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MONDAY Vol. XXXXVI No. 13331

March 31, 2025
Shawwal 2, 1446 AH

www.gulf-times.com 2 Riyals

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SPORT | Page 1

QSL: Tight finish on the cards as arch-rivals eye title glory



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Amir performs Eid al-Fitr prayer



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani performed Eid al-Fitr prayer along with citizens at Lusail praying area yesterday morning.

The prayer was also performed by His Highness Personal Representative of the Amir Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad al-Thani, His Highness Sheikh Abdullah bin Khalifa al-Thani, HE Sheikh Jassim bin Khalifa al-Thani, HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani, HE Speaker of the Shura Council Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanem, a number

of Their Excellencies Sheikhs and ministers, members of the Shura Council, and a number of ambassadors and heads diplomatic missions accredited to the state. Sheikh Dr Yahya Bati al-Nuaimi delivered the Eid khutbah in which he said that Eid is a day of joy for all those who fasted and prayed sincerely for the sake of Allah. He added that it was a day of honour for the humble and those who remain steadfast in obedience to Allah, and it is also a day of kindness, connection, and compassion. He also said that the Muslim holidays are a culmination and celebration of acts of devotion,

asking Allah Almighty for acceptance, success, and guidance. In his khutbah, His Eminence noted that this year's Eid al-Fitr comes amid a difficult situation, as brothers and sisters in Gaza have been displaced from their homes, their houses destroyed, and many have lost loved ones and family members. He affirmed that what brings comfort to the heart is faith in Allah and trust in the promise of His Messenger, peace be upon him. He also stressed that hope is on the horizon, and that relief follows hardship, and ease comes after difficulty. (QNA) Page 2

Amir offers Eid congratulations

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani offered his heartfelt congratulations on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr, expressing his hope that Allah the Almighty would bestow prosperity and happiness upon everyone during this blessed celebration. In a post on his official account on X, His Highness the Amir wrote that he wished everyone a joyful Eid, asking God to bring it back each year with bountiful goodness, good health, and happiness. (QNA)

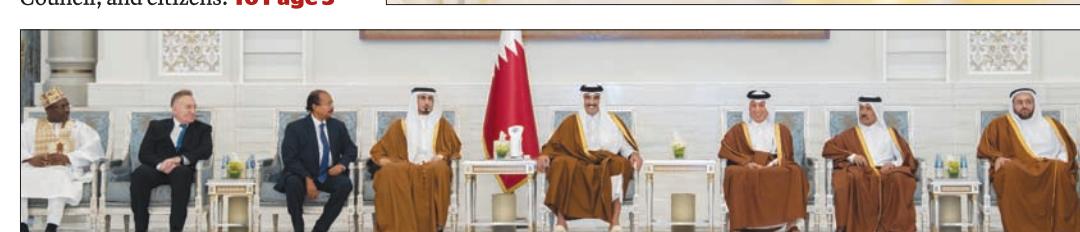


Amir receives Eid well-wishers

QNA
Doha

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani received yesterday morning well-wishers on Eid al-Fitr at Lusail Palace.

After the Eid prayer, His Highness the Amir received HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani, HE Speaker of the Shura Council Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanem, Their Excellencies Sheikhs, ministers, under-secretaries, members of the Shura Council, and citizens. [To Page 3](#)



Qatar hails formation of new Syrian govt

Qatar welcomed the announcement, made by Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa, regarding the formation of the new government, and wished for the government's success in carrying out its duties and consolidating the foundations of a state of institutions, justice and freedoms. [Page 6](#)

Bodies of 15 Gaza rescuers recovered

The Palestinian Red Crescent said yesterday it had recovered the bodies of 15 rescuers killed a week ago when Israeli forces targeted ambulances in the Gaza Strip. Bodies of eight medics from the Red Crescent, six members of Gaza's civil defence agency and one employee of a UN agency were retrieved, the Red Crescent said. It said one medic from the Red Crescent remained missing. The group said the those killed "were targeted by the Israeli occupation forces while performing their humanitarian duties as they were heading to the Hashashin area of Rafah to provide first aid to a number of people injured by Israeli shelling in the area".

Trump 'very angry' with Putin

US President Donald Trump said yesterday he was "very angry" with Russian leader Vladimir Putin, NBC reported, marking a sharp change of tone as Washington seeks to end the war in Ukraine. NBC's Kristen Welker on her show *Meet The Press* said Trump told her that he "was very angry" over Putin's recent comments about Zelensky's credibility and talking about new leadership in Ukraine.

Qatar celebrates Eid al-Fitr with religious fervour



Fireworks at Katara Cultural Village yesterday as part of Eid celebrations.

Qatar celebrated Eid al-Fitr yesterday with religious fervour and gaiety.

Muslims offered prayers across Qatar in the morning as a mark of devotion and the end of the holy month of Ramadan. Believers started to flock the mosques and prayer grounds from early morning to form large congregations where they greeted and embraced each other after the prayer in a show of amity, solidarity and brotherhood.

The Imams, while delivering the sermons, urged the worshippers to embrace the message of Eid al-Fitr and leverage the occasion by increasing acts of worship, obedience and maintaining family ties noting that Eid's significance lies in sacrifice, giving and helping the poor and needy. [To Page 2](#), [Pages 4, 5, 6, 12](#)





Amir performs Eid al-Fitr prayer



Qatar celebrates Eid al-Fitr with religious fervour

From Page 1

"Eid is the occasion to celebrate and strengthen the sense of brotherhood. I came here to pray with my friends," said Anas K at the Al Wakrah Eid prayer ground.

The Workers Support and Insurance Fund held the Eid al-Fitr prayer at Asian Town Cricket Sta-

dium where more than 6,000 persons attended the prayer. The stadium also hosted various cultural programmes and a musical event for the workers.

Awqaf prepared a total of 690 mosques for Eid prayer with necessary arrangements, while the Ministry of Interior (MoI) implemented measures to ensure the safety of the worshippers.

After a month-long fasting, Eid al-Fitr was seen by many as an opportunity to visit the parks and beaches with their families and friends. The parks and beaches across the country hosted thousands of visitors.

In order to provide the families and visitors with an enjoyable Eid al-Fitr experience, the Ministry of Municipality has enhanced recreational facil-

ties at parks. Maintenance works and cleanliness campaigns were carried out ahead of Eid while providing comfortable seating areas, clean public facilities and well-maintained green spaces.

The Ministry of Interior had also completed all arrangements to provide the public with a safe and peaceful environment during Eid al-Fitr holidays.

Amir receives Eid al-Fitr well-wishers

From Page 1

His Highness the Amir also received officers of the Armed Forces, Ministry of Interior, as well as heads of departments and national institutions.

The well-wishers expressed their sincere congratulations and blessings to His Highness the Amir, praying to Allah that it brings goodness and prosperity to him, Qatar and its people, as well as to the Arab and Islamic world.

His Highness the Personal Representative of the Amir Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad al-Thani, His Highness Sheikh Abdullah bin Khalifa al-Thani, HE Sheikh Jassim bin Khalifa al-Thani, and a number of Their Excellencies Sheikhs and ministers attended the reception.

His Highness the Amir received more Eid al-Fitr well-wishers at Lusail Palace yesterday afternoon, including Their Excellencies Sheikhs and citizens.

His Highness the Amir also received heads of diplomatic missions accredited to the country.

The well-wishers expressed their congratulations and blessings to His Highness the Amir on this happy occasion, asking All Mighty Allah to bring it and similar occasions back to Qatar, its dear people, and all Arab and Islamic nations with goodness, blessings, and prosperity.

His Highness Personal Representative of the Amir Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad al-Thani and a number of Sheikhs attended the reception.





"Education City Stadium serves as a symbol of unity, bringing together thousands of worshippers to mark the end of the holy month of Ramadan. This remarkable congregation reflects the strength of our faith and the deep bonds that unite our community."

Tens of thousands gather at Education City Stadium for Eid al-Fitr prayers

An Eid festival was also held featuring a variety of activities



QNA
Doha

For the third consecutive year, tens of thousands of worshippers from diverse backgrounds and age groups gathered at the Education City Stadium, part of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development, to perform Eid al-Fitr prayers.

The Minaretein Center at the Education City Mosque, in collaboration with the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs, organised the religious event, ensuring a smooth and spiritual experience for at-

tendees. Following the prayers, an Eid festival was held, featuring a variety of activities that fostered a joyful and festive atmosphere.

Project Manager at the Minaretein Center, Wasif Ali Khan, highlighted the significance of the gathering, stating: "Education City Stadium serves as a symbol of unity, bringing together thousands of worshippers to mark the end of the holy month of Ramadan. This remarkable congregation reflects the strength of our faith and the deep bonds that unite our community."

He also emphasised that the Eid festival following the prayers added to the celebratory spirit, as families and individuals came together to share moments of joy and togetherness.

By organising these events, the Minaretein Center not only commemorates Eid al-Fitr but also reinforces its mission of fostering an inclusive society built on values of tolerance, community engagement, and shared religious heritage.

Education City Stadium has become a permanent venue for Eid prayers, thanks to its vast capacity. Its role as a host for FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 matches has further cemented its status as a prominent landmark in the country, seamlessly blending spiritual, cultural, and sporting significance. (QNA)



5,000 gifts given to children under 'Joy of Eid' programme

QNA
Doha

As part of its 'Joy of Eid' programme, the General Directorate of Endowments of the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs distributed 5,000 gifts to children at 30 Eid prayer grounds across the country, with the support of the Waqf Fund for Family and Childhood.

Aiming to bring smiles to children's faces and share the joy of Eid with them, the initiative stems from the General Directorate of Endowments' role in supporting community projects and fostering the spirit of giving.

The Director General of the General Directorate of Endowments, engineer Hassan bin Abdullah al-Marzouqi, said that the "Joy of Eid" programme falls within the framework of the directorate's commitment to spreading the joy of Eid among children and their families, in line with its motto "Endowment: A Community Partnership".

He added that the directorate has distributed gifts at 30 Eid prayer grounds in various



locations. This is part of its ongoing efforts to ensure that endowments are present everywhere and on every occasion to strengthen community cohesion.

Eid is not just a celebration, but an opportunity to spread happiness among all, he stressed.

The Endowment Fund for Family and Childhood was established to contribute to strengthening family ties, creating a healthy environment for children to grow up in, supporting purposeful projects and beneficial programmes, and instilling virtuous values and morals in the souls of young people. (QNA)



Eid al-Fitr in Qatar steeped in joyous, ancient traditions

Eid al-Fitr in Qatar is a tapestry of joy and spirituality that brings together generations of all ages, blending religious values with deep-rooted customs and cherished traditions.

As soon as the crescent moon of Shawwal is sighted, marking the beginning of Eid, Muslims in Qatar exchange greetings through phone calls and text messages, as well as via modern apps and social media platforms to share the festive joy with family and friends.

With warm phrases like *Asakom min Awadah* and *Kul 'am wa antum bikhayr*, and Eid Mubarak, Qatars express their Eid wishes, hoping for happiness, blessings, and that God accepts the good deeds performed during the month of fasting, prayer, and Qur'an.

Traditional chants and songs play a significant role in expressing the emotions and sentiments of the community during happy occasions, especially Eid.

Songs like *Ya'Alaydo* and other heritage melodies have been passed down through generations and reflect the joyful spirit of Eid.

On the morning of Eid, Muslims in Qatar wake up early to shower, apply perfume, and dress in their finest clothes in preparation for the Eid prayer.

They head to prayer grounds, proclaiming *takbeer* and filled with joy for the blessings and grace they have received.

Doha's streets fill with worshippers on this special morning as they head to prayer, eager to listen to the Eid sermon.



Thousands of faithful attended Eid al-Fitr prayers yesterday at 5.43am at mosques and prayer grounds across Qatar. The historic prayer ground at Msheireb, now a part of Msheireb Downtown Doha, attracted many worshippers.

PICTURES: Thajudheen

After the prayer, Qatars begin visiting family majlis gatherings, where children and grandchildren visit the elder of the family.

Children receive "Eidiyah", a monetary gift from relatives, bringing them happiness and allowing them to buy toys or go shopping.

Children roam the neighbourhood (the fareej), greeting neighbours and collecting Eidiyah while singing traditional songs and chants as they knock on doors.

Guests are offered incense before leaving as part of the farewell gesture, with oud (agarwood) presented after they have enjoyed traditional sweets and Arabic coffee.

A well-known Qatari proverb goes *Ma aqb al-oud qoud*, meaning once the oud is offered, it's a sign the visit is over.

Qatars also mark the occasion with a large feast, known as "Al Dhabibah", to which family and friends are invited.

This feast is typically held at the family's main home, where the grandparents reside and where everyone gathers to receive well-wishers.

Preparations for Eid celebrations begin in the final days of Ramadan, with markets bustling with families shopping for new clothes and gifts.

Shops in Doha stay open late into the night, and the markets, especially Souq Waqif, see a surge in shoppers thanks to the wide variety of goods available to meet the needs of households.

In Qatar, men prepare for Eid well in advance by visiting tailor shops to have their Eid thobes custom-made.

During the last days of Ramadan, they shop for accessories like the *ghatra* (headscarf) and *agal* (headband).

Some also prefer to wear the *bisht*, a traditional cloak worn over the thobe for special occasions.

Similarly, women ensure they buy new clothes for themselves and their children, ranging from modern outfits and embroidered jalabiya to dresses for little girls.

Sweets hold a special place during Eid.

In Qatar, the treats offered to guests on Eid are called "Al Fal" and include traditional desserts along with popular Middle Eastern sweets like kunafa and basbousa, as well as a variety of fresh fruits.

Another essential item that Qatars prioritise before Eid is oud and bakhoor, both of which are hallmarks of hospitality in Gulf homes.

Oud is placed on hot coals in a burner, releasing its fragrant scent, and guests are perfumed with it during Eid visits, as the aroma lingers on clothes and *ghatra* for a long time.

A common tradition during Eid



in Qatar is leaving the main doors of homes open, symbolising presence and a warm welcome to visitors.

House-to-house visits continue throughout the morning until the Dhuhur (midday) prayer, after which many families and relatives gather for lunch together.

In recent years, Eid celebrations have come to include heritage activities held across different areas, offering visitors a glimpse into the old Qatari way of life.

These events showcase traditional crafts like blacksmithing, carpentry, perfumery, and the daily lifestyle of past generations.

Folk performances and traditional Qatari dances are also featured.

Throughout Eid, entertainment events cater to all age groups, such as traditional performances and fireworks displays that light up Dohas skies.

Various organisations, especially Qatar Tourism, prepare a rich

schedule of activities during Eid al-Fitr in open spaces like the Corniche, public parks, Lusail Boulevard, Msheireb, Old Doha Port, and other areas, alongside indoor festivities in shopping malls.

With the arrival of Eid, exchange companies see a significant uptick in business, as citizens and residents flock to buy foreign currencies for travel or send money back home to support loved ones with holiday expenses.

The high demand prompts money exchange services to operate at full capacity and extend working hours to serve their customers.

Eid in Qatar, with its array of celebrations, becomes a unifying national event for everyone living in the country, including non-Muslims.

The joyful spirit of Eid can be felt everywhere in parks, malls, and media turning the entire nation into one large, inclusive festive space for both citizens and residents alike. - QNA





Qatar welcomes announcement of new Syrian government formation

Qatar welcomed the announcement by Syria President Ahmed al-Sharaa of the formation of the new government and wished for the government's success in carrying out its duties and consolidating the foundations of a state of institutions, justice, and freedoms. In a statement yesterday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed Qatar's aspiration to co-operate with the new Syrian government to strengthen

relations between the two countries in various fields, in a way that serves the interests of the two fraternal peoples. At the same time, the ministry emphasised Qatar's support for the new government to achieve the aspirations of the fraternal Syrian people for stability, development, and prosperity. The ministry also reiterated Qatar's full support for Syria's sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity. (QNA)



ICC holds Eid Bazaar, Mehndi Night



Indian ambassador Vipul inaugurated the Eid Bazaar and Mehndi Night organised by the Indian Cultural Centre (ICC) on Friday and Saturday. The event showcased more than 60 stalls of handicrafts, leather products, imitation jewellery, readymade traditional clothes, food and henna stations. Embassy counsellor Dr Vaibhav A Tandale was the guest of honour at the opening. Officials of ICC, Indian Community Benevolent Forum, Indian Business and Professionals Council, and Indian Sports Centre were present.

Katara Eid festivities a big draw

Katara Cultural Village's Eid al-Fitr celebrations, which began yesterday with a diverse range of events for all age groups, attracted a good number of visitors.

The itinerary featured cultural, artistic, and heritage-based programmes, alongside musical and theatrical performances. The firework display is spectacular. Katara Beach has a variety of activities, including

The competition theatre on Katara's Corniche offers entertainment and education fun for children. The fireworks display is spectacular. Katara Beach has a variety of activities, including

swimming, boating, and kayaking apart from a dedicated children's play area.

Katara's restaurants serve a wide range of local and international delicacies in an elegant setting.



Qatar progressing well towards zero-waste target

Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

The Ministry of Municipality has reaffirmed its pioneering commitment to attain sustainability through various tangible initiatives towards the creation of a clean and more sustainable environment and green future.

On the occasion of the International Zero Waste Day, the ministry stressed the need for collaborating efforts of people and the related entities to attain the objective in Qatar and reviewed its various efforts and achievements in this regard.

The ministry has a comprehensive legal system to maintain public health, environment cleanliness and achieve sustainable development.

These include the ministerial Decision No 143 of 2022 on the regulations of using plastic bags, besides the launch of the comprehensive national programme for sorting waste at the source, and the ministerial Decision No 170 of 2021 regarding sorting of solid waste.

The Integrated National Solid Waste Management Programme launched in 2022 targets an integrated development of all facilities and systems for collecting, transporting and managing solid waste in the country until 2030 following the principles of circular economy, and Qatar National Vision 2030.

The ministry has always adopted an active awareness approach to promote the ideas and practices of sustainability across society such as constant inspection campaigns to



monitor the implementation of the decision to limit the use of single-use plastic bags, a number of conferences and events held throughout the year to promote recycling and sustainability, various activities and events held at the shopping malls to raise public awareness on related issues, and maintaining active partnership with the private sector, factories and companies in this regard.

Accordingly, the ministry has made several key success in waste recycling that include effectively disposing of the country's stock of damaged tyres, the production of more than 277 megawatt/hour of clean energy using recycled materials, and the production of more than 40,000 tonnes of fertilisers from recycled waste.

The ministry has allocated 51 land plots for establishing recycling plants at Al Afja Area in Mesaieed. The first guidebook for waste management and recycling was also launched, while awareness efforts are ongoing to attain the zero-waste target.

The Chedi Katara Hotel & Resort, nestled in the heart of Katara Cultural Village is offering a luxury staycation for Eid al-Fitr, with world-class hospitality, refined dining, and unforgettable leisure experiences.

Guests can choose from elegantly designed rooms, spacious suites, and private villas, each blending contemporary sophistication with Arabian charm, a statement said.

Every room and suite boasts sea views. For those desiring more space and exclusivity, the resort's private villas range from one to four bedrooms. Guests can unwind at Doha's largest outdoor pool, basking in the sun while enjoying panoramic ocean vistas.

At the dedicated Kids' Club, children can engage in fun-filled activities while parents relax at the spa, take a refreshing dip in the infinity pool, or indulge in exceptional gourmet experiences.

"Eid is a time of joy, togetherness, and creating unforgettable memories. At The Chedi Katara Hotel

Eid al-Fitr staycation at Chedi Katara



& Resort, we invite you to celebrate this special occasion with exquisite experiences, world-class hospitality, and the warmth of shared moments with your loved ones," said general manager Hani Akkari.

An Eid gala dinner on April 4 will feature entertainment by renowned Moroccan singer Zakaria. The price is QR450 per person. Breakfast Buffet at The Restaurant promises a blend of global flavours and local delicacies.

The Eid Brunch will have a buffet featuring the finest Arabic and international delicacies, with live cooking stations, and an array of gourmet dishes.



The other highlights include Beach N' Brunch on Saturdays, Tuesday Sushi Night, Levantine Bonfire BBQ on Thursdays, Eid Afternoon Tea at The Restaurant, special collaboration with

world-renowned chocolatier Pierre Marcolini at The Cigar Lounge, The Spa at The Chedi Katara Hotel, and expert-led Bala fitness sessions and private swimming lessons.

QU team develops AI powered assistive system to support visually impaired persons

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

A group of researchers from Qatar University (QU) has developed an innovative assistive system called 'Smart Hat' aimed at empowering individuals with visual impairments.

Designed as a lightweight, wearable device, 'Smart Hat' integrates seamlessly into the user's daily life and enhances the ability of visually impaired people to navigate their surroundings and perform tasks independently.

The team comprised of Prof Sumaya al-Maadeed, professor of computer engineering at the College of Engineering, an accomplished researcher in Computer Vision and Artificial Intelligence (AI), and PhD student Jayakanth Kunoth, Dr Mohammed Zied Chaari, and MSc student Nandini Subramanian.

Prof al-Maadeed and her team, according to an article on the latest edition of the QU Research Magazine, noted the potential of AI to address the challenges of the visually impaired people by providing real-time solutions that combine advanced computing techniques with user-friendly interfaces. Their goal was to design a system that could adapt to various environments, respond intelligently to user



The Smart Hat Innovation.

needs, and provide continuous support.

The assistive system integrates multiple advanced technologies, including AI, computer vision, and sensor-based systems, to create a robust and user-centric solution. One of the key features of the system is object detection and recognition. By using computer vision algorithms, the system identifies and labels objects in the user's environment in real-time.

The system provides audio feedback to guide users by describing objects, directions, or hazards. This allows visually impaired individuals to better understand their surroundings without relying on sight.

By leveraging deep learning models, the system maps out the user's environment and provides step-by-step navigation instructions. This feature

is particularly useful for avoiding obstacles and navigating crowded spaces. The AI in the system learns user preferences over time, adapting its responses to provide more personalised assistance.

AI plays a central role in the assistive system, powering both the recognition and decision-making processes. Deep learning models were employed and trained on diverse datasets to ensure accurate and reliable performance in various scenarios.

The system's AI components were trained on large datasets of images, objects, and environmental scenarios to develop robust object detection and recognition capabilities.

This training ensures that the system can operate effectively in diverse lighting conditions and settings.

The integration of NLP tech-

nologies in both Arabic and English significantly enhances the system's communication abilities. It enables the system to describe objects and provide instructions in a natural, conversational tone, making it more user-friendly and less daunting for individuals with visual impairments.

AI models in the system are designed to learn continuously from user interactions and feedback. This iterative improvement ensures that the device remains relevant and effective as user needs evolve.

The assistive system has the potential to transform the lives of individuals with visual impairments by providing them greater independence and reducing reliance on caregivers and empowers users to engage more fully in social, professional, and recreational activities.

Building on the success of this project, Prof al-Maadeed and her team plan to expand their research to include additional functionalities and applications. They also plan to partner with international organisations and researchers to share insights and further develop assistive technologies.

By combining cutting-edge technology with a user-focused approach, the team has created a solution that not only improves the lives of individuals with disabilities but also sets a new standard for innovation in assistive technology.

Eid offers at Hilton Salwa Resort

Hilton Salwa Beach Resort & Villas invites are offering 'festive entertainment, indulgent dining, and thrilling adventures' for Eid al-Fitr, a statement said. Nestled along Qatar's coastline, the resort offers 361 accommodations, including rooms, suites, Arabian townhouses, and private beach villas with pools.

Guests can enjoy a breakfast buffet and special Eid buffets at Souk Kitchen: Lunch is QR150 per person and dinner QR225 per person (includes soft drinks). Guests can also book a private in-villa BBQ experience.

Resort guests enjoy complimentary access to Desert Falls Water & Adventure Park, featuring over 30 rides. The Eid Spa Retreat offers an exclusive 60-minute Oud massage, plus a complimentary 20-minute reflexology session.

Salwa Beach Fest on April 4, from 10am to sunset



features DJ, fire dancers, special performances, magic shows, bouncy castles, face painting, HIIT workouts, beach games and challenges. Entry fee of QR200 per adult is fully redeemable on food and beverages. Kids under 12 enter for free.

Eid prayers across nations



Muslim faithful attend Eid al-Fitr prayers, marking the end of the fasting month of Ramadan, at the University football stadium in Hodan district of Mogadishu, Somalia, yesterday.



Chadian President Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno (centre) attends the Eid prayer, at the Grand Mosque in N'Djamena, Chad, yesterday.

Gazans mark grim Eid under Israeli strikes

AFP
Gaza City

For the second consecutive year, traditional Eid al-Fitr celebrations marking the end of Ramadan were absent in Gaza yesterday, as residents of the Palestinian territory awoke to the roar of Israeli bombardment. "Eid, which was once a day of family reunions and visits, has now become a day of farewells and funerals," said Nahla Abu Matar, a 28-year-old mother, speaking to AFP.

Like hundreds of thousands of Gaza residents, she has been displaced from her home in northern Gaza and is now living in the southern area of Khan Yunis.

"The mosques where we once prayed have been reduced to heaps of rubble, and the places where we used to gather are now strewn with ruins and bodies," she said. Gaza's rescue teams told AFP that eight people, including five children, were killed in a pre-dawn Israeli air strike in Khan Yunis yesterday.

"Instead of waking up to the sound of takbirs (Eid prayers), we woke up to the roar of air strikes and explosions," Abu Matar said.

At dawn, many Gazans gathered across different parts of the territory to offer traditional morning Eid prayers, an AFP correspondent reported.

Some unrolled their prayer mats in the streets amid the rubble.



Palestinians attend Eid al-Fitr prayer marking the end of the holy fasting month of Ramadan, in Jabalia, in the northern Gaza Strip, yesterday.

ble, while others prayed inside mosques – including the once-majestic Omari Mosque, whose walls have now collapsed under the bombardments.

Many prayed beside makeshift tents sheltering tens of thousands of displaced Gazans, living in dire humanitarian conditions.

At the Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza, several residents visited the graves of loved ones killed in the war.

As they prayed, the sounds of artillery fire and the buzz of military drones filled the air.

Ezzedine Mousa, a resident of Gaza City, described an overwhelming sense of fear gripping the region. "People are afraid to

visit one another because a rocket could strike at any moment, claiming their lives," he said.

"Our children's eyes reflect their fear, but we do our best to keep them happy with whatever little we have." Israel resumed its military campaign across Gaza on March 18 after a fragile weeks-long truce with Hamas collapsed.

Since then, more than 900 people have been killed across Gaza, according to the health ministry of the Hamas-run territory.

The war in Gaza broke out after Hamas stormed Israel in October 2023.

Israel launched a blistering military campaign in response to

Hamas's storming, which has so far killed at least 50,277 people in Gaza, the majority of them civilians, according to the Hamas-run territory's health ministry.

"The world rejoices in Eid while our sons and daughters lie in morgues. How much longer will this tragedy continue?" said Mohamed al-Qadi, who lost his sister and nephew in yesterday's pre-dawn Israeli strike on Khan Yunis.

Medics and witnesses reported that Israeli air strikes continued in Khan Yunis and some other parts of Gaza throughout the day.

An air strike in the southern city of Rafah wounded two children, according to medics.

Trump warns Iran of consequences if deal fails

AFP
Washington

US President Donald Trump has threatened that Iran will be bombed if it persists in developing nuclear weapons.

"If they don't make a deal, there will be bombing," NBC News said the president told one of its correspondents in an interview late Saturday. It said he also threatened to punish Iran with what he called "secondary tariffs." Trump's language represented a sharpening of his comment a few days earlier that if Tehran refused to negotiate a new nuclear agreement, "bad, bad things are going to happen to Iran." It was not clear whether Trump was threatening bombing by US planes alone or perhaps in an operation co-ordinated with Israel.

Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar told Politico late last month that "in order to stop a nuclear Iranian programme before it will be weaponised, a reliable military option should be on the table." Analysts have said Iran may be just weeks away from producing a deliverable nuclear weapon – though Tehran denies it is building such arms. Either way, such an attack carries a risk of spreading to a wider conflict.

Trump in 2018 pulled the US out of an agreement to relieve sanc-

tions on Iran in return for curbs on its nuclear program.

Now, in his second term, he has said he is open to talks on a new deal that could reduce the risk of military escalation.

Trump revealed in early March that he had sent a letter proposing such talks to Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Meantime, he has pushed ahead with his "maximum pressure" programme of additional sanctions and the threat of military action. Tehran, deeply suspicious of the US administration after Trump's withdrawal from the original nuclear deal, has refused to negotiate directly with Washington.

According to NBC, Trump also said US and Iranian officials were "talking," but he did not give details.

In a video published early yesterday by Iranian state media, President Masoud Pezeshkian said that Tehran's response to Trump, delivered to intermediaries in Oman by Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, said that "direct negotiations were rejected." But, he added: "The supreme leader has also emphasised that indirect negotiations can continue." "We do not avoid negotiations," said Pezeshkian, a reformist who has called for reviving nuclear talks with the US.

Chinese sailors missing off Ghana after suspected pirate attack

AFP
Accra

Three Chinese nationals are missing after their vessel came under a "suspected pirate attack" off the coast of Ghana, authorities said over the weekend.

The apparent kidnapping is the latest in the Gulf of Guinea, an area off the Atlantic coast of Africa whose waters – rich in hydrocarbons and fisheries – stretch across a slew of jurisdictions, including those of countries with limited naval and coast guard capacities.

Just before 6:00pm on Thursday, seven armed individuals boarded

the Mengxin I vessel in Ghanaian waters and fired warning shots, the Ghanaian military said in a statement.

The assailants rounded up members of the crew and sent others into hiding.

By the time the attackers departed three hours later, the captain, chief mate and chief engineer – all Chinese nationals – were missing, according to the statement, dated Saturday.

They are "suspected of being kidnapped by the attackers," it said.

Ghanaian authorities are sharing information with other members of west African regional bloc Ecowas, it added.

Niger withdraws from Lake Chad military force

Reuters
Niamey

Niger has quit an international force fighting armed militant groups in West Africa's Lake Chad region as it seeks to shore up security around oil assets at home, the government said in a bulletin on state television.

The Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), which also includes soldiers from Nigeria, Chad and Cameroon, has been working to stem the insurgency since 2015, but progress has been hobbled by division and poor co-ordination, allowing armed groups to flourish across the region's sparsely pop-

ulated scrublands. MNJTF has yet to comment on Niger's withdrawal, and it is unclear how the step will affect the mission's future.

The Lake Chad region has been repeatedly attacked by militant groups, including Islamic State in West Africa and Boko Haram, whose insurgency erupted in northeast Nigeria in 2009 and has killed tens of thousands of people.

Last year, Chad threatened to pull out of the MNJTF after about 40 soldiers were killed in an attack on a military base.

And Niger has become increasingly withdrawn since a military junta overthrew President Mohamed Bazoum in 2023. Along with Burkina Faso and Mali – neighbour-

ing states where juntas also snatched power in recent years – it withdrew from regional bloc the Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas) in 2024.

Niger's junta, which last week announced a five-year transition to constitutional rule, has promised to restore security in the country, whose vast desert north is crossed by migrants and traffickers.

But the army has little control over large parts of the country. Militants killed at least 44 civilians and severely injured 13 others during an attack on a mosque in the southwest this month.

Its energy infrastructure, including an oil pipeline that links the Agadem oilfield to Benin's coast, has come under attack.

Myanmar quake death toll hits 1,700 as aid scramble intensifies

Reuters
Bangkok

The toll from Myanmar's earthquake continued to rise yesterday, as foreign rescue teams and aid rushed into the impoverished country, where hospitals were overwhelmed and some communities scrambled to mount rescue efforts with limited resources.

The 7.7-magnitude quake, one of Myanmar's strongest in a century, jolted the war-torn Southeast Asian nation on Friday, leaving around 1,700 people dead, 3,400 injured and over 300 missing as of yesterday, the military government said.

The junta chief, Senior General

Min Aung Hlaing, warned that the number of fatalities could go up and his administration faced a challenging situation, state media reported, three days after he made a rare call for international assistance.

India, China and Thailand are among Myanmar's neighbours that have sent relief materials and teams, along with aid and personnel from Malaysia, Singapore and Russia.

"The destruction has been extensive, and humanitarian needs are growing by the hour," the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said in a statement.

"With temperatures rising and the monsoon season approaching in just weeks, there is an urgent

need to stabilise affected communities before secondary crises emerge." The US pledged \$2mn in aid "through Myanmar-based humanitarian assistance organisations" and said in a statement that an emergency response team from USAID, which is undergoing massive cuts under the Trump administration, is deploying to Myanmar. The devastation has piled more misery on Myanmar, already in chaos from a civil war that grew out of a nationwide uprising after a 2021 military coup ousted the elected government of Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi.

Critical infrastructure – including bridges, highways, airports and railways – across the country of 55mn are damaged,



Rescue teams work to evacuate residents trapped under the rubble of the collapsed building 'Sky Villa Condominium development' in Mandalay, yesterday.

slowing humanitarian efforts while the conflict that has battered the economy, displaced over 3.5mn people and debilitated the health system rages on.

In some areas near the epicentre, residents told Reuters that government assistance was scarce, leaving people to fend for themselves. "It is necessary to re-store the transportation routes as soon as possible," Min Aung Hlaing told officials on Saturday, according to state media. "It is necessary to fix the railways and also reopen the airports so that rescue operations would be more effective." The US Geological Service's predictive modelling estimated Myanmar's death toll could eventually top 10,000 and losses could exceed the country's annual economic output.

Hospitals in parts of central and northwestern Myanmar, including the second-biggest city, Mandalay, and the capital Naypyitaw, were struggling to cope with an influx of injured people, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said late on Saturday.



OFFICIAL

Albanese expects 'one-on-one' discussion with Trump on tariffs

Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese yesterday said he expected to have a one-on-one discussion with US president Donald Trump on tariffs, as Washington prepares to announce new tariffs on its trading partners on April 2. There are concerns Australia could be impacted by the looming escalation in the Trump administration's global trade war when it unveils the reciprocal tariffs on so-called "liberation day". Trump this month imposed steel and aluminium tariffs that affect Australian exports. Albanese said his government had engaged "very constructively" with US officials on tariffs, ahead of the expected April 2 announcement.

CLAIM

Rite at family grave led to wildfire: South Korea police

South Korean police yesterday said they booked a man suspected of starting what grew into the country's largest wildfire, killing at least 26 people and razing thousands of buildings. Authorities believe the man, who is in his 50s, began the fire in southeastern Uiseong County when he performed an ancestral rite by a family grave on March 22, an official from Gyeongbuk Provincial Police said. "We are in the process of verifying evidence," the official added. In South Korea's legal system, booking involves registering a suspect but may not coincide immediately with arrest or charges. Yonhap news agency said the man had denied the allegations.

CONTAMINATION

Japan beef bowl chain shut stores after rat, bug incidents

Japanese restaurant chain Sukiya will temporarily shut nearly all of its roughly 2,000 branches after a rat was found in a miso soup and a bug in another meal, the company said. Sukiya, famous for its beef bowls, apologised in a statement saying there had been a bug contamination at one of its Tokyo restaurants on Friday, two months after the rat incident at another branch. "Sukiya has decided to temporarily close all restaurants, with the exception of some stores in shopping centres, from March 31 to April 4 in order to take measures against pests and vermin," it said.

ALERT

Japan issues mid-level volcano warning

Japanese authorities yesterday issued a mid-level warning for a volcano in the Kyushu region, telling people not to approach and that an eruption "may occur". There was, however, no evacuation order for local residents near the Shimodake volcano, part of the Kirishimayama cluster. "Volcano warning issued for Kirishimayama (Shimodake) (near crater) (volcanic alert level 3: Do not approach the volcano). An eruption may occur," the disaster management agency said. Japan has scores of active volcanoes and sits on the so-called Pacific "Ring of Fire" where a large proportion of the world's earthquakes and volcanic eruptions are recorded.

US command in Japan being upgraded to deter China: Hegseth

Reuters
Tokyo

US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth yesterday described Japan as indispensable for tackling Chinese aggression and said implementing of a plan to upgrade the US military command in the country would get under way.

"We share a warrior ethos that defines our forces," Hegseth told Japanese Defence Minister Gen Nakatani at a meeting in Tokyo. "Japan is an indispensable partner in deterring communist Chinese military aggression," including across the Taiwan Strait, he said.

Calling Japan a "cornerstone of peace and security in the Indo-Pacific", he said President Donald Trump's government would continue to work closely with its key Asian ally. In July, then-president Joe Biden's White House announced a major revamp of the US military command in Japan to deepen co-ordination with Tokyo's forces, as the two countries labelled China their "greatest strategic challenge".

That change will place a combined operational commander in Japan, who would be a counterpart to the head of a joint operation command established by the Japan's Self-Defence Forces last week. Hegseth's praise of Japan contrasts with the criticism he levelled at European allies in February, telling them they should not assume the US presence

there would last forever. Trump has complained that the bilateral defence treaty, in which Washington pledges to defend Tokyo, is not reciprocal. In his first term, he said Japan should pay more to host US troops.

Japan hosts 50,000 US military personnel, squadrons of fighter jets and Washington's only forward-deployed aircraft carrier strike group along a 3,000km East Asian archipelago that hems in Chinese military power. It comes as Japan doubles military spending, including money to purchase longer-range missiles. The operational scope of its forces, however, is constrained by its US-authored constitution, adopted after its World War II defeat, which renounces the right to make war.

Hegseth and Nakatani agreed to accelerate a plan to jointly produce beyond-visual-range air-to-air AMRAAM missiles and to consider collaborating on production of SM-6 surface-to-air defence missiles to help ease a shortage of munitions, Nakatani said.

Hegseth said he asked his counterpart for greater access to Japan's strategic southwest islands, along the edge of the contested East China Sea close to Taiwan.

Hegseth, on his first official visit to Asia, travelled to Japan from the Philippines. On Saturday he attended a memorial service on Iwo Jima, the site 80 years ago of fierce fighting between US and Japanese forces.

Japan's ancient imperial family will launch a YouTube account this week, the government said, in the latest attempt at public outreach by the tradition-bound monarchy. Last year the royals made their social media debut with an Instagram account which now has nearly 2mn followers. Its posts show Emperor Naruhito, Empress Masako and their family meeting foreign dignitaries, visiting victims of natural disasters or checking out prized art exhibits. From tomorrow the family will also publish videos on YouTube, a spokesman at the Imperial Household Agency said. Naruhito, 65, ascended the Chrysanthemum Throne in 2019 after his father became the first emperor to abdicate in over two centuries. The monarchy holds no political power under Japan's post-war constitution, instead acting as symbolic figureheads.

Farmers protest Japan govt policies

A farmer drives a tractor down a street to lead groups of protesters calling for a change in the government's agricultural policies in central Tokyo, Japan, yesterday.

Harry charity rift blows up as chair makes fresh claims

AFP
London

A bitter boardroom row at an African charity Prince Harry founded and then quit escalated yesterday after its chairperson accused the prince of "bullying" and being involved in a "cover up".

Last week Harry and Lesotho's Prince Seeiso announced their departure from the Sentebale charity they founded in 2006 following a "devastating" dispute between trustees and board chair Sophie Chandauka.

Relations with Chandauka, who

was appointed in 2023, "broke down beyond repair", they said in a joint statement on Tuesday, prompting trustees to leave and demand that Chandauka resign.

In the latest allegations, Chandauka accused Harry, who founded the charity in memory of his mother Princess Diana, of trying to force her out through "bullying (and) harassment" in an interview with Sky News.

Prince Harry did not give Sky News a formal response to the allegations, but some former trustees have questioned the veracity of the claims.

According to Chandauka, there was a culture of "silence" at the

organisation, with board members reluctant to speak out against the Duke of Sussex, whom she accused of "belligerence" in board meetings and beyond.

In one example, Chandauka criticised Harry for his decision to bring a Netflix camera crew to the charity's polo fundraiser last year, as well as an unplanned appearance by his wife Meghan at the event.

Following critical media coverage of the fundraiser, she claimed Harry "asked me to issue some sort of a statement in support of the Duchess (of Sussex)".

She alleged the request to back Meghan was a push by the "Sus-

sex PR machine" that "supports Prince Harry's efforts".

Former trustee Kelelo Lerotholi told Sky News he did not recognise the allegations of boardroom rifts and discontent.

A source close to the trustees told the BBC they "fully expected this publicity stunt" after they left the board.

Former British politician Lynda Chalker, who quit as a trustee in November after nearly 20 years, described Chandauka's governance style as "almost dictatorial".

Chalker told The Times she left because she was "not happy with the direction" the chair was taking.

Harry founded the charity in

honour of his mother with Seeiso to help young people with HIV and AIDS in Lesotho and later Botswana.

"What's transpired is unthinkable. We are in shock that we have to do this, but we have a continued responsibility to Sentebale's beneficiaries," the co-founders said in their resignation.

According to Chandauka, relations broke down after she complained about "the harassment and the misogyny" in the organisation including by individuals on the board.

Harry was not one of the individuals, and they had a "great relationship" before she made the

allegations, according to the Zimbabwe-born lawyer.

But she said that after she spoke out, Harry "interfered in the investigation".

"So it's a cover-up, and the prince is involved," Chandauka said, claiming that after that point, the prince wanted her out.

"What Prince Harry wanted to do was to eject me and this went on for months. It went on for months through bullying, harassment," she said.

Chandauka said she had reported trustees to the UK's Charity Commission regulator and taken her case to the high court in London.



South Korea's Trade, Industry and Energy Minister Ahn Duk-geun (centre) poses for a photo with Japan's Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Yoji Muto (left) and China's Commerce Minister Wang Wentao during the 13th Trilateral Economic and Trade Ministers' Meeting in Seoul yesterday.

China, South Korea and Japan agree to strengthen free trade

AFP
Seoul

China, South Korea and Japan yesterday agreed to strengthen free trade in the face of a raft of new tariffs imposed by US President Donald Trump.

The agreement came at a meeting of top trade officials - the first at that level in five years - days ahead of the start of tariffs on a huge range of US imports, including cars, trucks, and auto parts.

South Korea and Japan are major auto exporters, while China has also been hit hard by the US tariffs. The meeting was attended by South Korea's Industry Minister Ahn Duk-geun, his Japanese counterpart Yoji Muto, and China's Wang Wentao.

The three countries called for their negotiations for a comprehensive trilateral free-trade agreement to be speeded up, and agreed to create "a predictable trade and investment environment", a statement said. South Korea's

Ahn said the three countries must respond "jointly" to shared global challenges.

"Today's economic and trade environment is marked by increasing fragmentation of the global economy," he said.

"The international environment surrounding us is constantly changing, and uncertainties are increasing," Japanese trade official Yasuji Komiyama told a press briefing.

Chinese official Wang Liping said "unilateralism and protectionism are spreading", and the three countries must assume responsibility to safeguard the multilateral trading system. The three account for 20% of the world's population, 24% of the global economy, and 19% of global merchandise trade, he said.

According to the South Korean trade ministry, Ahn emphasised that protectionism was "not the answer" and urged efforts to ensure the World Trade Organisation functions properly to "safeguard the stability and predictability" of global commerce.

Trump has promised tariffs tailored to each

trading partner from April 2 to remedy practices he deems unfair. But he also told reporters last week that there would be "flexibility", and markets appeared to react with some relief at the end of last week.

Following the meeting between the three ministers, they also held bilateral meetings.

Japan's Muto said regardless of domestic "political circumstances in either country", he hopes that exchanges and co-operation will continue with South Korea.

Muto said that the two countries face many common challenges, such as energy issues, which have a significant reliance on foreign and securing critical minerals.

"There may, at times, be political or diplomatic difficulties, but I strongly hope that social and economic activities will continue without disruption, allowing our businesses to operate without obstacles," he said.

The countries have long been locked in bitter historical disputes, including over Japan's use of forced labour during its decades-long occupation of the Korean peninsula.

Albanese lures voters with supermarket crackdown

AFP
Sydney

Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese yesterday promised to outlaw supermarket price gouging with the threat of heavy fines, ahead of a tightly fought May 3 general election. The supermarket crackdown and a surprise income tax cut are among a string of government proposals to ease the cost of living, which voters consistently cite as a top concern.

Surveys show the centre-left government and conservative opposition running neck-and-neck in the election race.

"Australians deserve a fair go at the checkout. We will hold the big supermarket chains to account," Albanese told reporters, promising to introduce legislation this year. Asked how abuses would be

addressed, he promised "heavy fines to make sure that if they're ripping people off, then they're in the gun to pay a heavy penalty." The government would set up a task force with representatives from the Treasury, competition regulators and consumer groups to decide on action, Albanese said. Australia was looking at overseas examples of regulating unfair pricing, he said, including in Britain and the European Union. Australia has one of the most concentrated grocery sectors in the world, with big players Coles and Woolworths enjoying considerable power to set prices for consumers and suppliers.

Competition regulators said in a report this month that the two companies enjoyed growing profit margins and had "limited incentive to compete vigorously with each other on price".

Albanese lures voters with supermarket crackdown

DECISION

India to let mills export 1mn metric tonnes of sugar

India will not restrict mills from exporting the 1mn metric tonnes of sugar permitted for the current season, sources said, quashing speculation that falling output estimates for the current year would prompt authorities to curb overseas sales. India, the world's second-biggest sugar producer, in January set an export allowance of 1mn metric tonnes through September 2025, as both the government and the industry believed there was a surplus for overseas markets. Since then, industry groups have lowered their output forecasts for the current year, raising concerns about potential supply shortages and export restrictions.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Maruti Suzuki to invest \$864mn for new plant

India's top carmaker Maruti Suzuki will invest Rs74.1bn (nearly \$864mn) to set up a third plant at an existing facility in the northern state of Haryana. The plant will take the capacity in the facility to 750,000 vehicles per year by 2029, the carmaker said. Maruti has two plants in the city of Kharkhoda in Haryana - one of which is operational while the other is under construction. All three plants are capable of manufacturing 250,000 vehicles a year. The automaker said that the additional capacity from the plant will allow it to meet growing demand for its vehicles, including abroad.

CORPORATE

Ashok Leyland says may shut loss-making UK e-bus plant

Indian heavy vehicles maker Ashok Leyland said that its electric bus unit Switch Mobility could shutter one of its British plants, which would swing the unit's UK operations to profitability "soon". The company said it would review the feasibility of the plant in Sherburn, North Yorkshire in a consultation process with employees, which could lead to the plant being closed, amid continued uncertainty in the sector. The plant accounted for 0.60% of Ashok Leyland's total sales in the fiscal year ended March 2023, the company said. "Switch UK losses should go away soon if the Sherburn facility ceases operations," a company executive said.

APPEAL

Indian steel producers plan plea against Chinese steel

The Indian alloy steel producers' association plans to soon file an anti-dumping petition with the federal trade ministry against cheap imports from China, its senior executive said. India, the world's second-biggest producer of crude steel, has the capacity to make around 18-20mn metric tonnes per annum of alloy steel that is used in auto, defence and aerospace sectors. "There has been an increase in imports of alloy and special steel bars and rods into India continuously from China, Japan, Korea and others, while China is exporting to India these products at very low prices," Anil Dhawan, director general, Alloy Steel Producers Association of India (ASPA), said.

Indian state firms 'seek stake in SQM's lithium projects in Australia'

Reuters

New Delhi

Four Indian state firms are in talks with Chilean miner SQM to acquire a 20% stake in its two lithium projects in Australia for \$600mn, four sources said, in New Delhi's biggest effort to secure supplies of the key EV battery metal.

Government-backed Khanij Bidesh India Ltd has partnered with Coal India, Oil India, and ONGC Videsh to seek the 20% stake in SQM's Mount Holland and Andover lithium projects in Western Australia, the sources said.

The sources did not wish to be named as the deliberations were not public.

SQM is the world's second-largest lithium producer.

India, the world's fastest-growing major economy, has intensified efforts to secure a steady supply of lithium, anticipating a surge in demand for the EV battery metal, which is critical to reducing carbon emissions from the world's third-largest emitter.

"This is so far India's biggest attempt to secure lithium supplies overseas," one of the sources said. "The due diligence is on, and the companies have expressed their interest with an initial offer."

KABIL, along with the three state companies, is in the process of appointing a mergers and

acquisitions adviser for the deal, the sources said.

SQM, KABIL, Coal India, Oil India, and ONGC Videsh did not respond to requests for comment.

India's plans to acquire stakes in SQM's projects have not been reported previously.

New Delhi formed KABIL - a joint venture between the state-owned National Aluminium Company, Hindustan Copper, and Mineral Exploration and Consultancy - a few years ago to acquire, develop, and process strategic minerals overseas for use in India.

India has recently stepped up efforts to secure overseas agreements for accessing critical minerals in resource-rich nations like Argentina, Australia, and Chile.

New Delhi is also exploring an initial agreement with cobalt-rich Congo.

Last year, KABIL signed an exploration and development agreement with a state-owned firm in Argentina for the exploration and mining of five lithium blocks.

Amid growing energy needs, India is trying to encourage EV production to reduce its reliance on fossil fuels.

EV sales in India accounted for just 2.5% of the 4.3mn cars sold in 2024, but their 20% growth rate outpaced the overall car market's 5% growth. Analysts expect sales to double in 2025 from 100,000 units in the previous year, mainly due to new launches.

India flays X for calling compliance website a censorship tool

India has criticised Elon Musk's X for wrongly labelling as a "censorship portal" an official website that allows tech companies to be notified about harmful online content, court papers showed yesterday.

The lawsuit marks an escalation in a legal dispute between X and the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi over how it orders content to be taken down, at a time when Musk nears the launch in India of his other key ventures, Starlink and Tesla.

The comments came in a rejoinder to X's new lawsuit filed on March 5 in the southern state of Karnataka seeking to quash the government's website initiative.

"The use of the said terminology by a worldwide portal like X is unfortunate and condemnable," the information technology ministry told the court, adding that the company was raising a "groundless concern of censorship".

Reuters

Bengaluru

As Starlink nears regulatory approval in India for satellite broadband services, analysts say a victory here could pave a road into more emerging markets and boost the company's ambitions to add a million subscribers every year.

There are still legal hurdles to overcome, and competition from companies such as Eutelsat and China's SpaceSail, which is entering Brazil, Malaysia and Kazakhstan. SpaceX also argues that US regulations put it at a disadvantage against foreign rivals.

AFP

New Delhi

India and the US have agreed to finalise part of a bilateral trade deal by this year but neither side gave indications of any tariff exemptions for the world's most populous nation.

Both countries held trade talks in New Delhi this week days out from the start of US President Donald Trump's reciprocal trade tariff regime, which includes punitive import levies against India, from April 2.

India's protectionist policies and its trade surplus with the US leave it open to potential retaliatory tariffs from the Trump administration.

Officials from both sides had "broadly come to an understanding on the next steps towards

a mutually beneficial, multi-sector Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA), with the goal to finalise its first tranche by fall 2025," India's commerce ministry said in a statement.

Both countries "exchanged views on deepening bilateral co-operation in priority areas including increasing market access, reducing tariff and non-tariff barriers and deepening supply chain integration".

There was no suggestion in the statement however that any action on those barriers would be taken ahead of tomorrow, when new US tariffs on its worldwide trade partners are slated to start.

Credit rating agency India Ratings and Research projects that the proposed tariffs could see the country's exports to the US decline by up to \$7.3bn in the next fiscal year.

The world's fifth-largest economy has over the last two months sought to reduce trade tensions with Washington by cutting tariffs on a few products, including high-end motorcycles.

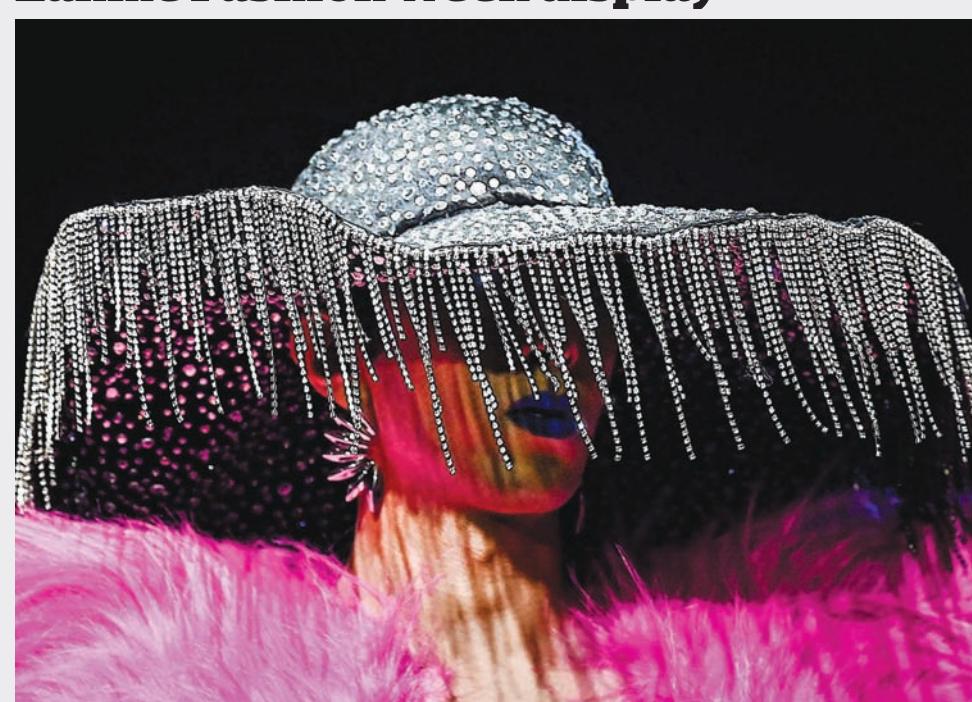
Before this week's trade mission, Indian media reports had suggested the government might offer to scrap a levy on online services such as advertising.

The reports also said New Delhi was willing to cut tariffs on cars, electronics and medical services.

The Indian Express newspaper, quoting an unnamed government official, reported yesterday that the counterparts had "substantial convergence on the contours of a trade deal".

They had not however finalised terms of reference to clearly define the scope of a trade agreement, the report said.

Lakme Fashion Week display



A model presents a creation by FDCI X Pearl Academy's 'First Cut' during the Lakme Fashion Week X FDCI in Mumbai yesterday.

India urges FATF to ease rules for UPI's growth

Reuters

Mumbai/New Delhi

India is asking the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), a global money-laundering watchdog, to reduce compliance requirements for cross-border payments made through its homegrown system, several sources familiar with the discussions said.

Launched in 2016, the Unified Payment Interface (UPI) accounted for 83% of India's digital payments volume in 2024, up from 34% in 2019, and dominates the domestic retail payments sector.

The government now wants to increase the use of its own payments network by Indians travelling abroad, which could potentially tap into a growing market, and make the global cross-border payments market more com-

petitive. But its expansion for cross-border payments has been hampered by compliance requirements on smaller payments, to which payments made via networks such as Visa, Mastercard and SWIFT are not subject, the sources said.

Government officials raised the issue at an FATF conference in Mumbai last week, two of the sources said, declining to be named because they are not authorised to speak to media.

The FATF, India's central bank and the federal finance ministry did not immediately respond to emails seeking comment.

Visa and Mastercard did not respond to requests for comment.

A final decision would depend on achieving a consensus among FATF member countries after the public consultation period, a third source familiar with the discussions said.

India approval 'could unlock emerging markets for Starlink'

Reuters

Bengaluru

But a foothold in India would be a potential \$25bn, boon for Starlink, helping it reshape that country's satellite broadband industry and making an attractive case to other developing markets, experts say.

"Starlink securing the contract serves both as a strategic PR victory and a demonstration that it has successfully navigated challenges that seemed insurmountable for most other operators. From Starlink's perspective, India is not only a credibility boost but also a crucial test of its economic feasibility in emerging markets," said independent satcom specialist Davis Mathew Kuriakose.

Elon Musk's SpaceX-owned satellite internet network has been operating since 2022 for licences to operate commercially in India, locked in a regulatory impasse over spectrum allocation. Starlink did not respond to an e-mail seeking comment.

The standoff saw Starlink clash publicly with Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Jio and Sunil Mittal's Bharti Airtel over whether India should auction satellite broadband spectrum - favouring existing telecom players - or allocate it administratively, which would benefit newer entrants such as Starlink. India decided in October it would allocate the bandwidth.

In a surprise development this month, Mittal's Airtel and Ambani's Jio signed separate agreements with SpaceX to bring Starlink services to India, a move industry insiders say signals that regulatory hurdles may soon clear.

Goldman Sachs forecasts that low Earth orbit (LEO) subscription fees, which include broadband and mobile services, will get dramatically cheaper, with prices dropping from \$148 per month in 2023 to about \$16 per month by 2035. Goldman also estimates the global satellite market will surge from \$15bn to at least \$108bn by 2035.

Space-focused financial firm Quility Space projects Starlink will add 3mn subscribers globally in 2025, with 1mn coming from Asia, its director of research Caleb Henry said.

"India will be the biggest contributor to Starlink's Asia subscriber growth once authorised," Henry said.

Six industry experts noted that SpaceX's revenue gains in India will depend on its pricing strategy.

Three of them expect Starlink to offer competitive broadband plans, potentially starting at \$15 a month - a price point designed to challenge India's existing market, where basic plans start at about \$12.

"There's always going to be a subset of the market willing to pay

a premium for convenience. India is an aspirational market, and the brand value of having a Starlink connection is also an added edge," said Vivek Prasad, principal analyst for space and satellite at consulting firm Analysys Mason.

Starlink operates in more than 120 markets with varying levels of regulatory complexity, including spectrum co-ordination requirements.

The company's deals with Reliance and Airtel need final regulatory clearances but were signed just weeks after Prime Minister Narendra Modi met Musk in Washington - an interaction that analysts say may have helped smooth the way.

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GULF TIMES

Peptide breakthrough curbs 'undruggable' cancer protein

It is heartening that in a significant development in the fight against cancer, researchers have discovered peptides which permanently block a key cancer protein once thought untreatable, using a new screening method to test their effectiveness inside cells. Scientists have identified promising drug candidates that irreversibly bind to a notoriously 'undruggable' cancer protein, effectively and permanently disabling it. Transcription factors, proteins that act as master regulators of gene expression, play a critical role in cancer development. Despite years of effort, designing small-molecule drugs to block these proteins has proven largely ineffective. As a result, researchers have recently turned their attention to peptides, short chains of amino acids, as a potential solution for targeting these elusive proteins.

Now, a team from the University of Bath has developed a breakthrough method to discover peptides that can selectively and irreversibly bind to transcription factors inside cells. Using this approach, they have successfully blocked a key cancer-driving transcription factor known as cJun, marking a significant step forward in targeting previously untreatable cancer mechanisms.

The team, publishing in the journal *Advanced Science*, used a new drug discovery screening platform technology, called the Transcription Block Survival (TBS) assay, which tests a huge number of peptides to "switch off" transcription factors that drive cancer. Their previous work identified reversible inhibitors of cJun, but this latest work builds on that by discovering peptides that bind selectively and irreversibly within cells, permanently blocking cJun action.

"We'd previously identified reversible inhibitors but this is the first time we've managed to block a transcription factor irreversibly with a peptide inhibitor"

Dr Andy Brennan, first author of the study and Research Fellow in the University of Bath's Department of Life Sciences, said: "The inhibitor works a bit like a harpoon that fires across to the target and won't let go – it grips the cJun tightly and stops it from binding to the DNA. We'd previously identified reversible inhibitors but this is the first time we've managed to block a transcription factor irreversibly with a peptide inhibitor."

For the TBS assay, researchers inserted binding sites for cJun, into an essential gene in cells grown in the lab. As cJun binds to the gene, it prevents it from working and the cell dies. In contrast, if cJun is blocked by the peptide inhibitor, the gene activity is restored and the cell survives. Jody Mason, CSO of Revolver Therapeutics and Professor of Biochemistry in the University of Bath's Department of Life Sciences, said: "Many drug candidates that are effective in vitro turn out to be toxic or don't penetrate cancer cells at all. However our platform screens for peptide activity directly in the cell, overcoming many common challenges faced by drugs based on small molecules or antibodies. The screen checks the activity of the inhibitor in a real cell environment which includes proteases and other proteins that can sometimes interfere with peptide activity, whilst also checking toxicity. 'We hope this technology can in the future uncover other promising drug candidates for previously 'undruggable' targets.'

Having proven cell permeability and activity in cancer cells, as well as target selectivity, the researchers now need to show the inhibitors work in preclinical cancer models. The research was partly funded by the Medical Research Council and Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council.

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America's many chip vulnerabilities

By Edoardo Campanella and John Haigh
Cambridge

Although semiconductor chips are ubiquitous nowadays, their production is concentrated in just a few countries, and this has left the US economy and military highly vulnerable at a time of rising geopolitical tensions.

While the US commands a leading position in designing and providing the software for the high-end chips used in AI technologies, production of the chips themselves occurs elsewhere. To head off the risk of catastrophic supply disruptions, the US needs a coherent strategy that embraces all nodes of the semiconductor industry.

That is why the CHIPS and Science Act, signed by president Joe Biden in 2022, provided funding to restore manufacturing capacity for high-end chips.

According to the Semiconductor Industry Association (SIA), the impact has been significant:

Currently planned investments should give the US control of almost 30% of global wafer fabrication capacity for chips below ten nanometres by 2032. Only Taiwan and South Korea currently have foundries to produce such chips. China, by contrast, will control only 2% of manufacturing capacity, while Europe and Japan's share will rise to about 12%.

But President Donald Trump is now trying to roll back this strategy, describing the CHIPS Act – one of his predecessor's signature achievements – as a waste of money. His administration is instead seeking to tighten the export restrictions that Biden introduced to frustrate China's AI ambitions.

It is a strategic mistake to de-emphasise strengthening domestic capacity through

targeted industrial policies. Coercive measures against China not only have proved ineffective, but may have even accelerated Chinese innovation.

DeepSeek's highly competitive models were apparently developed at a fraction of the cost of OpenAI's. A substantial share of the semiconductors used in DeepSeek's AI model comprises chips that were smuggled through intermediaries in Singapore and other Asian

7nm (Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company is working on 1nm chips), Huawei and DeepSeek's achievements are a cautionary tale. China now has every reason to develop its own semiconductor industry, and it may have made more progress than we think.

To reduce its own supply-chain vulnerabilities, the US cannot rely on an isolationist reshoring-only approach. Given how broadly the current supply chain is

To head off the risk of catastrophic semiconductor supply disruptions that could bring its economy to a halt, the US needs a coherent strategy that embraces all nodes of the industry

countries, and DeepSeek relied on clever engineering techniques to overcome the remaining hardware limitations it faced. Meanwhile, Chinese tech giants such as Alibaba and Tencent are developing similar AI models under similar supply constraints.

Even before the DeepSeek breakthrough, there were doubts about the effectiveness of US trade restrictions. The Biden administration's export ban, adopted in October 2022, targeted chips smaller than 16nm, banning not only exports of the final product, but also the equipment and the human capital needed to develop them. Less than a year later, in August 2023, Huawei launched a new smartphone model (the Mate 60) that uses a 7nm chip.

Even if China no longer has access to the most advanced lithography machines, it can still use old ones to produce 7nm chips, albeit at a higher cost. While these older machines do not allow it to go below

distributed, leveraging existing alliances is the only viable way forward. ASML, the Dutch firm with a near-monopoly on the high-end lithography machines used to make the most advanced chips, cannot simply be recreated overnight.

So far, the US has focused on reducing security risks related to the most sophisticated chips, giving short shrift to the higher-node chips that are needed to run modern economies. Yet these legacy chips (those above 28nm) are key components in cars, airplanes, fighter jets, medical devices, smartphones, computers, and much more.

According to the SIA, China is expected to control almost 40% of global wafer fabrication capacity for these types of chips by 2032, while Taiwan, the US, and Europe will account for 25%, 10%, and 3%, respectively. China will thus control a major strategic chokepoint, enabling it to bring the US economy to a halt with its own export bans. It also will have

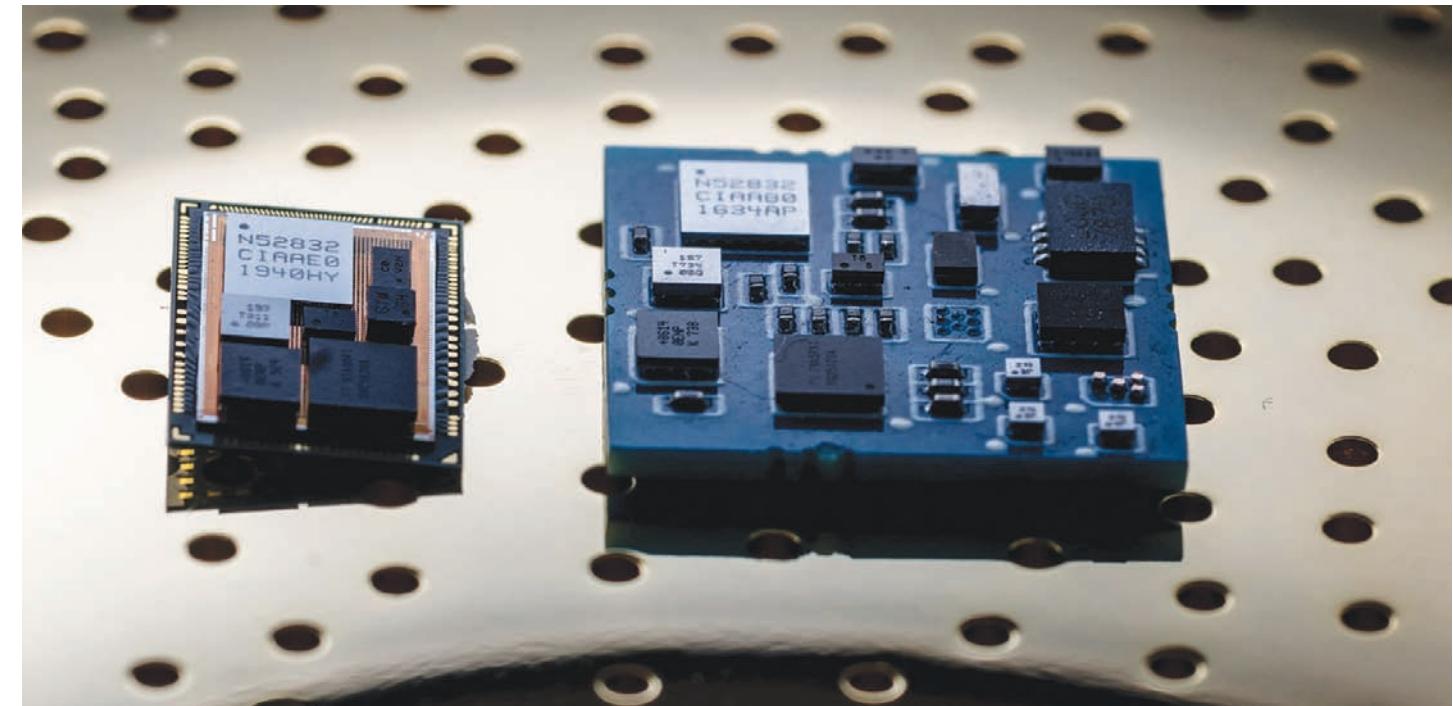
a sizeable military edge, because it could impair US defences by cutting off the supply of legacy chips. Finally, China's security services could put back doors into Chinese-made chips, allowing for espionage or even cyberattacks on US infrastructure.

Compounding the challenge, Chinese-made chips are usually already incorporated into final products by the time they reach the US. If America wants to curtail imports of potentially compromised hardware, it will have to do it indirectly, tracking down chips at customs by dismantling assembled products. That would be exceedingly costly.

Fortunately, the US does not lack policy tools to reduce its vulnerabilities. When it comes to military applications of legacy chips, it can resort to procurement restrictions, trade sanctions (justified on national-security grounds), and cybersecurity defences. As for expanding domestic production capacity, it can use anti-dumping and countervailing duties to counter unfair Chinese practices, such as its heavy subsidisation of domestic producers.

Chips, and the data they support, will be the oil of the future. The US needs to devise a comprehensive strategy that addresses the full range of its current vulnerabilities. That means looking beyond the most advanced chips and the AI race. - Project Syndicate

(Edoardo Campanella, Senior Fellow at the Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Business and Government at the Harvard Kennedy School, is co-author (with Marta Dassù) of *Anglo Nostalgia: The Politics of Emotion in a Fractured West* (Oxford University Press, 2019). John Haigh is Co-Director of the Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Business and Government and a lecturer in public policy at the Harvard Kennedy School.)



Trump can't stop 'sustainability revolution', says Al Gore

Former US vice-president Al Gore has condemned President Donald Trump's "extremely hostile" stance on fighting climate change, but said on Saturday that his administration had "limited" ability to stop the "sustainability revolution".

"I don't want to minimise the difficulties presented by the new administration in the US that is extremely hostile to anything that would help us solve the climate crisis," Gore told journalists in Paris.

"However, I think that their ability to slow the sustainability revolution is limited," added the Nobel Peace Prize winner.

Gore, who lost the 2000 presidential election to George W Bush, then gained new fame as an environmentalist with the 2006 documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*, said that he wanted to avoid "what my kids call toxic positivity".

However, despite what he called alarming signals from the Trump administration on freedom of speech, scientific research and climate issues, he sounded a largely upbeat note on the bigger picture.

"We are already seeing many of Donald Trump's executive orders overturned by the courts. And to those who worry that he will disobey court orders, I think that is unlikely in the end," Gore said.

"He will give the impression that he disrespects the court and may not obey court orders, but public opinion in the United States among Republicans as well as Democrats... is strongly in support of the rule of law and the necessity of government officials, including the president, obeying orders from the federal judiciary." - AFP

Trump says he's 'not joking' about possible third term as president

AFP/Reuters
Washington

Donald Trump repeated yesterday his suggestion that he might seek a third term as US president, NBC News reported, which would defy the two-term limit stipulated in the US constitution.

Trump, who took office on January 20 for his second, non-consecutive White House term, has made vague allusions to seeking a third one but addressed it directly for the first time yesterday in the telephone interview with NBC News.

"No, I'm not joking. I'm not joking," Trump said, but "it is far too early to think about it."

"There are, there are methods which you could do it, as you know," he said. He declined to elaborate on any specific methods.

US presidents are limited to two four-year terms, consecutive or not, according to the 22nd Amendment of the US Constitution.

The 78-year-old billionaire has a history of suggesting that he might serve more than two terms, but yesterday's remarks were the most concrete in terms of referring to plans to achieve the goal.

Trump has launched his second presidency with an unprecedented blitz of executive power, using the world's richest

Trump 'couldn't care less' if auto prices rise

US President Donald Trump declared on Saturday that he "couldn't care less" if automakers increase car prices for Americans in the wake of his imposition of import tariffs. There have been reports that Trump threatened auto executives with reprisals if prices jump, but he told NBC News that increasing prices would simply help US-based manufacturers. "I couldn't care less. I hope they raise their prices, because if they do, people are gonna buy American-made cars. We have plenty," he told NBC host Kristen Welker.

On Thursday, Trump imposed a blanket 25% import tariff on cars and light trucks made outside the United States, due to take effect on April 3.

Tariffs will be delayed for car parts from countries covered by US trade pact with Mexico and Canada as officials try to disentangle the mixed supply chain.

However, otherwise Trump intends for the import levy to be permanent, in order to boost US production and, in his view, save the American auto industry.

Despite his boosterism, however, share prices of the biggest US automakers have suffered and experts have warned that price rises will hit American consumers.

Asked by NBC News what his message would be to worried auto executives, Trump said: "The message is 'congratulations'. If you make your car in the United States, you're going to make a lot of money."

Trump maintained that he would only consider negotiating on the tariffs "if people are willing to give us something of great value".

The tariffs are part of Trump's efforts to promote American manufacturing and reduce the country's trade deficit.

Trump's trade policies have been a key focus of his presidency, with ongoing tensions with major trading partners. - AFP/Reuters

man, Elon Musk, to dismantle swaths of the government, and said his supporters want even more.

"A lot of people want me to do it," Trump told NBC News on Sunday. "But, I mean, I basically tell them we have a long way to go, you know, it's very early in the administration."

Amending the US constitution to allow a third presidential term would require a two-thirds majority in both the House and Senate, which Trump's Republican Party does not have.

When NBC asked Trump of a possible

scenario whereby Vice-President J D Vance would run for president and then abdicate the role to Trump, the US president said "that's one" method.

He added that "there are others" but refused to share further details.

If Trump does not approach Congress for the constitutional amendment, he would need to get support from two-thirds of the country's 50 states to call a constitutional convention that would propose changes to the charter.

Whether he goes through Congress or the states, he would then require ratifica-

tion from three-quarters of all states.

Both routes appear to be unlikely, given the current number of states and Congressional seats under Republican control.

A constitutional convention has never been successfully called in the United States, where all 27 constitutional amendments have been passed by the congressional method.

In January, days after Trump took office, Republican Andy Ogles of Tennessee introduced a House joint resolution to amend the constitution to allow presidents up to three terms.

Protesters slam Musk at Tesla dealerships in US, Europe, and Canada

Demonstrators descended on Tesla dealerships across the United States and in Europe and Canada on Saturday to protest company chief Elon Musk, who has amassed extraordinary power as a top adviser to US President Donald Trump.

Waving signs with messages like "Musk is stealing our money" and "Reclaim our country", the protests largely took place peacefully following fiery episodes of vandalism on Teslas in recent weeks that US officials have denounced as "terrorism".

Hundreds rallied on Saturday outside the Tesla dealership in New York's Manhattan.

Some blasted Musk, the world's richest man, while others demanded the shuttering of his so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), which is dramatically slashing the federal government.

Amy Neifeld, a 70-year-old psychologist who had not joined a protest since marching against the Vietnam War in the 1970s, accused Musk of leading the country toward fascism.

"I'm Jewish, so I grew up with a great awareness of fascism," she told AFP. "And it has just gotten uglier and uglier" since Trump returned to the White House.

"He acts like he's the vice-president," said New York protester Eva Mueller of Musk. "He's dismantling, actively, our government, he's dismantling our democracy."

The protest was organised by the environmental activist group Planet Over Profit, which argues that "stopping Musk will help save lives and protect our democracy".

In Washington's posh Georgetown neighbourhood, some 150 people gathered in a festive mood, dancing and cheering as passing cars honked.

Protests also took place in Florida, Massachusetts and California, as well as in European cities such as London, Berlin and Paris.

In Canada's Vancouver, where around 100 people protested at a Tesla dealership, one person in a dinosaur costume held a placard that read: "You thought the Nazis were extinct? Don't buy a Swasticar."

A small group of Americans held signs outside a Tesla dealership in the French capital, including one that read "Send Musk to Mars now!"

Musk and Trump "are destroying our democracy, not obeying the basic rules of our country, and firing people at agencies that do very important work", said Raf, 59, a Paris protester who did not wish to give his last name.

Asked for reaction to the protests, Tesla did not respond.

Acts of vandalism against Tesla vehicles, dealerships and other facilities have spread for weeks, in protest both against Musk's ruthless job-cutting work, and what has been seen as his unwelcome interference in politics.

US Attorney-General Pam Bondi has denounced the attacks on Tesla as "domestic terrorism". - AFP

European orbital rocket crashes seconds after launch

AFP/Reuters
Oslo

The first orbital rocket launched from continental Europe crashed seconds after blast-off yesterday, in a closely watched test for the continent's bid to build a new space economy.

The Spectrum rocket, developed by German startup Isar Aerospace, started smoking from its sides, then crashed back to Earth with an explosion just after launching from Norway's Andøya Spaceport in the Arctic, in live video broadcast on YouTube.

Isar Aerospace, which had said it did not expect to reach orbit with the launch, said the two-stage rocket fell into the sea, adding that "the launch pad seems to be intact".

Andøya Space, the Norwegian public firm that operates the spaceport, said that "crisis response" measures had been activated following the "incident".

Police said no injuries or damage beyond the rocket itself.

Orbital rockets are designed to place loads such as satellites into or beyond Earth's orbit.

Ahead of the launch, which had been repeatedly postponed due to weather conditions, Isar Aerospace had downplayed expectations, saying that the goal was not to reach orbit in its first attempt.

"Our first test flight met all our expectations, achieving a great success. We had a clean liftoff, 30 seconds of flight and even got to validate our Flight Termination System," said Daniel Metzler, the firm's co-founder and chief executive.

In an online press conference



The 'Spectrum' rocket from the German startup Isar Aerospace is seen at the start of its launch (above) and exploding (right) after falling down, in Andøya, Norway in this image obtained from a video taken by Isar Aerospace. - AFP/Reuters



following the launch, Metzler insisted that Isar was "very well positioned" to take advantage of the rocket-to-satellite market, adding that the company would "make the adjustments that are necessary" to the spacecraft.

Two more Spectrum rockets are already in development, the company said.

The 28m (92') tall, 2m diameter rocket has a one-tonne carrying capacity, but was unloaded for the test flight.

Spectrum's blast-off was the first of an orbital launch vehicle from the European continent, excluding Russia, and Europe's first financed almost exclusively by the private sector.

"Today is an important day for German and European space travel," said German Economy Minister Robert Habeck. "Isar Aerospace can and will make a decisive contribution to securing Europe's

independent access to space."

A first European orbital launch attempt was made in 2023 by billionaire entrepreneur Richard Branson's Virgin Orbit.

It attempted to use a Boeing 747 to launch a rocket into orbit from southwest England, but failed, and the company folded.

Europe has had no access to Russian space stations or launchers since Moscow's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, which sent diplomatic relations on a downward spiral.

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

It wasn't until March 6, when the first commercial flight of an Ariane 6 rocket took off from French Guyana, that Europe was able to regain launch independence after months without access to space for heavy payloads.

SpaceX also operates the Starlink satellite service, a communications network spanning much of the globe.

Germany's BDLI aerospace industries association said that Isar's first flight would lead to further progress.

"Europe urgently needs to ensure its sovereignty in space. Elon Musk's Starlink is not without

alternatives – nor should it be," BDLI managing director Marie-Christine von Hahn said.

Isar Aerospace was founded in 2018 in Munich.

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

Yesterday's launch generated "tonnes of data that the teams can now evaluate and learn from", an Isar Aerospace commentator said on the YouTube live stream.

In parallel with the development of new rockets, a number of spaceport projects have emerged across Europe, from the Portuguese Azores to the British Shetland Islands, Norway's Andøya and Ersfjord in neighbouring Sweden, many vying to be the first to launch.

Actor Richard Chamberlain dies at 90

AFP/Reuters
Los Angeles

Actor Richard Chamberlain, a handsome leading man who played in popular TV series from *Dr Kildare* in the 1960s to miniseries like *The Thorn Birds* and the original *Shogun*, has died at age 90, news media said yesterday.

Publicist Harlan Boll said in a statement yesterday that Chamberlain died late on Saturday in Hawaii from complications from a stroke.

"He was the original Shogun. He was the original Jason Bourne. He was the quintessential heartthrob of a generation," his friend and fellow actor David Havasi wrote on the X social platform.

With his boyish, clean-cut looks and ambition to be taken seriously, Chamberlain had a prodigious, far-ranging career.

He played not just in popular series but in musical theatre – he even had a brief stint as a recording artist – and took on classical stage roles, drawing surprisingly strong reviews while playing Hamlet in



This picture taken on February 29, 2000, shows Chamberlain with his newly unveiled star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in Hollywood. - Reuters

His film credits included parts as Aramis in *The Three Musketeers* (1973), and as Allan Quatermain in *King Solomon's Mine* (1985).

In 1988, he was the first Jason Bourne in a TV film *The Bourne Identity*.

Chamberlain was never far from the Hollywood acting world.

California-born and a graduate of Beverly Hills High School, he joined a student theatre group while in college.

After a stint in the army, rising to the rank of sergeant, Chamberlain co-founded a Los Angeles theatre group, the Company of Angels.

His big breakthrough came with the role of Dr James Kildare, a young hospital intern, in an NBC/MGM series.

Chamberlain was just 27 and almost instantly gained heartthrob status.

In the late 1960s, he played rep-

ertory theatre in England, helping establish his credentials as a serious actor.

Chamberlain won three Golden Globes during his career, for *The Thorn Birds*, *Shogun* and *Dr Kildare*.

He became a full-time resident of Hawaii in 1990.

Pope says illness is universal as he misses another Angelus

Pope Francis, who is recovering from a life-threatening bout of pneumonia, urged Catholics yesterday to mark Lent as a "time of healing" as he missed his seventh consecutive Angelus prayer.

The 88-year-old head of the Catholic Church left Rome's Gemelli hospital last Sunday after five weeks of treatment, returning to the Vatican for what his doctors said would be at least two months of convalescence.

Francis was again absent for this weekend's Angelus, normally delivered at midday on Sunday from a window of the Apostolic Palace overlooking St Peter's Square.

The Vatican published the text instead, as it has since his hospitalisation on February 14.

"Dearest friends, let us live this Lent as a time of healing," Francis wrote, referring to 40 days before Easter, the holiest period in the Christian calendar. Easter Sunday this year falls on April 20. "I too am experiencing it this way, in my soul and in my body."

He added: "Frailty and illness are experiences we all have in common."

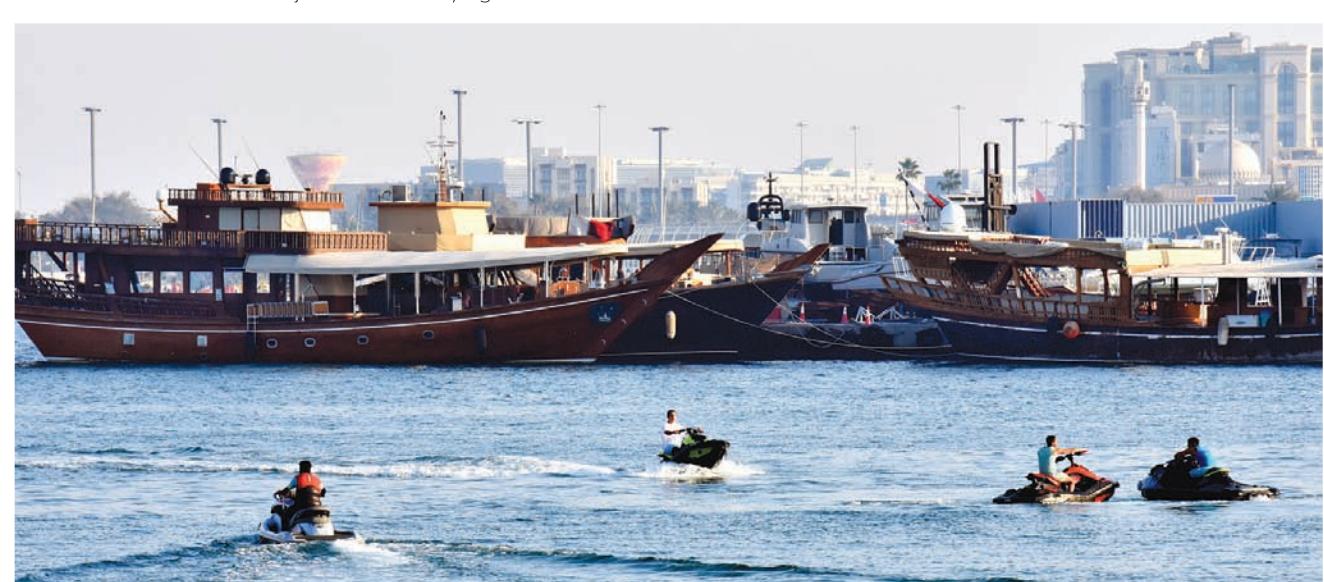
Doctors said Francis almost died twice during his hospitalisation, the longest and most fraught of his 12 years as head of the church.

Millions of Catholics are visiting Rome and the Vatican for the 2025 papal Jubilee, a year of religious celebrations, and crowds gathered yesterday in St Peter's Square despite the Pope's absence.

"It is not so important whether he shows himself or not. What is important is that he is alive," Xuchitl Vazquez, a 71-year-old pilgrim from Mexico, said. "What is important is that he is aware of what is happening in the world and the world is aware of what is happening to him." - AFP



Cultural performances welcomed festival-goers yesterday at Old Doha Port, marking the first day of the Eid al-Fitr celebrations. **PICTURES:** Thajudheen and Joey Aguilar



Activities and events celebrating Eid al-Fitr begin at Old Doha Port

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

Eid al-Fitr celebrations kicked off at Old Doha Port yesterday with cultural performances by a traditional maritime band at Al Bandar, drawing large crowds to the Mina District for the start of the eight-day festivities.

Organisers noted that these activities, set to run until April 5, offer a dynamic and engaging experience for Qatar residents and visitors, designed to immerse attendees in the Eid spirit.

The Mina District has been transformed into a hub of activity, with live music from various artists scheduled throughout the Eid holidays.

A diverse range of attractions and activations also take place at Mina Park, running daily from 4pm-10pm.

According to the organisers, the celebration aims to create a vibrant atmosphere that reflects the joy and

unity of Eid, providing an array of activities that display Qatari heritage and provide entertainment for the whole family.

Visitors will have ample opportunity to engage with Qatari culture through interactive activities and musical artistry.

Families can enjoy a variety of entertainment, including games, play areas, and special performances such as the Bubble Sand Show and the Ice Cream Show.

The Mega Park Carnival, which opened on March 27 and running until April 5, continues to be a major draw, offering thrilling entertainment, live shows, fun games, giant inflatables, and a bazaar.

The carnival remains open from 4pm to midnight.

Food lovers are also in for a treat, with the numerous restaurants, eateries, and cafes lining the Mina District serving different cuisines.

These establishments are proving

to be a popular haven for families and friends to gather and enjoy the festive atmosphere.

"Enjoy the mesmerising melodies of the qanun, oud, and saxophone, alongside the rhythms of a traditional band at Al Bandar. With a vibrant atmosphere and festive energy, it's the perfect place to celebrate Eid and make unforgettable memories with loved ones," Old Doha Port said on its website.

The Box Park, already renowned for its panoramic views of the Mina District, Grand Terminal, mega cruise ships and luxury yachts, saw high visitor numbers.

Many were seen taking leisurely strolls, while others took the opportunity to visit Flag Plaza.

Old Doha Port's Grand Terminal, with its docked cruise ships carrying thousands of passengers, provides a picturesque backdrop for the entire Mina District, further enhancing the festive ambiance.

