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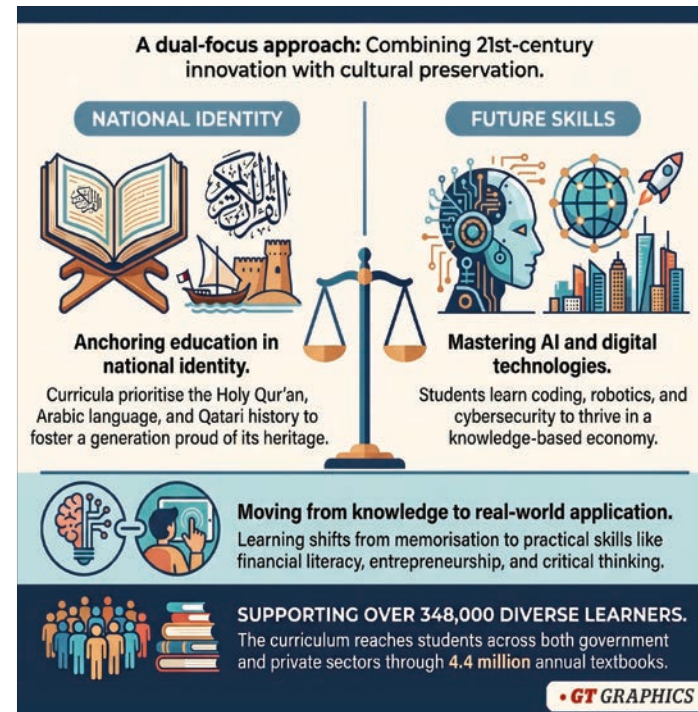
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Minister meets Gulf Health Council official



HE the Minister of Public Health Mansoor bin Ebrahim bin Saad al-Mahmoud met yesterday with Sulaiman Saleh al-Dakhil, the director-general of the Gulf Health Council, during his visit to Qatar. They explored ways to strengthen co-operation between Qatar and the council, while also reviewing the council's key activities and future projects.

Minister meets Ethiopia's ambassador



HE the Minister of Municipality Abdullah bin Hamad bin Abdullah al-Attayah met yesterday Ethiopia's ambassador to Qatar Faisal Ali Ibrahim. They discussed bilateral ties and ways to enhance and develop them. - **QNA**

Amir congratulates Ukraine's Zelensky

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani sent a cable of congratulations to Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky on the occasion of his country's Independence Day. HH the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani sent a similar cable of congratulations to Zelensky. Meanwhile, HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani sent a cable of congratulations to Ukraine's Prime Minister Serhii Koryukhyn on the occasion. - **QNA**

MoEHE announces new and updated subjects for 2026-27

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) has announced new subjects and updates to existing ones for the 2026-27 academic year, including an integrated Grade 10 science course and expanded Life and Professional Skills programmes.

As part of the changes, the ministry has introduced a unified Grade 10 science course combining physics, chemistry and biology.

The course is designed to help students understand the connections between the different branches of science and explore natural phenomena, life, matter and energy from an integrated perspective.

The course brings together scientific concepts that were previously taught separately and includes activities focused on research, experimentation, data collection and analysis.

It is being introduced gradually in government schools and private schools that follow the national curriculum.

Another subject developed by the ministry

is Life and Professional Skills, which is offered across the primary, preparatory and secondary stages.

It includes several programmes covering areas such as financial literacy and entrepreneurship, information literacy, family literacy and practical life skills.

The financial literacy and entrepreneurship programme introduces students to money management and entrepreneurship, while the information literacy programme focuses on finding, evaluating and using information effectively.

The family literacy programme addresses family values, social responsibility and healthy family and social relationships.

The subject includes practical programmes tailored to students at different stages.

For girls, the home economics programme covers household affairs, cooking and sewing, personal care and first aid.

For boys, the life management programme

includes camping, land and sea trips, first aid and self-reliance skills.

A self-development programme is also offered to secondary school students, helping them identify interests and abilities and make informed choices about specialisations.

It also covers future planning and preparation for university life.

The ministry is preparing self-learning materials for secondary school students through its official platforms during the first semester of the 2026-27 academic year, in co-operation with partners.

The materials will cover artificial intelligence (AI) in co-operation with Injaz Qatar, economics and trade in co-operation with the Qatar Development Bank, and data science in co-operation with the Cisco Academy.

Students who complete the workshops and meet the requirements of each subject will receive accredited digital certificates documenting their participation and achievements.

Qatari Diar, QOC signs co-operation agreement

Qatari Diar has signed a co-operation agreement with Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) to strengthen joint collaboration on sports and community initiatives, in support of greater sports participation and to encourage members of the community to adopt a healthy, active lifestyle.

The agreement was signed by Qatari Diar chief executive Sheikh Hamad Bin Talal al-Thani and HE the QOC Secretary-General Jassim bin Rashid al-Buenain during an official ceremony held at Qatari Diar's headquarters, in the presence of senior officials from both sides.

Under the agreement, the two parties will co-operate in organising and implementing sports events, championships, and community initiatives of mutual interest, and will launch joint community programmes and initiatives aimed at promoting a healthy lifestyle and encouraging sports participation.

The agreement also provides for the use of spaces and facilities owned by Qatari Diar, along with the necessary logistical support to ensure the successful implementation of events and activities.

It includes the exchange of expertise when launching sports initiatives through consultation, technical support, and related services, as well as co-operation in the media, marketing, and promotion of joint events and projects locally and internationally, including the use of Qatari Diar's available media, advertising assets, screens, and media spaces.

"We are proud to sign this agreement with Qatar Olympic Committee, which marks a significant step in strengthening our institutional co-operation in the field of sports," said Sheikh Hamad. "It also reflects our commitment to expanding our contribution to the community and supporting national efforts



to establish sport as a fundamental element in enhancing quality of life."

"We are confident that this agreement will lay the foundation for a fruitful and sustainable partnership, built on complementary roles and the exchange of expertise, translating the agreed areas of co-operation into sports and community initiatives that deliver tangible impact, fulfil the objectives of both parties and serve the community," he added.

"We are pleased to sign this memorandum of understanding with Qatari Diar, which marks a new step towards strengthening co-operation and partnership between the Qatar Olympic Committee and national institutions," said HE al-Buenain.

"We firmly believe in the importance of integrating efforts and exchanging expertise to support the continued development of sport in the State of Qatar," he said. "At the QOC, we are committed to building effective and sustainable partnerships that help broaden the scope of sports initiatives and programmes while enhancing the presence of sport and its positive role in society."

"Through this memorandum of understanding, we look forward to opening new avenues of co-operation with Qatari Diar and leveraging the expertise and capabilities of both parties in support of our shared objectives," HE al-Buenain added.

New Qatari curricula eyes blending future skills with identity

From Page 1

On the biggest challenge facing curriculum planners, al-Sharim said it is not the pace of updating content but the accelerating pace of change in the world itself - shifting skills, jobs and technologies that make it difficult to design curricula around fixed predictions of the future job market.

The response, she said, is to build adaptability: a strong knowledge foundation paired with core skills in analysis, self-learning, technology use, teamwork and problem-solving.

On national identity, al-Shar-

im said curricula are designed to prepare a generation proud of its Islamic faith, Arab identity and Qatari heritage, alongside 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, digital literacy and self-learning.

Through projects, real-life scenarios and inquiry-based learning, students are trained to analyse information and make decisions.

The curriculum also covers life skills including financial and family literacy, entrepreneurship and volunteering.

Digital skills are introduced progressively - from basic technology use through programming and al-

gorithms to artificial intelligence (AI), robotics and cybersecurity - with emphasis on safe, responsible and verified technology use.

Among the department's key strategic projects is the General Framework for Qatar's National Curriculum, which defines learner attributes as a benchmark for future curriculum development.

Al-Sharim said this includes strengthening national identity, Islamic values, the status of the Holy Qur'an and Arabic, while expanding access to international languages such as French, German and Japanese, with Spanish and Chinese to follow.

School walk campaign seeks to forge family bond

From Page 1

Supporting children, she stressed, involves more than monitoring grades. It also means listening to their concerns, sharing the details of their school day and safeguarding their emotional and social well-being.

Qatar Foundation (QF) Communication Department director Noor Saleh al-Mohannadi said the foundation would use its platforms, awareness centres and programmes to carry the campaign's message to a wider audience.

She said accompanying children to school could become a daily space for meaningful conversation, closer connections and positive memories while strengthening their sense of trust and security.

The campaign brings together the MoSDF, MoEHE, the Government Communications Office, QF, the Protection and Social Rehabilitation Centre "Aman", the Family Consulting Centre "Wifaq" and the Centre for Parenting "Kanaf" in a joint effort to place families at the heart of a successful school year.

QRCS supports cataract treatment, surgeries in Niger

The Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) has launched a large-scale ophthalmology and anti-blindness campaign in Niger, aimed at giving the most vulnerable populations better access to ophthalmology services.

Being implemented by Niger's National Eye Health Programme (NENH), the project is a partnership between the QRCS's representation office in Niger and Direct Aid - Niger, with joint funding from the QRCS and the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB).

Under the project, medical examinations and consultations will be provided for 12,000 patients with eye conditions and 2,000 cataract surgeries will be performed to help improve eye health in Niamey, Diffa, Tillaberi, and Zinder regions.



The project is part of the Alliance to Fight Avoidable Blindness (AFAB), an international public health initiative led by the IsDB and its

partners, to treat and prevent cataract-induced and preventable blindness in sub-Saharan Africa. - **QNA**

Qatar Foundation opens registration for 2027 edition of Akhlaquna Award

Qatar Foundation (QF)'s Pre-University Education (PUE) has announced the opening of registration for the 2027 edition of its Akhlaquna initiative.

Applications can be submitted on www.akhlaquna.qa and will be accepted until December 17.

This year's edition welcomes entries across four age categories: the Baraem (Young Children) category for participants aged 7-14, the Youth category for those aged 15-18, the Young Adults category for individuals and groups aged 18-25, and the Individual Contributions category open to participants aged 25-45 from Qatar and across the Gulf countries.

This edition marks the 10th anniversary of the Akhlaquna Award, which over the years has highlighted individuals and young people who have embodied ethical values through initiatives and projects with tangible impact.

Their efforts have helped foster a culture of values-driven community initiatives and inspired others to play an active role in their communities.

Ahmed Yousuf al-Malki, project manager and member of the Akhlaquna Award, part of the QF's PUE, said: "The tenth year marks an important milestone in the journey of the Akhlaquna Award, reflecting its continuity and success in embedding ethical values and transforming them from concepts into practices and initiatives that have a meaningful impact on society."



Ahmed al-Malki.

"Over the years, the award has highlighted individuals and young people who have become positive role models and created tangible change within their communities," he said. "This year, we aim to expand the reach of the Award and bring its message and values to a wider audience, particularly young people, encouraging more of them to translate the values they believe in into actions and initiatives that create a positive and sustainable impact."

Al-Malki noted that the award seeks projects and initiatives that embody ethical values and translate them into tangible, sustainable impact across areas including education, community service, volunteering, and other fields that contribute to positive social and ethical outcomes.

"We hope participation will give young people an opportunity to showcase their ideas and initiatives and help them recognise that age is no barrier to making an impact," he said. "We want to see young people who believe that change starts with the individual and who turn their ideas into tangible, sustainable impact in their schools, universities, and communities, while inspiring others to follow their example."

The Akhlaquna Award continues to empower young people and provide them with opportunities to showcase their ideas and initiatives, driven by the belief that age should never be a barrier to creating change.

Qatar takes part in COP17

Represented by the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC), Qatar is participating in the 17th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP17) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), which is taking place in Mongolia's capital city Ulaanbaatar.

COP17 is seeing broad participation from State Parties, representatives of international and regional organisations, and stakeholders involved in combating desertification, land degradation, and drought.

The assistant undersecretary for Protection and Natural Reserves Affairs at the MoECC, Dr Ibrahim Abdul Latif al-Maslamani, led Qatar's delegation.

The event is addressing a number of priority issues, most notably restoring degraded land, achieving land degradation neutrality, strengthening resilience to drought, and managing land and rangelands sustainably.

Qatar will be highlighting a number of its national efforts and initiatives in protecting and rehabilitating terrestrial ecosystems, restoring and rehabilitating "rawdās" and rangelands, developing the country's vegetation cover using native plant species, as well as controlling invasive plant species.

Qatar will also be showcasing the use of geographic information systems (GIS) and modern technologies to monitor and assess land condition and vegetation cover. - **QNA**

Workshop on Gulf strategy to fight cybercrime opens in Doha

The workshop on preparing the Gulf Strategy to Combat Cybercrime and AI-Related Crimes began in Doha yesterday, hosted by the Ministry of Interior (MoI) and organised by the GCC Secretariat-General in co-operation with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime.

The three-day workshop brings together representatives of Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) states, experts and specialists in cybercrime to strengthen security co-operation and co-ordination, develop regional capabilities and address emerging cyber threats.

Participants are discussing the use of modern technologies in combating cybercrime, developing a unified Gulf framework, enhancing cyber investigations

and facilitating cross-border digital evidence exchange.

The director-general of Criminal Investigation at the MoI, Major-General Mohammed Ibrahim al-Jufairi, stressed the importance of a joint Gulf strategy to enhance co-ordination, information sharing and technical capabilities, while improving preparedness to prevent, detect and respond to cybercrime.

He noted that the objective of the workshop goes beyond preparing a strategy document to building a unified Gulf security vision that is implementable and measurable, anticipates future threats, and enhances the readiness of security agencies in GCC countries to effectively and proactively address artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled cybercrime. - **QNA**

Doha Festival City launches Festival Academy for back-to-school season

Doha Festival City, Qatar's leading retail, leisure, and lifestyle destination, has announced the launch of its back-to-school campaign, Festival Academy, taking place from August 19 to September 12.

Running under the theme *One Journey. Endless Discoveries*, the campaign aims to transform the mall into the ultimate family edutainment venue, seamlessly blending immersive educational workshops, interactive programmes, and rewarding shopping experiences.

Spanning three specialised zones, Festival Academy offers a hands-on learning and discovery environment where children of all ages can engage in a curated menu of creative endeavours.

Academy Admissions, the journey's entry zone, allows kids to register and receive their "Festival Academy Report Card".

As they participate in activities across the mall, they can collect stamps in their report card.

Once their journey is complete, children can return to the Academy Admissions zone to redeem their rewards and celebrate with a memorable "cap and gown" graduation photo moment, and play e-sports at the Digital Gaming Station.

Children then take their report cards to the "Discovery Classroom" zone, where they can explore their creativity through workshops on crafting personalised items such as shoes, bags and more, hosted by a selection of specialised retail partners.

The zone will also feature a range of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) and science-focused workshops, including Science Gadgets Lab, Circuit Builders, Heart & Lungs Clinic and Little Animal Experts.

This is in addition to Lego and Magnatile building stations, a fun bracelet-making masterclass, and a variety of health-focused, family-friendly workshops hosted by the Primary Health Care Corporation.



The "Creative Classroom" provides young learners with an inviting space to explore art and imagination.

The zone features an art and design canvas corner, a puzzle corner, and a crafting corner, giving them the chance to create and personalise special back-to-school items that they can later take home.

"We are excited to welcome families to the Festival Academy, which creates an enriching, joyful experience that blends learning and entertainment for children, while offering their parents the opportunity to bond with them, create lasting memories, and enjoy a variety of rewards," said Doha Festival City director (Asset Management) Tugrul Comert.

"By integrating interactive learning with our exceptional retail offerings, we are re-defining the back-to-school season as an engaging experience that empowers young minds and brings the community together," he said.

As part of the initiative, families are invited to take part in a "Play, Spin and Win" promotion and receive instant gifts, driving remarkable value for parents and students preparing for the academic year.

To anchor the festive atmosphere, Doha Festival City will also host a vibrant line-

up of themed entertainment shows every weekend.

Children and parents can look forward to live performances, science-themed shows, and roaming mascot parades.

The Festival Academy activations will operate daily for eight hours throughout the campaign.



Tugrul Comert



Over 7,100 abandoned vehicles removed last year

Authorities removed 7,144 abandoned vehicles across Qatar in 2025 as part of intensified efforts to clear public spaces and streamline procedures for handling vehicles left there.

The Joint Committee for the Removal of Abandoned Vehicles, Machinery and Equipment transferred 5,340 vehicles to the Mesaimeer impound facility and 1,804 to the Umm Salal facility.

The total value of vehicles disposed of during the year was estimated at QR10.62mn.

The committee conducted 40 field campaigns across the country's municipalities, with concerned authorities expanding inspections, streamlining procedures and strengthening co-ordination among government entities to address the issue.

Several administrative measures were introduced in 2025 to expedite the removal and disposal process.

These included cancelling impound fees and linking violations to individuals' personal identification numbers.

Authorities also worked to simplify vehicle ownership transfers and disposal procedures, aiming to reduce administrative delays and make it easier for owners to resolve cases involving abandoned vehicles.

The committee further strengthened co-ordination and data-sharing links with relevant authorities and proposed integrating municipal and traffic violations to improve enforcement and information exchange.

As part of its disposal programme, about 1,200 vehicles were sold through auctions during the year.

The committee also examined mechanisms for exporting abandoned vehicles and proposed procedures for handling vehicles found on private property.

Public awareness campaigns were stepped up to encourage greater community participation in preventing vehicle abandonment in public areas.



Abdullah al-Saeed appointed director of training at Al Jazeera Media Institute

Al Jazeera Media Network has announced the appointment of Abdullah Faleh al-Saeed as director of training at Al Jazeera Media Institute.

Al-Saeed has over 14 years of experience in strategic planning and managing training and development programmes at several Qatari institutions, including the Qatar Central Bank, Qatar Development Bank, Bedaya Centre, and Qatar Energy.

He holds a Bachelor's degree in Accounting and Business Administration from Oxford Brookes University in the United Kingdom, a Master's degree in Finance from Northumbria University, and professional certifications from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

Al-Saeed has also held several leadership positions in planning, training, and development.

Snoonu and Teyseer Holding Sign Strategic Partnership to Support Growing Operations

Snoonu, Qatar's leading homegrown technology company, and Teyseer Security Services, part of Teyseer Holding, have signed a strategic partnership agreement to strengthen security and facility management across Snoonu's growing operational footprint in Qatar, marking a new step in collaboration between two homegrown Qatari businesses.

Signed on Thursday, the agreement will see Teyseer Security Services provide comprehensive security and facility management solutions across Snoonu's accommodation facilities, warehouses, headquarters and SnooMart locations. The partnership will support Snoonu's expanding network by providing tailored solutions designed to help maintain safe and secure environments for its employees, partners and wider community.

The collaboration reflects the shared commitment of both companies to strengthening Qatar's homegrown business ecosystem and creating opportunities for local businesses to work together, exchange capabilities and support sustainable growth. It also highlights the role of partnerships between Qatari companies in contributing to the continued development of the country's private sector and economy.

Commenting on the partnership, Hamad Mubarak Al-Hajri, Founder & CEO of Snoonu, said:

"We believe the strength of Qatar's homegrown ecosystem comes from local companies working together, sharing capabilities and creating opportunities for mutual growth. Our partnership with Teyseer Security Services is a natural extension of that belief. As Snoonu continues to expand, having trusted local partners who share our commitment to excellence and operational standards is extremely important. We look forward to building a long-term relationship with Teyseer and creating further opportunities to collaborate."

Mr. Abdulrahman Khalifa Al Mannai, Managing Director of Teyseer Holding, said:

"We are pleased to begin this partnership with Snoonu, a company that represents the ambition and potential of Qatar's homegrown technology sector. This collaboration demonstrates the value of two Qatari businesses coming together to support one another and contribute to the local economy. We are committed to delivering reliable, state-of-the-art security and facility management solutions that support Snoonu's growing network, and we look forward to building a successful and long-term partnership."

Through this collaboration, both companies aim to build a strong foundation for continued cooperation and explore further opportunities to support their respective growth and contribute to Qatar's thriving local business ecosystem.



DAAM, Aman sign deal for rehabilitation programmes

The Social and Sport Contribution Fund (DAAM) has signed a funding agreement with the Social Protection and Rehabilitation Centre (Aman) to support the Rehabilitation Programme for Victims of Violence and Family Breakdown, and the Support Programme for Children with Disabilities who are Victims of Domestic Violence.

The partnership reinforces national efforts to protect the most vulnerable members of society and ensure that they can access specialised care and rehabilitation services.

Under the agreement, DAAM will provide financial support for the delivery of both programmes. The initiatives aim to offer an

integrated package of protection, psychological, social, health and educational services that improve beneficiaries' quality of life, strengthen family stability, and help them reintegrate into society within a safe and supportive environment.

The Rehabilitation Programme for Victims of Violence and Family Breakdown delivers specialised care to women and children affected by violence or family disintegration.

Services include temporary shelter, psychological and social support, healthcare, legal counselling, educational support for children, as well as community reintegration and aftercare programmes designed to promote lasting family

stability and reduce the risk of further harm.

The second programme focuses on children with disabilities who have experienced violence or family breakdown.

It serves children with intellectual, hearing, visual and physical disabilities, as well as those on the autism spectrum.

Specialised rehabilitation services are tailored to individual needs and include psychological and social assessment, educational support, psychological counselling, occupational therapy, speech therapy, and awareness programmes for families.

The goal is to enhance the children's social inclusion and equip their families to create a safe, nur-

ture environment that supports their development and stability.

"Our support for these two programmes reflects DAAM's commitment to national initiatives that protect and empower the most vulnerable groups - particularly women and children affected by violence and family breakdown, and children with disabilities," said DAAM director (Shared Services) Yousef Mohammed al-Nuaimi. "This collaboration demonstrates our focus on programmes that deliver lasting community impact by providing protection, care and rehabilitation, while strengthening family cohesion and building an inclusive, supportive society."

"The funding agreement with DAAM highlights the importance



of co-ordinated national efforts in strengthening the social protection system and supporting those most in need, especially women and children who have experienced violence or family breakdown," said Alia al-Sumaiti, the director of the Planning and Development Office at Aman.

DAAM's support for these programmes underlines the vital role of community partnerships in

achieving sustainable impact and advancing the centre's efforts to create a safer, more cohesive environment for women, children and families - in line with the State's priorities and Qatar National Vision 2030.

Since its establishment in 2010, DAAM has launched numerous vital projects and initiatives across cultural, social, sports and charitable fields. - QNA



Abdulaziz Ibrahim al-Ishaq



Mohammed al-Muhannadi

Rawda Award workshop highlights the path to excellence in social work

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

Media professionals and content creators in Qatar recently participated in an introductory workshop that highlighted the criteria and standards for the Rawda Award for Excellence in Social Work - Media Category.

The seminar brought together representatives from local newspapers and media outlets alongside content creators, offering participants a look at how media initiatives contribute to social development.

The workshop was opened by Abdulaziz Ibrahim al-Ishaq, the chairman of the Rawda Award for Excellence in Social Work, affiliated with the Ministry of Social Development and Family.

He welcomed the participants and stressed that projects submitted for the award should demonstrate genuine social relevance and extend beyond an organisation's core business.

He cited initiatives that raise awareness among school students about environmental conservation and sustainability, particularly when such projects produce measurable, scalable changes in behaviour.

The seminar was led by Mohammed al-Muhannadi of the award's executive team, who explained the eligibility requirements and judging criteria for the Media Category.

He highlighted projects that develop effective social solutions, strengthen social protection and contribute to Qatar's broader social development objectives, and underlined the importance of empowering civil society organisations and enhancing their role in creating lasting social impact.

According to al-Muhannadi, eligible media initiatives should produce professional and responsible content that promotes social work, national values and awareness across society in Qatar.

Projects are also expected to demonstrate creativity, innovation, measurable impact and sustainability, while aligning with the National Strategy 2024-30 and national societal values.

He stressed that eligible projects should follow a clear cycle of planning, implementation, KPIs (key performance indicators), measurement and improvement, supported by structured data collection and analysis.

The workshop also provided practical guidance on the application process, evaluation standards and methods of measuring sustainable social impact.

The Rawda Award, officially announced by the Ministry of Social Development and Family in December 2025, is Qatar's first national award dedicated to recognising individuals, families, institutions, and other contributors to innovative and sustainable social initiatives.

The award comprises five categories: individuals, families, non-profit organisations, the private sector, and media, with total annual prizes of QR2.7mn.

First edition of 'Run the Dome' fully booked

Registration for the inaugural "Run the Dome" has reached full capacity ahead of the event on August 28-29 inside the Aspire Dome, following strong community interest, Aspire Zone Foundation (AZF) has announced.

With the event now fully booked, registration for the race has officially closed.

The AZF thanked all participants for their enthusiastic response and for choosing to be part of the inaugural edition of "Run the Dome".

The event offers a unique sporting experience that brings together community members of varying fitness levels in a fully air-conditioned environment.

The race features a 4.8km course inside the As-

pire Dome, providing participants with an enjoyable sporting challenge and an opportunity to experience an exciting atmosphere with family and friends.

The event features women-only and open races, along with a range of interactive activities and cheering points along the course, creating an energetic atmosphere and enhancing the spirit of participation, making "Run the Dome" a distinctive sporting and entertainment experience for the community.

The race will feature a women's category from 7am-11am and an open category from 2pm-8pm on August 28, followed by an open race from 8am to 8pm on August 29.



HOPE Qatar concludes 'Echoes of Abilities' Summer Camp

HOPE Qatar Centre for Persons with Disabilities concluded its two-month-long "Echoes of Abilities" Summer Camp 2026 with a vibrant and memorable grand finale held on August 22.

The celebration brought together students, parents, staff, volunteers, and distinguished guests from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) to recognise the creativity, talents, growth, and achievements of the participants throughout the summer.

Held in July and August, HOPE Qatar's annual summer camp welcomed more than 81 participants, including students with disabilities from HOPE Qatar and students from other schools and centres across Qatar.

The camp was supported by over 123 volunteers from schools and colleges in Qatar and abroad.

Throughout the two months, participants engaged in a diverse range of activities built around weekly themes, designed to support and enhance their physical, psychological, academic, sensory, social, and cultural development.

The camp provided a meaningful platform for students to explore new experiences, develop confidence, build friendships, and showcase their individual strengths and abilities.

The grand finale began with a formal opening ceremony and a welcome address by acting HOPE Qatar Centre head Aparna Merugu, who reflected on the journey of the summer camp and the collective efforts that made it possible.

"Echoes of Abilities has been a journey of discovery, growth, and joy," she said. "Throughout these two months, we have witnessed our students step forward with confidence, try new things, express themselves freely, and remind us all that every individual has unique abilities waiting to be recognised and celebrated."

The programme also featured the presidential address by founder and chief mentor Dr Rajeev Thomas, who highlighted the importance of creating meaningful opportunities for persons with disabilities to participate, learn, and thrive.

"Our responsibility is not merely to recognise abilities, but to create environments where those abilities can flourish," he said. "When we provide opportunity, encouragement, participation, and the right support, we allow every individual to discover their potential and contribute meaningfully to society."

The grand finale began on a captivating note with a live violin performance by The Very Violinist, a violinist based in Qatar.

Her performance set the mood for the day, creating a warm and inspiring atmosphere as students, parents, guests, staff, and volunteers gathered to celebrate the participants' achievements.

Praveena Prakash, a former India Space Research Organisation (ISRO) scientist, encouraged the students and the audience to continue believing in their potential and embracing new challenges.

"Every achievement begins with the courage to take a step forward," she said. "What we have witnessed today is a celebration of determination, confidence, and the extraordinary possi-



Snapshots from the event.



bilities that emerge when individuals are supported and encouraged to believe in themselves."

The celebration was honoured by the presence of MoEHE representatives Fahad al-Sharshani and Dr Ali Hamade, who attended the programme and joined the HOPE Qatar community in celebrating the achievements of the students.

The grand finale was also attended by more than 90 parents and family members, whose presence added to the spirit of community, encouragement, and celebration.

The finale featured performances and activities showcasing the abilities and confidence of more than 33 HOPE Qatar students.

Highlights included a candle walk, dance performances by students and volunteers, skits, musical and group performances, a talent show, interactive parent activities, and a special ramp walk by the students.

One of the evening's highlights was the fashion show, where students walked the runway alongside their parents.

The celebration also featured an exhibition showcasing the students' creative work and achievements, re-

From Vienna to Doha, Raphael finds confidence and belonging

By Shaima Sheriff
Staff Reporter

After moving from Vienna to Doha in search of specialised autism support, Raphael's family says personalised care and community acceptance have transformed their child's confidence, happiness and daily life within months.

Speaking at HOPE Qatar's summer camp finale, Raphael's mother Tova-Anne Marr and stepfather Ahmed Fatouh said the family moved to Qatar about eight months ago after exploring educational and therapeutic options for Raphael across Europe.

Raphael was born and raised in Austria. After his father died about a year and a half ago, the family considered a new start and examined educational and therapeutic options for children with additional needs.

Marr said an online search led her to HOPE Qatar Centre for Persons with Disabilities.

A response from the centre's founder and managing director, Rajeev Thomas, convinced the family to visit Doha.

"He wrote me a beautiful e-mail that immediately told me we had to come to this school," she said. "What resonated with us was that the programme was created for his son. There was a personal touch, and we saw so many possibilities for Raphael."

The move involved packing up the family's life in Austria and taking Raphael on his first flight, which they had feared would be difficult.

Marr said the centre offered advice before their arrival, including preparing him in advance for the journey.

Since joining HOPE Qatar several months ago, Raphael has become more confident and eager to attend, according to his parents.

"He has changed. He is so much more confident and so much happier," Marr said. "He looks forward to getting on the bus every morning, and we are noticing huge changes in him."



Tova-Anne Marr and Ahmed Fatouh.

For the family, the difference is not limited to structured therapy.

They said the sense of acceptance they have encountered in Qatar has made outings easier and strengthened Raphael's confidence.

Marr recalled that when Raphael displayed repetitive movements or made loud sounds in Austria, people sometimes stared, which could affect him.

In Doha, she said, the family feels less judged and more able to participate in public life.

"I think I cry once a week from happiness about how amazing people are here to my son," she said. "It has been life-changing. It is in the culture."

She believes children with disabilities often understand and absorb far more from their surroundings than adults realise.

"When they feel accepted in the community and feel they are part of it, they change," Marr said. "They have confidence, they feel happy, and you could see that joy in the children during the talent show."

Fatouh said the family had expected assistance but was surprised by the range of specialist support offered from the first day, including occupational and speech therapy.

"We were not even expecting that," he said. "We thought someone would simply help him cope, but the specialisation and care have been great."

Marr encouraged parents who may be hesitant to seek support to meet with professionals, ask questions, and assess available services.

She said the family found qualified staff with backgrounds in therapy.

For Raphael's parents, progress is measured not only by goals but also by moments: boarding the school bus happily, going out as a family, and feeling that he belongs.

Their journey, they said, has shown how specialised care and an accepting community can work to give a child room to grow.

flecting their learning, participation, and development throughout the summer camp.

Acting therapy programme co-or-

dinator Aya Melili delivered the vote of thanks, expressing appreciation to all those who contributed to the success of the camp and its Grand Finale.

ANNOUNCEMENT

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to

NIRAJ GIRI

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within 15 days from the publication of this notice.

Ceasefire verification mission heads to east DR Congo

AFP
Kinshasa

A mission to verify a fragile ceasefire between the Congolese army and Rwanda-backed M23 armed group was deployed yesterday to the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo as the two sides traded accusations of abuse. The eastern DR Congo has suffered decades of conflict with multiple armed groups fighting over its mineral-rich territory, including the M23, which seized swathes of the region last year. Peace efforts led by Qatar and the United States saw two separate peace accords signed last year, but fighting has continued on the ground. On Sunday, the Swiss government announced that the DR Con-

go and M23 had agreed to a fresh roadmap for peace talks, following negotiations held in Switzerland. It also said a mission would be deployed to verify violations of a previous ceasefire agreement signed in Doha in July 2025. The mission, the first of its kind, comprises members of the Congolese government and M23, as well as observers from member countries of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR). It was deployed on yesterday by UN helicopters to Minembwe in South Kivu province, which has seen intense clashes in recent months, according to UN and government sources. The mission will also travel to the lakeside town of Uvira, from where the M23 withdrew in January, as well as to the territory of Kalehe, where fighting has been

reported in recent weeks, South Kivu governor Jean-Jacques Purusi told AFP. Neither the DR Congo nor M23 authorities have yet reacted to the announcement of the mission. Rwanda has long denied any direct support for the M23, and President Paul Kagame did not address the new agreement during a long press conference yesterday in Kigali. He said previous agreements had failed as they did not tackle “the root cause” of the conflict, namely the continued presence in eastern DR Congo of Hutu militants linked to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Several international mediation efforts in eastern DR Congo, where a myriad of armed groups are active, have failed. The DR Congo in a statement yesterday condemned alleged “crimes and serious human rights

violations” committed by the M23 in the territories under its control and accused the group of killing “more than 300 people” in June and July. An M23 spokesperson on X countered that government forces had launched a “deadly attack” with artillery on a village near Minembwe. Both sides have regularly accused the other of alleged abuses and ceasefire violations. The area surrounding Minembwe, which has been fiercely contested for months, has been particularly difficult for international organisations to access. Reports by NGOs and UN experts have said the M23 has also silenced dissenting voices, including journalists and human rights activists in areas under its control. In April, the DR Congo and M23 agreed to facilitate humanitarian

aid and release prisoners following talks in Switzerland. An initial group of prisoners was handed over to the M23 by the Congolese government earlier this month. New talks were held behind closed doors last week, which included representatives from the US, Qatar, Switzerland, the African Union Commission, and Togo, serving as African Union mediator. The two sides said they had “agreed on the importance of a standardised method for reporting allegations of ceasefire violations”, according to the Swiss government statement on Sunday. They also agreed to establish a “mechanism tasked with reviewing progress and addressing challenges in implementation of obligations and commitments under the Doha Framework Agreement”, it added.

Yemen’s Houthis attack ship off Saudi Arabia’s Yanbu

Reuters
Cairo

Yemen’s Iran-aligned Houthis attacked a vessel off Saudi Arabia’s port city of Yanbu in the Red Sea, the group’s military spokesperson Yahya Saree said in a televised speech yesterday. Saudi Arabia’s national shipping company Bahri later said one of its vessels, the “Amzan”, was involved in a maritime incident in the Red Sea earlier in the day. The company announced that all crew members were safe and no injuries had been reported. The company said it remained in contact with the vessel and was closely coordinating with the relevant authorities. Earlier, the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations agency said a tanker had been struck by an unknown projectile 63 nautical miles west of Yanbu. The UKMTO said all crew were safe and accounted for with no reported environmental impact. Yanbu is Saudi Arabia’s main Red Sea oil port, where millions of barrels a day are loaded, and it has become the main route out for Saudi oil skirting the Strait of Hormuz, which has been blockaded by Iran. Shipping from Yanbu has itself faced disruption since the Houthis declared a blockade on Saudi-linked vessels in the Red Sea last month. The Houthis have carried out other attacks on Saudi oil facilities and shipping in the Red Sea in recent weeks. In July, Houthis — the group that came into existence from a years-long civil war in the country — claimed to have targeted Saudi oil giant Aramco facilities in the port city of Yanbu.

3 Palestinians killed by Israeli fire in Gaza

QNA
Gaza

Three Palestinians were killed and two others injured yesterday after being targeted by Israeli occupation gunfire in several areas of the Gaza Strip. Medical sources said that a 10-year-old girl from Jabaliah refugee camp was killed after being shot by Israeli occupation forces north of Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip. A Palestinian citizen was killed in an Israeli occupation airstrike that targeted Al-Mawasi area west of Khan Younis several days ago. A third Palestinian was killed in Israeli occupation warplanes bombing his tent at dawn yesterday in Deir al-Balah, central Gaza Strip. He was killed alongside his brother who was also killed in the attack. Two other Palestinians, including a woman, were injured by Israeli occupation gunfire in Shujaia and Zeitoun areas east of Gaza City. Israeli occupation warplanes



People run for cover as smoke billows in the distance following Israeli airstrikes in Gaza City yesterday. (AFP)

bombed the water desalting plant and the prayer hall in Sheikh Radwan market northwest of the city. Sources in Gaza hospitals said that four Palestinians, including a child, had been killed by Israeli occupation gunfire in various areas of the Strip today since dawn. Sources said that the Israeli oc-

cupation has killed 73,422 Palestinians and injured 174,401 since the start of the aggression on October 7, 2023. According to the Gaza Ministry of Health, since the declaration of the ceasefire last October, 1,288 Palestinians have been killed and 4,290 injured.



Smoke rises from torched houses in the village of Khiam. (AFP)

Israel hits south Lebanon

QNA
Beirut

Israeli attacks on southern Lebanon continued, targeting homes and infrastructure, amid military movements in several border towns. Lebanon’s National News Agency reported that Israeli forces blew up a number of homes in the western neighbourhood of the border town of Khiam, with successive explosions heard and smoke rising in the surrounding area. Israeli forces also carried out bulldozing operations in the town of Houla and set fire to a number of agricultural fields and properties, while simul-

taneously blowing up several homes in the town’s western neighbourhood. These operations were accompanied by successive explosions and thick plumes of smoke rising across the surrounding area, as fires continued to spread at several locations within the town. In a related development, Lebanon’s National News Agency reported that the bodies of two people were recovered in the Dawhat Kfar Remman area after contact with them was lost yesterday. Preliminary information indicated that an Israeli drone targeted them while they were riding a motorcycle in the area, killing them.

Iraq pushes back date for factions to disarm

AFP
Baghdad

A senior Iraqi official pushed back a September 30 deadline for pro-Iran factions to hand over their weapons, without offering an explanation for the move or providing a new date. Iraq has come under pressure from the US to rein in armed factions, particularly those close to Iran. The US and Iran have been at war since February 28, drawing in other countries in the region as well as non-state groups backed by the Islamic republic. For several months, Iraq’s government has stood by its deadline, but on Sunday, the security adviser to the prime minister, Qasim al-Araji, told state media the process would only begin at the end of next month.

“September 30 is the date for the international coalition to depart, not the deadline to hand over weapons,” Araji told the Al Iraqiya broadcaster, referring to the coalition of US-led forces. Government spokesman Haidar al-Aboudi had made a similar announcement to local media on Friday, despite announcing in June that factions had until the end of September to disarm. September 30, he said, was “the date for the international coalition to end its presence, not the deadline for armed factions... Perhaps people are confusing the two.” Since taking office in May, Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi has pledged to ensure the armed factions that emerged in the years that followed the US-led invasion hand over their weapons to the state. While some factions have in recent weeks said they would join state institutions, others, in particular those closer to Iran, are refusing. “The situation is extremely complicated,” an official said.

Swedish MEPs barred from West Bank visit

AFP
Jerusalem

Israel said yesterday that it had refused entry to two outspoken left-wing Swedish deputies in the European Parliament who wanted to visit the occupied West Bank. Jonas Sjostedt and Hanna Gedin, members of Sweden’s Left Party, were turned away Sunday at Israel’s Ben Gurion Airport, the primary gateway for visitors to the Palestinian territory. Israel’s foreign ministry said the pair had “consistently acted against Israel”, including by calling for international legal proceedings against Israelis. “On various public occasions, they have spread false accusations against Israel, including allegations of genocide, deliberate starvation and the intentional targeting of children and medical personnel,” the min-

istry said in a statement. United Nations investigators, who do not speak for the global body as a whole, charged in June that Israel was deliberately targeting Palestinian children in an ongoing “genocide” in Gaza. Israel fiercely rejected the finding and accused Hamas of using Palestinian children as human shields. Sjostedt in a Facebook post said that the two MEPs planned to meet human rights and charitable organisations, including Save the Children, and to see refugee camps. “We continue to work against Israel’s illegal occupation, the displacement of Palestinians, and genocide,” Sjostedt wrote. He added that Sweden had issued a protest. But Swedish Foreign Minister Maria Malmer Stenergard, while noting the Swedish embassy assisted the pair, said that every country “has its own entry regula-

tions” and that Sweden has a travel advisory in place for Israel and the Palestinian territories. “Why Jonas Sjostedt and Hanna Gedin nevertheless choose to travel there is something they themselves need to answer,” she told the *Dagens Nyheter* newspaper. Rawhi Fattouh, president of the Palestinian National Council, the West Bank-based legislative body, called on European parliaments to speak out against the exclusion of critical voices. The denial of entry is “an attempt to impose silence by force and turn criticism of the occupation into an accusation, in clear disregard for international law and the moral immunity afforded to parliamentary work”, he said. Israel regularly allows in foreign lawmakers, but in a high-profile exception in 2019 it denied entry to two US Democratic congresswomen highly critical of Israel, Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar.

UN peacekeepers killed in South Sudan ambush: UN

Two peacekeepers were killed in an ambush in South Sudan yesterday, the United Nations said, in the latest sign of deadly unrest targeting foreign staff in the east African country. South Sudan, one of the poorest and most corrupt nations in the world, has seen worsening instability in recent months, even as the government attempts to hold the first-ever elections in December. The latest attack occurred in Jonglei state in the east of the country, which has been a focus of conflict between the government and opposition forces. The UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) said the ambush by “unidentified armed individuals” happened as a patrol was heading to the town of Pajut and could “constitute war crimes”.

“Two peacekeepers were killed in the attack, while seven others were injured, including three peacekeepers, two South Sudan National Police Service personnel and two civilian staff,” it said in a statement, strongly condemning the incident. UNMISS said it had deployed a “Quick Reaction Force” to the area. “Such deadly violence targeting UNMISS personnel who are serving to support peace in South Sudan is unacceptable. I extend my deepest condolences to the family and loved ones of the peacekeepers who lost their lives and wish those injured a speedy recovery,” said UNMISS head Anita Kiki Gbeho. UNMISS said earlier this month that 36 humanitarian workers had been killed so far this year. South Sudan gained independence in 2011. (AFP)

Syria sentences Assad-era Grand Mufti to life imprisonment

AFP
Damascus

A Syrian court yesterday handed a life sentence to Ahmed Hassoun, the country’s former grand mufti under ousted leader Bashar al-Assad, convicting him of crimes including inciting sectarian strife and exploiting his position. Hassoun, the 10th Assad-era figure to be sentenced under the new authorities, was Syria’s top Muslim cleric for 16 years. He was known for his close ties to the former president and frequent appearances alongside him on religious occasions. Judge Fakhr al-Din al-Aryan said Hassoun, 77, was guilty of a raft of charges including “inciting civil war and sectarian strife”, for which he was jailed for life. The cleric was also convicted of “incitement to intentional homicide”, “principal complicity in intentional homicide”, and “inciting sectarian and racial strife”, for which he was handed additional terms ranging from three to 20 years.



Judge Fakhr al-Din al-Aryan (C) during the sentencing at the Fourth Criminal Court in Damascus yesterday. (AFP)

The court also decided to confiscate Hassoun’s assets and hand them to the public treasury. His sentencing is the first against a religious figure since Syrian authorities began trying Assad-era officials in April. On August 11, Syria sentenced

Bashar al-Assad, his brother Maher and five other security officials to death in absentia for atrocities committed during Syria’s civil war, the first such ruling under the new authorities. The former president fled Syria as his government fell in Decem-



Grand Mufti Ahmed Hassoun is seen delivering a speech inside the Eastern Catholic (Maronite) Cathedral of Mar Elias (Saint Elijah) in the northern Syrian city of Aleppo in 2020. (AFP)

ber 2024 and is believed to be in Russia. Authorities have also handed death sentences to Atif Najib and Wassim al-Assad, cousins of the former ruler who were tried in person. Hassoun, a native of Aleppo whose late father was also an important religious figure, was ar-

rested at Damascus airport in March last year as he tried to flee the country. Though he held the post of grand mufti for more than a decade, Hassoun lost the title in 2021 when Syria abolished the position. The United Nations and human rights organisations have voiced opposition to the death sentences handed to Assad-era officials. Human Rights Watch on Sunday said the sentences “raise important legal issues the government should urgently address.” “Advancing justice for the litany of serious crimes committed in Syria requires more than just convictions, but building a system that can deliver competent, impartial, and independent justice,” said Balkees Jarrah, the group’s Middle East and North Africa director. Syria began legal proceedings in April against Bashar al-Assad and other officials accused of atrocities during the civil war, which erupted in 2011 with brutal repression of pro-democracy protesters. More than half a million people were killed and millions displaced during the conflict, while tens of thousands disappeared.



The Delivery Race: What Comes Next for Qatar's Food Delivery Market?



In Qatar, ordering dinner no longer requires much persuasion. The habit has already been formed. A highly connected population, an extraordinarily diverse restaurant scene and the convenience of having practically anything arrive at the door have made delivery part of everyday life. The more interesting question facing the industry now is not whether people will order, but which platform they will choose, how often they will return and what makes one service meaningfully different from another.

Qatar makes particularly interesting terrain for that competition.

Geographically, the market is condensed; commercially, it is anything but. A relatively compact customer base is served by established regional and homegrown platforms, while many restaurants appear across several applications simultaneously. Yet despite that concentration, the sector continues to grow. Food delivery has not reached its ceiling simply because more companies are competing for the same dinner table.

Keeta's arrival in Qatar last year offers an interesting case in point. It entered neither an underserved market nor one unfamiliar with delivery. Consumers already had established ordering habits, restaurants understood aggregators and existing platforms had spent years building familiarity. The challenge was therefore not to introduce another way of ordering food, but to find relevance within an existing habit.

As Keeta completed its first year, Gulf Times reached out to the platform for a closer look at its consumer and delivery data. The numbers, while belonging to one company, offer a broader glimpse into how the industry itself is changing.

One particularly committed customer placed more than 1,500 orders during the year. Some customers ordered on more than 300 different days, while others ventured considerably further across Qatar's culinary landscape, trying more than 250 different restaurants.

There is something wonderfully excessive about all three figures, but also something revealing.

Delivery has moved beyond the occasional evening when nobody feels like cooking. It now stretches across breakfast before work, office lunches, afternoon coffees, family dinners and late-night cravings. What was once an additional convenience has gradually worked its way into the architecture of everyday life.

Qatar may be geographically compact, but its appetite for delivery continues to grow. In an already crowded market, the real competition is shifting from who delivers to who can do it better, and what comes next could change the journey altogether

Choice, however, creates an interesting contradiction. At the same time, the customer who ordered from more than 250 restaurants represents another emerging behaviour: the delivery app as a discovery platform.

This matters particularly for smaller businesses. More than 60% of orders recorded by Keeta went to small and medium-sized restaurants. For an independent operator, the digital marketplace changes the geography of its potential customer base. A neighbourhood restaurant is no longer necessarily limited to its neighbourhood; it can sit on the same screen as an international chain and potentially reach customers across the city.

Qatar's regulators have also begun responding to the sector's evolution. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry introduced guidelines for delivery activities through digital platforms, with an emphasis on transparency, fair competition, efficiency and the sustainability of SMEs, an indication that delivery has become an increasingly established part of the country's commercial infrastructure.

As the market matures, the competitive battle is also changing. Keeta's delivery network has been tested against significant peaks in demand, demonstrating the operational scale required to keep service consistent as order volumes rise.

When several applications can offer the same burger from the same restaurant to the same customer, restaurant availability alone becomes a weaker differentiator. Promotions may encourage someone to place an initial order, but the longer-term contest increasingly comes down to what happens afterwards: how predictable the experience is, how quickly an order moves from kitchen to customer and whether a platform can absorb a sudden surge without allowing the experience to collapse.

The delivery, in other words, becomes as important as what is being delivered.

Behind that on-time promise is a sizeable and diverse rider network, spanning more than 30 nationalities, supported by an operation that has maintained a strong on-time completion rate even as demand grows. For customers, the expectation remains simple: reliable and on-time delivery.

A minute saved hardly sounds revolutionary, but across millions of journeys small efficiencies accumulate. A rider positioned closer to a restaurant, an order collected slightly sooner or a more effective dispatch decision can ultimately determine whether dinner arrives when expected.

The more interesting question is whether the industry's next efficiency will involve more tech experience or not.

In a recent interview, Keeta Qatar General Manager Jane Liu pointed towards autonomous vehicles and drone delivery as part of the next generation of food delivery, noting that such technologies are already being deployed commercially in China.

The prospect sounds futuristic, but the technology has already moved beyond concept stage. Keeta's parent company, Meituan, has been developing autonomous delivery technologies, including drones, as part of its efforts to rethink last-mile logistics.

For Qatar, that raises an interesting possibility. A compact geography, modern infrastructure and considerable investment in technology could make autonomous delivery an intriguing area for future exploration. This does not necessarily mean motorcycles disappearing from Doha's roads. The more likely evolution may be different forms of delivery working alongside one another, with automation taking on particular routes or environments while riders remain central elsewhere.

Food itself may also become only one part of the competition. As consumers grow accustomed to ordering dinner on demand, the behavioural leap towards groceries, pharmacy products and everyday necessities becomes considerably smaller. The traditional food delivery application is consequently evolving towards a broader quick-commerce ecosystem.

And perhaps that is where Qatar's delivery market is now heading.

Keeta's first year is therefore interesting not simply because another company entered Qatar. It arrived in an already condensed and competitive market and still found space to build meaningful volume, testament to an industry that, despite its maturity, continues to grow.

Because customers ultimately think very little about the machinery behind any of this. They think about whether they want a burger or biryani, whether friends are coming over and whether dinner will arrive before the match begins.

For the industry, making everything behind that ordinary decision work, and making it feel effortless, may be where the real competition lies.

Mediator Pakistan holds talks in Iran on US ‘economic D-Day’

Reuters
Cairo/Washington

Pakistan’s army chief visited Tehran on a mediating mission yesterday as the US prepared to roll out “the greatest financial offensive ever” targeting Iran’s trade partners.

Iran dismissed the US threat, vowing to shut down all oil exports from the Gulf “if the economic war continues” and issued a new warning to shipping not to pass through the Strait of Hormuz without its permission.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent has promised to reveal severe measures on Iran, which has endured near-continuous economic sanctions since the Islamic Revolution of 1979. “At dawn begins an economic D-Day — the single greatest financial offensive ever marshalled against an adversary,” Bessent wrote in an opinion piece published in the *Financial Times* on Sunday.

Pakistan’s army chief Asim Munir, who has built a personal rapport with US President Donald Trump, arrived in Iran for talks, Iranian media said. Pakistan said



Iran’s Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf (R) receiving Pakistan’s army chief Syed Asim Munir in Tehran yesterday. (AFP)

the visit was part of its efforts “to promote regional peace and stability”, and a Pakistani source said Munir was expected to meet people close to Iran’s supreme leader.

Tehran has said Oman’s foreign minister will visit today to discuss the Strait of Hormuz.

The US and Iran have not conducted strikes against each other’s militaries for weeks, but their last

official face-to-face talks to end the six-month-old conflict took place in June and strikes on vessels in the Strait of Hormuz have continued.

Thousands of people have died, most of them in Iran and Lebanon, since the US and Israel began strikes on February 28, degrading much of Iran’s conventional military capacity and inflicting

economic pain while killing Iran’s then-Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

But Iran has preserved enough missile and drone capability to attack its Gulf neighbours and threaten oil tankers in the Strait of Hormuz, bringing shipping in the key waterway to a near standstill and pressuring world fuel prices. The exact state of Iran’s nuclear program, which the Americans and Israelis aim to wipe out, remains unknown.

Oil prices slipped more than \$1 a barrel yesterday as investors took profits ahead of the expected US announcement.

Without detailing specific measures, Bessent signalled the US would target “fearful nations” that practice “appeasement” by engaging with Iran’s economy and financial system. “They would do well to consider the consequences of sustaining it,” he wrote in the *Financial Times*.

Iran has been bracing for the sanctions for days, issuing a series of strongly worded statements hinting at a major military response.

Mohsen Rezaei, secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council, on Sunday suggested economic retaliation.

“If the economic war continues, not a single drop of oil will be exported, neither through the Strait of Hormuz nor from anywhere in the Persian Gulf,” Rezaei wrote in a social media post. “Iran will regard any country’s participation in or support for America’s economic war against the Iranian people as an act of war.”

Bessent previously urged China to co-operate with the US, noting China historically has received half of its oil imports from the Gulf region. China’s foreign ministry said yesterday that sanctions and pressure tactics do not help resolve issues and that Beijing would do what was necessary to protect the country’s interests.

Iran’s Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi dismissed the latest moves from Washington, which has said the measures will bring down the Iranian government, saying the US has been promising Iran’s end for 48 years, “each time under a new name.”

“Iran has remained steadfast and powerful, and only the names of the failed projects have changed,” he said on X.

Two quakes in Costa Rica cause minor damage

AFP
San José

Two moderately strong earthquakes struck central Costa Rica, including the capital San Jose, early yesterday, causing minor damage but no reported injuries, authorities said.

The first of the two shallow quakes was a 5.4-magnitude tremor and originated at a depth of only seven kilometers, according to the National Seismological Network.

It occurred at 1:37am and had its epicenter in Coronado, a few kilometers northeast of San Jose, where it was felt strongly.

A second 4.8-magnitude earthquake was felt two minutes later, in the same area.

It struck at a depth of 10 kilometers, the Seismological Network said.

The US Geological Survey reported a single 4.9-magnitude quake at a depth of 10 kilometers.

Throughout the morning, several aftershocks were felt in San Jose and other cities.

There were no reports of fatalities or injuries.

The National Emergencies Commission reported a landslide on a road and some minor infrastructural damage.

Trump’s frustrations drove order limiting child vaccinations, but MAHA wants more

President Donald Trump’s frustration that his administration was not doing enough to address what he considers a likely contributor to autism drove a US executive order this month that cut back the number of childhood vaccinations, administration officials told Reuters.

These five current and former officials privately say the order alone does not substantially change US vaccine policy and will not satisfy Trump’s demands or Health Secretary Robert F Kennedy Jr’s “Make America Healthy Again” political base. Instead, Kennedy and his allies are focussed on a series of studies that the health secretary kicked off last year examining what they say are the dangers of vaccines, including a potential link with autism. Medical experts and scientists say such concerns have been thoroughly refuted by studies examining

millions of children over many years.

“No one wants to see this get done with an executive order. Robert F Kennedy Jr knows that will not be a lasting change if it’s not backed up by credible science,” said Del Bigtree, one of Kennedy’s long-time allies and chief executive officer of Informed Consent Action Network, a group that has continually questioned vaccine safety. “This is only the beginning of a process that had to happen.”

The White House and the Department of Health and Human Services declined to comment on the specifics of what led to the executive order.

White House spokesman Kush Desai said in a statement that Trump was responding to “countless parents (who) have had their questions and concerns about America’s childhood vaccine schedule ignored if not outright mocked.” (Reuters)

UN offers to facilitate fertiliser transit through Hormuz

The United Nations offered yesterday to facilitate the transport of fertiliser that has been hampered by the disruption of shipping through the Strait of Hormuz due to the Iran war.

“The purpose is simple: to reduce immediate risks, support more orderly and predictable transit, and help rebuild the confidence necessary for diplomacy and de-escalation,” Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told a press briefing.

He insisted that the UN “would not authorise passage” through the strait or “alter the rights or obligations” of states under international law.

The world body would rather serve as a “neutral facilitator,” registering and verifying ships carrying fertiliser and related products.

“Of course, it can only be done if the countries that are involved in this conflict all agree to accept the mechanism,” Guterres said. Iran has blocked shipping through the strait in response to the US and Israeli strikes that began on February 28. That has not only impeded global transit of oil and natural gas but other key commodities including fertiliser.

Guterres, who launched discussions on the issue in March, said the coordination mechanism would be managed from Oman — which lies on the southern side of the strait opposite Iran.

Tehran has indicated it intends to impose fees on ships transiting the strait, which the US and others in the region oppose. US President Donald Trump insists he has “total control” of the strait and even asserted the strait is US territory, as it blocks shipping to and from Iranian ports. (AFP)



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Xi likely to visit India with big delegation for first time in 7 years

Reuters
New Delhi

Chinese President Xi Jinping is likely to attend next month's Brics summit in New Delhi with a large delegation, three sources said, in what would be his first visit in seven years and a fresh sign of a thaw between the rivals.

India is hosting the September 12 to 13 summit, where Xi's presence would be watched less for the Brics agenda than for what it signals about Beijing and New Delhi's efforts to stabilise relations after deadly border clashes in 2020.

"Chinese officials are busy finalising hotels and security protocols," one of the Indian sources with direct knowledge told Reuters.

Last year, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited China for the first time in seven years, but the relationship has only improved gradually. More recently, a fresh border-related dispute triggered sharp diplomatic exchanges between the two sides.

Two other Indian sources said Xi was likely to be accompanied by a delegation of about 400



National flags of China and India fly next to the Meijiang Convention and Exhibition Centre, a venue for 2025 Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO) summit in Tianjin. (Reuters/File Photo)

officials, compared with fewer than 200 officials the last time in 2019.

Officials from both countries are expected to use the summit to explore ways to expand engagement while managing longstanding differences over the border and regional security issues, the sources added.

Xi's final travel plans and agenda for any potential bilateral

between India and China are yet to be finalised, the sources said.

The Chinese foreign ministry said, "China attaches great importance to and actively participates in Brics co-operation, and supports India, the current chair, in successfully hosting this year's Brics summit."

"We currently have no information available to provide" about Xi's visit, it said. Xi missed

the last Brics summit in 2025 in Brazil.

India's foreign ministry did not comment.

The world's two most populous nations, both nuclear powers, share a roughly 3,800-km (2,400-mile), largely undemarcated and disputed border in the Himalayas.

Decades of relative peace along the border were shattered by 2020 clashes where 20 Indian and four Chinese soldiers were killed. The incident led to a four-year military standoff before reaching a disengagement pact in October 2024. But on August 12, India said peace along the border was critical to ties after reports that Indian and Chinese army patrols came face-to-face in late July near a remote border.

India's National Security Adviser Ajit Doval on Monday started his visit to Beijing to meet Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi to hold talks on the boundary issue.

While India and China remain competitors, US President Donald Trump's trade policies have created one area of convergence, making Xi's attendance a signal that neither side wants external pressure to undermine Brics.

Japan lawmakers visit China seeking to patch up ties

AFP
Tokyo

A delegation of Japanese lawmakers left for China yesterday seeking to patch up ties in the wake of comments about Taiwan by Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi that angered Beijing.

Takaichi suggested in November that Japan could intervene militarily in any conflict over Taiwan, which Beijing insists is part of its territory.

China warned its citizens against travel to Japan and imposed trade restrictions that have reportedly led to big drops in supplies of rare earth minerals to Japanese firms.

The delegation comprises a member of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and two opposition lawmakers, all from a cross-party group that seeks to foster ties with China.

They were expected to meet with senior officials of the Chinese Communist Party, Japanese media reported, in the first such exchange since Takaichi's comments.

"In a situation where everything is currently cut off, I would like to make this an opportunity to somehow grasp an opportunity of

dialogue," said delegation member and lower house MP Shinichi Isa, who is also public communications chief for the opposition Centrist Reform Alliance.

An official from LDP lower house member Gaku Hashimoto's office confirmed to AFP that he "departed (for Beijing) to stay for two days there", declining to comment further.

Japan's top diplomat said in July he "discussed bilateral relations" with his Chinese counterpart on the sidelines of a regional foreign ministers' meeting in Manila.

Beijing's foreign ministry spokesman later denied that a meeting took place.

Hashimoto, the son of late Japanese prime minister Ryutaro Hashimoto, held talks with Chinese Vice-Foreign Minister Hua Chunying in Beijing in June, Kyodo News reported last week.

At the time he was acting head of the Japanese Association for the Promotion of International Trade.

The group's new head, former foreign minister Takeshi Iwaya, is expected to lead the group on a trip to China in late September, Kyodo reported.

About 80 business representatives from western Japan's Kansai region also plan to visit China in late November to December, the news agency reported.



China's President Xi Jinping and King Abdullah II of Jordan review the honour guard during a welcoming ceremony at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, yesterday. (Reuters)

Xi urges 'diplomatic' Middle East solution in talks with King Abdullah

AFP
Beijing

Chinese President Xi Jinping urged a "diplomatic" solution to the Middle East crisis as he told the King of Jordan yesterday that the sovereignty of countries in the region should be respected.

Xi told King Abdullah II during talks in Beijing that China values Jordan's "unique and important role in the region", which was thrown into crisis after the US and Israel launched strikes against Iran on February 28.

"China has always advocated for a comprehensive ceasefire (and) resolving disputes through political and diplomatic means," Xi said, according to a Chinese foreign ministry statement.

"(China) believes the sovereignty and security of regional countries including Jordan should be respected," Xi said.

The Jordanian king has been on an official visit to China since August 18 — his ninth trip to the country since taking the throne in 1999.

The US-allied kingdom has been caught in the middle of Washington's months-long war with Tehran.

The Chinese president also urged

yesterday a "comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Palestinian issue", the foreign ministry statement said.

China supports "promoting the resumption of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks anchored on the correct direction of the 'two-state solution'," Xi said.

The two sides also signed several agreements on diplomacy, trade and supply chains, and issued a joint statement, China's foreign ministry said.

They called in that statement for restoring normal navigation in the Strait of Hormuz, according to state broadcaster CCTV.

Albanese wants to ban data centres near schools

AFP
Sydney

Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese will seek to ban large data centres being built near schools, homes and farms when he meets with state leaders this week, according to plans seen by AFP yesterday.

Albanese's government has pledged to rush through a national artificial intelligence law, likening its response to the data centre boom to Australia's world-first teen social media ban.

The national AI law will also set rules for AI training, from copyright to security and safety, AFP was told ahead of Albanese's meeting with state leaders tomorrow to agree on the nationwide legislation.

Australia's largest state of New South Wales has said it is assessing 26 new data centre projects worth AU\$100bn (\$71.7bn).

The state already has 90 data centres operating after construction grew 65% annually over the past three years.

But a proposal to build a data centre in the World Heritage-listed Blue Mountains in close proximity to a school was withdrawn in June after community outcry.

Prime Minister Albanese is expected to outline national minimum standards for water and energy use by data centres and rules to minimise commu-

"Hosting large-scale AI training data centres and unlocking frontier AI model training will help Australia capture a larger share of the economic value, technical capability and strategic influence of AI"

nity impact by locating data centres away from homes, schools, prime farm land or potential housing sites.

At a business dinner today, he will argue that the data centre boom needs to maintain the support of communities.

"Hosting large-scale AI training data centres and unlocking frontier AI model training will help Australia capture a larger share of the economic value, technical capability and strategic influence of AI," Prime Minister Albanese is expected to say, according to an excerpt of his speech.

"We must establish conditions to attract investment in frontier AI training, ensuring AI is developed safely, securely, and in ways that respect copyright and provide control and payment to the creative sector," he will add.

US startup Anthropic has lobbied Australian officials to change copyright laws to assist the training of AI models — prompting a backlash from media companies, musicians and other creators.

Indonesia to open airspace for cloud seeding: Malaysia

Indonesia has given Malaysian agencies official permission to enter its airspace to conduct cloud seeding operations, Malaysia's environment minister said yesterday, part of both countries' efforts to combat the haze blanketing the region. Indonesia has been stepping up efforts to slow the spread of haze caused by forest and land fires across several provinces, which this month led to dozens of school closures, including in neighbouring Malaysia.

Malaysia's national disaster management agency and its meteorological department were currently preparing schedules for cloud seeding operations in shared border locations, to be co-ordinated with the Indonesian military, Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability Minister Arthur Joseph Kurup said in a statement.

Malaysia was also prepared to offer assistance to Indonesia in extinguishing fires, with any specific requests to be brought to cabinet for further action, Kurup said.

Kurup said the two countries would be escalating their firefighting and fire prevention programmes ahead of national holidays in the coming weeks, including the Malaysia Day celebrations in Sarawak state on September 16.

Sarawak, which borders Indonesia's Kalimantan province on Borneo island, has been worst hit by the haze. (Reuters)

Typhoon Narra wreaks havoc in China, Vietnam

Reuters
Beijing/Hanoi

Floods and landslides triggered by Typhoon Narra battered northern Vietnam and China's southern region of Guangxi, as accompanying heavy rains damaged infrastructure and crops.

Rising floodwaters prompted China to relocate about 54,000 people, including 8,087 moved to emergency shelters, state broadcaster CCTV said.

Days of heavy rain in northern Vietnam brought by Narra killed one and displaced more than 4,300 households.

Narra lingered over the Beibu Gulf, also known as the Gulf of Tonkin, but weather officials said it would not make landfall, and instead bring downpours in the north.

Vietnam's mountainous provinces of Lang Son and Cao Bang received between 236mm (9 inches) and 300mm (12 inches) of rain in the 24 hours to yesterday morning, trigger-

ing floods and landslides.

Floods also affected Vietnam's Quang Ninh, home to the Unesco World Heritage site of Ha Long Bay, inundating parts of the city and disrupting tourism, fishing and transport.

The typhoon disrupted daily school and office activities, and snapped power links to nearly 55,000 families, authorities said, while destroying more than 10,000 hectares (25,000 acres) of rice and other crops.

In China, the waters of 15 rivers rose beyond warning levels at monitoring stations. Brown floodwaters engulfed parts of Chongzuo city in CCTV video, submerging roads and clusters of low-rise structures.

Chinese rescuers in rubber boots waded through knee-deep water, with some using boats to evacuate stranded residents.

Torrential rain is forecast for Guangxi, Guangdong, Hainan and Fujian in downpours expected to last through Wednesday, CCTV said.

US cancels joint marine drill over Iran war: Korea

AFP
Seoul

Republic of Korea said yesterday that the US had cancelled a large joint amphibious landing exercise scheduled for next month due to constraints on force availability caused by the war with Iran.

The biennial Ssangyong drills involve marine forces from Korea and the US and are designed to strengthen combined operations, typically involving warships, aircraft and ground forces rehearsing amphibious landings.

The cancellation follows US President Donald Trump's order last week to scale down the separate annual Ulchi Freedom Shield exercises, cutting the joint drills from 11 days to five.

Trump at the time cited their high cost and said they sent an "inappropriate and hostile" signal to North Korea, while highlighting his relationship with its leader, Kim Jong-un.

"The US Marine Corps formally notified our forces in June that its ability to deploy forces during this year's Ssangyong exercise would be constrained due to the situation in the Middle East," Han Seung-jeon, a spokesman for the Korean Marine Corps,



Republic of Korea's marines take part in US and Korea's marine corps combined amphibious landing drill called the 'Ssangyong' exercise, in Pohang. (Reuters/File Photo)

told reporters at a news briefing.

Seoul and Washington were continuing consultations on resuming the amphibious exercise, he said, without giving details.

The Pentagon did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Seoul's announcement.

Trump's order last week to

scale back the Ulchi Freedom Shield exercise came as he seeks to revive the relationship he developed with Kim during his first term.

The US president said Wednesday that it was important to "get along" with Kim, adding that Pyongyang now had 57 "very powerful" nuclear weapons.

Seoul estimates that North Korea has around 80 to 120 such weapons.

Trump and Kim met three times during Trump's first term, but Pyongyang accelerated its nuclear programmes after their second 2019 summit in Hanoi collapsed without an agreement on North Korea's denuclearisation.

Burnham dismisses Russian threats as allies gather in Kyiv

AFP
Kyiv

The United Kingdom will keep providing defence aid to Ukraine despite Russia's threats, Prime Minister Andy Burnham said yesterday on a visit to Kyiv where allies gathered to discuss support.

Air defence supplies are due to be the main priority at the meeting of the Coalition of the Willing, jointly chaired by the leaders of France and Germany, who will participate remotely, and by Britain's Burnham.

Burnham has arrived in Kyiv for his first trip abroad since taking office, alongside other European leaders and EU Council President Antonio Costa.

"Despite Russia's outrageous threats to my country, we will continue our support for Ukraine's defence," Burnham said in a speech delivered on Ukraine's independence day and ahead of the meeting.

Russia has recently pounded Kyiv with ballistic missiles, ripping open apartment blocks and killing dozens in the capital.

The escalating Russian strikes have pushed civilian deaths to their highest levels since the first months of Moscow's 2022 invasion.

A Russian drone attack on Cherniv, north of the capital, wounded 15 people, Ukraine emergency services said.

"Right now, things are really very difficult for all of us. But there



British Prime Minister Andy Burnham reacts as he looks at destroyed Russian vehicles displayed at Mykhailivska Square (St Michael's Square) in the old part of Kyiv, yesterday. (Reuters)

is a force holding us firmly by the hand," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said in an address to mark the occasion, adding: "It is the strength of our mutual circle".

He called on allies to give Ukraine "everything it needs to stop this war".

Also yesterday, the European Union said that it had released another 6.1bn euros (\$7.1bn) in military aid for Ukraine to boost its air defences.

The finance is part of a 90 billion-euro loan, including 60bn euros in military aid, that the EU has said will go to Ukraine.

Ahead of the talks, Ukraine has forged ahead with its campaign against Russia's logistics sites, hit-

ting multiple warehouses belonging to e-commerce giant Ozon.

Ozon reported fires early yesterday at its warehouses in Krasnodar and Makhachkala, both in southern Russia, adding that sites in Adygeysk and Nevnomysk were evacuated due to threats of drone attack.

Russian authorities also said debris from a Ukrainian drone attack killed two children and wounded nine others.

Russian leader Vladimir Putin on Saturday said Kyiv had "opened Pandora's box" by targeting Russia's economy and promised further escalation, including against Ukrainian agriculture.

Burnham is set to announce

that the British government is authorising defence firm MBDA to release classified information needed to help Ukraine and France set up local production of the long-range SCALP missile.

The Kremlin accused London of preventing peace in Ukraine by handing the information to Kyiv and threatened to target and "destroy" facilities producing the missile in Ukraine.

On Saturday, French President Emmanuel Macron pledged Paris would deliver new interceptor missiles.

The ballistic missiles Russia has been firing in their dozens are incredibly fast and travel with a high-arching trajectory, making them



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky and Britain's Prime Minister Andy Burnham pose after signing a partnership deal on AI following a bilateral meeting at Horodetskyi House in Kyiv, yesterday. (AFP)

Burnham urges allies to do 'everything' to support Ukraine's skies

British Prime Minister Andy Burnham urged allies yesterday to "do everything we can" and "dig into our own stocks of air defence" to protect Ukraine against Russian attacks at his first meeting co-chairing the so-called Coalition of the Willing.

"(Russian President Vladimir) Putin is now hoping he can win through a campaign of terror using ballistic missiles against Ukrainian civilians ... This can never be the route to victory, and we need to be clear in sending that message," Burnham said at the start of the meeting.

"It means doing everything we can all do, and working with our allies as well, beyond this coalition, to dig into our own stocks of air defence ... to protect Ukraine from the missiles that are falling now."

He also said there was a need for more sanctions on Russian oil and LNG exports to ramp up the pressure on Moscow. (Reuters)

difficult for Kyiv to intercept.

Ukraine relies on advanced systems — chiefly, US Patriot interceptors — to protect its skies.

But it has reported a shortage of Patriot interceptors since the US and Israel went to war with Iran in February, diverting supplies.

Ahead of the meeting, Zelensky revealed the extent of the deficit, releasing usually closely guarded numbers.

He said deliveries of crucial Patriot interceptors 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 at least 300 for the upcoming winter.



Supporters of India's Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) celebrate after India's Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan resigned following days of protests demanding his resignation over examination paper leaks, in New Delhi. (Reuters/File Photo)

India police used excessive force during protests: Amnesty

AFP
New Delhi

Indian police used excessive force, including electric shock devices and pellet guns, against youth-led protests that forced the education minister to resign last month, Amnesty International said yesterday.

A report from the rights' group clashes with the police account that force was used only after protesters turned violent, and comes after India's Supreme Court set up a panel on Thursday to investigate violence by both police and demonstrators.

Demonstrations in the capital New Delhi, triggered by the leak of the national medical entrance test, turned violent on July 20 when thousands of protesters attempted to march towards parliament.

Amnesty said witness testimony and visual evidence it had verified confirmed the use of

"pellet-firing shotguns, tear gas launchers, grenades, batons and electric shock devices against protesters" in Delhi and the eastern state of Bihar.

Amnesty said it had also verified two instances of a police officer "unlawfully using lethal force against a crowd" in Bihar's Siwan district. No one was killed.

"The weapons were deployed in a manner that breached international law and standards and domestic policing guidelines," it added.

Amnesty said that there were "isolated incidents of protesters throwing stones", but that the "heavy-handed response was state-sanctioned violence masked as crowd control."

Delhi Police said in a Supreme Court hearing last week they had used force only after protesters "resorted to violence".

They said anti-social elements "masquerading as aggrieved students" caused "grievous injuries" to security forces.

British police arrest 12 after deadly wrong-way crash

AFP
London

British police said yesterday they had arrested 12 people after a car pursued by police crashed while driving the wrong way on a major road, killing five youths and two officers.

The deaths Saturday came as officials warned of a trend for young people to carry out dangerous driving stunts to post on social media. However, police yesterday denied the collision was linked to filming for the TikTok online platform.

Police in the Cleveland area of northeast England said there was "no evidence to indicate that film-

ing of the activities on Friday night and Saturday morning has taken place for the purposes of TikTok".

The force revealed that officers were chasing two cars with cloned plates when the deadly accident occurred. It added that 12 have since been arrested on suspicion of participating in an organised crime group and weapon possession.

The crash came days after five teenagers were killed in Ireland while their car drove the wrong way on a motorway.

Irish police chief Justin Kelly commented that "what makes this reckless behaviour even more appalling is that in some cases it is being done for social media".

British Prime Minister Andy

Burnham said yesterday — while visiting Kyiv — that "anybody who glorifies dangerous driving is doing something that's truly reprehensible and unacceptable".

Downing Street said the government had "raised the issue of this appalling content with social media companies", including TikTok.

Britain's communications regulator Ofcom last month launched an investigation into whether TikTok, owned by Chinese company ByteDance, is doing enough under UK law to protect children from harmful content, focusing on its age checks.

According to TikTok, it strictly prohibits content that could cause significant physical harm including

dangerous driving and proactively removes such content.

Ofcom said in a statement sent to AFP yesterday that under the Online Safety Act, "platforms must minimise children's exposure to violent material and content promoting dangerous challenges".

The watchdog said it had shown it would "take action if evidence suggests companies are falling short".

National Highways for England told AFP that there were 947 reports of wrong-way driving in the year ending May 2026, slightly down on the previous year.

Irish police told AFP there have been 62 such incidents so far this year with no marked recent increase.

New Zealand moves to ban social media for under-16s

AFP
Wellington

New Zealand's government introduced legislation yesterday to ban under 16s from using social media, joining a number of countries seeking to keep youngsters off sites such as Instagram and TikTok.

Australia implemented world-first legislation banning children from social media in December, with the UK, France and others following suit.

Under New Zealand's proposed law, firms like Meta could be fined up to 10 % of their global revenue if they fail to comply.

"We simply cannot accept the harm being done to a generation of New Zealand children," Prime Minister Christopher Luxon said.

"One in three children aged between 13 and 17 are now spending at least five hours on social media a day," he said.

"Social media is exposing them to harmful content, addictive technology and pressures they are not equipped to deal with, and it's affecting their family life, mental health, sleep and education."

Luxon specifically called out platforms Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat and Facebook, saying they would be required to take "reasonable steps to check users are over the age of 16".

They would have to use "existing account information, facial age estimation, digital ID services and formal ID" to verify age.

Platforms would also be required to assess the risks they pose as well as report on how those dangers are being reduced, with

penalties slapped on companies that fail to comply.

Education Minister Erica Stanford said the Bill "places legal obligations on platforms".

"No penalties are proposed for children, their parents or caregivers," Stanford said.

It's unclear whether the bill will pass, as both National Party's coalition partners — the libertarian ACT party and populist NZ First — have said they oppose it.

In a statement, the populist NZ First said they could not support the law given the "colossal failure" of the legislation in Australia, while ACT said they believed the law "won't work" and that teenagers would easily get around the ban.

The main opposition party Labour has submitted a list of dozens of questions it wanted answered before deciding whether it would

offer support — including how age verification will work and which platforms will be affected.

"We take this legislation very seriously," spokesman Reuben Davidson said.

"The safety of young people in Aotearoa New Zealand is at stake and the risks they face in increasingly complex online environments are significant," he added, using the Maori-language name for the country.

Australia banned under 16s last year from the likes of Facebook, Instagram and TikTok, in a crackdown designed to protect children from online bullying and "predatory algorithms". A team of Australia-based researchers in a peer-reviewed study published in June found little evidence to suggest teenagers have turned away from social media as a consequence, however.

India faces weakest monsoon in nearly two decades as El Nino strengthens

Reuters
Mumbai

India is on course for its weakest monsoon in nearly two decades, with rainfall likely to end the season around 15% below the long-term average, the lowest since 2009, two senior weather department sources said.

The weak monsoon could hurt crop output, drive up food prices and curb rural incomes in the world's fifth-largest economy, where the rains provide around 70% of the country's annual rainfall.

A lack of good rains in the crucial crop-maturing month of September could dent yields of summer-sown crops such as cotton, soybean, corn and pulses, while also depleting soil moisture needed for winter-sown crops such as

wheat and rapeseed.

"We are witnessing the impact of El Nino on monsoon rainfall. It is likely to be severe in September, and we could see a double-digit deficit in rainfall," said a senior official with the India Meteorological Department (IMD), who declined to be named as he was not authorised to speak with media.

India could receive 15% below-average rainfall, or 85% of normal, during the June-September season, which would be the lowest rainfall since 2009, he said.

That would be nearly double the 8% deficit projected in the weather department's initial forecast.

Except for some eastern states, most parts of the country are likely to receive below-average rainfall in September, widening the seasonal deficit, he added.

The IMD is expected to issue its official forecast for September at



A girl runs for cover as it rains as monsoon clouds gather over Meerwada village in Guna district in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh. (Reuters/File Photo)

the end of this month.

The monsoon this year could begin withdrawing from northwestern parts of the country a few days earlier than usual next month, unless a fresh weather

system develops, said a second weather department source, who did not want to be identified in line with official rules.

The monsoon typically begins in June and starts to retreat by

September 17 from northwestern parts of the country, ending across the country by mid-October.

El Nino is strengthening and is likely to intensify further in September, suppressing rainfall

over India, they said.

A climate pattern marked by unusually warm sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific, El Nino disrupts global weather patterns and can bring drier conditions to parts of Southeast Asia and other regions.

In the past, India has experienced below-average rainfall during most El Nino years, sometimes leading to severe droughts that destroyed crops and forced authorities to limit the export of some grains.

India has received 13% less rainfall than average since the monsoon season began on June 1. Rainfall was 35.4% below average in June before a 1% surplus in July offered a brief reprieve. The monsoon weakened again in August, with rainfall so far running 15% below average.

How an enabling environment can turn ambition into opportunity

Qatar's luxury goods market is poised for remarkable expansion, with its projected growth offering fresh evidence of the country's success in building an enabling environment for business, tourism and investment.

According to a market assessment by Mordor Intelligence, the sector is expected to increase from \$1.62bn this year to \$2.63bn by 2031, representing growth of more than 62% and a compound annual growth rate of 10.15%.

These figures point to far more than rising demand for designer clothing, jewellery, watches and beauty products.

They reflect the combined impact of sound economic planning, a rapidly developing tourism sector, premium hospitality infrastructure and reforms that are making Qatar increasingly attractive to international companies and investors.

A thriving luxury market depends on confidence. Global brands will invest in a market when they see political stability, reliable infrastructure, strong consumer purchasing power and clear regulations.

Qatar has worked steadily to provide these

conditions, while positioning itself as a destination that offers more than traditional retail. The country's tourism performance illustrates this progress.

Qatar welcomed 5.1mn international visitors in 2025, a 3.7% increase over the previous year.

More than 10.8mn hotel room nights were sold, up 8.6%, while average hotel occupancy reached 71%.

These results demonstrate that the country is attracting a growing flow of visitors and creating the conditions for sustained activity in retail, hospitality, transport, entertainment and related services.

Luxury shopping is an important component of that experience. Visitors increasingly seek distinctive products, personalised services and memorable retail environments.

Qatar's modern malls, high-end hotels, cultural attractions and expanding calendar of international events provide an effective platform for brands seeking to engage both residents and tourists.

The market's projected growth across several categories is especially encouraging.

Clothing and apparel accounted for 29.45% of the sector in 2025, supported by demand for premium

tailoring, formalwear, designer collections and bespoke services. Luxury watches are expected to expand by 10.34% annually through 2031, while online luxury sales are forecast to grow by 10.88% annually.

Such trends show that the sector is developing in both traditional and digital spaces.

Regulatory reform has further strengthened this outlook. The reduction of certain business-related service fees by more than 90%, including the setting of a QR500 fee for a new commercial registration or licence, sends a clear message to entrepreneurs and international investors.

Lower costs and simpler procedures can encourage new businesses to enter the market, allow existing companies to expand and improve the competitiveness of the national economy.

These reforms are particularly significant for smaller enterprises and emerging local brands.

An accessible business environment gives entrepreneurs greater scope to develop specialised products, provide high-quality services and participate in supply chains created by international companies.

The benefits of luxury-market growth can therefore extend well beyond large global brands.

Qatar's broader economic diversification strategy also provides a strong foundation.

New tourism, residential and commercial developments are creating demand while improving the country's appeal as a place to live, visit and invest.

The emphasis on personalised experiences, innovation and premium services is consistent with Qatar's ambition to become a leading regional hub.

The opportunity is not confined to sales figures.

It includes jobs, skills, partnerships and innovation, strengthening Qatar's wider commercial ecosystem. In this way, luxury retail can serve as both an economic sector and an ambassador for the country's welcoming outlook. Challenges remain, including geopolitical uncertainty, counterfeit goods and the limitations of a relatively small population.

Yet the country's policy direction offers grounds for confidence.

By combining investment, reform and openness, Qatar is ensuring that opportunity remains at the centre of its economic future.

Reflections



Visitors are seen at the recently opened Space and Time Cube Surabaya immersive digital art space, in Surabaya on Sunday. (AFP)



Canada's refusal exposes limits of tariff diplomacy



By Kamran Rehmat

The most consequential thing about the collapse of the United States - Canada trade talks is not that 50% duties now fall on \$20bn of Canadian goods, nor that Ottawa will match them dollar for dollar on September 8.

It is that the deal died of American incoherence, in public, after the American president had already announced it - and that 10 countries which signed reciprocal agreements with Washington this year now know exactly what that signature is worth.

The sequence is quickly told. On Tuesday, Donald Trump declared a deal and extended his own deadline by three days.

By late Friday, the Canadian negotiators were flying home.

In between, an agreement that would have halved steel and aluminium tariffs from 50% to 25% and cut top-line automotive duties from 25% to 15% - the Japanese and South Korean rate - in exchange for Canada dropping its counter-tariffs and leaning on the provinces to readmit American liquor, came apart on the American side of the table.

It came apart because the administration does not have a trade policy so much as three of them competing for the president's ear.

Downstream aluminium producers lobbied to keep their protection even as primary metal was liberalised.

Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick, who administers the sectoral tariffs and has publicly disparaged Canadian negotiators, took up their cause; by one industry account he and trade adviser Peter Navarro were shouting at US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer in the White House over what they regarded as a giveaway.

The offer then mutated into something else - retained duties on downstream metal products, quotas on low-tariff steel - and the whole sectoral package unravelled.

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, invited to blame Lutnick, declined, and instead observed that his own team was united and that the same could not be said of the American administration.

It was the most damaging sentence of the week, because it was descriptive rather than rhetorical.

What arrived at the eleventh hour was no longer a tariff negotiation.

American negotiators sought to strip relief from medium and heavy trucks built in Ontario without offering a reason; to dilute Canada's protections for French-language content, domestic publishing, film and bilingual labelling; and to constrain Ottawa's freedom to sign trade agreements with third countries.

That last demand is the one that ended it.

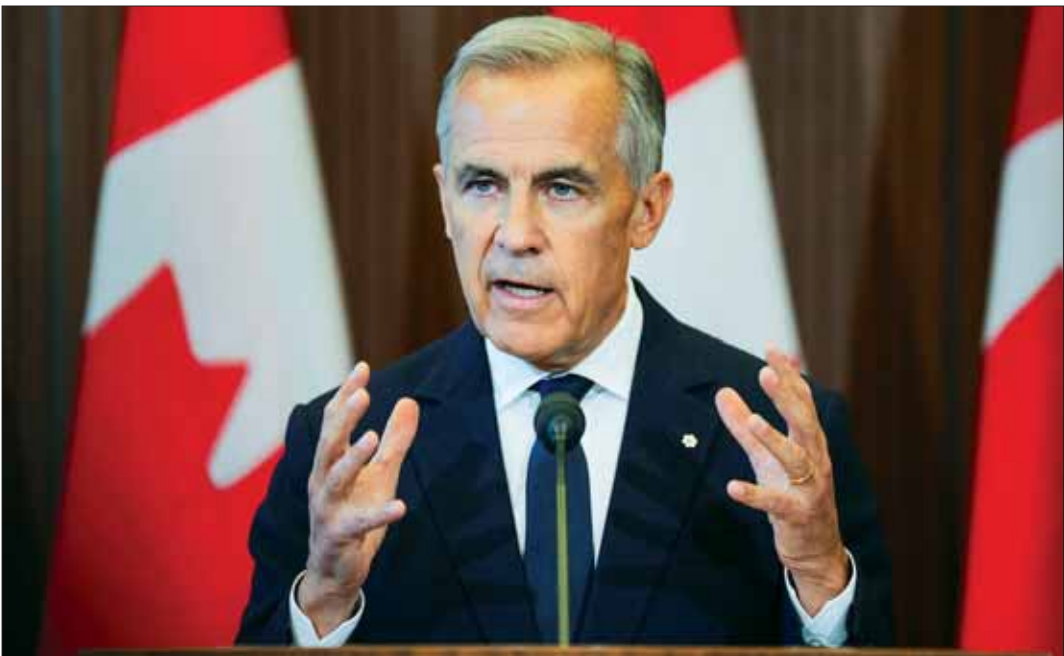
Flavio Volpe of the Automotive Parts Manufacturers' Association identified it precisely: requiring your closest partner to mirror your policy towards third parties is asking it to surrender agency over its own foreign policy.

Carney called it a power play and a question of sovereignty.

His summary - "they asked too much" and "offered too little" - is the whole affair in seven words.

He was never going to sign.

Eighteen months of annexation talk, of the border described as an arbitrary line, of the assertion that Canada exists only because the United States permits it, have made agreement politically impossible for any Canadian prime minister.



Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney speaks with the news media after he suspended trade negotiations with the United States, in Ottawa, Ontario on Saturday. (Reuters)

Trump's post in the early hours of Sunday, that Canada wants the benefits of statehood without the obligations, illustrates the mechanism perfectly. This is the central self-defeat of the strategy: the humiliation is the instrument, and the humiliation is what removes the other side's capacity to concede. Leverage spent on contempt is leverage that cannot be spent on terms.

Three numbers are enough to size the cost, and the rest is noise.

Steel mill product prices are up 22.5% over the year and aluminium products 40.5% - this is the tariff wall as felt by American manufacturers, not by foreigners.

General Motors has flagged a hit of up to \$3.5bn this year.

And American farmers source close to 80% of their potash from Canada, which is why the president's claim in June that America needs nothing Canada has is not an exaggeration but an error of fact.

The deficit that so exercises him is likewise an artefact of heavy sour crude: remove Canadian oil and

the balance flips to surplus, and Midwestern refineries built for that grade run at a fraction of capacity.

The signalling damage is the part that will outlast the tariffs.

Over the past year Washington has concluded reciprocal agreements with Malaysia, Cambodia, Argentina and others, and frameworks with the European Union, the United Kingdom and Japan, all resting on the proposition that concessions purchase relief.

Those governments have just watched the United States offer Canada what Greer himself called the best treatment available to any major exporter, and then withdraw it inside 72 hours.

Wendy Cutler, the former American negotiator, expects some of them to demand revisions once they see what was on Ottawa's table.

That is the mildest possible reading. The harsher one is that the reciprocal agreements have no enforcement mechanism, no domestic ratification and no protection against the same cabinet-level mutiny that killed

this one; they are statements of current American mood.

The comparative lesson is worse still. China retaliated hard last year, briefly choking off rare earth supplies, and was rewarded with a lowered tariff, a truce and a summit; Xi Jinping arrives in Washington on September 24.

Canada retaliated proportionately and has been punished with an untested Depression-era statute.

Greer and Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent have complained that only these two countries retaliated at all.

They might reflect on what that pair of outcomes teaches the other hundred and ninety: that proportion is penalised and escalation is rewarded.

Then there is the legal exposure.

Section 338 of the 1930 Tariff Act has never been used by any president.

It permits duties of up to 50% against countries discriminating against American commerce, and the discrimination cited here consists largely of Canadian

measures taken in retaliation for earlier American tariffs that Ottawa and most trade lawyers consider a breach of the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) - the agreement Trump negotiated himself and once called the fairest ever achieved.

A statute of that vintage, invoked for the first time in 96 years, against conduct the complainant provoked, is an invitation to litigation that the administration's existing tariff cases suggest it may not survive.

The president is meanwhile discovering the limits from another direction: on Friday, after a year of insisting tariffs do not raise prices, he lifted duties on imported beef to bring down the cost of groceries.

None of which means the talks are dead. Carney has said they are suspended and left a fortnight before retaliation bites, which is deliberate.

There is precedent: in September 1987 Simon Reisman walked out over dispute settlement, and days before the negotiating authority lapsed James Baker conceded the point in a Treasury Department corridor.

However, that deadline came from Congress, which the Reagan White House respected, and failure carried no punishment.

This deadline was the president's own, the penalty is 50%, and the negotiating partner has been told repeatedly that his country should not exist.

The duties land on lumber, plywood, dairy, clothing, whisky and honey roughly 10 weeks before midterms that polling says will turn on the cost of living.

American voters will register that as inflation. The rest of the world has already registered something more durable: that the United States can announce a deal on Tuesday and impose penalties on Saturday, and that the difference between the two was an argument in a room in Washington to which no foreign government has access.

• The writer is Deputy Managing Editor, Gulf Times.

France to impose phone ban at schools from next month

AFP
Paris

The French government said yesterday it would press ahead with a ban on mobile phones in high schools from next month, but trade unions warned that the measure might be hard to implement quickly.

In July, France's parliament approved legislation banning both social media access for children under 15 and mobile phone use in high schools.

It is part of a push by President Emmanuel Macron for children to spend less time in front of screens, which the government fears is arresting their development.

But earlier this month, the country's top court struck down

the social media provision, dealing a blow to Macron.

However the Constitutional Council did not rule on the separate provision banning mobile phone use in high schools.

Yesterday, government spokesperson Maud Bregeon said Macron "has decided to promulgate the law" containing the ban on phones, despite the Constitutional Council striking down its flagship provision. "As a result, the ban on mobile phones in high schools can take effect from the start of the new school year, with a stable, consolidated and statutory legal framework," she said after a cabinet meeting. France's school year starts in September.

France has already banned children from using mobile phones in colleges — the schools attended

between the ages of 11 and 15 — and in primary schools.

In early July, high schools had been instructed to prepare for the measure's implementation in September, ahead of its adoption by parliament later that month.

In order to enforce the ban, schools must amend their internal regulations.

But many schools may struggle to implement the measure because they have had little time to prepare.

Francois Resnais, national secretary of SNPDEN-Unsa, France's top union of school principals, criticised the timing as "bad".

"Schools are not ready," Resnais told AFP.

"Schools are starting the year with a rule that is not written into their internal regulations, except perhaps for those that tried to an-

ticipate something, but that remains very limited."

Christelle Kauffmann, the union's deputy secretary-general, is among the minority of school leaders who anticipated the measure.

At her high school, phones will be banned in corridors and school buildings from the start of term, but allowed outdoors.

She said it could take nearly a year before the ban could be fully implemented across all high schools. "It is very difficult for a school community to impose a new rule on young people. Even if the law is supposed to apply automatically, it is not that simple," she said. "You cannot put a supervisor behind every student."

Kamel Chibli, vice president of the Occitanie regional coun-

cil in southern France, said digital pouches and lockers used to store smartphones cost the regional authorities around €40,000 for a high school with 1,500 students.

High school students regularly use their smartphones to check timetable changes, room assignments and other school information. Some teachers also rely on phones in class for research, exercises and document sharing.

In its guidance, the education ministry allows exemptions from the ban for "educational uses" or for purposes "necessary for the proper functioning of the school".

Macron's office has said the president has no plans to give up on his push to bar children from apps such as TikTok and the government would work on a new draft law.

De la Espriella orders migrant deportations

Colombia's new right-wing President Abelardo de la Espriella has ordered a crackdown on illegal migration, instructing authorities to begin detaining undocumented foreigners who have been convicted of crimes with a view to deporting them, a video showed yesterday.

In the video of De la Espriella addressing a security cabinet meeting Sunday in his Caribbean stronghold of Barranquilla, he is heard saying: "The order to Immigration (authorities) is clear...first those who are committing crimes, second those who have not regularised their status and who will have to be deported in due course." (AFP)

Gaza documentary NAZA to premiere at Venice film festival

AFP
Rome

A new documentary called NAZA from the same directors as the Oscar-winning Israeli-Palestinian production "No Other Land" will premiere at the Venice Film Festival next month, organisers said yesterday.

The film, which will be in competition for the Golden Lion award, is about "the systems behind Israel's calculated mass killing of Palestinian civilians in Gaza" according to a synopsis published on the film festival website.

The film is directed by Yuval Abraham and Rachel Szor, two of the four co-directors of "No Other Land", which tells the story of Palestinian activists trying to protect a cluster of villages in the occupied West Bank from demolition by the Israeli military.

NAZA is produced by *The Guardian* and James Wilson (JW Films) and executive-produced by Jonathan Glazer.

Wilson and Glazer are the team behind the Oscar-winning film *The Zone of Interest* set in Auschwitz concentration camp.

The Guardian said NAZA is "an Israeli military acronym used

The film, which will be in competition for the Golden Lion award, is about "the systems behind Israel's calculated mass killing of Palestinian civilians in Gaza", according to the festival's website

euphemistically by Israeli intelligence to indicate the number of civilians that it expects will be killed in an airstrike".

The film will be screened on September 10 in the presence of the directors, the producers, *Guardian* journalists and the official delegation.

It is the only documentary among the 21 films competing for the Golden Lion Award at the 83rd Venice International Film Festival.

Israel's military campaign in Gaza has killed more than 73,000 people, according to the territory's health ministry, which operates under the Palestinian group Hamas' authority and whose figures are considered reliable by the UN.

A ceasefire took hold in October but progress on permanently ending the war has stalled, and Israeli forces currently control nearly 70% of the territory.

Reuters
Washington

President Donald Trump's administration yesterday released a proposed regulation to codify an unprecedented fee of more than \$100,000 on new H-1B visas for highly skilled foreign workers that has been blocked by the courts. The fee, first temporarily imposed by Trump last year, dramatically raises the cost of visas that are heavily relied on in the tech, education and research sectors.

A federal judge in June ruled that the fee was illegal and blocked the Trump administration from collecting it. A Boston-based appeals court is reviewing that decision while a different court considers whether a judge properly rejected a challenge to the fee by a major business group.

Trump's temporary fee increase expires in September, one year after it was issued. The proposed rule by the US Department of Homeland Security, posted in the Federal Register yesterday, would make a fee of \$103,265 permanent.

It could be finalised by the end of the year. The H-1B programme allows US employers to hire foreign workers with training in specialty fields and offers 65,000 visas annually, with another 20,000 for



A portrait of Donald Trump on a building in Washington, DC. (Reuters)

workers with advanced degrees, approved for three to six years.

Those visas typically came with fees between \$2,000 and \$5,000 before Trump's order. The fee would not apply to visas granted to foreign citizens already in the US on student visas, who make up a large share of new H-1B recipients, or to renewals of current visas.

Trump, a Republican, and other critics of the H-1B programme say it is abused by many companies who replace American workers with cheaper foreign labour.

But business groups and many individual companies have said the visa programme is needed to ad-

dress a lack of qualified American workers for some jobs and to allow US businesses to recruit top talent.

About 70 employers had paid the \$100,000 fee on a total of 85 visa applications as of late February, according to court filings.

In imposing the fee, Trump invoked the president's power under immigration law to restrict the entry of certain foreign nationals who would be detrimental to US interests. The fee is being challenged by the US Chamber of Commerce, the largest US business lobbying group, Democratic-led states and a coalition of unions and employers. Those lawsuits could be amended

to challenge the rule proposed this week once it is finalised.

The lawsuits claim that Trump's power to restrict entry does not allow him to override the law that created the H-1B visa programme. The states and groups that sued also say that the Homeland Security Department cannot impose fees, taxes or other means to generate revenue for the US without permission from Congress.

The Trump administration has maintained that the fee is not a traditional tax and that courts have little power to question the president's authority to restrict entry into the country.

Amid Trump's broader immigration crackdown, employers last year registered for about 344,000 H-1B visas, down more than 25% from 2024 and fewer than half of the 794,000 visas sought in 2023, according to data from US Citizenship and Immigration Services.

The Trump administration has also ordered enhanced vetting of H-1B applicants and proposed a new visa selection process that would favor higher-skilled and better-paid workers.

Earlier in August, the Department of Homeland Security in a separate rule added fees of up to \$4,500 to applications to extend the stay of H-1B workers or to transfer employees based in other countries to the US.

California scraps Paramount talks over Warner deal

Reuters
Los Angeles

California Attorney General Rob Bonta cancelled a meeting with Paramount Skydance representatives scheduled for yesterday to begin settlement talks over the state's lawsuit seeking to block Paramount's proposed \$110bn acquisition of Warner Bros Discovery, his office said.

Paramount has pushed for a settlement in the case, as it faces a mountain of fees and costs to keep the deal together if the lawsuit continues to a trial scheduled for March.

Bonta and his partner states have so far won key rulings, giving them leverage if settlement talks con-

tinue. Bonta accused Paramount of leaking details of a meeting held on Friday and acting in bad faith, a claim Paramount has denied.

"Not only did Paramount leak the alleged substance of settlement discussions, but they misrepresented these discussions, demonstrating a lack of good faith," Bonta said, adding his office met with Paramount on Friday.

"As soon as Paramount stops playing games and engages sincerely, my office is happy to meet again," Bonta added.

A Paramount spokesperson said the company shares "Bonta's concerns about the public discussions and misreporting that has surrounded this deal."

"As we have assured the Attorney General's office, Paramount



The Paramount water tower at Paramount studios in Los Angeles, California, US. (Reuters)

has not been the source of the leaks of any of our confidential discussions with the AG's office. We re-

main hopeful and stand ready to continue good faith discussions to resolve the Attorneys General suit and move forward with our plans for increased competition and increased output to the benefit of the talent and entertainment workers," the spokesperson said.

Bonta has repeatedly indicated an openness to settling cases generally. But he has also said that structural remedies, which could include selling off part of a business, are better than companies promising to take actions.

Paramount Skydance CEO David Ellison has promised to release 30 movies per year and to keep them exclusively in theaters for 45 days. California and 11 states sued on July 13, arguing the deal would create a media behemoth.

Father of sailor aboard the Lincoln held by ICE

Reuters
Washington

The immigrant father of a US sailor on board the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier, which was deployed in the Middle East during the Iran war, was taken into federal immigration detention, the sailor said in a Facebook post.

US Border Patrol arrested Luis Manuel Aviles Roa, originally from Nicaragua, after conducting a vehicle stop in Key West, Florida, a spokesperson of the Department of Homeland Security, of which Border Patrol is a part, separately said on Sunday.

"I've been deployed for over nine months, out at sea in the Middle East aboard the USS

Abraham Lincoln, fighting for a country that has given me everything," Joshua Aviles, the son of the detained immigrant, said on Facebook.

"I just got a call that my dad was taken by ICE," he said on Saturday, adding his father had his driver's licence, social security card and work permit.

The DHS said Luis Manuel Aviles Roa entered the US illegally and would remain in Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention pending removal proceedings.

"Having a family member in the military is not a free pass to violate our nation's laws," the DHS said. President Donald Trump says his immigration crackdown is aimed at improving domestic security.

US unleashes 'economic asphyxiation' of Iran

From Page 1

China's foreign ministry said sanctions and pressure tactics "do not help," and that it would act to protect its own interests. Trump has also threatened tariffs on countries doing business with Iran, including Türkiye, Iraq and India, although the Supreme Court has since struck down the legal basis for such levies.

Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi dismissed the sanctions push as an admission of military failure, questioning why Washington needed "the largest financial invasion in history" if it had already achieved its aims. "Is this a victory or an admission of America's defeat?" he asked.

Iran, which has endured decades of sanctions without its leadership being dislodged, has hit back by warning shipping against passing through the Strait of Hormuz without permission, listing 45 vessels it accuses of violating its rules and threatening retaliation over any ship-to-ship transfers involving them.

The US blockade has already driven Iranian oil exports through the strait down from 2mn barrels a day before the war to

just 0.4mn by mid-August, according to maritime tracker Kpler. A projectile struck a tanker off the Saudi port city of Yanbu in the Red Sea on Monday, sparking a fire on deck; Iran's Houthi allies, who last month vowed to block Saudi oil exports rerouted through the Red Sea, claimed the attack, which Saudi Arabia's national shipping company confirmed.

Diplomatic efforts continue in parallel. Pakistan's army chief, General Asim Munir, was in Tehran yesterday for talks with parliamentary speaker and chief negotiator Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, days after Trump reportedly called Munir to urge Iran back to the negotiating table. Islamabad, a key mediator behind April's since-collapsed ceasefire, is also a major trading partner of Iran, potentially exposing it to the new US measures. Oman's foreign minister was due in Tehran today, as Muscat seeks a deal with Iran on regulating passage through Hormuz.

For ordinary Iranians already battered by inflation that fuelled mass protests in December and January, the escalation promises further hardship. "I don't think people can really take this much longer," said Sarah Hassanbeigi, a 32-year-old Tehran pharmacist.

Qatar among world's digital elite

From Page 1

Fibre coverage has reached a full 100% — a scale of digital infrastructure that places Qatar firmly among the global vanguard. The ITU itself noted that high-income economies are increasingly bumping up against the ceiling of what connectivity performance can measure, leaving little room for further gains in infrastructure-based indicators.

That Qatar has still managed to hold its score at 98.4 speaks to just how mature — and how effectively regulated — its digital ecosystem has become.

The result is being read as validation of Qatar's wider regulatory approach: an environment engineered to draw investment and spur innovation, while keeping the telecommunications sector advancing in step with the country's broader ambitions. The payoff shows up in tangible terms —



sharper digital services, a more competitive national economy, and a smoother, faster experience for individuals and businesses alike.

Officials point to the ranking as further proof of Qatar's long-term digital roadmap taking shape, one anchored in Qatar National Vision 2030, the Third National Development Strategy, and the Digital Agenda 2030 — all aimed at building a connectivity ecosystem that is inclusive, sustainable, and built to last.

The IDI itself is considered the gold standard for measuring a country's progress towards universal and meaningful connectivity — the ITU's benchmark for ensuring everyone, everywhere, can get online affordably and reliably.

It weighs performance across a wide sweep of indicators: infrastructure, adoption, affordability, and data usage — the full picture of what it takes to be truly connected.

Qatar’s whale shark spectacle comes with a duty of care

By Shaima Sheriff
Staff Reporter

Each summer, hundreds of whale sharks gather off Qatar’s north-eastern coast, creating an extraordinary spectacle for visitors while highlighting the need to protect one of the ocean’s most vulnerable giants.

Among the operators taking visitors offshore is Qool Qatar, which runs seasonal whale shark viewing trips from Al Ruwais. A representative said the excursions offer controlled access to a sensitive marine habitat.

About 90km off Qatar’s coast, the Al Shaheen field lies above a major mackerel tuna spawning area. Dense clouds of fish eggs rise near the surface, creating a dependable food source for whale sharks, the world’s largest fish.

Seasonal currents and local water conditions help support the spawning event, while the restricted industrial zone limits fishing and casual boat traffic, providing marine life with a measure of refuge.

Together, these conditions have made Al Shaheen home to the world’s largest documented seasonal gathering of whale sharks. More than 600 individuals have been photo-identified, with each animal recognised by its unique spot pattern, “much like a fingerprint”, the representative explained.

The main season runs from May through September, with sharks arriving as early as April and departing as late as October in some years. Numbers depend on sea temperature, currents and the strength of the tuna spawning season.

“This is a wild, food-driven gathering rather than a scheduled

event,” the representative said. “Sightings on any individual boat trip cannot be promised.”

For visitors, that uncertainty is part of the encounter. Long stretches of open water can suddenly give way to spotted backs, broad heads and fins breaking the surface as the sharks feed.

Yet the spectacle comes with limits. Guests receive a briefing before departure, while boats are expected to maintain a respectful distance, avoid sudden acceleration and refrain from close approaches.

“Touching and feeding are strictly forbidden,” the representative said, adding that photography of nearby oil and gas infrastructure is also restricted because Al Shaheen remains a controlled industrial area.

Researchers have monitored Qatar’s whale sharks since 2010 through boat and aerial surveys,

photo-identification, tissue samples, satellite tags and acoustic tracking.

Studies show that males dominate the gathering, with maturing and mature individuals averaging about seven metres in length. A significant number return across multiple seasons, demonstrating strong fidelity to the feeding site.

Where the sharks disperse during winter and why mature females are less frequently recorded remain open questions.

The spectacle is also fragile. Whale sharks have been listed as Endangered on the IUCN Red List since 2016 after global numbers fell by more than half over 75 years.

Vessel strikes, fishing interactions, pollution and habitat disturbance remain major threats, while Al Shaheen overlaps with busy industrial and shipping activity.



Asia’s role in international law to be highlighted at AsianSIL event

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

An upcoming international conference, ‘the AsianSIL Interseasonal Conference 2026,’ hosted by the College of Law at Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU) later this year, aims to highlight the role of Asia in shaping the development of international law, particularly in emerging areas such as environmental governance, AI regulation and humanitarian law.

The conference “Is a New Normative International Legal Order in the Making? The Asian Perspective” will explore Asia’s evolving role in the international legal order. The conference will also examine Asia’s growing influence and contributions to international law in climate change, humanitarian crises, and artificial intelligence governance amid dynamic geopolitical shifts, technological advancements, and pressing global challenges.

According to Dr Khalid Mubarak al-Kuwari, chair of the conference and a lecturer at the College of Law, HBKU, the AsianSIL conference has advanced international law scholarship and dialogue across Asia and beyond since 2007.

Dr al-Kuwari said: “The world is undergoing profound strategic, economic, social and technological change. Positioned at the cross-



Dr Khalid Mubarak al-Kuwari

roads of multiple regions, Asia plays an increasingly influential role in shaping the international legal order. In this context, AsianSIL advances the rule of law, inclusive dialogue and research addressing pressing global challenges, including environmental governance, humanitarian law, international economic law and AI governance.”

The conference brings together scholars, practitioners, and policymakers to engage in critical dialogue and interdisciplinary exchange. It will take place over two days: Day One will feature an invitation-only junior scholarship workshop, while Day Two will host the main conference as a public session.

The conference also aims to foster interdisciplinary dialogue by facilitating discussions among legal scholars, policymakers, and practitioners to encourage cross-sectoral engagement. It focuses on promot-



Dr Susan L Karamanian

ing scholarly research by providing a high-level academic platform for presenting and publishing cutting-edge research in international law.

The conference will feature expert-led discussions on critical topics related to environmental governance and climate action. It will examine Asia’s role in global climate agreements, regional environmental policies, and sustainable development initiatives.

“For decades, issues relating to the future of the liberal international order have received considerable attention. Today, these discussions have become increasingly urgent as the world grapples with complex global problems alongside pressing regional conflicts and issues that the existing legal order seems ill-equipped to address, let alone solve,” said the dean of the college, Dr Susan L Karamanian.

According to the organisers,

Asia, which spans from the Pacific Ocean in the East to the Middle East in the West and is home to more than half of the world’s population, is critical to the conversation, both in defining problems and in offering solutions.

There will be discussions on humanitarian law in the modern era addressing challenges in international humanitarian law, particularly in conflict zones and disaster-prone regions within Asia. AI and Public International Law will be another focus of the conference, exploring legal and ethical implications of AI for global governance, trade, and security.

Furthermore, there will be deliberations on the topic ‘Small States and Emerging Economies: Asia Diplomacy and Multilateralism’. This will examine the role of small states and emerging economies in Asia’s legal and diplomatic landscape, including international dispute resolution, economic partnerships, and regional stability.

“We look forward to having our friends from or those interested in Asia here in Doha to engage in conversation and debate about the future of international law. We will do so in a vibrant, welcoming country that prioritises education and harmonises tradition with modernity. Qatar’s rich Arab culture, renowned hospitality and vibrant art scene await you,” added Dr Karamanian.

MATAR joins United for Wildlife to strengthen action against illegal wildlife trade

QNA
Doha

The Qatar Company for Airports Operation and Management (MATAR) has joined the Transport Taskforce of United for Wildlife, an initiative founded by Prince William of Wales, and The Royal Foundation, to reinforce Hamad International Airport’s (HIA) role in combating the illegal wildlife trade.

MATAR formalised its participation by signing the Buckingham Palace Declaration, which sets out commitments to help prevent the transport of illegal wildlife and wildlife products.

The Declaration provides a framework for transport organisations to strengthen awareness, training, reporting and co-operation with relevant authorities, helping them identify and respond to potential trafficking risks more effectively.

MATAR’s participation builds on measures already in place across HIA’s operations and advances the Qatar Airways Group Environmental Sustainability Policy, which includes a zero-tolerance position on the transportation of illegal wildlife and wildlife products.

More than 14,000 employees

across Qatar Airways Group have completed role-specific training for recognising and reporting potential indicators of illegal wildlife trafficking.

Passenger awareness materials displayed at HIA also highlight the risks associated with the illegal trafficking of wildlife and wildlife products.

As a signatory, MATAR will further enhance reporting procedures, increase employee awareness and extend relevant training across the wider airport community.

It will continue to work with airport partners and relevant authorities to support the early identification and reporting of suspected wildlife trafficking, in line with MATAR’s Sustainability Roadmap.

MATAR is a corporate subsidiary of Qatar Airways Group, and Qatar Airways serves as the Official Airline Partner of United for Wildlife and a founding member of its Transport Taskforce.

As the Taskforce marks its 10th anniversary in 2026, it brings together airports, airlines, shipping companies, freight organisations, law enforcement agencies and other partners to improve awareness, information sharing and reporting across the transport sector.

Aspetar study links oral health problems to injury risk in elite footballers

Aspetar, Orthopaedic and Sports Medicine Hospital in Doha, has published a pioneering clinical study showing that oral diseases are highly prevalent among elite national-team footballers and may be linked to pain and an increased risk of injury on the pitch.

Conducted during the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023, held from January 12 to February 10, the study is the first of its kind worldwide to clinically assess the oral health of elite football players during a major international tournament.

Aspetar’s Sports Dentistry team examined players from 18 of the 24 invited national teams that agreed to participate, representing a strong response rate for this type of research.

The preliminary study identified high levels of tooth decay, gum inflammation, dental erosion and wisdom-tooth problems, alongside sports-related dental trauma and temporomandibular joint disorders.

In similar cohorts of elite footballers, studies have reported that more than 80% of players show signs of gum disease, nearly 90% have dental erosion, and up to 40% have periodontitis. In addition, about 1 in 3 players report non-contact muscular or joint problems that may be influenced by chronic oral disease.

International evidence in elite sport suggests that roughly one-third of athletes feel that their performance, training load, or recovery has been negatively affected by oral health problems. Some athletes have also reported missing training sessions or experiencing reduced playing time due to dental pain or infection.

By documenting these patterns among Asia’s top footballers, the Aspetar study places oral health firmly on the agenda of injury prevention and performance optimisation.



Dr Mohammed Alsaey

These oral conditions are not only painful; they can also contribute to headaches, difficulties with chewing and sleeping, and persistent oral inflammation. Such inflammation may affect the muscles and joints and increase the risk of non-traumatic injuries, including muscle strains and tendinopathies.

Dr Mohammed Alsaey, director of Sports Dentistry at Aspetar and lead author of the study, said: “This preliminary study is the first worldwide to clinically investigate the oral health of elite national-team football players during a major tournament. Our findings show a very high prevalence of oral health problems – from cavities and gum disease to erosion and trauma – that may influence players’ performance, pain levels and risk of non-contact injuries.

“Building on these results, we are preparing follow-up studies involving different sports, age groups and competitions, as we suspect that the burden of oral disease could be even higher beyond elite football. We are determined to turn this knowledge into concrete prevention strategies for clubs and federations.”

The newly published study strengthens Aspetar’s position as a global reference centre and supports its vision of fully integrating oral health into multidisciplinary athlete care – from screening and education to on-field emergency management and long-term follow-up.

Native species, sustained care key to Qatar’s tree-planting drive: experts

The ongoing efforts to expand tree planting and rehabilitate natural meadows (rawda) would improve the overall quality of life and help maintain the health of the local environment, several environmental experts and researchers have stressed.

They noted that the success of tree-planting programmes will not depend solely on planting more trees, but rather on selecting climate-resilient native species, properly maintaining them, and ensuring sustained community participation.

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change’s programme to rehabilitate Qatar’s natural meadows that support native vegetation includes cultivating local tree seedlings, reintroducing them into natural habitats and monitoring their growth.

The initiative is part of Qatar’s broader 10mn Trees Initiative,

launched in 2022 with a target to plant 10mn trees by 2030. The programme is intended to expand green areas, improve air quality, enhance biodiversity, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and make greater use of treated wastewater for irrigation.

The programme builds on Qatar’s earlier One million Tree Initiative, which was completed in 2022. Accordingly, green areas increased from 3.5 square kilometres in 2015 to 16.7 square kilometres in 2023, while the 10-million-tree programme was launched in 2022 as its successor.

Environmental researcher and desertification campaigner Ali al-Hanzab said the ministry’s work to propagate and restore native trees and shrubs is particularly important given Qatar’s limited rainfall and harsh summer conditions.

The transition from the one-million-tree target to the 10-million-tree programme represents a significant expansion of Qatar’s greening ambitions, while water scarcity makes species selection critical.

Native species capable of tolerating heat and limited water should therefore remain central to afforestation projects, he said. At the same time, residents, land

users and businesses should also help protect newly planted trees.

Dr Latifa al-Nuaimi, professor of hydrogeology and environmental studies at Qatar University, described trees as an essential component of a healthy urban environment and urged authorities and contractors to reconsider unnecessary heavy pruning.

However, excessive pruning can restrict tree growth and reduce canopy density. Where branches do not pose a safety risk or obstruct movement, trees should generally be allowed to develop more naturally, increasing shade and their environmental benefits.

She also called for stronger maintenance arrangements for public gardens and landscaped areas, arguing that planting programmes will deliver greater value when trees and vegetation receive consistent irrigation and maintenance after installation.

She highlighted the multiple benefits of urban trees, including shade, reduced dust exposure, improved visual quality and psychological

comfort, carbon absorption, and providing habitats for birds and other organisms.

Dr Mohamed al-Sheyab, an academic and environmental and engineering expert, said trees contribute to climate mitigation by absorbing carbon dioxide through photosynthesis and storing carbon in their biomass. Expanding tree cover can support cleaner air, ecosystem stability and biodiversity while providing natural carbon storage.

However, the climate benefits of afforestation should be understood as part of a broader emissions-reduction strategy rather than as a substitute for cutting greenhouse gas emissions at the source.

Environmental expert Mohamed al-Jaidah said Qatar’s climate and water constraints make the use of locally adapted trees particularly important. He encouraged increased planting in natural areas, along roads, in public parks, and in residential spaces, while highlighting species such as sidra, ghaf, and Prickly acacia for their ability to withstand local environmental conditions.

Native trees can offer advantages, including greater tolerance to heat and water scarcity, longer lifespans, and potentially lower maintenance requirements.

