't," Trump said.

Trump said that Greenland's waterways have "Chinese and Russian ships all over the place" and the United States will not rely on Denmark or anybody else to handle the situation.

Denmark and the European Union understand why Greenland is important for peace around the world "and if they don't, we're going to have to explain it to them", Trump added.

Greenland's new prime minister said that the US visit signalled a "lack of respect" and called for unity in the face of "pressure from outside".



Signs along the National Mall point visitors to the Smithsonian Institution Building, or 'Castle', and the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History in Washington, DC. - **AFP**



US Vice-President J D Vance at the US military's Pituffik Space Base in Greenland. - **Reuters**

Denmark's king meanwhile issued a statement of support on social media.

"We live in an altered reality. There should be no doubt that my love for Greenland and my connectedness to the people of Greenland are intact," King Frederik said.

The US delegation includes Vance's wife Usha, national security adviser Mike Waltz and Energy Secretary Chris Wright.

The initial plan for the trip had been for Vance's wife to visit a dog-sled race on the island together with Waltz, even though they were not invited by authorities in either Greenland or Denmark.

Public protests and outrage from authorities in both Greenland and Denmark prompted the US delegation to only fly to the military base and not meet the public.

Under the terms of a 1951 agreement, the US is entitled to visit its base whenever it wants, as long as it notifies Greenland and Copenhagen.

Pituffik is located along the shortest route from Europe to North America and is vital for the US ballistic missile warning system.

The island, whose capital is closer to New York than the Danish capital Copenhagen, boasts mineral, oil and natural gas wealth, but development has been slow and the mining sector has seen very limited US investment.

Mining companies operating in Greenland are mostly Australian, Canadian or British.

A White House official has said Greenland has an ample supply of rare earth minerals that would power the next generation of the US economy.

Yesterday Greenland's new Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen urged political unity.

"At a time when we as a people are under pressure, we must stand together," he said at a press conference.

His pro-business party, the Democrats, which favours a gradual independence from Denmark, emerged as the biggest party in a March 11 election.

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, who had called the initial plans for the US visit "unacceptable", congratulated Greenland on its new government in a post on Instagram: "I look forward to close co-operation in an unnecessary conflict-ridden time."

The question now is how far Trump is willing to push his idea of taking over the island, said Andreas Oesthagen, a senior researcher on Arctic politics and security at the Oslo-based Fridtjof Nansen Institute.

"It is still unlikely that the United States will use military means," he told Reuters. "But it is unfortunately likely that President Trump and Vice-President Vance will continue to use other means of pressure, such as ambiguous statements, semi-official visits to Greenland, and economic instruments."

By revising the trip, the Trump administration is seeking to refocus the discussion on the topics it is interested in: the US presence on Greenland, military capabilities available, and the wider security of the Arctic, said Catherine Sendak, head of the Transatlantic Defence and Security programme at the Centre for European Policy Analysis, a Washington-based think tank.

"A change of course was needed," Sendak told Reuters.

However, some residents in Nuuk remained angry at the Trump administration ahead of Vance's visit.

"I am a human. Humans are not for sale. We are not for sale," Tungutq Larsen, a filmmaker, told Reuters.

Polls have shown that nearly all Greenlanders oppose becoming part of the United States.

Anti-American protesters, some wearing "Make America Go Away" caps and holding "Yankees Go Home" banners, have staged some of the largest demonstrations ever seen in Greenland.

On Thursday, residents in Nuuk planted Greenlandic flags in the snow and a cardboard sign in English that said "Our Land. Our Future".

Trump orders elimination of 'anti-American ideology' from Smithsonian institutions

President Donald Trump has ordered that "improper, divisive or anti-American ideology" be removed from the Smithsonian Institution, the vast museum and research complex that is a premier exhibition space for US history and culture.

The Republican president, in an executive order, directed that Vice-President J D Vance undertake the action.

The order also directs the Interior Department to restore federal parks, monuments and memorials that have been "removed or changed in the last years to perpetuate a false revision of history".

The order, titled *Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History*, is vague about what the president views as anti-American ideology.

However, it suggests Trump is seeking to purge elements of what conservatives view as a revisionist history of the United States that places systemic racism at the heart of its narrative.

The order singles out the National Museum of African American History and Culture as problematic, claiming that it informs visitors that "hard work", "individualism" and "the nuclear family" are aspects of "White culture".

The order also asserts the American Women's History Museum plans to celebrate male athletes participating in women's sports.

The White House did not elaborate on the order, and neither the Smithsonian nor the African-American History museum responded to requests for comment.

The Smithsonian spans 21 museums, most of them in the nation's capital lining the mall from the US Capitol to the Washington Monument, and including the National Air and Space Museum, the National Museum of American History and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden.

The Smithsonian, whose website says it is the world's

largest museum, education and research complex, also encompasses 14 education and research centres, and the National Zoo.

The order is in line with the Trump administration's efforts to do away with diversity and inclusion programs in government, universities and corporations.

Vance, as the US vice-president, is a member of the Smithsonian's Board of Regents.

According to Trump's order, the Democratic Biden administration "pushed a divisive ideology that reconstrued America's promotion of liberty as fundamentally flawed, inflicting revered institutions like the Smithsonian and national parks with false narratives".

Trump earlier this year made himself chairman of the Kennedy Centre in Washington, indicating that he wants to leave his mark on US arts and culture as part of his presidency.

Trump has been a critic of renaming or removing Confederate statues and monuments.

Earlier this year, he restored two US Army bases to their former names of Fort Benning and Fort Bragg despite a federal law that prohibits honouring generals who fought for the South during the Civil War.

The administration says the names honour different individuals, all former soldiers.

In 2017, Trump defended white nationalists in Charlottesville, Virginia, who protested the city's decision to remove a statue of the confederate commander Robert E Lee.

At the time, he said there were "very fine people of both sides" of the fight, sparking widespread outrage.

The Smithsonian Institute was founded in the mid-19th century with a donation from a deceased and childless British chemist, James Smithson, who asked in his will for his wealth to be used to create an educational institution in the then-young United States - a country he had never set foot in. - **Reuters/APP**

Trump administration moves to fire remaining USAID staff

Staff at the US Agency for International Development (USAID) were told yesterday that all positions not required by law would be eliminated, after the State Department notified Congress it would discontinue USAID functions that do not align with Trump administration priorities.

The move will mean that nearly all remaining USAID employees will lose their jobs in July and September, which are the separation dates set out in an internal memo sent to staff by Jeremy Lewin, a member of billionaire Elon Musk's job-cutting Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE).

The job cuts notice came on the same day that a powerful earthquake hit Myanmar.

USAID has historically played a major role in coordinating disaster relief efforts.

USAID employees learned about the latest cuts to agency staff from Lewin's memo, which was reviewed by Reuters.

In the memo, Lewin, who is acting as a deputy administrator at the agency, said all USAID positions not set in law "will be eliminated" and that all agency personnel around the world would shortly receive e-mails notifying them of the decision.

Staff would be given the choice of termination on July 1 or September 2, the memo said.

Over the next three months, the State Department would assume USAID's remaining "life-saving and strategic aid programming", the memo said.

USAID personnel will not automatically be transferred to the State Department, which would assess its needs and conduct "a separate and independent

President Donald Trump, a Republican, on his first day back in the White House ordered a 90-day freeze of all US foreign aid and a review of whether aid programmes were aligned with his administration's policy.

Soon after that, Musk and the DOGE gained access to USAID's payment and e-mail systems, froze many of its payments and told much of its staff they were being placed on leave.

On February 3, Musk wrote on X that he had "spent the weekend feeding USAID into the wood chipper".

A statement from Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the State Department had notified the US Congress of its intent to reorganise USAID, saying that the agency had "strayed from its original mission long ago. As a result, the gains were too few and the costs were too high".

"Thanks to President Trump, this misguided and fiscally irresponsible era is now over. We are reorienting our foreign assistance programmes to align directly with what is best for the United States and our citizens," Rubio said.

After Trump began his second term on January 20, Musk's DOGE launched a drive to shrink USAID and merge its remnants into the State Department.

The administration has since fired hundreds of staff and contractors and terminated billions of dollars in services on which tens of millions of people around the world depended.

Rubio said earlier this month that more than 80% of all USAID programmes had been cancelled.

- **Reuters**

Mexican soldiers get 40 years in prison for killing five civilians

Four Mexican soldiers were sentenced to 40 years in prison for the killing of five civilians in a crime-plagued northeastern border city, a court said on Thursday.



Massive quake kills more than 150 in Myanmar, Thailand

AFP

Naypyidaw, Myanmar

A huge earthquake hit Myanmar and Thailand yesterday, killing more than 150 people and injuring hundreds, with dozens trapped in collapsed buildings and the death toll expected to rise. The shallow 7.7-magnitude early afternoon tremor hit northwest of the city of Sagaing in central Myanmar, and was followed minutes later by a 6.4-magnitude aftershock.

The quake flattened buildings, downed bridges, and cracked roads across swathes of Myanmar, and even demolished a 30-storey skyscraper under construction hundreds of kilometres away in Bangkok.

While the full extent of the catastrophe is yet to emerge, the leader of isolated Myanmar, in the grip of a civil war, issued a rare plea for international aid.

Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing said 144 people had been killed, with 732 confirmed injured, but warned the toll was "likely to rise". Three deaths have been confirmed so far in Thailand.

"In some places, some buildings collapsed," he said in a televised speech, after visiting a hospital in the capital Naypyidaw.

"I would like to invite any country, any organisation, or anyone in Myanmar to come and help. Thank you."

He urged massive relief efforts in the wake of the disaster and said he had "opened all ways for foreign aid".

Four years of civil war sparked by the military seizing power have ravaged Myanmar's infrastructure and healthcare system, leaving it ill-equipped to respond to such a disaster.

Myanmar declared a state of emergency across the six worst-affected regions after the quake, which the World Health Organisation described as a "very, very big threat to life and health".

Hundreds of casualties arrived at a major hospital in Naypyidaw where the emergency department entrance had collapsed on a car. A hospital official described it as a "mass casualty area" with



Cars pass a damaged road in Naypyidaw, Myanmar. (AFP)



People walk past a collapsed building in Mandalay, Myanmar. (AFP)

medics treating the wounded outside.

"I haven't seen (something) like this before. We are trying to handle the situation. I'm so exhausted now," a doctor said. As night fell, journalists saw rescuers trying to extract a mother and son from the ruins of a collapsed building in Naypyidaw. Both were seriously injured but rescuers were unable to reach them, a Red Cross worker said.

Across the border in Thailand, a 30-storey skyscraper under construction collapsed to a tangled heap of rubble and dust in a matter of seconds.

Officials have said three workers are confirmed dead with dozens more still unaccounted for, many believed trapped in the rubble.

"I heard people calling for help, saying 'help me,'" Worapat Sukthai, deputy police chief of Bang Sue district, said.

"We estimate that hundreds of people are injured," he said.

As night fell, around 100 rescue workers assembled at the scene to search for survivors, illuminated by specially erected floodlights.

Visiting the site, Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra said "every building" in Bangkok would need to be inspected for safety, though it was not immediately clear how that would be carried out.

An emergency zone was declared in Bangkok, where some metro and light rail services were suspended.

USGS analysis projects thousands of deaths

A United States government predictive analysis based on the strength and depth of yesterday's earthquake in Myanmar estimated there could be thousands of deaths and severe economic loss, with the Sagaing and Meiktila regions worst hit. "Overall, the population in this region resides in structures that are vulnerable

to earthquake shaking, though resistant structures exist," the analysis said. "High casualties and extensive damage are probable and the disaster is likely widespread," it said. Myanmar's state-run MRTV put the death toll so far at at least 144 killed and 732 injured.



A worker reacts after the tremors of a strong earthquake that struck central Myanmar yesterday affected Bangkok, Thailand. (Reuters)



Workers carry an injured person near the site of a collapsed building after a strong earthquake struck central Myanmar yesterday. (Reuters)

all offered to provide assistance, while the WHO said it was mobilising its logistics hub in Dubai to prepare trauma injury supplies.

Pope Francis said he was "deeply saddened by the loss of life and widespread devastation" in a telegram published by the Vatican.

Earthquakes are relatively common in Myanmar, where six strong quakes of 7.0 magnitude or more struck between 1930 and 1956 near the Sagaing Fault, which runs north to south through the centre of the country, according to the United States Geological Survey (USGS).

A powerful 6.8-magnitude earthquake in the ancient capital Bagan in central Myanmar killed three people in 2016, also toppling spires and crumbling temple walls at the tourist destination.

Hegseth pledges US support for Philippines against China

Reuters
Manila

US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth yesterday reaffirmed Washington's "iron-clad" commitment to a defence treaty with the Philippines and pledged to deploy advanced capabilities to its partner to strengthen a deterrence against threats, including Chinese "aggression".

Hegseth met his counterpart Gilberto Teodoro and Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr, and they signalled continued strong co-operation amid growing threats from China, emphasising a shared commitment to peace in the Indo-Pacific region and in the South China Sea, where Manila accuses Beijing of repeated hostile actions.

"Deterrence is necessary around the world, but specifically in this region, in your country, considering the threats from the communist Chinese," Hegseth said.

He also said the US was not seek-

ing war and described President Donald Trump as a peacemaker.

"President Trump seeks peace... but in order to bring that peace, we will be strong," he told a press conference with Teodoro.

"Our allies will know we stand with them. Our admirals are prepared, and they will be properly equipped," he said. "We're rebuilding our military under President Trump."

China argued there were no issues with freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea and urged the US to stop "instigating ideological confrontation" and "sowing discord" in the region.

"All along, it is the US side that has been indulging its allies in provocations in the South China Sea, and it is the US side that has repeatedly fabricated false propositions about China's threat to freedom... in the South China Sea," Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun told a regular press briefing yesterday.

China also advised the Philip-

pines not to act in accordance with the US, and not to try to provoke military confrontation, Guo said.

China has expansive territorial claims in the South China Sea that overlap with the exclusive economic zones of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam.

The Philippines is Hegseth's first stop on a trip to Asia. Hegseth will also visit Japan, where he is expected to meet his counterpart Gen Nakatani in Tokyo, as well as Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba, this weekend.

"We're here in the Philippines to strengthen that partnership. We'll be in Japan to do the same," he said just as the US, Japan and the Philippines held maritime drills in the South China Sea.

The drills, which brought together Japan's multi-mission frigate JS Noshiro, Philippine Navy ship BRP Jose Rizal, and US Navy's guided-missile destroyer USS Shoup, were the eighth round of exercises among allies.

Duterte supporters rally on his 80th birthday



Supporters of former Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte hold a banner as they march to Mendiola, near the Malacanang Palace, to celebrate Duterte's 80th birthday, as he remains in ICC custody over war crimes allegations, in Manila, Philippines.

Xi Jinping would consider lowering interest on Chinese loans: Dhaka

Chinese President Xi Jinping has told Bangladesh's interim leader Muhammad Yunus that Beijing would consider requests to lower interest rates on Chinese loans to Dhaka, Yunus' press chief said yesterday.

Yunus was in China on his first bilateral state visit since assuming office last year. He has yet to visit India, amid diplomatic tensions between the two neighbours.

Xi also reaffirmed China's commitment to encouraging Chinese investment in Bangladesh and facilitating the relocation of Chinese manufacturing enterprises, Yunus' Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam said in a Facebook post describing the talks as "comprehensive, fruitful, and constructive".

"President Xi reiterated China's support to the chief adviser and the interim government. It was Professor Yunus' first bilateral foreign tour, and so far, it has been a grand success," Alam said.

China is also considering enhanced co-operation in water resource management, a key issue raised by Bangladesh during the talks, he added.

Bangladesh has secured a commitment of \$2.1bn in Chinese investments, loans and grants, Yunus' press wing said.

India 'weighs scrapping import tax on US LNG, boost purchases'

Reuters
New Delhi

India is considering a proposal to scrap import tax on US liquefied natural gas (LNG) to boost purchases and help cut the trade surplus with Washington, a key irritant for President Donald Trump, four government

and industry sources said.

The US is India's second biggest supplier but the two sides are looking to ramp up volumes for India's energy-hungry economy, one of the fastest growing in the world. Qatar is the top LNG supplier to India.

During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's US visit last month, India pledged to increase US en-

ergy purchases by \$10bn to \$25bn in the near future, while both leaders agreed to target \$500bn in bilateral trade by 2030. Scrapping the import tax would make US LNG more price competitive, and help trim India's trade surplus with the US, another government source said. The surplus totalled \$45.4bn last year.

"We are considering ending the

imports tax on US LNG under the bilateral trade agreement, similar to our model with the UAE," one of the sources said.

India currently imposes a 2.5% basic customs duty and an additional 0.25% social welfare tax on LNG, but tax is not levied on supplies from the UAE and Australia under bilateral agreements.

The sources spoke on condi-

tion of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the talks. India's oil and finance ministries did not immediately respond to emailed requests for comment.

Unlike Canada and the European Union, India is actively seeking to appease the Trump administration as it ratchets up pressure on trading partners, and is open to cutting tariffs on

over half of US imports worth \$23bn.

Also, China's 15% import tax imposed last month on LNG imports from the US could divert trade of the super-chilled fuel to India, where the International Energy Agency expects a 60% jump in gas use between 2023 and 2030, with imports of LNG doubling over that period.

India offers US tariff cuts on farm imports, eyes trade success

Unlike China, Canada and the European Union, India is actively seeking to appease the Trump administration and is open to cutting tariffs

Reuters
New Delhi

India has offered tariff cuts on imports of US farm products like almonds and cranberries as a further concession to the US, two government sources said, hoping to avert President Donald Trump's reciprocal tariffs set for next week.

Unlike China, Canada and the European Union, India is actively seeking to appease the Trump administration and is open to cutting tariffs on over half of US imports worth \$23bn, Reuters reported earlier this week.

Trade talks are progressing well and the bilateral trade pact, still in progress, will benefit both nations

In a series of meetings in New Delhi with Brendan Lynch, the assistant US trade representative for South and Central Asia, India agreed to cut tariffs on agricultural products such as almonds, walnuts, cranberries, pistachios and lentils, one of the sources familiar with discussions, said.

Trade talks are "progressing well" and the bilateral trade pact,

still in progress, will benefit both nations, Indian Trade Minister Piyush Goyal said.

"Securing a favourable deal is a priority for Indian negotiators," a second government source said, adding that India has aligned its offers with US priorities, particularly in the agriculture industry and some other sectors.

Both sources spoke on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the talks.

India's trade ministry didn't respond to email requests for comment, while the US embassy spokesperson in New Delhi said: "We don't have anything to share on private diplomatic discussions."

Import duties range from 30-100% on agricultural products like cranberries, almonds, walnuts, and around 10% on lentils.

However, there is still resistance in government circles to lowering tariffs for dairy products, rice, wheat and maize, the source said, adding India is seeking greater market access for shipments of fruits like pomegranates and grapes besides rice to the US market.

The negotiators are expected to agree on the framework for the broad contours of the first phase of the bilateral deal, expected to be signed by fall 2025, the sources said.

In 2024, exports of US agricultural and allied products to India totalled nearly \$2bn, including \$1.3bn in fruits and vegetables while India's exports to the US stood at about \$5.5bn.



Indian security force personnel patrol near the site of a gun battle with militants in a forest area in Kathua district of Jammu and Kashmir yesterday.

Four policemen, two militants killed in Kashmir gun battle

Reuters
Srinagar

At least four police personnel and two militants were killed in a gun battle in Jammu and Kashmir, an official said yesterday, as troops searched for heavily armed men who local residents had spotted in the area on Sunday.

Militants have for decades fought security forces in the region, known for its scenic lakes, lush meadows, and snow-topped mountains, resulting in the death of thousands of people, though violence has tapered off in recent years.

Government data show 14 security person-

nel were killed in such violence in the first half of 2024, and 30 died in 2023.

The encounter this week took place in a forested part of the Kathua area, near India's border with Pakistan, where the men were spotted last week.

"We have recovered bodies of three policemen and have also spotted the body of another cop and two militants lying in the forest," the official, who did not want to be named because he was not authorised to speak to the media, told Reuters.

Arms and ammunition, including two grenades, a bulletproof jacket, empty shells and some magazines of assault rifles were also recovered from the area, the official said.

Police and the army are yet to reveal the

number of those killed in the operation, but the governor of Jammu and Kashmir, Manoj Sinha, said in a post on X that "several terrorists" had been "neutralised" in the encounter.

"I bow to the valorous martyrs of J&K (Jammu and Kashmir) Police, who laid down their lives for our motherland... Operation in progress," he added.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government had, in 2019, revoked the special status granted to Jammu and Kashmir and split it into two federally administered territories.

"No power in the world" could restore the region's special status, Modi said in November.

Starmer promotes government's investment in transport system



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer addresses members of staff during a visit to promote new government investment into the transport system, at "Camira", a fabric manufacturer in West Yorkshire, northern England, yesterday.

Modi to kick off construction of India-Sri Lanka solar plant

AFP
New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will launch the construction of a long-delayed solar power project during his upcoming visit to Sri Lanka, an official said yesterday.

Vikram Misri, the secretary of India's foreign ministry, said Modi and Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake will witness a virtual groundbreaking ceremony for their joint-venture solar power project in the island's northeast on April 5.

The proposed 120-megawatt venture in the northeastern coastal district of Trincomalee has stalled for years, but New Delhi backed it as a joint project between the neighbouring nations. "This, in many senses, is going to be a milestone in the bilateral partnership," Misri

told reporters in New Delhi.

"They will together dedicate several projects that are being built with Indian assistance in Sri Lanka and will also witness the exchange of several MoUs pertaining to energy connectivity, digitisation, defence, health, and multisectoral grant assistance."

The pair will watch the virtual groundbreaking from Sri Lankan capital Colombo. The costs of the project were not immediately available. The groundbreaking, a day before Modi concludes his two-night visit to Sri Lanka, comes as Colombo grapples with the competing interests of its powerful northern neighbour and China, its largest lender.

Modi will be the first foreign head of government to visit the island nation under the new administration of leftist Dissanayake. He flies into Colombo on April 4 after attending a regional conference in Thailand.

King Charles cancels appointments after cancer treatment 'side effects'

AFP
London

Britain's King Charles III was forced to cancel his appointments on Thursday and yesterday after suffering "side effects" from his cancer treatment, Buckingham Palace said.

"Following scheduled and ongoing medical treatment for cancer, the king experienced temporary side effects that required a short period of observation in hospital," the statement added.

"His Majesty's engagements were therefore postponed," the statement added, saying that the

76-year-old UK head of state had since returned to his home in Clarence House.

The king had experienced temporary and relatively common side effects, the BBC reported, quoting sources, adding that it had been a very minor bump in his recovery.

The king was said to be on good form at home where he was working on state papers and making calls from his study, the PA news agency added.

Charles, who walked most of his life in the shadow of his mother, the nation's beloved Queen Elizabeth II, became king after her death on September 8, 2022.

In a break with the palace's past

silence on personal health matters, Charles, however, decided to go public with his cancer diagnosis in February 2024.

But he has never revealed what kind of cancer he is suffering from, with the palace just confirming that his treatment would continue into 2025. Buckingham Palace said that the monarch "would like to send his apologies to all those who may be inconvenienced or disappointed as a result."

Charles had been due to receive the credentials from the ambassadors of three different countries on Thursday, and had four engagements planned yesterday during a trip to Birmingham. Charles's cor-

onation in May 2023 as monarch of the United Kingdom and 14 Commonwealth countries was the first in Britain in seven decades.

It also saw his long-time love and his wife of almost 20 years crowned as Queen Camilla - a once-unthinkable scenario after Charles's first marriage to princess Diana collapsed in acrimony and scandal.

It is understood that Charles and Camilla's scheduled trip to Italy in early April will go ahead as planned.

No new dates have been confirmed yet after they postponed a planned meeting with Pope Francis at the Vatican following the advice of the pontiff's doctors. The meeting had also been sched-

uled for the start of the April trip.

The UK's head of state wrote to Francis when the 88-year-old pontiff was struck down with pneumonia in both lungs in February, amid fears that he might not survive.

Francis was discharged on Sunday following almost 40 days in Rome's Gemelli hospital.

Charles returned to work within two-and-a-half months of his cancer diagnosis and gradually ramped up his duties during the rest of 2024, including making several foreign trips which even took him as far as Australia and Samoa.

The king's daughter-in-law, Catherine, princess of Wales, who is married to Charles's eldest son

Prince William, in January said that she was now in remission after also having been diagnosed with cancer last year.

Buckingham Palace previously said the king wished to be transparent about his cancer diagnosis to "prevent speculation and in the hope it may assist public understanding for all those around the world who are affected by cancer".

That has chimed with his desire for a more modern, open and slimmed down monarchy to keep the ancient institution relevant, particularly to younger Britons, and as republican sentiment mounts in the 14 other countries outside the UK where he is also king.

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GULF TIMES**Europe's security depends on a European energy union**

In a world in turmoil, the European Union's security agenda is as expansive as it is urgent. From building economic resilience to achieving rapid rearment, progress on almost any of its components depends on one thing: energy.

Two recent landmark reports on EU competitiveness highlight what should be obvious: high energy prices and insecure supplies directly undercut economic stability and dynamism.

European industry forms the backbone of European competitiveness and has a vital role to play in European rearment.

The European Commission's Clean Industrial Deal aims to balance the twin imperatives of re-industrialisation and decarbonisation, including by promoting public and private investment in clean technologies and supporting energy-intensive industries, such as steel and chemicals, in the green transition. But the vision remains incomplete, not least because it neglects Europe's fuel-manufacturing industry.

This "silent" sector, which supplies 97% of the energy for transport and 50% of the feedstock used by the chemical industry, is more than a relic of a fossil-fuel-powered past; it is a cornerstone of the European economy. Entire value chains rely on the stability and affordability it provides, which renewables will not match anytime soon.

And yet, the Clean Industrial Deal includes no strategy for the fuel industry's development. Nor does it mention European fuel companies' ongoing decarbonisation initiatives.

In line with the Clean Industrial Deal's pledge to "engage in a dialogue with industries to develop sectoral transition pathways," the European Commission must take immediate steps to develop a

The EU should take a pragmatic approach and promote all energy sources that can contribute to a stable, affordable supply

transition pathway for fuel manufacturing. A well-designed strategy could unlock billions of euros in investment and advance key EU goals: decarbonising transport and heavy industry, strengthening European industry's global competitiveness, and bolstering Europe's strategic autonomy by reducing its dependence on foreign producers.

Other energy-intensive sectors, too, should be reassessed and integrated into European decarbonisation and re-industrialisation strategies, not sidelined.

This will require the EU to take a pragmatic approach and promote all energy sources that can contribute to a stable, affordable supply, including renewables, fossil fuels, nuclear energy, and hydrogen power. Hydrogen power is particularly important for energy-intensive sectors which cannot be fully electrified. The RePowerEU plan, introduced in 2022, aims to produce 10mn metric tonnes of renewable hydrogen (and import the same amount) by 2030. In order to achieve these goals, the EU must leverage its internal strengths.

The establishment of cross-border hydrogen corridors – within the EU and, ultimately, between the EU and other countries – will require EU-level action, buttressed by private-sector support. This must include the alignment of relevant regulations – that is, a true energy union.

Contrary to popular belief, the energy union is not part of the EU's single market. It is subject to a fundamental contradiction: under the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU, "sustainability" falls under the EU's mandate, but the security of energy supplies remains in the hands of the member states, each of which decides its own energy mix. By now, it should be clear that this is untenable. The only way EU member states can achieve true energy security (or its corollary, energy affordability) is together.

Of course, the EU has a lot on its plate – not least devising a cohesive vision for its global role at a time when the US under Donald Trump's second presidency is proving erratic, unreliable, and increasingly autocratic, and great-power politics are shaping international relations. Such a vision should include deepening relations with a wide range of non-Western countries – such as Brazil, India, Morocco, and the UAE – that share its interest in preserving some semblance of a rules-based order.

But if the EU is to play such a leadership role – providing the kind of legal certainty that can help to counterbalance the transactional, capricious, and intemperate behaviour we are seeing from the US – it must be unified, confident, resilient, and competitive. This demands a pragmatic, industry-aligned strategy for transforming itself from a lucrative market for others to an innovative industrial powerhouse in its own right, and enhancing its strategic autonomy on rapidly shifting geopolitical terrain. To succeed, a robust energy union is essential. - Project Syndicate

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Can COP30 succeed where COP29 failed?

By Montek Singh Ahluwalia

New Delhi

Last year's United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP29) in Baku ended with developed countries agreeing to mobilise \$300bn annually for climate finance in developing countries. But while this figure is three times higher than the previous \$100bn target, it falls far short of what's needed to close the climate funding gap.

The challenge today is more complex than when the Paris climate agreement was signed in 2015. Back then, the \$100bn figure was largely arbitrary, not based on a full analysis of actual investment needs. By contrast, COP29 had to estimate real costs and determine how much external financing would be required.

A report by the Independent High-Level Expert Group on Climate Finance (IHLG) finds that developing countries (excluding China) will need \$2.4-3.3tn in climate investments by 2035. About 60% of this could be financed domestically through higher savings and reduced public deficits. Even so, after reallocating existing investments toward the green transition, a \$1tn shortfall by 2030 – rising to \$1.3tn by 2035 – remains. Closing this gap will require external funding.

While COP29 acknowledged the scale of the financing gap, it failed to agree on how to close it. Developing countries pushed for wealthier economies to cover the shortfall with public funds, but developed countries offered only \$300bn annually – and even that came with a caveat: they would only "take the lead" in mobilising funds rather than guaranteeing direct provision.

The IHLG report suggests that \$650bn of the funding gap by 2035 could be met through private investment, including equity and debt. But this exposed a deep divide. Developed countries favoured private capital to ease budget pressures, while developing countries, aware of its volatility, insisted on public funding for accountability and predictability.

Scepticism around private finance is warranted. Many developing countries struggle to attract private investment, relying instead on grants and concessional long-term loans. Shifting these limited public resources to low-income economies means middle-income countries will have to rely even more on private capital – despite investor uncertainty.

Private climate finance will grow



from \$40bn in 2022 to an estimated \$650bn by 2035, according to the IHLG. But most investment remains concentrated in a few markets, making access unequal and uncertain. Falling renewable-energy costs could boost green projects over fossil fuels, but the transition's pace remains unclear.

Even when private capital is available, domestic policies often discourage investment. Many governments artificially lower energy prices for political reasons, making electricity providers financially unviable. Foreign investors understandably see this as a fundamental risk and hesitate to invest. If private finance is to play a bigger role, governments must reform energy pricing, strengthen regulations, and cut bureaucratic red tape to attract investment.

Public-sector support remains crucial. Multilateral development banks (MDBs) and bilateral institutions can lower risks for private investors through risk-sharing mechanisms while helping governments create stable, investment-friendly environments.

COP29's failure to secure a stronger funding deal means a renegotiation is unlikely until the next global stocktake in 2028.

However, gaps can still be bridged. Expanding MDB lending – which has lagged behind climate needs – could provide much-needed capital while countries work on long-term policy solutions.

COP29's final statement pointed to an opportunity to make real progress ahead of COP30 in Belém, Brazil. But one key factor will determine success: developed countries' willingness to commit more financial resources.

This has become even more uncertain with Donald Trump's return to the White House. His administration's hostility to global climate efforts, and its push for fossil-fuel expansion, will likely weaken international climate finance. The US is already scaling back existing commitments, further delaying climate negotiations.

Given how slow and bureaucratic these discussions have become, it's worth asking: Are massive annual COP meetings still the right approach? With tens of thousands of government officials, business leaders, and NGOs gathering each year, the urgency of the climate crisis demands more focused, results-driven decision-making.

One alternative is to delegate key financing negotiations to smaller, specialised groups. The G20, for example, lacks universal representation but includes all major economies – developed and developing – accounting for 80% of global GDP and emissions, and two-thirds of the world's population. More importantly, its members control the world's largest multilateral development banks, making it a natural platform for driving climate finance.

Another option is Brics, which has positioned itself as a counterweight to Western-led financial institutions. With China, India, Brazil, and other key developing countries playing a central role, the Brics could mobilise alternative sources of green finance, reducing dependence on western funding and pushing for fairer access to carbon markets.

If either the G20 or the Brics were to take the lead in climate finance, the focus would need to be on expanding MDB lending capacity, leveraging private capital, and incentivising large-scale investments in climate adaptation and mitigation.

With COP29 failing to secure an adequate funding framework, developing countries are left with more questions than answers. As the financing gap continues to grow, incremental pledges are no longer enough. The real question now is whether the COP process is still the best place for these negotiations.

If major economies keep delaying real commitments, India, Brazil, and South Africa may have little choice but to push for climate finance talks to shift to platforms like the G20 or Brics.

For COP30 to succeed where COP29 failed, it must move beyond vague pledges to secure clear, enforceable financial commitments. Otherwise, the world will once again gather, negotiate, and leave with little progress – while the climate crisis continues to escalate. - Project Syndicate

• Montek Singh Ahluwalia, former Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission of India, is Distinguished Fellow at the Centre for Social and Economic Progress.

Two models for agentic AI

By Daron Acemoglu

Boston

A "agents" are coming, whether we are ready or not. While there is much uncertainty about when AI models will be able to interact autonomously with digital platforms, other AI tools, and even humans, there can be little doubt that this development will be transformative – for better or worse. Yet despite all the commentary (and hype) around agentic AI, many big questions remain unaddressed, the biggest being which type of AI agent the tech industry is seeking to develop?

Different models will have vastly different implications. With an "AI as adviser" approach, AI agents would offer individually calibrated recommendations to human decision-makers, leaving humans always in the driver's seat. But with an "autonomous AI" model, agents will take the wheel on behalf of humans. That is a distinction with profound and far-reaching implications.

Humans make hundreds of decisions every day, some of which have major consequences for their careers, livelihoods, or happiness. Many of these decisions are based on imperfect or incomplete information, determined more by emotions, intuitions, instincts, or impulses. As David Hume famously put it, "Reason is and ought only to be the slave of the passions." Humans may make most decisions without systematic reasoning or due attention to the full implications, but as Hume recognised with the "ought" part of his statement, this isn't all bad. It is what makes us human. Passion reflects purpose, and it may also play a key role in how we cope with a complex world.

With AI advisers that provide customised, reliable, context-relevant, useful information, many important decisions can be improved, but human motives will remain dominant. But what's so bad about autonomous AIs making decisions on our behalf? Couldn't they improve decision-making even further, save time, and prevent errors?

There are several problems with this perspective. First, human agency is critical for human learning and flourishing. The very act of making decisions and contemplating



outcomes – even if the inputs and advice come from nonhuman agents – affirms our own sense of agency and purpose. Much of what humans do is not about computation or collecting inputs to decide on an optimal course of action; rather, it is about discovery – an experience that will become increasingly rare if all decisions are delegated to an AI agent.

Moreover, if the tech industry mainly pursues autonomous AI agents, the likelihood of automating more human jobs will increase substantially. Yet if AI becomes primarily a means of accelerating automation, any hope of widely shared prosperity will be dashed.

Most importantly, there is a fundamental difference between AI agents acting on behalf of humans and humans acting for themselves. Many settings in which humans interact have both co-operative and conflictual elements. Consider the case of one company providing an input to another. If this input is sufficiently valuable to the buyer, a trade between the two companies is mutually beneficial (and typically also benefits society).

But for there to be any exchange, the price of the input must be determined through an inherently conflictual process. The higher the price, the more the seller will benefit relative to the buyer. The outcome of such bargaining is often determined by a combination of norms (such as about fairness), institutions (such as contracts that will impose costs if violated), and market forces (such as whether the seller

has the option of selling to somebody else). But imagine that the buyer has a reputation for being completely uncompromising – for refusing to accept anything but the lowest feasible price. If there are no other buyers, the seller may be forced to accept the low-ball offer.

Fortunately, in our day-to-day transactions, such uncompromising stances are rare, partly because it pays not to have a bad reputation and, more importantly, because most humans have neither the nerve nor the aspiration to act in such aggressive ways. But now imagine that the buyer has an autonomous AI agent that does not care about human niceties and possesses nonhuman steely nerves.

The AI can be trained always to adopt this uncompromising stance, and the counterparty will have no hope of coaxing it toward a more mutually beneficial outcome. By contrast, in an AI-as-adviser world, the model might still recommend an uncompromising position, but the human would ultimately decide whether to go down that path.

In the near term, then, autonomous agentic AIs may usher in a more unequal world, where only some companies or individuals have access to highly capable, credibly hard-nosed AI models. But even if everyone eventually acquired the same tools, that would not be any better. Our entire society would be subjected to "war-of-attrition" games in which AI agents push every conflictual situation to the brink of breakdown.

Such confrontations are inherently risky. As in a game of "chicken" (when two cars accelerate toward each other to see who will swerve away first), it is always possible that neither party will cave. When that happens, both drivers "win" – and both perish.

An AI that has been trained to win at "chicken" will never swerve. While AI could be a good adviser to humans – furnishing us with useful, reliable, and relevant information in real time – a world of autonomous AI agents is likely to usher in many new problems, while eroding many of the gains the technology might have offered.

• Daron Acemoglu, a 2024 Nobel laureate in economics and Institute Professor of Economics at MIT, is a co-author (with Simon Johnson) of *Power and Progress: Our Thousand-Year Struggle Over Technology and Prosperity* (PublicAffairs, 2023).

Zelensky cautious on new minerals deal

Reuters



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

President Volodymyr Zelensky said that Ukraine would not accept any mineral rights deal that threatened its integration with the EU but said it was too early to pass judgement on a dramatically expanded minerals deal proposed by Washington.

The Ukrainian leader told reporters that Kyiv's lawyers needed to review the draft before he could say more about the US offer, a summary of which suggested the US was demanding all Ukraine's natural resources income for years.

He also said that Kyiv would not recognise billions of dollars of past US aid as loans, though he did not say whether such a demand featured in the latest draft version received by a top government official.

Zelensky did say, however, that the text was "entirely different" from an earlier framework agreement that he had been set to sign with Donald Trump before their talks descended into acrimony last month.

"The framework has been changed. Let us study this framework and then we can talk," he told a news conference in Kyiv.

The latest US proposal would require Kyiv to send Washington all profit from a fund controlling Ukrainian resources until Ukraine had repaid all American wartime aid, plus interest, according to a summary reviewed by Reuters.

Zelensky, who has repeatedly emphasised the need for strong relations with the White House, appeared to be alluding to this last element when he said Kyiv did not view past assistance as something that now needed to be repaid.

Navigating an acceptable path forward on issues like this is a major challenge for Zelensky whose rift with Trump last month saw Washington cut off flows of previously agreed military assistance and stop intelligence sharing.

It is also a highly sensitive diplomatic juncture with Trump trying to rapidly end the fighting with Russia, while reorienting Washington's policy towards endorsing Moscow's narrative about its three-year-old war in Ukraine.

Deputy Prime Minister Yulia Svyrydenko told lawmakers that

Rome limits citizenship eligibility for Italian descendants

Italy will limit its citizenship law based on blood ties to two generations, the government said yesterday, in a change to the system that has long sought to maintain ties with its wide diaspora.

Previously, people proving blood ties of up to four generations – meaning their great-great grandfather was born in Italy – could apply to Italy for citizenship.

"The granting of citizenship is a serious thing and in past years there have been abuses," Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani told journalists following a council of ministers meeting.

The decree announced yesterday allows citizenship for people born outside of Italy only if either parent or either grandfather was Italian.

The goal, Tajani said, was to "boost the affective link between Italy and the citizen abroad".

"Many descendants of emigrants will still be able to obtain Italian citizenship, but precise limits will be set, above all to avoid abuse,"

Tajani said, citing the "commercialisation of Italian passports".

Italy has long been a country of emigration, rather than immigration, and has taken an approach to citizenship that helps maintain ties with its wide diaspora.

Nationality is based on blood ties, rather than one's birthplace.

The foreign affairs ministry cited a boom in the recognition of citizenship abroad in the past 10 years, increasing by 40% from 4.6mn people to 6.4mn people.

There are currently 60,000 pending proceedings to verify citizenship.

In a statement, the ministry cited Argentina – a country with a long history of emigration from Italy – whose citizenship recognitions went from 20,000 in 2023 to 30,000 the following year.

In Brazil, they rose almost one-third from 14,000 in 2022 to 20,000 last year.

Before the change announced yesterday, there were between 60mn and 80mn people of Italian descent in the world eligible for citizenship, it said.

Despite its generous long-standing citizenship policy towards people of Italian blood, Italy strictly controls the awarding of citizenship to children who are born in the country to foreign parents.

Those children must wait until their 18th birthday before applying for citizenship, in an arduous bureaucratic process that can take years.

That has left hundreds of thousands of minors who were born and raised in Italy in legal limbo, unable to call themselves Italian.

Far-right Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni opposes granting citizenship to those without blood ties despite Italy's shrinking population, arguing instead for policies to boost the birth rate. – AFP

Nigerian police ban Kano Eid parade again as rival emirs dispute throne

AFP
Kano

For the second time in a row, police have banned the Durbar festivities that mark Eid celebrations in Kano, northern Nigeria's largest city, as two traditional royals struggle for the throne.

Authorities announced yesterday the suspension of the massive horse procession by the traditional emir and his courtiers that celebrates Eid al-Fitr.

The Durbar – also held each Eid al-Adha, linked to the Haj pilgrimage to Makkah – attracts visitors from across the region as well as Western tourists, who throng the expanse outside the palace as royals and courtiers display equestrian skills in homage to the emir.

However, two royals have been locked in a legal battle for the influential traditional seat, polarising support along political lines between the local and federal authorities.

This year, rivals Aminu Ado Bayero and Muhammad Sanusi II had planned competing Durbars, heightening tension in the city over fear of possible violence during the celebrations.

"The ban on Durbar activities became necessary after consultations and obtaining the relevant security situation in the state," Ibrahim Bakori, Kano's police chief, told reporters in his office. "The rising tension and uncertainties around the Durbar activities in Kano resulted in the decision."

Police previously banned the Durbar in June 2024, citing security concerns amid the feud, but causing outrage among residents in the city.

The month prior, Kano state Governor Abba Kabir Yusuf removed Bayero as the emir and returned Sanusi to the throne, four years after he was deposed.

The two remain locked in a legal fight over who is the rightful emir, a position that holds no constitutional power in Nigeria but yields huge religious and social influence.

To this day, Sanusi lives in the emir's palace, where he holds daily court, while Bayero lodges in a royal guest house a few kilometres away, where he receives homage from his supporters.

Both palaces are heavily guarded by military and police personnel.

Sanusi is backed by Yusuf and his opposition New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP) which Bayero enjoys the support of the All Peoples Congress (APC)-led central government.

Bayero cancelled his plans a day before the police banned the processions.

The police ban marks the fourth cancellation of the Durbar in the city in a decade.

In 2015, it was cancelled over fears of religious militant violence, following a Boko Haram attack the year prior on the central mosque outside the emir's palace that killed around 200 worshippers.

In September 2012, the Durbar was suspended for security concerns. Boko Haram had attacked the city the previous January, killing hundreds.

Putin wants Ukrainian troops 'finished off', Zelensky out

AFP
Murmansk, Russia

Russian President Vladimir Putin has called for a "transitional administration" to be put in place in Ukraine and vowed his army would "finish off" Ukrainian troops, in hardline remarks as US President Donald Trump pushes for a ceasefire.

A rapprochement between Washington and Moscow since Trump's return to office and the US leader's threats to stop supporting Kyiv have bolstered Putin's confidence more than three years into an offensive that has killed tens of thousands on both sides.

The renewed call to essentially topple Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky was the latest demonstration of the Kremlin leader's long-standing desire to install a more Moscow-friendly regime in Kyiv.

Speaking on the sidelines of an Arctic forum in the early hours of yesterday, Putin said Russia could discuss with the United States, Europe and Moscow's allies, "under the auspices of the UN, the possibility of establishing a transitional administration in Ukraine".

"What for? To organise a democratic presidential election that would result in the coming to power of a competent government that would have the confidence of the people, and then begin negotiations with these authorities on a peace agreement and sign legitimate documents," Putin added.

When launching its offensive in 2022, Moscow aimed to take Kyiv



Russian President Vladimir Putin chairing a meeting with members of the Security Council via a video link in Moscow. – Reuters

in a matter of days, but was repelled by Ukraine's smaller army.

Putin also issued a public call for Ukraine's generals to topple Zelensky, whom Putin has repeatedly denigrated, without providing any evidence, as a neo-Nazi and drug addict.

Moscow has also questioned Zelensky's "legitimacy" as Ukrainian president, after his initial five-year mandate ended in May 2024.

Under Ukrainian law, elections are suspended during times of major military conflict, and Zelensky's domestic opponents have all said no ballots should be held until after the conflict.

Putin, in power for 25 years and repeatedly elected in votes with no competition, has throughout the conflict accused Ukraine of not being a democracy.

Asked about Putin's remarks later yesterday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that it was motivated by what Moscow sees as the Ukrainian leadership's "total lack of control" over the

army, which he accused of trying to attack Russian energy sites "on a daily basis".

He said that "at the moment" Russia was sticking to a commitment not to target Ukrainian energy facilities – despite multiple claims by Kyiv, including yesterday, that Russia has attacked them.

"The Russian side reserves the right, if the Kyiv regime does not observe the moratorium, also not to follow it," Peskov said.

Ukraine has accused Russia of breaching its self-imposed order not to hit energy targets.

Its air force reported yesterday that Russia had fired 163 drones in an overnight aerial barrage, triggering fires at infrastructure and agricultural sites in the south of the country.

On the battlefield, Russia's defence ministry claimed fresh advances, saying its troops had seized a village in Ukraine's north-eastern Kharkiv region and retaken a border settlement in its own Kursk region.

"If European countries don't want to go down this path, it means they don't want to go down the path of peace in unison with the efforts shown in Moscow and Washington," he said.

DR Congo doubles salaries for soldiers amid rebel advance

Southern Africa bloc, M23 agree on regional force evacuation

Reuters/AFP
Kinshasa/Goma

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo) doubled salaries for soldiers and police yesterday, the finance ministry said, in an apparent bid to boost morale as Rwanda-backed M23 rebels advance in the east.

M23 has seized eastern DR Congo's two largest cities in a swift offensive that has left thousands dead, forced hundreds of thousands to flee their homes and piled pressure on President Felix Tshisekedi.

The pay hikes will be a "turning point towards better conditions" for the army, the finance ministry said.

An officer in North Kivu province told Reuters on Thursday that he had heard about the raises, but said troops had not received even their basic salaries over the last two months since banks shut following the fall of the city of Goma.

"We learned that our pay has been doubled, but we haven't yet experienced this increase because our salary has been frozen," the officer said.

The DR Congo has roughly 260,000 soldiers and other security forces, according to the 2025 budget law.

Official monthly salaries since 2022 have averaged between \$100 and \$200 for all ranks, government documents show.

It was not immediately clear what effect the pay raise would have on the budget.

A draft law amending the budget for 2025 was due to be sent to lawmakers earlier this month but that has not emerged.

"These expenses are being incurred outside the budget. This is serious because no one will be able to monitor the actual numbers and salaries of the military personnel to be paid," Valery

Madianga, a Congolese expert on public finances, said.

Rwanda denies allegations from the DR Congo and the UN that it supports the M23 with arms and troops, saying its forces are acting in self defence against the DR Congo's army and militias hostile to Kigali.

The M23 armed group meanwhile agreed a deal yesterday with the Southern African Development Community (SADC) on the evacuation of SADC forces from the eastern DR Congo, where more than a dozen of its soldiers have been killed in the conflict.

The 16-nation SADC, the regional bloc for southern Africa, decided to end the deployment earlier this month at a summit focused on the escalating violence.

Yesterday the chiefs of staff of the armed forces of South Africa, Zambia, Malawi and Tanzania met the M23's military chief Sultani Makenga in the city of Goma, according to a joint text released after the meeting.

The parties agreed, the text said, that the M23 would "facilitate immediate withdrawal of SAMIDRC troops with their weapons and equipment" via Goma airport, which is currently out of use because of damage caused by the fighting.

The M23 and SADC agreed to set up a joint committee to assess its condition, and the southern African bloc agreed to help repair it.

The size of the SADC deployment has never been made public but analysts estimate it to number around 1,300 troops.

South Africa lost 14 soldiers in the eastern DR Congo conflict in January.

Most were from the SAMIDRC mission but at least two were deployed as part of a separate United Nations peacekeeping force.

Soldiers from Malawi and Tanzania participating in the SADC mission have also been killed.

Swedish journalist jailed in Turkiye

Swedish journalist Kaj Joakim Medin, who was in Turkiye to cover protests against Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu's arrest, was jailed pending trial on terrorism charges, Turkiye's Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor's Office said. Medin was detained in Istanbul as part of an investigation launched after a protest in Stockholm in January 2023. Authorities said Medin was among 15 suspects identified for organising, promoting, or being linked to the demonstration. Medin was charged with "insulting the president" and "membership in a terrorist organisation". His employer, *Dagens ETC* newspaper, had raised concerns over his whereabouts. – Reuters

Journalist charged with disinformation granted bail

A Pakistani journalist charged with spreading disinformation online was granted bail yesterday after he was seized from his home following a social media post sharing an investigation into a military general.

The country has been ruled by the military for several decades of its 77-year history and criticism of the security establishment is seen as a red line.

Muhammad Waheed Murad, a multimedia journalist for Urdu News, was "abducted" in the early hours of Wednesday, when more than a dozen people

stormed his home without a warrant, according to his family and lawyer.

Murad appeared in court a few hours later, charged with committing "cyber terrorism" and spreading "false and fake information".

However, he was granted bail yesterday, met by colleagues who congratulated him, according to an AFP journalist.

Murad's lawyer criticised his detention as the latest assault on press freedom in the South Asian nation. – AFP



Katara Eid Al-Fitr 2025 Program

Katara makes Eid better
During the four days of Eid
4:00 pm - 10:00 pm

#	Event	Date	Time	Venue
1	Katara Aydiat for children	During the four days of Eid	4:00 pm - 10:00 pm	Katara Corniche
2	Fireworks	1 st , 2 nd & 3 rd days of Eid	8:30 pm	Katara Corniche
3	Police Music Band Show	During the four days of Eid	5:00 pm - 6:30 pm	Katara Corniche
4	Qatari Ardha	During the four days of Eid	4:00 pm - 10:00 pm	Katara Corniche
5	Folk Crafts Market	During the four days of Eid	4:00 pm - 10:00 pm	Ibn Al-Reeb Street
6	Traditional Dishes	During the four days of Eid	4:00 pm - 10:00 pm	Ibn Al-Reeb Street
7	Art Street	During the four days of Eid	4:00 pm - 10:00 pm	Katara Corniche
8	Al-Thuraya Planetarium shows	2 nd day until the 4 th day of Eid	5:00 pm - 7:00 pm	Building 41
9	Katara Oud Center Participation "Eid Nights"	1 st , 2 nd & 3 rd days of Eid	9:00 pm	Building 6
10	Qatari Fine Arts Exhibition	During the four days of Eid	10:00 am - 10:00 pm	Building 13
Outdoor Theatre Performances				
11	The Adventures of Adnan "The Mind is a Blessing"	During the four days of Eid	1 st show: 6:15 pm - 6:45 pm 2 nd show: 8:45 pm - 9:20 pm	Katara Corniche
12	Asian-African folklore	During the four days of Eid	4:30 pm - 5:00 pm	Katara Corniche
13	Q & A Competition	During the four days of Eid	4:00 pm - 8:15 pm	Katara Corniche
14	Rababa Player	During the four days of Eid	4:30 pm - 10:00 pm	Katara Corniche
15	Science Presentations	During the four days of Eid	9:20 pm - 10:00 pm	Katara Corniche

katara

www.katara.net

Minaretein Centre serves over 2,000 Iftar meals daily

Qatar Foundation (QF)'s Minaretein Centre has been serving over 2,000 Iftar meals daily without any food waste throughout the month of Ramadan, highlighting its commitment to sustainability and community engagement.

The Minaretein Centre's "Zero Waste Iftar" initiative challenges food waste by designing an Iftar that minimises excess and redirects food waste into productive use, said Abdulkarim Kuchukov, a master's student at Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU)'s College of Islamic Studies, in an article.

"The inspiration behind this initiative comes from Qatar Foundation's strategic focus on sustainability and volunteerism," says Minaretein Centre business transformation project manager Wasif Ali Khan. "By integrating these themes into a Ramadan Iftar, which is deeply connected to the culture and heritage of Qatar, we aim to create an event that not only fosters community spirit but also promotes environmental responsibility."

Achieving a zero-waste Iftar requires precise planning.

The process begins with efficient meal preparation, ensuring appropriate portion sizes to prevent leftovers.

Compostable materials replace single-use plastics and waste stations guide guests in sorting organic and recyclable waste.

Volunteers play a central role in meal distribution, crowd management, and waste supervision.

"Each year, we have optimised the programme to enhance its impact," Khan said. "We have focused on maximising the amount of compost generated,

minimising waste, and improving awareness initiatives by offering educational programmes in multiple languages."

"Additionally, we have expanded our tent to accommodate more attendees, growing the capacity to support up to 2,500 community members per day," he added.

The project is closely tied to the QF's broader commitment to sustainability.

Through structured waste collection, all food scraps are transported to the QF's composting facilities, contributing to agricultural initiatives across the institution.

Mohamed Shahran, one of the volunteer leaders at last year's Iftar tent, explained how the team was brought together and sustained their enthusiasm.

"Volunteers and contributors came from all walks of life to be part of a rewarding activity during Ramadan, seeking the pleasure of the Almighty," he said.

Farah Sadek, one of last year's female volunteer leaders, shared what motivated her to take part in the initiative.

"When I learned about the Iftar tent, I saw it as a wonderful opportunity to contribute towards and be part of the growth of our community at Minaretein," she said.

"The experiential learning opportunity that volunteering at the Iftar tent offers is a powerful way to instil Iman in the hearts of our youth," Sadek said. "Children don't just listen to what you say – they watch what you do."

"These are the kinds of opportunities where we apply the teachings of our Deen in a way that is real and meaningful," she added.

One of the most valuable aspects of volunteering is the personal growth it fosters.

Volunteers take on leadership roles, learn to manage high-pressure situations, and develop teamwork skills.

Many volunteers assume responsibilities that challenge them to coordinate teams and manage large-scale operations.

The Minaretein Centre's Zero-Waste Iftar demonstrates how traditional Ramadan gatherings can embrace sustainability without compromising on hospitality.

Through efficient waste management, community engagement, and strong volunteer participation, this initiative exemplifies responsible stewardship of resources.

As it continues to grow, it stands as a model for integrating sustainability into cultural and religious traditions locally and even worldwide.



A volunteer at the Zero-Waste Iftar.



Zero-Waste Iftar at Minaretein Centre.



Across Qatar, shops selling chocolate hampers and flower bouquets, which are widely sought after as Eid gifts, are experiencing brisk sales.

PICTURE: Shaji Kayamkulam



Customers browse footwear in a shop.

PICTURE: Shemeer Rasheed

Souqs see huge turnout ahead of Eid holidays

Souq Waqif and other souq areas in and around Doha have seen a considerably large turnout of shoppers over the past few days, especially from the evening until midnight, with many looking for Eid clothes, gifts and accessories.

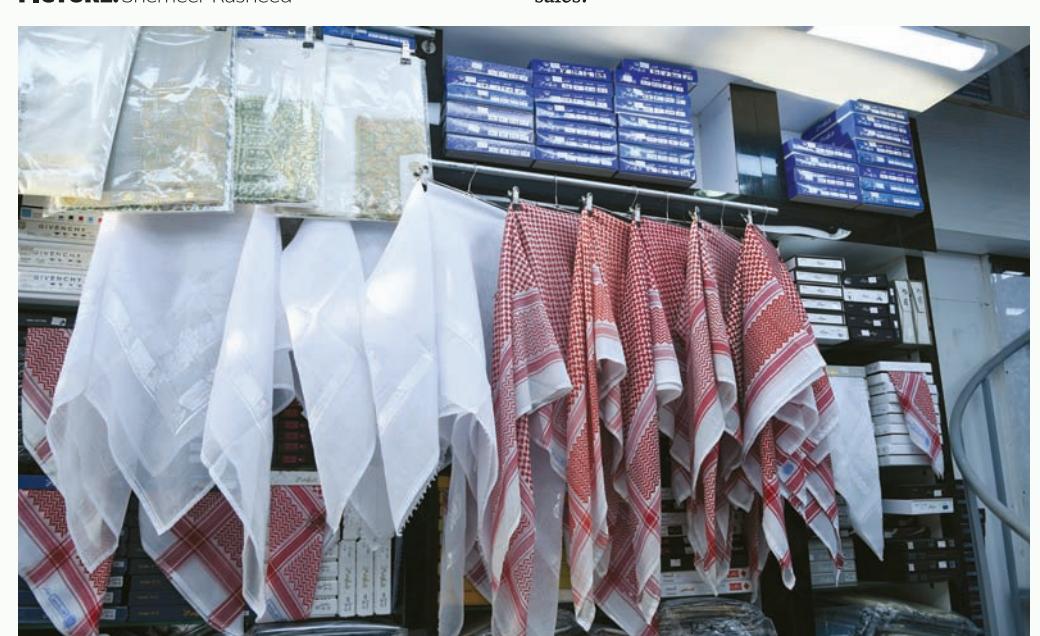
The traffic patrols have given special focus on these areas, where the movement of pedestrians is highly regulated by traffic police personnel, in addition to the road barriers meant to keep everyone safe despite the rush.

The shops in these locations are enjoying excellent sales over the weekend with expectations for better sales today and tomorrow (Friday and Saturday) as some shoppers prefer to buy their needs at the last hours before the holidays.

The souq areas are considered ideal for buying clothes and accessories at budget-friendly prices.

Many of these shops also gave their customers special discounts and good deals on several items.

Elsewhere across Qatar, shops selling chocolate hampers and flower bouquets are experiencing brisk sales.



Outlets at Souq Al Ali are popular for clothes and accessories.

PICTURE: Shemeer Rasheed

Right: Abayas showcased in a shop in Souq Waqif.

PICTURE: Ram Chand

Below: Ladies garments on display in a shop in Souq Waqif.

PICTURE: Ram Chand

