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BUSINESS | Page 1

Qatar, Canada sign foreign investment agreement







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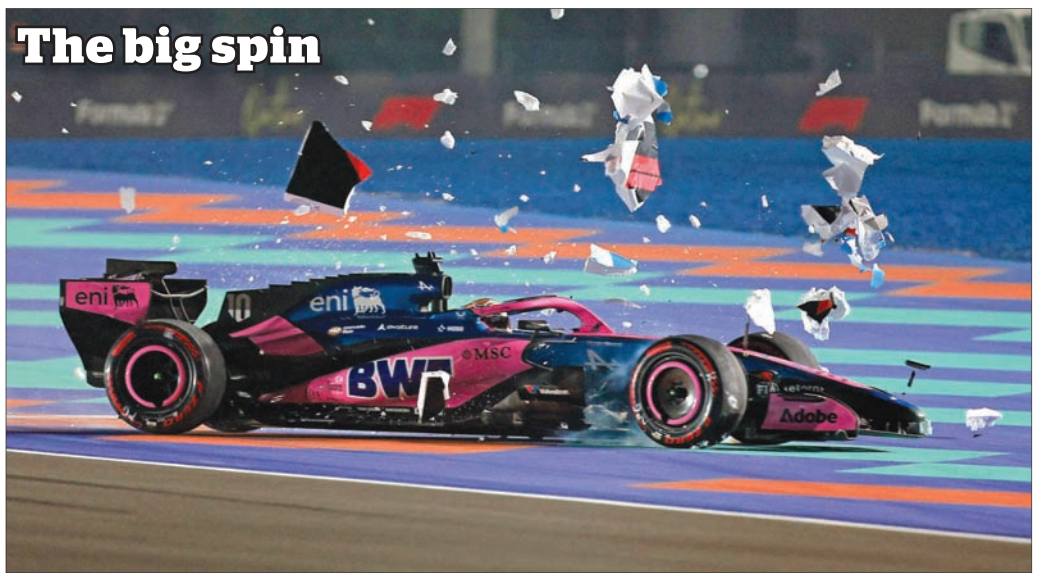


Alpine's French Formula One driver Pierre Gasly slides off the track during the second practice session ahead of the Qatar Grand Prix at the Lusail International Circuit in Lusail yesterday. The Qatar Grand Prix will take place on Sunday. (**AFP**) Sport Page 1

Qatar for more safeguards for children in digital world

Qatar has stressed the importance of protecting children from all forms of risks in both digital and real-world environments, underscoring the need for a comprehensive, balanced and multidimensional approach that places the best interests of the child at the heart of all policies, legislation and strategies related to information and communications technology (ICT).

This came in a statement delivered by acting charge d'affaires of Qatar's Permanent Mission to the United Nations Office in Geneva, Abdulrahman Mohammed Fakhro, during his participation in the OHCHR Global Consultation on Child Rights and Safety in the Digital Environment, held in Geneva.

He said Qatar attaches great importance to protecting children in the digital environment and recognises that effective regulatory frameworks are essential to safeguarding their rights and security online. He noted that the Cabinet approved, on Oct 14, 2026, a draft law on digital child protection, aimed at strengthening the protection of minors online by addressing key issues, including data privacy, exposure to harmful content, cyberbullying and digital exploitation.

He added that Qatar had launched several national initiatives to raise digital awareness, encourage parental involvement and equip children with the knowledge and skills needed to navigate the digital world safely.

These include the "Digitally Aware Family" campaign, launched by the Ministry of Social Development and Family in co-operation with 20 national entities, and the "Safe Space" initiative, run by the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, which offers interactive educational games, practical guidance and resources on cyberbullying, online safety and responsible digital behaviour.

He also highlighted efforts to promote digital safety awareness through the eSafety.qa platform, alongside initiatives by the National Cyber Security Agency, Qatar Foundation and Hamad Bin Khalifa University, as well as the "Haseen" programme, which seeks to integrate cybersecurity awareness and safe Internet practices into school curricula.

Fakhro stressed the importance of providing accessible reporting and support mechanisms for children facing online abuse, exploitation or threats. He noted that the Child Protection Hotline (919) offers a dedicated channel for confidential support and intervention, alongside reporting channels provided by the Ministry of Interior's Cybercrime Combating Centre, including the Metrash app and dedicated telephone and e-mail channels.

He underscored that protecting children in the digital environment requires sustained co-operation and co-ordination, as well as shared responsibility among all stakeholders.

Technological innovation and digital transformation must go hand in hand with respect for children's rights, dignity, privacy and well-being, ensuring that the digital environment empowers children, expands their opportunities and supports their growth. (**QNA**)

Qatar condemns Houthi attack on refinery in Saudi Arabia's Jazan

Qatar strongly condemned, in the strongest terms, the Houthi attack on an oil refinery in Saudi Arabia's Jazan, which led to the death of one worker and the injury of another.

Qatar considered the attack a shameful act of aggression, and a flagrant violation of Saudi Arabia's sovereignty and of international law.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in a statement, said that the targeting of oil facilities and critical infrastructure was a dangerous act of sabotage that contradict international laws and conventions and that could impact the security and stability of energy supplies globally.

The ministry renewed Qatar's full solidarity with Saudi Arabia and its support for any legitimate measures it may take to maintain its sovereignty, security, and the safety of its land or interests.

The ministry stressed that the security of Saudi Arabia was an integral part of Qatar's own security and the collective security of the GCC.

The ministry expressed the condolences of Qatar to the families of the victims, wishing the injured a swift recovery. (**QNA**)

Roadmap discussed for Makkah alliance members

Turkiye, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia discussed a roadmap for allowing potential new members into their defensive alliance during a meeting in Islamabad yesterday and agreed on some principles for membership, Turkish Foreign Minster Hakan Fidan said. The three countries signed a joint defence agreement in Makkah in August amid concerns about the Iran war. "We held discussions on what kind of a roadmap should be followed for other countries wanting to become members ... We took decisions on some principles. In short, everything is going very well," Fidan said after the talks, which the countries' defence ministers and military chiefs attended. (**Reuters**)

Growing global interest for Web Summit Qatar '27

QNA
Doha

The Permanent Web Summit Organising Committee reviewed participation figures for Web Summit Qatar 2027 at its regular meeting, held in Doha and chaired by HE Sheikh Jassim bin Mansour bin Jabor al-Thani, Director of the Government Communications Office (GCO). The meeting also covered the latest preparations for the fourth edition, the outcomes of Qatar's participation in Web Summit Lisbon, and the series of promotional events in Europe and the United States.

The meeting discussed the rising international interest in the summit. More than 1,000 startups have confirmed their attendance so far, and the number of confirmed investors has passed 370. The committee reviewed more than 120 partnerships signed to date, including first-time partners Visa, Hewlett Packard Enterprise, NetApp, and F5, alongside major international companies and institutions such as Microsoft, Cisco, McKinsey & Company, Shell, EY, Red Hat, and Zscaler.

Discussions also covered the increasing international media presence at the summit. The number of confirmed media professionals has tripled compared to the same period last year to reach 275, including session moderators from leading international outlets, such as *The Times*, the *Financial Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, Axios, *Fortune*, TRT World, and AFP. Registration remains open for media professionals who wish to cover the summit.

Bloomberg Media and CNN have joined the summit's media partners for the first time, alongside Al Jazeera Media Network, CNBC, *The Wall Street Journal*, Axios, Caixin Global, Fast Company Middle East, and Al Araby TV.

HE Sheikh Jassim bin Mansour bin Jabor al-Thani said: "These figures show the growing confidence the global technology community has in Web Summit Qatar and confirm its place on the calendars of startups, investors, and decision-makers worldwide. Rising demand reflects what the summit offers: the chance to connect, share expertise, build partnerships, and explore new avenues for growth."

He added: "This builds on our promotional events in Washington, DC, Paris, Berlin, Düsseldorf, and Stockholm, held with Qatar's embassies, and on our participation in Web Summit Lisbon 2026. Both put us in direct contact with startups, investors, and entrepreneurs from many countries and showcased the opportunities to set up and invest in Qatar. Together, they raise the international profile of our innovation ecosystem and widen co-operation and partnerships, in support of the Third National Development Strategy."

The committee highlighted startups that have grown and expanded since taking part in previous editions, including Positron AI, now valued at $5bn with backing from the Qatar Investment Authority and international investors, and AI software company Reka, valued at more than $1bn.

Startups confirmed for 2027 include aerospace technology company Electra, which has raised $115mn, and AI semiconductor chip designer Vizora, which has closed a $50mn funding round. To Page 3



WISH set to focus on attacks on healthcare, collaboration agreements

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

Attacks on healthcare will be a special focus at the global summit of the World Innovation Summit for Health (WISH) that gets underway tomorrow at Qatar National Convention Centre, noted a senior official of the organisation.

"WISH has taken the issue of attacks on healthcare to platforms in Osaka and New York, examining their impact on people living with non-communicable diseases. The Lancet Commission on Attacks on Health will launch its report at the summit, alongside an exhibition on attacks on healthcare in Palestine," Dr Sunoor Verma, director of Partnerships and Outreach at WISH told *Gulf Times*.

WISH, the global healthcare initiative of Qatar Foundation will hold its two day biennial summit under the theme 'The New Health Span' with the participation of a large number of healthcare leaders and policy makers as well as healthcare experts and academics.

According to Dr Sunoor, partnerships, including the ones with OHCHR, IFRC and Qatar Red Crescent Society, carry WISH's recommendations into practice. "At the summit, WISH will sign collaboration agreements with SOS Mediterranee, the University of Geneva, the International Council of Nurses, Al-Mujadilah and Global 50/50, Primary Health Care Corporation, Qatar Museums and Ehsan. An agreement without a work plan is a photograph," he said. "Each of these comes with one."



Dr Sunoor Verma. **PICTURE:** Shaji Kayamkulam.

The official noted that throughout the year, WISH showcases Qatar's health achievements at the World Health Assembly and engages at the UN Human Rights Council and General Assembly. "Qatar has shown that a country does not need to be large on the map to be large at the table," Dr Sunoor said. "Health is often the first door that opens when others are shut."

Dr Sunoor stated that a large number of high-profile speakers and participants are expected for the summit.

"Speakers at the opening include HE Sheikha Hind bint Hamad al-Thani, Vice-Chairperson of Qatar Foundation and the Minister of Public Health HE Mansoor bin Ebrahim bin Saad al-Mahmoud among others. Sessions will be moderated by broadcasters including Hala Gorani and Luisa Baldini. Doha secondary school students will compete in 'The Innovators of Tomorrow', run with Qatar Scientific Club," he explained.

The official underlined that since 2013, WISH has produced around 70 evidence-based reports, focusing on health issues that are overlooked or underfunded globally. "We go where the attention and the money are not," he said. "The summit is two days; the 18 months of research behind it are the real work. Delegates see the harvest, not the planting."

"We write reports for ministers, not for bookshelves," pointed out the official, citing childhood obesity: a WISH round table in 2022, a joint Qatar Foundation and Ministry of Public Health report in 2024 that informed the national strategy, and now a conversation about school canteens.

On this year's theme, he said: "Living to 100 is not the prize if the last twenty years are spent in a waiting room." The summit will launch four flagship reports and two policy briefs across five tracks: longevity, financing breakthrough therapies, artificial intelligence, the future of fertility and health diplomacy. On costly one-time cures, he was blunt: "A cure nobody can afford is a press release, not a cure."

" At home, WISH works with Hamad Bin Khalifa University, WISE, Earthna and Sidra Medicine, and this year co-hosted a dialogue on healthy ageing with the Ministry of Public Health at the World Health Assembly, attended by the minister, he highlighted. "Judge WISH not by who came to Doha," added, Dr Sunoor, "but by what changed after they left."

QATAR

Qatar, Azerbaijan hold sixth round of political consultations





The State of Qatar and the Republic of Azerbaijan held their sixth round of political consultations in Baku yesterday, led by HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi and the Azerbaijani Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Yalchin Rafiyev. The talks discussed bilateral co-operation and issues of mutual interest. (**QNA**)

Al-Muraikhi in Azerbaijan meetings



HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi met yesteray in Baku with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan Jeyhun Bayramov. The meeting dealt with discussing bilateral co-operation and the means to enhance and support them, in addition to discussing issues of joint interest. (**QNA**)



HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi met yesterday with the Minister of Emergency Situations of the Republic of Azerbaijan Kamaladdin Heydarov, in Baku. They discussed bilateral co-operation and ways to strengthen it, as well as issues of mutual interest. (**QNA**)

AG presents qualifying course certificate for newly appointed public prosecution assistants



HE Dr Issa Saad al-Jafali al-Nuaimi, the Attorney-General, has attended the conclusion of the Sixth Qualifying Course for Newly Appointed Public Prosecution Assistants for the 2025/2026 academic year, organised by the Criminal Studies Institute at the Public Prosecution.

The programme reflects the Public Prosecution's commitment to preparing and qualifying its members and enhancing their professional capabilities to enable them to carry out their duties efficiently and competently. During the ceremony, HE al-Nuaimi presented certificates of completion to the newly appointed Public Prosecution Assistants, wishing them success in their new roles. He stressed the importance of making greater efforts and demonstrating dedication and integrity in carrying out their professional responsibilities, adhering to professional values and workplace discipline, and continuously striving to enhance their performance and efficiency in serving justice and safeguarding the national interest.

The Sixth Qualifying Course is the second programme to be held following the entry into force of Public Prosecution Law No 9 of 2023. It brought together six newly appointed Public Prosecution Assistants and ran for one year, comprising six months of theoretical studies and six months of practical training at various prosecution offices. The programme covered 31 specialised training subjects, totalling 428 training hours, addressing various aspects of the Public Prosecution's work, including its areas of responsibility, procedures and practical applications. The sessions were delivered by a distinguished group of Public Prosecution members and legal experts specialising in the field.

Iceland Speaker meets Qatar's ambassador



The Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Iceland Thorunn Sveinbjarnardottir met with the ambassador of the State of Qatar to Iceland (non-resident) Nadia bint Ahmed al-Sheibi, on the occasion of the presentation of her credentials. The meeting dealt with discussing bilateral co-operation between the two countries. (**QNA**)

Aman holds awareness events

Series of events mark International Day for Elimination of Violence Against Women



The Protection and Social Rehabilitation Center (Aman), affiliated with the Qatar Social Work Foundation, held a series of awareness events at Doha Festival City to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, observed annually on November 25.

The events featured the Ministry of Social Development and Family's national "Digitally Aware Family" campaign, held under the slogan "Their Protection Is your Responsibility".

Aman set up an information booth highlighting its services for women, children and victims of family breakdown and violence. Interactive activities also addressed digital safety risks, including cyber extortion, online bullying, privacy violations and abuse on social media.

More than 2,000 visitors from different segments of society visited the pavilion. The events aimed to raise awareness of social protection, promote prevention and protection, and familiarise the public with Aman's services.

Acting Executive Director of Aman Fadel al-Kaabi said the centre's participation reflected its commitment to national efforts to protect women and safeguard their psychological and social well-being.

Combating violence, he said, begins not only with intervention after incidents occur, but also with raising public awareness and promoting prevention, respect and human dignity.

He stressed that protecting women from all forms of violence was a shared social responsibility requiring coordinated institutional, family and community efforts.

Preventive programs, he added, should raise awareness of rights and help people identify signs of violence and address them at an early stage.

Al-Kaabi said the event aligned with the centre's strategy of strengthening prevention and empowerment through a proactive approach to reducing the causes and risks of violence.

He also highlighted the growing challenge of digital violence and the need to improve awareness and protection tools, enabling women and families to navigate the digital environment safely.

Aman Community Awareness Director Bakhita al-Ghayathin said the events formed part of efforts to diversify public awareness initiatives and deliver clear, accessible preventive messages suited to different age groups.

The pavilion focused on helping visitors identify forms of digital violence, protect their privacy, avoid responding to online extortion or threats, and seek assistance and report incidents through the appropriate channels.

She added that the department continued to develop its awareness programs in response to social and technological changes, with a focus on early education and positive behaviours that help create a safe and supportive environment for women and children.

Aman Media and Communications Office Director Hanan al-Ali said holding events in shopping malls reflected the centre's efforts to expand community engagement by taking awareness messages beyond traditional and digital media into spaces where the public could interact directly.

She said Aman sought to make its messages relevant and influential in people's behaviour through innovative communication methods combining awareness content with interactive experiences, ensuring the messages reached different target groups and resonated with them. (**QNA**)

New animal welfare law toughens penalties for animal abuse, neglect

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

Law No 18 of 2026 on Animal Welfare was recently published at the latest edition of the official gazette, as a comprehensive animal welfare law establishing clearer responsibilities for animal owners, regulating animal-related facilities and activities, and strengthening measures to prevent abuse, neglect and unnecessary suffering.

It sets out a framework for protecting animals, ensuring proper care and holding individuals and establishments accountable for violations. According to the law, animal owners and those responsible for animal facilities must ensure that animals' physical, health and behavioural needs are met. This includes providing suitable housing and living conditions, adequate food and clean drinking water, appropriate exercise, regular health monitoring and veterinary treatment when necessary. Animals must also be inspected at least once daily, while owners are required to take appropriate measures to prevent them from escaping or being exposed to danger.

The legislation prohibits a range of abusive practices, including beating animals, deliberately causing fear or unnecessary suffering, inflicting unjustified injuries, overworking animals and killing them without acceptable justification. It also prohibits cruel methods of killing, including drowning, strangulation and the use of uncontrolled poisonous substances. Further, animal owners are prohibited from abandoning animals or leaving them unattended for extended periods in circumstances that could cause harm or suffering.

In addition, the law introduces controls on animal transportation, requiring animals to be moved in conditions that protect them from injury, exhaustion, thirst, hunger and unnecessary stress. Animals that are sick or physically unfit must not be transported, ridden or used for activities that could compromise their health. The sale or trade of animals showing signs of illness or exhaustion is also prohibited.

Animal-related establishments, including facilities involved in housing, breeding, treatment, training, displaying, trading or research, must obtain licences from the competent authority and comply with technical and health requirements.

Licences are valid for one year and must be renewed. Late renewal may result in a fine of QR500 per month, for up to three months, after which the licence may be cancelled. Authorities may also temporarily close establishments found committing animal abuse violations.

The law regulates the use of animals in research, experiments and education, requiring prior approval and appropriate professional qualifications. It prohibits using animals in cosmetic testing and experiments involving the development or testing of weapons and ammunition.

Violators of the stipulations of the law may face fines ranging from QR10,000-50,000 for specified offences. Penalties are doubled in cases of repeat violations, while individuals responsible for managing establishments may also be held accountable. Authorities are empowered to inspect facilities, collect evidence, seize animals in cases of abuse or danger, and transfer them to suitable care. In addition, the law provides for approved animal welfare organisations to rescue, shelter, rehabilitate and rehome animals at risk, reinforcing the role of institutional care in protecting abandoned, neglected and vulnerable animals.

MoECC organises awareness workshops through QSW 2026

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC) participated in Qatar Sustainability Week (QSW) 2026 by organising two awareness workshops at the Qatar Scientific Club, aimed at promoting environmental awareness, strengthening community engagement, and encouraging sustainable practices.

The workshops addressed key environmental issues, including sustainability and its goals, climate change, pollution, and the depletion of natural resources. They also highlighted the importance of conserving water and energy, waste segregation and management, reuse and recycling, the circular economy, and renewable energy in supporting sustainable development.



The programme featured interactive activities, practical exercises, quizzes, and group discussions, providing participants with hands-on experience in waste sorting and encouraging innovative solutions to everyday environmental challenges.

Similarly, the ministry's Department of Environmental Monitoring and Inspection, organised an awareness workshop titled "From Air Quality to Quality of Life" at LifeHub in Msheireb, attended by 25 students and teachers.

The workshop highlighted the importance of air quality for public health and environmental sustainability, the impacts of air pollution on people and the environment, and the main sources of air pollutants and ways to reduce them. It also explored the role of environmental legislation in combating pollution and protecting natural resources, while introducing participants to the Air Quality Index (AQI) and its role in assessing surrounding air conditions.

Expert calls for dedicated career path in customer service for service quality

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

Mudhi al-Hajri, a therapeutic and community nutrition expert, highlighted that when people talk about the development of government institutions, attention usually turns to modern buildings, electronic systems, the speed of transactions and the quality of services. Yet one element can sum up the whole picture in a single moment: the employee standing in front of the customer.

Speaking to *Gulf Times* al-Hajri said that a customer service employee is not merely a receptionist. She noted "He or she is the human face of the institution and, often, the first and last impression a citizen or resident takes away. An institution may have the best systems and newest premises, but if the customer meets an employee who lacks communication skills or the ability to handle difficult situations, the experience can be negative regardless of every other service."

This raises a question worth debating: is customer service in our institutions treated as a specialised profession, or is it still, at times, a job that can be assigned to any employee? It is time, in my view, to rethink this concept.

Al-Hajri added: "Staff who deal with the public every day need skills no less important than any other professional competence: effective communication, emotional intelligence, anger management, handling complaints, problem-solving, understanding different personalities and cultures, and explaining procedures clearly and respectfully".


Mudhi al-Hajri

She stressed: "I therefore propose a dedicated career path in customer service, beginning with introductory programmes at secondary-school level and progressing to a post-secondary professional diploma in customer service and customer experience, particularly for roles that involve constant contact with the public."

"Theory alone is not enough. Training should include simulations of real-life situations: dealing with an angry customer, listening to a complaint, explaining an unwelcome procedure, apologising professionally and turning a negative transaction into a positive one. These are skills that can be taught, trained and measured. Appraisal should also go beyond the number of transactions completed. It should rely on clear indicators such as speed of response, clarity of information, customer satisfaction, quality of communication, speed of complaint resolution and the rate of problems resolved".

"Here, I see a bigger opportunity, one that could put Qatar ahead not only in the Gulf but worldwide. Why should Qatar not be among the countries leading the creation of a global benchmark for the quality of customer service?" she asked.

Such an index could start with the Gulf States, then expand across the Arab world and internationally, setting unified standards to measure how government institutions treat the public. It could assess ease of access, speed of response, respect for the customer, clarity of information, complaint management, fairness, digital services and customer satisfaction. An annual ranking could help countries and institutions identify their strengths and areas for improvement.

Al-Hajri suggested that "the project would be called the Global Customer Service Quality Index (GCSQI), with Qatar as a founding nation. An international observatory specialising in customer service quality could also be established".

"The quality of government service does not begin with the electronic system, and it does not end with the delivery of a transaction. It begins with the human being.

I hope Qatar will be a pioneer in this field, we do not want to be always among those who follow global standards. We want to be among those who set the standards the world follows," al-Hajri said.

Narcotics seized

The General Directorate of Drug Enforcement has arrested a suspect for distributing narcotics. He and the seized items have been referred to the Public Prosecution.



Amir condoles with president, PM of Italy

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and the His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani sent cables of condolences to the President of the Italian Republic Sergio Mattarella and the Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni on the death of two Italian technicians as a result of the Iranian attacks on the territory of the State of Kuwait, wishing the injured a speedy recovery.
HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani sent a cable of condolences to the Prime Minister of the Italian Republic Giorgia Meloni on the death of two Italian technicians as a result of the Iranian attacks on the territory of the State of Kuwait, wishing the injured a speedy recovery. (**QNA**)

Qatar rises as a force in global cinema

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

Qatar's cinema and filmmaking industry has become an increasingly influential player in the regional and international cinema scene, driven by sustained institutional investment, international partnerships, emerging filmmaking talent and a growing media infrastructure.

Accordingly, the country has placed itself as a destination for film production and a platform for stories that resonate beyond its boundaries. Over the past few years, Doha has been increasingly attracting international filmmakers, supporting independent productions and providing opportunities for Qatari and Arab storytellers to participate in the global film industry.

At the centre of such achievement is the Doha Film Institute (DFI), established in 2010. Over the years, the institute has become a major supporter of independent cinema, offering production grants, training, mentorship and international networking opportunities, with its contribution extends beyond Qatar, supporting filmmakers from across the Middle East and North Africa and other regions whose stories might otherwise struggle to secure international financing and distribution.

Accordingly, DFI has extended support to more than 1,000 films from over 85 countries, and the supported projects have earned over 600 international awards while DFI-backed films have received 13 Oscar nominations. Besides, locally produced Qatari films backed by DFI have secured over 65 awards across more than 100 regional and international festivals.

In 2024, DFI supported 94 projects during the year, including 39 feature-length narrative films, 21 feature documentaries, four experimental features, 19 short films, nine television series and two web series. Of these projects, 80 originated from the Middle East and North Africa, including nine from Qatar.

DFI has extended support to more than 1,000 films from over 85 countries, and the supported projects have earned over 600 international awards while DFI-backed films have received 13 Oscar nominations

The portfolio also included 39 women-led projects, indicating the clear DFI support for diverse voices and expanding opportunities for women in filmmaking. In 2025, DFI announced a record 12 institute-supported films selected for the 82nd Venice International Film Festival, spanning prestigious sections including the Official Selection, Venice Days and Critics' Week. The selection included projects by Qatari filmmakers and productions involving international partners, reinforcing Doha's role in the development and financing of cinema beyond its geographical boundaries.

Meanwhile, the Made in Qatar programme, an important component of the Doha Film Festival, provides a dedicated platform for films produced by Qatari and Qatar-based filmmakers. Its 2026 competition featured eight films, reflecting the diversity of emerging local storytelling, from personal and family narratives to imaginative and experimental cinema. Further, initiatives like Qumra and year-round labs pair emerging filmmakers with international industry mentors to take projects from script to screen, as part of the efforts to enhance the cinema industry and encourage emerging talents in the field to reach out to their potential audience.

While the culture and media importance of such industry could not be undermined, the economic value of film industry and related fields are growing steadily creating more business opportunities.

According to Invest Qatar figures reported in 2023, the country's broader cultural and creative industries contributed around QR20bn to the economy in 2021, equivalent to around 3% of GDP, with 2,097 businesses operating in film, television, video, radio, photography and music.

However, between 2025 and late 2026, Qatar's media and film ecosystem experienced rapid commercial expansion, secured by Media City Qatar surpassing 500 licensed companies and the rollout of a 50% screen production rebate.

Around 70% of licensed entities originate outside the Middle East, and roughly 60% are classified as startups. Such expansion has generated around 1,250 new jobs across four main areas: screen, broadcast and music; gaming and interactive; tech, digital and social; and agencies and support services.

Growing global interest for Web Summit Qatar 2027

From Page 1

On the international front, the committee discussed the latest developments regarding government and trade delegations joining the summit, including official delegations from Canada, France, Spain, Brazil, and Switzerland, as well as Germany, which recorded the largest government participation at the summit's last two editions. This follows the presence of around 40 countries at the 2026 edition, and arrangements with delegations from other countries are ongoing.

The meeting reviewed the most recently confirmed speakers, including Tareq Amin, CEO of HUMAIN; May Habib, co-founder and CEO of Writer; Rajeeb Hazra, CEO and board member of Quantinuum; Ali Madani, founder and CEO of Profluent; and Gonzague de Pirey, Chief Omnichannel and Data Officer at LVMH.

The committee followed up on the outcomes of the summit's series of promotional events, organised by the GCO in co-operation with Qatar's embassies. This month, the series made three European stops in Berlin, Düsseldorf, and Stockholm, following two events in Washington, DC, and Paris in October that drew more than 240 senior figures, entrepreneurs, and investors.

The Berlin and Dusseldorf events brought together more than 150 entrepreneurs, investors, and industry leaders to explore European tech expansion into Qatar and investment in deep tech and science. In Stockholm, more than 100 participants discussed prospects for Qatari-Swedish cooperation in technology, trade, and investment.

The committee was also briefed on the outcomes of Qatar's participation in Web Summit Lisbon 2026, where, for the first time, companies could register and set up directly from the Qatar pavilion through the recently launched Companies House, which unifies registration and licensing across the country's economic zones. The Startup Qatar programme received nearly 500 applications from startups during the summit.

During the summit, the delegation held a series of meetings with international investors, technology companies, and entrepreneurs to discuss investing and setting up businesses in Qatar and taking part in the next edition. The pavilion hosted Qatari startup pitches to investors, representatives of Invest Qatar and the Qatar Investment Authority took part in onstage discussions, and Snoonu and Qatar Science & Technology Park ran workshops.

Web Summit Qatar is the largest and fastest-growing technology event in the Middle East and North Africa, bringing together entrepreneurs, investors, start-ups, and decision-makers from around the world to share expertise and explore the future of the digital economy. It strengthens Doha's position as a leading destination for international technology events and a platform for building strategic partnerships, regionally and globally.

Kuwait summons Iranian ambassador, issues protest note over continued attacks

QNA, AFP
Kuwait City

Kuwait's foreign ministry yesterday said it summoned Iran's ambassador over "continued Iranian attacks" after a drone attack a day earlier killed two Italians in the first fatal strike in the Gulf state for months.

The ministry "summoned His Excellency Ambassador Mohammad Totonji, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the State of Kuwait, and handed him a note of protest over the continued Iranian attacks on the State of Kuwait, most recently the drone attack that yesterday, Thursday, targeted a vital site in the country, killing two Italian nationals," it wrote on X.

Deputy Foreign Minister Hamad al-Mashaan condemned the attacks as violations of Kuwait's sovereignty, international law and UN Security Council Resolution 2817 (2026), holding Iran fully responsible.

He affirmed Kuwait's right to self-defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter and to take all necessary measures to protect its sovereignty, security, citizens and residents.

Iran has in the last week ratcheted up attacks on Kuwait and Gulf neighbour Bahrain while it continues to contest control of the Strait of Hormuz with the United States.

But its top diplomat and military both denied any involvement in the attack that killed two employees of German defence contractor Rheinmetall who were working on an air defence system.


PICTURE:QNA

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi held phone calls with both his Kuwaiti counterpart Jarrah Jaber al-Ahmad al-Sabah and Italian counterpart Antonio Tajani to deny Tehran's involvement, according to Iran's state TV and foreign ministry.

In his call with Tajani, "Araghchi stated that Iran had no role or involvement whatsoever in the occurrence of this event," the Iranian foreign ministry said in a statement.

Iran's top diplomat added that Tehran was prepared to cooperate with Kuwait and Italy to "determine the origin of the incident", the ministry said.

Sheikha Hoor al-Qasimi calls for greater cultural collaboration across Arab world

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

Sheikha Hoor bint Sultan al-Qasimi, president and director of Sharjah Art Foundation, has called for greater collaboration among cultural institutions in the Gulf and wider Arab world to create more opportunities for regional artists and introduce their work to international audiences.

Her comments follow her recent visit to Doha, where she joined HE Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, Chairperson of Qatar Museums, for a panel discussion as part of QC Talks at the National Museum of Qatar.

In an interview with Gulf Times, Sheikha Hoor welcomed the growing number of museums, foundations and biennials across the region, noting that each institution contributes its own perspective to the development of the cultural sector.

"It's good to see more places in the region establishing their own initiatives. Each of us has our own approach, we're not trying to do the same thing, and there's a beauty in how different we are. The more biennials there are, the better, because it fosters dialogue and gives artists more opportunities."

In Qatar, this growing cultural landscape includes the second edition of Design Doha Biennial, which opened on November 5 and runs until January 31, 2027, showcasing contemporary design practices from Qatar and across the region. Qatar Museums is also preparing for the fourth edition of Tasweer, its photography biennial, scheduled to open in April 2027. Both initiatives provide platforms for artists and creative practitioners to share their work with local and international audiences.

Sheikha Hoor recalled the early years of the Sharjah Biennial, when contemporary artists in the region had fewer opportunities to exhibit their work. Since she began working on the Biennial in 2003, the cultural landscape has expanded considerably, with new institutions established in Qatar, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and other countries.

"When I started working on the Sharjah Biennial in 2003, there were very few biennials in our region and not many institutions showing contemporary art, so many young artists would come to Sharjah because it was nearby.


Sheikha Hoor bint Sultan al-Qasimi.

Over the last two decades we have seen new spaces, museums and foundations opening across the Gulf, in Doha, Abu Dhabi, Riyadh, Jeddah and Sharjah, and now artists have so many more places to show their work."

As regional institutions expand their programmes and international partnerships, Sheikha Hoor encouraged greater co-operation in research, touring exhibitions, artist residencies and curatorial exchanges. Such initiatives can introduce lesser-known artistic histories to new audiences while providing artists and cultural professionals with opportunities to develop their practices.

She cited Sharjah Art Foundation's exhibitions on the Egyptian Surrealists and the Casablanca Art School as examples of how regional institutions can bring Arab art histories to audiences internationally.

"We love working together and sharing resources. We can collaborate, exchange ideas and show different perspectives, through research, touring exhibitions, and residencies and exchanges for artists and curators. Our exhibitions on the Egyptian Surrealists and the Casablanca Art School were shown here in the region and also travelled abroad, and audiences there were introduced to histories they didn't know. I'd love to see institutions across the Gulf and the Arab world doing even more of this together, so our artists can reach audiences here and around the world."

While welcoming international recognition, Sheikha Hoor also stressed that cultural institutions must remain connected to the communities they serve. She pointed to education, accessible exhibitions and opportunities for artists and curators as priorities for the sector.

Iraq oil smuggling clampdown threatens ties with Kurds, Iran

AFP
Baghdad


Tanker trucks drive along the New Baghdad Bridge with the Daura oil refinery complex in the background in southern Baghdad. (**AFP**)

Iraqi Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi is taking bold steps to curb rampant oil smuggling, moves that the US has praised but that risk putting him at odds with Iraq's Kurds and neighbouring Iran.

Iraq has long been stuck balancing the competing influence of the US and Iran. But Zaidi has been steering the country closer to Washington.

Zaidi, who has repeatedly vowed to disarm armed groups, recently went after a powerful faction over alleged oil smuggling.

On Tuesday, he also moved to place the Kurdistan region's border crossings and several oil fields under federal control — a step that would tighten Baghdad's grip on the autonomous region while cutting smuggling routes into Iran.

Zaidi enjoys close ties with Trump envoy Tom Barrack, who is driving efforts to expand US oil investments in Iraq and develop an export route through Syria that could reduce the dependence on the Strait of Hormuz.

Yet the US must first deal with two main challenges: armed groups hostile to its interests, and rampant smuggling that gives a lifeline to Iran and threatens investments.

The US, which is intensifying its economic pressure against the Islamic republic, accuses Tehran of using Iraq to evade sanctions, and has previously sanctioned Iraqi individuals and companies for blending Iraqi and Iranian oil.

Sajad Jiyad, senior non-resident fellow at the Centre for International Policy, said that Zaidi's "strategy is aligned with what America wants for Iraq and for its Iran policy".

"A stronger central government serves US interests better," as it can better control the country and rein in armed groups, even if that weakens traditional US allies such as the Kurdistan authorities, the Baghdad-based analyst said.

Zaidi's crackdown on oil smuggling through Kurdistan targets routes used to move crude into Iran where it is being blended with Iranian crude for export, according to an intelligence document cited by Iraq's state media.

Cutting off that flow is "exactly what US policy is right now: maximum pressure through economic blockade," Jiyad said.

Earlier this month, Zaidi went after Kataeb Hezbollah, a powerful group that refuses to give up its weapons, over alleged oil smuggling in its stronghold south of Baghdad.

He later sent government forces into the area under a compromise deal that averted a confrontation.

Several Iraqi political sources told AFP that Zaidi's relationship with Tehran has strained and that Iran will not accept that its allied factions disarm amid a regional war.

Zaidi's decision to put Kurdistan's border crossings and several oil fields under federal control sparked angry reactions from Kurdish authorities.

Relations between Baghdad and Erbil, the capital of Kurdistan, have long been tense, with recurring disputes over territories, oil exports or budget allocations.

Iraq's Kurds, who have close ties with the US, have repeatedly warned of federal government attempts to undermine their autonomy, which was formalised by Iraq's 2005 constitution.

They have become more wary recently seeing that US policy in Syria has denied the Kurds there autonomy in favour of centralised authority in Damascus.

Erbil-based political analyst Lawk Ghafuri said that the Kurds will consider Zaidi's decision a "threat", but they will eventually strike a deal, adding that Zaidi's strategy is to rise the stakes enough to secure concessions.

Judiciary chief Faeq Zaidan, widely seen as close to Zaidi, has called for a dialogue next week to diffuse tensions.

At its core, Zaidi's goal is to rein in armed groups, assert greater control over oil wealth and draw foreign investment, Ghafuri said.

The Middle East war and the disruption of the Strait of Hormuz dealt a blow to Iraq's oil exports, which make up 90% of its revenues.

The US has also slowed cash shipments for Iraq's oil sales, handled by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York since 2003.


A building where the family of Izzeldeen al-Hayya, son of Hamas chief Khalil al-Hayya, was reportedly staying stands after it was hit in an Israeli air strike, according to a senior Hamas official, in Gaza City, yesterday. (**Reuters**)

Son of Hamas chief survives Israeli strike

Reuters
Gaza

The son of Hamas chief Khalil al-Hayya survived an assassination attempt by the Israeli military yesterday, senior Hamas official Basem Naim said.

He told Reuters that Izzeldeen al-Hayya and his family had survived a dawn air strike and Hamas sources said several people, including Hayya's daughter-in-law, had been wounded but there had been no deaths.

The Israeli military had no immediate comment.

Naim described Izzeldeen al-Hayya, born in 1997, as the Hamas chief's last surviving son, with four others having been killed by Israeli forces.

The family of one of the late sons survived yesterday's strike, Naim said.

Hamas said in a statement that the Israeli military had targeted a residential apartment, and linked the attack to threats Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz has made against Hayya.

Hamas accused Israel of seeking to undermine a 2025 Gaza ceasefire agreement and said Israel bore full responsibility for the consequences of its continued attacks.

Izzeldeen is the twin brother of Hamam Khalil al-Hayya, who was killed in a 2025 Israeli air strike targeting Hamas leaders in Qatar, Naim said.

Named Hamas' overall leader in July, Hayya narrowly escaped assassination himself in the Qatar strike.

Hayya warned of possible retaliation on Thursday after Israeli attacks killed at least 10 people in Gaza.

Separately, three Palestinians were killed and two others injured yesterday in an Israeli strike on the city of Rafah, medical sources told Reuters. There was no immediate Israeli comment on the strike.

Iran arrests journalist who warned of protesters' execution

AFP
Paris

Rights groups said yesterday Iranian authorities have arrested and tortured a journalist who warned of the imminent execution of two protesters by publishing an official notice ordering their hanging.

Mehdi Mahmoudian, who collaborated on the screenplay for Jafar Pahani's Cannes-winning 2025 film "It Was Just An Accident", was arrested on Wednesday after publishing the information on his Telegram channel earlier this week, Norway-based Iran Human Rights (IHR) and Paris-based Reporters Without Borders (RSF) said in separate statements.

The arrest came as rights groups accuse the authorities of ramping up executions of political prisoners in the wake of January protests and the war against the United States and Israel.

Mahmoudian had posted an official note from the judiciary saying that Milad Armoun, 27, and Navid Najaran, 34, two protesters from the 2022 "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement already sentenced to death were due to be hanged on Wednesday. It was not clear from where he had obtained the document and it could not be immediately verified.

Their execution was subsequently postponed, according to their lawyer, although IHR said they were still at risk of being hanged.

But Mahmoudian was arrested and "subjected to severe beatings and torture" at police headquarters which included being beaten across the face and having a plastic bag placed on his head to extract a confession, IHR said.

He was transferred to a hospital before being imprisoned in Tehran, it added.

"By publicising the imminent executions of Milad Armoun and Navid Najaran, Mehdi Mahmoudian helped halt the executions of these two protesters," said IHR director Mahmood Amiry-Moghaddam.

The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) said Mahmoudian told his family in a brief telephone call he had been transferred to Greater Tehran Prison and "that security forces had severely beaten him during his arrest, leaving visible injuries".

Tunisia NGO slams prison conditions after dozens of deaths

AFP
Tunis

Tunisia's main rights group yesterday denounced "inhumane" conditions in Tunisian prisons, saying 30 inmates have died since the beginning of summer, the country's hottest on record.

Authorities have yet to release figures for prison deaths after a summer marked by multiple heatwaves, water shortages and power cuts.

"The situation in prisons is inhumane and catastrophic," said Bassem Trifi, head of the Tunisian League for Human Rights, adding that "overcrowding and the lack of healthcare" in prisons were a major issue.

Tunisian Justice Minister Leila Jaffel said in a parliamentary address last week that some prisons in Tunisia were indeed overcrowded.

She also confirmed there were "some deaths" among prisoners, but said that all those who had died had "suffered from chronic illnesses and passed away in hospitals", not in prison.



Relatives of detainees who died in Tunisian prisons hold portraits of their loved ones during a press conference on detention conditions in the country's prisons, held by Tunisian lawyer and president of the Tunisian League for Human Rights, Bassem Trifi (top left), in Tunis, yesterday. (**AFP**)

Trifi, however, said it didn't matter if the deaths occurred "in an ambulance or at a hospital".

"All of the deceased prisoners died under the legal custody of the justice ministry and prison authorities," he said.

Trifi said his organisation was formally demanding that the authorities clarify the circumstances around the 30 deaths.

The organisation had said in September that it had documented 23 deaths in detention over the summer, based on information from doctors, relatives and lawyers.

Nejia Jehider, a woman who said her brother died in detention, told AFP her family had yet to see the autopsy report.

"We recovered his body without any information on how he died," she said. "My brother was healthy and could not wait for his release from prison."

"I want to know how my brother died," she added. "I want to see the autopsy report."

Tunisia's summer this year was its hottest on record, according to the country's weather authority.

Although accustomed to scorching heat, Tunisia experienced a particularly gruelling summer this year, with July and August marked by "intense and prolonged heatwaves", the authority said.

Scientists attribute these episodes to climate change.

The highest temperature was recorded in the central city of Kairouan, which reached 49.7 degrees Celsius in mid-July.

Water cuts also became frequent, as much of Tunisia's water supply depends on electric pumps, which were disrupted during power outages.

The water cuts were compounded by a shortage of bottled water, also linked to the power outages.

Under-attack Palestinians find unlikely ally in Israeli retired general

AFP
As Sawiyah

The four Israeli soldiers stepped out of their car in the occupied West Bank, their faces masked, their uniforms unmarked and automatic weapons strapped across their shoulders.

They had entered a Palestinian olive grove but, little did they expect, the person there planning to tell them to leave could have once been issuing them orders.

A retired Israeli general, Eyal Ben Reuven, had come that day to the Palestinian town of As Sawiyah, on a mission to prevent some of the rampant violence against Palestinians by extremist Israeli settlers.

For the 72-year-old, joined by fellow battle-hardened veterans of the Israeli military, the violence is a stain on the institution in which they once served.

"I've fought in a number of wars. And unfortunately, I have reached the point where I have seen an evolution," said the former military man with piercing eyes, who spent much of his career driving tanks.

The army is failing to act, he said, even when the violence has reached a level "I never could have imagined".

Unrest has soared in the West Bank since the unprecedented October 7, 2023 attack, which responded with a massive military campaign in the Gaza Strip.


Retired Israeli general, Eyal Ben Reuven (centre) and other activists from 'Ad Hoc', an Israeli movement of ex-military personnel, walk after helping Palestinians to harvest olives in the Israeli-occupied West Bank village of As Sawiyah. (**AFP**)

More than 1,100 Palestinians have been killed by the army or settlers in the West Bank since then. More than 50 Israelis have died in the same time in the territory, which Israel captured in 1967.

The olive harvest has become a flashpoint, with settlers attacking or stealing from Palestinian farmers on a nearly daily basis.

With the other former soldiers, Ben Reuven has set up a protective presence, a tactic more common among leftist activists who put themselves in the way in a bid to stop attacks against Palestinians.

Clad in comfortable hiking attire and carrying walking sticks, it is difficult to imagine that some of the greying volunteers fought in intense combat.

Like good soldiers, they review instructions upon going out — they are there to assist the olive harvest, not to confront the settlers, and they will obey the army's instructions.

A Palestinian human rights activist, Arafat Abu Ras, led the military men to a small olive grove. An old Palestinian woman was waiting to guide them and the soldiers, more accustomed to the battlefield than to farming, used sticks and small rakes to start knocking the olives off the trees, volunteering to do the work on the Palestinians' behalf.

Almost immediately a military vehicle arrived. Under the humming of a drone, one of the serving soldiers shoved aside an AFP team to prevent filming, while another checked Abu Ras's identity papers and ordered everyone to leave.

Abu Ras said that the olive farmers had co-ordinated with the army, which insists that Palestinians receive approval for their harvests in the occupied West Bank, arguing that it is for safety reasons.

"They say, 'yes, yes', and then the next day they come and force us to leave," Abu Ras said.

After the serving soldiers arrived, a second vehicle came, this time with Israeli settlers. An official from a neighbouring settlement also ordered the olive pickers out, with troops saying it was a "closed military zone".

The Israeli veterans, in line with their guidance, complied. They instead moved elsewhere with the farmers, hoping to prevent attacks on them.

"Our army is a joke," fumed Yoel Feldschuh, a 77-year-old former air force brigadier general.


An Israeli soldier walks past activists from 'Ad Hoc', an Israeli movement of ex-military personnel, helping Palestinians to harvest olives in the Israeli-occupied West Bank village of As Sawiyah. (**AFP**)

"Is it its role to shut an olive grove? What does the military have to do with that?"

Feldschuh made headlines when he was handcuffed and taken away by police in a similar action a month earlier.

Changing the behaviour of the military, he said, "will take a generation".

COGAT, the Israeli body responsible for civil affairs in the Palestinian territories, maintains that "security forces are deployed to ensure a safe olive harvest".

But since September, the harvest has been marked by nearly 500 attacks, some of them fatal, according to the Israeli human rights organisation Yesh Din.

Amram Mitzna, an 81-year-old retired general, attributes the army's inaction to the young ages of the soldiers, who have grown up under now-caretaker Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's longest-serving leader.

"They consider every Arab an enemy who must be treated as such," said Mitzna, who has also served as mayor of Haifa, Israel's third largest city.

Netanyahu has allied himself with the far-right and championed a rapid growth of West Bank settlements, which are considered illegal under international law.

Netanyahu is fighting for political survival after losing ground in elections. Gadi Eisenkot, a former general seeking to succeed him, supports many of Netanyahu's security policies but accuses him of yielding to "Jewish terrorism" in the West Bank and vowed to crack down on extremist settlers.

Religious symbols debate: Canada's SC largely upholds Quebec secularism law

AFP
Montreal, Canada

Canada's Supreme Court yesterday ruled that a Quebec law banning a range of public officials from wearing religious symbols at work was largely valid, settling a landmark case that tested Canada's constitution.

The court upheld the controversial law with one exception, ruling provincial lawmakers should be allowed to wear religious symbols in the legislature. Chief Justice Richard Wagner wrote that the law, known as Bill 21, "is rooted in Quebec's legitimate and historical commitment to ensuring the (secularism) of the state in a free and democratic society."

The Quebec case was also seen as a major test of how far provinces can go in defying provisions of the federal constitution by invoking the so-called "notwithstanding clause." That clause, a quirk of Canada's legal system, effectively allows provincial governments to pass laws that may breach Canada's constitution, known as the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Predominantly French-speaking Quebec pre-emptively invoked the "notwithstanding clause" when passing its secularism bill, anticipating it would be challenged over constitutional protections guaranteeing freedom of religion and expression.

Conservative-led provinces have also invoked the clause to defend legislation relating to transgender youth. In 2023, Saskatchewan used the clause to pass a law requiring schools to obtain parental consent before changing the pronouns used for children under 16. Alberta has also invoked the clause in relation to laws banning transgender girls from participating in female sports and restricting hormone therapy for individuals under 16. Opponents of the Quebec bill immediately condemned the court's decision, saying it raised questions about the protection of any fundamental right within Canada's federal system.

Quebec lawyer Michael Bergman, who is part of a group that opposed Bill 21, said the ruling renders Canada's constitution "an empty shell."

"Because with the notwithstanding clause, a legislature of Parliament can make, by a magic wand, fundamental rights go away, disappear," he said.

The head of the National Council of Canadian Muslims, Stephen Brown, said the ruling made clear Canada's constitution was a "charter of suggestions," not a charter of guaranteed rights.

And Anaïs Bussières McNicoll of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association said Canada cannot be considered a free and democratic society "if people have to choose between their profession and their faith." But while the court ruled that Quebec used the notwithstanding clause appropriately in the secularism case, it did not categorically preclude restricting its use in other contexts.

Prime Minister Mark Carney urged caution in reacting to the decision, voicing respect for the court's decision on the propriety of the Quebec bill, but noting his government needed time to study the ruling to understand its implications beyond this case.

"I think what's important is that all legislatures and very much including obviously parliament, are doing their utmost to respect the rights and liberties of all Canadians, including those in the minority," Carney told reporters.

The leader of the separatist Bloc Québécois, Yves-François Blanchet, said the decision marked "a major victory" for the province's legislature. The pivotal ruling came just a month after a separatist, staunchly secular provincial government was elected in Quebec, promising to broaden restrictions on religious displays in public life.

Canada's parliament receives petition demanding ouster of Trump's envoy

AFP
Montreal, Canada

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney's administration will have until January to respond to a petition with nearly 300,000 signatures introduced to parliament this week demanding the removal of US Ambassador Pete Hoekstra.

The United States and Canada remain locked in a trade war, although Carney and US President Donald Trump have both expressed optimism that talks are progressing. Hoekstra, a relentless Trump defender and a former Republican congressman from Michigan, has had a volatile tenure since his arrival in Canada in April 2025.

Canada's Green Party lawmaker, Elizabeth May, who tabled the petition in the House of Commons on Wednesday, branded Hoekstra "the most undiplomatic diplomat." "I think it's important to note that Canadians overwhelmingly have, on this e-petition, spoken clearly that they believe that Pete Hoekstra is not welcome in Canada," she said.

May said Hoekstra had been "repeatedly abusive and insulting to Canadians", stressing that more than 280,000 Canadians had "asked the government... to declare him officially persona non grata and revoke his rights to operate as a diplomat" in the country.


Prime Minister Mark Carney at an event with federal Liberal candidate Aaron Kienle in Yorkton. (**Reuters**)

Petitions presented in the House of Commons require a formal government response within 45 days.

The citizen-led petition, which was open for signature until November 18, accused Hoekstra of normalising "the Trump administration's threats to annex Canada as the 51st state."

Hoekstra reportedly levelled a profanity-laced tirade against an Ontario official over an anti-tariff ad that quoted former US president Ronald Reagan on the merits of free trade. The ad, produced by Ontario's provincial government, infuriated Trump, prompting him to suspend all trade negotiations.

Hoekstra said in June that the idea of the United States annexing Canada would be "a great discussion" for Trump to have with Carney. He has also defended Trump's tariffs and criticized Canadians for referring to the US president's protectionist measures as being part of a trade war.

Canada wants relief from tariffs on key sectors, notably autos, but Ottawa has warned that completely removing the levies is unlikely and that the Canadian economy needs to adjust to a permanently altered trading relationship with the United States.

Trump backs Iraqi PM's efforts to assert more state authority

Reuters
Washington

US President Donald Trump yesterday backed the Iraqi leader's drive to assert state control, including stopping the smuggling of Iraqi oil, moves that put Baghdad in direct confrontation with Iran's militia allies and Kurdish authorities. "We support Iraqi Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi 's efforts to assert state authority throughout Iraq, stop the smuggling of Iraqi oil, end corruption, and bring all weapons under the exclusive control of the state," Trump said in a Truth Social post.

The post appeared shortly after Iraqi government spokesman Haider al-Aboudi said Baghdad considered crude oil exports that bypass state oil marketer SOMO to be smuggling as the proceeds do not reach the state treasury, the state news agency reported.

Speaking to the Iraqi state news agency, al-Aboudi added that Iraq lost an estimated $100bn to oil smuggling through its Kurdistan region from 2008 to 2025.

Iraq is hoping to attract wide-scale foreign investment in its often struggling economy.

Iraq on Thursday closed two border crossings in the Kurdistan region, one with Syria and one with Iran, after al-Zaidi ordered federal authorities to take control of crossings run by the semi-autonomous regional administration.

Thousands of Kurds protested on Thursday against al-Zaidi's moves to put oilfields under federal control and deploy federal troops along the region's international borders.


President Donald Trump with PM Ali al-Zaidi in the Oval Office at the White House in Washington, DC. (**Reuters/File Photo**)

The moves against the Kurds, just a week after al-Zaidi ordered a showdown against a heavily-armed militia aligned with Iran, Kataib Hezbollah, putting him in confrontation with two major factions. Both crackdowns have been linked to alleged oil-smuggling rings. "We are in contact with the Kurdistan region to ensure the optimal management and preservation of our oil wealth. The oilfields in the region and Basra belong to all Iraqis and remain under the Iraqi flag," Iraqi Oil Minister Basim Mohammed told a news conference.

Iraq's highest court ruled on Wednesday that Baghdad can deploy federal forces along all international borders, including those in the Kurdistan region.

The court decision appears to be a victory for al-Zaidi, a 41-year-old multimillionaire businessman and political novice who came to power in a compromise just six months ago. But political analysts say it may yet prove difficult to implement measures that challenge entrenched interests.

Ties between Baghdad and the Kurds have often been strained over control of oil, money, territory and trade. The central government responded with force when Kurdistan held an independence referendum in 2017, though relations have lately grown calmer. The Kurdistan Regional Government on Wednesday rejected what it called the "military language and threats" used in a statement from the spokesman for the Iraqi military announcing the new steps.

It said it was working with federal authorities to combat corruption and called for an end to oil smuggling across Iraq.

In al-Zaidi 's other major standoff, the prime minister ordered the army last week to prepare to enter Jurf al-Sakhar, south of Baghdad, where the government accuses Kataib Hezbollah of running a smuggling operation. The group was initially defiant but agreed to let soldiers enter the city.

Visa row: UN special rapporteur refutes Costa Rica 'false terrorism' accusations

AFP
San José

The UN special rapporteur on Palestinian rights said yesterday that Costa Rica will be held accountable for false "terrorism" accusations it levelled to deny her entry to the country.

Francesca Albanese, who has accused Israel of genocide in Gaza and the occupied territories, spoke from the airport serving the capital city San Jose, after being denied entry as she arrived Thursday.

The US-aligned government of Costa Rica asserted that Albanese was the subject of an "international alert over links to terrorist acts."

An Italian lawyer, Albanese is the UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967.

"I am deeply indignant that the government of Costa Rica has spread false information that links me to terrorism," Albanese said from the airport in a speech to the University of Costa Rica, which is granting her an honorary degree.


Francesca Albanese (**Reuters/File Photo**)

She also accused the Costa Rican government of supporting what she called an apartheid regime in the Palestinian territories.

"Defending human rights is not terrorism and the government must answer for these insinuations, as should be the case under the rule of law," Albanese said.

She has faced fierce pushback from Israel and some of its allies over her longstanding accusations that Israel has committed genocide against the Palestinians.

One dead, three missing after cargo ship sinks off Cuba

One sailor died and three others were missing after a Panama-flagged cargo ship with an Egyptian and Indonesian crew sank off northern Cuba, the island's maritime authority said Thursday.
The Halima, operated by Turkish company Sidra Line and carrying 208 containers, sank early Thursday near Cabanas Bay in Artemisa province, the Cuban Maritime Administration said in a statement carried by state media. Of the 16 crew members on board, 13 were rescued, "one of them deceased, and search operations for the other three are continuing," it said, without specifying their nationalities.
The maritime authority did not say whether the vessel was leaving Cuba or heading to the island.
The ship sank off the northern coast of Artemisa province, home to the Port of Mariel, Cuba's main container terminal and one of its most important logistics hubs, located around 45 km from Havana.
Sidra Line is a maritime transport and logistics company founded in Istanbul in 2021, specialising in regular container shipping routes and feeder services. (**AFP**)

Hackers breach US Air Force flagship Cloud One computing platform

Reuters
Washington

Hackers have breached the US Air Force's flagship cloud computing platform, three people familiar with the matter told Reuters, in a development that could jeopardise a vast swathe of sensitive tactical, personnel and logistics data.

The intrusion at Cloud One was discovered within the past month or so during work to upgrade the system, two of the people said, adding that the discovery has led to disruption across the platform. Reuters could not establish the identity of the hackers, the full scope of the intrusion or whether any data had been stolen.

In a statement to Reuters, the Air Force said it "does not comment on the security posture, vulnerabilities or operational status of specific networks and systems. We continuously take prudent measures to protect Department (of the Air Force) information, systems and mission capabilities."

Initiated in 2017, Cloud One was meant to serve as a one-stop shop for the Air Force's IT needs, combining the resources of four operators — Microsoft, Amazon, Oracle and Alphabet — to power scores of applications including ones that manage personnel data and pay or logistics and maintenance.

Among them are the Air Force's Cloud-Based Command and Control, which collates air defense radar and other data feeds from across North America, and the Theater Integrated Combat Munitions System, which tracks bombs and missiles across more than 200 US Air Force locations around the world.

SAIC was the prime contractor for Cloud One until 2025, when Leidos took over. SAIC did not respond to a request seeking comment. Leidos referred questions to the Air Force.

Cloud One is among the US military's biggest cloud platforms, according to two of the sources.


An aerial view of the Pentagon in Washington DC. (**Reuters/File Photo**)

"A breach here is a big deal," one of the sources said.

Investigators have called in Cyber Command, the US military's cyber force, to assess the damage, one of the sources said.

Cyber Command did not respond to requests for comment.

The discovery of the hack led to a range of disruption.

Two of the sources, along with a fourth person familiar with the matter, said that efforts to migrate back-office applications to Cloud One, a longstanding military priority, have been paused.

Updates to applications already running on Cloud One were blocked, leaving Air Force personnel unable to apply fixes just as a new batch of serious software vulnerabilities has been disclosed across the technology industry.

A fifth source said that some users had their administrator rights revoked.

All five sources spoke on condition of anonymity.

One source said that the cyber intruders exploited a software vulnerability to reach the control plane. That person likened the control plane to a universal remote, as intruders in theory could leverage their access to check the operational status of military aircraft or the movement of spare parts, though it was unclear whether the hackers did so in this case.

Reuters could not identify the specific vulnerability exploited by the hackers.

News of the breach comes amid heightened anxiety over AI-powered intrusions, a particularly serious problem for cloud-based networks because of the ability of AI models to swiftly detect weaknesses across wide surface areas.

The US government already has been dealing with the fallout from at least six other recently disclosed cyber incidents, including two at the FBI, a previous hack of Pentagon data, a recent leak of Department of Homeland Security personnel information, a breach affecting at least two spy agencies and a hack at the Treasury Department.

Cloud One has long been in the crosshairs of hackers.

In a 2023 commentary carried by the online publication FedScoop, Cloud One's leadership touted what they called a "100% success rate" in beating back what they said was a "staggering" number of attempts to penetrate the platform.

"There is no room for error when it comes to security," Cloud One's leadership wrote.

WORLD

Mexico files complaint with US over DEA tip line on alleged traffickers, corruption

Reuters
Mexico City

Mexico has filed a formal complaint with the US over a US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) tip line seeking information on suspected drug traffickers and alleged corruption among Mexican officials, President Claudia Sheinbaum said yesterday, touching on a particularly sensitive issue in bilateral relations.

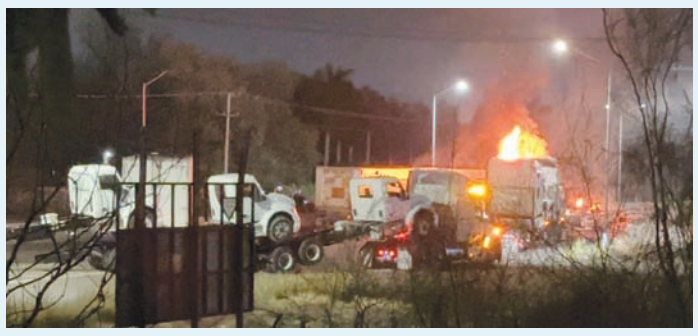
Foreign Minister Juan Ramon de la Fuente contacted the US ambassador to Mexico to lodge the complaint, Sheinbaum said during her morning press conference, adding that the ambassador said he would look into the issue.

Alleged links between elected officials and organised crime have become an increasingly fraught issue for Sheinbaum's government, which has rejected what it describes as attempts by US authorities to interfere in Mexican affairs.

"We have made it very clear that our relationship with the US is one of co-ordination, not subordination," Sheinbaum said.

The complaint comes despite a significant expansion of security co-operation between the two nations under Sheinbaum.

Her government has stepped up efforts against organised crime and fentanyl trafficking amid pressure from US President Donald Trump, who has repeatedly threatened unilateral action against Mexican cartels if Mexico didn't do more.


Vehicles burn on a highway near Los Mochis, Sinaloa following an announcement of the arrest of El Chapo Isidro. (**Reuters/File Photo**)

Recent co-operation has included the capture of drug lord Fausto Isidro Meza Flores, known as "El Chapo Isidro," in an operation Mexican officials said was carried out by Mexican troops supported by US intelligence.

Bilateral security co-operation, however, has been repeatedly tested. The DEA has long been a source of friction, with Mexican officials accusing the agency of overstepping its authority and infringing on national sovereignty.

Tensions also flared earlier this year after two US officials who were killed in the northern state of Chihuahua were identified by sources as CIA personnel, exposing US intelligence activities that Sheinbaum said her government was not aware of.

The US agency this week announced a tip line seeking information on alleged members of criminal organisations, corrupt officials and others collaborating with drug traffickers in Sinaloa, the northwestern Mexican state that is the stronghold of the Sinaloa Cartel. The tip line comes amid broader US pressure on Mexico over suspected links between politicians and cartels.

Reuters reported in June that the Trump administration had pressed Mexico to investigate politicians suspected of cartel links and extradite them to the US to face criminal charges.

Those discussions included allegations involving figures from Sheinbaum's ruling Morena party, according to sources familiar with the talks.

Among the politicians who have faced US scrutiny is Sinaloa Governor Ruben Rocha Moya, who has repeatedly denied wrongdoing.

Sheinbaum added yesterday that "the US should focus on tackling drug consumption and criminal groups operating within its own territory."

Enthusiasm in Venezuela as Machado seeks reform ideas

AFP
Caracas

Residents of a vast working-class neighbourhood near Caracas cheered "tomorrow, tomorrow" to say when they want elections in Venezuela, where Nobel-winning opposition leader Maria Corina Machado has launched meetings on how to restore democracy.

Her initiative aims to gather proposals from across the nation and Venezuela's diaspora for democratic reform, 11 months after Washington ousted president Nicolas Maduro.

The consultations are expected to last several months and, according to Machado's team, involve more than 1mn people.

Having returned from exile in October, Machado been excluded from transition talks with Washington-backed government and certain opposition parties.

She mingled with small crowds in her visits to three working-class neighbourhoods, including Petare near Caracas, to encourage people to participate.

Machado was greeted with loud cries of "Freedom!" as people kissed and hugged her, while others cried with emotion or spoke with trembling voices. Everyone wanted a photo. On a small terrace in the Campo-Rico neighbourhood, around 30 people gathered in front of a large computer screen to answer some 20 questions on the platform Punto de Acuerdo (Point of Agreement), set up by Machado's team.


Maria Corina Machado greets people in Caracas. (**AFP**)

The topics covered justice, education, health, wages and pensions, the role of the public and private sectors — and, notably, elections.

Participants agreed elections should be held in the first half of 2027, while Delcy Rodriguez, the interim president who succeeded Maduro, has appeared to be playing for time despite promising a vote.

During Venezuela's 2024 election, the opposition collected around 80% of the vote tally sheets, which showed its candidate had won by a wide margin.

The government, citing a cyberattack, never published detailed results.

"People here collected the tally sheets... they are part of the Citizens' Assembly, and here they are deliberating, discussing how to build the country of the future. They are debating ideas for the government you will lead," activist Jonatan Molano told Machado.

Having returned from exile a month ago, the opposition leader has rallied her supporters while also launching an effort to unite people beyond her own party.

On Wednesday, she promised a political transition with "truth without resentment and justice without revenge" during a meeting with students.

She said the Punto de Acuerdo programme aimed to bring "all Venezuelans" together around the same project. "This is historic. This is citizenship in action. These will be the foundations of the new republic," Machado said while attending an assembly in La Vega, a working-class neighbourhood in western Caracas.

"We are going to address the crisis facing our children. Four million children who don't go to school, right? Retirees living on a pension of one dollar a month who can't afford their medicine," she said. "The power going out for 10, 12 hours — enough, right? We are going to tackle the emergency. We are going to get this country moving again by looking after people," Machado added.

Fabio Valentini, director general of the Punto de Acuerdo platform, said: "What is collected here will undoubtedly shape Maria Corina's government programme, and what we are consulting people on at this stage are the most important principles that define the republic."

Jorge Pulido, a 20-year-old architecture student, said he was "deeply moved" to meet Machado on the roof terrace of a house in the working-class neighbourhood of Antimano and was delighted with the questionnaire.

"I think it covers the whole country very well. And all citizens are taking part. We are all like a family. Now more than ever, our leader Maria Corina needs us to move this process forward."

He said he was "born in 2006" and had "known nothing but all the disaster they (the Chavista government) have caused in recent years."

Moments later, Eduardo Aular, a 66-year-old retiree living on 260 bolivars a month (25 US cents), broke down in tears in Machado's arms.


Luiz Carlos Trabuco greets President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva in Brasilia. (**Reuters/File Photo**)

Lula confirms banker as FM for his next term

AFP
Brasília

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has appointed private banking executive Luiz Carlos Trabuco as finance minister for his next term, the presidency said Thursday.

Trabuco, 75, chairman of the board of Bradesco — one of the country's largest banks — will take over the ministry with a mission to reassure markets in Latin America's largest economy following a sharp stock market decline and currency depreciation after the leftist president's shock reelection a month ago. "Luiz Carlos Trabuco has accepted President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's invitation to take the helm of the finance ministry," the presidency stated, adding that the banker agreed to take the job during an afternoon meeting with the Brazilian leader.

Lula will begin his fourth non-consecutive term in office in January and has so far only named one minister for that mandate.

Bradesco is one of Brazil's largest private banks.

Ahead of the official announcement, rumors circulating about Trabuco's new job appeared to restore market confidence.

The national currency meanwhile regained strength after briefly crossing the symbolic threshold of six reais to the dollar on Monday.

"I cannot become a hostage to the financial system," Lula said last week during a trip to Madrid.

Trabuco, who is close to Lula, began working at Bradesco at 17 as an ordinary office clerk.

He rose through the ranks to become chief executive, serving from 2009 to 2018 before becoming chairman of the board.

But the appointment has already drawn criticism from within Lula's own camp and from his election rival. "A banker? That's what I call turning your back on everything that was done before the runoff," left-wing lawmaker Glauber Braga wrote on X.

Senator Flavio Bolsonaro in exile mocked the appointment.

"When Lula gets to the point of appointing a banker to the Finance Ministry, it means he hasn't the slightest idea what to do to get the Brazilian economy breathing again," he said in a YouTube broadcast from the US, where he fled after the recent election.

OpenAI countersues Apple for stealing trade secrets through employees

OpenAI sued Apple yesterday, accusing the Big Tech giant of stealing its trade secrets and blocking its access to hardware suppliers after Apple sued OpenAI for allegedly poaching its employees to gain access to its technology. The ChatGPT maker filed counterclaims in California federal court yesterday, saying that Apple's employment practices were designed to "trap" employees and prevent them from working on competitors' technology. Tensions between the two tech companies have escalated as the intensifying race to develop AI products fuels competition for talent and proprietary technology.
Earlier this year, Apple sued OpenAI and two former employees, alleging misappropriation of its trade secrets to benefit the ChatGPT owner's foray into consumer hardware. (**Reuters**)

Colombian media outlet denounces govt harassment

AFP
Bogotá

An independent Colombian media outlet late on Thursday denounced government attempts to intimidate it after an office inspection that lasted for around seven hours. Numerous press freedom organisations have questioned the recently inaugurated government's relationship with the press, lasering in on cases of restricted access to information, legal harassment and economic pressure.

La Silla Vacia has been investigating President Abelardo de la Espriella's legal and business ties since he took office in August.

The right-wing government has accused the outlet of "political activism" and sent an agency responsible for overseeing private companies to inspect its office, La Silla Vacia said.

"It's a strategic move to silence a media outlet that investigates this government, just as it has investigated all previous ones," Juanita Leon, publication director and this year's winner of Colombia's prestigious Simon Bolivar Prize for best journalist, told AFP.

Government officials requested documents without explaining their motive, according to the outlet.

Carlos Suarez, De la Espriella's chief advisor and executive at the state-owned Ecopetrol, lashed out at Leon on social media following questions about the origin of his family's fortune.

"I don't want to silence you either, Juanita: that would be gifting you the role of martyr and setting your chorus of helpers singing," he wrote on X in October.

De la Espriella has forbidden any member of his government from speaking to the press without presidential authorisation.

His administration recently canceled security details for government-critical journalists such as Daniel Coronell and Hollman Morris, who have repeatedly reported receiving death threats.

Milei's South Atlantic ambitions pose a test for Argentina's military limits

Reuters
Buenos Aires

In August, long-awaited F-16 fighter jets soared over Buenos Aires, part of Argentina's newly purchased fleet that President Javier Milei has proudly dubbed the country's "guardian angels."

The jets are a potent symbol of Milei's military modernisation drive, even as his ambitions for better strategic positioning in the South Atlantic and stronger sovereignty claims over the British-controlled Falkland Islands encounter real-world obstacles.

Argentina's armed forces suffer from decades of neglect. In 2025, the government spent 0.56% of its GDP on defence, the lowest in South America, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

Milei says he is rebuilding with help from allies. Argentina beat a handful of countries to buy the US-made airplanes from Denmark in April 2024. Washington threw its weight behind the deal, worried that Argentina would turn to China instead, a former defence official from then President Joe Biden's administration told Reuters.

The US has in recent years also approved the purchase of four P-3C Orion surveillance aircraft, sold Argentina eight Stryker armored vehicles and approved the potential purchase of Black Hawk helicopters. Argentina is also replacing its rifles with Israeli ones, while Germany and France have offered to sell the country submarines, according to local media.

Milei's focus on defence intensified in September when he stepped up the country's sovereignty claims to the Falklands, known in Argentina as the Malvinas, a bipartisan national cause. Days before, US President Donald Trump had suggested Washington could reconsider its traditionally neutral position on the dispute.

Today, an international court will rule on Argentina's request for provisional measures to halt British-authorised oil drilling near the archipelago.


A drone view of the National Congress in Buenos Aires. (**Reuters**)

While Milei has pledged to recover the islands that Argentina lost in a 1982 war to Britain through diplomacy rather than force, some experts argue that a more capable military could strengthen his hand in the South Atlantic. "We don't have the ability to project power towards the Malvinas," said Jorge Duran, a former commander of Argentina's armed forces' special operations. He later added: "We could barely patrol our waters."

Argentina's Defence Ministry and Milei's office did not respond to requests for comment.

Argentina's defence budget plunged after its military dictatorship ended in the 1980s and has remained low through subsequent economic crises, said Luciano Anzelini, an international relations professor at the Universidad Nacional de Quilmes in Buenos Aires province.

The country lost its last submarine in a 2017 naval disaster. Argentina's aging destroyers still rely on the vintage Commodore 64 computer, the military's top official, Marcelo Dalle Nogare, told Buenos Aires' Rotary Club in October. "The military capacity is little more than a museum," said Juan Battaleme, a former Argentine defence secretary for international affairs who helped negotiate the $301mn contract for the F-16 fleet.

Milei has pledged to return "respect" to the armed forces, naming a career military officer as defence minister for the first time since Argentina's return to democracy.

He has earmarked 10% of government proceeds from the sale or lease of non-military public assets for defence spending.

Since launching his Falklands sovereignty push, Milei's administration has also begun a tender for a dock at a long-planned southern naval base aimed at improving access to Antarctica. Critics dismiss Milei's talk of a military revival as political theater. There's been this "sudden burst of patriotism from Milei regarding the Malvinas issue," said former defence minister and opposition congressman Agustin Rossi.

"In reality, the policy has been one of military downsizing."

Whether Argentina's recent acquisitions will alter the balance of power in the South Atlantic remains unclear.

Britain has long maintained restrictions on arms sales to Argentina and says its position in the Falklands is secure. Armed Forces Minister Louise Sandher-Jones told Parliament in October that she was "confident that our military presence is at the appropriate level for the defence of the Islands."

Battaleme said that the F-16s, which can intercept hostile aircraft, weren't bought with the aim of recovering the Falklands.

A written statement provided by the F-16 programme, which is run by the defence ministry's air force, said that the jets are meant to improve Argentina's air control, as well as "protect its energy resources, critical infrastructure, and even its capacity as a global food producer," while "not losing sight of its interests in the South Atlantic."

Uganda launches Africa's first trial of an mRNA Bundibugyo Ebola vaccine

Reuters
Kampala

Uganda said yesterday that it had launched Africa's first clinical trial of an mRNA vaccine against the Bundibugyo species of the Ebola virus, which is behind the outbreak centred on Congo that is now the second-largest on record globally.

In a statement the state-run Uganda Virus Research Institute (UVRI) said it had launched the trial in collaboration with Moderna, which manufactures the vaccine.

Moderna's vaccine will also enter trials in Congo soon, alongside another new vaccine targeting Bundibugyo developed by the University of Oxford and the Serum Institute of India.

Scientists are already testing if an existing vaccine targeting a different Ebola virus, Merck's Ervebo, can provide any cross-protection against Bundibugyo.

The Ugandan trial is the second for the vaccine, after Moderna began its first human trial of the shots in Canada in August, targeting adults from 18 to 65 years of age.

UVRI said the Ugandan trial will for the first time test the vaccine's safety and ability to trigger an immune response in children aged 1 year and above, and aims to enrol 224 volunteers.

"Children are often among those hardest hit when Ebola strikes, yet they are too often the last to benefit from new vaccines," said Richard Hatchett, chief executive officer of the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, which is helping fund the vaccine.

Gavi buys 1.5mn doses of experimental Ebola jab

AFP
Nairobi

A global vaccine alliance has bought 1.5mn doses of an experimental Ebola vaccine, hoping it will be proven effective against a huge outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo, it told AFP yesterday.

There are currently no vaccines or treatments for the less common Bundibugyo strain of Ebola behind the outbreak declared in May, which has led to more than 5,700 confirmed deaths out of more than 11,000 cases, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Two potential vaccines against the deadly Ebola strain gripping the DRC were set to enter trials in the outbreak's epicentre this week.

They include a ChAdOx1 adenoviral vector vaccine developed by India's Serum Institute and the University of Oxford, and another developed by the US-based Moderna group using the mRNA technology made famous during the Covid pandemic.

But Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, which brings together government and private donors to help developing countries acquire jabs at affordable prices, is not waiting around.



A Congolese hygiene officer disinfects the personal protective equipment worn by a psychologist, in accordance with infection prevention and control protocols at the Ebola Treatment Centre of the Kitatumba Reference Hospital, in North Kivu province. (**Reuters**)

After the Covid-19 pandemic, the alliance set up a new $50mn First Response Fund — under a so-called "No Regrets" approach — to allow it to buy up doses in advance even before they have been fully tested.

Gavi signed a purchase commitment this week with the Serum Institute for 1.5mn doses of the ChAdOx1, and plans to have "hundreds of thousands" ready to deploy should the trials prove successful and they are approved by the WHO and DRC government.

"We're investing in it, hoping that the signals will be positive, and if that is the case, we'll have gained months and months on the deployment," Emanuele Capobianco, Gavi's director of global health security, told AFP.

He said he hoped for trials to conclude "within the first half of 2027" and even "within the first quarter" in a more optimistic scenario.

Gavi has only used the First Response Fund once before — for the Mpox outbreak that struck the DRC in 2024.

Gavi is already working with local health partners and community leaders to assist the government in delivering the Ebola jabs in a volatile, conflict-affected area, while also pushing back against high levels of vaccine hesitancy and misinformation among the population.

"Like anywhere, you have people resisting... but you also have a large part of the population that understands the enormous power of vaccines and they are eager to have them," said Capobianco.

Gavi also has a stockpile of 500,000 doses of an existing vaccine, Ervebo, used against the Zaire strain of Ebola, which began testing last month to see if it is also effective against Bundibugyo.

The alliance was under threat last year after the US pulled support worth $1.58bn, but Washington announced in June that it would re-engage in the wake of the Ebola outbreak.

"We had major cuts within the secretariat last year, but we are now on a new phase for delivery and our focus is on that," said Capobianco.

Burundi opposition leader barred from national polls

AFP
Nairobi

Burundi's electoral commission yesterday rejected an application from the country's main opposition leader to contest in the presidential polls next year.

President Evariste Ndayishimiye will seek a second term in the May 3 general elections for the ruling CNDD-FDD party, which has been in power since 2005 and is widely considered the favourite.

Agathon Rwasa, an ex-militia leader who fought in the country's civil war, lost to Ndayishimiye in 2020's polls, which the opposition labelled an "electoral charade".

The electoral commission said Rwasa had made a "false declaration" in his application, as he had registered as an independent candidate despite remaining a member of a political party.

"Consequently, the Independent National Electoral Commission rejects his candidacy," according to an official document seen by AFP.

The commission approved seven out of 10 applicants, and those rejected have two days to challenge the decision before the Constitutional Court.

The final list of candidates will be published on December 6.

Rwasa's disqualification came as "no surprise" to prominent exiled civil society activist Pacifique Nininahazwe.

"It concludes a process of political elimination initiated by the regime of Évariste Ndayishimiye... to neutralise his primary rival," he told AFP.

Burundi is one of the world's poorest countries and has a history of deadly political crises and a civil war that killed around 300,000 people between 1993 and 2005.

Earlier this month, Ndayishimiye submitted his candidacy papers, paying a deposit of 100mn Burundian francs ($33,000).

Opposition parties argue the huge sum imposed by the authorities is designed to prevent them from participating in the election.

The president's CNDD-FDD party won all 100 seats in the 2025 National Assembly elections — which also saw irregularities.

Ndayishimiye has led Burundi since June 2020 after the death of his iron-fisted predecessor, Pierre Nkurunziza, who ruled for 15 years.

Uganda to withdraw troops from DR Congo amid spat

AFP
Kinshasa

Uganda's army said yesterday it planned to withdraw from a key DR Congo town and accused militias apparently allied to the Congolese government of stepping up attacks in the strife-torn eastern region.

The Ugandan announcement comes days after the DRC said it had summoned the Ugandan embassy's head of mission over remarks by the country's army chief.

The mineral-rich eastern Democratic Republic of Congo has been wracked by violence for more than 30 years, often drawing in its neighbours Uganda and Rwanda directly or through support for local armed groups.

Ugandan armed forces (UPDF) have been deployed in Ituri and North Kivu provinces on the DRC's border with Uganda since 2021.

They were sent to back up the Congolese army against militants linked to the Islamic State group.

The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), historically a Ugandan rebel coalition, was established in the eastern DRC in 1995 and regularly carries out killings in the deeply troubled region plagued by myriad armed groups.

The Congolese army is also fighting the armed FRN anti-governmental group, formerly known as the M23, which is backed by Rwanda, in the region.

On Monday, Ugandan army chief, Muhoozi Kainerugaba and son of President Yoweri Museveni, threatened on X to take control of the strategic Congolese town of Walikale in North Kivu province.

The FRN launched an offensive towards the town at the beginning of the month.

Kainerugaba — known for inflammatory posts on social media — had in a separate post also called for the unconditional surrender of the airport in Isiro, the provincial capital in Haut-Uele.

In response, Kinshasa announced the following day the summons of the Ugandan diplomat following what it called the "particularly serious" remarks.

The DRC "remains determined to ensure respect for its dignity and its institutions in the face of any form of provocation or interference", it said in a statement.

Yesterday, the Ugandan army spokesman said on X that it would "soon" withdraw its forces from the town of Lubero in North Kivu which is close to a front line in fighting between Congolese and FRN forces.

In a separate post, the spokesman accused militia forces, including some apparently allied to the Congolese government, of stepping up attacks on civilians.

"These negative militia forces have increasingly mounted attacks against vulnerable communities, massacring women and children such as the Bahema and Tutsi communities in Ituri and the North Kivu region," he said.

"Under International Humanitarian Law (IHL), the UPDF retains the responsibility to extend protection to such vulnerable communities and will continue to do so whenever possible," he added.

In C Africa, Russia's Wagner Group muscles in on daily life

AFP
Bangui

The Central African Republic is one of the world's poorest countries and the last bastion of the Russian paramilitary Wagner Group once led by the late Yevgeny Prigozhin. Elsewhere on the continent, it is gradually being replaced by the Africa Corps, which reports directly to the defence ministry in Moscow.

On the streets of Bangui, it is not uncommon to come across Russians in uniforms, their faces hidden and with weapons on their belts.

Outside restaurants and supermarkets, their camouflaged vehicles stand out and are so recognisable that all cars stop quickly to give way to them.

Deployed in 2018 at the request of President Faustin-Archange Touadéra to support the Central African army, Wagner fighters have become the government's main security partners in exchange for lucrative contracts in the gold and diamond sectors.

The group is now diversifying and strengthening its presence by establishing itself in drinks manufacturing and distribution.

Russian water, soda are made locally and sold at significantly lower prices than those of the competition.

Street vendors even sell 50-millilitre sachets of coconut-flavoured beverage for 150 CFA francs ($0.25).

"They seek to conquer the smallest possible spaces. They are the only competitors of the Castel group," Central African researcher Soleil-Parfait Kalessopo told AFP.

The Mocaf, a subsidiary of the French group Castel, has been in the Central African Republic since 1953, and had a monopoly on the market before the Russians arrived.

Castel did not provide any figures on its production in the country when asked by AFP.



A general view of the entrance gate to the Russian House in Bangui. (**AFP**)

In March 2023, one of its factories was set on fire by four masked men dressed like Wagner mercenaries, according to security camera footage, which showed them throwing Molotov cocktails.

"The events of 2023 are now behind us," the Castel group said, when asked about its performance since the arrival of Russian competitors.

At the head of the First Industrial Company, which markets drinks produced by the Russians, is Dmitry Sytyi, according to Jeune Afrique magazine.

Sytyi is also director of the Russian House in Bangui, and is described by the All Eyes on Wagner collective as "one of the pillars of the Wagner network" in Central Africa.

The Russian House, opened in 2021, offers many free cultural and sporting activities to people in Bangui, as well as Russian language lessons.

Every afternoon, children play on the roundabout, trampolines and swings in the garden to the sound of a promotional video for Russia.

In front of the cultural centre, along the Ubangi river, stands a statue of Prigozhin, who was killed when a private plane crashed in 2023, two months after his aborted mutiny in Russia.

Another symbol of the Russian presence is a fresco at a market showing President Vladimir Putin shaking hands with Touadéra.

Most Central Africans appear to fear the Russians, refusing to mention their existence for fear of reprisals.

"They have methods of repression, of operating, which really terrorise the population," said Kalessopo.

Several human rights groups have accused Wagner paramilitaries of serious abuses, notably torture and murder, in several countries, including the Central African Republic.

For lawyer Crépin Mboli-Goumba, a member of the opposition Republican Bloc for the Defence of the Constitution (BRDC), Wagner fighters represent "a danger for democrats and democracy" by their involvement in the economy and politics.

As in Mali, where the Africa Corps has supplanted Wagner, Moscow has looked to impose its new structure on the Central African authorities, although not without resistance from Touadéra, whose personal security has relied on the group for several years.

A Central African minister confirmed to AFP that the Africa Corps was in the country but the subject remains sensitive.

"There was an agreement, they are here with the others," said Pascal Bida Koyagbele, a minister in charge of major public works and a close ally of the president.

Wagner operatives, he added, have "the advantage of knowing the terrain" and "generally guide the Africa Corps personnel".

Asked about the matter, communications minister Evariste Ngamana sidestepped the question. "Wagner or Africa Corps, it makes no difference. Ask the Russians. It's an internal issue," he said.

The arrival of the Africa Corps has not ousted Wagner from the Central African Republic.

The development of "military-technical co-operation" with Africa Corps "would not, in itself, constitute a replacement for the Wagner Corps", said Russian military expert Sergey Eledinov.

But the blurred lines could become "a factor of destabilisation", warned Anicet-Georges Dologuele, a Central African former prime minister now in opposition.

Touadéra has taken significant risks, he said, adding: "I don't know many human beings who would dare to disobey President Putin."



Paul Mackenzie, a Kenyan cult leader and his wife Rhoda Mumbua Maweu listen to their lawyer Lawrence Obonyo after arriving for a court ruling at the Mombasa High Court in Mombasa, yesterday. (**Reuters**)

Kenyan cult leader guilty of 123 manslaughter deaths

AFP
Nairobi

A self-proclaimed Kenyan preacher was yesterday found guilty of the manslaughter of 123 people, barely a month after being sentenced to 200 years in prison for the murders of children in an infamous starvation cult.

Hundreds of bodies have been discovered since 2023 at the sect's base near the coastal resort of Malindi, in what became known as the "Shakahola Forest Massacre".

Paul Mackenzie has faced multiple charges linked to the cult in different courts, but this is the final conviction in a series of cases that have lasted years.

The Mombasa court found that "Mackenzie had systematically persuaded his followers to fast until they died", the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) said.

"Children were to go first, then women and then men, with Mackenzie himself meant to die last," the ODPP said in a statement on X.

The trial called 95 witnesses including survivors, detectives and digital forensic experts.

The ODPP said post-mortem records demonstrated that 129 of the 238 victims died of starvation, adding: "The remains of 86 others were mostly skeletal, making the establishment of their cause of death impossible."

The court acquitted 60 accused persons on all counts, although in its statement the ODPP "indicated the intention to appeal".

Earlier this week, the self-proclaimed preacher was also convicted of radicalisation, terrorism-related offences and assault.

Mackenzie was arrested in April 2023 after a rights group alerted authorities and some followers were rescued from the 325-hectare (800-acre) ranch in the Shakahola forest on Kenya's coast.

The Kenya National Commission on Human Rights put the death toll at 429 in 2024. Some victims remain unidentified.

The case has fuelled calls for tighter regulation of religious organisations, after it emerged that Mackenzie had previously been arrested twice but released.

WORLD

Tourists enjoy brilliant autumn colours in Kyoto

AFP
Kyoto


Tourists dressed in kimonos pose for photos near autumn leaves next to the Nanzen-ji temple in Kyoto. (**AFP**)

Visitors from Japan and overseas marvelled at the brilliant reds and yellows of Kyoto's autumn foliage season, as it transformed the city's temples, gardens and mountains with a blaze of colour.

The ancient Japanese capital is known for its cherry blossoms in spring, but autumn is another peak tourism season, particularly for local visitors keen to enjoy the centuries-old tradition of viewing vibrant fall foliage.

"The autumn leaves themselves are beautiful," Rie Segawa, 34-year-old visitor from Osaka, told AFP, adding that the colours make her "feel calm".

"Seeing them turn red makes me happy to see the seasons changing," she said.

Anthony Piglioni from France said he'd heard so much about the famous cherry blossom season but "the colours are just as beautiful as in the spring".

"It's incredible... the colours, the landscapes... very zen, very relaxing," the 37-year-old told AFP.

Kyoto has a long-standing tradition of appreciating autumn foliage.

During the Heian period between the late eighth century and the late 12th century, when the city was Japan's capital, looking at autumn leaves was an important seasonal pastime among the aristocracy, much like cherry blossom viewing in spring.

The aristocracy would visit the mountains and compose poems celebrating the beauty of the autumn colours.

Over time, trees such as Japanese maples were planted in aristocratic residences, temples and gardens across Kyoto.

Scientists say climate change is delaying famed autumn foliage season in Japan, pushing back the peak display of red and yellow leaves, although this year was within the normal range for Kyoto.

Lawsuits won't affect Google's investments in Malaysia: PM

AFP
Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia's lawsuits against Google over alleged failures to tackle harmful online content will not affect the US tech giant's investments in the country, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said yesterday.

The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) said on Wednesday it was suing Google for $146mn.

The case has prompted concerns about whether it would affect the company's plans to sink billions of dollars into the Southeast Asian nation to build data centres and other infrastructure.

Anwar defended the legal action yesterday, saying Google had been slow to respond to complaints, with some left unanswered for up to half a year.

The lawsuits "will not affect (the investments)", he told reporters in the capital Kuala Lumpur.

"There are cases of online gambling that we have reported, but after six months, no actions have been taken."

The MCMC alleges that Google-owned YouTube failed to adequately address online gambling, scams and fraud on its platform and did not take proactive action against harmful content published by a controversial local blogger.

Google announced plans this month to invest $15bn in Malaysia over the next two years to build data centres and other infrastructure, expanding on a $2bn investment disclosed in 2024.

The country is Southeast Asia's fastest-growing hub for new data centres, which come crammed with servers that can train and run AI tools such as chatbots and image generators.

Anwar said he had spoken with Google's President and Chief Investment Officer Ruth Porat on Thursday.

"I contacted Ruth Porat yesterday and she told me that Google would cooperate to address the issues," he said.

Malaysia has previously taken action against other major social media platforms, including TikTok, over allegations that they failed to remove content deemed "grossly offensive".

Seoul repatriates 6 N Koreans found on drifting fishing boat

AFP
Seoul

Republic of Korea repatriated six North Koreans yesterday after they were found drifting in international waters on a fishing boat earlier this month, Seoul's unification ministry said.

The announcement came following heightened tensions along the heavily fortified border, after a recent mine blast that injured three Korean soldiers in the demilitarised zone (DMZ).

The boat, initially carrying seven North Koreans, was found drifting in international waters off Korea's Ulleungdo island on November 3 and towed by the military and coast guard.

Authorities decided to repatriate six on humanitarian grounds after confirming their wishes through a series of inquiries involving government agencies and the UN Command, according to authorities.

One of the Koreans expressed a wish to stay and will remain in the South, according to the ministry.

The fishing boat carrying the six North Koreans on Friday crossed the Northern Limit Line (NLL), the de facto maritime border, in the East Sea — also known as the Sea of Japan — under its own power at 8:33 KST (2333 GMT), the ministry said.

It then joined a North Korean vessel waiting north of the boundary and continued northwards, according to Seoul's Yonhap news agency.

The UNC is believed to have notified Pyongyang of the repatriation plan in advance, as it did last year, according to Yonhap.

The presence of a North Korean vessel suggests Pyongyang received the notification, although no response from the North has been reported, Yonhap added.

Under Seoul's constitution, all North Koreans are considered citizens of the Republic of Korea, as the South is officially known, and those who reach its territory and seek to defect are generally allowed to stay.

North Korea is known to brutally retaliate against defectors and their families.

Seoul carried out a similar repatriation last year, returning two North Korean vessels and all their occupants in accordance with their wishes after they were rescued in separate incidents in March and May.

Also yesterday, Korea's military said police had detained a North Korean defector in her 30s who entered a civilian restricted zone near the border.

Trump firm plans to build tower in Hanoi, sources say

Reuters
Hanoi

Vietnamese business partners of the Trump Organization are planning a skyscraper in Hanoi, three people with knowledge of the new project said.

It is one of three Trump-branded projects in the works in the Southeast Asian nation. A $1.5bn Trump-branded golf complex is being developed near Hanoi by local partners of the Trump Organization. A separate Trump Tower is planned in Ho Chi Minh City, people involved with the project have said.

All the projects are being developed at no cost to the Trump Organization, which will earn money from the use of its brand, operating fees and sales of villas on the golf complex, one person with direct knowledge of the plans said.

Vietnamese government officials met the Trump Organization's partners, which include Kinh Bac City Development Holding , on Thursday to discuss the Hanoi project, according to two of the sources.


A 3D-printed miniature model of US President Donald Trump, the Vietnam flag appear in this illustration. (**Reuters**)

The meeting took place shortly after Washington announced possible new tariffs of up to 35% on Vietnam, which could be cut to 20% if a trade deal is struck, they said.

Vietnam's Prime Minister Le Minh Hung said yesterday that a trade deal was close as Hanoi had made strong commitments to the US aimed at avoiding high tariffs that could hurt its export-reliant economy.

One of the people said that the Hanoi Trump Tower project was first submitted to the government in May and that it had not yet received approval.

All sources declined to be named as the information was not public. The plans for a new Trump Tower in Hanoi are being reported here for the first time.

The Trump Organization, US President Donald Trump's family business, was not immediately available for comment outside US working hours. Vietnam's government and Kinh Bac City Development did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The Trump Organization is run by Trump's sons, Eric and Donald Jr, who are executive vice-presidents. The White House has said that the president, upon taking office, ended his involvement in his businesses after placing them in a trust managed by his children.

Two of the sources said the Hanoi Trump Tower would be built on the western fringe of West Lake, an affluent area of the capital where foreign executives and diplomats live.

Pending approvals, construction could begin toward the end of 2027 or in 2028, one person said, adding that the plan submitted to authorities was for a building of at least 60 floors at an estimated cost of around $1bn.

In a different meeting on Thursday, government officials discussed with Vietnamese airlines possible plans to buy additional Boeing planes beyond purchases announced earlier, a separate person familiar with the talks said, adding that tariffs and trade negotiations were part of the discussion.

Philippine VP says ICC looking to 'make statement' in father's case

Philippine Vice-President Sara Duterte said yesterday she does not expect a fair hearing when her ex-president father's crimes against humanity trial opens next week, predicting the under-fire International Criminal Court will look to "make a statement".

Duterte said "China, Russia and our BFF the United States" — an acronym for "best friend forever", in a swipe at the Philippines' close US ties under President Ferdinand Marcos — all considered the ICC a "political organisation" rather than an impartial arbiter.

Last month, the US announced sanctions aimed at crippling the court's day-to-day operations, with Trump vowing to dismantle it "brick by brick" over its warrant for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for alleged crimes in Gaza.

Rodrigo Duterte, 81, has been held in detention at The Hague since his arrest on an ICC warrant in March 2025 and is scheduled to enter a plea on Monday over drug war killings that took place between 2011 and 2019.

"We don't expect a fair trial from the ICC," his daughter told reporters on Friday.

"I think the ICC, after the ganging up of superpowers, (will) want to make a statement that they are in the right. So there is no-one else there that they would like to make a statement to. And that's the case of Rodrigo Duterte," she said.


Philippine Vice-President Sara Duterte speaks during a press conference at her office in Manila yesterday. (**AFP**)

She also referred to the case against her father as the "only" one facing the tribunal, an assertion she has made numerous times despite the fact that multiple suits in various stages of litigation are working their way through the ICC.

Duterte added she believed the case against her father and her own ongoing impeachment were aimed at keeping her off the board for the 2028 presidential election.

"I still believe that it's about the 2028 elections, whether there will be elections or there will be no elections. It's about the change of leadership, if there will ever be a change of leadership," she told reporters, without naming her arch-rival, President Ferdinand Marcos.

Supporters of the elder Duterte believe he was "kidnapped" and sent to The Hague due to his daughter's spectacular falling-out with the man she once swept to power with in a landslide 2022 election victory.

While praising the "Dutch prison's" treatment of her father, Sara Duterte yesterday once again called for him to be allowed to witness the proceedings remotely.

"I think it's unfair that they are demanding that he attend the trial, every day... because of his age. He cannot sit eight hours a day on his chair. And I don't think he can focus his time and attention... to something for eight hours," she said.

"I think it's unfair to demand that of an 81-year-old man."

The younger Duterte was impeached by the House of Representatives in May and is currently on trial in the Senate, where a guilty verdict would see her barred permanently from elected office. (**AFP**)

Cambodia, Thailand agree to maritime site visit

Cambodia and Thailand have agreed to allow a site visit to disputed islands and features as part of UN-backed conciliation proceedings aimed at settling a long-running maritime row, both countries said yesterday.

"Good technical progress" was made in talks this week in Malaysia, with a technical working group set up and an understanding reached on parameters for delimiting the maritime boundary, a joint statement said.

Cambodia and Thailand have overlapping claims to about 26,000sq km of sea in the Gulf of Thailand, an area estimated to hold nearly 12tn cubic feet of natural gas and a large quantity of oil, with a value of about $300bn.

Cambodia initiated the conciliation process in early June after Thailand unilaterally terminated a 2001 agreement to jointly exploit the energy reserves.

Both parties agreed a visit to islands and features off their coasts would allow the commission to better understand the geography and context, the statement said

The maritime dispute intensified after two bouts of border fighting between the two countries last year. A truce has since held.

"Thailand will continue to engage constructively in this conciliation process and hopes to see continued progress," Thai Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow said

His Cambodian counterpart Prak Sokhonn said technical progress made in Kuala Lumpur was "a step forward". The commission comprises five members, including Australia, Denmark, Germany, South Africa and France.

East Timor previously used the UN mechanism to settle a dispute with Australia, resulting in a maritime boundary treaty being signed in 2018. (**Reuters**)

Thailand moves to pin down source of Myanmar mine river pollution

Reuters
Bangkok

Thailand plans by January to provide Myanmar with conclusive data-backed evidence showing how rare earth mines in its war-torn neighbour are polluting downstream rivers, and is seeking concrete transboundary measures for impacted communities within six months, its deputy prime minister told Reuters.

Mining activity in the militia-controlled regions of Myanmar across the border with Thailand has intensified in recent years, driven in part by China's dominant rare earth industry, but lax environmental controls have put downstream communities at risk.

Deputy Prime Minister Yodchanan Wongsawat said yesterday that existing data already showed that mines in Myanmar's Shan State are polluting rivers flowing into Thailand's north — but Myanmar officials have asked for more evidence.

"They kind of believe it's not their fault, but we have the evidence, we have the data," he said, referring to Myanmar, where a rash of mines, primarily extracting gold and rare earths, has led to the release of toxic chemicals into border rivers.

A Myanmar government spokesperson did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment.

Thailand and Myanmar agreed this week to establish 12 water sampling locations following meetings between the two countries in Bangkok, with joint sampling expected to begin between December and January.

These sensors will provide the additional data, Yodchanan said.

Tests conducted by Thailand's Pollution Control Department in August found arsenic exceeding standard levels at multiple locations along the Kok, Sai and Ruak rivers.

The Kok flows from Myanmar's Shan State into Thailand's Chiang Rai province, while the Sai and Ruak form parts of the border.


Thailand's Deputy Prime Minister Yodchanan Wongsawat speaks during an interview with Reuters.

In the remote hillsides of Myanmar's Shan State, which borders Thailand, Chinese miners opened new rare earth mines under the protection of the United Wa State Army militia group, Reuters reported last year.

Beijing said then that Chinese firms operating abroad are required to "abide by local laws and regulations and actively fulfil their social responsibilities."

Myanmar is one of the world's largest sources of rare earths that are primarily exported to China and turned into magnets used in critical technologies like wind turbines, medical devices and electric vehicles. But the main mining belts are currently outside the control of Myanmar's military-backed government, including sites in Shan State, where the area impacted by mining tripled between 2024 and 2025, according to analysis by Crisis Group.

Myanmar has been in the throes of a civil war, triggered by a 2021 coup that ousted an elected civilian government and sparked an armed uprising that caused the military to lose its grip over large swathes of the country.

Thai authorities are also seeking to identify mines that may be releasing pollutants into downstream rivers and assess whether they are under the control of Myanmar's government or other entities, said Yodchanan. "We also would like them to check whether they can control every mine or they cannot," he said, referring to the Myanmar government. "If they cannot, we will ask China to help."

Britain confirms EU deal has exit clause

AFP
London

A trade deal struck last week between Britain and the EU as part of Prime Minister Andy Burnham's reset with the bloc contains a termination clause, London confirmed Thursday.

It comes as the leaders of the right-wing opposition Conservative and Reform UK parties suggested they could seek to scrap the agreements if they defeat Labour at the next general election.

Burnham has reignited the Brexit wars that dominated political discourse following the narrow victory for the leave campaign during the 2016 referendum by suggesting Britain could apply to rejoin one day.

The UK premier and top EU officials signed three agreements in Brussels on November 20 designed to improve post-Brexit ties in the short-term, kicking decisions on their long-term relationship down the road.

They include the so-called sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) deal, which the British government says could add £5.1bn ($6.7bn) to the country's economy by slashing red tape on food and drink exports.

It includes a clause meaning that if one party ends the agreement within its first 10 years they would have to pay to rebuild the border checks infrastructure that the deal removes.

"That termination clause is a standard practice in international treaties, and this one applies equally to both sides, including the EU," Burnham's deputy spokesperson told reporters.

UK officials said an upfront sum for breaking the deal had not been stipulated.

An EU diplomat told AFP that the reciprocal clause "provides stability for the agreement to deliver its benefits".

Charles Grant, director of the Centre for European Reform think-tank, said it "makes sense" for the EU given the ongoing debate in Britain about its future relations with Brussels.

"It's an insurance policy," he told AFP.

Last Friday's summit also agreed measures linking the two sides' emissions-trading schemes and allowing young people to study and work across UK-EU borders.

On Thursday, Burnham's government formally introduced into parliament the legislation required to implement the trade and electricity agreements.

MPs will get their first chance to debate them on December 7, with a vote expected to follow, Labour confirmed Thursday.

The EU Partnership Bill, which the government also refers to as the "Cutting Costs" bill, will almost certainly be approved by the lower House of Commons, where Labour holds a large majority.

New Zealand's ruling coalition falls just short of majority

AFP
Wellington

New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon said yesterday he would reach out to an insurgent centrist party to help him stay in power, after final results from this month's election showed his right-wing coalition had lost its parliamentary majority.

The outcome plunges the South Pacific country into weeks of political uncertainty — and even the prospect of another election — as it faces a grim economic forecast and rising costs of living.

Preliminary results of the November 7 poll had shown Luxon's National Party-led coalition clinging onto power.

But margins were so tight that his party lost two seats in the final results announced yesterday — leaving his coalition with the populist NZ First and the libertarian ACT one seat short of a majority.

Luxon declared he had a mandate to form the country's next government in the wake of this month's vote, bitterly fought and dominated by spiralling costs of living.

He has continued running the country since the November 7 poll, but yesterday admitted that forming a new government will be "challenging".

"I want to be upfront with New Zealanders. These negotiations may be challenging, and they could take some time," he told journalists.


National Party leader Christopher Luxon speaks to the media after the Electoral Commission's declaration of the final results for the general election at the New Zealand Parliament in Wellington, yesterday. (**Reuters**)

He will now need the backing of the centrist newcomers Opportunity, led by Qiulae Wong, if he wants to govern.

If a deal isn't struck, the country could be headed for another election.

"Getting it right matters far more than getting it done quickly," Luxon said.

"New Zealanders need a government that is stable, that works together and will last for the full term."

Pledging kinder, gentler politics as well as action on climate change, Wong's party became the first in decades to make parliament without a former cabinet minister as leader.

She has vowed to work with whichever party has the largest number of seats.

But she has insisted that her party's "bottom lines" on climate change action, cost of living and cleaning up politics are non-negotiable.

On the campaign trail, she ruled out working with a government in which NZ First leader Winston Peters was foreign minister, after he told a Chinese-born lawmaker to "go back to your own country".

Speaking outside parliament following the final result, she told journalists she was expecting "challenging" talks.

Wong also would not rule out taking the country to another election.

"All we can do is be as constructive and proactive as possible to make this happen. But it's not just us around the table," she said.

Both Luxon and opposition Labour Party leader Chris Hipkins have held lengthy meetings with Wong in the wake of the election.

Wong's ascendancy to kingmaker in the next New Zealand government caps a remarkable rise since the 38-year-old former KPMG consultant took over the party — polling at about one % in August last year.

She preaches "pragmatic politics" as a counter to growing polarisation, saying she wants to "bring the heat down a little bit and actually just focus on moving the country forward".

She said following the election this month that her win represented a sea change after a decade of rising populism and extremism worldwide.

"I think we are seeing a push globally for more pragmatic politics," she told journalists.

"We've seen that populism doesn't deliver results," she said.

With the official count in, it could take weeks or even months for the shape of New Zealand's new government to be decided.

Following the 2023 poll, it took more than six weeks for Luxon to form his coalition government with NZ First and ACT.

In an e-mail to supporters, NZ First told supporters yesterday's results had "not provided the certainty our country needs", according to national broadcaster RNZ.

"Our team is ready to go so what happens over the next three months is crucial."

India's election body website flaw fixed after Reuters findings

Reuters
Mumbai

A security flaw in India's Election Commission (ECI) website that was allowing access to sensitive personal details and documents of some voters has been fixed, after Reuters discovered the vulnerability and alerted the institution.

Researchers said the flaw, which Reuters is the first to report, could have been easily abused.

The security issue, and the fix, come months ahead of elections in key Indian states, including the most populous, Uttar Pradesh, and while the ECI is facing growing public anger over a contentious drive to update voter lists.

Opposition parties and activists have said the drive has disenfranchised millions of voters to the benefit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party. The ECI says it has complied with all regulations, while the BJP argues opposition groups are misleading the country after failing to win elections.

A Reuters review over more than a month of the ECI's website showed that when a voter logged into their account and requested a telephone call with their local electoral officer, the network tab in an ordinary browser's developer tools, opened with a simple right click, started showing the reference number of the form submitted online to enrol as voters or update their information.



Members of security forces stand guard at the entrance of Election Commission of India headquarters. (**Reuters/File Photo**)

On using those reference numbers to book the call, the same network details started revealing personal information such as the name, phone number, e-mail, date of birth and address of the user, and even file paths to identification documents like passports that were submitted.

Such details were not otherwise visible on the browser's main screen, which pointed to a vulnerability in the website's code, said Indian security researchers Karan Saini and Ehraz Ahmed, who reviewed the Reuters findings step by step on the ECI website.

The bigger concern, researchers said, was the reference numbers followed a predictable pattern, meaning hackers could guess them, and automate downloads of large amounts of data.

A lay user is unlikely to follow such steps while requesting a call, but cybercriminals could, and also automate the steps to harvest data in bulk and abuse it, they said.

Reuters first shared its findings and sought comment from the ECI and its three commissioners on October 26, but they did not respond despite repeated requests.

On Thursday, an ECI spokesman said the commission's information technology division had been asked to look into the findings. Hours later, the vulnerability was fixed, with sensitive fields, including personal details and file paths, redacted, according to a Reuters review and the two researchers.

The security researchers confirmed the fix effectively blocked any abuse of the data.

Reuters could not determine whether the flaw had been exploited or how long it had existed or how many voters could have been affected. The call-booking feature, in which Reuters detected the security flaw, was introduced in June 2025.

It was also not known if any hacker had harvested the data or abused it.

India has around 1bn voters and any of them can log in to the ECI website using their voter ID or mobile numbers.

The BJP did not respond to a request for comment. Pawan Khera, a spokesperson for the Congress, the main opposition party, told Reuters on Thursday that the findings were "deeply alarming".

"In the context of elections, the exposure of voters' personal information can facilitate targeted intimidation, profiling, voter suppression and the manipulation of vulnerable communities," he said.

Told about the findings, former Indian election commissioner Ashok Lavasa said the flaw appeared to be inadvertent, saying "You don't collect all this information so that you can put it in the public domain."

The privacy policy on the ECI's website says while "reasonable efforts" are made to protect the data, "no system can be guaranteed to be completely secure".

Modi to revive parliament expansion bill tied to women's quota: sources

Reuters
New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government will make a second attempt next week to pass legislation that would expand India's parliament and regional assemblies while accelerating plans to reserve one-third of seats for women, government sources said.

An initial bid to pass the legislation failed in April.

India's cabinet approved the new bill yesterday, the sources said, paving the way for it to be taken up when parliament convenes on Monday.

The legislation will increase the number of lawmakers in the lower house by 50% by the next parliamentary election, due in 2029, and will entail a similar expansion of regional assemblies, the sources said.

The revision will remain frozen until 2051, they added.

The bill, which requires a two-thirds majority, did not get enough votes when it was first put forward in April, with opposition groups saying the mass redrawing of constituency boundaries that it entailed was a government bid to manipulate the system in its favour.

The government dismissed the accusation, arguing that the constituency changes were needed to reflect shifts in the population since seats were last fixed after a 1971 census.

The revival of the legislation comes months ahead of elections in Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state.

Analysts say the move suggests Modi's government is confident of securing the required numbers in parliament, with more regional parties indicating their willingness to extend support than in April.

The bill will also test Modi's political strength as his government faces mounting pressure after a series of protests and setbacks while also contending with a resurgent opposition seeking to capitalise on public discontent.

India's parliament does not currently reserve any seats for women.

A one-third reservation for women was agreed in legislation passed in 2023, but was then linked to the next census, which is still under way and would have taken the changes beyond the 2029 election.

Police rescue foreigners trafficked for cyber fraud

Indian police said they had rescued 164 foreign nationals allegedly trafficked into the country and forced to commit online fraud, in a rare case involving victims from overseas.

Fraud compounds, where international scammers lure Internet users into fake romantic relationships, cryptocurrency investments and betting platforms, are common in Southeast Asia. While similar crimes are also widespread in India, it is much less common for the ringleaders to traffic foreigners into the country to perpetrate them.

A police crackdown on an international cybercrime network in a suburb of the capital New Delhi resulted in the rescue of 92 Indonesian nationals and 72 Malaysians, the force said.

The individuals were trafficked into India "on various pretexts, including promises of employment and lucrative opportunities", it said in a statement late on Thursday. (**AFP**)

Conservatives tipped to win Victoria, poll says

Reuters
Sydney

Australia's centre-right conservatives look set for a decisive win at an election in the state of Victoria today, a new poll showed, ending more than a decade of state Labor government and seeing off populist right-wing challengers.

An election result in line with the poll in the country's second-most populous state would reassure establishment parties that a surge in support for Pauline Hanson's One Nation, Australia's answer to US President Donald Trump, Alternative for Germany and Reform UK, does not translate to votes at scale.

The Newspoll published yesterday said the Liberal-National coalition led by Jess Wilson, 36, came in ahead of Labor 57.5% to 42.5% when counting for likely voter preferences. That would hand the conservatives up to 67 of the state's 88 lower house seats, the poll said.

If that pattern is repeated at the ballot, the Victorian Labor party would win just 17 seats, from 54 currently, the poll showed, which would be the party's worst showing on record.

A conservative win would close the book on a government which rode high in the polls for years — even through some of the world's longest Covid lockdowns, in its capital city Melbourne — but which has become deeply unpopular as voters fret over worsening affordability and new taxes intended to pay down the highest state debt in the country.



A woman sweeps away water outside at a pre-polling booth in Melbourne yesterday. (**AFP**)

It would also sound the alarm for Labor governments in larger New South Wales state, which faces an election in March, and federally, where an election is due by 2028.

One Nation was formed by maverick Hanson in 1997 on an anti-immigration platform and remained at the political fringes until May 2025, when a resounding defeat in a national election threw the federal conservative coalition into crisis. Hanson's party won just 6% of the vote at that election but by year-end was leading some polls.

This May, the party won its first federal lower house seat in a by-election, in a regional New South Wales seat that borders Victoria. The party ran just five lower house candidates in Victoria in 2022, winning none, but has run candidates in all 88 seats in 2026.

Under Australia's preferential ballot system, if no candidate wins a majority, the contender with the lowest count is eliminated and their votes are distributed to the person their supporters nominated as their next preference.

UK pensions department hit by 'cyber incident'

Britain's Department for Work and Pensions said yesterday it had taken some services offline after a "cyber incident" that comes amid growing cyber attacks and threats worldwide.

Regular welfare payments and pension payments were however unaffected, it insisted in a statement.

Businesses and governments have faced a string of technological failures which, in recent weeks, have crippled the online systems of organisations such as Microsoft and the US Federal Aviation Administration.

"We have taken some DWP online services offline as a precaution following a cyber incident," a DWP spokesperson said in a statement.

"We are working closely with the National Cyber Security Centre and Government Cyber Coordination Centre to investigate and to bring services back online as quickly as possible".

Britain's domestic intelligence service MI5 and the defence ministry this week warned UK military suppliers to Ukraine about increasing sabotage attempts by Russia.

The UK advised the companies on how to reduce their exposure, detect and report hostile reconnaissance and minimise the impact of an attack.

A cyberattack in August targeted three British airports belonging to the Manchester Airports Group, resulting in the theft of personal data of 8.7mn customers.

A separate UK incident last year heavily impacted Jaguar Land Rover, while attacks affected also operations at retailer Marks & Spencer, plush department store Harrods and the Co-op food chain. (**AFP**)



A person walks past the Department for Work and Pensions as the ministry takes some services offline following a "cyber incident" in London,yesterday. (**Reuters**)

OPINION

The ICC and its jurisdiction

Former Philippine leader Rodrigo Duterte goes on trial on Monday for alleged crimes against humanity over his war on drugs, during which thousands of people were killed. It is one of the highest-profile cases to come before the court in its more than two decades of existence, and the biggest since US President Donald Trump's administration imposed sanctions that could imperil the court's ability to function.

The court was established in 2002 to prosecute individuals for war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and the crime of aggression when member states are unwilling or unable to do so themselves. It can prosecute crimes committed on the territory of its 125 member states, or by their citizens elsewhere. Member states include all 27 EU countries, other rich democracies and many developing nations, but not the United States, China, Russia or India. The State of Palestine is a member despite not being a full member of the United Nations; Israel is not. In Duterte's case, the court says it has jurisdiction as the Philippines was a member until he withdrew partway through his term.

There have been 34 cases before the court, some with more than one defendant, leading to 15 convictions, including 10 for the core offences of crimes against humanity and war crimes. All 10 were African militia leaders, from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, Sudan, Central African Republic and Uganda.

ICC judges have issued 68 arrest warrants, with 34 suspects now at large.

Duterte is only the second former national leader to appear before the court for crimes allegedly committed while in power, after Laurent Gbagbo of Ivory Coast, who was acquitted in 2019. Four serving national leaders face ICC arrest warrants: Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Russia's President Vladimir Putin, Afghanistan's Taliban leader Hibatullah Akhundzada and Myanmar military leader Min Aung Hlaing.

Kenyan President William Ruto and his predecessor Uhuru Kenyatta both appeared at the court over allegations dating to before they took office; in both cases the charges were dropped. Among former leaders who have faced arrest warrants are Sudan's Omar el-Bashir and Libya's late Muammar Gaddafi.

The United States never joined the court and the Trump administration is strongly opposed to it, casting it as a political institution and a threat to US service members. Trump imposed sanctions on some court officials during his first term, and this year imposed sanctions on the court itself, which Washington says are intended either to force major changes or shut the court down for good.

Washington has been particularly angered by the court's arrest warrant for Netanyahu and its inclusion of the actions of US troops in a wider investigation into Afghanistan. ICC judges closed that part of the case two weeks ago. At the UN General Assembly in September, Trump called the ICC a "rogue institution" and "an evil group of people", and urged its members to resign.

The sanctions, which could exclude the court from the global financial system, have yet to fully take effect. Court officials say they have prepared to keep operating with measures such as replacing software on computers with open-source alternatives.

The court has rejected US criticism and called the sanctions an attack on the principle of international justice. — Reuters

Closing rally



Spain's left-wing Frente Amplio (Broad Front) alliance leader Ada Colau attends a campaign closing rally ahead of the general election, in Madrid, Spain. (**Reuters**)

Lessons from Qatar for new crop of Caribbean leaders



Qatar's work in values-based education offers cues for a Caribbean ready to prepare its young people for leadership and succession

By Theon Ali
Ambassador of Antigua and Barbuda

The next generation of Caribbean leaders is already in our classrooms. How we educate those children will shape the quality of the governments, businesses and communities they eventually lead. We should be preparing them now.

In Antigua and Barbuda, the government's extension of free public education from early childhood to university, announced at the start of the September 2026 school year, creates an important opportunity. Removing financial barriers widens access. We must give equal thought to what young people gain from that education and how it prepares them to serve their country.

As Antigua and Barbuda's ambassador to Qatar, I have seen an approach that deserves our attention. Qatar has made significant advances in developing values-based education, with concrete examples within Qatar Foundation's schools. At Academyati in Education City, character, cultural identity and responsibility are built into the learning experience.

I believe the Caribbean is ready to build an approach of its own. We have strong traditions of community responsibility, a regional statement of the person our education systems should help develop, and opportunities to build on reforms already under way. What we need is a sustained effort to turn those foundations into everyday practice, beginning in childhood and continuing into adulthood.

I was born in 1980. My generation now holds many senior positions across the region, and in the years ahead we will increasingly hand them to younger people. That succession deserves deliberate preparation. It should begin long before a vacancy arises or a young person receives a title.

Much of my own early education happened outside the classroom. We grew up under trees, on beaches and in streets where our parents knew one another. We learned to share, to apologise and to accept that our behaviour affected other people. When the streetlights came on, we knew it was time to go home.

Those experiences formed us. Children today live in a different world, with more of their lives mediated through screens and powerful digital tools. Schools and communities now have to give them, on purpose, the chances we had on the street to settle arguments and look out for one another.

My conversations with our host at Qatar Foundation have helped me think about how this can happen through the daily life of a school. Academyati, Qatar Foundation's first progressive school, provides a practical example. It identifies five core values: dedication, altruism, excellence, integrity and patience. Its Rihla approach, meaning journey, brings learning to life through interdisciplinary projects, fieldwork and mentorship. Rooted in Qatari culture and Islamic values, the model connects children's sense of identity with a sense of duty to others.

In practice, the youngest pupils collected seeds from fruit prepared in class and grew papaya plants, learning about counting and measuring along the way. Older pupils prepared and served food to younger children, and others trained as assistant sports coaches for children with disabilities. At Learning Festivals, pupils present their work and what they learned to an audience.

For the Caribbean, the lesson is to make our own values equally purposeful in education. A child's understanding of integrity can grow from telling the truth to owning up to a mistake, and later to exercising ethical judgement when others depend on them. Children learn to lead by doing it, again and again, with adults who set the example.

The Caribbean already has a foundation for this work. In 1997, CARICOM leaders adopted the vision of the "Ideal Caribbean Person". It emphasises respect for human life, responsibility to self and community, and an appreciation of diversity.
CARICOM's Human Resource Development 2030 Strategy subsequently drew on that vision, connecting education with personal development and good citizenship. Our neighbours are already acting on it: Jamaica reintroduced civics into its school curriculum in 2022, and Trinidad and Tobago's Cultural Transformation Policy 2023–2027 asks schools to teach discipline, tolerance and civic responsibility.

The region is ripe for a more systematic approach. Health and Family Life Education and our youth programmes give us experience to build on. What is missing is continuity. Values should carry through a child's whole education, with teachers and families expecting the same things.

Some will ask whose values these are. The Ideal Caribbean Person was agreed by CARICOM governments, belongs to no single church or party, and treats our diversity as a strength. Others will say schools must first get reading and mathematics right. The two need not compete, and any pilot should be judged on academic results as well as character.

Our small size also makes carefully designed pilots practical.

Antigua and Barbuda could begin in a small group of primary schools, building on the Digital OECS Harmonised Primary Curriculum and supporting teachers with training and time. Pupils could look after a school garden or read regularly with younger children, and each term could end with them presenting their work to parents and neighbours. As they grow, they could plan projects and explain their decisions to others.

In secondary school and beyond, this should grow into mentorship and service. A young person who has led in a classroom should be able to step into a community group, a business or public office. We should give them that room while experienced leaders are still here to guide them.

Any pilot should track learning and attendance alongside pupils' projects and what teachers and families observe, and compare progress with similar schools. Two school years would give useful early evidence. Character takes longer.

We have already seen this pay off. In May 2026, Shaquan O'Neil and Jonathan Wehner, both of whom came through the National Youth Parliament Association, entered Antigua and Barbuda's Senate, one on the Government benches and one in Opposition. At 22, O'Neil became the youngest person appointed to the chamber.

The President of the Senate, Senator the Hon Alincia Williams-Grant, described them as "the product of our outreach programme here at Parliament, our Youth Parliament".

I have discussed with Senator Williams-Grant the possibility of an exchange between our Youth Parliament and young Qataris who participate in simulations of Qatar's Shura Council. The Ministry of Sports and Youth runs them with the Council.

An exchange could begin with online discussions and develop into visits, so participants can see how another small state prepares its young people. As ambassador in Doha, I will help make those connections. My ambition is for values-based education to become a consistent part of how we prepare Caribbean children for the responsibilities they will inherit. Qatar's experience offers lessons we can adapt. Our own traditions and regional commitments give us a foundation to build on.

When the streetlights came on, my generation knew it was time to go home. As we prepare to hand over responsibility, we owe the next generation the guidance and opportunities that will help them lead well. That work belongs in our classrooms today.

• *Theon Ali is Ambassador of Antigua and Barbuda to the State of Qatar and the Syrian Arab Republic, and Deputy Head of Mission at the Embassy of Antigua and Barbuda to the United Arab Emirates. He writes in a personal capacity.*

How obesity may raise the risk of Parkinson's disease

By Athira Sreekumar



For years, obesity has been discussed in terms of three main conditions: type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and fatty liver disease. However, newer research is pointing toward somewhere less expected: the brain. One condition in particular, Parkinson's disease, keeps showing up.

To see why, it helps to stop thinking of body fat as a passive storage unit for extra calories.

Fat tissue is an active organ that releases hormones and signaling molecules. When someone experiences prolonged overnutrition, that tissue expands in unhealthy ways. It becomes short on oxygen, attracts immune cells, and begins releasing inflammatory molecules like TNF- and IL-6 into the bloodstream.

That low-grade inflammation does not stay confined to the body. It can weaken the blood-brain barrier, the protective lining that normally shields the brain from substances circulating in the blood. Once this barrier loosens, inflammatory signals and fats can slip through, causing microglia, the brain's resident immune cells, to become overactive. Over time, this creates an environment of oxidative stress and struggling mitochondria, which is highly detrimental to neurons.

This is where the link to Parkinson's disease comes in. The condition is marked by -synuclein, a protein that misfolds and clumps into Lewy bodies. Neurons are especially sensitive to excess fat. High levels of free fatty acids can disrupt autophagy, the cellular recycling system responsible for clearing damaged proteins. As fat droplets accumulate inside brain cells, -synuclein becomes more prone to clumping, contributing to the gradual loss of dopamine-producing neurons in the substantia nigra.

Insulin resistance, which frequently accompanies obesity, may exacerbate these effects. In the brain, insulin helps neurons survive, adapt, and maintain a steady energy supply. When brain cells stop responding to it, they can experience energy shortages, leaving them increasingly vulnerable to damage.

This is particularly significant in regions like the Mena region, where obesity and metabolic syndrome have risen rapidly alongside changing lifestyles. Public health messaging should extend beyond heart health and blood sugar control to treat obesity as a potential contributor to cognitive decline and neurodegeneration as well.

There is still much to untangle, and much of the current evidence originates from lab and animal studies. However, understanding how fat tissue and the brain communicate could open new therapeutic doors: repurposing existing metabolic drugs, targeting brain inflammation, and supporting metabolic health earlier in life. Together, these strategies may become vital tools for protecting the aging brain.

• *Athira Sreekumar is a Qatar-based science communicator, bioinformatics researcher, biosciences educator.*



A representative photo. (pexel.com)

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French leader demands 'overhaul' of German ties

AFP
Berlin

French hard-left presidential candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon yesterday called for an "overhaul" of ties with Berlin, voicing stinging criticism of Germany's economic dominance in the EU and its record military spending.

The France Unbowed (LFI) party leader, who is polling in second place for April's election, told French broadcaster LCI during a Berlin visit that he sees a "need for a thorough overhaul of the French-German relationship".

"I am hostile to the liberal (economic) policy of German governments that dominates the European Union," the 75-year-old said ahead of the launch of the German edition of his latest book at Berlin's Babylon cinema.

Mélenchon's economic platform, which includes a proposal to cancel French debt held by the European Central Bank, is dramatically opposed to traditional German doctrines of tight budgets and low borrowing.

Mélenchon — currently the favourite to reach a run-off against far-right veteran Marine Le Pen — has also railed against Chancellor Friedrich Merz's commitment to transform the German military into the "strongest conventional army in Europe".

"We have the duty to ask: to make war against whom?" he said yesterday, warning that Paris could be drawn into unwanted conflict as Germany's growing military strength makes it a "target" for other countries.

'I am hostile to the liberal (economic) policy of German governments that dominates the European Union,' — French presidential candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon

Mélenchon's rivals have accused him of cosying up to President Vladimir Putin's Russia, with LFI's pledge to leave Nato a particular concern for many of France's allies amid the ongoing war in Ukraine.

The far-left party leader has been highly critical of Germany's position in the conflict, accusing Merz's government of sabre-rattling. "They need to tone it down, because all this one-upmanship leads nowhere," he said.

But Mélenchon flatly denied charges he is "Germanophobic," calling himself a "sort of disciple of Karl Marx" and a lover of Beethoven.

He also expressed pride at the German translation of his latest book, published in English under the title "Now, the People! Revolution in the 21st Century".

The politician further touted his close ties with Germany's far-left Die Linke party, which finished first in Berlin's state election in September.

Mélenchon met the party's national leader Ines Schwerdtner yesterday, saying the two were "united in mobilising against an economy of rearmament and war".

At least 8 migrants die off Spain's Canary Islands

AFP
La Restinga, Spain

Between eight and 10 migrants were found dead aboard a boat off Spain's Canary Islands, maritime rescuers told AFP yesterday, putting immigration back in the spotlight ahead of Sunday's general election.

Another six seriously injured migrants were taken by helicopter to the small island of El Hierro, which has seen a significant increase in arrivals in recent weeks, the sea rescue service said in a statement. Eighty-four other migrants, including a child, were also rescued and brought to the port of La Restinga on El Hierro, while one other person chose to stay on the boat.

An AFP journalist at La Restinga saw migrants being helped ashore by Civil Guard officers, Red Cross workers and soldiers from the army's emergency response unit. Some were carried on stretchers, unable to walk, while others were wrapped in red thermal blankets.

The arrivals come ahead of an election in which right-wing opposition parties have accused Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's government of failing to control the influx of migrants at the country's borders. They also say Sanchez's more open migration policy, including a mass regularisation programme, encourages irregular arrivals to Spain.


A migrant is carried on a stretcher upon arrival at the port of La Restinga. (**AFP**)

Critics point to the Canary Islands and to Ceuta, the Spanish territory in north Africa where tens of thousands of migrants crossed from Morocco in July.

"People losing their lives at sea is the worst consequence of this government's irresponsibility," the head of the main opposition Popular Party (PP) which tops polls, Alberto Nunez Feijoo, said on X.

"Spain urgently needs an orderly migration policy that can prevent tragedies like this one," he added.

On the final day of the election campaign, far-right Vox party leader Santiago Abascal denounced what he called the "abandonment of parts" of Spain, including Ceuta and El Hierro, by Sanchez.

Most polls suggest the PP will win the most seats but fall short of an overall majority, leaving it dependent on the anti-immigration Vox to govern.

The Atlantic route from west Africa to the Canary Islands is one of the world's deadliest migration crossings.

Thousands of migrants attempt the journey each year in overcrowded boats, braving rough seas, strong currents and long distances.

In the year to November 15, 24,364 people reached the Canary Islands, reversing a downward trend that had seen 14,690 migrants arrive in the same period of 2025, according to interior ministry figures.

But 11,037 of this year's arrivals happened between November 1 and 15, with El Hierro — the Atlantic archipelago's smallest island, home to around 12,000 inhabitants — declaring an emergency earlier this month.

Canary Islands regional leader Fernando Clavijo reiterated his call on X for the deployment of Frontex, the EU border agency.

He urged the central government in Madrid and EU authorities in Brussels to provide "a response commensurate with the urgency" of the situation to "save lives", including by taking action in Africa.

Sanchez told public television on Wednesday that the government had been working for weeks on border controls with the Senegalese and Gambian authorities to reduce the number of boats leaving for the archipelago.

An increase in patrols off Senegal, Mauritania and Morocco has pushed migrants to leave from further south, from Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and Guinea, making the crossings longer.

Migrant arrivals typically pick up in the current autumn season, when sea conditions along the route are generally calmer and more favourable for crossings.

Serbia's victorious students pick academic as presidential candidate

AFP
Belgrade

Serbia's student-backed movement, which won an October election after rallying against corruption, yesterday named university professor Radomir Saicic — who joined them early on — as presidential candidate in next month's polls.

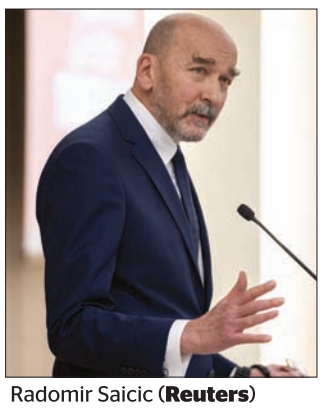
The December 27 vote comes three months after Aleksandar Vucic, who dominated Serbian politics for 14 years, cut short his second presidential term to run for prime minister but was soundly defeated.

The role is largely ceremonial but the president is responsible for nominating prime ministers and serves as commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

Saicic is a chemistry professor at Belgrade University and is a member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. The 65-year-old was among the first university professors who joined the student-led movement.

"Now we have the opportunity to turn the freedom we fought for into lasting change," Saicic told a press conference.

"The assembly, the government and the courts must once again earn the trust of the people. The same applies to the institution of the president."


Radomir Saicic (**Reuters**)

He pledged a "sovereign Serbia in which the constitution will be respected and in which every citizen will be able to live with dignity". The Student List, on which Saicic was also a candidate, won 140 seats in the 250-member parliament.

Explaining their choice, student representatives said they wanted a candidate "whose support was never merely symbolic, but genuine and steadfast".

"We believe citizens will recognise in him a commitment to upholding and representing the principles and values that have underpinned all our successes so far," a student representative told reporters.

Saicic was the one who announced the Student List's victory, setting off celebrations across the Balkan country as thousands poured into the streets of Belgrade and other cities. "Students won and with them also hope that Serbia can be a country of justice, freedom and dignity," Saicic told last month supporters at the movement's election headquarters.

Vucic, now an opposition MP, has repeatedly suggested his Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) might sit out the election, but a final decision is expected in mid-December. Vucic himself is barred from running again as the constitution limits presidents to two terms. The parliamentary and presidential elections followed nearly two years of protests sparked by the 2024 collapse of a railway station canopy in Novi Sad that killed 16 people.

The disaster at the recently renovated station, widely blamed on corruption, triggered Serbia's largest protests since the fall of strongman Slobodan Milosevic in 2000. The movement's initial demand for a transparent investigation evolved into calls for snap elections, which Vucic eventually announced after nearly two years of resistance.

Serbia's newly elected lawmakers were sworn in on November 17, and have a 90-day deadline to elect a new government.

UN agency seeks $7.1bn for protection of refugees

AFP
Geneva

The United Nations' refugee agency said yesterday it was seeking a much-reduced $7.1bn to protect stateless people and respond to emergencies in 2027.

UNHCR chief Barham Salih warned last month that his agency was being "asked to do the impossible", over-stretched by a huge funding shortfall and near record-high population displacements around the world.

UNHCR's 2026 appeal targeted $8.5bn — of which only $2.9bn has been raised to date.

"The appeal comes amid immense humanitarian needs and an exceptionally difficult funding environment. As a result, UNHCR's 2027 budget prioritises the most urgent needs," the agency said.

If fully funded, UNHCR would use the money next year to provide protection services for 13.6mn refugees and asylum seekers and 6.7mn internally displaced people (IDPs).

"We also aim to provide financial assistance to 3.9mn refugees and 2mn IDPs, and shelter and housing assistance for 1.8mn refugees and 850,000 IDPs," the agency said.

Some 117.8mn people worldwide were forcibly displaced from their homes at the end of 2025, according to UNHCR — down slightly from 2024's record 123.2mn.

Of those 117.8mn, 35.6mn were refugees under UNHCR's mandate, with two-thirds coming from Afghanistan, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine and Venezuela.

Despite the aforementioned elevated numbers, the agency has had to slash its workforce due to budget cuts.

The US — traditionally the world's top donor — has been cutting down foreign aid under President Donald Trump, while other major donors have also tightened their belts.

Since 2024, nearly 8,000 employees have left UNHCR, with its workforce falling from nearly 20,000 to just under 12,000.

In 2025 UNHCR sought $10.6bn and ended up with $3.8bn to spend; in 2024 it sought $10.8bn and got $5.3bn.

UNHCR spokesman Matthew Saltmarsh told reporters that the agency's strategy remained "protecting people forced to flee, reacting very quickly to emergencies when they arise but also, crucially, to help refugees to move beyond aid".

The appeal was launched ahead of UNHCR's annual pledging conference in Geneva on Tuesday.

Erdogan completes Turkiye's ratification of Makkah pact

Reuters
Istanbul

President Tayyip Erdogan has formally approved the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, the Official Gazette said yesterday, completing Turkiye's ratification after parliament ratified it earlier this month.

The three countries signed a joint defence agreement in Makkah in August amid escalating concerns about the increasingly aggressive US-Israeli war against Iran.

Turkiye's parliament ratified the agreement on November 5, clearing the way for Ankara to send military support to Riyadh amid attacks by Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi militants against the kingdom.

Under the Nato-like agreement, an attack on one party constitutes an attack on all.

A ruling party lawmaker told Reuters last month that Turkiye would also submit to parliament a mandate allowing for military personnel to be deployed to Saudi Arabia under the pact.

Turkiye has Nato's second-largest military. Saudi Arabia is home to Islam's holiest sites and is also one of the world's top oil exporters, while Pakistan is the only nuclear-armed Muslim country.

Evidence of deepest volcanic eruption found in Pacific

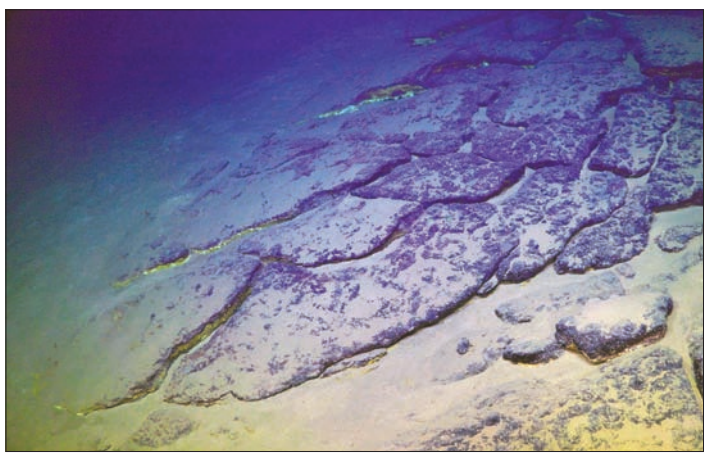
Reuters
Mariana Trench

An international team of marine geologists using a remotely operated submarine in an abyss in the western Pacific Ocean has found evidence of the deepest-known explosive volcanic eruption on Earth as much as 6,500 meters below the surface.

The researchers sailed to the Mariana Trench, among the deepest oceanic valleys on the planet, to deploy a remotely operated vehicle, or ROV, called Jason/Medea. They used the ROV to study the trench walls around the deepest-known point of seabed on Earth, called the Challenger Deep.

The ROV observed and collected pyroclastic rocks, telltale evidence of an explosive volcanic eruption composed of ejected rock fragments and volcanic glass.

"The key findings are the discovery of recent igneous activity near the trench," said geologist Robert Stern, a professor emeritus at the University of Texas at Dallas and a visiting researcher at UCLA who is the lead author of a study describing the findings in the journal Frontiers in Earth Science.


A pyroclastic flow discovered at 6,148 meters below sea level in the western Pacific Ocean in a part of the Mariana Trench. (**Reuters**)

"Pyroclastic rocks are well known from volcanic eruptions on land and even in the shallow ocean, but they aren't known from as deep as we discovered them," Stern said.

The Mariana Trench formed as part of a process called plate tectonics involving the inexorable movement of continent-scale plates on Earth's surface. The trench is the surface manifestation of a subduction zone, the boundary where one plate dives beneath another plate.

The surface above the subduction zone typically has big volcanoes, but these are generally located about 200 to 300km from the trench. The pyroclastic rocks that the researchers discovered were in the trench itself.

The ROV explored along 550km of a geological structure called a forearc that is part of the upper plate between the trench and a line of volcanoes on the seafloor, near the Challenger Deep. "The ROV was our principal research tool used for looking at and collecting samples from the seafloor down to 6,500 meters," Stern said. "We had a total of 10 dives, 7 of which were in the forearc around the Challenger Deep. The other 3 were in shallower waters near Guam because of weather conditions."

The rocks collected by the ROV contained broken pieces of rock and volcanic glass cemented in a relatively strong matrix of finer-grained material.

"This is unmistakably the product of a volcanic eruption. We did not see any eruption, and we have not yet found the vents from which the pyroclastic rocks erupted," Stern said.

The age of the rocks is not yet known, but they appear to be recent, in geological terms, Stern said.

In contact with US: Novak

Reuters
Istanbul

Russia's energy ministry is in contact with the US regarding its deal to supply diesel, Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said on yesterday.

Russia in part lifted its diesel export ban after it struck a deal in October with the White House as US President Donald Trump was seeking to calm diesel prices ahead of the midterm elections, though to date no Russian diesel cargoes have discharged in the US since the deal.

One diesel-carrying tanker, the Agioi Fanendes, is drifting in the North Atlantic Ocean not far from New York according to LSEG data, after it briefly signalled for the port earlier this month. Novak had declined to comment on that tanker on Wednesday.

Since the breakdown of an energy ceasefire at the end of last month, Russia is again battling an onslaught of Ukrainian drone attacks on its oil refineries, causing capacity outages and fuel shortages across several regions.

Ukraine submits Black Sea truce offer

Ukraine has offered a Black Sea ceasefire to enable food exports and passed this on to international allies, Kyiv's foreign minister Andrii Sybiha said yesterday.
"We are ready for a ceasefire. We are grateful to India, Turkiye, and Egypt, which are playing an active and important role in de-escalating tensions in the Black Sea, as well as in mediation efforts. We are now awaiting a response from Russia," Sybiha was cited by Suspilne public broadcaster.
He added that Russia had proposed Ukraine suspend attacks on the Russian oil sector under the truce, but Kyiv would only consider this as part of a bigger energy ceasefire deal. (**Reuters**)

QATAR



Serenity at Katara Hills

Katara Hills bathed in evening glory as the city skyline rises gracefully against a canvas of pastel blue, peach and golden hues. The gentle slopes of Katara Hills offers a peaceful escape from the city's hustle and bustle to enjoy nature's finest evening spectacle. **PICTURES:** Shaji Kayamkulam





Sealine makeover planned to meet demand during camping season

Major development of Sealine includes new access road, introducing a restaurant complex and more services around the area for visitors

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

There are plans to introduce extensive developments and reorganise services and commercial activities in the Sealine area, including relocating restaurants, cabins and motorcycle shops to larger, purpose-built sites to improve facilities, manage visitor traffic and accommodate growing demand during the camping season.

Saleh Hassan al-Kuwari, Director of the Natural Reserves Department at the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, said the development plan includes establishing a new restaurant area with 153 commercial units of varying sizes, alongside 46 contracts for public services.

The project involves preparing a new access road extending between 2.5km and 3km to facilitate access to the restaurant complex, which is located east of Tuaiss Al Tawqi.

Al-Kuwari said 17 contracts had so far been signed for the new restaurant units, while procedures were continuing for the remaining outlets.

The shops will have different dimensions to accommodate various business requirements, with some measuring 10x10m and others reaching 20x20m. The new development will complement the existing restaurant area, providing additional commercial space and a wider range of options for visitors.

The plan also includes relocating 28 motorcycle shops and four related service outlets to a larger location. In addition, around 5,000 cabins registered entry into the area during the current season, and authorities are working to move them to a more spacious site with greater capacity and improved facilities.

The new commercial area will offer a wide range of services to meet the needs of campers and visitors. These include motorcycle maintenance and accessories, electrical equipment and generators, car washing, consumer goods, camping supplies, firewood and charcoal. Other services will include laundry facilities, mobile phone installation and maintenance, ready-made cabins, waste collection, site cleaning and delivery services.







Al-Kuwari noted that the development initiatives were designed to improve the distribution of commercial activities, provide more suitable premises for business owners and make essential services more accessible to visitors. Better road access and traffic management are also key priorities, particularly during public holidays and peak camping periods when the area receives large numbers of visitors.

Meanwhile, around 1,250 camps have been established across Sealine and Khor Al Adaid during the current camping season, with Sealine accounting for around 80% of the total. He explained that preparations for each camping season begin immediately after the previous season ends.

The department reviews operational challenges, assesses the quality of services and examines feedback from campers and visitors before developing plans to address shortcomings. Co-ordination with relevant authorities also forms part of the preparations, particularly regarding the designation of new sites and the organisation of different activities.

Further, al-Kuwari clarified that camping is prohibited in several other areas, including locations stretching from Al Ghariya to Zulal Wellness Resort in Al Ruwais, as well as Arida, Ras Matbakh and Zekreet.

Such restrictions are intended to regulate outdoor activities and protect environmentally sensitive areas from the impact of unregulated camping. However, waste management remains one of the main environmental challenges during the camping season, particularly as visitor numbers increase.

Al-Kuwari called on campers to collect and dispose of rubbish regularly rather than allowing waste bags and other refuse to accumulate for several days.

Qatar elected to ITU Council for 2027-2030

QNA
Doha



The Plenipotentiary Conference 2026 (PP-26) concluded yesterday in Doha. Organised by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and hosted by Qatar, represented by the Communications Regulatory Authority (CRA), the conference took place from November 9 to 27, 2026, at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Center (DECC).

The successful hosting of this high-level international event reflects Qatar's role in supporting international dialogue and strengthening multilateral co-operation, as well as its commitment to contributing to a more connected and inclusive digital future.

Chaired by Engineer Ahmad bin Abdulla AlMuslemani, President of CRA of the State of Qatar, the conference witnessed three weeks of intensive international deliberations and negotiations, culminating in consensus among Member States on a series of decisions and strategic directions that will shape ITU's work in the coming years, strengthen international co-operation in the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) sector, and support digital transformation and development worldwide.

The Final Acts of the conference were also signed yesterday. They comprise the adopted resolutions and decisions, including those relating to ITU's strategic and financial plans for 2028-2031, and serve as an official reference for the conference outcomes and the direction of ITU's work in the coming period.

"Over the past three weeks, PP-26 successfully brought Member States together in constructive dialogue and co-operation, culminating in consensus on strategic decisions that will guide the Union's direction for the years ahead," said Engineer Ahmad bin Abdulla AlMuslemani, Chair of PP-26 and President of CRA of the State of Qatar. "As Chair of the conference, I take pride in the achievements made possible by the collective efforts of participating delegations.

Now that the conference has concluded, our focus shifts from reaching consensus on these decisions to translating them into tangible outcomes that enhance international co-operation, respond to rapid technological advancements, and make a meaningful difference in the lives of communities and their economies around the world."

"The decisions taken in Doha strengthen ITU's foundation, so that we can deliver across some of the defining issues of our time amid rapid technological change," said Doreen Bogdan-Martin, ITU Secretary-General. "Our task now is to transform these decisions into action as we seek to bring 2bn people online, while ensuring technology benefits everyone, everywhere."

The conference also marked a significant milestone in Qatar's international engagement, as Qatar was elected to the ITU Council for the first time for the 2027-2030 term, securing 165 votes and receiving the highest number of votes in Region E (Asia and Australasia). This reflects the confidence of Member States in Qatar's role and growing contributions to the ICT sector at the international level.

The institutional impact of Qatar's hosting of the conference extended to the launch of the "Doha Declaration: Leading Digital Transformation Towards a More Inclusive and Sustainable Future," which expressed a shared ambition to advance universal connectivity, bridge digital divides, and build more resilient and sustainable digital infrastructure. Doha was also associated with a series of decisions and outcomes that will guide ITU's work in the coming period, including the adoption of the first-ever Plenipotentiary Conference resolution dedicated to radiocommunications supporting lunar exploration, alongside the adoption of strategic directions and plans that will shape international priorities in telecommunications and digital technologies in the years ahead.

The Plenipotentiary Conference is ITU's highest policy-making body. Held every four years, it determines the Union's strategic direction and general policies, adopts its strategic and financial plans, and elects its senior leadership, the Member States of the ITU Council, and the members of the Radio Regulations Board.



Palestinian filmmakers reflect on power of storytelling, resilience at film festival



Palestinian filmmakers, Rashid Masharawi, Muayad Alayan, and Mohanad Yaqubi discussed the realities of making cinema under occupation, the role of institutional backing, and how independent stories reach audiences at a press briefing during Doha Film Festival 2026.

Acclaimed Palestinian filmmaker Rashid Masharawi, producer of Rabab Khamis's documentary Sama said, "Cinema should not be just a reaction, it should also be action. When obstacles arise, we find creative solutions and keep working because we make films out of true love for cinema. If we were liberated tomorrow, Palestinian cinema would not stop, since we still have millions of stories to tell."

Muayad Alayan, director and producer of 'Conversation with the Sea' said, "We should not avoid talking about the cause but we also have the right to tell stories about all aspects of our lives, because cinema is here to unite us and show the fullness of who we are. Filming in our hometowns helps to establish real structures and distribution so that global solidarity can become sustainable and reach audiences in cinemas."

Mohanad Yaqubi, filmmaker and producer of 'Revolutionaries Never Die' said, "Solidarity is our capital. When people support a Palestinian film, they do so out of genuine commitment rather than financial motivation and we have a responsibility to build on that momentum. We are seeing a new wave of independent Palestinian cinema that moves beyond traditional co-production constraints ,focused on the human experience. This proves there are many creative ways to make films and reach audiences worldwide."

Visit Qatar hosts Audi F1 team drivers for cultural tour in Doha

As principal partner of Audi Revolut F1 Team, Visit Qatar hosted team drivers Nico Hulkenberg and Gabriel Bortoleto in Doha on Nov 25, ahead of the Formula 1 Qatar Airways Qatar Grand Prix.

During their visit, the drivers explored some of Doha's best-known cultural and urban destinations, including Souq Waqif, Msheireb Downtown Doha and the Museum of Islamic Art (MIA), offering an opportunity to experience Qatar's heritage, architecture and contemporary identity.

The programme also featured an engagement event at Crystal Walk, Gewan Island, showcasing the team's show car with bespoke Visit Qatar pattern details, alongside an interactive Q&A session with both drivers. The Doha activation marks the third initiative delivered by Visit Qatar through its partnership with the team this season. Previous activations included 'La Parada' in Madrid, a three-day public activation held at Plaza de Santiago from 9 to 11 September, and 'The Garden Souq by Visit Qatar' in Singapore, which welcomed more than 1,700 visitors at Raffles Hotel Singapore from 7 to 9 October.

Through its partnership with Audi Revolut F1 Team, Visit Qatar is extending the destination's international reach by connecting with global audiences through one of the world's most prominent sporting platforms.





