

TUESDAY
14 APRIL 2026
26 SHAWWAL 1447

The Peninsula



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South Korea expresses solidarity with Qatar

DOHA: Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani has received a written message from President H E Lee Jae Myung of the Republic of South Korea, expressing solidarity with Doha following recent regional developments.

H E Lee conveyed his country's support for the State of Qatar in the aftermath of Iranian attacks on Qatar and the wider region. He also expressed hope for a negotiated settlement to bring the current crisis to an end.

The letter was delivered

yesterday by South Korean Presidential Chief of Staff H E Kang Hoon-sik, during a meeting with H H the Amir at the Amiri Diwan in Doha.

During the meeting, both sides discussed bilateral relations between Qatar and South Korea, with particular focus on cooperation in energy and economic sectors. They also addressed the latest regional and international developments.

The meeting was attended by Chief of the Amiri Diwan H E Abdullah bin Mohammed Al Khulaifi. — QNA



PM underlines importance of keeping maritime routes open

DOHA: Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs H E Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani received a phone call from Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran H E Abbas Araghchi, to discuss recent regional developments.

During the conversation, the two sides stressed the importance of maintaining the ceasefire between Iran and the United States in a bid to enhance regional stability.

H E Sheikh Mohammed emphasized the need for all parties to respond positively to ongoing mediation efforts, calling for dialogue and peaceful means to address the root causes of the crisis and reach a sustainable agreement that prevents renewed escalation.

He also underlined the importance of keeping maritime routes open and ensuring freedom of navigation, warning against using them as a bargaining chip.

H E the Prime Minister further cautioned that any disruption to shipping lanes could have serious consequences for countries in the region, as well as for global energy and food supplies, with wider implications for international peace and security. — QNA

NHRC launches schools campaign to boost human rights awareness

DOHA: The National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) has launched its annual awareness campaign aimed at promoting a culture of human rights among students, as part of broader efforts to strengthen public understanding of rights and responsibilities.

The initiative targets primary, preparatory and secondary schools across Qatar. It includes a training package introducing the committee's mission and vision, alongside sessions explaining core human rights principles.

The campaign also features

specialised lectures on protecting children in a safe digital environment, with activities beginning at the Fourth Assalam School.

According to NHRC's Director of Programs and Education Hamad Al Hajri said the initiative forms part of its 2024-2030 strategy, particularly its goal of expanding human rights awareness across society.

He said starting with schools reflects a belief that early education plays a key role in preventing future violations, describing awareness as a

The initiative targets primary, preparatory and secondary schools across Qatar. It includes a training package introducing the committee's mission and vision, alongside sessions explaining core human rights principles.

long-term investment in building a just society where rights are respected.

"Knowledge of rights and duties is essential for both individual and societal development," he said, adding that awareness is fundamental to advancing freedom, justice and peace.

School officials have welcomed the initiative. Safaa Abu Nada, head of the Fourth Assalam School, praised the campaign's content and delivery, saying it had helped raise students' awareness of digital rights and responsible online behavior.

As part of the program, NHRC's Head of Studies and

Research Abdulrahman Al Hammadi delivered a detailed session on child protection in the digital space. He highlighted the risks associated with rapid digital transformation, including legal and ethical challenges stemming from increased online interaction.

He warned that the digital world transcends geographical and cultural boundaries, underlining the need to equip children with the knowledge to navigate it safely, in line with international human rights standards. — QNA

Kahramaa enhances digital fault reporting to boost efficiency

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Qatar General Electricity and Water Corporation (Kahramaa) continues to strengthen its digital services to ensure faster response to technical faults and improve overall customer satisfaction, according to Mohammed Salem Al Shammari, Head of Contact Center and Customer Care.

Speaking in an interview with *Qatar TV*, Al Shammari outlined corporation's approach to handling technical reports through a range of digital channels designed to facilitate seamless communication with customers.

He explained that Kahramaa has introduced multiple electronic platforms, including a smart mobile application, its official website, WhatsApp service, and an interactive voice response (IVR) system. These channels enable users to submit technical fault reports easily, which are then instantly registered and automatically linked to specialised field teams across the country, ensuring rapid response and efficient handling.

He highlighted that once a report is submitted, users receive

a reference number that allows them to track the status of their complaint in real time, from initial submission through to resolution, via any of the available digital channels. This feature ensures transparency and keeps users continuously informed throughout the process.

He emphasized that early reporting by customers plays a critical role in maintaining service continuity and safety. Prompt notifications allow technical teams to intervene quickly, resolve issues efficiently, and ensure uninterrupted service around the clock.

Regarding the most commonly used channels, Al Shammari noted that the mobile application and WhatsApp service are among the most popular options due to their ease of use and accessibility.

In addition to fault reporting, Kahramaa encourages all to take full advantage of its digital services, which include requests for moving to a new residence, services for new property owners, applications for exemptions granted to Qatari citizens, bill payments, and consumption monitoring. →P2

Awqaf Ministry highlights shift from strategic planning to measurable societal impact

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs has unveiled its 2025 annual outcomes, highlighting a decisive shift from strategic planning to delivering measurable societal impact, in line with its 2025-2030 strategy and the Qatar National Vision 2030.

The Ministry described 2025 as a landmark year in which its programmes moved beyond framework-building to achieving tangible results on the ground.

The report provides a comprehensive overview of initiatives across religious outreach, education, endowments, social development, and institutional performance, reflecting a broader transformation of religious work into an integrated national system that promotes awareness, reinforces values, strengthens identity, and supports social cohesion and sustainability.

At the core of this transformation is a shift in how success is measured. Rather than focusing solely on the number of activities, the Ministry emphasised evaluating real impact on behaviour, knowledge, and values, with clear performance indicators to guide its work.

Undersecretary of the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs H E Dr. Sheikh Khalid bin Mohammed bin Ghanem Al Thani said the 2025 results demonstrate a qualitative leap in performance.

He noted that the Ministry has



Dr. Sheikh Khalid added that the Ministry's extensive outreach system, encompassing thousands of sermons, lessons, and programmes that reached hundreds of thousands, illustrates how a structured and institutionally driven religious discourse can strengthen value systems, raise awareness, and reinforce national identity.

successfully transitioned from planning to implementation and impact measurement, ensuring that its religious, educational, endowment, and social programmes are closely aligned with community needs and assessed against defined benchmarks.

Dr. Sheikh Khalid added that the Ministry's extensive outreach system, encompassing thousands of sermons, lessons, and programmes that reached hundreds of thousands, illustrates how a structured and institutionally driven religious discourse can strengthen value systems, raise awareness, and reinforce national identity.

The Undersecretary stressed that the

Ministry's strategy places people at the centre of its priorities, treating religious work as an essential component of comprehensive development. Efforts throughout 2025 focused on modernising religious discourse, expanding outreach, utilising technology, and building community partnerships to ensure lasting impact and greater accessibility of services.

He underscored that the achievements of 2025 mark the beginning of a more impactful phase rather than the conclusion of a cycle, with the Ministry continuing to enhance programme quality, improve efficiency, and deepen its role in serving society within a unified national vision. →P2

France reaffirms Qatar as 'trusted partner', pledges continued support

FAZEENA SALEEM
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: France has reaffirmed Qatar's position as a "trusted partner" and pledged to stand "shoulder to shoulder" with the country, while highlighting the importance of continued mediation and diplomacy to ensure lasting regional stability.

Director General for Political and Security Affairs at France's Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, H E Frédéric Mondoloni, in an exclusive interview with *The Peninsula* yesterday, underscored Paris' commitment to Doha during the crisis.

"Qatar is a trusted partner, and we want to honour our commitments during this challenging period," he said, adding that France remains "very committed" to ensuring dialogue prevails



and that the ceasefire between the US and Iran is preserved.

Mondoloni said that cooperation between Qatar and France has deepened significantly in both defence and diplomatic spheres during the

Qatar is a trusted partner, and we want to honour our commitments during this challenging period," he said, adding that France remains "very committed" to ensuring dialogue prevails and that the ceasefire between the US and Iran is preserved.

H E Frédéric Mondoloni

crisis. "We are standing along our partners in the region and France, including Qatar, to ensure the security of Qatar and structural integrity. We have a strong link with Qatar," he said, pointing to the longstanding defence

agreement between the two countries as "an asset."

He highlighted sustained high-level engagement between the leadership of both countries since February 28, including exchanges between the French President and H H the Amir, as well as between foreign ministers and senior officials. The recent visit of France's Minister for Armed Forces was also cited as part of ongoing efforts to reinforce ties, with more high-level visits expected.

On the ground, France has continued to support Qatar's security through military deployments. "We have deployed Rafale jet fighters in the region. We have deployed air defence systems and radar capabilities in the region, including in Qatar. So, this deployment will continue as long as the situation requires," Mondoloni said,

reaffirming France's readiness to remain engaged "for now and for the future."

Describing bilateral ties as "excellent," Mondoloni said the partnership spans political, economic and cultural domains, built on strong leadership relations and mutual trust. He emphasised that this foundation enables both countries to further strengthen cooperation, particularly during challenging times.

During his two-day visit to Doha for political consultations, Mondoloni met senior Qatari officials, including Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs H E Dr. Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh Al Khulaifi and Advisor to the Prime Minister and Official Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Majed bin Mohammed Al Ansari. →P2

EDITORIAL

Towards measurable social impact

THE Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs' 2025 outcomes mark more than just a successful year as they signal a deeper transformation in how religious institutions can shape modern societies.

By moving decisively from planning frameworks to measurable societal impact, the Ministry has positioned itself at the intersection of tradition and progress, aligning religious work with the broader ambitions of Qatar National Vision 2030.

What stands out most is not the scale of activity but the shift in mindset. For years, success in religious outreach was often measured by volume that how many sermons delivered, lectures held, or programmes organised.

In 2025, that paradigm changed. The Ministry has embraced a more meaningful question: what difference are these efforts actually making in people's lives? This pivot toward evaluating behavioural change, knowledge acquisition, and value formation reflects a maturity in governance that prioritises outcomes over optics.

The numbers still matter, of course. Delivering over 111,000 religious lessons and reaching more than half a million people is not a small achievement. But their real significance lies in what they represent which is a structured, institutional approach to shaping public consciousness. In a rapidly evolving society where tradition and modernity constantly interact, such efforts help anchor communities in shared values while fostering adaptability.

Undersecretary of the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Dr. Sheikh Khalid bin Mohammed bin Ghanem Al-Thani said the 2025 results demonstrate a qualitative leap in performance. "The Ministry has successfully transitioned from planning to implementation and impact measurement, ensuring that its religious, educational, endowment, and social programmes are closely aligned with community needs and assessed against defined benchmarks."

Equally notable is the Ministry's emphasis on inclusivity and accessibility. Upgrading mosques to accommodate people with disabilities and expanding digital and community outreach channels demonstrate a recognition that religious engagement must evolve alongside societal needs.

The role of the Sheikh Abdulla Bin Zaid Al Mahmoud Islamic Cultural Centre further reinforces this vision. Its extensive outreach to non-Arabic speakers highlights Qatar's unique demographic reality and its commitment to coexistence. By prioritising dialogue, language education, and cultural exchange, the centre has transformed religious outreach into a bridge between communities rather than a one-directional message.

Dr. Sheikh Khalid added that the Ministry's extensive outreach system, encompassing thousands of sermons, lessons, and programmes that reached hundreds of thousands, illustrates how a structured and institutionally-driven religious discourse can strengthen value systems, raise awareness, and reinforce national identity.

By embedding religious work within a broader framework of social development, the Ministry is redefining its role in national life. It is no longer just a custodian of tradition but an active contributor to building a cohesive, confident, and forward-looking society.

Shura Council approves amended draft law on drones

DOHA: The Shura Council held its regular weekly sitting at the Tamim bin Hamad Hall yesterday, under the chairmanship of Speaker H E Hassan bin Abdullah Al Ghanim.

The Council welcomed a ceasefire agreement between the United States and Iran, expressing its hope the deal underpin stability and lasting peace, while promoting dialogue, mutual understanding and respect for international law.

The Council also commended mediation and diplomatic efforts in reaching the agreement. Members emphasised the importance of building upon the deal to support regional stability and reduce tensions. At the start of the proceedings, Secretary-General H E Nayef bin Mohammed Al Mahmoud read out the agenda after which the minutes of its previous meeting were approved.

The Council reviewed a draft government bill on traffic and referred it to the Internal and External Affairs Committee for further study and reporting.

It also approved an amended draft law on drones and referred it back to the government following discussions based on the committee's recommendations.

The Council also agreed to extend the



Speaker H E Hassan bin Abdullah Al Ghanim chairing the Shura Council session yesterday.

mandate of the Health, General Services and the Environment Committee to finalise examining several proposals including draft laws on animal health and animal welfare, as well as a request for a general debate on childhood obesity in the State of Qatar.

Meanwhile, the Council debated a report by H E Dr. Ahmed bin Hamad Al Mohannadi's

participation in a virtual parliamentary session in September 2025 on regulating military artificial intelligence. Another report was presented by H E Amina bint Youssef Al Jaidah on her participation in an Arab parliamentary dialogue on protecting the elderly from violence, abuse and neglect, which was held virtually in December of 2025. — QNA

DICID roundtable highlights social cohesion as key to crisis resilience



Chairman of DICID Board of Directors, Dr. Ibrahim bin Saleh Al Nuaimi addressing the event.

DOHA: The Doha International Center for Inter-faith Dialogue (DICID) organised a roundtable on strengthening social cohesion and building community resilience in times of crisis, in partnership with the Cultural Village Foundation - Katara and in cooperation with the "Qatar Minna wa Nahnu Minha" initiative (Arabic for "Qatar is part of us and we are part of it"), launched by a group of academics and intellectuals residing in Qatar.

Speaking to QNA, Chairman of DICID's Board of Directors, Dr. Ibrahim bin Saleh Al Nuaimi, said the discussions focused on the importance of reinforcing social cohesion to address potential challenges and threats.

Al Nuaimi commended the contributions of speakers from various disciplines, noting a shared emphasis on the strong bonds between citizens and residents in Qatar, built on harmony, coordination and ongoing cooperation.

He also praised the quality of the presentations and participants' engagement, as well as their recognition of Qatar's role and successful experience in promoting

dialogue initiatives.

In his opening remarks, Al Nuaimi said the event comes amid rapidly evolving challenges facing contemporary societies, highlighting its aim to exchange expertise and promote values of belonging, cooperation and responsibility to support a cohesive and resilient society.

He underlined that principles rooted in Islamic teachings, including the Holy Quran and the Prophetic Sunnah, emphasise cooperation and mutual support, reinforcing social trust as a foundation for strong and stable communities.

Al Nuaimi added that these values align with modern scientific research, which underscores that social cohesion is not only a moral principle but also a key requirement for stability and sustainability.

He noted that since its establishment in 2007, DICID has worked to translate dialogue into practical programmes and effective partnerships that promote coexistence, cooperation and mutual understanding, expressing hope that the roundtable would further reinforce societal stability.

The session, moderated by Dr. Sekou Marafa Toure, senior researcher at DICID, brought together a select group of experts who discussed approaches to enhancing social cohesion, resilience and stability, as well as the role of awareness, shared values and women's contributions in fostering peaceful coexistence. — QNA



Participants and guests attending the session.

Awqaf Ministry highlights shift from strategic planning to measurable societal impact

FROM PAGE 1

The report shows that the dawah sector remained the primary driver of community impact, supported by wide-ranging programmes, diverse engagement tools, and integration with mosques, institutions, and digital platforms.

During the year, 111,946 religious lessons were delivered in mosques across the country, alongside more than 7,200 public lectures and outreach activities, benefiting over 520,000 people.

These efforts contributed to promoting values, encouraging positive behaviour, strengthening a sense of belonging, and supporting family and community cohesion.

In parallel, the Ministry made notable progress in mosque infrastructure, with 34 new mosques inaugurated across different areas and 21 mosques upgraded to accommodate people with disabilities in line with inclusive design standards.

The report also highlighted zakat performance, revealing that total disbursements reached QR335,262,731, distributed to eligible beneficiaries based on clearly defined social priorities.

Overall, the Ministry concluded that the 2025 outcomes reflect steady progress toward a measurable and sustainable model of social development, where religious work is closely linked to national priorities and plays an active role in building a cohesive, confident, and forward-looking society.

Kahramaa enhances digital fault reporting to boost efficiency

FROM PAGE 1

Al Shammari also stressed the importance of regularly updating personal information and contact details to ensure uninterrupted delivery of notifications and service updates.

These initiatives form part of Kahramaa's broader efforts to enhance service quality, ensure operational efficiency, and deliver a seamless and reliable customer experience across Qatar.

These initiatives have recently been reinforced by regional recognition, as Kahramaa's Customer Services Department won the Outstanding Performance Award for customer service departments across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, specifically for excellence in handling complaints and service requests.

This achievement crowns Kahramaa's long record of successes and reinforces its leadership in the electricity and water sectors.

It reflects the efficiency of its customer service system and its ability to enhance service quality in line with the best global practices, supporting the corporation's strategic directions and boosting customer satisfaction.

Qatar University webinar highlights ethical use of laboratory animals

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Qatar University (QU), represented by its Laboratory Animal Research Center (LARC), in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Health, organised a specialised research webinar on the ethical use of laboratory animals as part of its Animal Research Seminar Series.

The event brought together experts and professionals to address

best practices, regulatory frameworks, and scientific considerations that enhance research quality and integrity.

The webinar focused on strengthening awareness of ethical standards and regulatory compliance in animal-based research, highlighting their critical role in advancing high-quality scientific outcomes. Participants engaged in a series of expert-led presentations covering recent legislative developments, research funding

frameworks, animal welfare considerations, criteria for selecting appropriate animal models, and the scientific impact of sample size on research validity and reproducibility.

The event featured contributions from leading specialists representing national institutions and QU, reflecting a collaborative approach to advancing responsible research practices. Discussions emphasised the importance of aligning scientific rigor with ethical responsibility,

ensuring that research conducted within Qatar meets international standards while addressing national priorities. A representative from QU noted that the university remains committed to fostering a research environment grounded in integrity, innovation, and compliance, highlighting that initiatives such as this webinar contribute to building national research capacity and enhancing the quality and impact of scientific outputs.

France reaffirms Qatar as 'trusted partner', pledges continued support

FROM PAGE 1

He said the visit aimed to exchange views and "demonstrate also the support of France to Qatar in this very difficult situation after the war broke out in February."

"I think France has demonstrated its support to Qatar, sending what we can do in terms of military capabilities, and defence capabilities to help Qatar overcome this very difficult situation," he said, also expressing appreciation for Qatar's assistance in facilitating the safe return of French nationals affected during the early days of the conflict.

Addressing the broader regional situation, Mondoloni

welcomed the ceasefire between the US and Iran and underscored the importance of sustaining it through diplomacy. He added that while the ceasefire is "good news," a comprehensive and sustained negotiation process is essential to address underlying issues.

France, he said, believes that "regional stability can only be solved through negotiation," stressing the need for a "real serious... global negotiation process" covering nuclear, ballistic and regional concerns related to Iran.

Although not directly part of the recent Islamabad dialogue between the United States and Iran, France is closely



The freedom of navigation should be established, guaranteed, without any kind of mechanism of toll passage. It needs to be free and toll-free.

monitoring developments and encouraging continued talks.

Mondoloni acknowledged limited progress but stressed that dialogue must continue. "We should not consider that even if an agreement was not found... that is a lost cause, not

at all," he said, urging stakeholders to build on areas of progress. France, he added, remains actively engaged on multiple diplomatic fronts, including at the United Nations Security Council, where it supported efforts condemning attacks on Gulf states and advocating for regional stability.

"We condemned the horrible and illegal attacks of Iran against its neighbours, including Qatar," he said, referencing diplomatic efforts that led to the adoption of a Security Council resolution addressing the escalation.

Mondoloni also stressed the importance of ensuring freedom of navigation in the Strait of

Hormuz in accordance with international law. "The freedom of navigation should be established, guaranteed, without any kind of mechanism of toll passage. It needs to be free and toll-free," he said.

He revealed that France, alongside the United Kingdom, is preparing to organise a conference aimed at launching a "peaceful multinational mission" to secure maritime routes in the Strait.

"It is strictly defensive... but we want to deploy it as soon as possible," he said, adding that discussions are ongoing with partners from Europe, the region and beyond.

Reiterating France's

dual-track approach of defence support and diplomatic engagement, Mondoloni said maintaining open communication channels, including with Iran, remains essential to reducing tensions.

"France is one of the countries that have a functioning channel of communication with Iran... which I think is useful if we want to de-escalate in the current situation," he said.

As regional dynamics continue to evolve, Mondoloni emphasised that close coordination with trusted partners like Qatar will remain central to France's strategy, with a clear focus on dialogue, mediation and long-term stability.



Al Misnad meets Lebanese, Swiss Ambassadors

Minister of State for International Cooperation H E Dr. Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser Al Misnad met yesterday with Ambassador of the Republic of Lebanon H E Bilal Kabalan (pictured). The meeting discussed cooperation between the two countries and ways to enhance them, particularly in the humanitarian field. It also discussed a number of topics of common interest. Al Misnad also met yesterday with Ambassador of the Swiss Confederation to the State of Qatar H E Florence Tinguely. The meeting discussed cooperation between the two countries and ways to develop them.

CCQ, Yunus Emre Institute sign deal to advance cooperation

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The Community College of Qatar (CCQ) signed a joint cooperation agreement with the Yunus Emre Institute to introduce Turkish language education within its academic offerings and strengthen cultural and scholarly exchange between the two institutions in ways that enrich student learning and the wider academic community.

Dr. Khalid Mohamed Al-Horr, President of the College, and Anwar Cidek, Director of the Yunus Emre Institute in Doha, signed the agreement in the presence of H E Dr. M. Mustafa Göksu, Ambassador of Türkiye to Qatar, alongside several academic and diplomatic leaders.

Under the agreement, CCQ's Foundation Programme and Foreign Languages Division will offer Turkish language courses at the A1 and A2 levels as part of its academic plan, with implementation set to begin in the 2026/2027 academic year.

The partnership also includes annual joint workshops, training courses, and lectures designed to promote academic knowledge exchange and support the development of Turkish language teaching methodologies in line with leading international standards.

The three-year agreement lays the foundation for sustainable collaboration focused on strengthening students' language skills and enriching Qatar's academic cultural landscape. It also creates new opportunities for students who wish to deepen their proficiency in Turkish through academic support and direct consultation services from the Institute.

Commenting on the partnership, Dr. Khalid Al-Horr said: "We take great pride in this partnership with the Yunus Emre Institute, which reflects our commitment to strengthening linguistic and cultural diversity across the college's learning environment. The agreement expands academic choices

for our students and equips them with language and cultural competencies that open new pathways in the labor market and scientific research."

For his part, Anwar Cidek expressed his pride in the collaboration, saying: "We are delighted to contribute to the development of Turkish language education at the Community College of Qatar, one of the country's leading higher education institutions.

The Institute will dedicate its full academic and cultural capabilities to ensure the success of this cooperation in a way that reflects the depth of cultural ties between Qatar and Türkiye."

He added: "We will work closely with CCQ's Foundation Programme and Foreign Languages Division to prepare academic content and contribute to activities and events that showcase the richness of Turkish culture in all its dimensions, from art and literature to cuisine and traditions."

Dr. Nisreen Anati, Dean of the Foundation Programme and Foreign



President of Community College of Qatar Dr. Khalid Mohamed Al-Horr, Director of the Yunus Emre Institute in Doha Anwar Cidek and Ambassador of Türkiye H E Dr. M. Mustafa Göksu during the signing of the agreement

Languages Division, expressed that the agreement will strengthen Turkish language education and expand academic and cultural exchange among students.

She emphasized that the academic community in Qatar, driven by a shared commitment to deepening cooperation between both sides.

Sheikh Abdullah bin Zaid Centre promotes Islam in multiple languages

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The Sheikh Abdullah bin Zaid Al Mahmoud Islamic Cultural Centre has reinforced its role as a key platform for introducing Islam and fostering cross-cultural dialogue, delivering wide-ranging programmes in 2025 aimed particularly at non-Arabic speakers within and beyond Qatar.

Operating under the umbrella of the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs, the centre translated the ministry's vision into impactful initiatives that promote understanding, coexistence, and communication across cultures through diverse educational and awareness programmes.

According to the Ministry's 2025 report issued yesterday,

the centre organised 9,594 awareness and educational activities targeting non-Arabic speakers, benefiting 544,141 individuals.

It also conducted 66 Arabic language courses for non-native speakers, attended by 1,705 learners, alongside 1,894 events introducing Islam and its civilisation in multiple languages, reaching 132,513 beneficiaries.

Cultural exhibitions organised by the centre attracted more than 15,762 visitors, while the "Al Raqeem" exhibition, held alongside the Qatar International Arabic Calligraphy Competition, drew around 57,500 visitors.

Director of Sheikh Abdullah bin Zaid Al Mahmoud Islamic Cultural Centre Dr. Saleh bin Ali

Al Marri said the achievements reflect sustained efforts to promote the values of moderation, tolerance, and coexistence, while enhancing religious and cultural awareness among expatriate communities, particularly non-Arabic-speaking Muslims in Qatar.

He noted that the centre's field and knowledge-based work included thousands of targeted outreach activities and hundreds of programmes introducing Islam to diverse audiences, benefiting hundreds of thousands of residents. This, he said, demonstrates the breadth of the centre's impact and its ability to engage with multiple cultures and languages.

The centre also organised two major cultural exhibitions that attracted thousands



Dr. Saleh bin Ali Al Marri

of visitors and contributed to presenting a positive image of Islam while strengthening civilisational dialogue.

In addition, it produced five new publications and distributed

219,864 multilingual educational materials addressing Islamic values and contemporary religious topics in accessible formats that support proper understanding and encourage positive integration within multicultural societies.

Dr. Al Marri highlighted the centre's focus on teaching Arabic as a gateway to understanding the Quran and Islamic culture. During 2025, the centre delivered 66 specialised courses attended by 1,705 learners, including 242 participants representing 19 diplomatic entities, reflecting growing international confidence in the centre's educational programmes.

The centre also played a key role in organising and supporting local and international initiatives, notably the "Al

Raqueem" Arabic calligraphy competition. In collaboration with the Museum of Islamic Art, it hosted an exhibition showcasing winning artworks, which attracted approximately 57,000 visitors. Additionally, it organised a school-level Arabic calligraphy competition involving 479 students from public and private schools, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education.

Dr. Al Marri concluded that these integrated efforts reflect the centre's mission to build informed religious awareness grounded in knowledge, dialogue, and coexistence, while reinforcing Qatar's position as a leading model in cultural and religious outreach for diverse, multilingual communities.

Katara inaugurates Elite Exhibition

VICTOR BOLORUNDURO
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Director General of Cultural Village (Katara) Professor Dr. Khalid bin Ibrahim Al-Sulaiti, officially opened the Elite Exhibition 2026 yesterday at Building 13, the headquarters of the Qatari Association for Fine Arts in Katara.

The much-anticipated exhibition brings together an elite selection of works by leading Qatari artists, offering visitors a rich tapestry of contemporary and heritage-inspired pieces. Attended by artists, cultural figures and art enthusiasts dressed in both traditional and modern attire, the opening featured guided tours through brightly lit galleries where guests paused to admire and discuss the displayed creations.

Highlights include striking abstract paintings with bold geometric shapes in vivid greens, reds and yellows; realistic marine-life studies featuring coral, crabs and lobsters rendered in intricate detail; traditional wooden door motifs evoking Qatari architectural heritage; and folk-art scenes incorporating Arabic calligraphy alongside figures in cultural dress. Sculptures on white



Director General of Cultural Village (Katara) Professor Dr. Khalid bin Ibrahim Al-Sulaiti with officials during the inauguration of the exhibition.

pedestals, from fluid wooden abstracts to polished bronze figures, complement the two-dimensional works, creating a dynamic visual dialogue across the spacious halls. Dr Al-Sulaiti, accompanied by senior officials and visitors, toured the exhibition, stopping to examine pieces such as a large canvas depicting a white dove amid star motifs and another portraying a serene mangrove landscape.

Katara Cultural Village continues to solidify its position as Qatar's premier cultural destination, providing a permanent platform for the Qatari

Association for Fine Arts to present curated exhibitions that celebrate national creativity while inviting broader dialogue. The Elite Exhibition 2026 reflects this commitment, blending innovation with tradition in a celebration of visual arts that resonates with both local audiences and international visitors.

The exhibition is now open to the public and is expected to draw significant interest throughout its run, further enhancing Katara's reputation as a year-round hub for cultural exchange and artistic excellence.

Qatar reveals details of pavilion for 2026 Venice Biennale

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The National Pavilion of Qatar has revealed details of its presentation for the 61st International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia, running from May 9 to November 22, 2026.

Commissioned by Chairperson of Qatar Museums H E Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, the project is titled "Untitled 2026 (A Gathering of Remarkable People)".

It centres on the participatory practice of Thai artist Rirkrit Tiravanija and brings together a diverse group of collaborators: Qatari-American artist Sophia Al-Maria, Lebanese artist Tarek Atoui, Kuwaiti-Puerto Rican artist Alia Farid, and Palestinian chef Fadi Kattan.

Tiravanija has conceived a temporary tent-like structure inspired by traditional Qatari gathering spaces and broader Arab cultural traditions. This architectural setting serves as a vibrant hub for cultural exchange, dialogue, and shared experiences in the Giardini della Biennale, on the site of the future permanent Qatar Pavilion designed by Lina Ghotmeh. Produced by Qatar Museums and presented by Rubaiya Qatar

(Qatar's contemporary art quadrennial), the exhibition is curated by Tom Eccles, Executive Director of the Centre for Curatorial Studies and the Hessel Museum of Art at Bard College, and Ruba Katrib, Chief Curator and Director of Curatorial Affairs at MoMA PSL.

The pavilion builds on Tiravanija's long-standing emphasis on social interaction, where art becomes a platform for people to connect, create, and nourish both body and spirit. Inside the structure, visitors will encounter a rich program of activations. Sophia Al-Maria presents an experimental narrative film featuring a protagonist on a dream-like journey exploring the transformative power of music and sound. Alia Farid contributes Jerrican (2022–2026), a large-scale sculpture from her series of oversized vessels reminiscent of traditional Gulf water containers. These hollow, lightweight forms, fabricated in lacquered fiberglass using techniques similar to those for public drinking fountains, evoke everyday heritage while playing with scale and materiality.

Tarek Atoui organises improvisational collaborations



Alia Farid

with musicians and poets, drawing on field recordings, archival sources, and sonic elements from across the Arab world. Complementing these, Fadi Kattan curates a culinary program showcasing chefs from the MENA region. Their menus often focus on a single ingredient, highlighting preservation alongside innovation and tracing the influences of migration and trade on regional cuisines.

Sheikha Al Mayassa emphasized the project's deeper significance, "On the global stage of the Venice Biennale, this exhibition demonstrates Qatar's unwavering belief in the power of culture to bring people together and to create space for reflection, connection, and affirmation of our shared humanity. Qatar is proud to provide a platform for the creative talent of our nation and the Arab world."

Awqaf Ministry honours students of First Assalam School

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The General Directorate of Endowments at the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs has honoured first and second-grade primary students at The First Assalam School as part of its ongoing efforts to promote educational values and motivate students toward academic excellence.

This comes within the framework of encouraging students to strive in their academic achievement, develop their talents, bring joy to their hearts, reinforce social values, and instill a sense of belonging.

Ghanem Abdul Latif Al-Rumaihi, Head of the Marketing Department in the Endowment Funds Department at the General Directorate of Endowments, presented the gifts to the students during a ceremony organized by the school for first-grade students, amidst a festive atmosphere that reflected the joy of

Eid and its impact on the children.

In his speech during the ceremony, Hameed Alam, Director of the First Assalam School, expressed his gratitude to the General Directorate of Endowments for this initiative.

He emphasised that the gifts were presented in appreciation of the students' diligence during both in-person and distance learning periods, as well as their commitment to attendance and academic achievement. He noted that such programmes contribute to encouraging students, boosting their self-confidence, and fostering a spirit of creativity and discipline.

During the visit, the delegation from the General Directorate of Endowments also viewed the hand-crafts and artworks produced by the students, which ranged from creative drawings, botanical paintings, and colouring works to examples of traditional crafts such as weaving using traditional hand looms, and applied

educational experiments in life skills, reflecting the school's keenness to develop the students' practical and creative skills. The school students presented an expressive painting to the General Directorate of Endowments as a token of appreciation and gratitude for their recognition and support.

This initiative serves as a continuation of the "Eid Joy" programme implemented by the General Directorate of Endowments during Eid Al-Fitr, during which 5,000 gifts were distributed to children at 20 congregational mosques for Eid prayers across various regions of the country.

It is noted that the First Assalam School operates in the morning as a formal education school and includes students from about 20 different nationalities. The school targets non-Arabic speaking students and applies the British "Cambridge" curriculum to ensure their integrated learning.



Qatar, France discuss strategic partnership

Adviser to the Prime Minister and Official Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr. Majid bin Mohammed Al Ansari met in Doha yesterday with Director-General for Political and Security Affairs at the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of the French Republic H E Frederic Mondoloni. The meeting discussed areas of cooperation and ways to enhance them as well as the latest regional developments, particularly de-escalation efforts. Both sides highlighted the strategic partnership between Qatar and France across various fields as well as their continued cooperation on regional and international issues.

City University Qatar, beIN partner to advance talent development



beIN's Director of MENA HR Hamad Ibrahim Al-Shaikh and Vice-Chairman at Artan Holding Nasser Hassan Al-Naimi during the signing of the agreement.

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: City University Qatar and beIN Media Group 'beIN' have formed a strategic partnership that underscores their shared commitment to developing talent, strengthening academic-industry collaboration, and driving innovation across the region.

The agreement was signed yesterday at City University's Lusail Campus by Hamad Ibrahim Al-Shaikh, beIN's Director of MENA HR and Nasser Hassan Al-Naimi, Vice-Chairman at Artan Holding, in the presence of senior representatives from both organisations.

Commenting on the partnership, Nasser Hassan

Al-Naimi, Vice-Chairman at Artan Holding said, "This partnership represents a significant milestone in our mission to provide industry-relevant education. It enables us to enhance experiential learning, expand professional pathways for our students, and contribute to the development of a knowledge-driven economy in Qatar."

Hamad Ibrahim Al-Shaikh, Director of MENA HR at beIN Academy programme, designed to equip aspiring media professionals with real-world broadcast skills, this partnership underscores our commitment to nurturing future talent and strengthening collaboration with academic institutions. By

working closely with City University Qatar, we aim to create meaningful opportunities that empower the next generation while innovation and excellence across the media industry."

This partnership creates a dynamic platform that connects education with real-world industry needs, creating meaningful opportunities for students, professionals, and both organizations. Through this collaboration, City University Qatar and beIN will develop a strong talent pipeline by facilitating internships, mentorship, and recruitment opportunities for students, graduates, and alumni. beIN's employees and their families will also benefit from priority access to City University

Qatar's academic resources, along with discounted undergraduate, graduate, and executive education programs.

The partnership further promotes experiential learning through guest lectures, masterclasses, and mentorship initiatives that enhance career readiness. In addition, both institutions will collaborate on research, co-branded events, and projects that foster innovation, address industry challenges, and support corporate social responsibility and sustainability initiatives.

Appointed representatives from both organizations will oversee coordination and conduct annual reviews to ensure continued alignment with strategic goals.

Aspire Academy's Hassan Waly clinches FIP Promises Oeiras title in Portugal

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Aspire Academy student-athlete Hassan Waly, playing alongside Spain's Javier Bolumar, won the under-18 title at the FIP Promises Oeiras event in Portugal.

This is not only Waly's first FIP Promises title but also the first for a Qatari player at a European event. FIP Promises events are the International Padel Federation's (FIP) tournaments for various age groups from under-12 to under-18, designed to develop young players through high-level international competition.

Waly and Bolumar, who were seeded sixth, impressed throughout the tournament, winning three matches against

FIP Promises events are the International Padel Federation's tournaments for various age groups from under-12 to under-18, designed to develop young players through high-level international competition.

higher-seeded opponents.

They were given a bye in the first round, then beat the Spanish duo of Mario Brocal and Jaime Rodriguez 6-2, 6-2 in the last 16. In the quarter-finals, Hassan Waly and Javier Bolumar won the first set against second seeds Francisco

Goncalves Da Silva and Goncalo Liberato Costa, before the Portuguese pair had to retire. Then in the last four, they overcame fourth seeds Lautaro Dos Santos Sueyro and Valentin Villalba, from Argentina, 6-4, 6-3.

Their toughest test came in the final against the Spanish top seeds, Juan Carlos Gutierrez Guerrero and Mario Martinez Guerrero, and they eventually needed a tiebreak to clinch the title. Aspire Academy's Head Padel Coach, Mariano Amat, was thrilled with the way Hassan Waly played in the deciding moments of the final.

"The final was a long and closely contested match, ultimately decided by a lengthy tiebreak," he said.

"Hassan showed real

composure under pressure, making a decisive impact at the net and with his overhead play during the key moments of the match. This result reflects not just talent but the kind of competitive maturity we have been working as coaches to develop: the ability to manage tight situations and make the right decisions when it matters most."

"The other good news is that Hassan's development is continuing, and he has room to improve even further going forward."

"Next up for Hassan is the FIP Promises Athletics II tournament in Cairo, Egypt, which starts on 20 April, and again he will be playing with Javier Bolumar."

"These few weeks allow



Waly and Amat

Hassan to take part in two international competitions to increase his tournament exposure, and to combine those with structured training periods."

"While this is a significant milestone for Aspire Academy's padel programme, our goal is not just a single result; we will keep working."

"We want to build complete

players who are capable of competing at the international level on a consistent basis."

As Waly prepares for his next tournament, several of Aspire Academy's other padel players are set to travel to Spain to train at the Sompadel academy in Madrid, alongside some of the best Spanish players in their age categories.



Qatar Shell GTL Limited

INVITATION TO TENDER

The Qatar Shell GTL Tender Committee Requests Property Owners to Tender for the following Services:

SR No.	Tender Ref.	Title	Tender Fee	Tender Issue Date	Tender Closing Date
1	WS2704357779, CW998540	Al Khor lease	N/A	12th Apr	17th Apr

General Instructions:

- Requirement for one or two adjacent residential compounds totalling 506 units (apartments and villas).
- Compound(s) must be located within the city of Al Khor (within 30 km of Pearl GTL; Al Khor proximity preferred).
- All units must be air conditioned; minimum 3 bedrooms per villa/apartment (family units).
- Buildings must be completed and ready for immediate occupancy, with valid Municipality Building Completion and Civil Defense certificates.
- Compounds must comply with Shell Health and Safety & Worker Welfare requirements.
- Minimum capacity per bidder: 25% of total scope (≈125 units).
- Facilities & services (Landlord scope): full facility management, security & maintenance; gated access; clubhouse (gym & games room); at least one sports court; for family packages—children's playground and swimming pool.
- The tender will be administered exclusively online via SAP Ariba Platform; Tender Documents will be shared only with registered and approved bidders.
- Eligibility: valid Commercial Registration (CR) and an authorization letter on company letterhead to obtain access to Ariba.

Contact (registration of interest & Ariba onboarding):
Reem Al Abdulla - Real Estate Qatar Department
Email: Qatar-Accommodation@shell.com

CIC Rayyan Zone honours Quran contest winners

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The Centre for Indian Community Qatar (CIC) Rayyan Zone honoured the winners of various Qur'an competitions and contests during the recent Ramadan, in a special award ceremony.

The event recognised winners of multiple competitions including the Surah Adh-Dhariyat Hizf Challenge, Online Quiz, Surah Mumtahina Daily Quiz, a combined online quiz covering Surahs Ar-Ra'd, Ibrahim, and Hijr, as well as the Surah Al-Isra Quiz.

In addition, prizes were distributed to winners of the Prabodhanam Quiz competition, which was conducted in two phases.

The ceremony was attended by CIC Central President RS Abdul Jaleel, Central Executive member Suhail Shanthapuram, Rayyan Zonal President Subul Abdul Aziz, Vice Presidents Muhammad Rafeeq Thangal and Abdul Jaleel MM, Secretary Safir, Executive Members Abdul Salam AT, Haris K, and Siddiq Vengara, along with Women India Qatar Rayyan Zone Vice President Sajna Karuvattil, Secretary Zainaba Abdul Jaleel, and Organisation Secretary Irfana.

Swissôtel Corniche Park Towers Doha announces exclusive long stay offerings

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Swissôtel Corniche Park Towers Doha unveiled its exclusive long-term stay offering, designed for guests seeking luxury, flexibility, and comfort in the heart of West Bay.

Starting from April 1, 2026, Swissôtel is offering specially curated monthly and weekly rates, perfect for business travellers, expatriates, and anyone seeking an extended stay experience in Doha. The Swissôtel long-stay apartments offer a seamless combination of home-like comfort and hotel luxury, with the benefits of Swissôtel's exceptional services. Guests will enjoy unmatched views of Doha's vibrant West Bay and easy access to all essential facilities within the city.

Exclusive benefits of Swissôtel's Long Stay Apartments include: Up to 30% savings on dining and spa services; full access to Pürovel Spa & Sport for relaxation and fitness; high-speed Wi-Fi and dedicated workspace for business

professionals; housekeeping services twice weekly, ensuring cleanliness and convenience; 24-hour concierge service to handle every need with ease; exclusive access to Doha Sands Beach for a perfect escape; all utilities included for a stress-free stay; and 1 parking spot per apartment for those with their own vehicle.

The Swissôtel Corniche Park Towers Doha apartments cater to those seeking a premium living experience, whether for business or leisure. Perfectly positioned in West Bay, residents will enjoy not only the city's stunning skyline but also the quiet serenity of their personal haven.

These long stay apartments are available with flexible weekly and monthly packages to accommodate the diverse needs of both individuals and families. With exclusive rates and a personalised touch, Swissôtel is redefining luxury living for extended stays in Doha. Terms and conditions: valid for stays from April 1 to June 30 2026.



Israeli troops fire tear gas at Palestinian schoolchildren

UMM AL-KHAIR: Israeli forces fired tear gas at Palestinian schoolchildren staging a sit-in yesterday in the occupied West Bank, AFP footage showed, after settlers blocked access to their school.

The incident took place at Umm Al-Khair, a small village in the southern West Bank region of Masafer Yatta.

Schoolchildren there had been due back in class yesterday for the first time in more than 40 days, after lessons were suspended following the outbreak of the Middle East war on February 28.

A group of schoolchildren and Palestinian residents had gathered near a barbed wire fence erected by Israeli settlers, which blocked access to the school, an AFP journalist reported. Schoolchildren and some local adults were holding an open-air class as a sit-in to demand access when troops fired the tear gas, witnesses said. "We were sitting and they threw a grenade (tear gas canister) at us. I got scared and started screaming and ran away," 12-year-old Sarah al-Hathaleen told AFP.

"I started crying. A woman hugged me and stayed with me. We were very scared." Bassam

Footage showed canisters being fired, with children screaming and fleeing.

Jabr, director of education for the Masafer Yatta area, confirmed the children were staging a sit-in at the time of the incident.

"Settlers are trying to tighten the noose on us in every way. One of these methods is cutting off the road for school students and expanding the settlement," Jabr said of settlers from the nearby Carmel settlement whose residents erected the fence. "Sadly, there are no solutions. We will continue this sit-in today and tomorrow until we find a solution so the students can return to their schools," he said.

AFP footage showed canisters being fired, with children screaming and fleeing.

"Last night we were excited for school today. The Israelis came and closed the road with barbed wire... we want to be back in school," said 11-year-old Rashid al-Hathaleen.

The Masafer Yatta region is a known hotspot for settler violence and Palestinian home demolitions. — **AFP**

Lebanon death toll from Israeli offensive rises to 2,089: Health Ministry

BEIRUT: Lebanon's Ministry of Public Health announced yesterday that the death toll from the Israeli offensive on Lebanon since March 2 has risen to 2,089.

The ministry said in a statement that the number of injuries has also increased to 6,762. Lebanon's National News Agency reported that Israeli warplanes struck the town of Kfar Reman, as well as the towns of Kafra and Yater in Bint Jbeil district, and also carried out an airstrike on Sahmar in the Western Bekaa.

The Israeli offensive on southern Lebanon began on March 2 before expanding to include Beirut's southern suburbs and parts of central and eastern Lebanon. — **QNA**



Lebanese Red Cross volunteers inspect the damage to their rescue ambulances at the site of an Israeli drone strike that targeted their headquarters in Tyre yesterday. (AFP)

Turkiye says Iran, US 'sincere' about ceasefire

ISTANBUL: Turkiye's foreign minister said yesterday he believed Iran and the United States are "sincere" about reaching a ceasefire despite the failure of Pakistan-mediated talks on the weekend.

"Both sides are sincere about the ceasefire," Hakan Fidan said in an interview with the official Anadolu news agency, adding that he has been in contact with the parties involved in the negotiations.

But he warned: "We always need to take Israel's potential for acting as a spoiler into account".

"I think the Iranians will evaluate the proposal made by

the Americans and respond," Fidan said. "I am thinking that if the nuclear issue comes down to an all-or-nothing situation especially regarding enrichment, we might face serious obstacles," he added.

"Hopefully, we will try to overcome this with the support of some mediators," he added.

"Negotiations with Iran should be conducted, persuasion methods should be used, and the strait should be opened as soon as possible," Fidan said.

He however said the status of Hormuz and not its reopening would be the major sticking point ahead.

"The issue (opening of Hormuz) may be resolved in about 2-3 weeks, with some kind of agreement. The problem is not there," Fidan said.

"The real question is whether something will emerge afterward that will bring a new phase.. because this is an international free passage zone. Any disruption to freedom of navigation is not something parties want to see," he added.

He said regional countries had expressed similar views.

"They want the post-war order to remain the same as the pre-war order. They have major interests and expectations in this regard." — **AFP**

UAE President and Bahrain King discuss regional developments

MANAMA: King of Bahrain H M Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa met in Manama yesterday with UAE President H H Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

The two sides discussed the latest developments in the Middle East and their repercussions on regional and international security and stability, including their impact on maritime security, energy supplies and the global economy.

They also addressed Iranian attacks targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure in Bahrain, the UAE and other countries in the region, describing them as violations of national sovereignty and international law that undermine regional security and stability.

The two sides further reviewed bilateral relations and various aspects of cooperation between the two countries, as well as ways to enhance them. — **QNA**

China says maintaining ceasefire in Middle East war 'immediate priority'

BEIJING: Maintaining a ceasefire in the Middle East war is an "immediate priority" for resolving the conflict, China's top diplomat told his Pakistan counterpart in a phone call yesterday.

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also said

yesterday that the ceasefire between the United States and Iran was "holding" and that efforts were underway to reach an agreement.

"The immediate priority is to make every effort toward preventing the resumption of hostilities and to maintain the

hard-won ceasefire momentum," Wang Yi told Pakistan's Ishaq Dar, according to a Chinese foreign ministry statement. Wang said a joint peace plan by China and Pakistan announced last month as the two officials met in Beijing "still can serve as a

direction for efforts toward a resolution". Meanwhile, China yesterday called reports it had supplied or intended to supply weapons to Iran "baseless smears".

China said it had "always adopted a cautious and responsible attitude towards the export

of military items, implementing strict controls in accordance with its own export control laws and regulations and its international obligations". "We oppose baseless smears or malicious association," foreign ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun told a regular news briefing. — **AFP**

Asean urges Iran peace talks, reopening of Strait of Hormuz

MANILA: Asean encouraged the United States and Iran yesterday to press ahead with talks to end the Middle East war and ensure safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz.

Southeast Asian nations like the Philippines and Malaysia rely heavily on oil from the Middle East, much of it exported through the key strait that's been effectively closed during the conflict.

Foreign ministers of the 11-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations met online to discuss the US-Israeli war against Iran.

Asean foreign ministers agreed to urge the United States and Iran to "continue negotiations that will lead to the permanent end of the conflict and lasting peace and stability in the region", said a joint statement issued after the meeting.

They also called for the "full and effective implementation" of an ongoing two-week ceasefire and the "restoration of the safe, unimpeded, and continuous transit passage of vessels and aircraft in the Strait of Hormuz".

The Philippines, which holds Asean's rotating chairmanship, last month adopted a four-day work week for civil servants in a bid to conserve fuel, while Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam encouraged public employees to work from home. — **AFP**

Japan volcano erupts sending plumes of ash 3.4 kilometre high

TOKYO: A volcano in southern Japan has erupted for the second time in four months, sending huge plumes of ash billowing kilometres into the sky, the weather agency and local media reported. Sakurajima erupted after noon on Saturday, sending ash soaring up to 3,400 metres, the Japan Meteorological Agency said.

It was the first major eruption since December 13, according to the Yomiuri Shimbun daily. — **AFP**

South Korea, Poland vow deeper defence ties

SEOUL: South Korea and Poland pledged to deepen their defence partnership yesterday.

Warsaw has emerged as a key buyer of arms from Seoul, and the countries signed a weapons deal worth over \$40bn in 2022.

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk is in Seoul for the first such visit in 27 years, and held a summit with South Korean President Lee Jae Myung yesterday.

"Mutually beneficial defence cooperation between the two countries will be further expanded," Lee told a joint press conference afterwards.

He stressed the "steady implementation" of the 2022 agreement, calling it "essential for deepening and advancing our defence industry cooperation". Under the deal, Poland has bought South Korean military hardware including tanks, self-propelled howitzers and rocket launchers.

Some of those weapons are



South Korean President Lee Jae Myung (right) meets Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk at the Blue House in Seoul yesterday. (AFP)

now "operating proudly across Poland's vast plains, helping to safeguard the country's territory and protect its people", Lee said in his opening remarks before the summit.

Seoul and Warsaw would elevate ties to a "comprehensive strategic partnership", he added. Tusk described South Korea as "Poland's

second-most important ally after the United States", according to a Korean translation of his opening remarks.

Defence cooperation "remains the core driving force of bilateral relations", he said, adding that Warsaw would encourage South Korean partner firms to shift production lines to Poland. — **AFP**

Opposition candidate concedes defeat in Benin presidential vote

COTONOU: Benin presidential election favourite Romuald Wadagni headed for victory yesterday as his opponent conceded defeat even as votes were still being counted.

Opposition candidate Paul Houkpe offered "republican congratulations" to finance minister Wadagni, 49, who had been widely tipped to win after being endorsed by outgoing leader Patrice Talon.

Official results were not expected before Tuesday. But Wadagni's ability to conjure economic growth in the face of insurgency gave him a clear lead, even if the eight million-strong electorate showed scant enthusiasm for either candidate, notably in the West African nation's cities.

"To... Romuald Wadagni, I offer my republican congratulations. Democracy requires mutual respect and the ability to rise above partisan divisions," Houkpe said in his concession statement. Talon stood down after two five-year terms since

2016. But in the capital Porto-Novo, turnout for Sunday's vote ranged from 20 to 40 percent at some polling stations, while life in economic capital Cotonou was largely back to its usual bustle yesterday. Houkpe ran a low-key campaign and needed the help of majority lawmakers to secure the required parliamentary endorsements even to get on the ballot paper.

The main opposition Democrats party did not field a candidate as its leader, Renaud Agbodjo, failed to secure sufficient endorsements.

For the media, in the words of Le Telegramme daily, the election was "generally calm and well-organised," while Le Matin Libre saw "Wadagni on his way to the Marina," the presidential palace. The Economic Community of West African States election observation mission praised "a peaceful atmosphere" and "the smooth running of the election." — **AFP**

Australia names first woman to lead army

SYDNEY: A woman will command Australia's army for the first time since its founding 125 years ago, Defence Minister Richard Marles said yesterday as he unveiled the "deeply historic" appointment.

Lieutenant general Susan Coyle was named Australia's Chief of Army following a three-decade career during which she has served in the Solomon Islands, Afghanistan and the Middle East.

"Her achievement means that she will be the first woman to command a service in Australian history," Marles told reporters.

"And it is a deeply historic moment. As Susan said to me, you cannot be what you cannot see."

Australia's army is in the throes of a major transformation, equipping itself with long-range firepower, drones and other modern combat tools.

Coyle stressed her experience in areas such as cyberwarfare. — **AFP**



World in brief

Saudi and Iranian Foreign Ministers discuss developments following Iran-US peace talks

RIYADH: Saudi Foreign Minister H H Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah received a phone call yesterday from Iranian counterpart Abbas Araghchi. During the call, they discussed the latest developments following the peace negotiations between Iran and the United States. — **QNA**

Kuwait and India FMs talk region in phone call

KUWAIT CITY: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Jarrah Jaber Al Ahmad Al Sabah has received a phone call from his Indian counterpart Subrahmanyam Jaishankar to discuss the latest regional developments.

The conversation focused on ongoing events in the region and the diplomatic efforts being made to address them.

Both sides exchanged views on ways to support stability through continued coordination and dialogue between Kuwait and India. — **QNA**

Bahrain summons Iraqi envoy over drone attacks

MANAMA: Bahrain has summoned a senior Iraqi diplomat to protest against continued "illegal" drone attacks launched from Iraqi territory targeting Bahrain and several other GCC states.

According to the Bahrain News Agency, Director-General of Bilateral Relations at Bahrain's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Abdullah bin Ali Al Khalifa, handed an official protest note to the Charge d'Affaires of Iraq's embassy in Manama, Ahmed Ismail Al Karawi. Al Khalifa stressed the importance of Iraq addressing these threats and attacks urgently and responsibly in accordance with relevant international and regional laws and conventions.

He also reaffirmed Bahrain's right to take all necessary precautionary measures to safeguard its security, stability, and the safety of citizens and residents. — **QNA**

Indonesia says can outlast war fallout to year end

JAKARTA: Indonesia's economy minister said yesterday the Southeast Asian nation can outlast the impacts of Middle East war-fuelled oil price hikes for as many as 10 months without cutting fuel subsidies.

Minister Airlangga Hartarto told foreign media in Jakarta his government "is ready for five, six, or even ten months" on current projections. "Diesel, as well as... propellant, will be subsidised until the end of the year," he said. "And the government has sufficient funds for it." Indonesia is an oil producer but nevertheless a net importer, and heavily subsidises fuel consumed domestically. The subsidy covers about 30 to 40 percent of the cost for consumers and absorbs over five percent — some \$12bn — of the annual budget of the country. — **AFP**

Torrential rain in Angola claims another six lives

LUANDA: Torrential rain in Angola over the weekend has killed a further six people, the interior ministry said yesterday, after more than 40 people died a week ago.

For a second straight weekend, the central coastal city of Benguela was hardest hit, with the ministry giving a provisional death toll of five, with four people missing.

Footage from public broadcaster TPA showed entire neighbourhoods submerged by the waters of the Cavaco River and residents waist-deep in water.

Heavy downpours are a regular occurrence in southern Africa during the southern hemisphere summer. — **AFP**

Pro-EU Magyar vows 'new era' in Hungary after ousting Orban in vote

BUDAPEST: Hungarian Prime Minister-elect Peter Magyar pledged yesterday to usher in a "new era" after defeating nationalist leader Viktor Orban in elections seen as a blow to hard-right populism.

Orban, a self-described "thorn" in the European Union's side who was backed by US President Donald Trump and Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, was ousted in Sunday's ballot after 16 years in power.

Hungarians fed up with corruption handed Magyar, a conservative former government insider, a decisive victory.

Magyar said he would do "everything in our power to ensure that this truly marks the beginning of a new era".

He urged President Tamas



Peter Magyar, leader of the pro-European conservative TISZA party during a press conference at the HUNGEXPO Congress and Exhibition Center in Budapest, Hungary, yesterday. (AFP)

Sulyok, an Orban ally, to convene parliament "as soon as possible".

"Our country has no time to waste. Hungary is in trouble in every respect. It has been

plundered, looted, betrayed, indebted and ruined," he told reporters.

Magyar's Tisza party won two-thirds majority in the parliamentary elections, which drew record turnout.

Tens of thousands of jubilant supporters poured into the streets to celebrate in the capital, Budapest.

Many EU leaders welcomed Magyar's win.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz called it a "heavy defeat" for "right-wing populism" and French President Emmanuel Macron hailed it as a victory for the "values of the European Union".

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Moscow hoped for "pragmatic" relations with

Hungary's new government, following the ousting of Orban, the EU's most Russia-friendly leader. China, with which Orban had also fostered ties, congratulated Magyar.

Magyar thanked both Moscow and Beijing for "being open to pragmatic cooperation, just as Hungary is."

Almost-complete official results showed Tisza securing 138 seats in the 199-seat parliament on 53 percent of the vote.

Orban's Fidesz party retained 55 seats on 38 percent of the vote.

Turnout was a record 79.6 percent.

Orban, 62, conceded defeat on Sunday, saying the message was "painful but unambiguous".

Crowds of Magyar supporters celebrated into the early hours outside his party's election headquarters by the Danube and in Budapest.

"I feel fantastic!" said Zoltan Sziromi, a 20-year-old student in the throng of revellers waving Hungarian flags and dancing.

"We've finally got rid of that system and it was about time," he told AFP.

Addressing the crowd, Magyar said voters had "liberated" the country of 9.5 million people and "said 'yes' to Europe".

Orban, who was seeking a fifth straight term, has transformed his country into a model of "illiberal democracy", clashing with the EU over rule-of-law issues and holding up EU aid for war-torn Ukraine. — AFP

France, UK to host summit on Strait of Hormuz this week

PARIS: France and Britain will co-host a summit this week to discuss a "coordinated, independent, multinational plan" to safeguard shipping in the Strait of Hormuz, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer said yesterday.

Britain had convened "more than 40 nations who share our aim to restore freedom of navigation" and the summit will discuss ways to protect shipping "when the conflict ends," Starmer said.

Britain and France will work on a "peaceful multinational mission" that would be "separate from the warring parties," French President Emmanuel Macron said earlier yesterday.

US-Israeli strikes on Iran in late February sparked a region-wide war and brought traffic through the Strait of Hormuz to a near standstill, blocking a key route for global oil and gas shipments.

Iran and the United States last week agreed to a two-week cessation of hostilities, but ceasefire talks between the warring sides in Pakistan on the weekend ended in failure.

US President Donald Trump responded by ordering his navy to carry out a blockade of the Strait of Hormuz starting yesterday.

Trump also said, on his Truth Social platform, that "Other Countries will be involved with this Blockade" but did not specify which ones.

The UK-French initiative, which Macron and Starmer announced on X, appeared to be separate from Trump's announced blockade.

On April 2, a UK-led diplomatic meeting of some 40 countries demanded "the immediate and unconditional reopening" of the vital shipping route. — AFP

UN chief says 'all parties' must respect freedom of navigation in Hormuz

UNITED NATIONS: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres yesterday called on "all parties" to respect freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz, after Iran and subsequently the United States blocked flows through the critical waterway.

The strait, through which a fifth of global oil and gas flows, has become a key flashpoint as the US and Iran attempt to gain leverage over each other during ceasefire negotiations.

Disruptions in the strait "have already had direct effect well beyond the

immediate region, with increased global economic fragility and insecurity in many sectors," the UN chief's spokesman Stephane Dujarric said in a statement.

The remarks came after US President Donald Trump ordered a blockade of ships entering or leaving Iranian ports and coastal areas on Monday, following the failure of peace talks over the weekend.

Iran had already effectively halted traffic through the strait following the US-Israeli attacks beginning February 28. — AFP

Bulgaria's ex-president Radev tipped to win snap vote

SOFIA: Bulgaria will hold its eighth general election in five years this weekend, with ex-president Rumen Radev's new grouping tipped to win a ballot many hope will end chronic instability.

Radev, a former air force general, resigned as president early this year after nine years in the job.

The snap election follows the resignation late last year of a conservative-led

government after vast protests against endemic corruption in the EU and NATO member of 6.5 million people.

Bulgaria, which joined the eurozone on January 1, has been plagued by instability since 2021 when long-time conservative premier Boyko Borisov lost power after massive anti-graft protests.

Since then, no government has lasted longer than a year in the European Union's poorest member state. — AFP

No stability in Mideast while Lebanon is in flames: EU's von der Leyen

BRUSSELS: European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said yesterday that there can be no stability in the Middle East while Lebanon is in flames, adding that restoring freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz is of "paramount importance."

She also said the European Union's fossil fuel bill had risen by €22bn (about \$25.72bn) since the start of the conflict involving Iran. — XINHUA

Russia records over 6,000 Ukrainian Easter ceasefire violations

MOSCOW: The intensity of shelling and combat operations by the Ukrainian forces during the Orthodox Easter ceasefire decreased during daylight hours, the Russian Defence Ministry said yesterday, accusing the Ukrainian forces of 6,558 violations of the truce.

The ministry said that despite the announcement of the Easter ceasefire, Ukrainian forces continued to launch strikes using drones and artillery against Russian positions, as well as against civilian infrastructure in the border areas of Russia's Belgorod and Kursk regions. — XINHUA

IMO chief says countries have no right to blockade international straits

LONDON: Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization Arsenio Dominguez said yesterday that countries have no right to blockade international straits used for international transit.

Speaking at a press briefing, Dominguez made the remarks when responding to a question on whether Washington's potential blockade of the Strait of Hormuz would violate international law.

"From a legal perspective, in accordance with international law, there is no right to prohibit the right of innocent passage, nor to impede the freedom of navigation through international straits used for international transit," he said. — XINHUA

Britain declines to back Trump's Hormuz blockade plan, says PM

LONDON: Britain does not support a threatened blockade of the Strait of Hormuz by U.S. President Donald Trump, Prime Minister Keir Starmer said yesterday.

Despite "some considerable pressure," Britain would not be "dragged into the war" that is not in its national interest, Starmer told the BBC. British media reported on Sunday that Britain will not be involved in a blockade of the Strait, quoting a government spokesperson.

"We continue to support freedom of navigation and the opening of the Strait of Hormuz, which is urgently needed to support the global economy and the cost of living back home," the spokesperson said. — XINHUA

Russia offers to take in Iran's enriched uranium

MOSCOW: Russia is ready to take in Iran's enriched uranium as part of a future peace deal with the United States, the Kremlin said yesterday.

Failed talks between Iran and the United States over the weekend dashed hopes of a swift deal to permanently end the war that has killed thousands and thrown the global economy into turmoil since it began in late February.

Russia, which possesses the world's largest stockpile of nuclear weapons, has repeatedly offered to host Iran's enriched uranium as part of any peace deal.

"This proposal was voiced by President Putin in contacts with both the United States and regional states. The offer still stands, but has not been acted upon," the Kremlin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters yesterday in response to a question by AFP. — AFP

Right-wing candidates tipped for runoff in Peru presidential poll

LIMA: Two Peruvian right-wing candidates looked set yesterday to advance to a presidential runoff, after an election marred by logistical foul-ups and deep voter anger.

With about half the election tally counted and voting still ongoing in a handful of centers, Keiko Fujimori, the 50-year-old daughter of a disgraced ex-president, led the field with 17 percent of the vote.

She was followed on 15 percent by Rafael Lopez Aliaga, a wealthy infrastructure mogul and former mayor who has vowed to hunt Venezuelan migrants, drawing comparisons to US President Donald Trump.

There are still millions of votes to be counted, and several of the 35 presidential candidates could yet make a late surge to snatch a runoff spot.

But in a midnight address to voters, Fujimori hailed the results as victory for the political right, which, she said, had vanquished the leftist "enemy".

Voting is still underway at 13 polling places in Lima, where ballot materials failed to arrive on election day Sunday.

There are an estimated 50,000 votes still to be cast, likely not enough to affect the outcome of the presidential race.



People wait in line for the reopening of a polling station in Lima yesterday after logistical failures prevented tens of thousands of people from voting in presidential and legislative elections the day before. (AFP)

"The authorities are so incompetent," said 56-year-old domestic worker Nancy Gomez as fed-up voters queued round the block for a second day.

Peruvians had hoped Sunday's election would end the political chaos that has brought eight presidents in a decade and a surge in violent crime.

But election day saw yet more tumult, with missing election materials preventing many polling centers from opening on time.

Amid hours-long delays, police and prosecutors raided the headquarters of the National Office of Electoral Processes in an effort to find out who was to blame.

Officials said police also raided a private subcontractor blamed for failing to deliver ballots, boxes and other materials on time.

Lopez Aliaga had initially claimed "grave electoral fraud" and called on supporters to take to the streets in protest. — AFP

Voters grill Republican lawmaker in crucial swing district on Iran war

MAHOPAC: Rep. Mike Lawler faced another tough crowd at a town hall late on Sunday night, as frustrated constituents in his suburban swing district demanded he answer for the war in Iran.

One man asked the GOP congressman why he voted against a measure that would have checked President Donald Trump's power to commit the country to the Iran conflict without congressional approval.

"The fact is the president is well within his authority to

conduct the strikes that have been conducted," Lawler responded over boos, comparing the conflict to strikes on Libya during the Obama administration in 2011. "If, at the end of these 90 days, the conflict is not done, then yes, Congress should take steps to authorize continuing force," he said, adding that it would be "idiotic" for lawmakers to order a withdrawal as the administration pursues peace talks with Iran.

The next question came from Marion Walsh, who identified

herself as both a military mother and daughter.

"Respectfully, you have abdicated your responsibility to the majority of the constituents in District 17," she said. "You have in fact endangered our young people, our service members of our country and killed civilians by not standing up to Trump on this unjustified war."

Lawler said the goal of the war is to "dismantle the unholy alliance" between China, Russia and other US adversaries. — THE WASHINGTON POST

Pope says doesn't fear Trump, has 'moral duty to speak out' against war

ALGIERS: Pope Leo XIV (pictured) said yesterday he had "a moral duty" to speak out against war and didn't "fear" President Donald Trump after the US leader criticized his calls for an end to the conflict in the Middle East.

Before taking off from Rome headed to Algiers for a papal visit, the pontiff came under fire from Trump, who railed against Leo's recent comments calling for peace with the Middle East grappling with the war triggered by a joint Israel-US attack on Iran in late February.

The pope told reporters aboard the papal plane that he had "no intention to debate with" Trump, adding that he was "not a politician".

"What I am saying is that the mission of the Church is very clear," he said. "The Gospel says... blessed are the peacemakers. I believe that the Church has a moral duty to speak out very clearly against war and in favour of



peace and reconciliation."

The pope added: "I have no fear, neither of the Trump administration, nor speaking out loudly about the message of the Gospel."

Earlier, the US president had said Leo was "toying with a country (Iran) that wants a nuclear weapon", adding that he was "not a big fan of Pope Leo".

The pontiff landed in the Algerian capital shortly before 0900 GMT and called for "forgiveness" in a speech paying tribute to victims of the country's 1954-1962 war of inde-

pendence from France.

The remarks, his first since arriving in the North African country, came amid heightened tensions between Algeria and France, and followed a meeting days ago with French President Emmanuel Macron at the Vatican.

"In this place, let us remember that God desires peace for every nation," he said at the Algerian Martyrs Memorial in the capital.

"This peace, which allows us to face the future with a reconciled spirit, is possible only through forgiveness."

Leo's two-day visit to Algeria was infused with personal significance for the pope as Algeria was the home of Saint Augustine (354-430), whose spiritual legacy permeates Leo's pontificate.

The influential Christian theologian laid the foundations for the 13th-century Augustinian order to which Leo belongs, one based on communal living and service. — AFP

Brazil police remove 'explosive device' on Copacabana boardwalk

RIO de Janeiro: Brazilian police said yesterday they had removed an "explosive device" from the boardwalk of Copacabana beach, a tourist-heavy area where Colombian singer Shakira will perform a massive free concert on May 2.

Local media reported the object was a stun-grenade — a non-lethal device often used as crowd control, which emits a blinding flash and extremely loud bang to temporarily disorient people.

Police in Rio de Janeiro said the bomb squad had been dispatched and "safely removed the device" for further analysis. — AFP

Spanish Prime Minister's wife charged with corruption

MADRID: Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's wife, Begona Gomez, has been formally charged with corruption after a years-long criminal investigation, according to a court ruling published yesterday.

The probe is one of several corruption cases that have embroiled the Socialist leader's family and former allies, putting pressure on his minority coalition government. Judge Juan Carlos Peinado opened the investigation in April 2024 to determine whether Gomez had exploited her position as Sanchez's wife for private gain, which she and the prime minister deny. — AFP