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## SPORT | Page 1

Al Ahli face Al Shahania as QSL teams set for final push



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Palestinians transport their belongings as they flee Gaza City's eastern neighbourhood of Shujaiya following an evacuation order issued by the Israeli military yesterday.

## Qatar slams false media reports

Qatar has strongly condemned 'the statements published by some journalists and media outlets alleging that Qatar has made financial payments to undermine the efforts of Egypt or any of the mediators involved in the ongoing negotiations between Hamas and Israel.' This came in a statement issued yesterday from Qatar's International Media Office in response to false media reports regarding ongoing mediation efforts between Hamas and Israel. Qatar affirmed that 'these allegations are baseless and serve only the agendas of those who seek to sabotage the mediation efforts and undermine relations between nations. They also represent a new development in the ongoing misinformation campaign that is attempting to divert attention away from the humanitarian suffering and perpetuate the politicisation of the war. Qatar warns against these individuals becoming

embroiled in matters that serve no purpose other than to derail mediation efforts and exacerbate the suffering of the Palestinian people.

'Qatar remains committed to its humanitarian and diplomatic role as a mediator between the relevant parties to end this devastating war and is working closely with Egypt in our efforts to achieve a lasting ceasefire and protect civilian lives.'

'Qatar commends Egypt's pivotal role in this critical matter, as both sides engage in daily co-operation and co-ordination to ensure the success of joint mediation efforts aimed at achieving regional stability.'

'Qatar reiterates that mediation efforts must remain free of politicisation and distortion, and that the priority remains alleviating the suffering of the Palestinian people, protecting civilians, and achieving a just and sustainable settlement based on the two-state solution.'

## Qatar strongly condemns Israeli raids on Syria

**Q**atar strongly condemned the Israeli raids that targeted five areas in Syria and wounded dozens of civilians and military personnel.

The raids are a blatant attack on Syria's sovereignty and unity and a flagrant violation of international law, Qatar said.

In a statement yesterday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs urged the international community to take urgent action to compel Israel to comply with international laws and norms and stop the repeated attacks on Syrian territory, thus pre-

venting further escalation and tension in the region.

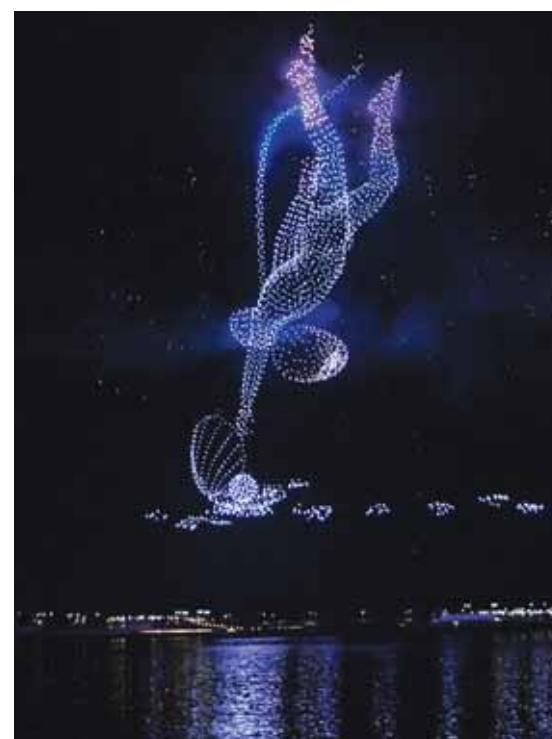
The Ministry reiterated Qatar's unwavering support for Syria's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity, as well as the aspirations of its brotherly people for security and stability.

The Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) too expressed strong condemnation and denunciation of the Israeli raids on various areas in Syria.

In a statement yesterday, the Council's secretary-general, Jassim Mohammed al-Budaiwi, underlined that the raids con-

stitute a new episode in a series of attempts by the Israeli occupation forces to undermine and destabilise regional and international security, stressing the importance of respecting Syria's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity.

The statement added that the international community's silence regarding the repeated Israeli attacks encourages their continuation. The GCC called for the need to take concrete steps to stop them, in the interest of security and peace in the region. (QNA)



Thousands of drones create the image of a pearl diver at the Lusail Sky Festival yesterday.

PICTURE: Shaji Kayakulam

## Lusail Sky Festival dazzles

By Peter Alagos  
Business Reporter

**A**ll roads led to the Al Saad Plaza in Lusail City for the much anticipated Lusail Sky Festival, which began yesterday and will run until tomorrow from 4pm to 10pm.

The three-day event, unveiled by Visit Qatar, in collaboration with Qatari Diar, is part of an exciting lineup of artistic and musical events to add more colour and adventure for holidaymakers visiting various tourist destinations in the country. Entry is free.

Yesterday's festival kicked-off with a daring sky exhibition by the Lekhwiya Parachute Jumpers, followed by breathtaking performances and contrails from Europe's top-notch pilots, including the Scandinavian Airshow Wingwalk, the aerial acrobatics of Artur Kielak, Phoenix Paramotor Display Team, Bushcat Demo Team, airborne pyrotechnics, skywriting demonstrations by the Skytexter formation, and the Scandinavian Ragnarok Team Show. **To Page 12**

## 31 killed as Israel bombs Gaza school



A man rushes a wounded Palestinian child to the Ahli Arab Hospital (Maamadani), after an Israeli strike hit a school in the Al-Tuffah neighbourhood in Gaza City yesterday.

QNA  
Gaza

**T**hirty-one Palestinians were martyred and more than 100 others wounded as a result of Israeli occupation warplanes bombing a school sheltering displaced persons in the Al-Tuffah neighbourhood, northeast of Gaza City.

Local sources said Israeli warplanes targeted the school with three missiles, adding medical teams and civil defence personnel recovered dozens of dead and wounded, including children and women, and transferred them to the Baptist Hospital.

The bodies of some were dismembered and charred. The evacuation process from under

the rubble of the school, which was extensively destroyed by the bombing, is still ongoing.

In the city of Rafah, south of the Gaza Strip, one person was martyred as a result of an Israeli drone bombing a gathering of Palestinian civilians. Three others were martyred as a result of the Israeli occupation forces bombing a tent sheltering displaced persons in the city of Khan Yunis.

A number of people were wounded as a result of the bombing of a tent sheltering displaced persons north of the new camp in Al-Nuseirat, in the central Gaza Strip. Medical and civil defence crews recovered 12 martyrs and more than 20 wounded after the occupation forces targeted several homes in the Shujaiyya neighbourhood, east of Gaza City. **To Page 3**

## Ministry announces start of turtle nesting season at Fuwairit Beach

**T**he Ministry of Environment and Climate Change has announced the start of the turtle nesting season, which continues until August 1, a statement said.

Qatar places great importance on protecting endangered species as part of its national strategy through monitoring rare and endangered land and marine species, which are considered a national treasure for the country and its future generations.

The country started its efforts to protect sea turtles with the

launch of the Hawksbill Sea Turtle Conservation Project in 2003, after the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) classified the species as endangered.

The Hawksbill Sea Turtle Conservation Project is considered one of the leading initiatives in the country for protecting endangered marine species.

It aims to safeguard the endangered Hawksbill sea turtle alongside Qatar's northern coasts, including Ras Laffan, Huwaila, Al Jassasiya, Al Maroona, Fuwairit, Al



Ghariyah, and Al Mafyar, as well as on other islands such as Umm Tais, Rukan, Shra'awa, and Halul.

The project involves relocating turtle nests to protect them from high tides, monitoring nest temperatures, equipping some turtles with tracking devices to study their habitats in Qatar and neighbouring countries, and collecting DNA samples from the turtles.

The ministry's dedicated efforts over the past years have led to the successful release of more than 35,000 baby turtles into the sea from Fuwairit Beach.



## Interior minister inspects HIA security procedures

HE the Minister of Interior and Commander of the Internal Security Force (Lekhiya) Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani has paid an inspection visit to Hamad International Airport (HIA). During the visit, HE the Minister inspected the progress of the comprehensive expansion project taking place at the airport with the aim of meeting the growing travel demand, enhancing passenger experience and raising the efficiency of operational processes. He was briefed on the airport's security procedures and the services provided to passengers, reflecting the commitment of the concerned authorities to ensuring the highest standards of security, safety, and service quality. (QNA)



## Community Police conducts field visits to hospitals, shopping malls during Eid



The Community Police Department has conducted field visits to several hospitals and malls across the country on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr. The visits aimed to strengthen the spirit of community partnership, spread awareness and positive values, and offer Eid greetings and congratulations. The visits were attended by Director of the Community Police Department, Brigadier Dr Ibrahim Mohammed al-Sameeh and a number of officers. (QNA)

## Minister meets Armenian deputy FM



HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi met yesterday with Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia Vahan Kostanyan during his current visit to Armenia. Discussions during the meeting dealt with co-operation relations between the two countries and means to support and develop them, in addition to a number of topics of common interest. (QNA)

# HMC provides critical emergency, ambulance aid during Eid holidays

The Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) continued its impressive services during Eid al-Fitr while handling the emergency cases. The Emergency Department received 2,208 cases during the first three days of Eid al-Fitr.

Dr Aisha al-Sada, resident physician at the Emergency Department of Hamad General Hospital, told local Arabic daily *Arrayah* that these cases included the patients who visited the emergency wing to treat accident injuries.

Some of the cases, according to her, were caused by abdominal pain and digestive problems. Also, cases of infections and high temperatures were reported. Cases of chest pain, dizziness and vertigo were also dealt with.

The number of cases, reported on the first day, stood at 611 while a total of 799 and 798 cases were received at the Emergency Department on the second and third days of Eid al-Fitr, respectively.

Dr al-Sada advised people to maintain food safety, adhere to restrict sugar intake and select the



right foods. "Viruses are spreading during this period, which requires caution," she said. She urged patients with infections to avoid contact with others, especially the elderly, who have weak immunity. She also urged the public to adhere to traffic regulations to avoid accidents.

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had helped direct non-urgent cases to the primary healthcare centres (PHCCs) reducing the pressure on the Emergency Department and improving the quality of services provided to severe cases.

The Paediatric Emergency Centre at Al Sadd and the emergency wings at other PHCCs and hospitals received a total of 5,146 cases on the first three days of Eid al-Fitr. Dr Mohamed al-Amri, head of the Paediatric Department and



director of Paediatric Emergency at HMC, said some of these cases included gastroenteritis and respiratory infections.

He advised parents of children with diabetes to keep them away from sweets and ensure they receive the necessary doses of insulin.

He urged them to be careful in play areas, whether it is for injuries or other problems that may occur. The Ambulance Service at HMC attended to a total of 1,271 cases during the first three days of Eid al-Fitr. Ali Darwish, assistant executive director of the Ambulance

Service, said these cases included traffic accidents and some were transported by air ambulance.

There has been a decrease in the calls received by the Ambulance Service due to community awareness and the co-operation of road users, he added.

## Qumra 2025 screenings set to roll from today at MIA

Qumra 2025 public screenings begin today at the Museum of Islamic Art (MIA) Auditorium, featuring films supported by Doha Film Institute. The screenings are part of the 11th edition of Qumra's events, which will run until April 9.

The first screening at 7.30pm today is *East of Noon* (Netherlands, Egypt, Qatar) by Hala Elkoussy, a satirical fable about artistic freedom and resistance through the story of Abdo, a musician challenging authority by creating art in a confined world. Mamadou Dia's *Demba* (Senegal, Germany, Qatar), screening tomorrow (Saturday 5 April), charts how a man struggling with grief and depression with the anniversary of his

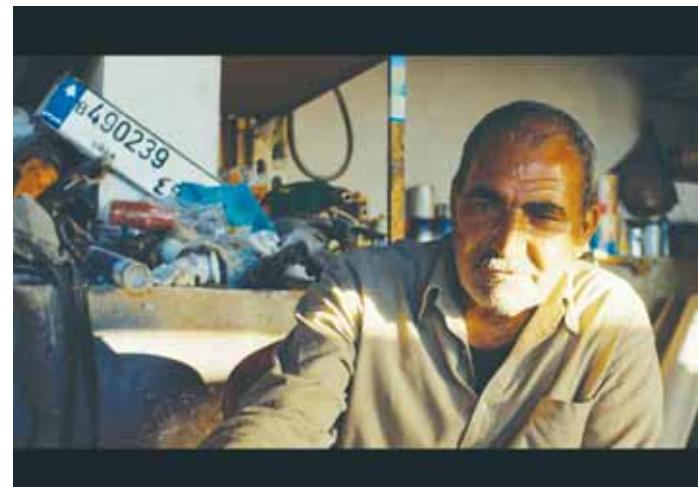


wife's death nearing, finds solace reconnecting with his estranged son. On Sunday, *Moondove* (Leba-

n, Netherlands, Qatar) by Karim Kassem presents a poetic narrative set in a mountain village grappling

with severe drought, where an annual theatrical tradition becomes a metaphor for broader societal changes. Qumra 2025 includes seven critically acclaimed feature films supported by DFI representing the most prominent, bold, and distinctive voices in independent cinema, a statement said. The 11th edition of Qumra, the annual talent incubator for Arab and international cinema, includes 49 exceptional projects by emerging filmmakers from 23 countries, including several projects by Qatari and Qatar-based filmmakers.

All screenings will be held at the Museum of Islamic Art Auditorium, with tickets available at <https://my.dohafilminstiute.com/events/films>



Moondove



# Ministry extends acceptance of entries for National Library photo contest

By Tawfik Lamari

Staff Reporter

The Ministry of Culture announced the extension of the acceptance of entries for the National Library of Qatar Photography Competition until April 30. This competition comes as part of the Ministry of Culture and the Qatar Photography Center's commitment to building a large base of photographers of various age groups, and their continued commitment to supporting and honing these talents.

The competition targets all age

groups. It coincided with the inauguration of the National Library of Qatar building on March 3. The contest includes all photographs taken with a professional camera of the building's interior or exterior in a professional style that highlights the aesthetics of the space.

Participation in the competition is free and open to photographers within Qatar.

Entries must be significant, spirited, and participants may submit a maximum of five recent photographs. The images must be available in JPEG or JPG format, of high quality, with a minimum

image density of 3000 pixels and a print resolution of 300 dpi. No digital additions or merges are permitted.

Only basic edits are permitted, such as cropping, adjusting the angle, colour, lighting, and sharpness of the image, in addition to removing distractions. The photo must be submitted in black-and-white or in colour and must not contain any signature, logo, frame, or symbol.

The first-place winner will receive a cash prize of QR10,000, second place QR7,500, third place QR5,000, and fourth through tenth place QR1,000 each.



The entrance area of National Library of Qatar.

# Gaza faces largest orphan crisis in modern history

QNA

Ramallah

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) reported yesterday that children make up 43% of the population in Palestine, with more than 39,000 orphans in the Gaza Strip, marking largest orphan crisis in modern history.

The estimates revealed that 39,384 children in Gaza lost one or both parents after 534 days of Israeli aggression, with around 17,000 of them left without either parent, facing a harsh reality of life without support or care. In its statement ahead of Palestinian Children's Day on April 5, PCBS emphasised that famine and malnutrition are threatening children's lives in Gaza, with 60,000 expected cases of severe malnutrition. It also confirmed the return of polio to Gaza Strip.

The report noted that since October 7, Israeli occupation forces arrested more than 1,055 children, in a systematic violation of children's rights and a blatant breach of international law. Demographic estimates indicate that the population of the State of Palestine reached about 5.5mn by the end of 2024, with 3.4mn re-

siding in West Bank and 2.1mn in Gaza Strip. Palestinian society is characterised by its young demographic, with children under the age of 18 constituting 43% of the total population, or approximately 2.38mn, with 1.39mn in West Bank and 0.98mn in Gaza. The under-15 age group represents 37% of the total population, around 2.03mn, with 1.18mn in the West Bank and 0.9mn in Gaza. Children under 18 make up 47% of Gaza's population, compared to 41% in West Bank, while 40.3% of Gaza's population is under the age of 15, compared to 34.8% in the West Bank.

During the 534 days of Israeli aggression in Gaza, Palestinian children have faced an unprecedented humanitarian disaster, constituting more than 60% of the total casualties, along with women. The aggression resulted in the martyrdom of 50,021 Palestinians, including 17,954 children of whom 274 were infants born and martyred under the bombardment, 876 children under the age of one, 17 children who died from the cold in displaced persons' tents, and 52 children who perished due to starvation and systematic malnutrition. Additionally, 113,274 people were injured, 69% of whom were women and children, while more than 11,200 individuals are still missing, 70

percent of them women and children. In West Bank, 923 Palestinians have been martyred, including 188 children, and 660 children have been injured since the start of the Israeli aggression until the date of issuing this statement. A report from prisoner rights organisations highlighted an unprecedented in-

crease in the Israeli occupation's arrests of Palestinian children. During 2024 alone, at least 700 children were arrested, raising the total number of detained children since the outbreak of the war to more than 1,055.

Furthermore, approximately 7,700 newborns are at risk of death

due to a lack of medical care, as remaining hospitals operate at extremely limited capacity, putting children's lives in danger.

The shortage of incubators, respirators, and essential medications worsened the health conditions, increasing the likelihood of fatalities.

The short report noted that the

United Nations yesterday accused Israel of destabilising Syria after a

UN accuses Israel of destabilising Syria after attacks

AFP  
Damascus

The United Nations yesterday accused Israel of destabilising Syria after a wave of strikes on military targets, including an airport, and a ground incursion killed 13 people. Since rebels toppled long-time strongman Bashar al-Assad in December, Israel has launched an extensive bombing campaign against Syrian military assets and conducted ground incursions into southern Syria to push back the new government's forces from the border.

The UN envoy for Syria, Geir Pedersen, decried "the repeated and intensifying military escalations by Israel in Syria, including air strikes that have reportedly resulted in civilian casualties".

"Such actions undermine efforts to build a new Syria at peace with itself and the region, and destabilise Syria at a sensitive time," he said in a statement. Authorities in the southern province of Daraa said nine civilians were killed and several wounded in Israeli shelling overnight near the town of Nawa.

The provincial government said the bombardment came amid Israel's deepest ground incursion into southern Syria so far. Israel said it responded to fire from gunmen during an operation in southern Syria and warned interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa he would face severe consequences if its security was threatened.

An angry crowd gathered yesterday for the funeral of those killed in Daraa. "This is an agricultural area... where no one threatens Israeli forces. We want to live in peace, but we do not accept attacks," said one of them, 48-year-old Khaled al-Awdat.

There were no Israeli casualties. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu demanded in February that southern Syria be completely demilitarised and said his government would not accept the presence of the forces of the new government near Israeli territory.

In December, Netanyahu ordered troops to enter the UN-patrolled buffer zone that separated Israeli and Syrian forces along the 1974 armistice line on the Golan Heights.

On Wednesday, Israel hit targets across Syria including in the Damascus area.

## Sheep farming in Dhi Qar



An Iraqi boy carries the fleece of a sheep at a farm on the outskirts of the city of Nasiriyah in Iraq's southern Dhi Qar province.

# Iranians celebrate end of Persian new year amid Trump threats

AFP

Tehran

Iranians picnicked with their loved ones in parks and public spaces to mark the end of Nowruz, the Persian New Year, undeterred by the latest warnings towards Tehran from US President Donald Trump. At the capital's Mellat Park on Wednesday, a vast urban oasis near the snow-capped Alborz Mountains, men and women sang and danced as the temperature approached 30C.

Some relaxed in the shade of a tent while children played nearby,

while just a few steps away, a family gathered around a fire to tend to sizzling skewers. Trump has given Iran's leaders a two-month deadline to reach an agreement on the country's nuclear programme, which has strained relations with Western nations for decades.

Western countries including the United States have long accused Iran of pursuing a nuclear weapon, which Tehran has denied, insisting its enrichment activities were solely for peaceful purposes. "If they don't make a deal, there will be bombing" against Iran, Trump said in an interview broadcast late Saturday on NBC, a repeat of ear-

lier threats. Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has vowed a "firm response" in the event of an attack, while an Iranian military official hinted that US military bases in the Middle East could become targets.

The escalating rhetoric did not stop Iranians from gathering on "Sizdah-Bedar" or Nature Day, the 13th and final day of Persian New Year festivities.

Afsaneh Hakimi, a 38-year-old housewife, sitting in the park wearing a brightly coloured floral headscarf, said she was worried war might break out. "We don't want war. They (the leaders) should

make peace and negotiate," she said, insisting however that Iran "must have nuclear weapons to defend itself".

If there is a war, "things will become more expensive, the economy will collapse, and unemployment will rise," she said, as the national currency, the rial, continues to depreciate against the dollar, fuelling hyperinflation and driving up the cost of living. Ali Larijani, a close adviser to the supreme leader, warned on Monday that Iran might have no choice but to develop a weapon if attacked. "We are not moving towards (nuclear) weapons, but if you do something wrong

in the Iranian nuclear issue, you will force Iran to move towards that because it has to defend itself," he told state TV.

Despite his threats, Trump has expressed a willingness to negotiate with Iran.

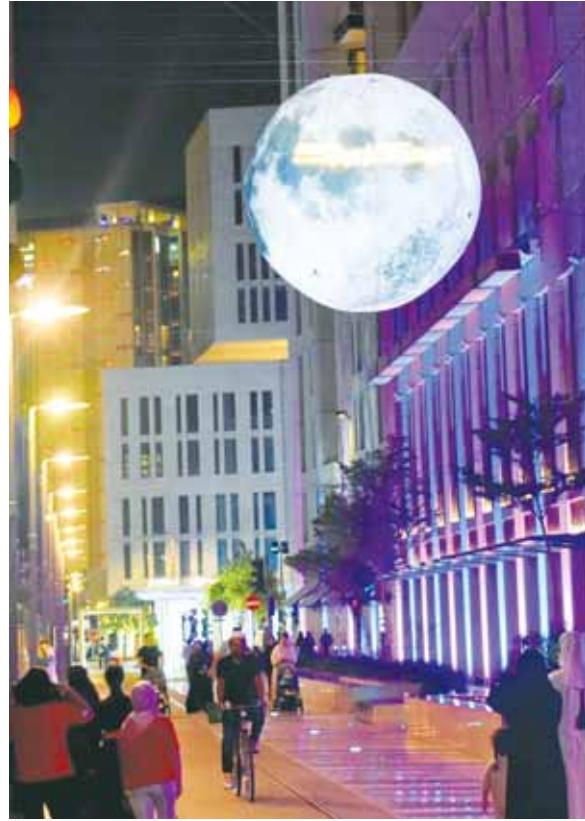
In March, he sent a letter to Iranian leaders calling for talks. Iran responded last week, stating its readiness for indirect discussions with the United States. Under pressure, "Iran's response has always been diplomacy," said Mohammad Abbasi, a tourism worker, insisting that Iranians were "not warmongers" and still carried the scars of the devastating Iran-Iraq

war of the 1980s. Despite past negotiations with the United States, "commitments and obligations were not honoured," said Abbasi, referring to Trump's unilateral withdrawal in 2018 from the nuclear deal signed with Iran three years earlier.

The agreement, which Iran had been complying with, provided sanctions relief in exchange for strict limits on its nuclear activities. "I hope we reach an agreement and find good solutions," said 44-year-old Mohammad Shirkavand, who wished for peace, prosperity and security for Iran in 1404, the new Persian calendar year.



## Msheireb Downtown Doha's Eid al-Fitr gala a big draw



**M**sheireb Downtown Doha's (MDD) Eid al-Fitr festivities, which conclude tomorrow, has been attracting a large number of residents and visitors with an array of live entertainment and engaging activities.

Baraha Msheireb, described as the largest courtyard in the region, features live music. The venue is a focal point for family fun, hosting traditional games alongside engaging shows.

Organisers noted that MDD carefully curated this year's Eid offerings, creating a unique programme for different age groups that seamlessly blends tradition with contemporary entertainment.

The festivities extend

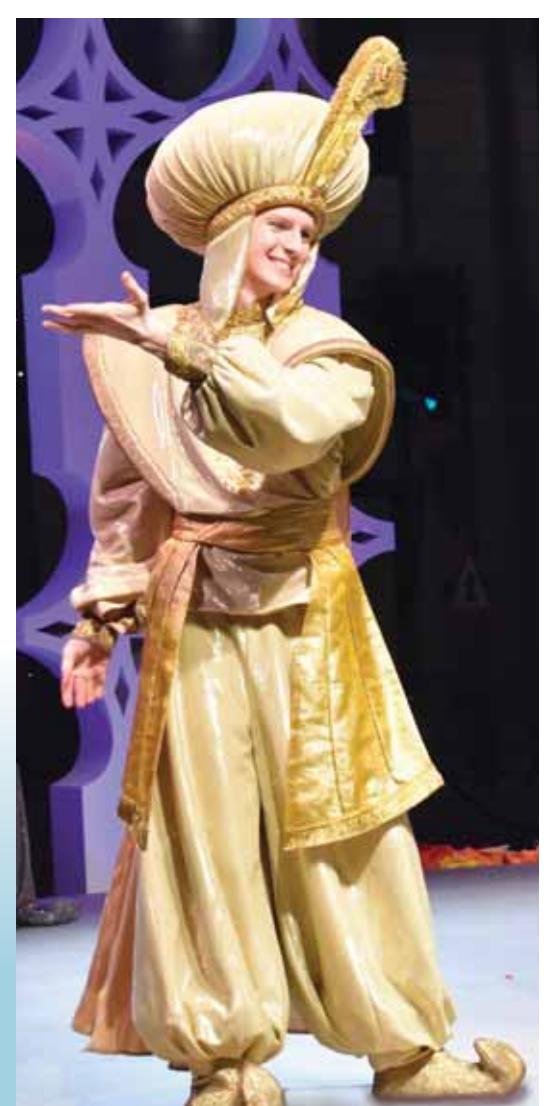
throughout the district, where Sikkat Al Wadi, known for its charming walkways and boutique shops, features roaming entertainment.

The thought-provoking Mindfulness Mirror Installation provides a unique and interactive experience, encouraging reflection and contemplation amidst the celebratory atmosphere.

MDD's Eid celebrations feature performers from diverse backgrounds who bring their unique talents to the stage. Those with a creative flair can also participate in a number of art workshops, allowing them to craft personalised Eid decorations to take home as a cherished memento of their visit.

Hosh Msheireb, the Company House Courtyard, hosts a range of games and challenges, as well as creative workshops. This cozy retreat provides a perfect respite from the bustling crowds, giving visitors time to relax and recharge.

Hosh Msheireb also offers traditional Qatari cuisine and beverages, ensuring that visitors can savour the flavours of the season. The courtyard is open from 4pm to 11pm.





## An example of compassion, brotherhood

An initiative by the Center for Indian Community (CIC) Volunteer Team, which started by distributing Iftar kits to about 50 workers years ago, grew into a movement that served nearly 3,000 people daily during the recent Ramadan.

By identifying and assisting needy workers living in remote labour camps across Qatar, the team has set an inspiring example of compassion and brotherhood. With the support of the CIC Public Service Wing, the team had around 150 volunteers distribute Iftar kits.

They also provided Suhoor meals to approximately 800 individuals and distributed essential food materials to over 300 workers during Ramadan, ensuring that the holy month was truly meaningful for those in need. Many needy individuals live in remote areas far from Doha, such as Karana, Jeryan, and Abu Nakhla, as well as in isolated pockets of Doha and Wakrah,



a CIC statement said. Reaching out to them and engaging in communication is a challenging task, but the CIC team took it upon themselves to fulfil this humanitarian mission. The initiative was launched when years ago, CIC Social Wing officials noticed the struggles of a few workers in the Industrial Area who lacked the means to break

their fast. News of their efforts spread rapidly among labour camps, leading to a surge in calls and messages from workers in need. This marked the beginning of CIC's active involvement in Iftar distribution.

This year, from the very first day of Ramadan, the CIC, Women India, and Youth Forum volunteers, under volunteer



captain Siddique Vengara's leadership, were actively involved in distributing Iftar kits. Prior to Ramadan, the team conducted a detailed study of various regions, ensuring that their assistance reached the most deserving individuals in a well-organised manner. From Al Khor to Abu Samra, their efforts have been systematic and far-reaching.



The initiative was supported by numerous other organisations, including TWA, IT Team, ITPN, FC Bidda, QAIID, Ansar Alumni, MES Alumni, MES Women, Wahab, Pravasi Welfare Association, Qatar Mallu Volunteers, Qatar Malayali

Volunteers, Indian Qatar Pravasi Association, Qatar Valapattanam Community, Chakkarakkoottam, as well as various business establishments, local and regional associations, and both expatriate and local well-wishers.

### Eid lunch with truck drivers



Tea Talk - Qatar, an expat group from Mahe in southern India, celebrated Eid al-Fitr by serving lunch to nearly 70 drivers from 50 trucks at Doha Industrial Area and Abu Samra border on the first day of Eid. The drivers were from countries such as India, Pakistan, the UAE, Afghanistan, Egypt, Jordan and Bangladesh. Group members Manmadhan, Shuhail, Lilar, Fahad, Thaj, Rahim, Sibi, Shajahan, Wahid, Jayaprakash J P, Faizal K, Sonesh and Faisal Mahe interacted with the drivers.

### Eid Mulaqat organised



Qatar KMCC Kasaragod District Committee organised an Eid Mulaqat on the occasion of Eid-al-Fitr. Organised by workers from the district, the event saw many expatriates participating with their families and sending out a message of unity and love. World KMCC vice-president S A M Basheer inaugurated the programme. District President Lukman Talankara presided. M P Shafi Haji, Adam Kunji Talankara, Sameer, Siddique Maniyampara, Ali Cherur, Shanif Paika, Zakir Eriyal, Abdul Rahiman Eriyal, Mansoor Trikaripur, Razzaq, Harris Eriyal, Anwar, Anwar Trikaripur and other district, mandal, panchayat and municipal office bearers and activists attended. Several leaders spoke, sharing the message of Eid. The event concluded with an Eid feast.

### Incas Qatar Nadapuram Niyojaka Mandalam Committee hosts community gathering



Incas Qatar Nadapuram Niyojaka Mandalam Committee hosted an Iftar gathering and aid distribution, with the participation of community leaders and representatives. K K Usman, Hyde Chunkathara, Anwar Sadath, Boban K V, Ashraf Vadakara, Basheer Thuvarikkal, U baid, Arif Payanthongil, Jithesh Narippatta, Nadeem Manar, Ansar Kolladan, Shahid V P, and Vipin P K Meppayur spoke.



### Fostering empathy, compassion and social responsibility

As part of its ongoing commitment to the Round Square initiative and in the spirit of community service, Podar Pearl School organised an Iftar Drive near Ezdan 5, Al Meshaif, during the holy month of Ramadan.

The event aimed to foster empathy, compassion, and social responsibility among students. Volunteers from Grade X and XII, accompanied by their teachers, distributed pre-packed Iftar meals to members of the local community. This initiative gave students a chance to experience the joy of giving while supporting those in need during a time of reflection and generosity.

The Iftar Drive closely aligns with Round Square initiative's ideals of leadership and service, as well as the school's mission to nurture resilient,



compassionate, and socially responsible individuals. Through their thoughtful efforts, students demonstrated the values of integrity, respect, and care in action, a statement added.

### NIS partners with IIT Madras

Noble International School (NIS) has announced a strategic partnership with IIT Madras' School Connect Programme to provide Grade XI and XII students with comprehensive training in modern courses and expert career guidance.

The eight-week certification course is designed to bridge the gap between school education and higher learning by offering students exposure to advanced concepts in science, technol-

ogy, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

Through this partnership, NIS students will have access to expert lectures, hands-on training, interactive workshops, and career counselling sessions led by distinguished professors and industry professionals.

NIS principal Shibu Rasheed, emphasised the importance of such initiatives in preparing students for the future. "This partnership with IIT Madras is a game-changer for

our students. It not only provides them with cutting-edge academic training but also offers valuable insights into career opportunities in emerging fields," he said.

The initiative will focus on modern courses such as Artificial Intelligence, Data Science, Robotics, and Entrepreneurship. Additionally, career guidance sessions will help students make informed decisions about higher education and career paths, aligning their aspirations with industry trends.





## Several White House national security officials fired: sources

Several high-ranking White House National Security Council (NSC) officials have been fired, according to three people familiar with the matter, in what appears to be the first significant purge of Donald Trump's second presidency.

It was not immediately clear exactly why the officials were let go or if their firing is permanent.

However, three of the sources said several were told there were issues with their background vetting.

One of the sources said there were also

concerns about leaks to the media, while two other sources suggested the ouster was aimed broadly at officials who held views that were seen as too interventionist for the liking of Trump's allies.

Among the several NSC officials who were fired were David Feith, a senior director overseeing technology and national security, Brian Walsh, a senior director overseeing intelligence matters, and Thomas Boddy, who oversees legislative affairs, the sources told Reuters.

The NSC declined to comment.

The news of the firings comes a day af-

ter an Oval Office meeting between Trump and right-wing conspiracy theorist Laura Loomer, who privately called on the president to fire some NSC staffers.

The *New York Times* was the first to report their meeting, while Axios first reported on the NSC purge yesterday.

Any connection between Loomer's private suggestions and the firings was not immediately clear, and two sources said some dismissals came before Loomer met with Trump.

However, multiple sources said Loomer, who has a history of peddling Islamo-

phobic conspiracy theories, did provide Trump with a list of national security staff perceived by her to be disloyal to Trump.

Loomer appeared to largely confirm that on social media yesterday.

"It was an honour to meet with President Trump and present him with my research findings," Loomer wrote on X, formerly Twitter.

The National Security Council has been dogged by negative headlines since March, when National Security Adviser Mike Waltz added a journalist to a Signal chat in which top Trump officials discussed an

imminent bombing campaign in Yemen.

Trump had repeatedly expressed to associates in private that he was angry with Waltz, and the adviser appeared close to losing his job, according to two sources familiar with the dynamic.

However, one of the sources said in recent days that Waltz himself appeared to be safe for now.

The precise foreign policy impacts of the national security purge, if any, were unclear, and the portfolios of the fired staffers appeared to have relatively little overlap. - **Reuters**

## US is committed to Nato, but 'Europe must spend more'

Reuters/AFP  
Brussels



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio told Nato allies yesterday that Washington remained committed to the alliance but expected them to spend far more on defence and would give them some time to do so.

He spoke as he met fellow North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) foreign ministers gathered in Brussels, with some European officials saying that they were reassured by the renewed commitment to the alliance at a time of rising tensions over President Donald Trump's new trade tariffs.

The Trump administration's words and actions over the past months have raised questions about the future of Nato, the transatlantic alliance that has been the bedrock of European security for the past 75 years.

Rubio dismissed doubts about US commitment to the alliance as "hysteria".

"Some of this hysteria and hyperbole that I see in the global media and some domestic media in the United States about Nato is unwarranted," Rubio said on his first visit to meet his Nato counterparts in Brussels. "President Trump's made clear he supports Nato. We're going to remain in Nato."

"The United States is in Nato ... the United States is as active in Nato as it has ever been," he told reporters.

"He is not against Nato," Rubio said of Trump. "He is against a Nato that does not have the capabilities that it needs to fulfil the obligations that the treaty imposes upon each and every member state."

Trump has said the military alliance should spend 5% of gross domestic product on defence

Rubio: (Trump) is not against Nato. He is against a Nato that does not have the capabilities that it needs to fulfil the obligations that the treaty imposes upon each and every member state.

- a huge increase from the current 2% goal and a level that no Nato country, including the United States, currently reaches.

Washington has also bluntly told European countries that it can no longer be primarily focused on the continent's security.

European allies have been anxiously seeking details on the timeframe and extent to which the US aims to reduce its engagement in Nato for weeks, in order to co-ordinate the process of a European defence ramp-up to avoid security gaps in Europe.

In Brussels, Rubio brought some element of response on that.

"We do want to leave here with an under-

standing that we are on a pathway, a realistic pathway, to every single one of the members committing and fulfilling a promise to reach up to 5% of spending," he said, adding that this included the United States. "No one expects that you're going to be able to do this in one year or two. But the pathway has to be real."

A European official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the meeting with Rubio was "very reassuring".

"The meeting was not confrontational," the official said. "Just that allies need to do more. No bashing."

Still, reaching 5% of GDP spending on defence would be hard for many Nato allies.

According to Nato estimates, some of the continent's big economies, such as Italy and Spain, are among those below the current 2% target, at around 1.5% and 1.3% respectively.

Twenty-three of the alliance's 32 members met or exceeded the 2% target last year.

"For the time being, I think 5% is probably too high," Portuguese Foreign Minister Paulo Rangel told reporters, noting that Portugal - which spent 1.55% of GDP on defence last year - first needs to get to 2% and then have a plan to meet a new target the alliance will set at its next summit.

A string of European countries have announced steep increases in military budgets, with economic powerhouse Germany opening the way for a major splurge.

"Great things are happening. Over the last couple of months, we literally see hundreds of billions of euros rolling in," Nato chief Mark Rutte said.

"So this is probably the biggest increase in defence spending here on the European side of Nato since the end of the Cold War," he said. "But we still need more."

The move allows Adams to bypass an upcoming Democratic primary election ahead of the mayoral vote in the United States' largest city in November.

## New York Mayor Adams to run for re-election as independent candidate

Reuters



New York Mayor Eric Adams, who saw corruption charges against him dismissed this week, said yesterday that he would run as an independent, after being heavily criticised by members of his Democratic Party over his co-operation with President Donald Trump.

The move allows Adams to bypass an upcoming Democratic primary election ahead of the mayoral vote in the United States' largest city in November.

On Wednesday, a federal judge dismissed corruption charges against Adams, while sharply criticising apparent efforts by Trump's administration to use the case as political leverage over the city leader.

"The dismissal of the bogus case against me dragged on too long, making it impossible to mount a primary campaign while these false accusations were held over me," said Adams in a short video yesterday.

"But I'm not a quitter. I'm a New Yorker," said Adams, whose approval rating was down to 20% by last month, according to a Quinnipiac poll.

"I have always put New York's people before politics and party, and I always will," said Adams in a video message posted on X. "I will forgo the Democratic primary for mayor and appeal directly to all New Yorkers as an independent candidate."

Adams has come under fire for cozying up to Republican Trump since he took office, agreeing to enforce the White House's crackdown on immigration despite New York's policy of being a "sanctuary city".

On Wednesday, while dismissing the charges against the mayor, Judge Dale Ho was nonetheless excoriating about the circumstances.

"Everything here smacks of a bargain: dismissal of the Indictment in exchange for immigration policy concessions," Ho wrote.

He said the case was dropped with prejudice, meaning it could not be revived by the government - even if Adams fails to sufficiently cooperate on deportations.

In his video, Adams vowed that he would remain a Democrat, despite running as an independent.

The 64-year-old would have faced a crowded field in the Democratic primary, led by former governor Andrew Cuomo, who like Adams was once a rising star in the party before being disgraced and forced to resign after allegations of sexual assault and harassment.

Cuomo is leading in the polls, followed by Zohran Mamdani, a grassroots organiser and political outsider who is gaining momentum.

"There is nothing 'independent' about Eric Adams, who is completely beholden to real estate moguls, billionaires, and the far-right," said Mamdani, reacting to Adams's announcement.

A former police officer from a modest family, and New York's second African American mayor, Adams was initially popular but saw his star wane under the weight of corruption allegations, rising costs of living and other challenges.

The mayor was accused of wire fraud, soliciting illegal foreign campaign donations and a bribery conspiracy. He denies the charges.

New York is a bastion of the Democratic party, and the party's candidate will be the favourite to win November's election.

## Thousands of Haitians take to streets to protest surging gang violence

By Yves Pierre Surin  
Reuters

Thousands of Haitians took to the streets in Port-au-Prince on Wednesday to express their anger against armed gangs that control nearly all of the capital and surrounding areas and the government's failure to hold them off.

Violent armed groups have united behind a coalition known as Viv Anse and forced more than 1mn people from their homes, which has contributed to a freezing of the economy and fuelled mass hunger.

They are also accused of extortion, mass rapes and killings.

The transitional government, a rotating body of presidential council members appointed nearly a year ago, alongside a long undermanned and underfunded UN-backed security mission, have done little to hold off the gang's advances.

"Do you see what is happening?" protester Joseph Mackandy told Reuters at the demonstration.



Demonstrators march toward Prime Minister Alix Didier Fils-Aime's office in Port-au-Prince during a protest against insecurity. - **Reuters**

was among the countries slapped with 10% tariffs by the United States, a hard blow for the poor Caribbean nation that counts the US as its top trade partner, exporting hundreds of millions of dollars in goods such as textiles, spirits and cosmetics.

"One more problem for a suffering country," said economist Emy Germain, who heads consultancy ProEco Haiti, on social media.

The protest comes just a few days after a mass jailbreak in the central town of Mirebalais.

Separately on Wednesday, Haiti

recorded a \$598mn surplus on trade with Haiti last year.

## Bolivian city 'drowning' in rubbish

AFP

Cochabamba, Bolivia

Health officials in Bolivia's fourth-biggest city raised disease concerns on Wednesday as tonnes of rubbish have accumulated on the streets due to a 12-day-old protest by residents blocking access to its main landfill.

Officials warned of a severe public health issue in Cochabamba, a city of 600,000 whose residents have closed off the landfill to demand its permanent closure.

The city's health department said cases of diarrhoea soared by 7% in the last week, and those of Hepatitis A - a viral disease spread through contaminated food or water - rose by 55%.

"This could be the beginning" of a health crisis, the department's epidemiology head Ruben Castillo told AFP.

Residents living near the K'ara K'ara landfill are demanding it be shuttered permanently, claiming contamination due to improper waste management.

"We are demanding our right to health; the municipality does not listen to us," Alcira Estrada, a 38-year-old merchant who lives near the landfill, some 10km from the city centre, told AFP.

The protest has now seen the problem spread



This picture taken on Wednesday shows a man throwing a bag into a pile of garbage in Cochabamba. - **AFP**

wider, with 7,000 tonnes of waste accumulated on Cochabamba's streets, according to municipal estimates.

The municipality agreed in September to close the landfill in six months, but the deadline has passed.

Cochabamba produces between 600 and 800 tonnes of garbage daily, according to municipal spokesperson Juan Jose Ayaviri.

## Illegal luxury timber from Brazil making its way to US and Europe: investigation

By Alexander Villegas  
Reuters

Almost 2,000 container ships carrying illegally harvested timber from the Brazilian Amazonian state that will host this year's UN climate summit has reached Europe and the US in recent years, showed an investigative report by an environmental non-governmental organisation (NGO).

The report released yesterday by London-based Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) featured satellite imagery, records and interviews with industry sources to trace about 53,000 cubic metres of timber to four sites in the state of Para that had been sanctioned, were under embargo or had other irregularities such as illegal gold mining.

Para capital Belem will host the 2025 UN Climate Change Conference - or COP30 - from November 10-21.

"The findings suggest a pervasive culture where corrupt deals and the manipulation of legal frameworks are widespread," the EIA, founded in 1984, said in the report.

Wrongdoing or negligence was detected at nearly every step of the supply chain, from permitting to harvesting to exporting, it said.

Laws in the US, Europe and Brazil to stem illegal logging have

existed for decades, but the many loopholes that allow the illicit industry to thrive underscore the difficulty of policing a continental forest.

In several cases, the EIA said Para's environmental regulator SEMAS renewed or failed to remove concessions where infractions had been reported, including one case that was later embargoed by federal environmental regulator Ibama.

In a response to Reuters' questions, SEMAS said that it is "reinforcing its standards and mechanisms" to evaluate forestry management plans and was committed to conserving forest resources, noting it seized over 12,000 cubic metres of illegal timber and embargoed more than 500,000 hectares of land due to mining and deforestation from 2013 to January 2025.

"The cases mentioned in the report will be analysed and ... if irregularities are found, those responsible will be punished," SEMAS said.

The EIA said it linked 19 sawmills, 16 exporters and 30 US and European importers to what it suspected was tainted timber, which included high-value and protected species like ipê and cumaru that are used for luxury decking and furniture but are also on the endangered list of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

It said companies including US-based Sabra International had previously been flagged as buying illegal timber.

Sabra International and several of the importing and exporting companies did not immediately reply to Reuters' questions about the allegations.

The EIA also said it found myriad red flags in the timber supply chain.

Some sites that claimed to produce timber showed little to no evidence of logging, indicating they were used for laundering wood extracted illegally, the agency said.

Some other sites that supplied exported timber had been previously fined or subjected to an embargo for illegal logging or had been reported for illegal mining, which would require operations to cease under Brazilian law, the report showed.

After harvesting, sourcing documents are easily bought and sold to launder the illegal timber and the EIA said it interviewed several industry sources who claimed to have bribed officials to ease permitting or pass inspections.

One anonymous sawmill representative said documents to launder ipê are obtained easily from other concessions.

"Everyone does it," one sawmill representative said when it came to buying and selling timber credits.

## DECISION

**Search for Malaysia's long missing MH370 suspended**

The latest search for Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 has been suspended by maritime exploration firm Ocean Infinity as it is "not the season", Kuala Lumpur's transport minister said, more than a decade after the plane went missing. "They (Ocean Infinity) have stopped the operation for the time being, they will resume the search at the end of this year," Transport Minister Anthony Loke said. Ocean Infinity, based in Britain and the US, led an unsuccessful hunt in 2018, before agreeing to launch a new search this year. The Boeing 777 carrying 239 people disappeared from radar screens on March 8, 2014, while en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing.

## CONTROVERSY

**Indonesia rule allowing police oversight of journalists flayed**

Indonesian activists yesterday decried a new regulation allowing police to monitor foreign journalists and researchers working in the country, a move they say would limit press freedom. The new rule said a police letter is needed for foreigners doing their work "in certain locations". The National Police said the new rule was necessary to "maintain state sovereignty over Indonesian territory and to provide protection for foreigners in Indonesian territory". But the executive director of an advocacy group Legal Aid Institute for the Press said yesterday it could make it more difficult for people doing journalism or research work in Indonesia.

## CRIME

**Japan's yakuza numbers hit new low, police data shows**

Membership of Japan's yakuza criminal underworld hit a new low of 18,800 in 2024 after years of decline, falling below the 20,000 mark for the first time, police data showed yesterday. Yakuza forces have been dwindling since 2005, due in part to a stricter crackdown. Despite that decline, "some of their activities are becoming more and more opaque, with their sources of funding diversifying", the National Police Agency warned in a report published yesterday. "The fact remains unchanged that yakuza is a threat to our society." It was not immediately clear how police compiled the yakuza membership data.

## LAW AND ORDER

**S Korea finds two tonnes suspected cocaine on ship**

South Korean authorities found about two tonnes of suspected cocaine on a ship docked at a port, the customs service said, in what appears to be the largest haul of smuggled drugs in the country's history. Korea Customs Service and Coast Guard found 57 boxes of the suspected drug on a bulk ship docked at Gangneung city port, the customs service said in a statement. They searched the ship after receiving information from the US Federal Bureau of Investigation and Homeland Security Investigations. The ship started its voyage in Mexico, travelled via Ecuador, Panama and China before reaching Gangneung, the statement said.

# SE Asian nations, among hardest-hit by Trump tariffs, seek negotiations

Reuters

Hanoi/Bangkok

**S**outheast Asian nations reeled yesterday as they were hit with some of President Donald Trump's heaviest tariffs, which now threaten the economies that have benefited from investment since he imposed levies on China during his first term.

Vietnam, slapped with 46% tariffs, called for talks with Washington in order to reconsider "unfair" US duties and Thailand's prime minister said she would pursue negotiations to try to reduce the 37% rate her country faces – far greater than the 11% it had expected.

Both countries are heavy exporters to the US, having gained from the so-called China+1 strategy, whereby manufacturers, seeking to escape tariffs on China, shifted some of their Chinese production to nearby countries in the region.

"We have to negotiate and get into details," Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra said. "We can't let it get to where we miss our GDP target." Six of the nine Southeast Asian countries listed by Trump were slapped with much bigger-than-expected tariffs of between 32% and 49%. By comparison, the level for the European Union was 20%, Japan's was 24% and India's

**Manila sees possibilities, Lanka fears job losses**

The Philippines reacted with "guarded optimism" yesterday to US President Donald Trump's sweeping tariffs, saying higher rates placed on its neighbours could present an opportunity. The longtime US ally was hit with a reciprocal levy of 17%, though Manila's department of trade and industry noted the country ranked among "the least hit". "As we have expected, the Philippines is among the least hit among key exporters to the US," it said, noting higher

tariffs placed on Vietnam (46%), Thailand (36%) and Taiwan (32%). Meanwhile, Sri Lanka's apparel manufacturing industry warned that the tariffs will disrupt the island's export sector and place thousands of jobs at risk.

"The tariff level is extremely high relative to our regional competitors," said Yohan Lawrence, head of the Joint Apparel Association Forum, referring to a 44% tariff imposed by Trump on Sri Lankan goods.

27%. So far, none of the Southeast Asian nations have spoken of retaliatory tariffs.

Vietnam, where companies like Apple, Nike and Samsung Electronics have large manufacturing operations, appears particularly exposed. Its exports to the US were worth \$142bn last year, nearly 30% of its gross domestic product.

Vietnam's Trade Minister Nguyen Hong Dien sent a diplomatic note to the US yesterday and said he was seeking to talk to the US trade representative to revisit the decision he deemed unfair, according to a report on state media.

Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh had earlier ordered up a task force to address the situation after

an urgent cabinet meeting yesterday, state media said. He noted the country's 8% growth target for this year remained unchanged.

"Vietnam's export-driven growth model has been highly successful, attracting multinational companies... However, a 46% US tariff would directly challenge this model," said Leif Schneider, head of international law firm Luther in Vietnam.

ING estimates that the tariffs put 5.5% of Vietnam's gross domestic product at risk.

Vietnam made a number of recent concessions to Washington to avoid tariffs, including cutting duties and a pledge to import more US goods, and is likely to offer more in the coming days.



People hold placards as they take part in a demonstration against impeached South Korean president Yoon Suk-yeol in Seoul yesterday.

## Security tightened ahead of Yoon impeachment ruling

AFP  
Seoul

**S**outh Korean police yesterday began dialling up their security levels in preparation for a Constitutional Court ruling on President Yoon Suk-yeol's impeachment, as they sealed off areas around the court.

Police took the alert to the second-highest level yesterday and said they would issue the top alert today, enabling the deployment of 100 percent of the force.

The top alert is typically issued in response to the potential for mass casualty events, acts of terrorism or major disasters.

Police have already cleared

a 490-foot radius around the courthouse. "The area surrounding the court is basically sealed off from any protesters," an official from the Korean National Police Agency, said.

The move comes as multiple embassies – including the US and France – have issued warnings to their citizens to avoid political rallies or mass gatherings in connection with today's verdict.

Authorities are hoping to avoid a repeat of the 2017 presidential impeachment ruling, when four people died after the court upheld the removal of former president Park Geun-hye.

At the time, Park's supporters clashed with authorities, pil-

ing onto police buses, smashing windows with wooden sticks and assaulting officers.

Schools, embassies, major corporations, tourist sites and museums near the courthouse yesterday announced they would be closed.

Lee Ho-young, acting chief of the Korean National Police Agency, has said the ongoing situation has become "more grave than ever", citing "threats to the safety of key figures" and possibility of violent and illegal incidents.

Yoon plunged democratic South Korea into political turmoil when he declared martial law on December 3, suspending civilian rule and sending soldiers to parliament.

**Philippines reassures China over jet purchase**

The potential purchase of F-16 jets by the Philippines from the US does not harm the interests of any third party, including China, a Philippine security official said yesterday. National Security Council spokesperson Jonathan Malaya assured China the planned acquisition is not intended as a threat to any nation and is merely part of the Philippines' efforts to modernise its military. "We would like to assure the People's Republic of China that the planned procurement of the F-16 fighter jets to the Philippine arsenal does not in any way harm the interest of any third party," Malaya told a briefing. The US department of defence's Defence Security Co-operation Agency said on Tuesday the state department had approved a possible foreign military sale to the Philippines of 20 F-16 planes for an estimated cost of \$5.58bn.

**Australian premier falls off stage**

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese falls off a stage on Day 6 of the 2025 federal election campaign, in the Hunter Valley, Australia, yesterday.

**Three Filipinos suspected of spying held in China**AFP  
Beijing

**C**hina yesterday said it had "destroyed" an intelligence network set up by the Philippine espionage agency and arrested three spies from the country. The announcement comes as the two countries continue to confront each other over disputed territory in the South China Sea and tensions mount over the Philippines' security ties with ally the US.

At least five Chinese nationals were arrested on suspicion of espionage in January and another two in February by Philippine authorities.

And the latest arrests in China come two days after Beijing's embassy in Manila issued a travel warning to its citizens about frequent "harassment" from

Philippine law enforcement agencies.

State broadcaster CCTV yesterday reported that authorities had identified one of the suspected spies as a Philippine national who had lived and worked in China long-term and had been found conducting espionage near military facilities.

The CCTV report included a video of his arrest and what appeared to be a recorded confession. He was recruited by Philippine intelligence services to "take advantage of his long-term residence in China to conduct espionage activities in China and collect sensitive information, especially on military deployment", state media said.

He came close to military facilities multiple times and "conducted close observation and secret photography", CCTV added.

# Myanmar junta chief in Bangkok, quake toll crosses 3,000

AFP  
Sagaing, Myanmar

**T**he head of Myanmar's junta arrived in Bangkok yesterday for a regional summit as the death toll from his country's devastating earthquake passed 3,000.

Min Aung Hlaing will join a BIMSTEC gathering – representing the seven littoral nations of the Bay of Bengal – where he will raise the response to Friday's 7.7-magnitude quake.

The junta chief arrived at Bangkok's plush Shangri-La hotel, the venue for today's summit, amid tight security.

Many nations have sent aid and teams of rescue workers to Myanmar since the quake but heavily damaged infrastructure and patchy communications – as well as a rumbling civil war – have hampered efforts.

Myanmar has been engulfed in a brutal multi-sided conflict since 2021, when Min Aung Hlaing's military wrested power from the civilian government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

Following reports of sporadic clashes even after Friday's quake, the junta joined its opponents on Wednesday in calling a temporary halt to hostilities to allow relief to be delivered.

There were hectic scenes yesterday in the city of Sagaing – less than 15kms from the epicentre – as hundreds of desperate people scrambled for emergency supplies distributed by civilian volunteers.

Roads leading to the city were packed with traffic, many of the vehicles part of aid convoys organised by civilian volunteers and adorned with banners saying where they had been sent from across Myanmar.

Destruction in Sagaing is widespread, with 80% of buildings damaged, 50% severely, UNDP resident representative for Myanmar Tito Mitra said. "The situation is really devastating," he said.

Food markets are unusable and

hospitals are overwhelmed by patients and structurally unsound, he said, with patients being treated outdoors in heat of 40 degrees Celsius.

"We have seen children, pregnant women, injured people there. There's not enough medical supplies," he said.

"If you look at the overall impacted area, there's possibly 3mn-plus that may have been affected."

Residents say they still face a lack of help nearly a week after the quake.

"We have a well for drinking water but we have no fuel for the water pump," Aye Thikar said. "We also don't know how long we will be

without electricity," she said.

The 63-year-old nun has been helping distribute relief funds to those left without basic amenities.

But many people are still in need of mosquito nets and blankets, and are forced to sleep outside by the tremors that either destroyed their homes or severely damaged them.

"People passing by on the road have generously donated water and food to us. We rely solely on their kindness," she said.

The leaders of the seven-member BIMSTEC grouping – Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand – will discuss trade, security and other issues, as Asia reels from US President Don-

ald Trump's swinging new raft of tariffs.

Host country Thailand has also proposed that the leaders issue a joint statement on the impact of the disaster when they meet today – a week from the day the quake struck.

Opposition groups and rights organisations have fiercely criticised Thailand's decision to host Min Aung Hlaing, accusing him of war crimes in Myanmar's brutal conflict.

His attendance at the summit represents a diplomatic win for Myanmar's isolated government as it breaks with a regional policy of not inviting junta leaders to major events.



## CONTROVERSY

**Harry welcomes regulator action over charity dispute**

Prince Harry yesterday said he hoped Britain's charity regulator would "unveil the truth" after it opened a compliance case into his charity Sentebale following accusations from its chair that he was guilty of "bullying at scale". Harry, the younger son of King Charles, co-founded Sentebale in 2006 to help young people with HIV and AIDS in Lesotho and Botswana. Last week Harry and co-founder Prince Seeiso of Lesotho said in a joint statement that they, along with the board of trustees, were stepping down from the charity because of a dispute with board chair Sophie Chandaqua.

## LAW AND ORDER

**UK police slam criticism of baby killer Letby inquiry**

British police yesterday hit out at "ill-informed" criticism of the investigation and prosecution of nurse Lucy Letby. She was jailed in 2023 for the remainder of her life after being found guilty of murdering seven newborns and attempting to murder eight more between June 2015 and June 2016 while working in the neonatal unit of the Countess of Chester Hospital. Letby, 35, has maintained her innocence throughout but has been refused permission to appeal against her convictions. The police investigation, which had taken into account the views of multiple medical experts, had been like "no other in scope, complexity and magnitude", an officer said.

## CRIME

**UK retailers 'lose £2.2bn to thefts in one year'**

Britain's Co-op Group said yesterday losses from shoplifting in its food retail business rose by over 14% to £80m in 2024. The group, which trades from over 2,300 food stores across the UK, has been one of the worst hit retailers by a surge in thefts in recent years. As in the United States and elsewhere, retail crime is a huge and growing problem in Britain. Industry body the British Retail Consortium's annual crime survey, published in January, found more than 20m incidents of theft were committed in the year to August 31, which equates to 55,000 a day, costing retailers £2.2bn.

## LEGAL

**India government approves bill overhauling Waqf land boards**

India's parliament passed a bill yesterday to reform Muslim land-owning organisations, with the opposition terming it an "attack" on a minority. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government argues the bill will boost transparency to more than a dozen powerful Waqf boards. The bill was passed by the lower house of parliament after a debate that stretched into the early hours of yesterday. Opposition parties accuse the government of pushing "polarising politics". "The Waqf (Amendment) Bill is a weapon aimed at marginalising Muslims and usurping their personal laws and property rights," Congress Party chief Rahul Gandhi said.

# India 'studying impact' of 27% US tariff, vows to push trade deal

Reuters

New Delhi

India yesterday said it was studying the impact of the 27% tariff slapped by the US on its imports and vowed to push for a trade deal this year, signalling a conciliatory tone despite failing to get relief from President Donald Trump's trade policy.

New Delhi's response came hours after Trump announced the drastic tariffs that piled more stress on an ailing global economy and sent world stock markets and oil prices tumbling.

While Trump said Indian goods will face a 26% tariff, the White House executive order put the rate at 27%. India's trade ministry too put the rate at 27%, citing the executive order.

A baseline 10% baseline tariff starts today before the remaining, higher reciprocal tariff takes effect from April 9.

India's trade department is "carefully examining the implications" of the US announcement and also holding talks with Indian industry and exporters on their assessment of the tariffs, a trade ministry statement said.

"The department is also studying the opportunities that may

arise due to this new development in US trade policy," it said, and referred to the agreement between Trump and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in February to work on the first phase of a trade deal by autumn 2025.

"The ongoing talks are focused on enabling both nations to grow trade, investments and technology transfers," it said, referring to negotiations between the two sides. "We remain in touch with the Trump administration on these issues and expect to take them forward in the coming days."

Trump has slapped higher duties on other countries, including 34% on China on top of a 20% tax announced earlier, and 46% on Vietnam.

The relatively lower tariffs imposed on India calmed equity markets.

India's benchmark share indexes, the Nifty 50 and the BSE Sensex, were down 0.3% each at open, lower than the 1.5% to 3% losses seen across other Asian markets. The rupee fell as much as 0.3% to 85.75 against the dollar in early trade but recovered to 85.45.

India gains a natural competitive advantage in several key sectors due to the relatively lower tariffs imposed, research firm Global Trade

Research Institute said in a note. Nearly \$14bn worth of electronics products and over \$9bn worth of gems and jewellery are among the top sectors to be hit by the US tariffs.

The Trump administration, however, exempted pharmaceutical exports from the tariff bringing cheer to India's pharma industry. The US accounted for nearly a third of India's pharmaceutical exports - mainly cheaper versions of popular drugs - with sales of about \$9bn last fiscal year.

Shares of Indian drugmakers rose nearly 5% in early trade yesterday in contrast to the drop in the broader stock market.

India's export competitiveness would be less impacted than key rivals due to its position in the middle of the tariff rates, said the country's industry bodies, Assocham and the Federation of Indian Export Organisations.

The duty of 27% was based on tariff and non-tariff barriers including currency manipulation, the Trump administration said.

The tariffs would remain in effect until Trump determined that the "threat posed by the trade deficit and underlying non-reciprocal treatment is satisfied, resolved, or mitigated," the White House statement said.

The duty of 27% was based on tariff and non-tariff barriers including currency manipulation, the Trump administration said.

The tariffs would remain in effect until Trump determined that the "threat posed by the trade deficit and underlying non-reciprocal treatment is satisfied, resolved, or mitigated," the White House statement said.

The US accounts for nearly \$10bn or 30.4% of India's annual gems and jewellery exports of \$32bn.



Staff await customers at a jewellery shop at Zaveri Bazaar, in Mumbai yesterday.

# India's jewellery exports set for a sharp decline

Reuters

Mumbai

India's \$32bn gems and jewellery industry is bracing for a sharp fall in exports as hefty US tariffs will impede overseas sales to its biggest market, industry officials said.

"The tariff is higher than expected," Colin Shah, managing director of Kama Jewelry, one of India's leading diamond jewellery manufacturers, said. "It is quite severe and will affect exports."

India is the world's largest hub for diamond cutting and polishing, handling nine out of every 10 diamonds processed globally.

The US accounts for nearly \$10bn or 30.4% of India's annual gems and jewellery exports of \$32bn.

Gems and jewellery are India's third-largest export to the US, after engineering and electronic goods, and the industry employs millions in the country. The sector has already been hit in recent months by weak demand from China and exports dropped 14.5% to \$32.3bn in the 2023-24 fiscal year (April-March). A long-term bilateral trade deal with the United States could soften the blow, Shah said.

India and the US are in talks to clinch an early trade deal.

"We're are pretty hopeful that India could land a trade deal with the US in the next few months. So, we just need to push through this tough phase for a little while longer," said Shaunak Parikh, vice-chairman of the Gem and Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC).

Meanwhile, Indian exporters said they were disappointed and relieved in equal measure.

"The tariffs slapped on India are definitely both high and higher-than-expected, which will hurt demand for our exports," Ajay Sahai, director general of the Federation of Indian Export Organisations, said.

But Sahai also pointed out that India was hit with lower levies than manufacturing rivals.

"Many countries which we compete with globally, including China, Indonesia, and Vietnam etc, have been hit harder than us," he said.

Experts say that India's future policy responses should also take into account China's next steps.

"Asia has been hit much more than India on tariffs," said Madhavi Arora, chief economist at Emkay Global Financial Services.

## Modi arrives in Thailand for regional summit

India's prime minister arrived in Bangkok yesterday for a regional summit and talks with his Thai counterpart, but made no mention of a widely speculated meeting with Bangladesh's leader. Narendra Modi met with Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra and will attend the BIMSTEC grouping of the seven nations on the Bay of Bengal. Top representatives of BIMSTEC members - Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand - are expected to attend the Bangkok summit. Bangladeshi media have widely speculated that Modi and Muhammad Yunus will meet in a bid to ease tensions after tit-for-tat barbs between top figures from both governments. Yunus had sought a meeting with Modi in a bid to reset relations, with Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar saying the request was "under review". Nepali media have said Modi is also expected to meet with Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, which would be the first since Kathmandu's leader returned to power last year.



Thailand's Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi hold a framed photo of themselves taking part in the welcome ceremony at Government House in Bangkok yesterday.

## Maoist militants seek peace talks with India

AFP

New Delhi

India's Maoist militants, cornered by an all-out military offensive, have offered to engage in peace talks but insist security operations must stop first, a condition authorities have rejected.

A crackdown by Indian troops has killed more than 400 militants since last year, according to government data, with Home Minister Amit Shah vowing to crush the decades-long insurgency by 2026.

More than 10,000 people have been killed in the decades-long "Naxalite" militancy, whose participants say they are fighting for the rights of marginalised people in India's resource-rich central regions.

The Maoists' top body said

it was ready for dialogue if the government withdrew security forces and halted the ongoing offensive.

"In the interests of the people, our party is always ready for peace talks," said the statement.

It urged rights activists to "pressure the government to create an environment for peace talks". The statement from the militants, issued in Telugu language and dated March 28, only prompted an official response on Wednesday.

Officials in the state of Chhattisgarh, the heartland of the militancy, said the government was open to talks but would not accept any conditions from the insurgents.

"We will not negotiate under pressure, and operations will continue," the state's Interior Minister Vijay Sharma told reporters.

# Rats and rotting waste as rubbish row blights Birmingham

AFP

Birmingham, United Kingdom

On a normal day in an ordinary English street there would be nothing special about the arrival of a bin lorry. But in Birmingham, the UK's second city, a rare garbage truck visit brings crowds of people rushing into the road, their arms full of rubbish.

Residents are desperately trying to get rid of an estimated 17,000 tonnes of trash that has piled up under a refuse workers ramped up a strike last month.

Now, as bin bags swelter in the spring sun and rats, foxes, and cats

claw through mounting heaps of litter, many people in Birmingham feel the city has reached breaking point.

Four weeks in, the city council has declared a "major incident," the prime minister has had to defend the government's response in parliament, and residents say their problems are worsening by the day.

"There was a bin fire on the end of our street the other night," said Abel Mihai, 23, who lives in the Saltley area of the city where mounds of ripening rubbish have attracted worms, maggots and vermin.

"It's scary - I'm worried for my kids," he said, adding the pest-infested piles were affecting his three-year-old son's health.

"Every time he goes out the back he vomits from the smell," Mihai said.

"We need to do something about it," his eight-year-old daughter Vanessa said. "It's not good."

At the centre of the dispute is a pay row between the cash-strapped city council and refuse workers belonging to the Unite union, which says some staff employed by the council stand to lose £8,000 (\$10,400) per year under a planned restructuring of the refuse service.

The quarrel also plays into wider problems in British society - from stretched local council funding to sweeping inequality.

Residents in poorer areas of the

city in England's Midlands region said they felt neglected, and questioned whether the trouble would have spiralled in wealthier parts of the country.

City Councillor Mohammed Idrees said he was also worried about Birmingham's reputation.

The city of over a million people is known for its industrial heritage and rich multicultural makeup - but he said the strike was "creating a very bad image throughout the world."

The council has disputed the union's account of the restructure and insists it has "made a fair and reasonable offer" to workers.

But at a union picket line outside a city waste depot, refuse collectors

said they felt insulted by the changes, which they said would amount to a hefty pay cut for hundreds of workers.

Wayne Bishop, a 59-year-old driver and union member, said he would lose his position under the shake-up and be around £600 per month worse-off. He said the job was gruelling work and deserved to be paid fairly.

"We can't afford that for our toil," he said. "We go out all weathers, we just can't afford to lose that with the cost of living going up."

The industrial action has been

rumbling on since January, but increased to an all-out strike on March

11. It's now begun to cause a political stink for British Prime Minister Keir Starmer.

Confronted by the opposition in parliament on Wednesday, he admitted the situation in Birmingham was "completely unacceptable" - but insisted his government would provide extra support and stood by the council, which is run by Starmer's Labour party.

Residents are tired of waiting though, and some have taken matters into their own hands.

The special waste truck visit on the street in Saltley on Wednesday was arranged by members of a community centre who contacted a local councillor for assistance.

## Artificial intelligence could impact 40% of jobs worldwide: UN

By Agnes Pedrero  
AFP

The global artificial intelligence (AI) market is projected to reach \$4.8tn – roughly the size of Germany's economy – by 2033, the UN said yesterday, warning nearly half of jobs worldwide could be affected.

While AI is transforming economies and creating vast opportunities, the technology also risks deepening existing inequalities, the UN trade and development agency UNCTAD warned in a report.

In particular, the report cautioned that "AI could impact 40% of jobs worldwide, offering productivity gains but also raising

concerns about automation and job displacement".

While previous waves of technology mainly impacted blue-collar jobs, UNCTAD highlighted that knowledge-intensive sectors would be left most exposed by AI.

This means advanced economies will surely be hardest-hit, it said, adding though that these economies were better positioned to harness the benefits of AI than developing economies.

"The benefits of AI-driven automation often favour capital over labour, which could widen inequality and reduce the competitive advantage of low-cost labour in developing economies," UNCTAD said.

In a statement, the agency chief Rebeca

Gryspan underlined the importance of ensuring people are at the centre of AI development, urging stronger international co-operation to "shift the focus from technology to people, enabling countries to co-create a global artificial intelligence framework".

"History has shown that while technological progress drives economic growth, it does not on its own ensure equitable income distribution or promote inclusive human development," she warned.

In 2023, so-called frontier technologies like the Internet, blockchain, 5G, 3D printing and AI, represented a \$2.5tn market, with that number expected to increase six-fold in the next decade to \$16.4tn, the report said.

And by 2033, AI will be the leading technology in this sector, with an expected value of \$4.8tn, it showed.

However, UNCTAD cautioned that access to AI infrastructure and expertise remained concentrated in just a few economies, with only 100 firms, mainly in the US and China, currently accounting for 40% of global corporate research and development spending.

"Countries should act now," the agency said, insisting that "by investing in digital infrastructure, building capabilities, and strengthening AI governance", they could "harness the AI potential for sustainable development".

"AI is not just about replacing jobs," it said, insisting the technology could "also

create new industries and empower workers."

"Investing in reskilling, upskilling, and workforce adaptation is essential to ensure AI enhances employment opportunities rather than eliminating them."

The UN agency stressed the need for all countries to take part in discussions around how to govern AI.

"AI is shaping the world's economic future, yet 118 countries – mostly in the Global South – are absent from major AI governance discussions," it said.

"As AI regulation and ethical frameworks take shape, developing nations must have a seat at the table to ensure AI serves global progress, not just the interests of a few."

## Danish PM in 'unity' visit to Greenland after US threats

AFP  
Copenhagen

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen visited Greenland yesterday in a show of unity with the autonomous Danish territory which US President Donald Trump has vowed to take over.

In the capital Nuuk, Frederiksen met her new Greenlandic counterpart Jens-Frederik Nielsen as well as Nielsen's predecessor Mute Egede.

The trio boarded a Danish navy patrol vessel called Vaedderen for a trip around Nuuk.

Danish public broadcaster DR said many people expressed joy at seeing Frederiksen, with one resident shouting from a window: "Hey Mette! Thanks for being here."

Tensions between the United States and Denmark have soared after Trump repeatedly said he wanted to take control of the resource-rich Arctic island for security reasons.

"It is clear that with the pressure put on Greenland by the Americans, in terms of sovereignty, borders and the future, we need to stay united," Frederiksen said after arriving on the island for a three-day visit.

Her visit comes on the heels of a trip by US Vice-President JD Vance last week that both Nuuk and Copenhagen viewed as a provocation.

It also follows the formation of a new Greenland coalition government led by the centre-right Democrats party, which won a general election in March.

"I have but one wish and that is to do all that I can to take care of this marvellous country and to support it at a difficult time," Frederiksen said.

Observers say that her visit will reassure the



Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen (right) aboard the Danish Navy inspection vessel Vaedderen together with Greenland's acting head of government Mute Bourup Egede (centre) and newly elected head of government Jens-Frederik Nielsen in the waters around Nuuk yesterday. -AFP

island of 57,000 people, the vast majority of whom, polls show, want to become independent from Denmark but do not wish to become part of the United States.

"I think it's very, very important and it's very reassuring for Greenlanders to see a Danish head of government," Mikaela Engell, an expert on the Arctic territory who previously served as Denmark's High Commissioner to Greenland, told AFP.

Earlier this year, "the Danish government was almost invisible", she said, describing Copenhagen's efforts as tip-toeing, trying to accommodate US interests and not antagonise Trump.

However, after the general election and Vance's visit, the "gloves have come off", Engell said.

Marc Jacobsen, a researcher at the Royal Danish Defence College, told AFP that the visit would give Copenhagen an opportunity "to show coherence, to show support, to talk about what can they do more concretely, both in terms of how to respond to the United States, but also in terms of concrete co-operation investments".

Frederiksen is also expected to maintain the position laid out earlier by Denmark's foreign minister "that it is possible to enhance US military presence" under a 1951 defence agreement.

During his visit last week to the Pituffik military base, Vance castigated Denmark for not having "done a good job by the people of Greenland" by allegedly under investing in security.

Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen responded in a post on social media that "we are open to criticisms, but let me be completely honest, we do not appreciate the tone in which it's being delivered".

Denmark's foreign ministry has said efforts are underway to set up a meeting between Lokke and his US counterpart Marco Rubio at a meeting of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) foreign ministers this week in Brussels, but "neither Greenland nor the Arctic are planned to be discussed".

"It will be the elephant in the room, right?" Jacobsen said. "But the thing is that if they were to talk about the Arctic and Greenland, then someone from the Greenland government should be present, that's the agreement between Denmark and Greenland."

According to the *Washington Post*, the White House is currently estimating the cost for the US federal government to control Greenland, and the potential revenues it could derive from exploiting its largely untapped natural resources.

## Car on fire after 'explosion' on Amsterdam iconic square

A man set himself and his car on fire on Amsterdam's iconic Dam Square yesterday, police said, in what they suspected was a possible attempt to take his own life.

Images posted by local media and online show a small red car pulling up to the National Monument located near the square's southeastern corner.

A small explosion followed shortly afterwards, with flames shooting out of the vehicle.

The images also show a man with burning clothes close to the burning red car.

Police are seen extinguishing the flames on the man before taking him into custody.

Police sealed off the square while explosives experts investigated the vehicle. It was later removed from the square.

"Camera images show that the fire on the Dam was sparked after an explosion in a car," Amsterdam police confirmed on X, formerly Twitter. "At that moment there were a lot of people close to the vehicle, but as far as we know, no bystanders were injured."

Passers-by can be seen scattering, with several police vehicles quickly surrounding the burning car.

The fire was believed to have been deliberately started by the car's driver "who was injured in the process", police said.

The driver stumbled from the car with his clothes on fire, quickly extinguished by police.

The injured man was taken to hospital and was under police arrest.

He was later identified as a 50-year-old Dutch national from the North Netherlands province. Police however did not release his name.

"Detectives are keeping all scenarios open, but have strong suspicions that the man wanted to take his own life. He is suspected of arson," the police said.

An AFP reporter on the scene saw police and explosives officers probing the burnt-out vehicle, while the square in the heart of the city remained largely cordoned off.

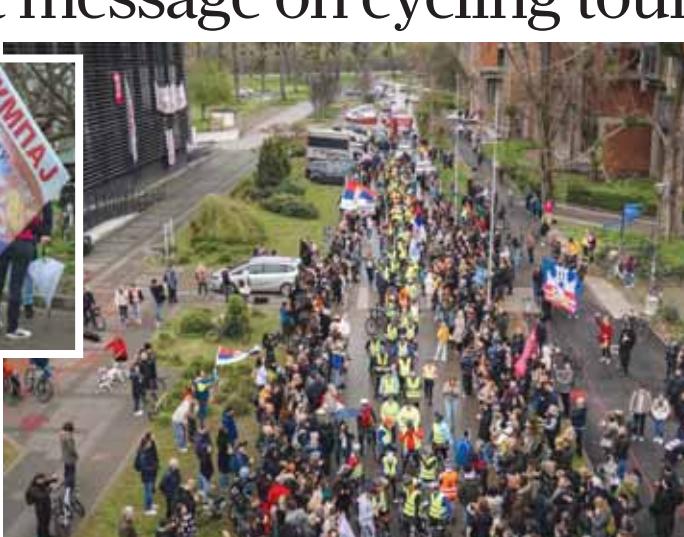
A witness told the local AT5 television station she heard a "small pop, not even a real explosion" on the square and saw people running away.

"Then suddenly there was a loud bang and lots of black smoke. After that I saw the man. Suddenly he was on fire. It was unreal," she said.

The latest incident came days after a Ukrainian man last week stabbed five people at random in the streets around the square, located in the heart of the Dutch capital.

Dutch prosecutors said on Tuesday the man "acted with terrorist intent".

This image taken from a social media video shows a car on fire in a square in Amsterdam. -Reuters



## Students peddle anti-graft message on cycling tour

AFP  
Novi Sad, Serbia

Dozens of students left the Serbian city of Novi Sad to cheers and tears yesterday, at the start of a two-week cycle trip to Strasbourg, where they hope to draw Europe's attention to their anti-corruption fight.

The Balkan country has been gripped by a wave of protests against institutional graft since 16 people were killed when the concrete roof of the renovated Novi Sad railway station collapsed in November last year.

Public outrage over the tragedy has fuelled growing nationwide demonstrations, with many blaming the deaths on corruption and inadequate oversight of construction projects.

However, Lav Stojanovic, a student at the Novi Sad University sports faculty, said that they now wanted their message to be heard beyond the country's borders.

"We are going ... to show the whole world that here the struggle is constant ... and that we are only seeking justice ... and a fairer society," he told AFP before leaving.

With helmets on their heads, fluorescent jackets on their backs and some wrapped in Serbia flags, around 80 students on bicycles left the university campus on Thursday morning.

Despite the rain, hundreds of people sheltered under colourful umbrellas saw them off, chanting "Pumpaj, Pumpaj" ("Pump it, Pump it" in Serbian) – one of the protest movement's slogans.

Aleksa Mikic said he was taking part in the 1,400km pedal "to



A Serbian student carries a placard reading 'Pump for the freedom of Serbia!' on the campus in Novi Sad, ahead of the bicycle ride to Strasbourg, France. -AFP

finally get some answers", with Strasbourg home to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR).

"Unfortunately, in our country we failed to obtain them," he added.

Protests over the Novi Sad tragedy have claimed the scalp of Milos Vucevic, who resigned as prime minister in January.

However, despite the opening of an investigation into the collapse, the protesters want the publication of all renovation contracts awarded to Chinese, Hungarian and French companies.

The authorities have been forced to make some concessions but have so far resisted calls to publish.

During their journey, the students will pass through European capitals and cities including Budapest, Bratislava, Vienna and Munich.

The authorities have been forced to make some concessions but have so far resisted calls to publish.

The aim is also "awakening the diaspora, since a large number of our people live in the cities we will

pass through", said Mikic, 21.

Another cyclist was high school student Elena Ovaterlov, who said she wanted "to inform people about what's happening in Serbia".

She voiced hope that the ECHR would address the issue "because institutions in our country do not do their job as we would like".

Serbia is a candidate to join the European Union and Brussels has asked it to undertake measures promoting media freedom, fight against corruption and reform its electoral system.

However, some of the demonstrators feel Europe is too soft on the authorities in Belgrade and the cyclists want to change that.

President Aleksandar Vucic's right-wing nationalist SNS party has been in power for more than a decade and many Serbs see hope for the future in the young student protesters.

Along the way, they will stay with Serbian expats.

The aim is also "awakening the diaspora, since a large number of our people live in the cities we will

pass through", said Mikic, 21. "They are the voice of all of us," said Duska Hinic, 37, who came to cheer the cyclists. "They are what all of us want to do, but we don't have enough courage or time. The least we can do is to come and see them off, to wish them luck."

Vuk Nekterijevic, 19, said he believed that the protests will "show that our fight is truly sincere, that we are ready ... to do practically everything in our power to show both Europe and the world that this is truly something good worth fighting for".

Once the cyclists had departed, the crowd dispersed, with many well-wishers emotional.

Pensioner Mito Andric was hoping to meet the cyclists again in Vienna on Monday.

"I'm wholeheartedly with the students, from day one and we're going all the way," the 64-year-old whispered.

ing them to firms with over 1,000 staff.

The EU also wants to change its due diligence law so companies have to assess their supply chains for environmental and human rights problems once every five years, rather than every year.

While backed by industry, the drive to simplify has drawn criticism from some investors, left-leaning lawmakers and campaigners, who said the first wave of omnibus proposals would gut corporate accountability and that such swift changes to recently agreed laws created an unstable environment. -Reuters

## Deadliest 2024 hurricane names retired from use: UN

They were most destructive and deadly: hurricanes Beryl, Helene, Milton in the Atlantic and John in the eastern Pacific are names no longer an option to christen future storms, the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) announced on Wednesday.

Instead, the names Brianna, Holly, and Miguel have been added to the list of possibilities for future storms in the Atlantic, while Jake was added for the eastern Pacific roster.

By giving hurricanes and cyclones human names, the WMO believes it is easier to warn populations about a storm's potential dangers.

Names are assigned in alphabetical order, alternating between feminine and masculine names that are short and easy to pronounce.

"The names are repeated every six years, unless a storm is so deadly that its name is retired," the WMO explained.

In 2024, "Hurricane Beryl was the earliest Atlantic basin Category-5 hurricane on record, with major impacts in the Caribbean", it said.

"Hurricanes Helene and Mil-

ton caused catastrophic damage in the United States. Hurricane John triggered deadly and extended flooding in the Mexican state of Guerrero."

Climate change has affected the severity and frequency of such storms, scientists warn.

Tropical cyclones – the term for hurricanes, cyclones, and typhoons – feed on moisture in the air and draw their energy from the heat of the water.

"The proportion of intense tropical cyclones (categories 4-5) is expected to increase at the global scale with increasing global warming," the WMO said in 2022, a message reiterated many times since.

Rising sea surface temperatures are fuelling more powerful and frequent storms.

The 2024 Atlantic hurricane season was the ninth consecutive season with above-average activity, with 18 storms intense enough to be named.

Five storms developed into major hurricanes of categories 3 to 5 on the Saffir-Simpson scale, with winds of 178kph (111mph) or more, according to the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. -AFP

## EU Parliament votes to freeze sustainability rules

rivals in China and the United States, where President Donald Trump is rolling back regulation and imposing tariffs on foreign goods.

The proposal must be

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**GULF TIMES**

## What rebalancing the US economy really requires

US President Donald Trump's aggressive tariff policy has stimulated important debates over rebalancing the US economy at home and in the global economic order. In remarks before the Economic Club of New York on March 6, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent offered a window on the Trump administration's economic-policy approach to "rebalancing" and re-privatising America's economy. Bessent also observed, as has Trump, that the "detox period" as the economy reduces its dependence on federal spending may require short-term "pain" to deliver longer-term gain.

Exactly what is to be rebalanced is not entirely clear. The tax and regulatory policies being considered by the administration provide routes to increase investment in the US by both domestic and foreign firms. But the resulting effects on the dollar's exchange rate and the current account are not well aligned with the reduction in the US trade deficit that the administration seeks.

As US financial markets and domestic industry register pain from on-again, off-again tariffs, it is worth asking whether the goal of rebalancing is well served by Trump making trade policy his top priority. The short answer is no. For example, tariffs on aluminium and steel, key intermediate inputs in manufacturing, are unlikely to rebalance the US economy toward increased manufacturing. A better approach would emphasise long-needed changes in fiscal policy, though the political steps are more challenging than simply saying "rebalancing."

**While some economies, like China and Germany, need to increase domestic spending, the US needs to increase national saving**

saving (by households and corporations) and public saving, it is the latter that requires adjustment. Simply put, the US should reduce government budget deficits and put the federal debt-to-GDP ratio on a stable or even downward trajectory.

To be fair, Bessent has emphasised deficit reduction as an objective that is desirable on its own merits. And deficit reduction offers benefits in terms of the administration's economic realignment goals.

All else being equal, an increase in national saving that results from lower budget deficits puts downward pressure on real interest rates in global capital markets and the term premium on longer-term US public debt. And, all else being equal, the US current-account deficit also would decline, and, to the extent that fiscal consolidation is accomplished by a decline in federal spending, a rebalancing toward the private economy can be accomplished.

On the tax side, the Trump administration should take care to avoid new large tax cuts that raise the budget deficit and reduce public saving. As the Congressional Budget Office's annual Long-Term Budget Outlook makes clear, long-run increases in public saving require reducing the growth of federal spending.

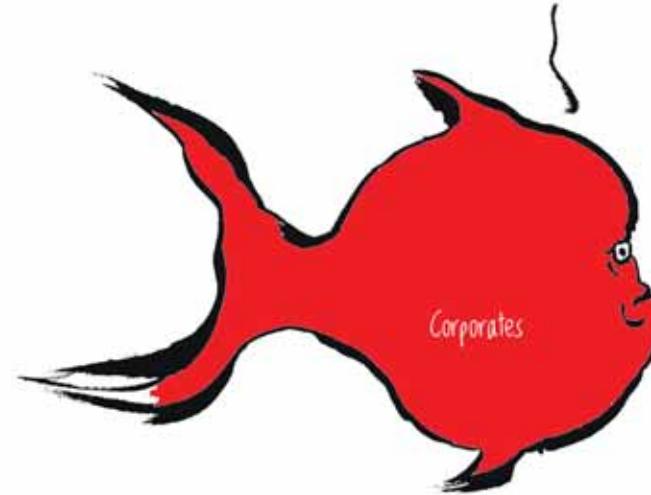
In that regard, pursuing a fiscal path toward rebalancing requires well-known, if politically challenging, steps. While the administration's department of government efficiency (DOGE) focuses on reductions in federal employment, serious long-term spending reductions must centre on slowing the rate of growth of expenditures on Social Security and Medicare.

There are ways to accomplish these changes that strengthen aid to lower-income seniors, while reducing the programme's generosity for more affluent seniors.

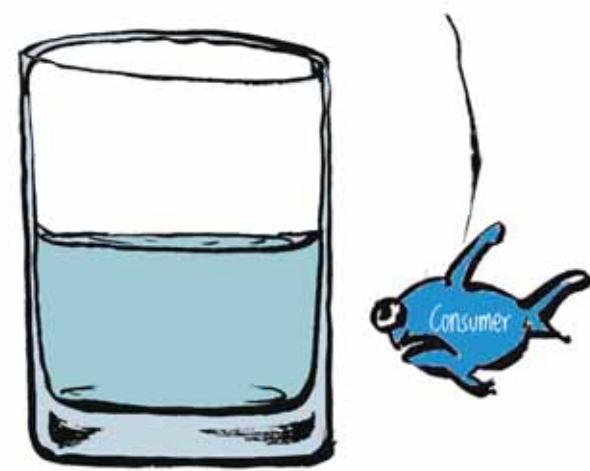
If the Trump administration is serious about rebalancing the US economy, it should build on the president's control of both houses of Congress to push changes with large long-run economic payoffs, despite short-term political challenges. That really would be putting America first. Talk of rebalancing that emphasises tariffs at home and lectures abroad is unlikely to turn Trump's signature slogan, "Make America Great Again," into more than words on a baseball cap. - Project Syndicate

**REYNOLD**  
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04-04-2025

"The glass is half empty."



"The rest is tariff."



## This UN debt initiative is different

By **Mahmoud Mohieldin, Paolo Gentiloni, Trevor Manuel and Yan Wang**  
Washington, DC/Rome/Johannesburg/Boston

**E**conomic development requires financing that is affordable, accessible, and has maturities matched to development outcomes. Yet, for most developing countries, none of the above apply. Instead, an escalating "debt disaster" is unfolding across much of the developing world, exacerbated by a series of cascading global crises.

The urgency of the current crisis cannot be overstated. Over half of the 68 countries eligible for the International Monetary Fund's Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust (PRGT) are now facing debt distress – more than double the number in 2015.

But even this figure fails to capture the scale of the problem, as many countries outside the PRGT framework are also grappling with crippling debt burdens and liquidity challenges. Between 2017 and 2023, developing countries' average debt-service costs surged by nearly 12% per year – more than double the growth rate of their exports and remittance earnings. Consequently, external debt sustainability deteriorated in two-thirds of developing countries over this period, including 37 of 45 African countries with available data.

Despite their unsustainable debt burdens, many countries are reluctant to default, owing to inefficient debt-resolution mechanisms and prohibitively high political and economic costs. As a result, indebted countries prioritise their creditor obligations over their own

development, as ballooning debt-service payments crowd out vital investments in infrastructure and human capital, stifling growth and delaying climate action.

Today, 3.3bn people live in countries that spend more on debt servicing than healthcare and education, the vast majority of them in middle-income economies.

If left unaddressed, current liquidity constraints could quickly morph into a full-blown solvency crisis. Urgent intervention is therefore needed to avert a wave of defaults and put indebted countries on the path to economic independence.

In response to the escalating debt crisis in the Global South, United Nations secretary-general António Guterres established the Expert Group on Debt in December 2024. Its members are tasked with identifying and advancing policy solutions to help developing economies – particularly African countries and small island developing states – break free from the vicious cycle of debt distress.

Although previous UN working groups have tackled sovereign debt issues, several factors set this initiative apart.

The first is timing: successive economic shocks have forced developing countries to borrow, typically at high interest rates, severely restricting their fiscal space. With just five years left until the 2030 deadline for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), developing countries – impeded by a persistent \$4tn annual financing gap – are on track to meet less than one-fifth of the SDG targets.

Second, while previous initiatives focused on developing countries' ability to repay and service their debts, the Expert

Group aims to ensure that any proposed solutions support sustainable development.

Third, the Expert Group aims to identify and promote solutions that can gain political and public support at the global, regional, and national levels. While bold and ambitious measures are essential to addressing the current debt and development crisis, we cannot afford to pursue proposals that stand little chance of achieving the support required to drive meaningful change.

With this in mind, the Expert Group seeks to develop comprehensive strategies. If solutions apply only to new debt or fail to foster economic growth, stabilising debt dynamics could take years. Trade-offs must also be carefully considered; increased reliance on guarantees, for example, might mobilise more private capital but could reduce access to concessional financing and grants for sovereigns.

Lastly, the Expert Group's composition and outreach make it uniquely positioned to address these issues. Supported by UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and other international bodies, the Group brings together former and current officials, policymakers, and leading academics, combining technical expertise with high-level influence.

The Group's strong ties to key institutions and networks – including international financial institutions, the G20, Jubilee 2025, and various regional and national organisations and agencies – create valuable opportunities to engage policymakers, scholars, civil-society representatives, and other stakeholders. By fostering co-ordination among UN member states, the Group can help mobilise political will and refine emerging proposals.

Three upcoming gatherings, in particular – July's Fourth International Financing for Development Conference in Spain, the G20 Summit in South Africa, and November's UN Climate Change Conference (COP30) in Brazil – could serve as critical platforms to promote realistic and practical policy solutions.

To be sure, no single reform will resolve the developing world's debt crisis overnight. But the crisis has laid bare the limitations of conventional approaches, underscoring the urgent need to rethink the structure and purpose of sovereign debt so that countries are no longer forced to choose between repaying their creditors and securing their future.

Given the stakes, any solution must be both swift and capable of uniting a broad coalition of stakeholders. But speed cannot come at the expense of long-term progress. To break the cycle of debt distress, solutions must go beyond short-term fixes and serve as a foundation for sustainable development. – Project Syndicate

• **Mahmoud Mohieldin**, UN Special Envoy on Financing the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, is Co-Chair of the Expert Group on Debt.

• **Paolo Gentiloni**, former European Commissioner for Economy, is Co-Chair of the Expert Group on Debt.

• **Trevor Manuel** is a former minister of finance of South Africa and Co-Chair of the Expert Group on Debt.

• **Yan Wang**, a former senior economist at the World Bank, is Senior Academic Researcher at the Boston University Global Development Policy Center and Co-Chair of the Expert Group on Debt.



Today, 3.3bn people live in countries that spend more on debt servicing than healthcare and education

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# Remaining steadfast on obedience

There are lessons for us all in the passage of the days and nights - and the days are moving away from us as quickly as the clouds. The people shall continue advancing until they finally end up in Paradise or Hell. Also, the rapid rate at which the days and nights are running away from us during these present times confirm the foretelling of "time compression". This is one of the signs of the Last Hour that the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, informed us of. This is therefore, a great opportunity for the wise amongst us to awaken, perform good deeds and repent sincerely. Allah Says what means: "And it is He who has made the night and the day in succession for whoever desires to remember or desires gratitude." [Qur'an 25:62]

Muslims have recently spent a whole month enjoying the blessings of their Lord between supplication, prayer, remembrance of Allah, almsgiving and recitation of the Qur'an. But, alas, the days and their memories of them have passed away so quickly, as if they were autumn leaves blown away by a strong wind.

When one compares the people's spiritual condition during Ramadan to that after it, they will certainly see signs of laziness and negligence in terms of performing righteous deeds. It is as if acts of worship and repentance were only meant for Ramadan! Such people are ignorant of the fact that Allah is the Lord of all months and that Ramadan is only meant to be an occasion when one renews their resolve to worship Allah and persevere in that. That is why Allah Says, after prescribing fasting for His slaves, what means: "...That you may become righteous." [Qur'an 2: 183]

In view of this, it becomes incumbent upon us to consider the reality of worship and its internal impact on us - and not its outward forms. For there are some of us who have nothing to show for their fasting except hunger and thirst and will have no reward for their worship except tiredness and sleeplessness. This is further confirmed when one hears people asking one another merely about the number of times they have recited the Qur'an and listened to sermons and admonitions during Ramadan. Are these people ignorant of how Allah dealt with the people of 'Aad, who were very tall like lofty pillars, the like of which were not created in the land before? Do they not read about what happened to 'Aad, Thamood and the people of Prophet Lut? Do they not consider the Qur'an carefully? Had it been from other than Allah, they would surely have found therein many contradictions.

Where are the hearts that are submissive to Allah? Many hearts have become fertile ground for heedlessness. The youth are stuck in their exuberance for this life and the elders are doing no righteous deeds. We have neglected the Book of our Lord publicly and privately and therefore we are as far from sincere deeds as Mount Safaa is from Mount Marwah. Allah Says what means: "Then do they not reflect upon the Qur'an, or are there locks (upon) their hearts? Indeed those who reverted back (to disbelief) after guidance had become clear to them - Satan enticed them and prolonged hope for them." [Qur'an 47:24-25]



Do not be deluded by your determination to shun the dictates of your whims in Ramadan only to yield to temptation after it, for lustful desires are wickedly intriguing. Remember that many a brave man has been dealt a deadly blow by those whom he overlooked. The one who becomes negligent of his duties to Allah after he has been doing them perfectly, or who falls back into committing sins after he has abstained from them is actually the farthest one from prosperity and salvation - even if he does deceive himself with seasonal acts of worship. He is also likely to be punished by being deprived of the joy and sweetness of worship. As for the believing men and women, who are inwardly as pure as they are outwardly and who worship Allah at all times, they will taste the sweetness of worship and Allah will provide for them for all of their needs. They are the ones who sincerely follow the path of the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, constantly in their worship of Allah.

Ramadan is distinguished among other months as far as acts of worship are concerned, but this does not mean that acts of worship should only be performed during Ramadan. The Messenger of Allah, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, was always generous and his generosity increased during Ramadan. He used to seek refuge with Allah from abandoning committing good deeds after performing them constantly. He, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, would say: "I seek refuge with You from recession after advancement." Allah also warns against this when He Says what means: "And do not be like she who untwisted her spun thread after it was strong...." [Qur'an 16:92]

A supplication of the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, also confirms this. He would say: "O Allah! Make this life for me an increase in good deeds." Therefore,

*we can see that he did not restrict the performance of good deeds to Ramadan alone, but followed the commandment of His Lord which means: "And worship your Lord until there comes to you the certainty (i.e., death)." [Qur'an 15: 99]*

Human beings are not doubt imperfect. Islamic law, therefore, does not burden us with that which would exceed our capabilities. We are however required to hold fast, at all times, to the trustworthy handhold (the religion of Islam). This will make us attain the pleasure or our Lord in this world and the next and will save us from destruction as well as protecting us from all evils. This is despite however little our acts of worship may amount to. The Messenger of Allah, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "O people! Do whatever you can of righteous deeds, for Allah will not cease to accept your deeds and bless you as long as you do not become apathetic. The most beloved of all good deeds to Allah is the one done continuously even if it is little." [Al-Bukhari & Muslim]

In view of this, we must understand that there are established acts of worship that must be performed at all times and never fluctuate, even after Ramadan like Salaah (prayer), Zakaah (obligatory charity), invocation of Allah and repentance, which Allah enjoins on His slaves when He Says what means: "...And turn to Allah in repentance, all of you, O believers, that you might succeed." [Qur'an 24:31]

The Messenger of Allah, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, used to say: "I seek the forgiveness of my Lord and repent to Him one-hundred times a day."

Now that you know this, it becomes incumbent on you to put it into practice, for you have tasted the sweetness of worship and closeness to Allah in Ramadan, do not therefore, ruin that with your sins. Moreover, the continued observation of acts of worship or negligence in them is

an indication of the inner-workings of the heart, for it is the most changeable organ in the human body. That is why the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "The heart was given that name because of its inconstancy. The similitude of the heart is like that of a feather at the bottom of a tree which the wind blows hither and thither." [Alhmad] The Messenger of Allah, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, used to say in his supplication: "O turner of the hearts! Establish my heart firmly on your religion!"

It is your right to celebrate Eid for it is Allah who made joy and happiness among the rewards for certainty of faith and made sorrow and distress among the recompense for displeasure and doubt. Eid should be an occasion for wholesome recreation and amusement. It is when people exceed the limits of Allah in their celebration and harm others that it becomes unlawful. This is because in these instances, people do not give Allah His due rights, nor do they thank Him for His blessings. 'Ali bin Abi Taalib, may Allah be pleased with him, saw some people playing around in a manner that is displeasing to Allah on the day of Eid and remarked: "If Allah has accepted these people's fasting then these are not the actions of the grateful and if Allah did not accept their fasting then such is not the behaviour of the fearful."

Ibn Al-Qayyim, may Allah have mercy upon him, said about happiness: "Surely, Allah shall bring this ware (happiness and joy) to its merchants (i.e. those who know how best to rejoice) and those who know its value, though it may, on the way, fall into the hands of those who do not appreciate its value, for many are carriers of knowledge who are not themselves knowledgeable and many are carriers of knowledge unto those who are better than them in understanding." Allah Says what

means: "The example of those who were entrusted with the Torah and then did not take it on (by neglecting their duty towards it) is like that of a donkey who carries volumes (of books)..." [Qur'an 62:5]

The Muslim should therefore, not exceed the limits when rejoicing for Allah does not love such people. This is because excessive joy generates arrogance and disdain for the truth. While commenting on the saying of Allah which means: "From the evil of the retreating whisperer (a devil who makes evil suggestions to man but disappears when one remembers Allah)." [Qur'an 114:4] One of the Qur'anic commentators said: "The devil occupies the heart of man whenever he is happy or sad, but when he remembers Allah he withdraws." So fear Allah during joyful moments for the sincere Muslim does not transgress the limits, nor does he deviate from the truth due to his happiness. Ali Ibn Abi Taalib said: "Every day in which one does not disobey his Lord is a cause for celebration."

The Wise Law-Giver has prescribed for you the fasting of six days in the month of Shawwaal. The Messenger of Allah, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Whoever fasts (the whole of) Ramadan and then follows it up with six days fasting in the month of Shawwaal, is like the one who fasts for the whole year (in terms of reward)." It is better to observe this fast immediately after Eid and do them in succession, but there is no harm if one separates between them or fasts them anytime during that month. I must add that these six fasts are not obligatory.

Whoever fasts them will be rewarded for that and whoever does not, will not be punished. If one is however consistent in fasting it for years and then becomes unable to do so in a particular year due to illness or travel, they will get the same reward as if they fasted them. This is because the Messenger of Allah, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "If a man is sick or travels, what he used to do while he was resident and healthy will be written down for him."

However, it is not permissible for someone to fast these six days before they make up for the days that they missed during Ramadan. One will only get the reward for the six days fasting in Shawwaal if they have completely fasted the whole of Ramadan. Finally, let whoever wants an additional reward endeavour to fast on the 13th, 14th and 15th day of every month for the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, has explained that whoever fasts them is like the one who fasts perpetually.

Fear Allah as He should be feared and be conscious of Him in private and in public. Worship Him as if you see Him, for even though you do not see Him, He sees you.

Allah Says what means: "And rely upon the Exalted in Might, the Merciful. Who sees you when you arise. And your movement among those who prostrate. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Knowing." [Qur'an 26:217-220]

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

 Islamweb.net English

# Making up missed days of fasting

It is from the mercy of Allah and the easiness of the religion that we are allowed to break the fast if there is any danger, hardship or difficulty in it. Allah Says (what means): "...He (Allah) has chosen you and has not placed upon you in the religion any difficulty..." [Qur'an 22:7.8]

It is allowed for those who are (not chronically) ill and for travellers to break their fasts during Ramadan, but they must make up the days they missed. Allah Says (what means): "[Fasting for] a limited number of days. So whoever among you is ill or on a journey [during them] - then an equal number of days [are to be made up]..." [Qur'an 2:184]

Mu'aath, may Allah be pleased with him, said: "Verily, Allah made the fast obligatory upon the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam (may Allah exalt his mention), by revealing (what means): "O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you... and for those who can fast [but do not] there is a 'ransom' payment..." At that time, whoever wished to do so would fast and whoever wished not to do so would feed a poor person, and that was sufficient for them. After that, Allah revealed another verse (what means): "The month of Ramadan in which the Qur'an was revealed... Whoever is resident among you during this month is to fast." [By this verse,] fasting was established for those who were resident and healthy. A concession was made for the traveller and the sick, and the feeding of the poor by the elderly who could not fast was [left] confirmed." [Ahmad, Abu Dawood and Al-Bayhaqi]

If fasting during travel is not difficult, then it is better to fast. If fasting would be difficult then breaking the fast is better. Abu Sa'eed al-Khudri, may Al-

lah be pleased with him, said: "We used to travel for war expeditions with the Messenger of Allah, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, during Ramadan. Some of us would fast and some of us would not fast, and the fasting person would not find fault with the one who was not fasting, and the person who was not fasting would not find fault with the person who was fasting. Then they thought that the person who had the strength would fast and that was better. And they thought that the person who felt weak would not fast and that was better." [Muslim]

If the person is ill during Ramadan, and is able to fast without difficulty, then he fasts. If he is unable then he breaks his fast.

If the ill person expects to recuperate from his illness, he waits until he recuperates and then he makes up for whatever days he did not fast. However, if he is not expected to recover, he breaks his fast and gives charity for each day that he does not fast. Allah Says (what means): "...And upon those who are able [to fast, but with hardship] - a ransom [as substitute] of feeding a poor person [each day]..." [Qur'an 2:184]

As for the person who has reached an old age, at which he doesn't have the strength to fast, he may break the fast and give charity for every day that he did not fast. Ibn 'Abbas, may Allah be pleased with him, said: "It was permitted for the very elderly man (or woman) to feed a poor person for every day (that he did not fast), and he did not have to make up for the days." [Ad-Daraqutni and Al-Hakim]

Breaking the fast without a legitimate excuse:

Regarding the one who intentionally breaks the fast by having sexual intercourse with his wife during the daytime in Ramadan, then he has committed a great sin

and violated the sacredness of this month, and must make up the fast for that day. In addition, he is required to free a slave if it is possible to do so, if not, he has to fast two consecutive months and if he is unable to do so, then he has to feed 60 poor and needy people. The same is required of the wife as is required of her husband, if she freely consented (to having sexual intercourse). However, if she was forced, then nothing is required of her according to the predominant opinion of the scholars.

If one intentionally breaks his fast by eating or drinking without a legitimate excuse, then again he has committed a great sin and violated the sacredness of this month. Such a person has a severe threat awaiting him. Prophet Muhammad, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Whoever breaks fasting of Ramadan without having a legitimate excuse or being ill, he cannot make up for that day, even if he undertakes a perpetual fast." [Al-Bukhari] Imams Ahmad, Ash-Shafi'i, Sa'eed Ibn al-Musayib and Al-Sha'bi and others - may Allah have mercy upon them - declared that one should sincerely repent and seek the forgiveness of Almighty Allah and make up the day later.

On the other hand, a group of Muslim scholars believe that expiation is required for breaking the fast of any day of Ramadan without a legal reason. They say, one should fast for two months consecutively or feed 60 poor people as well as to make up the day later with any of both forms of expiation.

Vomiting, if done deliberately, invalidates the fast, and necessitates making up for the fast. However, if vomit overcomes one and exits without one's choosing, the fast is not nullified.

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

# Keeping up the good work

In Ramadan, people pray, fast, perform 'Umrah (the minor pilgrimage), spend in charity, supplicate and recite the Qur'an, yet the question remains: have any of these good deeds been accepted? Allah The Almighty Says (what means): "...Indeed Allah only accepts from the righteous [who fear Him]." [Qur'an 3: 27]

Fudhaalib Ibn 'Ubayd would say, "If I knew that Allah had accepted from me (something) as minor as a seed's weight of good deeds, then that would be more beloved to me than possessing this world and all that it contains, because Allah Says: [the above-mentioned verse]."

Our righteous Salaf (predecessors) would exert extra efforts in worship and then rebuke themselves and doubt that their deeds were even accepted by Allah The Almighty. They were described by Allah The Almighty as (what means): "[And they who give what they give while their hearts are fearful]" [Qur'an 23: 60] They would be far more concerned about the acceptance of the deeds than the amount of good deeds they performed.

What good is left for those who miss out on the virtue of Ramadan? What greater disaster is there for them, than being deprived of the mercy and forgiveness of Allah The Almighty in this month? Moreover, the pious people from whom Allah The Almighty accepts righteous deeds have one distinctive trait, which is refraining from sinning after the end of Ramadan.

Many people think that since they have performed scores of good deeds they can rely on these deeds, believing that they have enough good deeds in their record. However, the genuine pious people are those who continue to be devout worshippers even after the conclusion of the month. When Allah The Almighty describes the devout believers and worshippers, He does not restrict their devotion and obedience to a limited period; rather, He describes them to be this way always, not only during Ramadan.

He Says (what means): {Certainly will the believers have succeeded: They who are during their prayer humbly submissive.

And they who turn away from ill speech. And they who are observant of Zakaah. And they who guard their private parts.} [Qur'an 23: 1-5]

Muslims are commanded to be devout worshippers until death. Allah The Almighty Says (what means): {And worship your Lord until there comes to you the certainty [i.e., death].} [Qur'an 15: 99] One must persevere in worshipping Allah The Almighty and being obedient to Him. This may be the reason why it was legislated for us to fast six optional days in the month of Shawwaal (which directly follows the month of Ramadan) and this was made equivalent in reward to fasting for the whole year, because the reward is multiplied tenfold. Therefore, the 30 days in Ramadan are equal to 300 days, while the six that follow in Shawwaal are equal to 60 more days - which constitutes a full year, in terms of reward.

Many people are deceived by the acts of worship they perform during Ramadan. They exert great efforts in completing the whole Qur'an once in Ramadan - with some even completing it several times - and praying the Taraweeh (voluntary night prayers). Others might wait in the Masjid after the end of one prayer till the time of the next one, and be engaged in mentioning Allah The Almighty from the Fajr (morning) prayer until sunrise (the reward for which is like that of performing a Hajj and an 'Umrah). However, although they perform all these deeds, they are not inwardly sincere and their intentions may become corrupted and impure. Shaytaan (Satan) may whisper to them, making them feel that, having performed all these good deeds, they have accumulated mountains of rewards, and that their balance is therefore very high. This makes them become arrogant and they may start slackening in their worship.

However, if one recalls a single verse from the Qur'an, such thoughts and feelings would immediately cease. It is the Saying of Allah The Almighty (what means): {And do not confer favour to acquire more.} [Qur'an 74: 6]



## Sky's the limit at Lusail City fest

The much anticipated Lusail Sky Festival, which began at the Al Saad Plaza in Lusail City yesterday, will run until tomorrow (Saturday), from 4pm-10pm. The event was unveiled by Visit Qatar in collaboration with Qatari Diar. Pictured are some of the action at the launch yesterday. **PICTURES:** Shaji Kayamkulam



## Lusail Sky Festival dazzles

**From Page 1**

In between the aerial performances, visitors were treated to dances, mini parade, and roving installations, as well as an exhibition showcasing classic airplanes.

The Visit Qatar hot air balloon also enthralled spectators with a brief night glow.

The Poseidon waterscreen and the First Laser show ushered in the nighttime activities.

This was followed by the Phoenix Paramotors, Bushcat Demo Team, Scandinavian Airshow, and the GROBS grand finale Intro Scandinavian Airborne Pyrotechnics.

Touted as the largest event of its kind in the region, the inaugural Lusail Sky Festival will culminate tomorrow with a grand finale

of fireworks, Poseidon waterscreen laser show, and laser show.

Throughout the festival, spectators will enjoy a spectacular series of open-air activities, including skydiving demonstrations, night synchronised laser and fireworks displays with music and light effects, and a spectacular drone show featuring over 3,000 illuminated drones and 150 pyrotechnic-equipped aircraft, creating captivating nighttime imagery.

Aside from the aerial performances, visitors can also enjoy the food zone, which features 14 food trucks and carts for a wide range of culinary delights.

The entertainment theatre also features live performances and many other family-friendly activities.

