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SPORT | Page 1

Al-Attiyah edges ahead of al-Rajhi at Jeddah Baja



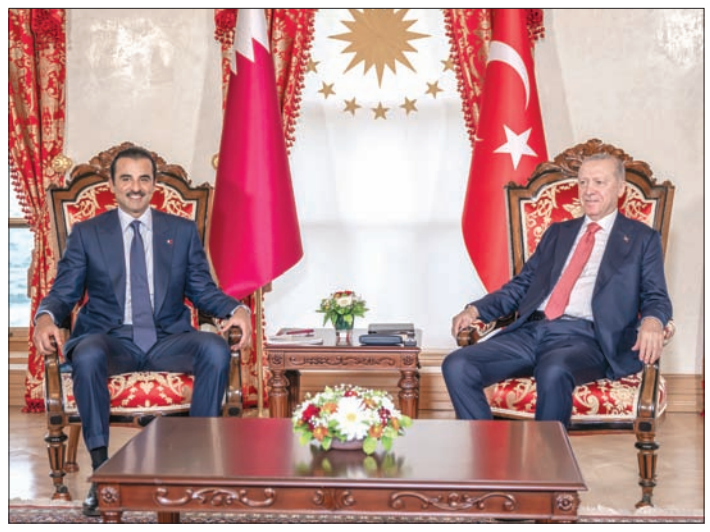




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Qatar, Turkiye deepen strategic ties

● Amir, Erdogan co-chair 12th Qatar-Turkiye Supreme Strategic Committee meeting
● Meeting focuses on expanding co-operation in defence, education, energy, trade and other areas





QNA
Istanbul

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and Turkiye President Recep Tayyip Erdogan co-chaired the 12th meeting of the Qatar-Turkiye Supreme Strategic Committee at Dolmabahce Palace in Istanbul yesterday. At the outset of the meeting, President Erdogan welcomed His Highness the Amir and his accompanying delegation, praising his commitment to strengthening strategic co-operation between the two countries and Qatar's diplomatic efforts to ease tensions and support regional and international peace and security.

The Amir thanked the Turkish president for the warm welcome, highlighting the strong bilateral partnership and Qatar's commitment to expanding co-operation in line with the aspirations of both peoples.

During the meeting, they discussed strategic ties in defence, trade, investment, energy and education, as well as regional and international developments, particularly the situation in the region and global energy security. The meeting was attended by HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani and a number of members of the Amir's official delegation. On the Turkish side, Minister of Foreign Affairs Hakan Fidan and a number of senior officials also attended.

A major focus was expanding economic and trade co-operation, with both sides reaffirming their ambition to increase bilateral trade to $5bn in the near future. They welcomed the entry into force of the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA), describing it as a significant milestone in facilitating trade, investment and economic integration.

The communique highlighted substantial Qatari investments in Turkiye and noted that Turkish contracting companies had undertaken 206 projects in Qatar worth $20.8bn. Both countries agreed to strengthen private-sector partnerships, promote business forums, facilitate trade exhibitions and advance co-operation through the Joint Economic and Trade Committee (JETCO). They also welcomed initiatives to improve regional trade routes, logistics connectivity and supply-chain resilience.

Energy co-operation was another priority, with both countries expressing their commitment to energy security, diversification of energy sources and expanded collaboration, particularly in liquefied natural gas (LNG).

In education and culture, the two sides welcomed the signing of an education agreement and agreed to expand co-operation in teacher development, language teaching, student exchanges and educational institutions. They also discussed a potential joint scholarship programme, supported by Qatar Fund for Development and Turkiye's Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities, to provide educational opportunities for students from disadvantaged and conflict-affected countries.

Both countries pledged to deepen collaboration in digital transformation, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies and cybersecurity. They welcomed the strategic partnership between Turkiye's Turksat and Qatar's Es'hailSat, including the Es'hail-3/Turksat-Biruni satellite project, as an important example of technological cooperation.

Defence and security featured prominently in the meeting's outcomes. The two sides welcomed the signing of a Mutual Defence Agreement aimed at strengthening collective defence, protecting sovereignty and territorial integrity, and promoting regional stability. They agreed to enhance co-operation through joint military exercises, defence-industry partnerships, personnel training and consultations on security threats. They also commended the Badr MoU signed by Qatar, Turkiye, Pakistan and Indonesia to strengthen defence-industrial capabilities through joint production, technology development and information exchange. To Page 11

تميم بن حمد
@TamimBinHamad

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani confirmed that the strategic partnership between the State of Qatar and the Republic of Turkiye continues to grow across various fields. In a post on his official X account, the Amir said the progress was reflected in the 12th meeting of the two countries' Supreme Strategic Committee, which His Highness co-chaired in Istanbul yesterday with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. His Highness added that the meeting discussed ways to build on achievements and set priorities for joint action in the coming period. (**QNA**)

Qatar condoles with victims of Fujairah accident

Qatar has expressed its solidarity with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) following a traffic accident in the Emirate of Fujairah, that resulted in multiple deaths and injuries. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) conveyed the condolences of the State of Qatar to the families of the victims, as well as to the government and people of the United Arab Emirates, and wished a speedy recovery to those injured. (**QNA**)

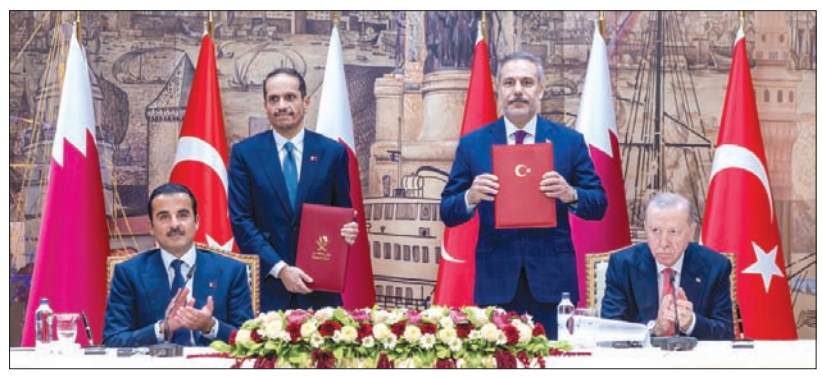
UNSC condemns Houthi attacks against Saudi

The UN Security Council (SC) yesterday strongly condemned the military escalation by the Houthi group in Yemen, the attacks they have launched against Saudi Arabia, and their threats to commercial shipping vessels. The Security Council also adopted Resolution 2837, which extends sanctions related to Yemen, including asset freezes and travel bans. The new resolution, tabled by the United Kingdom, demands that the Houthis immediately and unconditionally cease their military escalation and attacks, including those targeting civilian populations and infrastructure, such as commercial airports and international maritime shipping. Furthermore, the Security Council extended the mandate of the Panel of Experts, established under Resolution 2140, until December 15, 2027. (**QNA**)

Amir, Turkish president sign joint defence agreement

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan have signed in Istanbul a joint defence agreement aimed at strengthening military co-operation between Qatar and Turkiye. The agreement was signed yesterday at Dolmabahce Palace where the two leaders also witnessed the exchange of several agreements and memorandums of understanding (MoUs) covering consumer protection, market monitoring, education, and co-operation in peacebuilding, reconciliation and conflict resolution.

They also witnessed the exchange of the joint statement of the 12th meeting of the Qatar-Turkiye Supreme Strategic Committee. Senior officials and ministers from both countries attended the signing ceremony, including HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani, HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Sheikh Saud bin Abdulrahman al-Thani, HE Amiri Diwan Chief Abdullah bin Mohammed al-Khulaifi, HE the Minister of Finance Ali bin Ahmed al-Kuwari, HE the Minister of Commerce and Industry Sheikh Faisal bin Thani al-Thani, alongside the members of the Amir's official delegation.



On the Turkish side, the ceremony was attended by Minister of Foreign Affairs Hakan Fidan, Minister of Treasury and Finance Mehmet Simsek, Minister of National Defence Yasar Guler, Minister of Industry and Technology Mehmet Fatih Kacir, Minister of Trade Omer Bolat along with a number of ministers and senior officials. (**QNA**)



Gord entities sign agreements with Oman Net Zero Centre at COP31

QNA
Antalya

The Global Carbon Council (GCC) and the Climate Action Center of Excellence (CACE), an initiative established by the Gulf Organisation for Research and Development (Gord), have signed two separate memorandums of understanding (MoUs) with the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Oman Net Zero Centre (ONZC), during COP31 in Antalya, Turkiye.



The agreements aim to strengthen co-operation on carbon market development, support the operationalisation of Article 6 of the Paris Agreement, and enhance Oman's technical and institutional capacity to participate in international carbon markets. The MoUs were signed by Minister of Energy and Minerals of Oman, Engineer Salim bin Nasser al-Aufi, and Founding Chairman of GCC, CACE and Gord Dr Yousef Alhorr.

The co-operation comes as Oman advances its national carbon market framework, following the introduction of its updated National Net Zero Strategy and carbon market regulatory framework in May 2026. The agreements seek to complement these national efforts by bringing together expertise in carbon crediting standards, policy implementation, and market development.

Under the first MoU, GCC and ONZC will explore the adoption of GCC's Carbon Market Infrastructure (CMI) and Interoperable National Registry Solution to support Article 6.2 implementation in Oman. Developed to facilitate transparent carbon credit accounting and transactions, the solution could complement Oman's existing national carbon registry, Meezan, by enabling interoperability with international greenhouse gas crediting programmes.

The co-operation will also cover capacity-building initiatives for government entities, project developers, and market participants, including training on carbon market requirements, project development, registration and issuance processes, registry infrastructure, and methodology development. GCC and ONZC will further explore the adoption of GCC's standards, governance frameworks, and methodologies to support carbon market activities in Oman. To Page 11

QATAR



Glimpses of Amir's visit to Turkiye

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and the President of the Republic of Turkiye Recep Tayyip Erdogan co-chaired the 12th meeting of the Qatar-Turkiye Supreme Strategic Committee at Dolmabahce Palace in Istanbul last evening. During the meeting, they discussed strategic ties in defence, trade, investment, energy and education, as well as regional and international developments, particularly the situation in the region and global energy security.
The meeting was attended by HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani and a number of members of the Amir's official delegation. On the Turkish side, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Hakan Fidan and a number of senior officials also attended. (**QNA**)







Amir's Turkiye visit carries particular significance amid deepening bilateral ties: Qatar's ambassador

The ambassador of the State of Qatar to the Republic of Turkiye Faisal bin Abdullah al-Hanzab said His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani's visit to Turkiye carries particular significance, reflecting the strength of the strategic partnership between the two countries and Qatar's active engagement in international efforts to advance climate action.

Speaking to Qatar News Agency (QNA), ambassador al-Hanzab said the visit carries both an international and a bilateral dimension, with His Highness the Amir participating in the World Leaders' Summit at the 31st United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP31) in Antalya, before heading to Istanbul for the 12th session of the Qatar-Turkiye Supreme Strategic Committee, co-chaired by the Amir and the President of the Republic of Turkiye Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Al-Hanzab said this year's session of the Supreme Strategic Committee comes at a particularly significant time, amid rapid and far-reaching regional and international developments and the challenges they pose to regional security and stability, energy security and supply chains, as well as humanitarian and development priorities.



Faisal bin Abdullah al-Hanzab

Against this backdrop, he underscored the importance of sustained consultation and close coordination between Qatar and Turkiye, particularly given their converging views on a broad range of regional and international issues and their shared commitment to diplomatic solutions and effective multilateral action.

He underscored the international dimension of the Amir's visit through his participation in the Antalya Leaders' Summit at COP31, saying it reflects Qatar's commitment to contributing to global efforts to address climate change, advance sustainable development and support the transition toward a more sustainable economy. He noted that these shared priorities provide further scope for expanding Qatar-Turkiye co-operation, particularly in clean energy, technology, innovation and environmental sustainability.

Al-Hanzab said the visit, with its international and bilateral dimensions, underscores the growing breadth and depth of the strategic partnership between Qatar and Turkiye. He added that convening the 12th session of the Supreme Strategic Committee at this juncture sends a clear message about the strength and resilience of the institutional framework that anchors bilateral ties, despite the evolving regional landscape.

He stressed that the committee's importance extends well beyond its role as a high-level mechanism bringing together the leaderships of the two countries, highlighting the tangible outcomes achieved through its successive sessions, including agreements and memoranda of understanding that have broadened cooperation across political, economic, trade, investment, defence, cultural and other fields.

Since its establishment in 2014 and the convening of its first session in 2015, he added, the committee has evolved into one of the principal pillars of the strategic partnership between Qatar and Turkiye, providing a regular framework for translating the political understanding between the two leaderships into concrete programmes of co-operation and institutional commitments, al-Hanzab said.

In this regard, he noted that the two countries have concluded more than 148 agreements and memoranda of understanding covering various fields, underscoring the importance of further diversifying their economic and trade ties and unlocking the full potential of their respective economies.

Al-Hanzab said the current session is expected to witness the signing of a number of significant agreements that could mark a qualitative step forward in bilateral relations, giving fresh impetus to their further development. He added that the committee will also address a number of priority areas of cooperation.

Concluding his statement to QNA, ambassador al-Hanzab described Qatar-Turkiye relations as a distinctive model of international partnership, reflecting a deliberate strategic choice grounded in a deep understanding of the two countries' weight and standing on the international stage. He said the relationship is rooted in a firm conviction that what unites Qatar and Turkiye transcends immediate interests, extending toward a broader horizon of mutual understanding and convergence in perspectives and interests. (**QNA**)

Amir's visit a strategic step towards enhancing logistics integration: Turkish minister

QNA
Ankara

The Minister of Transport and Infrastructure of the Republic of Turkiye Abdulkadir Uraloglu confirmed that His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani's visit to Turkiye carries significant strategic importance, coming at a crucial time as Ankara seeks to expand regional partnerships and deepen economic and trade ties with Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) countries.

In an exclusive statement to Qatar News Agency (QNA), Uraloglu said His Highness the Amir's visit would give a strong boost to bilateral relations and open new investment opportunities, serving mutual interests and supporting sustainable economic integration between Turkiye and the Gulf states.

He highlighted the transport sector as a key pillar of Turkiye's efforts to strengthen regional connectivity, noting that his government prioritises improving road, maritime and air links.



He said talks with Qatar would focus on the strategic Development Road project and the development of cross-border trade and logistics corridors linking Gulf markets with Europe through Turkiye.

The agenda, Uraloglu said, would also include reviewing existing agreements and memoranda of understanding between the two countries, addressing obstacles to their implementation, and aligning Qatar's development needs with Turkiye's major infrastructure and transport projects.

SSC meeting carries significance in light of current circumstances: Turkish envoy

The ambassador of the Republic of Turkiye to the State of Qatar Yakup Caymazoglu stated that the 12th Meeting of the Turkiye-Qatar Supreme Strategic Committee (SSC), which was held yesterday in Istanbul, under the co-chairmanship of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and the President of the Republic of Turkiye Recep Tayyip Erdogan, is of particular significance in light of the current regional and international circumstances, making close coordination between our countries more important than ever.

Speaking to Qatar News Agency (QNA), the ambassador Yakup Caymazoglu emphasised that since its establishment in 2014, the Supreme Strategic Committee has become the cornerstone of bilateral relations, providing a comprehensive institutional framework for deepening co-operation across a wide range of fields.

In this context, he noted that the previous 11 meetings held so far have resulted in the signing of over 120 co-operation documents, covering areas such as trade, investment, defence, security, energy, education, and culture, and have elevated the relationship to a distinguished level of strategic partnership, characterised by mutual trust, solidarity and a shared vision for the future.

He noted that the significance of this year's SSC meeting is further enhanced by its coincidence with the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP31), currently being hosted by the Republic of Turkiye in the city of Antalya.

At this critical juncture, Caymazoglu explained, the meeting will provide an invaluable opportunity for the leadership of both countries to hold consultations at the highest political level, assess the evolving situation in the region and beyond, and explore joint steps towards promoting peace, stability and dialogue. It also serves to deepen cooperation in areas such as environmental protection, climate action, and the green economy.

In his remarks, Caymazoglu emphasised that both Doha and Ankara share a firm commitment to dialogue, diplomacy, and the peaceful resolution of disputes. Both countries actively support diplomatic and mediation initiatives aimed at preventing escalation, resolving conflicts and promoting lasting peace.

In a related context, he underscored that his country highly values the constructive mediation efforts undertaken by the State of Qatar, ranging from its involvement in Afghanistan to its humanitarian initiatives concerning the Russia-Ukraine war, as well as its contributions to enhancing regional stability.

He further noted that, amidst ongoing diplomatic efforts to address regional conflicts, including the war and the tensions involving Iran and the United States, the Supreme Strategic Committee provides a timely opportunity to reinforce the full solidarity and close co-ordination between the two nations, while also exploring the potential for joint diplomatic initiatives.

"Our co-operation offers a valuable example of how strategic partnerships can contribute to dialogue and peaceful solutions at times of heightened uncertainty," he said noting that political, military, defence and security co-operation constitute essential pillars of strategic partnership.

Anchored in the Qatari-Turkish Combined Joint Force Command in Qatar, Caymazoglu noted that this co-operation is reinforced through joint military exercises, as well as military training and education programs. Meanwhile, both sides are witnessing expanding collaboration in the defence industries, including co-production and technology partnerships., which collectively strengthen the capabilities of both countries and contribute to regional security and stability.



Yakup Caymazoglu

He continued: "Our growing cooperation in the defence industry is a tangible manifestation of the strategic depth of our relations, His Excellency said. A recent example of this expanding co-operation is the Badr Memorandum of Understanding, signed in Doha on 21 October 2026 between Turkiye, Qatar, Pakistan and Indonesia. This initiative represents an important step towards developing multilateral co-operation in defence production, research and development, and technical training."

He further stated that the economic partnership between the two countries continues to expand, driven by a shared commitment to achieve a shared target of USD5bn in bilateral trade. Furthermore, the entry into force of the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement on August 1, 2025, represents an important milestone, creating further opportunities for businesses and investors in both countries.

The ambassador noted that investment is an equally vital dimension of the partnership between the State of Qatar and the Republic of Turkiye. He pointed out that Qatari investments in Turkiye across finance, energy, real estate, and logistics sectors, alongside the growing presence of Turkish companies in Qatar, particularly in construction and infrastructure, reflect the depth of mutual trust between the business communities of both nations.

He further mentioned that environmental protection and sustainable development are also gaining increasing prominence in the bilateral agenda. He expressed his hope that, at the COP31 held in Antalya, co-operation between Turkiye and Qatar in addressing climate challenges will be further enhanced.

In this context, Caymazoglu noted significant potential for joint initiatives in the green economy, clean energy, waste management, resource efficiency and climate resilience. Furthermore, the shared commitment to sustainable development, including co-operation under the Zero Waste Initiative, offers promising opportunities to translating environmental objectives into tangible projects and partnerships.

He emphasised that the close co-operation between the two nations on regional developments, particularly the situation in Gaza, reflects their shared determination to alleviate humanitarian suffering, uphold international law, and support a just and lasting peace based on the two-state solution.

He also affirmed that Turkiye stands firmly in solidarity with the State of Qatar, stressing that any threat to Qatar's security, sovereignty, or territorial integrity is a matter of concern for Turkiye, which will continue to stand by its brothers and sisters in Qatar with unwavering resolve and determination.

The ambassador Yakup Caymazoglu concluded his statement by saying: "I take great pride in the level our relations have reached under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, and HE the President of the Republic of Turkiye Recep Tayyip Erdogan. I am confident that the 12th Meeting of the SSC will provide additional momentum to our shared agenda and carry the partnership between our two nations even further in the years ahead. Turkiye and Qatar have always stood by each other, in challenge and in prosperity, and will continue to do so". (**QNA**)

Amir sends condolences to Kuwaiti Amir

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani and HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani have sent cables of condolences to the Amir of the State of Kuwait Sheikh Meshal al-Ahmed al-Jaber al-Sabah following the death of Sheikha Intisar Jassem Mohamed al-Malek al-Sabah. (**QNA**)

Al-Muraikhi meets Greek deputy PM



HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi met yesterday with Deputy Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic Kostis Hatzidakis. The meeting discussed co-operation relations between the two countries along with ways to support and strengthen them, in addition to a number of topics of common interest. (**QNA**)

Acting president of Venezuela meets PM



Acting President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela Delcy Rodriguez met yesterday with HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani, at her residence in Istanbul. During the meeting, they discussed bilateral co-operation between the two countries and ways to strengthen and develop it. (**QNA**)

Al-Muraikhi inaugurates headquarters of Qatar's embassy in Greece









HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi inaugurated the headquarters of the Embassy of the State of Qatar in the Hellenic Republic in Athens today. The inauguration ceremony was attended by Deputy Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic Kostis Hatzidakis; ambassador of the State of Qatar to Greece Ali bin Khalfan al-Mansouri; and a number of officials and heads of diplomatic missions accredited to Greece. (**QNA**)

Andhra Pradesh CM discusses co-operation with Qatar envoy



Chief Minister (CM) of Andhra Pradesh state of the Republic of India N Chandra Babu Naidu has met ambassador of Qatar to India Mohammed bin Hassan al-Jabir. The two officials discussed bilateral relations between Qatar and India and explored ways to strengthen co-operation. (**QNA**)

Lebanon minister hails Qatar's mediation efforts to ease regional tensions

QNA
Beirut



Minister of Interior and Municipalities of the Lebanese Republic Ahmad al-Hajjar has praised the State of Qatar's mediation efforts to de-escalate tensions in the region, reaffirming Lebanon's commitment to diplomacy amid growing security challenges.

In remarks to Qatar News Agency (QNA), al-Hajjar said co-ordination between Lebanon and Qatar remained ongoing, highlighting Doha's continued support for Lebanon across various fields.

He said Lebanon was facing mounting political, security and social pressures amid the Israeli occupation of southern villages and towns, widespread destruction and continued displacement of residents.

The minister stressed that Lebanese security agencies were working to strengthen security and help residents remain in their homes, reaffirming Beirut's commitment to UN Security Council Resolution 1701 and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanese territory.

He also highlighted increased security patrols and co-ordination among Lebanese security agencies, as well as efforts to strengthen co-operation with Arab countries.

On relations with Syria, al-Hajjar said the two countries were enhancing co-ordination on combating drug trafficking, terrorism, criminal matters and illegal border crossings.

He reiterated the government's commitment to extending state authority across Lebanon and expressed confidence that public awareness would help preserve civil peace.

Govt service centres handle over 49,000 transactions in October

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

Government service centres across the country handled 49,271 transactions in October as part of the country's ongoing drive to make administrative procedures more efficient, accessible, and customer-focused.

Data recently published by the Civil Service and Government Development Bureau through its Sharek platform showed that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) topped the list of participating government entities, completing 16,940 transactions, equivalent to about 34.4% of the monthly total.

The Ministry of Justice ranked second with 10,560 transactions (21.4%), followed by the Ministry of Labour with 7,143 (14.5%). Together, the three leading ministries accounted for more than 34,600 transactions, representing approximately 70.3% of all services delivered during the month.

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) ranked fourth with 6,108 transactions, while the Civil Service and Government Development Bureau completed 4,396. Other participating entities included Qatar General Electricity and Water Corporation (Kahramaa), with 1,045 transactions; the Ministry of Social Development and Family, with 954; and the Ministry of Municipality, with 822.

Qatar Central Securities Depository (Edaa) recorded 520 transactions, followed by the Supreme Judicial Council with 382, Qatar Development Bank (QDB) with 272, and the General Retirement and Social Insurance Authority with 129.

The geographical distribution of transactions reveals that Al Hilal Centre was by far the busiest of Qatar's seven government service centres. The centre processed 21,273 transactions, accounting for 43.2% of the national total. Al Rayyan ranked second with 14,343 transactions (29.1%), followed by Al Wakrah with 4,713 (9.6%). The Pearl Service Centre handled 4,263 transactions, while Rawdat Al Hamama recorded 3,364. Al Khor processed 1,266, and Al Shamal recorded 49.

The figures indicate that Al Hilal and Al Rayyan together accounted for approximately 72.3% of all transactions, highlighting the concentration of service demand at the two busiest locations.

Alongside these transactions, the latest statistics recorded 5,769 customer surveys conducted, covering 12 government entities and institutions. MoFA received the highest number, with 1,815 surveys, followed by the Ministry of Justice with 1,402 and MoCI with 784.

The Civil Service and Government Development Bureau recorded 695 surveys, while the Ministry of Labour received 482. Other entities also attracted customer feedback, including Kahramaa and the Ministry of Municipality, with 151 surveys each, and the Ministry of Social Development and Family with 110.

The remaining surveys covered Edaa (76), the Supreme Judicial Council (61), QDB (35), and the General Retirement and Social Insurance Authority (seven).

MoCI organises seasonal influenza vaccination campaign for employees

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI), in co-operation with the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) and the Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC), organised a seasonal influenza vaccination campaign targeting Ministry employees.

The ministry continues to implement the seasonal influenza vaccination campaign in co-operation with healthcare authorities across the country, as part of its efforts to promote public health, prevent seasonal illnesses, and safeguard the health and well-being of all its personnel.

The campaign reflects the MoCI's commitment to fostering a culture of prevention, raising health awareness among its employees and staff, limiting the spread of infections, and reducing health complications associated with seasonal influenza. These efforts help provide a healthy and safe working environment and strengthen occupational health and safety standards.

MoCI reaffirmed the importance of partnerships with healthcare authorities across the country to promote health awareness and support a safe, sustainable working environment.

It noted that the initiative reflects its commitment to safeguarding the health and well-being of all personnel and ensuring that health programmes and initiatives reach employees across all job categories, in line with national efforts to promote community health and reinforce a culture of prevention and health awareness.

ITU Member States elect directors of 3 technical bureaus at Doha meeting

Member States of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) elected the directors of its three technical bureaus – radiocommunication, telecommunication standardisation and telecommunication development – during the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference 2026 (PP-26) in Doha, Qatar.

Eric Fournier of France was elected Director of the Radiocommunication Bureau with 94 of the 169 valid votes. Seizo Onoe of Japan was re-elected Director of the Telecommunication Standardisation Bureau by an overwhelming majority, receiving 169 votes. Nele Leosk of Estonia was elected Director of the Telecommunication Development Bureau with 93 of the 176 votes cast.

The elections complete the ITU's senior leadership team for the upcoming term. Member States had re-elected Doreen Bogdan-Martin of the US as ITU Secretary-General for a second term, with 164 of the 173 votes cast.

Bogdan-Martin has more than three decades of experience in international telecommunications policy and has served as ITU Secretary-General since 2023. She previously served as Director of the Telecommunication Development Bureau from 2018 to 2022 and was the first woman to hold either elected position in the history of the UN agency for information and communication technologies.



Member States also elected Adel Darwish of the Kingdom of Bahrain as the ITU's next Deputy Secretary-General, with 90 of the 177 votes cast. Darwish brings more than 25 years of experience in telecommunications, regulation and digital development across the public and private sectors. He has served as Director of the ITU Regional Office for the Arab States since 2020.

The Plenipotentiary Conference is the ITU's highest decision-making body. Held every four years, it sets the Union's general policies, adopts its strategic and financial plans, and elects its senior leadership. (**QNA**)

COMMUNITY

PICE Qatar's Green School Project builds classrooms, inspires hope

Filipino civil engineers in Qatar have extended their commitment to nation-building by providing a safer and more sustainable learning environment for Indigenous Manobo students through the Philippine Institute of Civil Engineers (PICE) Qatar Chapter's 7th Green School Building Project at Mt Apo National High School in Sitio Sibayan, Barangay Ilomavis, Kidapawan City.

The project, which culminated in the turnover of a newly constructed classroom on September 19, 2026, aims to improve educational facilities in an underserved community where students and teachers previously relied on seven makeshift classrooms.

Serving 137 students and 12 teachers, the school now has a 63sq m permanent classroom built to Department of Education standards. The building features durable materials and a galvanised cladding system, incorporating sustainable, climate-resilient construction principles.

With an initial construction cost of P650,000, the project was coordinated by Michael Mineses, a former member of the PICE Board of Directors.

The initiative also marked the revival of PICE Qatar's flagship community infrastructure programme, which was suspended during the Covid-19 pandemic because of financial and operational constraints. Efforts to revive it began in 2025 under then-PICE Qatar president Mario S Oligo, with COPCP chairperson Katherine Sarajan Rombano leading the initiative.

Implementation continued in 2026 under PICE Qatar president Jundee Mar Tejedo, COPCP chairman Lester O Militante, vice chairperson Nida L Austria Tagtag, and supervising officer Katherine S Rombano, with support from chapter members, donors and volunteers.

The groundbreaking ceremony was held on June 25 while the September turnover brought together PICE National president Cary Beatisula, Kidapawan City mayor Atty Jose Paolo Evangelista, local education officials, school representatives, community leaders and members of the Manobo community.

PICE Qatar donated 30 school armchairs and three solar-powered streetlights with poles, adding P63,000 to the project investment and bringing the total to P713,000 (approximately QR43,200).

Pual Marquez, the Ashghal Planning Team, PICE COCPA, and the 2026 PICE Board of Directors supported the additional facilities.

Funding came from several initiatives, including the "One Ticket Today, Classroom All the Way" raffle campaign, Adopt a Community Project raffle, Bowling for a Cause, Top CE Nights Awards, and BIM modelling workshops, along with corporate sponsorships and individual donations.



In recognition of its contribution, Mt. Apo National High School presented PICE Qatar with a Certificate of Citation for Sponsorship.

The project also forms part of the chapter's entry for the 2026 PICE Most Outstanding Community Project Awards – Hall of Fame.

For PICE Qatar, the initiative underscores how Filipino engineers overseas can translate professional expertise into meaningful community service, demonstrating that engineering excellence extends beyond infrastructure to improving lives and expanding opportunities for future generations.





Zed Media presents a magical evening of cinema and music in Doha



Zed Media's Zed Tokz Season 5 – Tune & Take created an unforgettable evening for Doha's audience, bringing together the magic of cinema and music. Featuring renowned Malayalam film director Kamal and celebrated music director Vidyasagar, the event was held at Al Qamar Hall, Ideal Indian School Campus, Abu Hamour, Doha.

The programme witnessed the participation of community leaders from various sectors in Doha, along with audiences who had registered in advance. The registration-based entry ensured an organised gathering and provided an engaging platform for meaningful interaction and discussion.

The event was presided over by Shanavas Bava, director of Zed Media, who also delivered the welcome address. Femin Hakkim, director of Zed Media, served as the moderator. The session offered the audience a unique opportunity to explore fascinating behind-the-scenes experiences, memorable moments and insights from the artistic journeys of the distinguished guests.

Through this programme, Zed Media once again highlighted its commitment to creating platforms in Doha that bring together art, cinema, music and meaningful conversations.

With engaging conversations about cinema and the timeless charm of music, Tune & Take became a memorable addition to Doha's cultural and artistic scene.



MES staff outing fosters unity and camaraderie

MES Indian School organised a rejuvenating staff outing on October 28 at Al Dosari Park and Zoo, Al Shahaniya, bringing together nearly 450 employees representing the Boys', Girls', Junior, KG and Evening sections.

The excursion offered a welcome respite from academic responsibilities, providing staff members with an opportunity to strengthen interpersonal bonds and enjoy moments of recreation and fellowship. The guidance and encouragement of principal Dr Hamada Kadar, and the school leadership team facilitated the successful execution of the event. The staff secretaries of all the sections of the school, members of the Cultural Committee, and the Physical Education faculty merited special commendation for their exemplary co-ordination, dedicated service, and meticulous arrangements, complemented by the enthusiastic participation and co-operation of the entire staff.

Beyond its recreational appeal, the outing reinforced the spirit of collective endeavour, mutual appreciation, and institutional solidarity, underscoring the value of cohesiveness among staff members.









Sharon Desouza

Resilience takes centre stage at enrichment forum

The Professional and Community Enrichment Forum 2026 placed emotional resilience at the heart of its second year, bringing leaders, business figures and community members together at W Doha Hotel to build skills for handling challenge, uncertainty and stress at work and at home.

Organised by H Ents Global and MintBerry Qatar, the forum aimed to encourage positive change and strengthen well-being in an increasingly demanding world.

The evening's main feature was a masterclass by Sharon Desouza, an internationally certified practitioner with EFT International in London and an International Coaching Federation (ICF US)-accredited coach. She introduced participants to The Positive Progress Code, focusing on practical ways to restore positivity, boost productivity and build resilience.

In an interactive session, participants explored cognitive restructuring, nervous system regulation and techniques for releasing accumulated stress from the mind and body. They also learned about somatic movement, daily wellness routines and practices that support sustained personal growth.

The masterclass closed with participants sharing their key takeaways. In her closing message, Desouza urged the audience to embrace the phrase "Be Positive, Powerful and Unstoppable".

The organisers thanked the event partners whose support contributed to the forum's success, and the event concluded its second consecutive year with a renewed commitment to emotional well-being and community empowerment.



COMMUNITY

PISQ launches 2nd edition of Organic Kitchen Gardening

Pakistan International School Qatar (PISQ) recently announced the commencement of the 2nd edition of its Organic Kitchen Gardening activity, extending this initiative across the KG, Primary, Girls' and Boys' Wings as part of its engaging club activities.

The activity was carried out in the presence of the principal, Ch Muhammad Afzal, who encouraged students to connect with nature, embrace sustainable practices, and understand the importance of growing their own food.

Young gardeners planted a variety of seeds, including coriander, beetroot, gourds, spinach and other seasonal vegetables, gaining valuable hands-on experience in planting, nurturing and caring for their own kitchen gardens.

Through this initiative, students are learning the value of environmental responsibility, healthy living and sustainable food practices while discovering the joy of watching their efforts grow.









Qatar Negombian delegation meets Sri Lankan envoy to discuss community welfare initiatives



A delegation from Qatar Negombian held a courtesy meeting with Sri Lankan ambassador Sithara Azard at the embassy in Doha, focusing on community welfare, healthcare, drug-prevention awareness, career development, and future initiatives benefiting Sri Lankan expatriates.

The delegation was led by Qatar Negombian president Shabeeb, accompanied by secretary Usman, general adviser Amjad and media co-ordinator Mujeeb.

During the meeting, Shabeeb provided a brief introduction to Qatar Negombian, outlining the organisation's vision, mission and commitment to strengthening unity, co-operation and social welfare among Sri Lankan Negombians residing in Qatar. He highlighted the organisation's efforts to support the community through various social, educational and humanitarian initiatives.

A key highlight of the meeting was the official invitation extended to the ambassador to attend the upcoming General Medical Camp, organised by Qatar Negombian for the benefit of Sri Lankan expatriates in Qatar. The initiative aims to promote healthcare awareness and encourage community members to prioritise their health and well-being.

During the discussion, the ambassador provided valuable guidance on how Sri Lankan community organisations should operate responsibly within the State of Qatar, emphasising the importance of respecting local laws, regulations and cultural values while contributing positively to society.

In addition, the discussions covered health-related awareness programmes aimed at encouraging healthier lifestyles, preventive healthcare and improved well-being within the community.

Shabeeb presented a commemorative memento to Azard in recognition of her valuable contributions and dedicated service to the Sri Lankan community in Qatar.

MES young diplomats on the global stage



A delegation of 42 students from MES Indian School and MESIS participated in the prestigious Fall MUN 2026 Conference, held on November 7 at Georgetown University, alongside nearly 550 delegates from various institutions.

Adding lustre to the school's participation, Lukman Qureshi and Nithyashri Manohar of MES Indian School earned the coveted Honourable Mention Awards for their exemplary performances in the Model Unesco and UNDP committees, respectively, representing South Africa and Yemen. Their commendable diplomatic acumen, incisive deliberations, and persuasive articulation set them apart from the other participants.

The conference culminated in a vibrant closing ceremony at the University, where Fall GMUN officials felicitated the outstanding delegates in recognition of their accomplishments. Manmmadan Mambally, administrator, MES Off-Campus, co-ordinated the students' participation, ensuring their active engagement in this enriching platform for diplomacy, global awareness and leadership development.



BPS excels at SAI Global International Debate Competition

Students of Birla Public School (BPS), Doha, brought laurels to the school by securing honours in both the Junior and Senior categories at the SAI Global Debate Competition 2026, held on November 7. Organised by the SAI International School Bhubaneswar, India, the competition witnessed participation from forty-two schools across seven countries.

Represented by two teams comprising four students each, BPS demonstrated commendable debating skills through confident articulation, critical thinking, thoughtful analysis and persuasive argumentation.

In the Junior Category, Gowtham Krishna Pati (Class VII) secured first place in the Argumentative Debate, while Kahn Dhar (Class VIII) won third place in the Turncoat Debate. The team also included Mukund Anuj Kumar (Class VIII), who participated in the Argumentative Debate against the motion, and Aaron Joy Miracle (Class VIII), who competed in the Extempore round.

In the Senior Category, Shravani Agnihotri (Class X) received a special prize in the Argumentative Debate. The other team members were Janushre Sornavel (Class X), who argued against the motion; Benita Biju (Class XI), who participated in the Turncoat Debate; and Miyah Mehreen Muhammad (Class IX), who competed in the Extempore round.

The students' achievements were the result of rigorous preparation through the school's Debate Club, with a focus on research, effective delivery, adapting to the virtual competition format and understanding international judging criteria. Rekha Pius, Shabeela Useph, the Debate Club coordinators and the coaches played a key role in coordinating the school's participation and guiding the teams throughout their preparation.

BPS celebrates Keralappiravi Day with cultural programmes









Birla Public School celebrated Keralappiravi Day on November 3 with a series of cultural programmes highlighting the richness, uniqueness and heritage of the Malayalam language.

The principal, Dr Anand R Nair, inaugurated the ceremony. In his inaugural address, he highlighted the uniqueness and greatness of the Malayalam language and emphasised the importance of nurturing a love for one's mother tongue among the younger generation.

The vice-principals, Radhika Rele and Edna Fernandez; members of the senior leadership; and Shiju P R, head of the Malayalam Department; attended the programme.

Following the prayer song, Riva Bin administered the language pledge. Jahnavi Ajith delivered a speech on the topic "Kerala and the Malayalam Language", highlighting the language's significance and cultural heritage.

The cultural celebrations began with a poem recitation by Dhruva Rajesh, followed by a group song by students of the Primary Section and a group dance by girls of the Secondary Section. The performances added colour and vibrancy to the celebrations, reflecting Kerala's rich cultural traditions.

The celebration served as a meaningful tribute to Kerala's rich linguistic and cultural heritage, reinforcing the importance of preserving and promoting Malayalam among the younger generation.

Rajagiri Public School marks 11th Annual Sports Day









Rajagiri Public School celebrated its 11th Annual Sports Day on November 6 at the Aspire Dome, Doha. The event was graced by distinguished guests from Al Duhail Sports Club and the Qatar National Handball Team, with Ziad El Jaouni, Qatari professional footballer, as the chief guest.

WORLD

Eisenkot urges respect for Israel's Arab minority after Netanyahu attacks

AFP
Jerusalem

Israeli prime ministerial hopeful Gadi Eisenkot called yesterday for respect for the country's Arab minority after caretaker premier Benjamin Netanyahu and other right-wing figures sought to delegitimise the community's lawmakers by linking them to Hamas.

Two Arab-majority parties, Raam and the Joint List, secured a combined 19 seats in last month's election, winning nearly a sixth of the 120-seat parliament and potentially emerging as kingmakers in efforts by Eisenkot to form a government.

"Arab citizens of Israel are an integral part of the Israeli story," Eisenkot wrote on X on yesterday.

"The attempt to marginalise them and vilify them collectively is a profound violation of the principles of civic responsibility. It dishonours Israel's Declaration of Independence and the values we take pride in as a Jewish and democratic state," he added.

Netanyahu and his allies have repeatedly criticised leaders of Arab parties for refusing to describe Hamas as a "terror group".

All leaders of Arab parties have condemned the Hamas storming of Israel, in which Arab Israelis — descendants of Palestinians who remained in what became Israel in 1948, and who now form more than 20% of the population — were also among those killed.

Netanyahu has also repeatedly alleged electoral fraud by Arab-majority parties, but electoral authorities have rejected the claims.

In a speech at the inauguration of the new parliament this week, Netanyahu lamented that the two Arab lists refuse to recognise Israel as a Jewish state, although Raam leader Mansour Abbas has done so in the past.

He further claimed that they sought to establish either an "Islamic state" or a "nationalist Palestinian state".

During the same ceremony, National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir heckled Joint List leader Youssef Jabareen during his oath of allegiance, accusing him of having "pledged allegiance to Hamas". "It is entirely legitimate to disagree with representatives of the Arab parties, even to strongly disapprove of some of them. But it is neither legitimate nor acceptable to malign an entire community, and I will not allow it," Eisenkot said.

President Isaac Herzog tasked Eisenkot with forming a new government on Sunday after consultations in which a majority of political parties, including the two Arab lists, recommended him for the role.

But one of Eisenkot's right-wing allies, Avigdor Liberman has said he will back out of the coalition if Israeli-Arabs are part of it.

If Eisenkot fails to form a government within 28 days, he may request a 14-day extension. Should he still fall short, the mandate would pass to another lawmaker, most likely Netanyahu.

Iran targets US radar system in Bahrain

AFP
Tehran

Iran's Revolutionary Guards said their forces had targeted a US early warning radar system in Bahrain, with the US military saying it shot down two Iranian drones targeting the Gulf island yesterday.

"A few hours ago, IRGC Aerospace Force fighters targeted and destroyed the US aggressors' early-warning radar on the island of Bahrain," the Revolutionary Guards said in a statement carried by state media.

They said the operation was in response to a US attack on a telecommunications tower in Sirik, on the shores of the Strait of Hormuz.

Several hours later, the US military's Central Command denied that the radar had been destroyed and said it intercepted two "one-way attack drones" launched at Bahrain by the Guards.

It reported no casualties or damage.

Tehran repeatedly targeted American bases in Bahrain earlier in the Middle East war, with US media reporting damage to a logistics hub extensive enough that the US Navy is now relying on bases thousands of miles away.

Centcom, which oversees American military operations in the region, said last month that it had helped Gulf countries export 1.5bn barrels of oil since the summer via Hormuz, a key energy trading route. "This is a serious warning to the aggressor enemy to stop its aerial provocations and oil smuggling in the Strait of Hormuz," the Guards added in their statement.

Gulf countries bore the brunt of Tehran's wrath after the US and Israel started the war by launching a wave of surprise attacks on Iran on February 28.

In retaliation, Iran has restricted shipping through Hormuz and struck infrastructure including airports, seaports, energy facilities, landmarks and US assets across the region.

The US imposed a blockade on Iranian ports early in the war and announced in August what it called an "economic asphyxiation" campaign on Iran aimed at curbing its trade and financial flows.

Washington has appeared to dial back threats of renewed strikes after the defeat of President Donald Trump's Republican Party in recent midterm elections, in part due to the unpopularity of the war on Iran.

US denies Iran's claim of destroying radar

The US military denied Iran's claim yesterday to have attacked a US early-warning radar in Bahrain, saying its forces had shot down two one-way attack drones launched by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps towards Bahrain with no harm caused.
Iran had said its strike was in retaliation for what it described as an air attack on a telecommunications tower in its Hormozgan province, according to Iranian state media.
The claim came during a fragile lull in the conflict between Iran and the US, which began with US and Israeli strikes on Iran on February 28 and has since spread across the region.
Iran launched missile and drone attacks on US bases in Gulf states and sought to restrict shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, a vital route for global oil and gas supplies. Washington, in turn, imposed a naval blockade on Iranian ports.
There was no immediate comment from Bahrain. (**Reuters**)

Syria lifts visa curbs on US citizens

AFP
Damascus

Syria has lifted restrictions on the entry of US citizens imposed several days ago, an official told AFP yesterday, after the limits sparked uproar online.

The current Syrian government, in place since fighters overthrew Bashar al-Assad in December 2024, has allowed Westerners to obtain entry visas at Damascus airport or border crossings. However, this week, several US citizens complained on social media that they had been turned away on the grounds they needed a visa in advance.

"The entry procedures for US citizens travelling to Syria have returned to their earlier state, after the cancellation of the obligation to obtain prior authorisation, which was imposed temporarily by the interior ministry," Mazen Allouch, an official with the ports and borders authority, told AFP.

He said there had been no change for citizens of other countries, including Europeans. According to Syria's tourism ministry, 719,000 tourists, excluding travellers from Arab nations, visited the country in the first six months of 2026, despite its struggles to recover from more than a decade of civil war and sectarian divide.

Armed men kill dozens of civilians in Niger

AFP
Abidjan

Armed men have killed at least 37 civilians in an ambush in western Niger near Burkina Faso and Mali, local sources said on yesterday.

Ruled by a military junta since a 2023 coup, Niger is battling violence by militants linked to Al Qaeda and the Islamic State group.

The latest attack targeted residents of the village of Tillim headed early on Thursday to a weekly market in the city of Tera in the restive Tillaberi region, a former elected official said.

Escorted by members of a local self-defence group, they "fell into an ambush by unidentified armed men", he told AFP.

He said 37 people were killed on the spot and another succumbed to their wounds a day later.

"Among the dead are 11 members of the self-defence group, along with seven women and 20 men," the former official said.

A Tera city resident said the attack killed 37 people including women and children.

Several people were wounded and have been taken to hospital, the resident said.

Niger's Tillaberi region on the borders with Mali and Burkina Faso has become the epicentre of the attacks. Last year, Tillaberi became the deadliest region in the central Sahel where civilians were the most targeted, according to conflict monitor ACLED.

It said the increase in violence was down to Tillaberi's strategic location in the tri-border area — a flashpoint zone where the frontiers of Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali converge and militants operate.

Tillaberi also hosts just under half of the 450,000 people registered as displaced in Niger last year, according to the UN.

Struggling to contain the attacks, the Nigerien army has tolerated the forming of self-defence militias by villagers, leading to clashes with militants.

In Feburary, 25 civilian self-defence militiamen were killed in ambushes by unidentified assailants in several villages in Tillaberi.

Niger's military authorities announced the following month that civilian army auxiliaries would soon be introduced to help fight the militant groups.

In the southeast, Niger also faces violence from Boko Haram and their rival splinter faction, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP).

Burkina, Mali and Niger — all ruled by military juntas — have teamed up in a confederation and set up a unified force of 5,000 troops to fight groups.

Teen reunites with family after one month in Israeli jail

AFP
Al-Jib, Palestinian Territories

Looking tiny in his adult-size grey prison jumpsuit, 15-year-old Palestinian Ezzedine al-Lahalia appeared stunned as his mother embraced him after a month in an Israeli jail.

His first request was a child's wish for his favourite food: stuffed cabbage and shawarma.

The teenager, who had been charged with throwing stones, was reunited with his family Thursday night in an emotional scene witnessed by an AFP photographer.

Ezzedine's mother held back tears as she kissed his cheeks, while the older men released alongside him greeted their wives, children and families. Then Israeli troops fired tear gas, interrupting the families' reunions.


Ezzedine al-Lahalia hugs his mother as they reunite in Al-Jib. (**AFP**)

Lahalia, from the West Bank city of Sair, reunited with his family in the village of Al-Jib near Jerusalem, where Israeli authorities typically release Palestinian prisoners on Thursdays.

"After the Israelis brought the prisoners out, after we had received them, they fired tear gas," Ezzedine's mother, Rania Jaradat told AFP.

"They were afraid that the families would assemble near the gate and celebrate," she said.

After Lahalia's release, she said, "the first thing he asked for was stuffed cabbage and shawarma". She happily complied.

He was released after the family paid 5,000-shekels (around $1,500) in bail.

As the eldest of five, his absence was particularly felt by his younger siblings. "They're happy that I've returned, but they were very distressed while I wasn't with them," Ezzedine told AFP.

According to the Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, 9,300 Palestinians are currently held in Israeli jails, including 350 minors.

Earlier this week, the military said it had shot a 14-year-old in a group of boys it suspected of throwing stones at passing car in the north of the West Bank.

The Israeli human rights group B'Tselem noted an increase in deaths of Palestinians after the easing of open-fire rules in 2022 for stone throwers.

US officials raise concern over violence against Christians in Nigeria

Violence against Nigerian Christians remains a key concern, the US State Department said, a year after the Trump administration accused Nigeria of violating religious freedoms and designated it as a "country of particular concern" (CPC).
President Donald Trump last November threatened military action against the West African nation over the treatment of Christians.
The Nigerian government rejected the CPC designation and said the move was based on misinformation and faulty data.
Assistant Secretary of State Frank Garcia, speaking to a panel in Congress on Thursday, said the State Department was treating the issue as a top priority, working closely with Nigerian authorities to address the violence and hold those responsible to account.
"Unfortunately, the violence has not stopped," Garcia said.
Nigerian leaders have previously said the country is dealing with terrorism, not persecution of Christians, and that they would welcome US help in fighting insurgents as long as the country's territorial integrity is respected. Insecurity tops the list of campaign issues ahead of Nigeria's presidential and parliamentary elections, set for January 16, 2027. Africa's most populous nation is battling an insurgency, banditry and farmer-herder clashes in its northern regions as well as kidnapping for ransom in the south.
US Assistant Secretary of State Riley Barnes said Nigeria had hired police, deployed forest guards and increased prosecutions and arrests following the US designation, but these moves had not led to greater safety for Christians. (**Reuters**)

Lebanese army says seized arms depot in Beirut

The Lebanese army announced yesterday that it seized a large number of arms and ammunition from a depot in Beirut's southern suburbs, a Hezbollah stronghold, adding that it arrested one person.

The army conducted "a special security operation after close monitoring of the transportation and trade of weapons", it said in a statement, adding that it raided an "arms depot in the Msharafieh area of the southern suburbs".

It said it seized a "large number of war arms and munitions" and arrested one person who is currently under investigation. The statement made no mention of who the arms belonged to.

Beirut's southern suburbs are a key Hezbollah stronghold and faced intense bombing and destruction during the Iran-backed group's last two wars with Israel. (**AFP**)

Gaza's burn victims caught in Israeli dispute over aid

Reuters
Cairo/Gaza

The excruciating burns run around the side of Masa Yassin's tiny face, behind her ear, over her scalp and down her neck.

Since her family's tent burst into flames when a nearby cooking gas tank exploded in July, part of the 6-year-old girl's treatment has been a clear plastic 3D-printed mask, which helps manage swelling and control the scars on her face.

But soon she will outgrow it, and the international medical charity Medecins Sans Frontieres, which operates the only clinic in Gaza that can make her a new one, says it has been barred by Israel from importing the plastic.

"Should there be no masks, my daughter will grow more scar tissue," said Masa's mother Islam Yassin, as she gently adjusted straps on the mask of the girl on her lap on a plastic chair in their tent in a camp in Gaza City.

"We would have to resort to surgery instead of masks, and there are no such surgeries in Gaza."

More than a year since a ceasefire halted major fighting in Gaza, the entire population of more than 2mn Palestinians lives confined to around a third of the tiny enclave's territory, mainly in makeshift tents and damaged buildings.


Masa Yassin,stands with her mother, Islam Yassin, in front of their tent in Gaza City. (**Reuters**)

Israeli forces still control everything that enters and exits. Israel says it allows in all needed medical equipment and supplies. But many aid groups say restrictions make it impossible to provide basic treatment desperately needed by a vulnerable population besieged inside a conflict zone.

The custom masks provided by MSF for scores of Gazan burn victims have become embroiled in a dispute between the international medical charity and Israel over Israeli demands for information about local staff working for foreign groups. Israel has banned MSF's international staff from Gaza and barred the group from importing any supplies since the end of February, after MSF refused an Israeli demand to submit names of all its local staff in Gaza. MSF says it cannot provide such lists without assurances staff would be safe, because hundreds of medics have been killed during the war.

In a response to a request for comment, COGAT, the unit of the Israeli military responsible for aid to Gaza, confirmed it had barred imports by MSF for failure to comply with requirements, including supplying staff lists needed to prevent "the misuse of humanitarian aid by terrorist organisations".

It said that unlike MSF, other aid groups had complied and were operating freely.

It had approved the entry of more than 24,000 tons of medical supplies into Gaza, it said, and rejected accusations that it was blocking medical aid as a falsehood spread by Hamas militants.

MSF says complying with the Israeli registration requirement would put its staff in danger, and that the victims of the restrictions are vulnerable Palestinian patients like Masa. "A child's mutilated face can no longer receive even a basic treatment, not because the technology or the expertise is lacking, but because Israel imposes a regime under which healing itself is a privilege," Filipe Ribeiro, MSF's head of mission for Palestine, said in a message to Reuters.

Respiratory illnesses rise in Gaza, WHO says

Reuters
Geneva

The World Health Organisation warned yesterday of surging respiratory illnesses in Gaza, with worse expected after heavy rains flooded tens of thousands of tents housing displaced Palestinians.

"The numbers already show the pressure. Acute respiratory infections are 33,000 cases higher than at the same time last year," Dr Reinhilde Van De Weerdt, WHO Representative in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, said.

Poor living conditions and severe overcrowding are driving up infections as Gaza's population is squeezed into an ever-smaller area, WHO said.

The crunch has worsened as the Israeli military expands its control by advancing the "yellow line" — a demarcation established under October's US-brokered ceasefire.

Bolsonaro shrugs off fugitive label, eyes future Brazil presidential bid

Reuters
Washington

On his first visit to Washington since losing a presidential election, Flavio Bolsonaro brushed aside doubts about his grip on Brazil's political right and said he was ready to stand for the Liberal Party in the next race, which he argued might come sooner than expected.

Speaking to Reuters on Thursday between meetings to sort out his US immigration status, Bolsonaro rejected critics — including reelected President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva — who brand him a runaway for making a dash to the US after last month's vote. "That is a pejorative way of trying to attack me," he said. "Honestly, I couldn't care less. I am convinced that I needed to be here."

A Quaest opinion poll showed 62% of Brazilians disapproved of him leaving the country after the runoff, which Lula won by a margin of more than 4 mn votes.

The senator, who was expected to see US officials in Washington, declined to say with whom he was meeting. The son of former President Jair Bolsonaro — who is serving a 27-year sentence for a coup plot after he lost the 2022 election — said he believes economic problems will cut short Lula's fourth term. "Brazil is going to go broke," he said, claiming families were struggling with too much debt and businesses were unwilling to invest in a country with what he said was an unfair legal system.

"If a new electoral race emerges, I am ready to return."

Bolsonaro offered few details about his standing in the right-wing Liberal Party, but said he intended to run under its banner again. Before fleeing the country, he alleged without evidence that the election had been fraudulent, despite the electoral court declaring Lula the winner.

His political allies have also conceded the result. He acknowledged that his post-election legal challenges face long odds.

"If you ask me whether I think they'll go anywhere, I doubt it," he said, accusing the justice system of being in thrall to the government without citing evidence.

Bolivia's natural gas reserves drops

Bolivia holds 2.30tn cubic feet of proven natural gas reserves as of the end of last year, according to a report commissioned by the state-owned energy company YPFB released yesterday.
The figure represents a steep decline from the 4.48 tn cubic feet (TCF) reported in the previous report, based on data through December 2023.
According to the latest report, Bolivia also has 2.76 TCF in proven and probable gas reserves. (**Reuters**)



Pope Leo arrives on the popemobile in Pimentel, Peru. **(Reuters)**

Pope returns to 'beloved' Peruvian hometown

AFP
Chiclayo, Peru

Pope Leo XIV returned yesterday to his cherished Chiclayo, the Peruvian city where he served for nearly a decade as bishop, and where old friends and tens of thousands of locals eagerly await him.

The visit is the emotional centerpiece of the pope's South America tour, bringing him back to neighbourhoods which knew him as Robert Francis Prevost before he was tapped to lead the world's 1.4bn Catholics. The US-born pontiff, who has Peruvian citizenship, paid tribute in Spanish to his "beloved Diocese of Chiclayo" from the balcony of St Peter's Basilica in his first speech as pope.

The 71-year-old has been so looking forward to returning that not even lung cancer surgery last month could delay his trip, which has seen him rocket through Uruguay and Argentina to Peru.

In the coastal city where Leo served from 2015 to 2023, his image is everywhere, from merchandise to murals. Bishop Prevost "left a significant mark here, through his personal style, his character, and his actions," Jorge Villegas, vicar general of the Diocese of Chiclayo, told AFP. "He reached every last corner of the Diocese of Chiclayo, a region where the geography is far from easy," he said.

Prevost remained close to the poor and local communities during periods of hardship, including the Covid-19 pandemic and devastating floods, at one point donning rubber boots to wade through muddy waters to help those in need.

Locals remember his "solidarity," Villegas said, "standing by us during several natural disasters."

He also spearheaded the construction of plants that produce life-saving oxygen during the pandemic, the vicar general said.

Leo will lead a mass on the Pampas de Pimentel, a vast and hot desert plain on Peru's northern coast, which is expected to draw around 1mn pilgrims, before meeting with clergy, then staff and students at a Catholic university.

He will privately visit the San Oscar Romero chapel in one of Chiclayo's humblest neighbourhoods, which he helped rebuild, and dine with Chiclayo's priests.

On Thursday, dozens of people gathered in the historic center in front of the cathedral, enjoying the festive atmosphere ahead of Leo's arrival. Among them — wearing a cap with a picture of the pope on it — was Katerine Preciado, a 33-year-old Catholic from Colombia who now lives in Peru near the border with Ecuador, where criminal gangs recruit the young.

She said she hopes the pope will deliver "a message of peace, reconciliation, and mercy — a message full of love," and help Peru "reconcile as a nation".

Democrats plot 'must-have' wins in 2027 for full control

Reuters
Washington



A general view of the US Capitol in Washington, DC. (**Reuters**)

Democrats poised to take full control of the US Congress next year are aiming for a fast start in the opening weeks of January, with what they say will be a response to voters' top concerns in the aftermath of the party's huge wins on November 3.

In statements and interviews, prominent Democrats in the House of Representatives and Senate told Reuters their initial forays could address voter frustration over the Iran war, high consumer prices, and affordable healthcare.

They also plan to address what they see as widespread disgust over ethics breaches and corruption, which are thought to have contributed to the rejection of Republicans across the US.

"I can confidently say that we want to do a congressional stock trading ban," Democratic Senator Brian Schatz of Hawaii told Reuters on Thursday when asked what might be his top three legislative moves in early January.

Voters have expressed outrage for years over stock trading by lawmakers of both political parties. Many argue such trading is improper given members of Congress shape legislation, often behind closed doors, in actions that could affect prices of stocks and bonds.

House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries, who is expected to become the next House speaker, told reporters of his early goals in 2027. "We have to make sure that we're cleaning up the mess here in the Congress with the executive branch and at the Supreme Court and that should begin by prohibiting members of Congress from trading stocks," he said, including it in a long list of legislative musts.

Schatz, who is in line to become the No 2 Democrat in the new Congress that begins the first week of January, said the party's caucus was still working on reaching a consensus with Democrats in the House over the order of business.

Democrats' intra-party tensions between their moderates and left-wing lawmakers was on full display on Thursday when Senator Chris Van Hollen of Maryland, a progressive, announced that he will challenge more moderate Senator Chuck Schumer of New York for the party's top leadership job in the Senate.

Schumer insists that he has the votes to win in a closed-door vote early next month. They are hoping to get some Republican backing on their bills, something voters have said they long for.

Republican Senator Josh Hawley of Missouri said in an interview that he supports bipartisan initiatives, including raising the federal minimum wage, reversing his party's rural hospital cuts and banning stock trading. "Absolutely. It's my bill that's currently pending" in the Senate, he said of the stock trading ban.

He and progressive Democratic Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts have a bill targeting pharmacy benefit managers acting as middlemen in the drug supply chain.

Critics say the managers have too much influence over prescription drug prices.

Schatz argued the stock trading ban resonated with voters who "directly connected corrupt actions of government officials with them (consumers) paying more."

Besides the stock trading ban, Schatz rattled off two other initiatives: ending the Iran war and reversing Republican cuts to Medicaid, the federally backed healthcare programme for the poor and disabled. "How exactly we reverse the Medicaid cuts, that's yet to be settled on in terms of our techniques and our tactics," Schatz said.

Democrats are projected to hold at least 255 seats to Republicans' 169 in the House, with 12 contests still undecided.

In the Senate, the breakdown will be at least 55-44, with Democrats possibly gaining one more seat in Alaska when vote-counting is completed.

Most legislation in the Senate needs the backing of at least a 60-vote supermajority to advance toward passage.

That would mean luring at least four Republicans, potentially those currently holding seats in Alaska, Indiana, Kansas and Kentucky, for example, where the incumbents are all up for re-election in 2028.

At the same time, Democrats will have to move carefully to craft those bills to protect some of their incumbents who face re-election in 2028, including those holding Senate seats from Georgia, Arizona, Colorado, Ohio and Nevada.

That is where the legislative tensions could emerge. It is easy for lawmakers to say they have some support from the opposition on measures they want to advance.

It is harder to maintain that support once the bills are written.

If Democrats are unable to score bipartisan victories, they might have to resort to a procedural tactic Republicans successfully used to win tax cuts that mainly benefited the wealthy, coupled with social programme reductions.

The procedure sidesteps the need for the 60-vote majority in the Senate.

Instead, they could pass bills with a simple 51-vote majority.

For Democratic Senator Raphael Warnock of Georgia, who is up for re-election in 2028, his top three bills would be ending the Iran war, killing tariffs imposed by President Donald Trump and bringing back healthcare subsidies that Republicans let expire.

"I start there as a way of stopping the bleeding and then we can lay out a vision going forward," he said in a hallway interview.

No migrant caravan is en route to US: Sheinbaum

AFP
Mexico City

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum said yesterday that no migrant caravans were heading for the US border after her American counterpart Donald Trump threatened tariffs if she failed to block people traveling northward.

Sheinbaum's government has intervened to block several groups arriving from Central America since September, but at least two more groups have attempted the journey in recent days. "There is currently no caravan in transit to the northern border," the leftist leader told a daily press conference. Local authorities had dissuaded a group of people who began the trip last week, she said.

Trump on Thursday said "tariffs on Mexico will be IMMEDIATELY DOUBLED" if authorities failed to block the caravans.

Members of the caravans, one with about 1,000 people and another with around 100, have told AFP they hoped the Republican midterm-election defeat would lead to less stringent US border restrictions.

Democrats swept both chambers of Congress and won the governorship of Texas for the first time in more than three decades.

Mexico is Washington's top trading partner, and the pair are currently renegotiating the terms of their free trade deal.

A large portion of the goods the US imports from Mexico are not subject to tariffs, but steel and aluminum are subject to duties ranging from 25% to 50%.

Testing the 'Raider'



The United States Air Force's B-21 "Raider", the long-range stealth bomber that can be armed with nuclear weapons, rolls onto the runway at Northrop Grumman's site at Air Force Plant 42, during its first flight, in Palmdale, California, US. (**Reuters/File Photo**)

Three Cuban governors step down in unusual move

AFP
Havana

Three Cuban municipal governors left their jobs this week in an unusual succession of departures that has disrupted local power structures as the US-blockaded island suffers a deep economic crisis.

Between Tuesday and Thursday, President Miguel Diaz-Canel approved "the removal from office" of the three governors, according to the news site Cubadebate.

In Cuba, the president nominates gubernatorial and vice-gubernatorial candidates, who are then elected by councilors for a five-year term. Resignations are rare.

The governors in the eastern municipalities of Guantanamo and Las Tunas stepped down for "health problems" and "family and personal limitations" respectively, the pro-government media outlet wrote.

The central Camaguey municipality's governor stepped down following "errors committed in the performance of his duties," the official newspaper *Granma* reported on Tuesday.

Since January, Washington has launched a devastating set of new sanctions and an oil blockade against Cuba, crippling the island nation's economy and leading to widespread blackouts and shortages of necessities.

US President Donald Trump has hinted at launching a military intervention to overthrow the island's Communist ruling party, and last month the US Secretary of State urged Cubans to work with American intelligence services, adding they may do so discreetly.

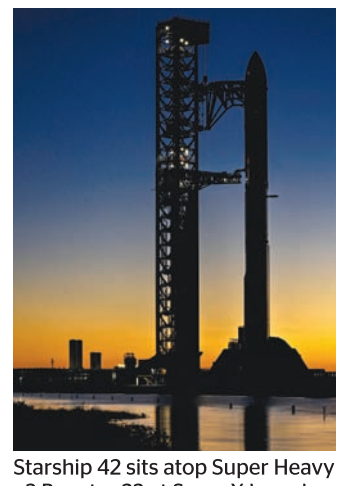
SpaceX to attempt first-ever twin 'catch' of Starship

AFP
Houston

Elon Musk's SpaceX was poised yesterday to carry out its latest test of the world's biggest and most powerful rocket, the Starship, with plans for the first-ever "catch" of both the booster and the spaceship. Successful recoveries of the two Starship components would mark a significant milestone in the space industry's decades-long pursuit of fully reusable rocket systems that can drastically reduce mission costs and make frequent launches possible.

"If successful, this will mark the first full recovery of an orbital launch system and a breakthrough moment in making Starship a reliable, rapidly reusable rocket," SpaceX said.

The company has caught the booster, dubbed Super Heavy, on three previous occasions, with the first stage descending vertically back to the launch site shortly after blastoff and nestling into mechanical "chopstick" arms. For the 15th Starship test flight, SpaceX aims to carry out its first attempt to capture the Starship spacecraft that gives the rocket system its name.



Starship 42 sits atop Super Heavy v3 Booster 22 at SpaceX launch complex pad 2 as preparations continue for its 15th test flight in Starbase, Texas. (**Reuters**)

It would be a groundbreaking moment in the development of the vessel, some versions of which are designed to launch internet satellites and data centers into orbit. Other iterations will be made to ferry people to the Moon and Mars.

A spacecraft that can be fully reused is the "Holy Grail" of the space industry, said Clayton Swope, an aerospace expert at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies.

"No one's really been able to do that so far," he said. "People have been trying to do that since the (Nasa) space shuttle. But the space shuttle ended up being kind of a compromise because a lot of the vehicle wasn't reusable."

Recovering an upper stage involves an extraordinary amount of precision, said Kathleen Curlee, a senior analyst at Georgetown University's Centre for Security and Emerging Technology.

"Getting Starship off the ground is an engineering achievement in and of itself, catching the upper stage involves millions of moving parts that all have to go right for a successful capture," she said.

The spaceship will be falling much faster and from a much higher altitude than the booster, with the vessel forced to withstand the extreme heat of reentering Earth's atmosphere.

As of yesterday morning, however, it was unclear if the launch would take place as planned as the US Federal Aviation Administration had not yet given its final approval.

Musk, the world's richest person, has already revolutionised the space sector with the partially reusable Falcon rockets, which are regularly employed to launch satellites and carry astronauts to the International Space Station.

But the Starship project has been plagued by years-long delays as SpaceX grapples with novel engineering challenges — even as Nasa is counting on the spaceship to serve as a lunar lander for its Artemis programme.

Other technical challenges include transferring fuel to Starship in orbit.

WORLD

China rules out hosting 2028 UN climate talks: sources

AFP
Antalya

China has decided against hosting the UN's annual climate talks in 2028 after having considered the possibility in recent months, sources familiar with the issue told AFP yesterday.

The decision leaves the door open for another Asian-Pacific country to organise COP33, as it would be the region's turn to host the summit.

In April, India withdrew its offer to host the event, without specifying a reason. Republic of Korea has previously expressed interest.

Beijing had contemplated for months whether to become a candidate but ultimately ruled it out, the sources said on condition of anonymity at the COP31 conference in Antalya, Turkiye.

The Guardian first reported the news.

The Chinese government never confirmed its possible interest in hosting COP33.

Asked about the report in The Guardian, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson said: "I am not aware of the relevant situation."

The spokesperson said the United Nations climate talks are "an important platform for global climate governance".

He added: "China will continue to commit itself to promoting the global green and low-carbon transition and international cooperation in responding to climate change."

China would have been an intriguing choice.

While it is the world's biggest emitter of greenhouse gases, it is also deploying renewable energy and electric vehicles at a breakneck pace.

China has also been active in UN climate negotiations, while the United States has skipped the talks since President Donald Trump took office in 2025.

Climate cooperation had been a key feature of the US-China relationship under presidents Barack Obama and Joe Biden.

The United States will elect a new president in 2028. The US elections usually take place before COPs.

COP33 will be particularly important as nations will undertake a "global stocktake" of progress on climate action and assess where the world has fallen short in meeting the goals of the Paris Agreement.

China warns against additional export controls on US chips after Nvidia scandal

China warned the US yesterday against putting additional export controls on semiconductors in the wake of the scandal surrounding AI chip giant Nvidia.

China "has consistently opposed the abuse of export control measures, which disrupts the stability of global industrial and supply chains and serves no party's interests," foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning told a regular briefing when asked about calls from US lawmakers to impose more limits on exports of chip equipment to China.

"China and the US should work together to implement the important consensus reached by their respective heads of state and maintain the stable development of China-US economic and trade relations," Mao said.

Nvidia co-founder Jensen Huang — who resigned Thursday — has admitted to an affair, reportedly with Alice Huang, a former senior executive at Singapore-based data centre company Megaspeed.

Reports allege the Commerce Department under Secretary Howard Lutnick may have failed to act on suspicions that Megaspeed was helping reroute restricted Nvidia technology to China.

US media quoted US lawmakers as saying that they were in favour of imposing additional export controls on chips to China as a result of the snowballing scandal.

"The export controls on chips to China has been a big issue around here. I'm in favour of limiting those exports," House speaker Mike Johnson was quoted as saying. "I think there is a developing consensus in Congress that is an important position to take."



A pedestrian walks in front of a Nvidia sign outside the company's headquarters. (**AFP**)

US intelligence reportedly circulated a memo this spring alleging that Alice Huang — no relation to Jensen Huang — was an asset of China's Ministry of State Security.

Beijing has rejected the allegations and on Thursday said that they are a "pretext to for imposing a technological blockade" to stop China advancing in artificial intelligence technology.

The furore comes ahead of a meeting expected next week between US President Donald Trump and Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping in Shenzhen in southern China at a Apec gathering. (**AFP**)

Takaichi to attend Apec in first China trip as PM

AFP
Tokyo

Japan said yesterday that Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi would visit China next week for the first time since she took office last year, attending an Asia-Pacific summit in Shenzhen.

The trip comes at a time of particularly fraught relations between the rival nations after Takaichi suggested in November last year that Japan may intervene in any attack on the island of Taiwan, which China claims as its territory.

"Prime Minister Takaichi is scheduled to visit the Philippines and China from November 16 to 19 to attend Asean-related summit meetings and the Apec summit," said deputy chief cabinet secretary Masanao Ozaki.

The visit to China will be her first since becoming prime minister in October last year.

Ozaki said that while at Apec, Takaichi will discuss issues such as "trade and investment, regional economic integration, economic and energy resilience, the digital economy... and present Japan's position on these matters".



Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi. (**AFP/File photo**)

But all eyes will be on any interaction with Chinese President Xi Jinping. Analysts say that a bilateral summit between the two leaders is very unlikely.

Multiple Japanese media reported that Tokyo had also asked Russia for a meeting with President Vladimir Putin at the gathering.

Relations between Tokyo and Moscow are at a low point after a Japanese journalist was arrested in Russia on spying allegations last month and assets belonging to Japan Tobacco were seized in the country.

Before the Shenzhen trip Takaichi will head to Manila for a meeting of the 11-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean).

Ozaki said a Quad meeting — including the leaders of Australia, India, Japan and the US — is being arranged on the sidelines of Asean.

China reacted furiously to Takaichi's comments on Taiwan, which came just weeks after she took office.

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

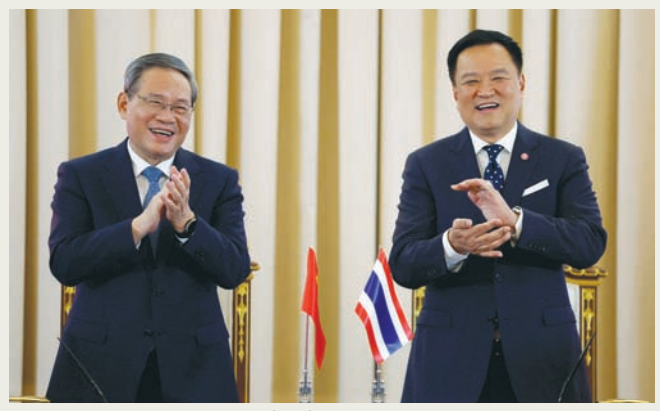
Takaichi last month called China an "important neighbour" and pledged to build a stable relationship in a policy address.

But she added that Japan would also "firmly assert our country's positions" and "strongly call for responsible behaviour".

While Beijing has refused to have ministerial talks with Takaichi's government, Xi sent a message of condolence to the family of former Japanese prime minister Yasuo Fukuda after he died last month, describing him "a longtime friend of the Chinese people".

In September, China's top diplomat Wang Yi said ties with Tokyo were "waiting to be normalised again" as he met former Japanese foreign minister Takeshi Iwaya, who was leading a trade delegation in Beijing.

Chinese premier in Thailand


Chinese Premier Li Qiang (left) and Thailand's Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul applaud during a signing ceremony for memorandums of understanding (MoUs) at Government House in Bangkok, yesterday. (**AFP**)

Malaysia probes Megaspeed subsidiary over possible adavnced AI chips diversion

AFP
Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia said yesterday it was investigating a subsidiary of Megaspeed International over the possible diversion of advanced AI chips to other countries, widening a scandal involving US chip giant Nvidia.

It came the day after Nvidia boss Jensen Huang resigned over an affair, reportedly with Alice Huang — a suspected Chinese spy and former top executive at Megaspeed, a Singapore-based data centre company.

Megaspeed is under scrutiny for allegedly steering Nvidia AI chips to China despite US export rules designed to slow the development of artificial intelligence technology by Beijing.

Malaysia's Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry (MITI) said Megaspeed's local subsidiary Speedmatrix is a tenant at data centres in Malaysia and is allowed to bring AI chips into the country without a permit or license.

But since July last year, any entity wanting to "export, reexport, transhipor transit high performance US AI chips from or through Malaysia" must get a permit.

Giving false information to customs authorities about such items is a "serious offence", the ministry said in a statement.

"MITI is therefore working with the Royal Malaysian Customs Department to determine whether any of the chips brought into Malaysia have since been reexported to other countries, and whether such reexports were carried out in accordance with the law."

The ministry said Speedmatrix "has never been cleared" of any wrongdoings.

MITI said it was also working "closely" with authorities in Singapore and the US "and is considering further measures to strengthen controls where necessary".

Megaspeed is also under investigation in neighbouring Singapore.

Singaporean authorities said servers containing the chips were being exported through the city-state to Malaysia and were suspected of being delivered to other destinations, contrary to declarations made in Singapore.

The Nvidia scandal has wiped almost half a trillion dollars off the company's market capitalisation, as it raises national security fears and leaves the AI industry in uncharted waters.

Singapore said on Thursday it had barred Alice Huang, a Chinese national, from re-entering the country in February for giving investigators inaccurate information about her role at Megaspeed, though she was not investigated for espionage.

El Nino mostly to blame for Indonesian wildfires: research

AFP
Jakarta

Wildfires that consumed vast swathes of Indonesia this year were driven largely by a strong El Nino, fuelled by climate change and decades of natural landscape destruction, researchers said yesterday.

El Nino was largely to blame for an extreme lack of rainfall in the Southeast Asian archipelago from July to October, reducing seasonal rainfall by about half, according to a report by scientists from the World Weather Attribution (WWA) group.

Climate change contributed by driving up temperatures.

"Seasonal temperatures from August to October were dominated by climate change — primarily from the burning of fossil fuels — which made the seasonal heat about 1.6C hotter," said the report.

"Human-induced warming made these (fire-prone) atmospheric conditions about three times more likely as well as more intense."

The researchers also pointed to deforestation and peatland drainage for agriculture, mining and logging as major contributors to the fire disaster.

Smoke from the wildfires made hundreds of thousands ill in Indonesia from breathing in toxic haze and exposed many more in neighbouring countries to dangerously high air pollution levels.

"Indonesia's landscapes have changed dramatically over the last 30 years, with extensive peatland drainage and deforestation creating landscapes that can be extremely vulnerable to ignition," said meteorologist Pramudhian Firdaus of the FLARE Wildfire Research group.

"These findings show how both emissions reductions and sustained forest and peatland protection are important in reducing future risk."

Wildfires have burned through 2.88mn hectares (7.1mn acres) so far in 2026, according to the Nusantara Atlas deforestation monitor.

The burned area figure — 18 times the size of London — increased nearly a million hectares in a month.

The Indonesian government has not confirmed or rejected the figure nor released its own estimate of area burnt since July.

Indonesia experiences fires every dry season, but this year's blazes have been particularly severe.

Middle East crisis fuels crude conflict in Myanmar civil war

AFP
Myaing, Myanmar

Myanmar's small-scale oil prospectors are under fire from all sides as rebels and the military battle to capture a cottage industry increasingly lucrative amidst the Middle East energy shock.

"As long as we work here, bad luck can kill us," said Htun Aung, a worker on an artisanal oil well in Myanmar's arid heartlands.

"But if the reality of death is hard to face, then making a living is even harder," said the 52-year-old, speaking under a pseudonym for security reasons.

Myanmar imports 90% of its fuel oil, official figures show, making it particularly vulnerable to supply issues caused by the US-Israeli war on Iran.

But the central region of Magway hosts a hardscrabble industry of domestic prospectors manning grimy derricks that squelch up crude oil in humble quantities.

The area is dubbed "Anyar Dubai", associating the Anyar landscape with the oil boom Emirate, despite the pitiable $50 per week earned by workers like Htun Aung who spend their days drenched in foul crude run-off.

With prices at Myanmar's petrol pumps nearly double what they were in late February, the underground "black gold" is an increasingly coveted prize of war.

"We just want to live in peace," said Htun Aung. "But now they strike from one side and the others strike from the other — they keep attacking each other."

"We've had to flee three, four, five times already," he added. "We run here, we run there. We fill up our motorbikes with fuel and run again."

Allied pro-democracy rebels claim to have controlled oil fields in Magway's Myaing township since 2023, the third year of a nationwide civil war triggered by a coup.

They patrol the dusty territory in a westward crook of the Irrawaddy river in ragtag columns and outfitted with rocket-propelled grenades, flak jackets, tote bags and flip-flops.


A member of the People's Defence Forces (PDF) resting in a foxhole at a position near an oil field in Myaing Township, Myanmar's Magway region, amid an offensive by the Myanmar military in the area. (AFP)

Rebels shelter in foxholes, camouflaged among thousands of oil wells dug in an unregulated practice dating back centuries.

Engine winches chug day and night, plunging plumbing tubes dozens of metres down boreholes before dragging them up filled with crude oil slurry.

Prospectors pay landowners up to $3,500 to lease a spot to drill, one veteran said, with no guarantee they will hit oil.

Some wells yield dribbles while others gush profit, filling tarpaulin-lined pits and barrels with oil hauled off to improvised refineries for processing into petrol and diesel.

"Anyar Dubai" has been "going viral" for its plentiful supply, said rebel spokesman Pyae Phyo Kyaw, at a time when Myanmar military-held areas have been rationing petrol.

He touted recent offensives fending off military advances, but admitted being battered by counter-attacks.

"We see it primarily as an attempt to destroy what has been a strong supply route and source of revenue for us," said the 35-year-old, speaking under his real name.

Myanmar's military could not be reached for comment.

But in September, a month-long military operation claimed to have captured over 130 wells in Myaing and 735 more in neighbouring Pakokku township.

Oil projects are not generally contested. The major ones are under staunch military guard, and on-the-books output is tiny by international standards — around 6,000 barrels a day last year, according to the US Energy Information Administration.

But artisanal fields are coveted by rebels precisely because of their modest size, according to Thomas Kean, senior Myanmar consultant for the International Crisis Group.

"Part of the reason why they're significant is because they're not globally significant," he said, explaining that they are small enough to thrive under the radar, yet big enough to fund guerrillas.

Spiking oil prices may not directly drive conflict, said Kean, highlighting a broader military campaign to evict rebels from heartland footholds by squeezing revenue sources.

But as the spoils of war become more profitable, the stakes get higher. "We're talking about millions of barrels a year coming out of these oil fields," he added.

"With global prices what they are, that's a significant amount of money."

India blocks over 100 speakers from opposition democracy conference

AFP
New Delhi

India blocked more than 100 international speakers from attending a democracy summit organised by the opposition Congress party, a senior opposition politician said yesterday.

Those denied visas included a Norwegian journalist who had previously questioned Prime Minister Narendra Modi about press freedom.

Shashi Tharoor, a Congress MP and former senior United Nations official, said 115 of the 315 speakers cleared by India's foreign ministry were subsequently refused entry or had their visas cancelled, "apparently on the instructions" of the home ministry.

"It is completely unclear under what provision of law the government has taken such a drastic step," Tharoor wrote on X.

"What a shame that a proud democracy has become so insecure that it must stifle any voices it fears will be critical!" he added.

Asked about the apparent denials, a foreign ministry spokesperson said "visa matters are sovereign functions of any country or any government".

Norwegian journalist Helle Lyng said on Wednesday that her visa was cancelled shortly before she was due to travel to India, where she had been invited to speak on media and press freedom.

She had questioned Modi at a press briefing during his visit to Oslo in May.

The Editors Guild of India condemned the cancellation, saying the move smacked of "bureaucratic overreach" and calling on the government to disclose its reasons and reverse the decision.

The two-day summit, which opened yesterday in the city of Hyderabad, brings together around 1,000 delegates from more than 70 countries to discuss democracy, climate change, artificial intelligence and global co-operation.

Indigenous rights in Australia 'embarrassing', says UN envoy

AFP
Sydney

Cases of Indigenous women shackled while giving birth and growing numbers of children in detention are "embarrassing" to Australia, the UN's special rapporteur on Indigenous rights said yesterday.

UN Special Rapporteur Albert Barume said he visited Australia because he saw Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's attempt to recognise First Nations people in the constitution as a sign of progress, despite a national referendum failing to pass in 2023.

Barume ended his two-week visit yesterday with a bleak message that Indigenous people's rights are "unsafe" in Australia because they are controlled by states and territories, not the national government.

"The state of protection of Indigenous people's rights is a bit embarrassing. I heard the story of women giving birth shackled — I couldn't believe it," he told a news conference in Sydney.


Albert K Barume, UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, speaks during a press conference in Sydney yesterday. (**AFP**)

Rights groups say the practice used for some women prisoners disproportionately impacts Indigenous women who experience higher rates of incarceration.

An Indigenous lawmaker sought to introduce a bill to stop the practice in the federal parliament in August.

Australia's international reputation was at stake, Barume said, after he was denied access to youth detention centres in Queensland state and the Northern Territory, which have the highest rates of Indigenous youth incarceration.

Officials in these states also refused to meet him.

"If you cannot be subjected to international scrutiny, you should not be in charge of human rights," he said.

The national government should be "the sole and only duty bearer for human rights", he added.

Over 90% of children in detention in Queensland and the Northern Territory are Indigenous, government data shows.

Indigenous Australians make up 6.6% of the youth population, but 60% of children aged 10 to 17 in detention nationally.

Among incarcerated children aged 10 to 13 years, 79% are Indigenous.

Barume said Australia should establish a national minimum age of criminal responsibility of 14 years and invest in programmes to prevent crime instead of jailing "huge numbers" of children.

"First Peoples' children require culturally appropriate care, protection, education, family and community support — not criminalisation," he said.

The failure of a national referendum on Indigenous recognition three years ago had "opened a floodgate of racism", he said, urging Albanese's government "not to abandon the idea".

The Australian attorney-general's office said the decision by Queensland and the Northern Territory not to co-operate with UN envoy's visit "does not reflect the position of the Albanese government".

It said it was working with the states to implement Australia's international obligations.


People gather at the accident site after a collision between a container truck and a passenger bus on a highway bordering Kaziranga National Park in the Golaghat district of Assam yesterday. (**AFP**)

Truck and bus collision in Assam kills at least 23 people

Reuters
Guwahati

At least 23 people were killed, and several others injured after a container truck collided with a bus in India's northeastern state of Assam yesterday, police said.

The accident took place on a highway located near the Unesco World Heritage site of Kaziranga National Park, which is famous for its one-horned rhinoceroses.

"There are 23 confirmed deaths, and seven people have been referred to the hospital," Swapnaneel Deka, superintendent of police of Golaghat district, under which Kaziranga falls, told Reuters. "It is likely the death toll will increase."

He said the bus was travelling to a neighbouring district, with around 30 people on board. The driver of the truck was injured.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said in a post on X that he was "deeply distressed by the tragic accident" and had sent a senior minister to the site to oversee relief arrangements.

"Our foremost priority now is to make sure the injured receive the best possible medical care without delay," he wrote.

UK eyes welfare cuts to tackle surge in youth unemployment

Reuters
London

Faisa Omar applied for more than 500 jobs in the UK and got nowhere — a slog she likened to "shouting into the void". It took a 10-week training course, tailored to the green energy sector, to finally land her a job within a month.

Her story is one the Labour government hopes to replicate on a much bigger scale, as it prepares to receive a report and proposals next week that would, controversially, restrict youth sickness and disability benefits in order to fund back-to-work programmes aimed at the nearly 1mn young people not in work, education or training.

Britain had 981,000 people aged 16-24 not in employment, education or training (NEET) in the second quarter of this year, accounting for 13% of the age group as a whole and a share that was the second-highest in Europe last year.

Its 15.6% youth unemployment rate is also unusually high compared with the 3.4% rate for older workers — elsewhere in Europe, the youth jobless rate is typically only just over double that of older age groups.

Former minister Alan Milburn, a party ally of Prime Minister Andy Burnham, warned of a "lost generation" in May in the first part of his report into youth unemployment.

Disagreement is likely to arise over Milburn's plans for how to fund more back-to-work programmes against a backdrop of stretched public finances, something he addressed in a newspaper interview on Thursday.

"I'm not saying that any of this will be easy, or that it will be pain-free," Milburn told the Times. "Candidly, it could mean that some people will get less financial support."

Milburn said earlier this year that he wanted to shift the 25-to-1 ratio of spending on benefits versus employment support more towards the latter, and draw lessons from the Netherlands and elsewhere where more young people are in work.

Next week he will propose barring under-25s from ill-health supplements to standard unemployment benefits and also moving them to a more restricted version of the main disability benefit.

But his report is unlikely to rapidly reduce the £8bn ($11bn) a year spent on benefits for young people.

Cuts are also likely to be unpopular among many lawmakers in the Labour Party who thwarted attempts by previous prime minister Keir Starmer to cut welfare, handing ammunition to opposition parties who accuse the governing party of favouring welfare recipients over workers.

Michael Houlihan, UK head of employment charity Generation, said programmes with a proven track record in getting people into jobs should be scaled up.

Around 70% of people on Generation's courses found a job within 12 months, double the average for similar ones, he said, with the key being to ensure courses were tailored to the precise needs of employers in sectors with vacancies.

For 27-year-old Omar, attending a course in 2023 at Generation focused on specific roles in green energy helped her nail down a job within a month.

"Before Generation I had the drive but I didn't have the map. So I didn't know how to get into sustainability. Climate change was one of my passions, but I didn't know how to ... find an accessible path into the green sector," he said.

One part of the problem now, according to James Tuttiett, an executive at IT consultancy FDM Group, is that artificial intelligence has reduced client demand for junior staff. He said FDM now had to train recruits for longer before hiring them out.

"You have this silent hiring freeze where AI can increasingly do a lot of jobs that exist in white-collar work," he said, adding that a higher minimum wage and increased employer social security payments had also limited hiring.

So-called NEETs' reasons for not being in work or training vary, but many lack educational qualifications or report having health conditions that make it harder to get a job.

Nye Cominetti, an economist at the left-leaning Resolution Foundation think tank, said Britain's welfare benefits were not unusually generous compared with European countries with lower rates of NEETs. But young people receiving health-related benefits in Britain faced fewer requirements to engage with a process of getting back to work.

Sonja Bekker, a professor of employment law at Utrecht University in the Netherlands, said her city sent people to knock on the doors of young people not in education or work, to offer solutions such as childcare or mental health support.

Vocational schools mean many Dutch pupils are on months-long work placements aged 17, and two-thirds of 16- to 17-year-olds have part-time jobs — compared with less than a fifth in Britain.

Even in the Netherlands, though, the rate of NEETs has begun to rise. Like in Britain, AI and taxes are sometimes blamed.

England's NHS triggers backup after Microsoft outage

England's National Health Service (NHS) activated contingency plans yesterday in response to the global Microsoft outage, reverting to "other IT systems or paper records" to maintain essential care and appointments.
"With the global Microsoft issue inevitably having a disruptive impact for staff, local NHS services are enacting long-standing measures to manage IT outages," a spokesperson said in a statement sent to AFP, acknowledging that the situation has disrupted staff operations.
A union leader earlier claimed that the outage was having a "serious impact" on Britain's state health service.
NHS staff receiving emergency calls were "unable to refer patient details in the normal way which is creating a massive backlog and has the potential for chaos", Rachel Harrison, public services head at the GMB union, said in the statement.
She added, however, that "emergency and life threatening call-outs appear to be unaffected".
NHS England insisted that patients in need of care should continue to call emergency hotline numbers or contact their local pharmacy.
The National Pharmacy Association, however, told AFP that the problem was affecting their members' "ability to communicate" with doctors' offices, causing delays in dealing with patients' prescriptions. (**AFP**)

Bangladesh unions urge restraint after protests

AFP
Dhaka

Bangladesh's key garment labour unions called for restraint yesterday after the industry's wage board agreed to raise the minimum wage following weeks of violent worker protests.

The South Asian nation of 170mn people is the world's second-largest garment exporter after China, producing clothes for major international brands including Fruit of the Loom, Levi Strauss and VF Corp, whose labels include Vans, Timberland and The North Face.

"Do not get involved in any subversive activities that could jeopardise the ongoing work of the wage board," union leader Meer Abul Kalam Azad told fellow workers.

Workers say rising food, housing, transport and healthcare costs have eroded their purchasing power in a country where inflation is running at around eight %.

They are demanding a minimum monthly wage of 30,000 taka ($240) — a 140% increase on the current 12,500 taka.

Unrest over the wages began in October and threatened to disrupt an industry that earns around $38bn annually, accounting for four-fifths of the country's export earnings and employing more than four mn workers.

Nazma Akhter, a veteran labour leader, called for workers to be "responsible".

"A minimum wage board has been formed, and the board is moving quickly," Akhter told reporters. "If they cannot secure the support of the workers, the wage board may not be able to move forward."

The government-appointed board, comprising representatives of employers and workers, is expected to announce the new minimum wage by December.

Separately, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) is scheduled to hold an emergency views-exchange meeting today, with wages and labour unrest expected to dominate discussions.

More than 200 garment factories remained closed on Thursday as workers stayed away.

The BGMEA said it has more than 4,500 member factories in Bangladesh.


Garment workers enter a factory to begin their shift in Baipail, near Dhaka. (**Reuters/File Photo**)

British govt approves asylum centre despite village 'independence' vote

The British government on Thursday approved a plan to convert an old defence facility into accommodation for more than 1,200 asylum seekers, despite a nearby village symbolically voting to leave the United Kingdom in protest against the project.
The Labour government, which has pledged to rehouse asylum seekers currently accommodated in hotels, plans to open a number of reception centres on former military sites.
On Thursday the government said it had approved one near the village of Piddington, a community of 350 inhabitants 25 kilometres (15 miles) from Oxford, which held a ballot in September to oppose the plan.
The housing and communities minister Angela Rayner "has granted full planning permission for the temporary, phased use of the former MOD Bicester storage site", a spokesperson said.
The government plans to house around 1,250 asylum seekers on the former Ministry of Defence site, all single men between 18 and 65.
This summer, Piddington residents held protests to oppose the project, saying they were worried about their safety, particularly that of women.
In the referendum in September, 285 out of 312 votes were cast in favour of seceding from the United Kingdom and "pursuing self-determination".
The vote had no legal weight but made headlines around the world, putting the village at the centre of the UK's debate on asylum and immigration for a few days.
Greg Smith, an MP for the opposition Conservative Party whose constituency is near the site, condemned the decision as a "disaster".
"This is totally outrageous and proves this government don't give two hoots about us," he posted on X, vowing to challenge the decision. (**AFP**)

Australia's spy agency, federal police hit by Microsoft outage

Australia's spy agency and federal police were among organisations caught up in an outage of Microsoft programmes yesterday, with the government triggering an agreement to ensure priority restoration of services.
Users worldwide have been unable to access services for hours, including Microsoft 365, Outlook and Teams.
At a news conference, Australian Security Intelligence Organisation Director-General Mike Burgess and Australian Federal Police Commissioner Krissy Barrett confirmed their organisations have been affected.
Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke said Microsoft told him it did not believe the outage was caused by a cyber attack.
The government has activated an agreement to ensure Australia gets prioritised in restoring services, Burke said. (**Reuters**)

OPINION

All eyes on Apec with Trump, Putin and Xi set to attend

Attention will focus next week on a summit of US, Chinese and Russian leaders set for the 21-member gathering of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) forum in China's southern technology hub of Shenzhen. Founded as an informal 12-member dialogue effort in 1989 in the Australian capital of Canberra, it has become the region's premier economic forum to foster ties on advancing growth, trade and investment.

Accounting for about 62% of global GDP and roughly half of global trade, the grouping of "member economies" rather than nations allows participation by Chinese-ruled Hong Kong and democratically governed Taiwan, which Beijing claims as its own territory. It does not include India, the world's most populous nation, however.

Apec operates on non-binding commitments reached strictly by consensus, with commitments undertaken on a voluntary basis. The Apec Economic Leaders' Meeting is set for November 18 and 19, preceded by an annual summit of CEOs on November 17-18.

China is hosting the summit for the third time, after events in the commercial hub of Shanghai in 2001 and the capital, Beijing, in 2014. Both domestic and international reasons govern the choice of Shenzhen, adjacent to the financial centre of Hong Kong, said Chim Lee, senior analyst at the Economist Intelligence Unit.

As part of China's Greater Bay Area home to Hong Kong and Macau, which Beijing seeks to establish as a global hub for technology and innovation, the city offers a platform to showcase China's vision for development and trade. It also highlights Shenzhen's resilience to geopolitical turbulence, Lee added. The city is the base of several leading Chinese auto and tech giants, such as BYD, Huawei and Tencent.

China has not yet officially said who will attend, but US President Donald Trump, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr are among those expected to be present. The leaders of Canada, Australia, Mexico and Indonesia are also due to attend, along with those of Malaysia, South Korea and Vietnam among Asia-Pacific nations. Taiwan has designated Stan Shih, founder of Acer, as its envoy. Tokyo said on Friday that Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi will attend. New Zealand also confirmed on Friday that Prime Minister Christopher Luxon would attend.

Middle East Instability: The economic ripple effects of conflict, such as risks to energy security, trade flows, supply chains and inflation are major concerns expected to figure in talks. Tripartite Dynamics: All eyes are on the possible meeting of Chinese, Russian and US leaders. China is hesitant to engage in talks on nuclear disarmament, as it has fewer such weapons than the other two, analysts said. The US and Russia will also be keen to discuss the Ukraine war, but not necessarily China, they said.

China-US Relations: A key focus to see if ties can stay stable. Both sides are falling short on commitments to an extended trade truce, analysts said. Rare earth supplies, artificial intelligence and tariffs are also likely to figure on the agenda, with US arms sales to Taiwan closely watched.

China's ties with Japan and the Philippines: Strains in Japan and China ties have persisted since Prime Minister Takaichi angered Beijing in November 2025 by suggesting that Japan could deploy its military if a Chinese move against neighbouring Taiwan also threatened its territory. China-Philippines relations will likewise be closely watched amid continuing tension in the disputed waterway of the South China Sea.

Apec'S members are Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Peru, the Philippines, Russia, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, the United States and Vietnam. — Reuters

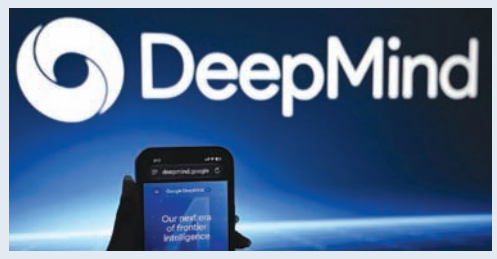
Climate predictions and Artificial Intelligence

AI is often criticised for the energy its data centers consume, which is driving more fossil fuel use and contributing to climate change. But it is also helping meteorologists make markedly more accurate forecasts, including for hurricanes, which are notoriously complex to predict and pose a growing threat in a warming world.

The US National Hurricane Center (NHC) began using Google DeepMind's AI model last year and is working with the company on developing its successor. The work has come to the fore this year -- as an intense El Nino weather pattern led to a record number of hurricanes in the Pacific, and Hurricane Isaias struck the southeastern United States last month as a major storm.

Ferran Alet, a DeepMind research scientist who leads its cyclone work, explained that Google doesn't have a hurricane-specific model -- rather it is the same model used for everyday weather, pushed to its limits. "We see extreme weather as almost like something we should strive for because it's the most challenging thing for us and then everything will follow," he told AFP.

Prior to AI, the NHC used several kinds of models to forecast tropical cyclones. "Dynamical"



models use supercomputers to solve the equations of fluid motion and thermodynamics that govern the atmosphere. Statistical models rely on historical relationships between storm behaviour and variables such as location and date, and hybrids combine physics and statistics. AI models, on the other hand, learn from large datasets, like statistical models, but on a vastly bigger scale and with the ability to pick up far more complicated patterns.

A DeepMind paper published in Nature in August found the model gave forecasters on average an extra day's worth of predictive accuracy, with three-day forecasts as good as what earlier models could provide for only the next two days. — AFP

Message from Berlin



Supporters of the climate campaign group Fridays for Future hold illuminated letters spelling out "Pay Your Climate Debt" as they take part in a protest in Berlin yesterday on the occasion of the UN climate summit COP31, being held in Antalya, Turkey until November 20. (**AFP**)

Urgent climate finance pleas at COP31 face non-urgent response

By Simon Jessop and **William James**
Reuters

- **War, inflation, national security have forced a shift in focus**
- **Most vulnerable nations say climate insecurity is the most pressing issue**

Urgent pleas for cash from poor nations most exposed to the kind of climate-related disasters that have marked this year risk meeting a sluggish response at Turkey's COP31 talks as Western governments put national security and living costs first.

Two years ago, rich countries agreed at UN climate talks they would triple climate funding for poorer countries to $300bn per year by 2035 versus a previous 2020 target. Also by 2035, financing from all public and private sources combined would be $1.3tn annually.

The rich countries met their 2020 target two years late.

Since then, climate action has slipped down the political agenda for Western governments as US President Donald Trump has withdrawn international funding, while wars in Ukraine and the Middle East have added to inflationary pressures and the need to spend on security.

Vulnerable small island nations say the cash they need to repair damage and to guard against future climate-related crises is again arriving too slowly and their own budgets have shrunk.

"Like many small island developing states, we remain in a perpetual climate disaster recovery mode," Solomon Islands Prime Minister Matthew Wale told the conference. "We cannot build resilience while our fiscal space erodes."

Even when money is available, technical hurdles set by lenders can stretch the administrative capacity of small states. For many developed nations, facing international and domestic unrest as citizens protest against the rising cost of living, their focus has narrowed.

Britain, which has sought to be a leader in addressing climate change, said in July savings made from switching some climate finance contributions from grants to loans would be used to help fund a cap on domestic bus fares. Meanwhile, defence spending has climbed significantly.

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute estimated in April that world military expenditure reached $2.89tn in 2025, up 2.9% in real terms from 2024. Marshall Islands President Hilda Heine said military defence ultimately was the smaller concern.

"We are told there is no money, but as spending on war grows, the greatest security threat we face remains underfunded. I appeal to you: Find money for life, not death," she said in her speech to the conference in the Turkish Mediterranean city of Antalya.

IMPLEMENTATION, NOT NEW TARGETS

As they respond to the contemporary mood, host country Turkey and lead negotiator Australia have emphasised making previous pledges work, rather than securing a new headline target at the conference, which continues until the end of next week.

"COP31 must respond to the global moment and send a clear message to accelerate implementation," Australia's COP31 negotiating president Chris Bowen said. He also said finance must be "faster, simpler and fairer".

Analysis by previous COP host Brazil published earlier this week found that $137bn was mobilised in 2024, a slight increase on 2023, but that direct aid and future commitments to multilateral funds were lower.



Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva poses with attendees on the day of a meeting called Meeting with Civil Society at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP31) in Antalya, Turkey. (**Reuters**)



California Governor Gavin Newsom takes part in a fireside chat, as part of the 'America Is All In' US Climate Alliance, and Climate Mayors COP31 panel. (**Reuters**)

Current trends suggested provision would fall $840bn short of the $1.3tn goal, it said. "Geopolitical tensions, constrained fiscal space in many developing countries and the high cost of capital where it is most needed are among the obstacles," the report said.

By way of solutions, it urged measures such as risk-sharing and clearer links between national plans and budgets. Some smaller nations have taken novel steps to find cash and to spur richer nations to match it. The Solomon Islands pledged $400,000 from its own pocket on Thursday, saying it was determined to show leadership and calling on rich countries to do the same. The Bahamas committed $75mn to protect and restore its seagrass meadows, which store carbon, to try to persuade investors to fund verified carbon projects.

UNCLOGGING THE SYSTEM

Both public and private funding provide climate finance grants, loans, aid and investment in measures ranging from renewable energy to flood defences. Multilateral development banks are a conduit for finance that leverages capital provided by shareholder countries to increase lending power and they say they are delivering. Their lending reached record levels in 2025, according to the European Investment Bank.

But, they could do more, according to Washington-based think tank the Center for Global Development and recipients of the finance have said the development banks should make access easier. Addressing that, a group of multilateral funds told the COP31 talks they would rely more on one another's assessments in co-financed operations rather than having to go through multiple overlapping processes.

For private investors, the most obvious issue is the risk of investing in an instrument that does not guarantee returns. Given how unforthcoming the world's richer governments have been, the private sector is ever more important. "Our clients see opportunities in the energy transition, but they need reliable power, predictable costs and confidence in customer demand before they invest," HSBC Chief Sustainability Officer Julian Wentzel said. "COP31 needs to help create that confidence."

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CHAIRMAN
Abdullah bin Khalifa al-Attiyah
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Faisal Abdulhameed al-Mudahka
DEPUTY MANAGING EDITOR
Kamran Rehmat

P.O.Box 2888, Doha, Qatar
editor@gulf-times.com
4435 0478 (News)
4446 6404 (Sport)
44466636 (Home delivery)
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Amir, delegation depart Istanbul

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani left Istanbul yesterday after chairing Qatar's delegation to the 12th meeting of the Supreme Strategic Committee between Qatar and Turkiye. His Highness and the accompanying delegation were seen off upon departure at Istanbul International Airport by Minister of National Defence of the Republic of Turkiye Yasar Guler; several senior Turkish officials; and ambassador of Qatar to Turkiye Faisal bin Abdullah al-Hanzab . HH the Amir was accompanied by HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani, along with an official delegation. (**QNA**)

Qatar, Turkiye deepen strategic ties

From Page 1

Co-operation will also expand in healthcare, labour, youth and sports, environmental protection, family services and humanitarian assistance. Both countries agreed to strengthen institutional co-ordination, exchange expertise and implement existing agreements. They also welcomed the entry into force of their humanitarian aid co-operation agreement and pledged closer co-ordination on international relief operations.

On regional issues, Qatar and Turkiye reaffirmed their support for a ceasefire in Gaza, unrestricted humanitarian access and international efforts towards reconstruction and early recovery. They condemned Israeli actions in Gaza and the occupied West Bank, including settlement expansion, forced displacement and violations of Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem. Both sides reiterated their support for an independent Palestinian state based on the June 4, 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and reaffirmed the importance of UNRWA's humanitarian mandate.

The communique also addressed developments in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, Sudan, Somalia and Cyprus. The two countries stressed the importance of sovereignty, territorial integrity, political stability and diplomatic solutions. Regarding tensions involving the United States and Iran, they emphasised dialogue, de-escalation, protection of civilians and uninterrupted navigation through the Strait of Hormuz.

Qatar and Turkiye further agreed to strengthen co-operation in mediation and conflict resolution, counterterrorism and international diplomacy, while expanding collaboration between the Doha Forum and Antalya Diplomacy Forum. The two sides concluded by reaffirming their commitment to implementing the committee's decisions and agreed to hold the 13th Supreme Strategic Committee meeting in Qatar in 2027.

Gord entities sign agreements with Oman Net Zero Centre at COP31

From Page 1

Complementing these efforts, the MoU between CACE and ONZC focuses on strengthening Oman's operational readiness for Article 6 implementation. Areas of co-operation include institutional capacity building, national registry operations, mitigation outcome authorisations, corresponding adjustments, benefit-sharing practices, and reporting under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The agreement also provides a framework for knowledge exchange on carbon market policies and regulatory arrangements, alongside exploring facilitation for carbon credit monetisation through auctions, calls for proposals, and carbon exchange facilities.

Together, the agreements bring technical and institutional capabilities to support Oman's evolving carbon market ecosystem, combining GCC's experience in carbon crediting standards and infrastructure with CACE's expertise in policy support, Article 6 implementation, and market operations.

Commenting on the co-operation, Minister of Energy and Minerals of the Sultanate of Oman Eng Salim bin Nasser al-Aufi said: "Developing a credible and well-functioning carbon market is an important part of Oman's pathway towards net-zero emissions by 2050. Our co-operation with GCC and CACE provides an opportunity to strengthen technical capacities, climate finance and policy expertise and explore solutions that support the implementation of Article 6. By building on our national carbon market framework and existing infrastructure, we aim to facilitate effective participation in international carbon markets while maintaining alignment with Oman's national priorities."

Speaking on the occasion, Founding Chairman of GCC, CACE and Gord Dr Yousef Alhorr said: "The effective implementation of Article 6 requires more than policy frameworks. The quality and integrity of carbon markets depend on credible standards, experienced personnel, reliable infrastructure and the institutional capacity to translate commitments into action. Through these agreements with the Oman Net Zero Centre, we aim to bring together GCC's infrastructure, experience and expertise and CACE's policy support to strengthen Oman's carbon market readiness. This co-operation also reflects our broader commitment to supporting practical and transparent carbon market development across the region."

Oman Net Zero Centre (ONZC) is responsible for co-ordinating Oman's pathway towards net-zero emissions by 2050 and overseeing its national carbon market framework, including the authorisation of mitigation outcomes and operation of the Meezan registry.

EU leaders told to 'act now' to stay in AI race

AFP
Dublin

The EU must "act now" to ensure Europe stays in the AI race with the US and China, French AI firm Mistral's chief executive Arthur Mensch told a summit of the bloc's leaders yesterday.

The leaders heard from Mensch and Nobel-prize winner Geoffrey Hinton, widely known as one of the "godfathers" of AI, as they discussed how Europe can strike a balance between its AI ambitions and with its desire to protect citizens from the growing risks posed by the technology.

"Europe has all the technology and the talent to lead the AI race," Mensch, whose company is considered Europe's leading AI model developer, told the leaders, according to comments shared with AFP.

"What it needs now is speed, financing and a strong co-ordination between member states."

He said the decisions taken over the next two years would shape the industry for the next decade.

"That is why we call on European leaders to act now. For now, the choice is still ours," he said.

Mistral has pushed for Europe to charge ahead on AI, in contrast to calls by US CEOs including OpenAI's Sam Altman and Anthropic's Dario Amodei this year to slow down AI development.

Top EU official Roberta Metsola said she was tired of hearing that Europe had "somehow lost the AI race".

"We have world class talent, we have a great... ecosystem from a technology perspective," Metsola — the president of the European Parliament — told reporters before the informal summit began.

The summit comes against the backdrop of a scandal roiling Nvidia, a central player in the AI industry and a huge investor in the EU, after revelations CEO Jensen Huang had extramarital affairs — including with a woman accused of spying for China.

Nvidia has had hundreds of billions of dollars wiped from its value and continued to drop yesterday and broader tech stocks were also struggling, as traders digested Huang's resignation a day earlier.

Former Google researcher Hinton joined the EU leaders discuss how to protect rights as well as the security challenges posed by the technology.

Hinton and fellow computer scientist Yoshua Bengio warned of AI's threats in the months after the release of OpenAI's ChatGPT in 2022, which kickstarted the latest AI frenzy.

EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas warned of a "dark side of AI".

"We can all already see this in the battlefield in Ukraine, where you have drones equipped by artificial intelligence to really train to find anybody to kill," Kallas explained.

Estonia and Finland said in a letter this week that Europe needed to "establish EU-level arrangements for responding to serious AI incidents", calling for "developing advanced AI and governing it responsibly".

Pointing to past overdependence on non-EU suppliers for fossil fuels and critical minerals, Estonia's Prime Minister Kristen Michal told AFP that the mistake should not be repeated. "We should not make the same mistake. We should invest in new technologies."

'Europe's security separate from Ukraine peace talks'

Reuters
Dublin



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, Romania's President Nicusor Dan, Lithuania's President Gitanas Nauseda and Poland's Prime Minister Donald Tusk during a photo in Dublin. (**Reuters**)

EU leaders said on yesterday that Europe's security structure should not be a subject for Ukraine-Russia peace negotiations, but they did not answer the question of who should speak for Europe in any future talks.

The Kremlin said on yesterday that Russia would be open to European countries taking part in Ukraine peace talks if it saw they were ready to contribute to the peace process.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz described the Kremlin's comments as "the same old game" and said that Europe and the US agreed on a clear message.

"There will be no discussions about Ukraine without Ukraine, and no discussions about Europe without Europe. Furthermore, there is no need to talk about European security architecture. We have that already," Merz told reporters during a summit of European Union leaders in Dublin.

Russian officials have called for a broad agreement on Europe's security architecture to be reached before tackling the specifics of the war. Before its invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russia demanded the withdrawal of Nato forces from countries that joined the alliance after 1997. Nato rejected the demand.

US negotiator Jared Kushner said in Moscow on Thursday that he had begun discussions with European partners on the continent's security architecture.

EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said Russian calls for discussions about Europe's security architecture risked diverting attention from the need for a ceasefire. Latvian Prime Minister Andris Kulbergs called such discussions "a trap".

During a meeting on Thursday, leaders from Poland, the Baltics and Nordic states warned against brainstorming with the US or Russia about Europe's security architecture, according to a European diplomat and a European official.

Forty European countries, meeting as a broader group in Dublin on Thursday, signed a declaration saying that any matter affecting European security should be decided with the involvement of Europeans.

EU leaders broadly agreed that Europe needed to speak with one voice, but did not settle on a single individual to do so. Merz said discussions would continue.

"There are established institutional forms of (EU) representation — Kaja Kallas, for instance, is part of this — but the E3 format has also proven very effective," he said, in reference to an informal security grouping of France, Germany and Britain, which is no longer an EU member but a prominent Nato ally.

"Moreover, we always include Italy and Poland," Merz added.

Representatives from Britain, France, Germany, Italy and the EU attended Russia-Ukraine talks in Abu Dhabi earlier this week, where both Moscow and Kyiv cited some progress, though there was no sign of a breakthrough on key issues such as territory.

Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson said Britain, one of Europe's top three military powers, certainly had to be included in any future talks and that the five countries plus EU institutions would make sense.

"I'm quite flexible on that, so I think what we actually say is more important than the exact configuration of the people in the room," he said.

Moscow car bomb wounds former aide to pro-Russian Ukrainian politician

Reuters
Moscow

A car bomb in Moscow wounded a onetime spokesman for a pro-Russian former prime minister of Ukraine on yesterday, Russian investigators said, the second such explosion in the country in two days.

Sergei Zavorotniy, once a top aide to Mykola Azarov, who was Ukraine's prime minister from 2010 to 2014, was hospitalised after a car he was driving blew up on a street in Chertanovo, a district of the Russian capital, according to the investigators' statement.

Moscow has blamed Ukraine for previous assassinations of senior military officials and people linked to Russia.

There was no immediate comment from Ukraine yesterday.

Ren TV and the 112 Telegram channel both reported that Zavorotniy had lost his left arm in the attack and was in hospital with a concussion, rib fractures and other injuries.

The Baza Telegram channel published a photograph of a black four-door car with a smashed windshield, doors and front bumper on a city street.

Russia's Investigative Committee, which handles serious crimes, said it was investigating the incident.



Investigators work at the site of a car explosion which wounded Sergei Zavorotniy, a former spokesman for the pro-Russian former prime minister of Ukraine, Mykola Azarov (2010 -2014), in Moscow. (**Reuters**)

Zavorotniy's former boss Azarov fled to Russia in 2014, when Ukrainian street protests which became known as the Maidan Revolution ousted pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovych after he backed away from a pledge to develop closer ties with the European Union.

Azarov told Russia's TASS state news agency yesterday that he had no information about the car bomb, except that Zavorotniy had survived.

The explosion was the latest in a series of apparent assassination attempts inside Russia.

On Thursday a member of the Russian military was killed by a car bomb in St Petersburg.

Ukrainian sources have claimed responsibility in some cases, while denying involvement others. Kyiv has not commented on Thursday's attack.

Azarov and Yanukovych fled for Russia after more than 100 demonstrators during the Maidan Revolution were killed in the Ukrainian capital Kyiv as security forces cracked down on mass protests. In 2019 a Ukrainian court sentenced Yanukovych to 13 years in prison in absentia for treason, and Kyiv later placed sanctions on him and Azarov.

Zavorotniy called the sanctions against his former boss emblematic of "a kind of Ukrainian-style McCarthyism, where local authorities simply 'snap to attention' and carry out the orders of their overseas supervisors", in comments to Russia's RBC newspaper.

Zavorotniy became Azarov's top aide after a career as a foreign correspondent in Latin America during the Soviet era for the Moscow-based *Komsomolskaya Pravda* newspaper, which had a peak daily circulation of 21mn copies.

Alexander Kots, who covers the Ukraine war for the newspaper, described Zavorotniy in an article yesterday as a historian of Latin America who wrote his doctoral thesis on Cuba.

He said Zavorotniy had once chatted with Colombian author Gabriel Garcia Marquez in a hotel lobby in Mexico and had penetrated the inner circle of former US-backed Chilean military ruler Augusto Pinochet.

After Zavorotniy moved to Russia in 2014, he began working as a political commentator, writing articles criticising the Ukrainian security establishment, according to Kots.

COP31 wish list includes fossil fuel transition

AFP
Antalya, Turkiye

COP31 leaders released yesterday a wish list of priorities from countries to potentially include in a final decision at the UN climate talks, including the contentious transition away from fossil fuels.

Australia, which is steering the negotiations in a co-hosting arrangement with Turkiye, has pushed for the climate conference to produce a "cover decision" — an overarching political agreement negotiated by consensus. As the two-week conference approaches its midway point, the Australian team published a "Summary of Reflections" expressed by countries at the talks in the Mediterranean resort of Antalya.

The list — which does not name any nation — includes several issues that have divided wealthy, developing and oil-rich countries at every climate gathering over the years. "There's all kinds of signals being sent here about what could be in the cover decision," Alden Meyer, an expert at the climate think tank E3G, told AFP.

"The big question is what can survive that test of opposition by different groups of countries," he said. Chief among them is the "transition away from fossil fuels in energy systems", which was already agreed in a hard-fought decision at the COP28 summit in Dubai in 2023.

But explicit mentions of the fossil fuel transition were left out of the final decisions at COP29 in Azerbaijan and COP30 in Brazil, with oil-producing countries accused of blocking the wording.

France favours pressurising Houthis

It is necessary to raise pressure on Yemen's Houthis, France's foreign ministry spokesperson said yesterday.

"Our position is that it is necessary to increase pressure on the Houthis so that they put an end to their unacceptable attacks and provocations, particularly against Saudi territory, but not only there," Pascal Confavreux said on whether Paris backed the idea of the EU designating the Houthis as a terrorist organisation.

Saudi Arabia is pressing the EU for the move, but has yet to overcome European concerns that this could undermine a future peace process, six European officials said. (**Reuters**)

QATAR

Qatar calls for unhindered humanitarian access to Gaza at UN briefing

QNA
New York



The State of Qatar, the United Kingdom and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan have called for the immediate and unrestricted delivery of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip, warning that severe shortages of shelter and essential supplies are putting civilians at further risk as winter approaches.

The call was made during a media briefing at the UN headquarters in New York, attended by HE the Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the UN Sheikha Alya Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani, alongside representatives of 53 countries supporting the initiative.

In a joint statement, the three countries said the full and immediate entry of humanitarian assistance, as outlined in UN Security Council Resolution 2803, had yet to be achieved.

They expressed concern over the lack of adequate shelter for large numbers of people in Gaza, warning of increased risks of hypothermia, respiratory infections and waterborne diseases.

The statement noted that developments since the ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas took effect showed that the humanitarian situation in the strip could improve when there is political will.

The group urged the incoming Israeli government to facilitate the rapid delivery of aid through all available crossings and land routes, and to allow essential supplies, including fuel, water, sanitation equipment, medical supplies and shelter materials, into the territory.

It also called for the resumption of medical referrals to hospitals in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, as well as greater protection for healthcare workers, humanitarian personnel and medical facilities.

The statement further called for transparent investigations into attacks targeting humanitarian and healthcare workers and urged that international delegations and journalists be allowed into Gaza.

The three countries reaffirmed their commitment to supporting emergency winter preparations and efforts to restore essential healthcare services and rehabilitate Gaza's damaged health infrastructure, in co-operation with the Palestinian Authority, the transitional National Committee for the Administration of Gaza, the UN and humanitarian partners.

They also stressed the vital role of the UN and neutral international humanitarian organisations including the International Red Cross and the Red Crescent Movement in delivering assistance to the population.





Around 11,000 people from diverse backgrounds turned out for Diabetes Qatar's annual World Diabetes Day walkathon at Aspire Park yesterday, joining efforts to promote prevention and healthier lifestyles.
PICTURES: Shaji Kayamkulam

Scores attend World Diabetes Day walkathon at Aspire Park

By Sara Eljack
Doha







Families, students and representatives of various institutions joined around 11,000 people at Aspire Park yesterday for Diabetes Qatar's annual walkathon, highlighting the importance of prevention, early detection and healthier lifestyles.

Held under the theme "Step towards a healthier life", the World Diabetes Day celebration was attended by Diabetes Qatar chairman Sheikh Dr Mohammed bin Hamad al-Thani and executive director Dr Abdullah al-Hamaq, along with supporters from across the community.

The event was part of Diabetes Qatar's "Early Intervention to Address Diabetes" campaign, which runs throughout November. The programme featured diabetes risk assessments, health screenings, educational activities, sports and recreational activities, and family entertainment.

In a press statement, Dr al-Hamaq said the strong turnout reflected the community's interest in learning about diabetes and adopting healthier habits.

"Through this year's campaign, we are highlighting the importance of early intervention, recognising risk factors and getting screened at the right time. These steps can help prevent type 2 diabetes and reduce the risk of diabetes-related complications," he said.

He added that the annual walkathon brings people of all ages together to raise awareness, encourage regular physical activity and show support for people living with diabetes and their families.

Speaking to *Gulf Times* on the sidelines of the event, Dr Amal Adam Mustafa, healthcare manager at Diabetes Qatar, stressed the need to strengthen public awareness as diabetes rates continue to rise worldwide.

Dr Mustafa noted that the association was organising educational programmes throughout November in schools and workplaces. These include a forum scheduled for November 16 to discuss the rights of students living with diabetes and ways to support families whose children have the condition. Topics will include psychological support, carbohydrate counting and treatment plans, equipping parents with practical information to manage their children's daily needs.



Meanwhile, Khulood al-Mulla from Diabetes Qatar's Public Relations Department said the association would organise Al Bawasil Camp in December, bringing together children living with diabetes from Qatar and other countries.

The week-long residential camp aims to equip children with practical skills to manage their condition independently.

"We teach children how to depend on themselves, how to calculate their insulin and how to manage their food," she said.

The camp will include overnight accommodation, outdoor trips and recreational activities, alongside a structured programme running from morning until evening.

The walkathon was sponsored by AlRayan Bank, with support from health, sports and community organisations. Dr al-Hamaq thanked the sponsor, participating organisations, partners, volunteers and members of the public for helping make the event possible.

Through its November campaign and year-round educational initiatives, Diabetes Qatar seeks to promote early intervention, encourage timely diagnosis and improve health outcomes for people living with diabetes and those at risk of developing the condition.

Qatar's boat, yacht market records up to 25% growth this year

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter



Qatar's boat and yacht market saw demand and sales grow by up to 25% in 2026 compared with the previous year, driven by rising interest in marine activities, an expanding customer base, and continued development of the country's domestic marine manufacturing industry.

Industry executives speaking on the sidelines of the Qatar Boat Show, which recently concluded at Old Doha Port, highlighted the sector's strong performance, noting that the event provided an important platform for launching new products, securing commercial agreements and partnerships, and promoting Qatari companies and manufacturers across regional and international markets.

The 2026 edition attracted more than 31,000 visitors over four days, with all tickets sold out. It featured 546 brands from 14 countries across an exhibition area of 277,000 square metres. Gulf participation increased by 30%, while Qatari exhibitors accounted for 55% of total participants, compared with 45% international exhibitors. Furthermore, 70% of exhibitors renewed their participation, reflecting the event's growing commercial significance within the marine industry.

Abdulaziz al-Haram, general manager of a boat factory, said the exhibition offered an important opportunity to showcase the progress of Qatar's domestic marine manufacturing industry and highlight the capabilities of local factories alongside regional and international competitors.

He said the factory recorded sales growth of more than 25% in 2026 compared with the previous year, with its products available in Qatar and exported to markets across the Gulf, Africa, and Asia. Al-Haram also announced that the company has signed an agreement to represent the Qatari manufacturer in the Maldives, opening new opportunities for international expansion.

With 22 years of experience in boat and yacht manufacturing, the factory recently introduced a 62-foot yacht with a 16-foot beam and outboard engines. Prices for its products range from around QR10,000 to QR3.5mn, depending on specifications, equipment and customer requirements. He added that the company offers versatile designs, including a three-in-one boat that can serve as a yacht, a speedboat or a traditional cargo vessel, catering to different customer needs.

Louay al-Sheikh, sales manager at a yacht company, said the company recorded demand growth of between 15% and 25% in 2026 compared with the previous year, supported by growing interest in marine activities and an expanding pool of buyers despite market challenges. The company's services extend beyond yacht and boat sales to include maintenance, repairs, after-sales support, brokerage of pre-owned yachts and yacht management.

Al-Sheikh said prices for smaller sports boats start at around QR1mn, while larger Majesty and Nomad yachts start at around QR6mn. High-end yachts measuring around 175 feet can reach QR80mn to QR90mn, depending on their specifications and equipment.

Meanwhile, the third edition of the Qatar Boat Show demonstrated the growing strength of Qatar's marine industry, with increased Gulf participation, new product launches and strategic agreements aimed at opening international markets for domestic manufacturers. Strong public turnout and a complete sell-out of tickets highlighted rising interest in boats, yachts, and marine-related activities.