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Assistant Professor of International Affairs at Qatar University Dr Abdullah Bandar al-Otaibi told Qatar News Agency (QNA) that the success of the mediation showed Doha had moved beyond hosting negotiations to becoming a diplomatic actor capable of helping move conflicts from crisis management to settlement. **To Page 5**



Labour minister holds meetings with Tajikistan ambassador, US embassy charge d'affaires



HE the Minister of Labour, Dr Ali bin Smaikh al-Marri, held separate meetings yesterday with the ambassador of the Republic of Tajikistan to the State of Qatar, Nurmurod Muhammadali, and Charge d'affaires at the embassy of the United States of America to the State of Qatar, Christopher Hodges. The meetings addressed several matters of mutual interest and explored bilateral cooperation across various areas of the labour sector and ways to deepen and expand it. **(QNA)**



Municipality minister meets Maldives' ambassador



HE the Minister of Municipality, Abdullah bin Hamad bin Abdullah al-Attiyah, met yesterday with the ambassador of the Republic of Maldives to the State of Qatar, Adam Shareef Umar. Discussion during the meeting dealt with boosting the two countries' cooperation in areas of mutual interest. **(QNA)**

Qatar to partake in Baghdad, Moscow book fairs in Sept

The 27th Baghdad International Book Fair is taking place from Sept 2-12, with 20 countries, including Qatar, taking part.

Also the 39th Moscow International Book Fair is set to kick off from Sept 2-6, with more than 300 publishing houses from Russia and other countries taking part, including Qatar, represented by the Ministry of Culture

Over 600 publishing houses and agencies from Arab and foreign countries will participate in Baghdad fair, spread across almost 395 booths. Oman will be the guest of honour at the much-anticipated edition, showcasing the country's literary, intellectual and scientific landscape.

The event is punctuated by a wide diversity of cultural and intellectual programs that feature panel discussions, poetry and critical evenings, with Iraqi and Arab literary and intellectual dignitaries taking part.

This is alongside a cultural and artistic symposium bringing together numerous participants to showcase multiple new releases and hold literary and intellectual events.

The inaugural fair was launched in 1979 and has become one of Iraq's and the region's foremost cultural and intellectual events, drawing widespread participation from publishing houses and cultural institutions from across the Arab world and beyond.

It hosts key cultural and intellectual personalities, as well as attracting significant public and media attendance.

Moscow fair will feature more than 400 sessions with prominent authors, showcases of latest publications, professional panel discussions, as well as presentations of new works by a host of writers.

In addition, the event dedicates a rich programme to children and their families, featuring a creative space, theatrical shows and workshops, chiefly events devoted to introducing Chinese culture, alongside a contingent of children's literature authors who will be thrilled to showcase their latest literary releases for the autumn season.

The fair was first held in 1987, positioning itself as a pre-eminent platform for cultural and knowledge exchange on the world stage. **(QNA)**

Qatar Museums announces ICOM Board for 2026-2028

Qatar Museums (QM) has announced the appointment of the new Board of ICOM Qatar, the country's National Committee of the International Council of Museums, for the 2026-2028 term.

The newly appointed Board is chaired by HE Director of the National Museum of Qatar (NMQ), Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Hamad al-Thani, with Director of International Co-operation and Government Affairs at QM, Dr Fatema Hassan al-Sulaiti, serving as Vice-Chair.

Board members include Director of the Museum of Islamic Art (MIA), Shaikha al-Nassr; Director of Cultural Diplomacy, Aisha Ghanem al-Attiya; Director of Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Zeina Arida; Director General of Msheireb Museums, Abdulla al-Naama; and Director of Information Technology at QM, Saeed Ali al-Shawi.

Head of International Relations at QM, Dr Rashid Malheya, has been appointed secretary, while Head of Cash Management at QM, Maryam al-Suwaidi, will serve as treasurer.



HE the Chair of ICOM Qatar, Sheikh Abdulaziz al-Thani, commented: "Together with the new board, I look forward to advancing the National Committee's work and championing the value of museums as places that inspire learning, foster understanding and enrich communities".

Vice-Chair of ICOM Qatar, Dr Fatema Hassan al-Sulaiti, added that ICOM Qatar is committed to strengthening international cooperation and supporting the

professional development of museum and heritage professionals, while creating new opportunities for knowledge exchange.

Dr al-Sulaiti explained that the new leadership will broaden professional engagement and support initiatives contributing to the preservation, interpretation and promotion of cultural heritage. It will also work closely with Qatar Museums, cultural institutions, government entities and international partners

to further advance ICOM's mission.

During the 2026-2028 term, the new board will champion initiatives that support professional growth, encourage cross-sector collaboration, and enhance the impact of museums as spaces for learning, dialogue, and cultural exchange.

ICOM Qatar is the National Committee representing museum professionals and institutions in Qatar and is a local branch of the International Council of Museums, creating opportunities for professional exchange, capacity building and collaboration in line with international standards and best practices.

Established in 1946, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) is the world's leading organisation representing museums and museum professionals. **(QNA)**

EAA supports over 10,000 vulnerable children to stay in school in Zambia

Education Above All (EAA) Foundation, a global foundation for education and development, with support from its strategic partner, Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD), and in partnership with World Vision Zambia, the Forum for African Women Educationalists of Zambia (FAWEZA), and Zambia's Ministry of Education, has marked the successful completion of the Empowering Vulnerable Children with Education (EVE) Project in Namwala District, Zambia.

Implemented over three years, the EVE Project strengthened equitable access to and retention in quality primary education for children at high risk of dropping out or being excluded from school. The project addressed some of the most pressing barriers affecting vulnerable learners, including early marriage, poverty, child labor, long travel distances and poor learning environments, helping create more inclusive opportunities for children to learn and thrive.

In a statement on Sunday, EAA Foundation said the EVE project exceeded its original target of supporting 7,000 high-risk and most-at-risk learners across 37 schools, reaching 10,193 children, and achieving a 98 per cent survival rate. It also identified and re-enrolled 1,780 out of school children, enabling them to return to the classroom and continue their education.

To strengthen wellbeing and protection, the project established 37 SAFE Clubs, which provided life skills and psychosocial

support to 5,748 learners while engaging 4,868 parents and caregivers in home-based learning support.

In addition, 74 teachers were trained in gender-responsive and inclusive teaching practices, and 37 Stay-in-School Committees were equipped to identify, monitor and support children at risk of dropping out using a locally developed Student Risk Matrix.

EAA Foundation said that, as the project concludes, efforts have been made to ensure that its impact continues beyond the formal implementation period through the establishment of community savings groups and their linkage to financial service providers to help families meet children's basic needs. The Student Risk Matrix has also been institutionalised as an early warning tool within schools and community structures.

It added that the project helped enhance the capabilities of teachers, parents, and community

volunteers, who are now better equipped to mentor and support vulnerable learners. Continued collaboration with the Ministry of Education will help integrate the project's tools and best practices into national education priorities.

Dr Said Yasin, Executive Director of EAA Foundation's Educate A Child programme, said: "The success of the EVE Project reminds us what is possible when commitment meets collaboration. Together with World Vision Zambia, FAWEZA, and the Ministry of Education, we have not only supported thousands of vulnerable children to remain in education, but we have also helped build a path forward that communities are now equipped to sustain. From bicycles to safe spaces, from teacher training to community-led early warning systems, the sustainability built into this effort is as important as the numbers reached. It is a powerful example of what partnership can do to unlock potential and

protect the right to education for every child."

Maryam al-Ghithani, Head of African and Asian Projects at QFFD, said: "Qatar Fund for Development is proud to have supported the Empowering Vulnerable Children with Education Project, which has helped remove barriers preventing vulnerable children in Zambia from accessing and remaining in quality education. The project reflects our commitment to investing in inclusive and sustainable education solutions that empower children, strengthen communities, and contribute to long-term development. By working with Education Above All Foundation, World Vision Zambia, FAWEZA and Zambia's Ministry of Education, we are pleased to see the impact of this partnership continue beyond the project cycle through community ownership, stronger school systems and practical tools that help protect every child's right to learn." **(QNA)**



QC's initiative restores sight for hundreds in Sri Lanka

Qatar Charity (QC)'s Sri Lanka office has successfully completed a major vision care initiative under its global health programmes as part of the Challenge 27 campaign, bringing renewed hope and improved quality of life to hundreds of vulnerable individuals across the country.

With a total project cost of QR282,480, the initiative enabled the completion of 300 cataract surgeries and the distribution of 555 prescription spectacles, which includes vision correction support for 150 school students.

The programme was launched in response to the growing need for accessible eye care services among low-income families, elderly individuals suffering from

cataracts, and children whose educational performance was being affected by uncorrected vision problems. By partnering with qualified medical professionals and healthcare institutions, Qatar Charity ensured that beneficiaries received essential eye examinations, surgical interventions, and corrective eyewear free of charge.

This intervention forms part of Qatar Charity's health programme initiatives, which also encompass malnutrition projects for children under five and pregnant women, as well as support for chronic disease treatment. Collectively, these initiatives benefit more than 2,000 cases, with a total budget of QR988,680. **(QNA)**

Mystery AI model sparks debate over transparency and ethics

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

The rapid rise of powerful artificial intelligence (AI) models should be matched by clear information about their ownership, development and data practices, computing sciences engineer and AI specialist Arselene Sakly told *Gulf Times*, amid questions surrounding the mysterious Ox Alpha model.

A powerful AI model of unknown origin has triggered fresh debate among developers and technology

observers over transparency, privacy and the ethical use of increasingly capable AI systems.

Known as Ox Alpha, the model recently appeared on OpenRouter, a platform widely used by developers to access and compare AI models. It was listed as a "hidden model", raising questions about its source, ownership and purpose. According to Open Code, the model was offered free of charge with near-unlimited use for one week, quickly attracting attention from the developer community.

Sakly said scientific research and technological progress are es-

sential, but must be guided by clear ethical standards. He stressed that transparency becomes particularly important when powerful AI models are made available to the public, as users should know who developed them, what data was used to shape them and how their interactions may be handled.

"Transparency is essential," Sakly said, noting that users and regulators need sufficient information to assess the risks and responsibilities associated with increasingly powerful AI systems.

Ox Alpha has been described as a highly capable model with a context

window of around one million tokens and the ability to process text, images and video. OpenRouter described it as a frontier model designed for efficient programming, continuous agent operation and practical production use, while Stripe chief executive Patrick Collison described it as "very impressive" in a post on X.

Its sudden appearance has also fuelled online speculation about its origins, including comparisons with recent AI model launches by Chinese companies such as Moonshot AI and Alibaba.

Bloomberg has reported that some companies have released

models without initially revealing their identities as part of efforts to test public adoption. Supporters argue that temporary anonymity can allow developers to assess a model's performance without brand bias. Critics, however, say it can weaken accountability, particularly when AI systems can generate code, analyse multimedia and support automated workflows.

For Sakly, the debate surrounding Ox Alpha reflects a broader challenge facing the AI industry: finding a balance between rapid innovation and responsible development.

As AI tools become increasingly



Arselene Sakly

integrated into business, education and public services, he said greater clarity over ownership, safety testing and data protection will be essential to building public trust.

Lusail Sports Club, QSFW to boost co-operation for 2026-27 season

In line with the vision of the Ministry of Sports and Youth and the state's efforts to support, empower and integrate people with disabilities into society, Lusail Sports Club and Qatar Foundation for Social Work (QFSW) are continuing to strengthen their co-operation during the 2026/2027 sports season. The partnership aims to support community initiatives and projects, link sport with social responsibility, and serve various segments of society. The enhanced co-operation builds on the memorandum of understanding previously signed between the two sides. During the new season, the scope of joint work will be expanded through the implementation of several community initiatives and programmes, with a focus on supporting and empowering people with disabilities and promoting their participation and integration in sports and community activities and events. This co-operation comes alongside Lusail Sports Club's participation in the First Division League, further strengthening the club's social role both on and off the field. As part of the renewed co-operation for the new season, the Qatar Foundation for Social Work logo will appear on the shorts of the official first-team kit. The move reflects the depth of co-operation between the two organisations. It highlights



the importance of using sport as an influential platform to raise community awareness and promote the values of participation, solidarity and social responsibility. Lusail Sports Club said its expanded co-operation with Qatar Foundation for Social Work forms part of its strategic approach to building sustainable partnerships with a tangible impact. The club said the partnership goes beyond sport, contributing to community service and supporting national strategic plans, particularly projects aimed at empowering and integrating people with disabilities. The co-operation is also aligned with the Qatar National Vision 2030 and the directions of the state and the Ministry of Sports and Youth to strengthen the role of sports institutions in community development.

UDST welcomes 2,000 students for academic year

The University of Doha for Science and Technology (UDST) officially welcomed 2,000 students, with Qatari students representing 25%, for the 2026-27 academic year, marking the beginning of another year of applied learning, innovation, and student success.

This year, UDST continues to expand its academic offerings and strengthen its role as Qatar's national university for applied education. With five dynamic colleges, UDST now offers more than 80 academic programmes across the fields of Business, Computing and Information Technology, Engineering and Technology, Health Sciences, and General Education, providing students with diverse pathways that respond to national priorities and the evolving needs of industry.

To support Qatar's growing knowledge economy and workforce development, UDST introduced a new portfolio of specialised academic programmes for this academic year. These include the Executive Master of Health Administration in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Health and the University of Ottawa in Canada, and the Master of Science in Midwifery.

In addition, in co-operation with the Ministry of Municipality, UDST launched the Bachelor of Science and Diploma in Animal Health and Veterinary Science to prepare highly qualified talent capable of meeting the diverse needs of Qatar's key sectors. Students may also benefit from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education's In-Country Scholarship, available for many UDST programmes.

To mark the beginning of the academic journey, the University hosted "Ahlan" a



campus-wide orientation event welcoming its newest cohort of students. The event introduced students to campus life, academic resources, and support services through interactive sessions with faculty members, college deans, and representatives from key student support divisions, including Admissions and Registration, Student Central Services, Sport and Wellness, and Counselling and Accessibility Services.

As part of its ongoing commitment to enhancing student experience, UDST continues to offer a range of initiatives that support student success from the very beginning of university life. The Student Success Management System helps students navigate their academic journey through personalised support and streamlined services.

Dr Salem Al-Naemi, president of UDST said: "At UDST, every new academic year represents a renewed commitment to em-

powering the next generation of innovators, professionals, and leaders. Our expanding academic offerings reflect our vision of anticipating the future while responding to the evolving needs of our nation. As our students begin this exciting chapter, they join a university where applied learning, innovation, and industry collaboration come together to prepare them for meaningful careers and lifelong success."

At UDST, Qatari citizens and children of Qatari women continue to benefit from tuition-free diploma and bachelor's degree programmes. Through its growing portfolio of applied bachelor's and master's degrees, diplomas, and certificates, UDST remains committed to delivering high-quality education that prepares graduates with the knowledge, technical expertise, and practical skills required to support Qatar National Vision 2030 and meet the demands of a rapidly evolving global economy.

MoEHE official highlights efforts to build future-ready education system

Assistant Undersecretary for Educational Affairs at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) Maha Zayed al-Qaqaa al-Ruwaili affirmed that the ministry is leading a comprehensive development trajectory aimed at enhancing the quality of education, improving the efficiency of educational practices, and building a more inclusive, innovative, and future-responsive educational system.

Speaking to Qatar News Agency (QNA), al-Ruwaili said that, with the start of the new academic year, these efforts stem from a vision centred on placing students at the heart of the educational process, empowering national cadres, utilising technology, and building effective partnerships. She noted that these efforts reflect Qatar National Vision 2030 and the country's direction toward establishing a world-class education system.

Regarding the quality of education system and academic achievements, al-Ruwaili revealed that the year 2026 witnessed a tangible increase in students' overall academic achievement rates, ranging from 80-96% depending on the subject, along with a noticeable rise in the percentage of government schools that achieved performance levels exceeding 70% across all subjects. As an additional effort to promote inclusive education, a package of projects to support non-Arabic-speaking students at the primary stage was implemented in 12 schools, benefiting 476 students.

Regarding teaching faculty, 412 professional development sessions were delivered for teachers in the academic year 2025/2026, alongside 112 lesson observation sessions aimed at exchanging expertise and utilising a comprehensive database to tailor train-

ing needs, rather than offering a uniform training approach for all teaching and non-teaching staff.

With regard to early education, the state of Qatar expanded opportunities by offering enrolment in government kindergartens for children from the age of 3 within the formal education system, with "Kindergarten 1" introduced in 12 government schools, and 3 new nurseries opening during the 2025/2026 academic year. She also emphasised the importance of the School Readiness Scale to assess children's developmental readiness for school.

She also highlighted the ministry's program aimed at enhancing early childhood education, launched under the strategic Sunrise program, which included a major awareness event titled "From Here... the Story Begins" to raise community and parental awareness of the importance of this stage.

Regarding digital transformation, al-Ruwaili revealed that the ministry's official educational platforms benefit more than 129,000 students, 15,000 teachers, and 92,000 parents, in addition to the launch of 110 digital innovation clubs and the implementation of specialised cybersecurity programs across 140 schools at various educational levels.

She also noted the launch of a digital citizenship classroom as a pilot project in 10 primary schools, the publication of 7,700 model lessons on official educational platforms, and the development of question banks comprising 1,575 questions. In addition, eight new policies governing e-learning were adopted, including policies on AI integration, digital safety, and digital equity.

In regard to special education, services for inclusive education



were expanded to cover 81 government schools and 18 schools in outlying areas. Al-Ruwaili also mentioned plans to integrate students from the Audio Education Complex into government schools, beginning with the fifth and sixth grade students during the 2026/2027 academic year at Umm Al Qura School and Zekreet School.

She also announced the opening of new specialised schools, including Al-Hidaya Special Needs School for Boys (Mebaireek), as well as plans to open Al-Hidaya School (Abu Sidra). In addition, Al-Jiwan Kindergarten for Early Intervention was opened in September 2025 in

partnership with Hamad Medical Corporation, and the WARIF Academy was launched for students with severe functional limitations.

She further highlighted the ministry's future vision of establishing a unified services centre combining 3 ministries to streamline assessment, diagnosis, and assistive technology support services, thereby easing the burden on parents.

Al-Ruwaili also touched on the development of Qatar's national curriculum framework and the integration of financial literacy, genomics, and STEM programmes into the curriculum. She noted

that learning resources received special attention as part of curriculum modernisation efforts, with support provided for the development of modern educational resources aligned with the updated curriculum framework, as well as the use of digital technologies to enrich educational content.

She also highlighted the role of reading initiatives, such as the Reading Olympics and the Mobile Library project, which benefited 25,549 students, alongside projects aimed at integrating Qatari values, arts, and culture into the educational system to enhance reading skills, promote self-directed learning, and reinforce national identity.

Regarding innovation and academic guidance, al-Ruwaili pointed to the remarkable success of the 17th National Scientific Research and Innovation Exhibition, which saw the participation of 2,383 students who presented 1,222 research projects. The exhibition was further highlighted by the international achievements of Qatari students at the International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF) in the United States and the International Invention, Innovation and Technology Exhibition (ITEX) in Malaysia.

In the area of academic guidance, al-Ruwaili stated that the first Annual University Fair was organised with the participation of 53 universities and attracted 3,000 students. These efforts contributed to increasing the proportion of students enrolled in the scientific track to 57.41% of the total number of students enrolled in Grade 11 during the 2025/2026 academic year, marking an increase of 17.4% compared to the 2020/2021 academic year. The percentage of Qataris recruited into the teaching profession also



Maha Zayed al-Qaqaa al-Ruwaili

increased to 67%, while scholarship sponsorship was provided to 2,100 students.

She also noted that the teaching of foreign languages was expanded to include French, German, and Japanese, as well as the organisation of language, cultural, and scientific camps for students in countries such as France, Germany, Japan, China, and the United Kingdom during the period from 2023-2026.

In addition, she announced a major milestone in technical education with the opening of the Qatar Technical Secondary School for Girls in Al Shamal during the 2025/2026 academic year, as well as the opening of two new Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) schools for the 2026/2027 academic year, located in Al Sakhamra for boys and Rawdat Al Hamama for girls.

In a related context, she affirmed the ministry's commitment to easing the burden on families by issuing official circulars regulating expenditure on school activities and prohibiting the imposition of any financial obligations or in-kind requests on students, parents, or staff as a condition for participating in events.

In concluding her remarks to Qatar News Agency (QNA), the Assistant Undersecretary for Educational Affairs stressed that educational development is a continuous process founded on long-term planning and evidence-based management, ensuring that generations are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to compete globally and participate effectively in achieving national development. (QNA)

QFFD, QRCS launch comprehensive healthcare project for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

Driven by their firm commitment to humanitarian work and alleviating the suffering of the most vulnerable populations, Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD), in co-operation with Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS), has launched a health project in Bangladesh.

The initiative aims to enhance Rohingya refugees' access to essential healthcare services and ensure the uninterrupted provision of around-the-clock medical care.

This joint project embodies the strategic partnership between both parties to support international humanitarian efforts. Implemented in collaboration with the local partner, BRAC, the project will deliver its services through the Primary Health Care Center at Camp #9 to approximately 33,850 refugees over 12 months.

The host health centre pro-

vides a comprehensive package of medical services, including outpatient clinics, 24/7 emergency services, inpatient care, prenatal and postnatal maternal care, natural childbirth, vaccinations, and laboratory testing.

Additionally, the project ensures the provision of essential medications, treatment for communicable and noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), and mental health and psychosocial support services, as well as the operation of ambulance and medical referral systems.

Special emphasis is put on maternal and child health, by monitoring pregnancies, conducting periodic checkups, providing essential medications and health guidelines, and raising awareness about danger signs during and after pregnancy.

Furthermore, the centre offers



family planning services and promotes awareness of proper nutrition practices for mothers and children.

Other activities of the project include public health education,

early detection of medical conditions, guidance of patients to the right services, enhancement of disease prevention measures, and preparedness for potential epidemics and health risks. (QNA)

Qatar philatelic centre takes part in Asian Stamp Exhibition in Indonesia

The Qatar Philatelic and Numismatic Center of the Ministry of Culture is participating in the Asian Stamp Exhibition in Bandung, Indonesia, from Aug 27-31.

The exhibition is being held under the umbrella of the Federation of Inter-Asian Philately (FIAP), alongside meetings of the federation's Executive Committee.

The centre is participating with five stamp exhibits that have won several medals at international exhibitions, including Qatar's first definitive stamps (8 frames); Kuwait's postal history (8 frames); Oman's postal history (5 frames); the postal history of the Yemeni city of Aden (5 frames); and interned covers from World War II (the United States and Switzerland).

By and large, the centre is a member of both the Federation



Internationale de Philatelie (FIP) and FIAP, in addition to serving on FIAP's Executive Committee.

It is committed to participating in international exhibitions organised by FIP and FIAP. It seeks to promote and foster stamp and coin collecting, advance the hobby and provide opportunities for its development by facilitating all possible means for its members to pursue it. (QNA)

Rixos Premium Qetaifan appoints Rosette Fares as cluster director of Marketing

Rixos Premium Qetaifan Island North has appointed Rosette Fares as its new cluster director of Marketing, tasked with overseeing the destination's marketing and communications strategy and key leisure attractions.

Fares will lead integrated marketing efforts for Rixos Premium Qetaifan Island North, Meryal Waterpark, and Azure Beach Doha as the destination works to establish itself as Doha's premium all-inclusive offering, combining luxury hospitality, aquatic adventure, and beach culture into one world-class experience.

In her new role, Fares will oversee the overall marketing and communications strategy across the three assets, driving brand positioning, digital marketing, public relations, strategic partnerships, destination campaigns and commercial marketing initiatives. She will serve as the primary media liaison for



Rosette Fares

the destination while leading the digital ecosystem, crisis communications, and the development of a high-performing marketing team, supporting the continued growth and positioning of Qetaifan Island North.

With more than 18 years of experience in luxury hospitality marketing, branding, communications, and public relations,

including five successful years within the Rixos brand, Rosette has built a distinguished career leading the marketing function for internationally renowned luxury brands. Throughout her career, she has managed multi-million-dollar marketing budgets, developed integrated commercial strategies, and successfully launched major hospi-

tal and lifestyle brands.

Most notably, she led the pre-opening marketing and communications of Rixos Gulf Hotel Doha, successfully introducing the Rixos brand to the Qatari market and driving its positioning across the GCC and key international source markets, contributing to the hotel's success as Qatar's first all-inclusive beach resort and one of the country's leading luxury lifestyle destinations.

Sherif Kasseb, managing director of Rixos Premium Qetaifan Island North, said: "Rosette's appointment reflects our commitment to building one of the region's most recognised integrated hospitality and entertainment destinations. Her strategic marketing expertise, commercial mindset and proven ability to build brands and destination awareness across local, regional and international markets make her the ideal leader to shape the



next chapter of our marketing journey. I am confident she will play a key role in strengthening our destination's positioning, expanding our global reach and driving sustainable growth across Rixos Premium Qetaifan Island North, Meryal Waterpark and Azure Beach Doha."

Fares said: "It is a privilege to take on this role and continue my journey with the Rixos family. Having introduced the Rixos brand to Qatar, I am proud to now support shaping the next chapter of this exceptional destination. Together with our talented teams

and valued partners, I look forward to strengthening our brands, showcasing Qetaifan Island North to the world, and creating experiences that inspire guests to visit and return."

Alongside her new responsibilities, Fares will continue to serve as director of Public Relations for Rixos Hotels & All-Inclusive Collection – Mena, where she leads Arabic-language public relations and communications for the region, driving strategic media relations, corporate communications and brand visibility across key Arabic-speaking markets.

Private schools provide 15,000 seats under community project

By A Staff Reporter
Doha

Private schools and kindergartens in the country have provided around 15,000 school seats under the Ministry of Education and Higher Education's Community Responsibility Project, according to Dr Rania Yousry Mohamed, director of the Private Schools and Kindergartens Department and acting director of the Private Schools Licensing Department.

The Ministry is intensifying efforts to complete student placements before the start of the new academic year, with around 3,250 students already placed across the various seat categories.

The Ministry is targeting completion of the placement process between August 25 and 30, while continuing to co-ordinate with private schools to secure more places. The project provides four main categories of educational support. These include fully free seats available to eligible students from different social groups and nationalities, subject to applicable requirements; discounted seats, through which participating schools offer varying reductions in tuition fees; free seats specifically allocated to students with disabilities; and seats for Qatari students covered by the educational voucher. The level of financial contribution by schools varies

by category, with some schools covering a substantial proportion of tuition costs while parents pay only a limited amount.

Further, 130 free seats have been allocated to students with special needs through specialised and inclusive schools. The measure forms part of the student-support pillar of the Community Responsibility Framework for Private Schools and Kindergartens, which aims to expand educational opportunities for eligible students and strengthen access to inclusive education.

Meanwhile, the Ministry has clarified that Qatari students are not restricted to educational-voucher seats. Eligible Qatari students may apply for other free or discounted seats offered under the initiative, provided they meet the requirements for each category. For students applying for voucher-supported places, the Ministry has introduced more flexible eligibility arrangements.

The educational voucher is valued at QR28,000 per student, with participating schools covering tuition costs in excess of the voucher value under the approved arrangement. The Ministry has also removed the previous household-income restriction for the relevant voucher-supported seats, allowing eligible Qatari families to apply regardless of income.

In August, the Ministry announced 3,793 voucher-supported seats for Qatari students across



Dr Rania Yousry Mohamed

17 private schools. These schools cover a wide range of curricula and educational stages, and four participating schools also offer evening study options.

The Ministry has earlier reported that the broader Community Responsibility Project involves 113 participating schools and kindergartens.

The total number of seats is expected to remain flexible as the Ministry continues discussions with private schools. Dr Rania noted that some participating schools have recently increased their contributions by hundreds of places, including additions of around 400 seats at one school and 300 at another.

Another significant development is the opening of evening study centres for Qatari students.

The Ministry introduced this option after identifying private

The measure forms part of the student-support pillar of the Community Responsibility Framework for Private Schools and Kindergartens, which aims to expand educational opportunities for eligible students and strengthen access to inclusive education

schools with limited morning capacity but available places in the evening. Schools were asked to assess parents' willingness to consider evening education, and the feedback indicated that some families viewed it as a practical alternative.

Further, the Ministry intends to recognise the private schools and kindergartens that make outstanding contributions to community responsibility. Schools demonstrating significant achievements across the framework's different areas are expected to receive awards and recognition as part of an incentive system designed to encourage continued participation.

Preparations advance ahead of Qatar Boat Show 2026

Preparations are well underway for the third edition of Qatar Boat Show, with Old Doha Port gearing up to welcome visitors from November 4 to 7.

Following the launch of the Crafting Wonderful campaign earlier this year, Qatar Boat Show is working closely with exhibitors, sponsors and partners as preparations continue for the 2026 edition at Old Doha Port. With less than three months to go, preparations are progressing across the exhibition, visitor experience and wider programme, with new partnerships and experiences set to be announced in the lead-up to the event.

Building on the success of its first two editions, Qatar Boat Show will once again bring the world of yachting and marine lifestyle to Old Doha Port, with visitors set to experience an expanded line-up of yachting, marine lifestyle, dining, entertainment and waterfront experiences.

With Qatar Boat Show 2026

approaching in November, visitors can start planning their trip through the show's website, where they can explore the show's hotel partners and access preferred accommodation rates, making it easier to plan their stay and enjoy a seamless visit. Visitors can also benefit from Qatar Boat Show's latest partnership with Qatar Airways as the Official Travel Partner when planning their journey to Qatar ahead of the event.

More information on participating brands, activities and the wider programme will be announced in the coming weeks.

The 2026 edition will also extend beyond the marina, bringing together marine luxury, culture, hospitality and entertainment across Old Doha Port. From exploring vessels on the water to discovering the destination's restaurants and waterfront spaces, the four-day event will offer residents and visitors the opportunity to experience the world of yachting up close.

Al Mashmoum Park opens in Al Wakrah

The Ministry of Municipality has opened Al Mashmoum Park in Al Wakrah, providing a new family-friendly destination and a natural recreational space for local residents. Mohamed Ibrahim al-Sada, Director of the Parks Department at the Ministry of Municipality, told Qatar TV that the new park is one of the neighbourhood parks and covers an area of approximately 4,300sq m. He noted that the park was designed to provide a range of services and facilities, including sports amenities, a walking path, running tracks, restrooms, and a children's play area, serving the needs of residents in the surrounding area.

The Pearl Service Centre ranks first for H1 '26

In support of the objectives of the Qatar National Vision 2030, the Pearl Service Centre has been ranked first as the best government services centre for the first half of 2026, achieving an overall score of 92.9%. The ranking was based on an assessment covering four key areas: service delivery results, customer experience, operational efficiency, and the performance of the centre's director and support staff. The achievement reflects the centre's commitment to delivering high-quality government services and enhancing customer satisfaction and operational performance in line with Qatar's national development goals.

Qatar's real estate market clocks over QR330mn trading volume in a week

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

The Ministry of Justice has released its weekly real estate trading bulletin for the period from August 9 to 13, showing that the total real estate trading volume across the country exceeded QR330mn, with residential units accounting for around QR26mn of that total.

At the municipal level, Al Rayyan Municipality led the market by a wide margin, recording the highest share of sales with a total trading value of QR117mn, compared to just QR2mn recorded in Al Sheehaniya Municipality, which posted the lowest figure for the week.

Al Rayyan also topped the list in terms of transaction activity, registering 28 deals, while Al Sheehaniya recorded only a single transaction over the same period.

Within the residential units segment in particular, activity was concentrated in Lusail Zone 69, which recorded the highest number of transactions at nine deals, while the areas of Al Kharayej, Ghar Thualeib, and Umm Al Amad were the least active, each registering just one deal.

In terms of trading value for residential units, The Pearl came out on top among all

zones with QR13mn in sales, whereas Ghar Thualeib recorded the lowest trading value at QR1mn.

The figures reflect the continued concentration of real estate activity in Al Rayyan and the Pearl and Lusail Zone 69, indicating sustained investor and buyer interest in these areas relative to other municipalities and residential zones across the country.

The latest figures come against the backdrop of a strong month for the real estate sector overall, with July 2026 trading volume reaching QR1.86bn across 1,485 transactions, led by Doha, Al Rayyan, and Al Daayen in terms of transaction value.

Weekly trading volumes since the start of the year have fluctuated considerably, ranging from lows of around QR330mn to peaks exceeding QR1bn in a single week, indicating that the August 9-13 period sits toward the lower-to-mid end of recent weekly activity.

Analysts tracking the sector note that this pattern of fluctuation is typical, with trading value driven heavily by the presence or absence of large-ticket land and commercial transactions in any given week, alongside steadier, more consistent turnover in residential unit sales across established zones such as The Pearl and Lusail.

Academic Bridge Program receives international accreditation from WASC

QNA
Doha

Qatar Foundation's (QF) Academic Bridge Program (ABP), part of Pre-University Education (PUE), has received full accreditation from the Accrediting Commission for Schools, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (ACS WASC), becoming the first educational institution in Qatar to receive this accreditation as a Supplementary Education Center.

In a statement yesterday, QF said the accreditation followed a comprehensive evaluation process that included in-depth self-study and an initial visit by a team of experienced educators, who assessed ABP against the standards for Supplementary Education Centers, with a focus on the quality of student learning and well-being.

QF stressed the accreditation represents an important step in ABP's journey to further strengthen academic and educational quality assurance through an ongoing process of self-evaluation, periodic review, and evidence-based improvement.

Abeer al-Khalifa, President of QF's Pre-University Education (PUE), said: "This accreditation reflects Qatar Foundation's enduring commitment to excellence in education and the shared dedication across our Pre-University Education ecosystem to empowering students to achieve their fullest potential."

"ABP's attainment of this accreditation is a significant milestone that recognises the dedication of its leadership, faculty, and



staff, as well as the quality and rigour of the learning experience it provides. We are immensely proud of this achievement, which reinforces ABP's role in preparing students for success in higher education and beyond and will continue to benefit generations of learners in Qatar and beyond," she added.

Dr Saheim al-Temimi, ABP Director, said: "Achieving this accreditation represents a significant milestone for ABP and recognition of our commitment to excellence in education. It also reflects the dedication and efforts of our faculty, administrative staff, and all stakeholders in fostering a culture of continuous improvement, student success, and academic quality."

"As we celebrate this achievement, we look forward to building on it and continuing to provide high-quality educational experiences that prepare our students for success at university, empower them to achieve their aspirations, and enable them to contribute meaningfully to their communities," he added.

Alana Steward, International Consultant at WASC, said: "WASC is proud to welcome ABP

as a member of its community of Supplementary Education Centers. With its focus on student learning and well-being, ABP provides its students with distinctive pathways to university education and prepares them for success beyond graduation."

The evaluation committee's initial visit report highlighted several ABP's key strengths, including the clarity of its vision and mission in preparing students for a successful transition to university education and future careers, as well as positive student outcomes, including university acceptance rates and academic progress.

The committee also commended ABP's collaborative leadership approach and student-centred culture, built on strong relationships and individualised academic support, as well as its partnerships with local and international universities.

The report further highlighted ABP's data-driven approach to review and evaluation, its commitment to professional development and continuous improvement, and its comprehensive support system, which contributes to a positive learning environment for students, faculty, and administrative staff.

GUQ welcomes new students, announces new programmes

Georgetown University in Qatar (GUQ) is set to welcome 150 students to its incoming Class of 2030. The talented cohort, which was selected from just 9.4% of all applicants, is notably bilingual, with over half speaking three or more languages. Their accomplishments range from being members of Qatar's National Tennis, Equestrian, Skeet Shooting, Volleyball, and Wrestling teams to distinctions in performing arts and academic competitions, including Concertmaster of the Qatar Youth Orchestra, Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra performer, Academic Olympiad winners, and community service leaders and volunteers.

They join the Qatar campus at an exciting time, with the launch of new programmes designed to prepare students to meaningfully contribute to society, including a major in Science, Technology, and International Affairs (STIA), alongside new minors in Art, Heritage, and Cultural Diplomacy, and Women's and Gender Studies. To support the programme's growth, the university also welcomed seven new faculty members in 2026, teaching in Arabic,



Class of 2030

international economics, international politics, and STIA, along with five additional visiting appointments. The class was officially welcomed into the community at Georgetown's venerated New Student Convocation ceremony last week by the new university president, Eduardo M Peñalver, who sent warm greetings from the Hilltop campus in Washington, DC, along with acting dean Clyde Wilcox, who offered the students words to live by.

"Take advantage of the diversity of the university, and learn from it. We are in a region that is in the world's gaze, and you have an extraordinary vantage point from which to observe events as they unfold," said Wilcox. "What you develop here is judgment about ideas, theories and facts, and much of that learning will come from the people around you." Professor Nandini Deo also advised students: "Define yourself by the problem you will help solve. Figure out what is unfair, unjust

or not good enough about today's world. Then, find the people who are working to understand that problem and solve that problem." Accepting the GUQ banner to carry forward on behalf of his class at the ceremony was Adarsh Kumar from Bihar, India, who has been on the path to solving problems for himself and his community from a young age. Raised with limited access to education and funding, he began his journey to empower himself and others by founding his first educational access nonprofit at age



Professor Nandini Deo



Acting dean Clyde Wilcox

13 and, at 16, launching an educational tutoring and access platform, Skillzo, which has already helped over 20,000 students improve their skills and connect with opportunities. His dedication and perseverance earned him the \$100,000 2025 Chegg.org Global Student Prize, and a place as the youngest-

ever Google Youth Advisor. The Class of 2030 currently has 150 students, with an admission rate of 9.4%; 35% are male and 65% female. The cohort represents 42 nationalities and 25 languages, with 43% Qatari, 38% resident expatriates, 31% international students, and 9% first-generation college students.

Qatar luxury market tipped to reach \$2.63bn by 2031

From Page 1

Clothing and apparel represented the largest segment in 2025, accounting for 29.45% of the market, driven by demand for premium tailoring, formalwear, designer collections and bespoke services. Luxury watches are forecast to grow by 10.34% annually through 2031, supported by demand for limited-edition pieces and the expansion of authorised dealers.

Women accounted for 56.3% of luxury spending in 2025, while purchases by men are expected to increase by 10.22% annually over the forecast period. Traditional shops remain the dominant sales channel, accounting for 74.9% of the market last year, although online luxury sales are projected to grow by 10.88% annually. Tourism is identified as a major contributor to the sector's expansion. Official Qatar Tourism figures show the country welcomed 5.1mn international visitors in 2025, an increase of 3.7% from the previous year. More than 10.8mn hotel room nights were sold during the year, up 8.6%, while average hotel occupancy reached 71%, reflecting stronger demand across the

hospitality sector. Qatar Tourism annual performance statistics The report also highlighted regulatory changes that have lowered barriers for international brands and investors. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry confirmed that Ministerial Decision No 60 of 2024 reduced some business-related service fees by more than 90%, while setting the fee for a new commercial registration or licence at QR500. The ministry said the measures were intended to support entrepreneurs, encourage foreign investment and improve the competitiveness of Qatar's business environment. Ministry of Commerce and Industry announcement The researchers said the market's growth prospects were also underpinned by new tourism and residential developments, increasing interest in personalised shopping experiences and Qatar's broader efforts to diversify its economy. The assessment identified regional geopolitical instability, counterfeit products and the country's relatively small population as potential constraints, but maintained its forecast for sustained double-digit annual growth through 2031.

Qatar-backed roadmap advances DRC peace process

From Page 1

He said the transition from the Doha Framework to an executive roadmap in Switzerland strengthened Qatar's position as a reliable mediator, noting that the real test of mediation was not signing an agreement but translating it into practical steps. Dr al-Otaibi attributed the progress to Qatar's combination of trust, access and continuity. Doha, he said, maintained communication channels with all sides and continued its political and diplomatic engagement after the agreement was signed without becoming a party to the conflict. The activation of the EJVM+ and release of the detainees, he added, provided tangible evidence that the agreement was producing results. Such confidence-building measures can alter the parties' calculations and

demonstrate that political commitments can deliver gains on the ground. He said sustained progress could help prevent a return to violence and gradually build trust, opening the way to addressing more difficult issues, including security arrangements, the return of displaced people and humanitarian concerns. The Doha Framework could serve as a model for other African conflicts, Dr al-Otaibi said, though not one to be copied verbatim. Its transferable elements were trust-building, open communication, political mediation linked to implementation mechanisms and continued engagement after signing. "The success of the mediator is not measured only by what the parties sign in Doha, but by what changes on the ground after they leave it," he said. (QNA)



School talent programme strengthens future of Asian athletics

QNA
Doha

The President of Asian Athletics Association Dahlan Jaman al-Hamad stressed the importance of implementing the Athletics for Talented Students Program in schools, describing it as an important step toward identifying athletic talent at an early age and developing their abilities in accordance with scientific and technical principles, which would contribute to preparing a new generation of athletes capable of representing the Asian continent and achieving success in the future. In a special interview with Qatar News Agency (QNA), he said the programme focuses on identifying and nurturing athletics talent in schools, given the importance of the sport and its connection to many fundamental skills that underpin other sports. He noted that implementing the programme would broaden the base of athletics participants and help uncover more promising talents. Al-Hamad also revealed that the Asian Athletics Association has adopted specialised programmes to educate and train



school staff and prepare them practically to implement the talent programme. He explained that the primary objective is to support talented children, cultivate their passion for athletics, and develop their abilities through technical and scientific support, thereby paving the way for the emergence of new champions in the future. He added that the Asian Athletics Association believes that talent and champions can be discovered in all parts of the continent whenever they are provided with appropriate support and nurturing. Accordingly, the Association is working to train coaches to identify talent, while encouraging children to participate in various athletics events and develop their abilities.

MoEHE completes interviews for Qatari trainers' initiative

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) has concluded interviews for Qatari trainers and children of Qatari women nominated for the second cohort of the Qatari Trainers Localisation Initiative, which targets private educational and training service centres across the country. The interviews were held from August 16 to 20 and witnessed a strong turnout from applicants, reflecting growing interest in the opportunities offered by the initiative and in the broader development of national talent within the private education and training sector. According to the ministry, applications for the second cohort

were opened through its official website following the success of the first cohort. A total of 322 Qatari trainers and children of Qatari women applied to join the programme, underscoring the demand for structured professional pathways in training and education. After applications were reviewed and classified in line with the approved terms and criteria, 268 candidates were shortlisted for interviews. They included 253 Qatari trainers and 15 children of Qatari women, with the selection process designed to assess readiness, professional competence and suitability for the requirements of private training specialists. The interview committees in-



A training session in progress.

cluded specialists from the ministry, along with representatives from Qatar Chamber, the Centre for Community Service and Continuing Education at Qatar University, the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, Al Jazeera Media Institute and Teach for Qatar. The ministry said the participation of these institutions reflected the importance of institutional partnerships in supporting and developing national competencies and linking training opportunities

to the needs of the labour market. The initiative aims to attract and prepare Qatari trainers and children of Qatari women, enhance their professional capabilities and develop their practical skills. It also seeks to raise the quality of educational and training services, support the nationalisation of the private education and training services sector, and widen professional opportunities for national cadres in a field that continues to see growing demand.

QU organises 'Ya Hala 2026' to welcome new faculty members

Qatar University (QU), through the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning under the Office of the Associate Vice-President for Teaching and Learning, organised "Ya Hala 2026," its annual orientation event for new faculty members. The event introduced new faculty to QU's academic environment and highlighted key systems, services, and opportunities that support teaching, learning, and scientific research. "Ya Hala 2026" aims to facilitate the integration of new faculty members into the QU community and strengthen communication and interaction with University leadership and academic and administrative units. The event sup-

ports new faculty members as they begin their academic journey and encourages their active participation in advancing QU's mission and objectives. The event brought together representatives from various sectors and departments across QU, including Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Research and Graduate Studies, Medical and Health Sciences and Digital Learning and Online Education. Their participation reflected the University's integrated approach to providing new faculty members with a supportive environment from the start of their careers at QU. Dr Abdulaziz al-Mannai, acting associate vice president for Teaching and Learning, said the event

strengthens communication and interaction among new faculty members, University leadership, and academic and administrative units, supporting their transition into the academic environment and encouraging their active participation in advancing the University's mission and objectives. Prof Tamer Khattab, director of the Excellence in Teaching and Learning Centre, emphasised that advancing the educational process, enhancing its effectiveness, and aligning it with the latest teaching methods require a collaborative effort among faculty members. He noted that this effort is grounded in the development of contemporary knowledge, prac-

tical application, and active engagement. Dr Khattab added that new faculty members play a central role in this process, bringing fresh perspectives shaped by their experiences at leading international academic institutions. By sharing these insights with their colleagues at Qatar University and learning from the university's established academic culture and practices, they contribute to a productive exchange of ideas that supports continuous educational development. The "Ya Hala" initiative supports an institutional culture based on communication, collaboration and excellence in teaching and learning while reflecting QU's national role in supporting human development.



Smoke and a fire ball rise during an Israeli strike in the area of al-Zawayda, in the central Gaza Strip, yesterday. (AFP)

Israeli airstrikes in Gaza Strip kill two people, including 4-year-old boy

Reuters
Cairo

Two Israeli airstrikes in the Gaza Strip yesterday killed at least two people, including a four-year-old boy, and wounded seven others, Palestinian health officials said, as Israel warned it would intensify strikes after what it said were launches of balloons, drones and kites from Gaza towards Israel.

One of the strikes hit a building in Zawayda town in the centre of the enclave and followed a warning by the Israeli army for the owners of the property to leave the area, residents said.

Medics said flying debris and shrapnel that spread for dozens of metres around had wounded at least six people, including the four-year-old, Mohammad Abdel-Salam Taha, who was later pronounced dead at hospital.

“There is no ceasefire, there is nothing,” said Abu Ahmed, a displaced Palestinian who was sheltering close to the building, which the airstrike reduced to a pile of mangled steel and concrete.

“We want solutions, we want to live in peace,” he said.

The second airstrike took place in the nearby Nuseirat refugee camp, the health officials said. Israel’s military said it was looking into both strikes.

An October 2025 US-backed ceasefire halted major fighting in the shattered territory, but it

failed to end strikes by the Israeli military, which it said aimed to thwart attacks by Hamas and other Gaza fighters.

The military said in a statement late on Saturday that it had struck and killed a senior Hamas fighter, Sharif Al-Hasnat, in the city of Deir Al-Balah.

It said he was leading efforts to restore Hamas’ “underground infrastructure”.

Hamas accuses Israel of violating the ceasefire and undermining efforts to implement a broader plan by US President Donald Trump to end the Gaza conflict, which also includes Israeli withdrawals and Hamas disarmament.

More than 1,280 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza since the ceasefire took effect last October, according to Gazan health officials, while the Israeli military says four Israeli soldiers have been killed.

Israel has reported the launch of drones, balloons and kites from the Gaza Strip towards Israel. Following a situation assessment yesterday, it warned Hamas it would intensify strikes in Gaza and order civilians to evacuate areas if the launches didn’t stop immediately, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s office said in a statement.

Senior Hamas official Basem Naim dismissed Israel’s warning, writing on X that children launch the kites “in search of their innocent childhood amid the rubble.”

Lebanon arrests food influencer over drug trafficking allegations

AFP
Beirut

Lebanon yesterday arrested a social media influencer known for his videos about food who had been handed a life sentence in absentia for drug trafficking, a judicial source told AFP.

Georges Dib, known on TikTok as “Doctor Food”, who is followed by more than eight million accounts, was apprehended at his home in the far north governorate of Akkar, according to the source, which spoke to AFP on condition of anonymity.

Dib, who also owns a confectionery business, would be taken to a detention centre in Mount Lebanon, where he would face a new trial on further drug trafficking charges, the source added.

Two years ago, the Lebanese judiciary issued a warrant for Dib, accusing him of “manufacturing narcotics, trafficking and smuggling them abroad”, according to Lebanon’s state-run National News Agency (NNA).

The NNA said at the time that authorities had seized confectionery and other food products at Beirut’s Rafic Hariri International Airport that contained narcotics and were manufactured in factories owned by Dib.

The products were to be shipped to a Gulf country, the news agency reported.

Despite an arrest warrant and conviction against him, Dib continued to post videos on TikTok.

Last month, after news of his conviction was made public, he denied the accusations in one of his videos, urging followers not to listen to what was being said about him.

Dib rose to prominence on social media posting content about cooking and daily life with his ex-wife, known as Shorouk, a Canadian of Palestinian origin who has more than 15mn followers.

They separated after she accused him of abuse. On Saturday night, she held a “divorce party” at a seaside resort in Lebanon attended by thousands of her followers.

Israeli army kills teen during West Bank raid

AFP
Ramallah, Palestinian Territories

Israel’s military killed a Palestinian teenager in the occupied West Bank yesterday, Palestinian health authorities said, while an Israeli and a Palestinian were wounded in separate incidents.

Israeli gunfire killed Islam Ahmad Maher Ajouri, 14, in the Askar refugee camp where he lived, outside Nablus in the north of the West Bank, the Palestinian health ministry announced.

Mohammed Abu Kashk, head of the Askar camp services committee, told AFP that the teenager was killed by Israeli forces during a raid on the camp.

“There were no clashes or confrontations that would justify shooting a child and killing him,” he said.

According to a source from the Palestinian Red Crescent, Ajouri was hit in the chest by live ammunition. He was pronounced dead at Nablus National Hospital.

At his funeral, his uncle Ahmed Mohamed Zamzoum told AFP that the boy went outside during the army raid. “Every time the Israeli forces enter, one or more martyrs are killed,” he said.

The Israeli army told AFP it was verifying the information.

In a separate incident, the army said it apprehended a man suspected of stabbing an Israeli earlier yesterday in Al-Auja, in the central West Bank.

Israeli rescue service Magen David Adom said the 24-year-old victim had “a penetrating wound”. The man was evacuated to a



Mohamed (C), brother of Palestinian Islam Ajouri, grieves with his relatives over the body of his sibling at Rafidia Hospital in Nablus in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, yesterday. (AFP)

hospital in Jerusalem, and his condition was described as “moderate”.

According to the initial findings of the investigation, the victim parked near a shopping centre and was “attacked from behind and stabbed in the shoulder”, Israeli police said in a statement.

Hani Najum, the head of the Al-Auja village council, told AFP that “the Israeli army raided the village, deployed in its streets” and imposed a curfew.

In a third incident, the army reported that an attempt was made “to steal a weapon from an IDF soldier” near the Palestinian town of Taybeh, northeast of Ramallah, and that forces opened fire at the man, saying he was “neutralised”.

Palestinian sources told AFP that the man, Aws Akram Maatan, belonging to the village of Burqa east of Ramallah. The man suffered an injury to his foot and was taken to a Jerusalem hospital for treatment.

The head of the Burqa village council, Sayel Kanaan, said in a statement that Maatan had been shot “without justification”.

Violence has surged in the West Bank, which Israel has occupied since 1967, since the start of the war in Gaza in October 2023.

Israeli soldiers or settlers have killed at least 1,100 Palestinians since then, according to an AFP tally based on data from the Palestinian health ministry.

Over the same period, at least 48 Israelis have been killed in Palestinian attacks or during Israeli military operations, according to Israeli figures.

Tunisia recovers migrants’ drowned bodies

The Tunisian national guard said yesterday it recovered 11 bodies from the sea after a boat carrying migrants sank off the country’s southeastern coast, with three people still missing.

The boat was carrying 15 people, only one of whom was rescued after it sank some 14 nautical miles off the shore of Zarzis on Friday night. “Search operations resulted in the recovery of three bodies yesterday and eight bodies today, bringing the total to 11,” the national guard said in a statement.

Searches for the three remaining missing passengers were ongoing, it added.

On Saturday night, residents in Ben Guerane — the marginalised city near the Libyan border where 14 of the migrants were from — staged protests, blocking roads and setting fires on fire over the shipwreck.

Tunisia, whose coast is some 145 km from the Italian island of Lampedusa, is a departure point for migrants who make the perilous journey across the Mediterranean for better lives in Europe.

The central Mediterranean crossing is the deadliest migration route in the world, according to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

The IOM said earlier this month that the number of migrant deaths on the central Mediterranean route had more than doubled in the first four months of 2026 compared to the same period last year.

At least 914 migrants have died or gone missing along the route this year, according to the IOM.

In 2023, Tunisia signed a €255mn (\$290 mn) deal with the European Union, nearly half of which was earmarked for tackling irregular migration. The deal, strongly supported by Italy’s hard-right government, aimed to bolster Tunisia’s capacity to prevent boats leaving its shore. (AFP)

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Humanoids break records at Beijing World Robot Games

AFP
Beijing

Faceless humanoids exceeded human records and delighted hundreds of spectators at the World Robot Games over the weekend in Beijing as China showcased its dominance in the industry.

Dozens of humanoids and their human operators descended on Beijing's Olympic speed skating arena Sunday to compete in events from athletics and boxing to football and martial arts.

During Saturday's opening ceremony, a Chinese robot broke Jamaican legend Usain Bolt's record for the 100m dash, a feat splashed across headlines in Chinese state media.

The white and headless humanoid model shattered the 400m world record by nearly five seconds.

Developed by a local government-backed research centre in Beijing, it finished in 38.16 seconds — with its time later revised to 38.15.

In one 400m heat, a white-shelled robot thrashed its arms side to side as it propelled itself



Officials carry a stretcher with a humanoid robot that fell while competing, yesterday. (AFP)

manoid model shattering the 400m world record by nearly five seconds.

Developed by a local government-backed research centre in Beijing, it finished in 38.16 seconds — with its time later revised to 38.15.

In one 400m heat, a white-shelled robot thrashed its arms side to side as it propelled itself

around the track, leaning dangerously forward as fans wondered out loud if it would fall.

The robot wobbled as it stormed toward the finish but managed to remain upright.

Fans were just as pleased to watch the robo-athletes flop, as multiple robotic runners failed to start.

Others made their way around

the track at the pace of a brisk walk or crumbled immediately after the gun start.

Children and their parents giggled as a toddler-sized robot kicked a football off the pitch over knee-high barricades.

Each clunky, barely defended goal earned the waddling humanoids roars of applause from the stands.

Spectators erupted into laughter as a humanoid in a boxing ring stumbled off to the side and folded over the ropes where it stayed motionless until humans lifted it away.

For 72-year-old spectator Hou Yali, the weekend's robot records left her wanting to watch the machines go against humans.

"We'll be able to see more clearly whether machines can surpass humans," said Hou, who is retired and lives in Beijing.

"Right now, this is just running, just a competition of speed. It's not a test of intelligence, or hiring someone to do household tasks or act as live-in help," she said.

Hou, who pays aides to clean her home and make meals for her



Humanoid robots fight during a kickboxing match at the 2nd World Humanoid Robot Games in Beijing, yesterday. (AFP)



A humanoid robot falls while competing in the 400m race on the second day of the 2nd World Humanoid Robot Games in Beijing, yesterday. (AFP)

weekly, said she would like to see robots do those tasks. "With the development of our country's

economy, people have more money in their pockets, and they may decide to use robots," she said.

China postpones lunar mission

China said yesterday it has postponed its Chang'e-7 lunar mission after a "comprehensive assessment", according to state-run Xinhua news agency. The uncrewed Chang'e-7 mission "does not meet the conditions for launch and therefore cannot be carried out within the launch window scheduled for this year", Xinhua said, citing authorities. Before yesterday's announcement, the Chang'e-7 spacecraft, named after a mythical Chinese goddess of the moon, had been expected to be launched as early as next week. The spacecraft was expected to search for frozen water near the moon's south pole. (Reuters)

Japan earthquake injures dozens

AFP
Tokyo

A magnitude 5.9 earthquake struck near Tokyo early yesterday, injuring at least 37 people and disrupting travel in the bustling megacity.

The quake caused violent shaking in the Japanese capital and its surrounding areas, prompting the nation's warning systems to sound public announcements and sirens in the streets and lighting up smartphones with notices in affected areas.

The quake struck the southern part of the Ibaraki Prefecture near Tokyo at 2:00am (1700 GMT on Saturday), the Japan Meteorological Agency said.

There were no concerns about a tsunami, the agency said, adding that the earthquake's depth was 68 kilometres (42 miles).

Japan's Fire and Disaster Management Agency said that at least 37 people had suffered minor injuries.

The worst case was that of a woman in her 80s in Yokohama, south of Tokyo, who tried to leave her bed after the quake but fell and hurt her hip, according to the local government and media reports.

The late-night quake disrupted regional train services in Tokyo on Sunday morning, according to East Japan Railway Company.

A building in Saitama, north of Tokyo, also suffered minor damage, according to the Fire and Disaster Management Agency.

Authorities are investigating if a water main that ruptured in a neighbourhood in the capital was related to the quake, Kyodo News said.

The weather agency warned of an increased risk of landslides in the area as the quake could have loosened soil in the region, which was lashed by torrential downpours on Saturday.

The agency also warned of the possibility of strong aftershocks in the days ahead.

3 wounded in attacks in Thailand's restive south

AFP
Narathiwat, Thailand

Dozens of co-ordinated arson and incendiary attacks across Thailand's insurgency-hit south late Saturday left at least three people wounded and government property burned, the military said.

Multiple local government offices and several vehicles were damaged or destroyed in the 51 attacks, according to an AFP journalist and the military's Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC).

Firefighters worked to extinguish burning tyres left in the middle of a road and flames inside a 7-Eleven convenience store Saturday night, while police officers stopped motorists for security checks, footage from local broadcaster Thai PBS showed.

"Multiple coordinated incidents aimed at creating unrest occurred in various locations across the southern border provinces" from around 8:00pm to midnight on Saturday, ISOC said in a statement.

Most were in Narathiwat province, where three civilians were wounded and an overnight curfew was imposed, while other attacks occurred in neighbouring Yala and



Fire damage is seen at a building in the Bongor Subdistrict Administrative Organisation office in Ra-ngae district in the southern Thai province of Narathiwat yesterday. (AFP)

Pattani provinces, authorities said. No group has claimed responsibility for Saturday's attacks.

Two women, aged 45 and 46, and a 21-year-old man were hurt in a roadside bombing in Narathiwat, provincial officials said in a statement.

All three were hospitalised and in stable condition.

The national railway operator temporarily suspended part of a route in Narathiwat after officials found damage on the tracks "caused by a disruptive bombing incident last night", ISOC said.

Narathiwat Governor Boonchuay Homymyen told local media that authorities were investigating sites of the attacks yesterday, including a local government office and telecommunications towers and electrical poles.

The Narathiwat military command earlier announced a curfew from Saturday night until 6:00 am on Sunday.

A vehicle was stolen from the office of a subdistrict administrative organisation in Narathiwat during one of the attacks that left

the building in flames, ISOC said.

The burned-out pickup truck was later found abandoned on a road.

At a municipal office in Pattani province damaged in another attack, army commander for the southern region Norathip Poinok said yesterday that the assailants had aimed to destroy the building and undermine public trust in the state.

"We had intelligence reports for about two months that there would be attacks on local offices," he told reporters, adding that the military had issued warnings to security agencies but did not know when and where the assaults would occur.

Insurgents in the deep south regularly carry out attacks on security officials and government property, including ahead of visits by officials to the region.

Last month, assailants killed five soldiers in a shooting and bomb attack at a checkpoint in Narathiwat.

Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul and members of his cabinet are scheduled to make a two-day visit to the city of Hat Yai in southern Songkhla province next week to discuss investment projects, flooding prevention and security issues, his office said on Saturday.

Vietnam approves customs law amendments for IP enforcement

Vietnam's National Assembly yesterday approved amendments to the customs law that strengthen customs powers to intercept counterfeit and intellectual property (IP)-infringing goods, a move that could address some concerns raised in a US trade investigation into the country's protection and enforcement of intellectual property rights.

The changes come after the US Trade Representative in May launched a Section 301 investigation into Vietnam's intellectual property regime after designating the country a "priority foreign country" in its annual Special 301 review.

Among the concerns cited by USTR were widespread counterfeiting, weak border enforcement, limited use of customs' authority to seize suspected counterfeit goods on its own initiative, and the absence of similar powers over goods transiting Vietnam.

The revised law, which takes effect in March 2027, expands customs enforcement provisions to cover not only imported and ex-

ported goods but also goods transiting through Vietnam, broadening the range of shipments that may be subject to intervention by customs authorities.

Under the amendments, customs authorities retain the power to suspend clearance when rights holders provide evidence of possible infringement and a financial guarantee. Customs officers may also proactively halt the clearance of imported, exported or transit goods if they identify clear signs of counterfeiting or other intellectual property violations.

The law also introduces new provisions governing goods traded through e-commerce platforms, as Vietnam experiences rapid growth in cross-border online shopping, much of it supplied by Chinese merchants.

Goods imported and exported through e-commerce platforms will be required to undergo customs procedures and remain subject to customs supervision, while platform operators and logistics providers will be required to provide relevant information to customs authorities. (Reuters)

Singapore will investigate any tariff evasion, PM says

Singapore will investigate any efforts by companies to route goods through the city-state to circumvent tariffs and import goods made with forced labour, Singapore Prime Minister Lawrence Wong said yesterday. The White House said last week that the US is losing annual tariff revenue of about \$19bn to \$26bn on goods, largely from China, that are transshipped through third countries to avoid US import duties. "We will not allow Singapore to be used as a conduit for illegal trade practices," Wong said. Wong pointed to the US concerns about Chinese goods being routed through Southeast Asia and the 12.5% US tariff on Singapore exports which the US said it had levied on Singapore because it does not have a law prohibiting the importation of goods produced with forced labour, and said Singapore takes both issues seriously. Singapore will investigate any evidence of wrongdoing, said Wong, but it has to be realistic given it is a major hub for re-exports and transshipment. (Reuters)

Indonesian teenage 'Superman' helps to douse Borneo wildfires

AFP
Palangkaraya, Indonesia

Dressed as his favourite superhero, Indonesian teenager RudiYansah walks along a charred landscape, helping douse wildfires that have razed large parts of Borneo island.

The Southeast Asian country has been battling infernos that have left a thick, blanketing smog over parts of the island that Indonesia shares with Malaysia and Brunei.

RudiYansah's red and blue Superman costume stood out against the stark, scorched landscape surrounding the town of Palangkaraya, where he has joined a local volunteer firefighting group set up by his father to put out smouldering peatland.

The 17-year-old told AFP he has been using his free time after school to help his father douse fires since 2023.

But this year, he decided to don the brightly coloured tights when fighting fires, creating a striking image that has drawn attention to the struggle to contain the blazes.

While RudiYansah said dressing as the Man of Steel was "just for fun", video of him using a hose to wet foliage has gone viral, garnering millions of views and earning him the title of "forest hero" from the country's forestry minister.

"Honestly, I'm really happy because I can help locals, even though it feels really tiring," RudiYansah, who like many Indo-



A drone view shows the Ampera Bridge shrouded in haze from wildfires in Palembang, South Sumatra province, Indonesia, yesterday. (Reuters)

nesians only uses one name, told AFP yesterday while still wearing his cape.

He said that he wet his costume slightly before heading into the fields to prevent it from burning, and washed it every night to keep it clean.

His father, Mulyadi, told AFP the haze from this year's fire season was the worst his volunteer firefighter group had seen since it was established in 2020.

"In the house, he's like a normal kid," he said when asked about his cape-clad son.

"But when he saw me going out, he asked, 'Are you going to put out fires? I'll go with you,'" he said.

The lack of water was the main challenge for firefighters, Mulyadi said, with wells and other water sources drying up during drought.

Fires between January and July burned more than 200,000 hectares of land — an area three times the size of the capital Jakarta, the government said this week.

That is already larger than during previous El Nino seasons — a weather pattern that triggers worldwide changes in winds, atmospheric pressure and rainfall — in 2019 and 2023.

The government has ordered more troop and aircraft deployments to help contain the spread of the blazes and smog, which has reached Malaysia.

El Nino is a naturally occurring climate phenomenon that typically brings drought, which increased the risks of wildfires, in Indonesia.

Human-caused climate change can amplify its impacts because a warmer ocean and atmosphere make more energy and moisture available to feed extreme weather events.

RudiYansah, who dreams of becoming a forest ranger someday, called on firefighters to carry on despite the challenges in putting out the fires.

"To volunteers and firefighters across Indonesia, keep up the spirit in the fight against the flames," he said.



Russia says ambassador to UK no longer in post

AFP
London

The Russian embassy in London yesterday confirmed there was no longer an ambassador in post, while blaming Britain for the deterioration of bilateral relations.

The embassy released a statement after the *Sunday Times* reported that Moscow had “withdrawn” its envoy, Andrei Kelin, as it “attempts to force Britain to reconsider its support for Ukraine”.

Moscow had not put forward any candidates to replace Kelin “and embassy staff are understood to have no indication of when a successor might be appointed”, the newspaper reported.

“Following *The Times*’ article on the conclusion of Andrei Kelin’s diplomatic mission as Russian ambassador to the United Kingdom, the embassy considers it necessary to note that nothing in its comment provided to the newspaper implies that the Russian side intends to downgrade the level of diplomatic relations between our two countries,” a Russian embassy statement posted on Telegram said.

“As for the state of Russia-UK relations across all areas, they have deteriorated to an unprecedentedly low level entirely on London’s initiative,” it added.

Kelin, who had been Russian ambassador to the UK for over seven years, left his post on July 21, the *Times* reported.

“Downgrading a diplomatic relationship by withdrawing an ambassador is one formal way for a government to express severe displeasure or protest without severing ties entirely,” it said.

The Foreign Office told AFP it was “a matter for the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs”.

“We have an ambassador and embassy in Moscow to engage and raise concerns with the Russian government,” it said in a statement.

“We continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with Ukraine, which has the right to defend itself against Russia’s illegal and unprovoked invasion,” it added.

Russia on Monday warned Britain it would pay a “price” after reports that UK-made drones supplied to Ukraine had been used in

strikes deep inside Russia.

The embassy in London accused Britain of becoming “an accomplice and co-perpetrator” of the attacks and of “deliberately opting for an escalation” in the conflict.

“The deeper its involvement in the conflict and the greater its support for Kyiv’s terrorist machinery, the higher the price it will pay,” it said.

Britain has been one of Ukraine’s strongest backers since Russia’s full-scale invasion in 2022, committing around 25bn pounds (\$33bn) in support, including 16 billion pounds in military aid.

Ukraine has stepped up long-range strikes inside Russia in recent months, while Moscow has intensified missile and drone attacks on the Ukrainian capital.

Indian rescuers search for 22 people missing after cargo ship sinks

Reuters
New Delhi

India’s coastguard and navy continued search-and-rescue operations off the eastern coast yesterday after a Panama-flagged bulk carrier carrying 24 crew members sank, with two Chinese nationals rescued, a senior official said.

The two Chinese seafarers said the vessel, called the Ocean Winner, had developed a list on Friday and sank within eight minutes, forcing the crew to abandon ship, Shyam Jagannathan, director general of India’s Maritime Administration, told Reuters.

Jagannathan said the chances of finding survivors generally fall sharply after the first 12 hours, but rescuers were continuing their search.

“All agencies are co-ordinating closely and actively doing search and rescue efforts,” Sarbananda Sonowal, federal minister for the Ministry of Ports,

Shipping and Waterways, said in a social media post.

The missing crew members include 18 more Chinese nationals, three Myanmar nationals and one Bangladeshi, according to India’s coastguard.

The Indian Navy is closely co-ordinating with the coastguard to locate the missing seafarers, the Navy said in a post on X.

Two coastguard vessels from Sri Vijaya Puram, formerly known as Port Blair, the capital of India’s Andaman and Nicobar archipelago, were dispatched for the search-and-rescue operation, a coastguard spokesperson said.

The Ocean Winner was carrying iron ore bound for China after departing from India’s eastern Paradip port on Friday, according to an initial report prepared by India’s Maritime Administration.

It sank about 240 nautical miles from the port, according to government sources.

The cause of the sinking was not immediately known.

Bangladesh’s gas crisis hits factories, homes, transport

AFP
Brahmanbaria

The giant structures of Bangladesh’s Ashuganj fertiliser factory have stood silent for more than a year, as a natural gas crisis shuts industries, triggers power cuts and sparks protests over fuel shortages.

Machinery once ran round the clock, using natural gas to produce urea that farmers depended on to grow crops for the country’s 170mn people.

Now the state-owned factory, which once employed more than 1,200 people and produced more than 1,000 tonnes of fertiliser a day, is a rusting shell.

Ashuganj closed in March 2025, with the country battered by a gas shortage sparked by a plunge in production owing to underinvestment in ageing fields and exploration, while the US-Iran war has choked imports from the Middle East.



This aerial photograph shows the Ashuganj Fertiliser and Chemical factory in Bangladesh’s Brahmanbaria district. (AFP)



CNG-powered autorickshaws waiting for long hours to refuel in Bangladesh’s Brahmanbaria district. (AFP)

“Only the skeleton of the factory remains,” said Md Bazlur Rashid, 59, who spent his entire working life at Ashuganj, built near the eastern Titas gas field. “It has lost its life”.

The factory is one of six major urea fertiliser plants that have been forced to close down or restrict operations because of gas shortages.

Trade union leader Md Abu Kawsar said the shutdowns had cost workers their jobs while threatening an industry linked to food security.

“You cannot simply let these factories sit idle and allow them to deteriorate,” he told AFP. “Reviving them could also help save foreign currency.”

But the consequences of the gas shortage extend far beyond fertiliser production.

Hundreds of factories, including textile plants, are cutting production or shutting.

Bangladesh is the world’s second-largest garment exporter, which accounts for about 80% of the country’s export earnings.

At home, domestic piped gas is often cut.

Power plants turning gas into electricity are struggling to meet demand, creating regular blackouts.

The government issued electricity-saving measures in Au-

gust, including ordering shopping malls to close an hour earlier.

Electricity generation, industry and captive power plants account for more than three-quarters of Bangladesh’s gas consumption.

Households, which account for just over a tenth of the country’s gas consumption, have also been hit.

“We don’t get a drop of gas overnight,” said housewife Nargis Begum, 50, who lives close to the Ashuganj factory.

“Then sometimes the pressure is too low. We can’t turn on two burners at the same time.”

Many households, particularly in rural areas, have switched to wood-burning stoves, while electricity cuts leave residents without fans in the sweltering humidity.

“There is no let-up in our suffering,” said Begum. “There is no guarantee of electricity. It’s so hot now. Last night, there were

three or four outages.”

Gas-powered rickshaw drivers have also blocked roads in protest after hours waiting for fuel.

The shortages are the result of a crisis that has been building for years.

Bangladesh was largely self-sufficient in natural gas in 2018, but production declined as older fields depleted, while demand has risen, with Qatar providing key imports.

Experts say successive governments have failed to invest sufficiently in exploration.

Energy Minister Iqbal Hasan Mahmud Tuku blamed the previous government of Sheikh Hasina, ousted in a 2024 revolution, for failing to drill new wells.

“The previous government stayed away from gas exploration,” he told an energy security conference in Dhaka in July. “Our dependence on imports has

brought us to this point.”

Imports have also proved vulnerable.

The crisis worsened after the war in the Middle East disrupted liquefied natural gas (LNG) shipments, with traffic through the Strait of Hormuz severely curtailed.

Supplies were further hit when a floating storage and regasification unit, which processes imported LNG into gas, halted operations because of a technical problem.

With no quick fix, the government is continuing LNG orders and investing in terminals to expand imports, even as experts call for more domestic exploration.

Bangladesh has offshore gas fields – but drilling new wells takes time.

Md Anwar Hossain Bhuiyan, a geology professor at Dhaka University, said gas production could be increased in existing fields, but a long-term solution requires new wells.

“A single well can cost \$12-\$16mn to drill, but the value of the gas that can be recovered is much higher – around \$4.5-\$4.9bn,” he said.

The government plans to buy two drilling rigs and has launched an offshore bidding round.

But Petrobangla chairman Md Abdul Mannan, whose state-owned Corp oversees Bangladesh’s oil and gas sector, said the ultimate answer lies beyond gas.

“The gas crisis will be resolved once we turn to renewable energy,” Mannan told AFP. “I can’t give you a timeframe for that, perhaps two years.”

Australia confirms first H5N1 bird flu case in local mammal

Australia yesterday confirmed its first case of H5N1 bird flu in a mammal, with the deadly virus found in a long-nosed fur seal in South Australia state.

Australia has been grappling with rising cases of the highly pathogenic avian influenza after it landed in the country in June.

The country’s first mass seabird deaths from the virus occurred this month, marking an escalation of the outbreak that began after the virus was first detected in migratory seabirds before spreading to native species.

South Australian authorities confirmed the nation’s first mammalian detection in the seal, found at the coastal town of Beachport, about

310km south of Adelaide, the state capital.

The seal, one of an estimated population of 100,000 in the state’s waters, was found dead with no signs of injury, the authorities said.

Its death “does not appear to be associated with other sick or dead marine mammals,” federal Agriculture Minister Julie Collins said in televised remarks. “Once the H5 bird flu is spreading in the natural environment it is not possible to avoid significant losses.”

Australia was the last continent to report bird flu, although the virus was detected in late 2025 on the sub-Antarctic territory of Heard Island. (Reuters)

Sydney marathon unveils medal with wrong stadium

Organisers of the 2026 Sydney Marathon have sparked online mirth by unveiling a finishers’ medal depicting a stadium in far-away Munich, Germany.

The two-sided medal is engraved with a Sydney skyline showing course landmarks including the Opera House, the Sydney Harbour Bridge – and the Allianz Arena in Munich.

Marathon bosses admitted the “unfortunate error” in the medal, which displays the German arena’s shape and diamond-patterned exterior instead of the flatter features of Allianz Stadium in Sydney.

“A little too much international flavour has found its way onto the back of the finishers medal,

with an incorrect depiction of the stadium,” a Sydney Marathon spokesperson said.

“We’re not going to run from it, it was an unfortunate error, though it’s certainly given everyone something to talk about this weekend, mostly in good humour.”

The other side of the Sydney Marathon medal shows a widely praised blue-and-gold design by Indigenous artist Ambrose Killian, who told AFP he was not involved in the creation of the Sydney skyline.

Marathon organisers say they expect a record of more than 40,000 participants who will earn the medal as a “badge of honour” for completing the 42.2km course. (AFP)

Blowing in the wind: Humble balloon gets green makeover

AFP
London

A global symbol of parties and celebrations but an environmental headache, the humble balloon is undergoing a green revolution thanks to UK researchers.

Researchers at Imperial College London say they have developed the first fully biodegradable balloon and hope to bring it to market within two years.

“So there were hundreds of trials. We had many, many failures,” said Juliana Cumming, a PhD student at the university and co-creator of the “Bioloon”, a 100-per cent biodegradable balloon.

In a university laboratory, the 29-year-old proudly showed AFP a flask containing a precious yellow liquid.

Once solidified, it becomes a soft, elastic material with a texture comparable to that of a conventional balloon.

But there is one crucial difference – it breaks down completely within nine months unlike traditional balloons, Cumming said.

The Bioloon is the result of a public-private partnership



Co-inventor of Bioloon and PhD researcher Juliana Cumming gives a demonstration of a piece of fully biodegradable rubber being inflated, at Imperial College in London. (AFP)

launched by Charlotte Melia, an events entrepreneur, who describes herself as environmentally minded.

“I was a party planner for over 10 years and ... I was very sustainably focused. The final stumbling block for me was the balloon waste,” she told AFP.

“We were putting out thousands of party balloons every single week,” she said, but they were only there “for a matter of hours simply to be popped and thrown in the trash”.

The final straw came when she realised “balloons were non-biodegradable” even though the packaging said they would say break up “at the rate of an oak leaf”.

Convinced that a sustainable alternative was possible, Melia decided with an associate to put up some £30,000 (\$41,000) to part fund Cumming’s doctoral research.

The environmental impact of traditional balloons, which de-

spite their advertising do not degrade, is largely unknown to the general public.

But a number of studies have documented the dangers posed by balloons once they end up in nature, particularly for marine life and birds.

A 2019 study by the University of Tasmania, published in *Scientific Reports*, found balloons were “the highest-risk plastic debris item” for seabirds, carrying a mortality risk 32 times higher than ingesting hard plastics.

Imperial College’s department of chemical engineering estimates that between 20 and 25bn balloons are purchased worldwide every year.

Cumming spent three years developing her formula.

The starting point is the same as for an ordinary balloon: natural latex derived from the sap of the rubber tree, native to the Amazon, and has changed little since the balloon was invented in 1824.

“In order to turn the natural latex into something that we refer to as rubber it goes through this process called sulphur vulcanisation,” she explained.

That involves adding “sulphur accelerators, antioxidants, and ac-



Bioloon CEO Charlotte Melia holds a sample of biodegradable rubber at a laboratory at Imperial College in London. (AFP)

tivators into the material” which “prevents the biodegradation of balloons” and also leaks “toxic chemicals into the environment”.

It was this stage of the manufacturing process which became the focus of Cumming’s research. “Our balloon is still made with natural latex, but we blend it with another biodegradable polymer and we don’t add any of these additives that are used in traditional balloons,” she said.

“So this retains the biodegradability,” she added, declining to reveal further details of the patented process.

According to the creators, the

Bioloon breaks down regardless of where it ends up.

The researchers “tested it in soil, seawater and deionised water. It degraded in all of those conditions ... and we estimate that it would biodegrade within about nine months,” she said.

Importantly for all those planning a shindig, the balloon inflates as easily as a conventional one.

For Melia, the technology’s potential extends far beyond party decorations, and could be adapted for everyday and medical products, including household gloves, surgical gloves, latex clothing.

US, Canada exchange barbs as rift over trade war intensifies

AFP
Washington

The Trump administration yesterday warned that Canada would be “foolish” to think it could win a trade war with the United States, predicting a “devastating” impact on its northern neighbour.

Negotiations between Washington and Ottawa broke down late Friday, putting into force new 50-percent US tariffs impacting about \$20bn worth of Canadian goods, or 5.5% of Canadian exports to the US.

Canada in retaliation said it would match US tariffs, with new levies notably targeting the US steel and dairy industries to take effect on September 8.

US Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy said Canada would come out worse from tussling with President Donald Trump in a trade war. The US currently accounts for roughly 70% of Canadian exports.

“We’re great trading partners, right? But Canada gets the benefit of trading with the US way more than the US gets the benefit of trading with Canada,” he told the *Fox News Sunday* talk show.

“To think that they’re going to go to war with Donald Trump and actually win that war with the US, I think it’s foolish on their part.”

He predicted that Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney would return to negotiations “very very quickly, because it’s going to be devastating for his country.”

Carney was defiant on Saturday, announcing retaliatory tariffs on the US after walking away from a “bad deal” on trade as the rift between the longtime allies deepened. “You’re at war when you get attacked. We got attacked,” the Canadian prime minister said.

Carney cited last-minute US de-



President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Mark Carney recently spoke on the phone and officials from the two countries met to resolve a deepening rift between the longtime allies. (AFP)



Shipping containers in the Port of Montreal in Quebec, Canada. AFP

mands that would restrict Canadian trade deals with other countries and unacceptable “threats” to the French language and Quebec culture.

Trump hit back early yesterday, saying, “Canada wants the benefits of being a State, without being one!!!” “They have also charged our great farmers, for many years, massive amounts of Tariffs. No

more!!!!” Trump added in a post on Truth Social. The acrimony underscored the deepening rift between the close allies since Trump began his second term in January 2025 — including his repeated threats to make Canada the 51st US state.

Carney has said bilateral relations have been forever changed, and that Canada must reduce its reliance on the US. Despite the

“Canada wants the benefits of being a State, without being one!!!”
“They have also charged our great farmers, for many years, massive amounts of Tariffs. No more!!!”
— Donald Trump

economic fallout, he has won political support at home for his willingness to stand up to Washington since taking office two months after Trump returned to the presidency.

“We have a bully in Washington,” Canadian retired teacher Stuart Edwards told AFP Saturday in Fort Erie, Ontario in the shadow of the Peace Bridge, a conduit for billions of dollars in annual trade with the US. “We’re not going to put up with it, Canada isn’t. We’ll fight back,” he said.

In the recent talks in Washington, Canada was seeking relief from Trump’s tariffs on autos, steel and aluminum, which have battered the country’s economy, forced job losses and strained what was once an iron-clad trade relationship. The White House had alleged “discriminatory treatment” by Canada against US beverages, automobile and dairy products in introducing the duties.

US Trade Representative Jamie-Son Greer told the *New York Times* on Saturday that the US had offered to reduce its tariffs on steel, aluminum and autos, as well as eliminate a recently imposed tariff on Canadian lumber.

Greer said those measures would have given Canada “the most preferential treatment of any trading partner,” according to the *Times*.

He also announced no new talks were planned with Canadian negotiators.

Tuareg rebels release 22 Mali soldiers: sources

AFP
Bamako

Tuareg separatist rebels yesterday freed 22 Mali government troops, some held for more than three years, adding to a steady flow of releases in recent weeks, according to security and ruling junta sources.

Tuareg fighters and their allies took dozens of soldiers prisoner when they launched co-ordinated attacks across the west African nation in April and July.

These attacks also claimed the life of General Sadio Camara, the country’s defence minister and the mastermind behind the junta’s pivot towards Russia and away from the West.

Mali has been battling militants and separatist insurgents for more than a decade and the military seized power following coups in 2020 and 2021, claiming the overthrow of civilian rule was justified by the need to end the violence.

There have been a number of significant releases in recent weeks.

On August 13, the army announced that 82 soldiers held by Tuareg fighters since the April battles had been freed. Three days later, six wounded troops were handed over.

Sources told AFP on Saturday that two former Wagner Russian paramilitaries captured two years ago had also been let go.

A security source yesterday said that 22 soldiers went free in the latest exchange and a junta source confirmed that about 20 soldiers were involved.

The Tuareg Azawad Liberation Front (FLA) said in a social media post that troops had been freed but did not give a number.

At least eight FLA fighters were freed in exchange for the troops, the security source

said. FLA spokesman Attaye Ag Mohamed said that “civilian detainees” held in the junta prisons, some for more than five years, had been freed under the deal.

Another FLN spokesman, Mohamed El Maouloud Ramadane, told AFP yesterday that it was “eight civilians” who were released in exchange for the soldiers.

Some of the freed government troops had been captured recently and some had been held “for more than three years”, the junta source told AFP.

Government forces have struggled to contain the insurgency in one of the world’s poorest countries.

In their April assault, the FLA and the Al-Qaeda-linked Group JNIM captured the northern city of Kidal and killed the junta’s defence minister. The rebels briefly captured the town of Anéfis in July when it staged new attacks.

Besides the army releases, two former fighters from Russia’s Wagner mercenary group, captured two years ago in northern Mali were released on Thursday, AFP learnt on Saturday from several security and diplomatic sources. The two men were taken prisoner in July 2024 during fighting in Tinzaouatene, near the Algerian border, where the Malian army and its Russian Wagner allies suffered a setback at the hands of the rebels from the FLA’s precursor organisation and the JNIM’s militants.

Africa Corps, the Russian paramilitary organisation that has since replaced Wagner, confirmed in a statement the release of “Russian nationals detained” since July 27, 2024 by a “coalition of the FLA and JNIM”.

Fighters from both Wagner and Africa Corps have fought alongside the Malian army as part of the junta’s security agreements with Moscow.

US envoy to Belgium condemns suspension of academic Arday

AFP
Brussels

The US ambassador to Belgium has denounced the suspension of a US academic who led plagiarism accusations against Jason Arday, the black ex-Cambridge professor found dead last week after resigning over the scandal.

Bill White, posting on X on Friday, denounced the decision by the University of Ghent as an attempt to silence Nathan Cofnas, a self-defined “race realist” who was himself sacked from his Cambridge post two years ago.

On Thursday, Cofnas announced on X that Ghent had suspended him, adding: “They will almost certainly fire me.”

Without him, the University of Ghent said in a statement it had launched a “preliminary disciplinary investigation” against a post-doctoral researcher embroiled in the furore, suspending him “as a precautionary measure”.

In response to the suspension, White said Washington would

be reviewing any relationship it might have with the University of Ghent. “Dishonest, corrupt institutions that engage in, or reward, scapegoating mob behaviour are not desirable partners for us,” wrote the ambassador, an ally of US President Donald Trump.

Arday, who became Cambridge’s youngest-ever black professor when he was appointed in 2023, was found dead in mid-August aged 41. He was facing mounting accusations that he had plagiarised parts of his doctoral thesis and exaggerated some of his personal life achievements.

Diagnosed with autism and other developmental difficulties as a child, Arday had disputed the allegations against him, with his family blaming a racially motivated “misinformation campaign”.

But he quit on August 5, writing in his resignation letter that he had “reached the limits of what any person should reasonably be expected to endure”.

Plagiarism concerns surrounding Arday first surfaced several years ago but went nowhere at the time.

Republicans see opportunity in progressives’ primary wins; Democrats embrace debate

Reuters
Providence, Rhode Island

Republican politicians yesterday framed recent primary wins by candidates from the Democratic Party’s left wing as a sign of extremism, while some Democrats said they welcome a debate with progressives over the party’s future.

Following victories by progressive primary candidates for the US Senate such as Abdul El-Sayed in Michigan and democratic socialist Angie Nixon in Florida, US Senator Tim Scott and other Republicans appearing on Sunday talk shows used pointed language to attack left-wing candidates in the Democratic Party.

Scott, a South Carolina Republican, called the Democratic left wing “dangerous, radical, and, frankly, weird” in comments during NBC’s *Meet the Press*. US Representative Anna Paulina Luna,

a Florida Republican, saw the Democratic primary results as an opportunity for her party.

“Angie Nixon being the nominee in the state of Florida will bring Republicans out to vote specifically against her because of the fact they don’t want her radical policies,” Luna told Fox News’ *Sunday Morning Futures*.

The campaign of Nixon, who is a member of the Democratic Socialists of America, did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment.

Multiple Republicans yesterday, such as US Representative Ashley Hinson of Iowa and Texas Governor Greg Abbott, tried to paint the opposing party as a “crazy” group dominated by the Democratic Socialists of America. Very few Democrats seeking office are DSA members, although some Democrats yesterday said their party should welcome them even though it does not share the DSA platform.



Abdul El-Sayed gestures after addressing supporters at his election night event in Detroit, Michigan. (AFP)

US Representative Jake Auchincloss, a Massachusetts Democrat, said on *Fox News Sunday* that the party establishment will

lose if it picks a fight with the DSA “and candidly, rightfully so, because Americans are angry at the status quo.”

That puts the onus on the party establishment to demonstrate its support for a pro-middle-class agenda based on “free enterprise, free minds, freedom from fear, and free elections,” Auchincloss said.

The DSA should be included in any discussion about the Democratic Party’s future, said US Senator Chris Van Hollen, a Maryland Democrat.

Van Hollen, who said he’s “kicking the tires” on a 2028 presidential run, told “Meet the Press” that left-leaning voters “don’t want to simply return to the pre-Trump status quo.”

“Those in the Democratic Party who are afraid of a healthy debate are missing the point,” he said, adding that voters “want Democrats who are going to stand for something.”

Flypast for Trump motorcade



Air Force One and military aircraft fly overhead as President Donald Trump’s presidential limousine drives on the racetrack during the Freedom 250 Grand Prix IndyCar Series race in Washington, DC. (Reuters)

Mexican governor requests leave again

Reuters
Mexico City

Sinaloa Governor Ruben Rocha, indicted by US federal prosecutors on drug-trafficking, bribery and cartel-protection charges, again requested a leave of absence from office on Saturday, days after defiantly reclaiming his post.

Rocha’s return was not well received by either the Mexican government or the ruling Morena party, which accused him of prioritising his personal interests over those of the public.

Earlier on Saturday, President Claudia Sheinbaum warned on X that “power without principles becomes arrogance” and “no personal interest can ever be above those of the people or the Nation,” intensifying the political firestorm, without directly naming Rocha. Echoing her words, Rocha posted a statement on X saying that “Sinaloa, the nation, and the transformation movement are above all else.”

Rocha, 77, a member of Sheinbaum’s Morena party, returned to office on Friday after more than three months on leave following



Governor Ruben Rocha. (Reuters)

US drug-trafficking charges.

In April, US prosecutors alleged Rocha and nine other current and former officials conspired with Sinaloa Cartel known as Los Chapitos, helping it to traffic drugs into the US in exchange for political support and bribes.

Washington’s move marked a rare expansion of anti-cartel action beyond drug bosses to include a sitting senior Mexican politician. Rocha has described the US case as a politically mo-

tivated attack on Sheinbaum’s movement.

Sheinbaum’s government previously said Washington did not provide sufficient evidence to justify Rocha’s arrest or extradition, even as her administration opened its own investigation.

But there were signs that Rocha’s return to power was received coolly by Sheinbaum and Morena, underscoring lingering tensions within the ruling party over the case.



What's next on Iran sanctions?

US President Donald Trump has vowed to hit Iran hard economically, after Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said that Washington would impose measures on Tehran that have “never been seen”. Bessent is due to hold a press conference at 2pm EDT (1800 GMT) today.

The United States, United Nations and European Union have applied sanctions, implemented trade embargoes and frozen assets since the late 1970s over Iran's nuclear program, human rights violations and support for militant groups. Since the Iran war began in February, Washington has levied additional maritime, energy and financial sanctions and started a naval blockade.

Data from the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) shows the agency has imposed sanctions on more than 1,000 people, vessels and aircraft since Trump began his second term. Recent measures have targeted Iran's shadow oil fleet; shipping insurers; entities and people enabling Iran's acquisition of weapons; and digital exchanges, freezing an estimated \$500bn in Iran-linked cryptocurrency. Past US sanctions have deterred larger independent refiners from buying Iranian oil. But the independent refineries are somewhat immune since they have little exposure to the US financial system, sanctions experts say.

The United States could continue targeting Iranian individuals and entities, as well as others in China and the Gulf, that are helping Tehran evade sanctions to collect revenues for its war effort. The Treasury Department recently issued sanctions against firms that are springing up to facilitate Iran's trading of oil revenue for imports. But such measures amount to a “whack-a-mole” approach that has not altered Iran's behaviour, said Brett Erickson, managing principal of Obsidian Risk Advisors, noting that Tehran simply creates new entities to replace them.

Further aviation sanctions were also possible, aimed at degrading Iran's ability to move trade now that the US has blockaded shipping via the Strait of Hormuz, he added. Some US and Israeli officials have floated the prospect of a land blockade, which would require assistance from Iran's neighbours: Iraq, Turkey, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Armenia. A land blockade could increase pressure on the Iranian people by halting their imports of food, energy and textiles, but experts say such a move would be difficult to execute and might not result in protests or internal pressure. Trump has repeatedly threatened tariffs on goods from countries that do business with Iran, although the Supreme Court struck down the legal basis for such taxes. — Reuters



In the line of vitriol



By Kristian Coates Ulrichsen

Even by the standards of the second Trump presidency, the past week has seen a particularly cavalier treatment of longstanding US allies and partners. In a post on his Truth Social website on August 16, President Trump contrasted his “very good” relationship with Kim Jong-un of North Korea with disparaging remarks about South Korea.

A day later, Trump claimed he had demanded \$10bn from South Korea for protection and suggested that Seoul's failure to join the war with Iran would have consequences for bilateral relations. Trump separately threatened on the same day to “bomb the s**t out of” Oman if the Sultanate “gets in the way” of US attempts to reopen the Strait of Hormuz and impose terms on Iran.

It may not be a coincidence that Trump brought up the Iran War in his comments on South Korea and Oman, two trusted and valuable US allies and partners. In Oman's case, bilateral relations with the US go back nearly 200 years and the relationship is the second oldest the US has with a state in the Middle East and North Africa, after Morocco.

After all, this week marked the expiration of the 60-day deadline for a US-Iran agreement set out in the memorandum of understanding (MoU) that Trump himself signed in Versailles on June 17.

The MoU came in for criticism for being at the same time too expansive in its ambition and too vague in its detail on sequencing and implementation and quickly collapsed in mutual acrimony as each side blamed the other for the failure to reach a breakthrough. Maritime traffic through the Strait of Hormuz remains far below its prewar level and the uptick in transits in the aftermath of the June MoU has fallen back as Iran has resumed regular attacks on vessels in the waterway.

An increase in Houthi attacks from Yemen on vessels in the Bab al-Mandab strait and the Red Sea also threatens a key workaround that cushioned the impact of the restrictions in Hormuz shipping during the spring. Drawdowns in global oil inventories have eroded another of the buffers that mitigated the Hormuz blow in the opening months of the Iran War and

subjected refined products to market pressures.

As Trump has consistently shown himself to be unable to secure favourable terms to reopen the Strait of Hormuz he now faces political headwinds as the Congressional midterms loom into view. It is thus little surprise that he seems to be lashing out at others in an apparent attempt to find scapegoats. Indeed, this is the second time Trump has threatened Oman after he warned on May 27 that the country would have to “behave or we'll have to blow them up.” However, the use of undiplomatic language and the seeming disregard for the interests of allies and partners may leave the US isolated just at the time when it could use international support to reach a workable deal with Iran.

Looking specifically at the US position in the Middle East, the wars that began after October 7, 2023 have placed the region's mediators in danger just when dialogue and diplomacy has been most needed. Both Qatar and Oman redoubled their efforts to prevent the war between Israel and Hamas from expanding and spreading into a regionwide conflict. Whereas Qatari officials took the lead in working alongside US and Egyptian counterparts to secure the release of hostages in Gaza and reach a ceasefire in the fighting, Omani diplomats focused on the US-Iran dimension. While the Qatari and Omani diplomatic initiatives largely functioned separately from each other, they came together when necessary, one example being during the six rounds of dialogue between US and Iranian officials that Oman facilitated in April and May last year.

And yet, both Qatar and Oman have found themselves in the crosshairs of hawkish elements of the policy establishment both in Israel and in the US. Israeli missiles struck a residential neighbourhood in Doha on September 9, 2025, killing six people, including a Qatari security officer as they targeted a delegation from Hamas which was meeting to discuss a US-backed ceasefire proposal.



US President Donald Trump speaking at an event in New York. (AFP)

The unprovoked attack on a building in a busy street in the middle of a weekday afternoon caused global outrage and demonstrated an utter disregard for international norms and the rules-based order which was already under severe strain as a result of Israeli operations in Gaza as well as Russian actions in Ukraine.

Sustained criticism of Qatar and Oman by sections of the media and political classes in the US and Israel have also taken place in recent years. The White House also seems to have taken exception to the Omani foreign minister's high-profile visit to Washington, DC and appearance on US television on February 27 in a last-ditch attempt to avert war with Iran.

But now that Operation Epic Fury has resulted in Trump digging himself into a hole that he seems unable to climb out of, there is more need than ever for a pragmatic recognition that diplomacy rather than bluster and talks rather than threats are the best way forward.

The use of military force alone has rarely proven able to resolve differences between states. Any hopes that the White House or Israeli leaders might have had in the opening days of the war that they could bring down the Iranian regime have long since dissipated, but dialogue between the US and Iran is complicated by a chasm of distrust going back 47 years.

This makes the role of a trusted intermediary such as Oman or Qatar all the more vital to keep open channels of communication and make possible the exchange of messages.

It is this position that is now at risk from the latest verbal volleys and while Omani officials have shown admirable forbearance in taking them in their stride, the threat of bombing a Gulf partner is likely to increase still further the concerns felt in the region at US posturing.

• *The writer is a leading scholar specialising in Gulf politics and international political economy, and a fellow at the Baker Institute and co-director of the Middle East Energy Roundtable.)*

Baghdad's reckoning: Can Iraq disarm Iran's militias?



By Jasim Al-Azzawi

Forty days remain. On September 30, Iraq's government has promised that all weapons will belong to the state alone. American troops will finish withdrawing the same day. Nothing about that coincidence is accidental. It is a deadline written by Washington and Baghdad together, and it now hangs over Iraq like a blade.

Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi, a political newcomer who took office in May, has staked his government on it. “After September 30, we will not allow any entity besides the state to carry any weapons,” he told reporters after meeting President Trump at the White House in July. Some militias have already complied. The Peace Brigades loyal to Muqtada al-Sadr disbanded months ago. Two smaller Iran-aligned factions, Asaib Ahl al-Haq and Kataib Imam Ali, announced in June that they would place their weapons under state control.

But the deadline that binds al-Zaidi is now dividing the very coalition that put him in office.

The Coordination Framework, the Shia bloc underpinning his government, is splitting three ways.

Some factions want to trade their weapons for ministries. Others, cut out of the cabinet, refuse outright. Abu Alaa al-Walal, secretary-general of Kataib Sayyid al-Shuhada, put the second camp's logic bluntly: “Whoever wants to hand over his weapons, we are ready to buy them.”

Kataib Hezbollah dismissed the prime minister's warnings on X as “empty bravado,” and hinted at retaliation under the principle of “an eye for an eye.” Sheikh Akram al-Kaabi of Harakat al-Nujaba went further, casting the weapons as necessary to resist what he called America's “malicious project” to “steal and plunder Iraq's wealth.” Only Hadi al-Amiri of the Badr Organization, Iran's oldest Iraqi proxy, has tried to calm things, urging “the language of moderation” on all sides.

Tehran is not standing by. Quds Force commander Esmail Qaani has made repeated, unannounced trips to Baghdad this year, most recently on August 10, urging factions to hold their weapons as leverage rather than surrender them. His message, according

to sources close to the militias, was to avoid concessions to Washington “to take government posts.” Iran has reason to be desperate. It has already lost Syria. Hezbollah is under siege in Lebanon. Iraq's militias, alongside the Houthis, are what remains of the “rings of fire” Tehran built to encircle its adversaries.

That desperation carries costs Iraqis are already paying. Iranian-aligned factions attacked Saudi Arabia this summer, drawing joint American and Saudi strikes that killed at least twenty fighters and further constricted the Strait of Hormuz, through which Iraq's oil exports collapsed from 4.2mn barrels a day in February to 1.45mn in May. Tehran's own parliament speaker, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, was in Baghdad this week pressing for a “new regional order” that keeps the militias intact in some form.

Washington's patience has a price tag attached. Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth told al-Zaidi in July that a deeper US-Iraq partnership requires Baghdad to “assert its sovereignty and disarm the Iran-aligned militias.” Days later, American firms signed more than \$60bn in energy, healthcare, and technology deals with Iraq, including Chevron, ExxonMobil, and Halliburton. They have tremendous oil reserves,” Trump said from the Oval Office. “We're going to have a long-term relationship with a man that will be a great leader.” The subtext was unmistakable: disarmament and dollars are now the same conversation.

What almost no one will say plainly is what becomes of the Popular Mobilization Forces, the state-salaried umbrella that many of these militias formally belong to. Renad Mansour, who directs the Iraq Initiative at Chatham House, calls full disarmament “an impossible task,” noting the factions are “deeply embedded inside Iraqi territory.”

Inna Rudolf of King's College London expects al-Zaidi to avoid confrontation, relying instead on “quiet diplomacy,” trading concessions behind closed doors rather than forcing a fight he might not win. A darker layer lies beneath the politics. Human rights investigators, including

Amnesty International, have long documented extrajudicial killings and abductions carried out by PMF-linked militias, disproportionately against Sunni men swept up in the campaign against ISIS and its aftermath.

For years, families of former Ba'athists and ex-regime officials have accused these same factions of using “de-Baathification” as cover for score-settling. That history is precisely why militia commanders now fear the anti-corruption drive al-Zaidi has launched alongside disarmament. His government has already seized tens of millions of dollars in cash and gold from arrested officials. Militia leaders, who by some estimates have siphoned billions from Iraq's oil economy and from Iranian, European and American commercial channels, want guarantees before they disarm: guarantees of Amnesty, and guarantees that stolen wealth stays theirs.

Iraq's Kurdistan region sits outside this entire drama. Its Peshmerga forces are not covered by the September 30 deadline, and Washington maintains a quiet presence near Erbil that it does not officially acknowledge.

What happens next is genuinely unknowable. Iraq could stumble into a fight between its own army and the militias that once fought alongside it against the Islamic State. It could instead reach a face-saving compromise that leaves the PMF's structure largely untouched behind a new legal veneer.

What is harder to dismiss is the direction of travel. Iraq's neighbours and patrons no longer accept the old ambiguity. Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Pakistan signed the Makkah Joint Defense Agreement on August 7, forging a trilateral security pact explicitly built around collective deterrence. Baghdad, for now, remains an observer to that architecture rather than a participant. Whether Iraq eventually earns a seat at that table, or squanders it, may depend less on September 30 than on what al-Zaidi's government is still willing to risk after it.

• *The writer is a prominent news anchor, programme presenter and media instructor.*



An Iraqi flag fluttering in the province of Basra. (AFP)

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Ukrainian drone attack hits Ozon’s warehouse

AFP
Moscow

Ukraine yesterday hit a warehouse belonging to Russian e-commerce giant Ozon for the second day running, as Kyiv vowed to expand its attacks on logistics sites.

Ukraine has for weeks mounted a campaign targeting Russia’s Wildberries – the country’s top online retailer – alleging it supplied components to the military.

Ozon is Russia’s second-largest online marketplace, with its pick-up points and delivery boxes ubiquitous across the country.

Both companies have been dubbed “Russia’s Amazon”, due to their control over a huge swath of the fast-growing e-commerce sector.

Ozon said yesterday a fire had broke out at its logistics hub in the central Orenburg region after a drone attack.

“Operations at the warehouse are currently suspended,” the company added.

The strike came a day after an Ozon centre in the neighbouring Samara region was hit.

The company said an unsp-

ified number of its workers were wounded in that attack.

Ukraine’s military on Saturday said it was launching a new campaign targeting the company.

“After Ukrainian units hit the 15 largest logistics hubs of Wildberries, it is now Ozon’s turn,” the defence ministry said in a statement.

A logistics centre next to an Ozon facility on the outskirts of Saint Petersburg was also hit overnight.

The attacks on the warehouses – typically easier to reach than heavily-defended military installations – have already delivered economic losses worth billions of dollars.

Several of the facilities that were hit – packed full of flammable products – were completely destroyed.

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday pledged support for Wildberries amid the strikes, saying the government would help rebuild logistics hubs hit by Ukrainian attacks.

Russia has railed at the attacks on its “civilian infrastructure” more than four years into its full-scale offensive on Ukraine that has killed thousands of civilians and flattened cities across the country’s east and south.

Norway pledges \$9bn as Baltic, Nordic leaders meet in Kyiv to support Ukraine

Norway will give \$9 bn to Kyiv next year, its prime minister said yesterday, as the leaders of Baltic and Nordic countries gathered in Kyiv in a show of support. Kyiv is expected to host a meeting today of the Coalition of the Willing – a French-British-led initiative – to discuss how to ramp up both support for Ukraine and pressure on Russia to halt its invasion ahead of the winter. “Norway’s support to Ukraine next year will be at the level of this year: \$9bn dollars, a record high,” Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store told reporters.

Oslo said the majority of the support would go to Ukraine’s military. Kyiv has faced huge financial shortfalls since Russia invaded in 2022. The invasion has destroyed swathes of the country, forced millions out of their homes and killed thousands of civilians.

Zelensky said yesterday that his army has a \$27bn deficit, without giving precise details. He urged the European Union to advance payments on part of a €90bn (\$105bn) loan to cover the gap this year. Without some \$10bn, his soldiers will not have enough weapons,, the Ukrainian leader warned. (AFP)

Austrian mountain town finds niche in AI boom

AFP
Leoben, Austria

Nestled in the wooded hills of Austria’s Styria region, the town of Leoben oozes tradition with its pastel-coloured buildings and quaint central square boasting a 13th-century church.

But on the edge of town, engineers peer through giant magnifying glasses while robotic arms manipulate sheets of copper to develop components used in the world’s most advanced AI systems.

AT&S, an electronics company based in Leoben, makes integrated circuit (IC) substrates, the boards that connect chips to computer memory and power supplies – a crucial component in the race to develop AI and high-speed data processing. The company is one of the most striking beneficiaries of the AI boom in Europe.

For chief executive Michael Mertin, this success shows that Europe can still “occupy important niches” in the AI race, even if it cannot compete with US rivals on chip innovation, or with Asian firms in terms of production scale.

“We will not be the leading na-



The logo of AT&S. (AFP)

tion or the leading region... (but) there are some outstanding technologies where we are world leaders in Europe,” Mertin said.

Founded in 1987, AT&S initially made printed circuit boards before entering the IC substrate business in 2016, when it began serial production at a new plant in Chongqing, China. The company opened a second factory to produce IC substrates in Malaysia in 2024.

The Leoben site serves as the global headquarters and houses its R&D operations. After investing more than €500mn (\$576mn) in an R&D centre opened last year, it has also become Europe’s only major

commercial manufacturer of advanced IC substrates.

Malcolm Penn, chairman of the semiconductor consultancy Future Horizons, said AT&S was one of few European companies directly benefiting from booming demand for AI hardware: “They’re riding the AI boom... They’re not driving the wave, they’re riding the wave.”

IC substrates are “critical” in the AI ecosystem “because they’re one of the key aspects of reducing power consumption, reducing noise, increasing speed,” he added.

Europe’s strengths in AI-related hardware tend to lie in specialised parts of the semiconductor sup-

ply chain, with companies such as Dutch lithography giant ASML and British chip designer Arm occupying leading positions.

AT&S cannot claim to be in the same league as them, but the growth of AI has led to a big increase in demand over the past few months, said Barbara Decker-Schloegl, its senior director of operations. “You can see it across all areas – customer inquiries keep rising and rising,” she said.

“The issue of artificial intelligence, including the high demand for the corresponding computing modules, will not foreseeably slump,” Mertin added.

“From my point of view, this is an industrial revolution, almost like the introduction of the steam engine back then,” he said.

Around 2,200 people from more than 70 countries work at the site in Leoben, a former iron mining centre of 28,000 people in the mountainous southern state of Styria. Around 60 % of the staff are Austrian, and “AT&S is one of the largest employers in this region”, Decker-Schloegl said.

The Technical University of Leoben has supplied AT&S with engineers and technicians.



A woman stands next to a placard depicting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky made from portraits of the missing Ukrainian servicemen and set at Independence Square in Kyiv. (AFP)

themselves. Experts have cited a flurry of obstacles to staging elections in the war-torn country.

They include how soldiers, millions of Ukrainian refugees and people from occupied territories would cast their ballots, as well as the threat of both interference and physical attacks from Russia.

Only 15 % of Ukrainians believe elections should be held before the end of hostilities, according to an opinion poll.

Zelensky, while having faced increasing pockets of criticism domestically as the war drags on, is still largely popular.

Zelensky hit out at his potential rival with numerous jabs during the briefing. “I believe he is going himself – or is being pushed – towards wrong things,” Zelensky said of Fedorov.

The former minister was a prominent backer of the drone warfare strategy that has come to

dominate Ukraine’s war with Russia, and had pushed for army reforms – winning support among the public.

But openly calling for an election is a risky bet and could have knocked his standing.

Fedorov’s team confirmed to AFP yesterday he plans to visit the US soon – a trip likely to revive speculation about whether he is positioning himself as a rival to Zelensky.

The domestic row comes amid an escalation in the war.

Moscow has intensified its strikes, using hard-to-intercept ballistic missiles that expose Ukraine’s air defence shortfall.

Ukraine, meanwhile, has accelerated its own campaign of long-range strikes on Russian energy and logistics sites – including oil refineries and retail warehouses.

Zelensky said deliveries of crucial interceptor missiles for US Pa-

triot air defence systems – which can shoot down Russia’s ballistic missiles – had halved since 2023.

“Over the entire of 2023, Ukraine received 675 missiles, and over all of 2025 – 364, even though Russian missile strikes have increased,” Zelensky said.

“For 2026, as currently projected, it is 264,” he added, saying Ukraine was seeking a package of 300 for the upcoming winter.

The US faces its own shortfall of the missiles amid its war on Iran and has been resistant to release large numbers to Ukraine.

Zelensky said Russia could produce around 100 ballistic missiles a month.

Civilian deaths in the four-and-a-half-year-long war have surged to their highest since the first months of the invasion amid the uptick in Russian strikes, according to verified statistics from the UN.

Pakistan’s army chief to visit Tehran today

Reuters
Cairo

Pakistan’s army chief Asim Munir will visit Tehran today to continue efforts to bring peace and security to the region, Iran’s foreign ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei said yesterday, according to a statement by the ministry.

Pakistan has taken on a mediator role in negotiations between Iran and the US aimed at ending the war which began with US and Israeli strikes on Iran in February.

Two Pakistani government sources confirmed Munir’s visit to Reuters. The first source said that Iran and Pakistan were in direct contact.

A second source said the talks would also address recent developments in the conflict, including US President Donald Trump’s threat of tougher sanctions on Iran.

“He (Munir) will discuss peace under Islamabad’s MoU,

Trump’s warning and the situation after the Pakistan-Turkiye-Saudi Arab Agreement and Houthi issues with Iranian leaders,” the source said.

The visit comes amid heightened tensions as Iran threatens a military response to US plans for sanctions that could further put a strain on the Islamic Republic’s ailing economy.

Munir’s visit to Tehran coincides with the announcement on details related to the planned sanctions today, which US officials have said would be “the toughest sanctions in history” on Iran.

Trump had warned of economic consequences against any country that provided “any type of lifeline to Iran” as he seeks to isolate the Islamic Republic.

Oil shipments are at a virtual standstill in the Strait of Hormuz, with Tehran threatening to strike any unauthorised oil tankers that try to transit the vital waterway, and Iran’s economy is already under immense pressure from sanctions.

Thousands march in Sweden climate demo as election looms

AFP
Stockholm

Around 10,000 people marched in Stockholm yesterday for a protest against human-made climate change, just weeks ahead of a general election where the issue is among Swedish voters’ top concerns.

“We are so many people who are concerned about this problem,” said 21-year-old student Kliff Lindberg, who added that he was “relieved” to see such a strong turnout.

“That gives me a lot of strength and it’s beautiful to see I think.”

Experts in Sweden and abroad have warned that the government’s climate policy jeopardises the country’s emissions-cutting goals – to reduce CO2 emissions from transport by 70% from 2010 levels by 2030, and to achieve net-zero emissions by 2045.



Thousands of climate activists and protesters gather at Gustav Adolfs Torg for a climate demonstration in Stockholm. (Reuters)

Since taking power in 2022, Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson’s right-wing government has cut petrol taxes and reduced requirements for petrol suppliers to add low-carbon alternatives to their mix.

The government has notably rejected a commission’s recommendations on ways to meet the 2030 target, which included phasing out fossil fuels by hiking taxes on petrol and diesel.

Swedes will elect a new parliament on September 13, with the right-wing bloc trailing in opinion polls.

The rally in the capital, organised by youth and sporting groups, unions, rural associations and rights groups, included Sweden’s most famous climate campaigner Greta Thunberg.

“There is absolutely no party in Sweden who are even proposing politics in line with anything close to what science says will take for us to avoid a climate disaster,”

Thunberg said to AFP.

“If we continue like now we will see collapse, we are already seeing collapse,” she said.

According to a Verian opinion poll published by public broadcaster SVT on Thursday, 37% of respondents said the climate was a top priority in the election.

The government has argued that the phase-out of fossil fuels must be gradual in order to preserve and strengthen Sweden’s competitiveness and its companies. But organisers of the demonstration argued that urgent action was needed.

“The climate crisis is very real, and it is here,” said Beatrice Rind- evall, head of the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, which is co-organising demonstration.

“It is time to put in place a climate policy that reduces emissions right now,” she added in a statement, pointing to this summer’s devastating heatwaves in Europe.

Drownings surge past 300 in France amid heatwaves

AFP
Paris

France has recorded more than 300 drownings this summer, up sharply from last year, a minister said yesterday, linking the surge to the heatwaves that have swept Europe. The 301 drownings since June 19 are an increase of 14% from the summer of 2025, Sports and Youth Minister Marina Ferrari told France Inter radio.

She called it a “sad toll”, saying the increase was “in line with the repeated heatwaves” that have hit many European countries – a phenomenon experts say is driven by human-caused climate change. “Lots of people have sought to hit the water, with risky behaviour,” she added.

“Many deadly accidents have occurred in areas that are not authorised or supervised for swimming.” On July 15, Ferrari gave an initial summer drownings toll of 142 deaths.

Qatar strikes gold in CISM world parachuting contest



QNA
Bratislava

Qatari skydiver Saleh al-Abidi (*pictured*) clinched the gold medal in the Senior Individual category of the Accuracy Landing competition, concluding his participation in the 48th CISM World Military Parachuting Championship 2026, hosted by Slovakia from Aug 14 to 23.

This feat followed contests over Lucenec Airport, with 128 competitors in the Senior Individual category representing 33 countries and vying for the top spots and medals. Al-Abidi topped the standings with six points, tying with Czech competitor Bonifac Hajek and Germany's Matthias Diemler, giving Qatar another feat at the military world championship.

HE Chairman of the Qatar Air Sports Committee and Commander of the Joint Special Forces, Maj Gen Mohammed bin Zayed al-Otaibi, said he is profoundly pleased with the achievement al-Abidi had made, emphasizing that this feat is a natural outgrowth of the infinite support the Qatari sports have been receiving from the judicious leadership.

Al-Otaibi added that this participation was incredibly motivated by the ambition and doggedness to win the gold and hold the flag of Qatar aloft on the stage in this global extravaganza.



The Qatari players had incredibly proved their outstanding capabilities to compete in front of the most prominent athletes, he underlined. HE Secretary-General of the Qatar Air Sports Committee, Capt Hazza Hamad al-Attiyah, affirmed that he is proud of this phenomenal feat, adding that what had been achieved was literally an outgrowth of the unwavering support and attention the team receives from the wise leadership.

The team's determination and

resolve pulled off this success and hoisted the flag higher over Slovakia despite the strength of competition and high technical level at this tournament, Al Attiyah admitted. He thanked all players for their phenomenal efforts throughout this participation and congratulated the champions on these tremendous feats.

Al-Attiyah noted that the continuous presence on the coronation stages manifests the massive work the committee is undertaking to advance incredible players capable of achieving honorable results in various arenas. Lt Abdulaziz Abdullah al-Hajaji, Captain of Qatar's

Accuracy Landing Team, said snatching this gold came following a powerful contest, noting that the team incredibly remained focused and this pulled off success to finish first.

Al-Abidi, for his part, said he was glad for this tremendous feat, emphasizing that all players were incredibly united throughout the whole tournament, eying the title and turning this effort and conscientiousness into holding the flag aloft at this global arena.

He added that this accomplishment is a new step in the team's path and boundless achievements at multiple major tournaments.

Art and culture a 'beating heart' connecting East and West, says QM CEO

By Joey Aguilar
Doha



Ahmad al-Namla

For Qatar Museums' former CEO Ahmad al-Namla, art and culture are not only central to how a country tells its story, but also an essential means of communication between East and West. In the latest Evolution Nation video series, he describes them as a "beating heart" and an "artery of communication" between people, helping societies better understand and accept one another.

Nearly four years after Qatar welcomed the world for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, al-Namla looks back on a defining period for the country's cultural sector and the years of preparation that helped introduce international audiences to Qatar's history, identity and heritage.

Between 2018 and 2022, he said Qatar Museums undertook important preparations to ensure its museums and exhibitions were ready for the FIFA World Cup, with a focus on highlighting Qatari identity and presenting key collections and projects to international audiences. Al-Namla said the World Cup provided an opportunity not only to welcome visitors to Qatar but also to share the stories and objects that speak to the country's history and its connections with the wider world.

Among the works he remembers most fondly is the Baroda Carpet at the National Museum of Qatar (NMQ), an extraordinary 19th-century object measuring 2.64 metres long and 1.74 metres wide. According to NMQ, the carpet is woven with silk thread on a natural deerskin base and adorned with more than 1.5mn natural marine pearls, known as "Basra" pearls, sourced from the coasts of Qatar and Bahrain, alongside rubies, emeralds, sapphires and diamonds.

"One of the most important works that I love very much displayed at the National Museum of Qatar is the Baroda Carpet. For me, the Baroda Carpet is an icon. It was made in the 19th century and contains a million and a half pearls, most of which are believed to be from Qatar's riches, which was very famous

for pearls at that time. "It was made to be a carpet placed on the tomb of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, but unfortunately it never reached its final destination."

Apart from individual objects and exhibitions, al-Namla sees art and culture as essential to communication between societies and to creating greater understanding across different histories, perspectives and traditions. "Art and culture are a very important focus and a beating heart and the importance of the role they play is that they are the artery of communication between East and West and between human beings. So, it is very important that we understand and accept the culture of others," he pointed out.

That sense of connection, he said, was particularly visible during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, when Qatar welcomed visitors from across the globe. For al-Namla, the experience was closely linked to one of Qatar's most deeply rooted traditions: hospitality.

"One of the most important experiences for me was the experience of hosting the guests of the World Cup, preparing the conditions for them, because it reflects one of our most important heritages in Qatar, which is welcoming guests and honouring them."

The Evolution Nation video series forms part of Qatar Creates, the cultural movement by QM. Launched to mark 50 years since the establishment of the original NMQ in 1975, the campaign celebrates the people, institutions and ideas that have contributed to Qatar's cultural development over the past five decades.

Thailand, Qatar join hands for mangrove restoration

By A Staff Reporter
Doha

Few would expect Thailand and Qatar to become partners in mangrove restoration. One is defined by its tropical coastlines and dense mangrove forests; the other by desert landscapes and the waters of the Arabian Gulf. Yet it is precisely this contrast that has created a remarkable opportunity for cooperation on environmental sustainability. That vision is now becoming a reality.

Through the facilitation of the Thai embassy in Doha, senior Qatari researchers recently undertook a five-day working visit to Thailand's mangrove conservation sites, laying the groundwork for a mangrove restoration project in Qatar that will involve a Thai expert as a consultant later in 2026.

The visit was organised by the embassy in Doha in June, in cooperation with the Thailand International Cooperation Agency (TICA), Thailand's principal agency for international development cooperation. The programme brought two senior researchers from Qatar University's Environmental Science Centre (ESC) - Prof Dr Jassim al-Khayat and Prof Dr Vethamony Ponnunmy - to visit Thailand's coastal conservation sites, research centres, and government agencies responsible for marine and coastal resources.

According to the embassy, this visit marks the first major step toward deeper cooperation on sustainable development and mangrove restoration between Thailand and Qatar. This year, a mangrove expert from Thailand has been selected to serve as a consultant for a mangrove restoration project in Qatar, representing an important milestone in bilateral cooperation between the two countries in the field of sustainable development.

This progress did not happen by chance. For more than a year, the embassy in Doha has worked to position Thailand as a trusted partner for Qatar on environmental sustainability, laying the foundation for practical collaboration that benefits both countries.



The foundation for this initiative was laid in 2025 through two embassy-led visits by Thai experts to Qatar. The first visit was held from February 16 to 19, 2025, and included a seminar entitled 'Mangrove Conservation in Qatar: Towards a Practicable Action Plan', co-hosted with the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC), ESC, and Earthna Centre for a Sustainable Future on February 17, 2025 at Qatar Foundation.

The delegation also visited mangrove conservation sites, agricultural plantations, and eco-tourism locations in Al-Thakira and Al-Ruwais to observe conservation efforts, exchange expertise, and explore potential areas for collaboration. The second visit was held from April 22 to 23, 2025, and coincided with the Earthna Summit 2025, which the embassy, in collaboration with MECC, ESC, and Earthna, co-hosted a seminar entitled 'From Local to Global: Thailand's Sustainability and Eco-Tourism Journeys', as an official side event of the summit.

The seminar highlighted Thailand's sustainability frameworks, emphasising its globally recognised eco-tourism models, environmental conservation efforts, and community-driven develop-

ment initiatives. The embassy also organised an exhibition at the Earthna Village 2025 to showcase Thailand's journey towards sustainable development through the display of upcycled and community products from Thai mangrove forests, highlighting the achievements of community-driven development while demonstrating how local communities contribute to sustainable development.

The recent visit to Thailand in June brought the ESC delegation to meet with the institutions responsible for Thailand's conservation ecosystem. In Phetchaburi Province on the western coast of the Gulf of Thailand, the delegation visited the Department of Marine and Coastal Resources' Mangrove Resource Management Centre, observing mangrove nurseries and restoration techniques, as well as community-led value addition projects that generate sustainable livelihoods.

The group also visited the Laem Phak Bia Environmental Research and Development Project under Royal Initiative, a research centre recognised as a regional model for integrated coastal management and circular economy practices. In Chonburi Province on the eastern coast of the Gulf of Thailand,



the delegation visited the Royal Thai Navy Sea Turtle Conservation Centre, where they explored an approach to marine animal conservation that engages public and military institutions with the private sector to protect endangered sea turtles and other marine species.

The visit also included policy discussions with senior representatives from TICA, the Department of Marine and Coastal Resources (DMCR), Kasetsart University, and the Royal Thai Navy. The discussions focused on exchanging knowledge about mangrove restoration protocols, marine resource conservation, and how ecotourism policy frameworks can be structured as conservation tools rather than as tools for resource exploitation.

The embassy noted that the



visit delivered tangible outcomes, as both parties committed to strengthening institutional networks and academic cooperation. Although Thailand and Qatar face different environmental challenges, both countries share a common aspiration towards environmental conservation and sustainable development, a shared vision that underpins the growing partnership.

Thailand's best practices in coastal resource management and mangrove conservation provide opportunities for academic cooperation with Qatar, which has already achieved remarkable progress in various environmental conservation and restoration projects under the Qatar National Vision 2030 and the Third National Development Strategy. Qatar brings considerable strengths

to the partnership, namely strong institutional management and abundant natural resources that offer significant potential for conservation-led development. Against this backdrop, Thailand's experience and expertise offer an accessible model that could be a beneficial addition to Qatar's on-going efforts.

As Thailand and Qatar continue to strengthen their partnership, the embassy said this initiative demonstrates how countries with vastly different environments can work together to address shared global challenges. What began as an exchange of expertise has evolved into a practical partnership - one that promises lasting benefits for environmental conservation, scientific cooperation, and sustainable development in both countries.