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20% of Qatar's 2025 budget allocated for education, health

Qatar's 2025 budget sees QR210.2bn expenditure

By Pratap John
Business Editor

Qatar's general budget for fiscal year 2025 expects total revenues of QR197bn and an expenditure of QR210.2bn with an anticipated deficit of QR13.2bn, HE the Minister of Finance Ali bin Ahmed al-Kuwari announced yesterday.

Qatar has set an oil price of \$60 per barrel in preparing the budget.

HE al-Kuwari said, "Qatar continues to adopt a conservative approach in estimating oil and gas revenues, with an average oil price of \$60 per barrel. This approach aims to enhance financial flexibility and ensure spending stability."

Among the highlights of the budget is QR41.4bn allocation for the health and education sectors, accounting for 20% of the total budget.



HE the Minister of Finance Ali bin Ahmed al-Kuwari

The minister noted that Qatar's total expected revenues for the 2025 fiscal year budget are estimated at QR197bn, reflecting a 2.5% decrease compared to the 2024 budget revenues.

He stated, "The anticipated oil and gas revenues for 2025 are QR154bn, down from QR159bn in the 2024 budget, marking a 3.1% decrease. Non-oil revenues for 2025 are estimated at QR43bn, which remains unchanged from

2024 levels!" HE al-Kuwari said total expenditures projected at QR210.2bn next year, showed a 4.6% increase compared to 2024.

He noted the expected budget deficit of QR13.2bn will be financed through local and external debt instruments, as required.

HE the Minister of Finance underlined that allocations for the health and education sectors (QR41.4bn that accounts for 20% of the total budget) "underscores Qatar's commitment to enhancing human capital development and improving public service quality." Furthermore, he said, "strategic sectors such as trade and industry, research and innovation, tourism, digital transformation, and information technology have been allocated significant resources to support economic diversification and sustainable development efforts."

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PM meets Iran energy minister



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani met with Minister of Energy of the Islamic Republic of Iran Abbas Alabadi, who is currently visiting the country. They reviewed co-operation between the two countries and ways to support and develop it, in addition to a number of topics of common interest. (QNA)

Gaza deal may be close: US

Reuters
Tel Aviv/Gaza

US national security adviser Jake Sullivan said yesterday that he believed a deal on a Gaza ceasefire and hostage release may be close as Israel had signalled it was ready and there were signs of movement from Palestinian resistance movement Hamas.

After meeting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem, Sullivan said: "It might not happen but I believe it can happen with political will on both sides." He said he planned to travel to Qatar and Egypt, Washington's fellow moderators of the talks, to advance efforts that "would start bringing those hostages home. It would also allow for a massive surge in humanitarian assistance."

A Western diplomat in the region said this week that a deal was taking shape but was likely to be limited in scope, involving the release of only a handful of hostages and a short pause in hostilities.

Sullivan dismissed suggestions that Netanyahu was waiting for Trump to take office on Jan. 20 before accepting a deal.

"No, I do not get that sense. I got the sense from the prime minister he is ready to do a deal," he told a press conference in Tel Aviv.

An agreement would also enable the release of Palestinian prisoners held by Israel.

Anything more than a limited truce remains unlikely so long as both sides stick to demands that have hampered numerous rounds of failed negotiations. "Whether it does get done still depends on both sides signing on the proverbial dotted line," Sullivan said.

Hamas, also backed by Iran, wants an end to the war before all hostages are freed, while Israel says the war will not end until



Jake Sullivan

the hostages return and Hamas no longer rules Gaza or constitutes a threat to Israelis.

Trump has demanded Hamas release the hostages held in Gaza before he takes over from Biden on Jan. 20. Otherwise, Trump has said, there will be "hell to pay".

A Palestinian official close to the talks described what he called "a fever of negotiations" with ideas emerging on all sides, including among mediators in Egypt and Qatar and said Trump's involvement had given the talks a boost.

36 killed in Israeli strikes

Israel killed 13 Palestinians in two air strikes in Gaza yesterday that Gaza medics and Hamas said were part of a force protecting humanitarian aid trucks. Israel's military said they were Hamas fighters trying to hijack the shipment.

The 13 were among 36 Palestinians killed in separate Israeli attacks yesterday, the medics said.

Children were among seven people killed when a residential building in Gaza City's al-Jalaa Street was bombed in a separate attack.

Jordan to host Syria summit

Jordan will host a Syria crisis summit over the weekend with participation of foreign ministers from numerous Western and Arab nations, Amman's foreign ministry announced yesterday.

The Saturday summit "to discuss developments in Syria" will include top diplomats from Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Qatar, who will also convene with their Turkish and US counterparts, the EU's foreign policy chief and the UN envoy for Syria, the statement said.



Relatives greet former prisoners released by the Syrian Kurdish administration in Qamishli in Syria yesterday.

Blinken meets Erdogan

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken headed straight into talks with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan after landing in Ankara yesterday, a US official said.

Washington's top diplomat flew in from the Jordanian Red Sea resort of Aqaba where he kicked off a regional tour yesterday to discuss fallout from the ouster of Syria's Bashar al-Assad.

Turkiye was expected to put heavy emphasis on its security concerns following the upheaval in Syria, where it has been fighting a Kurdish-led force that Washington backs as a key player in the fight against Islamic State (IS) group.

Before leaving Aqaba, Blinken said the role of the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) was "critical" to preventing a resurgence of IS in the country. -AFP

Rawdat Al Hamama Park opened to public

Facility features the longest air-conditioned outdoor track in the world with a length of 1,197 metres

QNA
Doha

HE the Minister of Municipality Abdullah bin Hamad bin Abdullah al-Attayah yesterday inaugurated Rawdat Al Hamama Public Park, which features the longest air-conditioned outdoor track in the world with a length of 1,197 metres, with the aim of encouraging the public to practice jogging and walking.

The Public Works Authority (Ashghal), in co-ordination with the Public Parks Department at the Ministry of Municipality, ex-



HE the Minister of Municipality Abdullah bin Hamad bin Abdullah al-Attayah yesterday inaugurated Rawdat Al Hamama Public Park.



ecuted this project that serves the residents of Al Kheesa and the surrounding areas.

The park can receive up to

10,000 visitors daily and it features the largest plant clock in Qatar, in addition to 8 service kiosks, a 500-spectator open amphitheatre, and separate prayer rooms and bathrooms for men and women.

The opening ceremony was attended by President of Ashghal, Eng Mohammed bin Abdulaziz al-Meer; Assistant Undersecretary for Public Services Affairs, Eng Abdullah Ahmed al-Karani; and Director of the Public Parks Department, Mohammed Ibrahim al-Sada along with a lineup of officials from the Ministry of Municipality and Ashghal.

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COMMUNITY
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Qatari aircraft arrives in Turkiye's Gaziantep carrying aid for Syria



A third aircraft belonging to the Qatari Armed Forces arrived yesterday in the Turkish city of Gaziantep, carrying 30 tonnes of aid, including medical supplies, food and shelter supplies, provided by the Qatar Fund for Development, as part of the air bridge operated by the State of Qatar to provide relief to brothers in the Syrian Arab Republic and contribute to addressing their humanitarian conditions. HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad affirmed in a statement to Qatar News Agency (QNA) that Qatar will continue to provide humanitarian aid to Syria, based on the bonds of brotherhood and its moral and humanitarian duty, and its continued support for the brotherly Syrian people. She stressed the importance of concerted international efforts to increase humanitarian aid to the Syrian people, and ensure its sustainable and unhindered access to all affected areas. **(QNA)**

Official

Amir sends cables of congratulations to president of Kenya

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani and HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani sent cables of congratulations to Kenya President Dr William Ruto on the anniversary of his country's Independence Day. **(QNA)**

PM receives phone call from Iranian FM

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani received yesterday a telephone call from Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran Abbas Araghchi. Discussion during the call focused on relations between the two countries and ways to support and enhance them, in addition to the developments in the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories. The two sides also discussed the developments updates in Syria, in addition to a host of topics of mutual interest. During the call, the two sides stressed the need to ensure the unity of Syria and work towards a peaceful transfer of power through an inclusive political process, based on Security Council Resolution 2254. They also underlined enhancing efforts to protect civilians and combat terrorism. **(QNA)**

PM, sports minister congratulate host nations of FIFA World Cup 2030

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani sent a cable of congratulations to Head of Government of the Kingdom of Morocco Aziz Akhannouch, on his country's winning bid to host the FIFA World Cup 2030. HE the Minister of Sports and Youth Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Thani said Morocco's winning FIFA World Cup 2030 bid manifests its prestigious status on the global stage. HE the Minister added the North African nation gained huge confidence after it had delivered a string of successful events. Morocco was officially named as a co-host of the 2030 World Cup along with Spain and Portugal. In a press statement, HE Sheikh Hamad hailed the remarkable multi-level development of Moroccan football that culminated in their national team finishing fourth in the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. He extended his congratulations to the trio, stressing Doha's full support for them to produce an outstanding event. **(QNA)**

'Digital transformation is about ensuring people remain at the heart of innovation'

By Shafeeq Alingal
Staff Reporter

Digital transformation is no longer just about implementing new technologies – it's about ensuring that people remain at the heart of innovation, psychologist, researcher and author Dr Patrizia Ariane Ecker has said.

In an interview with *Gulf Times*, she explained that success today is defined by the ability to address real human needs, encourage adaptability and foster lifelong learning. "This can be achieved by moving away from a technology-centric approach to a human-centric one focusing on how technology can enhance creativity, decision making and collaboration," she said.

With over 15 years of experience, Dr Ecker has founded a boutique consultancy specialising in digital transformation, AI, and cognitive biases. Her upcoming book, *The Digital Reinforcement of Bias and Belief*, explores the cognitive and social implications of web-based information processing.

Her focus is on human-centric digital transformation, which means moving away from viewing technology as the centrepiece and instead emphasising its role as an enabler for people.

"The future of AI and digital tools lies in complementing human creativity, critical thinking, and decision making, rather than mimicking or replacing them. For instance, fostering lifelong learning and adaptability is crucial. Students, professionals,

and governments must align to cultivate a workforce capable of navigating rapid technological shifts, ensuring inclusivity and equity.

"Digital transformation and AI have vast potential to drive global development by improving access to education and achieving healthcare advancements, economic growth and sustainable development."

As a psychologist she believes that AI has the potential to transform society positively, but only if approached thoughtfully. "AI has the potential to greatly benefit humanity, but its development and use must be guided by thoughtful principles. AI should complement human abilities rather than replace them. By working alongside humans, AI can enhance our natural skills, fostering collaboration and innovation without supplanting the value of human input.

"Lifelong learning and critical thinking, among other human-centred skills, must remain a priority. There is a need to establish frameworks that emphasise adaptability and interdisciplinary collaboration in education and workforce development and encourage active participation, especially among younger generations, to reduce decision making aversion and increase societal agency.

"Governments can significantly enhance their services and impact by adopting a collaborative and human-centric approach to digital transformation through Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) and by redefining the future workforce, leveraging technology for inclusivity and building a human-centric ecosystem."



Dr Patrizia Ariane Ecker

Dr Ecker said that AI creates new opportunities even though it can reduce some traditional job roles. "Reskilling and upskilling must be prioritised with a strong emphasis on education and training to help individuals adapt to new and emerging roles in the workforce.

"Many jobs will evolve rather than dis-

appear, with AI augmenting human capabilities rather than replacing them entirely. This collaboration between humans and technology can lead to more efficient and innovative ways of working. Furthermore, digital tools significantly lower barriers for startups, fostering entrepreneurship and innovation."

Dr Ecker noted that Qatar offers a dynamic environment for digital innovation. She has plans to advise organisations by supporting digital transformation initiatives with a strong emphasis on a human centred approach.

"The GCC, particularly Qatar, is making significant strides with investments in AI, smart cities, and education. The country's vision for innovation and sustainability positions it as a leader in the region. With initiatives like the National AI Strategy, Qatar is setting benchmarks in integrating technology with societal goals," she said.

Dr Ecker suggested Qatar should focus on several key areas while strengthening public private collaboration is essential; partnerships between the government, private sector and academia can help design interdisciplinary programmes that define and cultivate the skills needed for the workforce of tomorrow. "Additionally, investing in human-centric initiatives is critical. Innovations that prioritise societal well being such as AI tools for education, healthcare and sustainability, should be encouraged. Qatar could also take a leading role in the region by driving ethical AI standards," she added.

HIA issues travel advisory for upcoming busy travel period

As the holiday travel season approaches, Hamad International Airport (HIA) is prepared for the anticipated increase in passenger traffic, particularly during the busy travel period from December 17 to 20, as travellers set out for their holiday destinations.

To help ensure passengers have a smooth and enjoyable travel experience, HIA has shared important tips and updates. Passengers are advised to check in online and arrive at HIA three hours prior to their flight to avoid delays and en-

sure a smooth journey. Check-in counters will close 60 minutes before departure.

Qatar Airways passengers can make use of the HIA's self-service check-in and bag-drop facilities located at (check-in row 3). This enables passengers to print boarding passes and bag tags, tag their luggage, and drop bags off before proceeding to border control.

Citizens and residents can use E-Gates to fast-track the immigration process. Restrictions apply. Passengers are reminded that baggage allowances and weight

restrictions will be strictly enforced by airlines. Check with the airline for specific guidelines.

Non-standard or oversized luggage is discouraged. A baggage repack area is available in the departure hall with luggage weighing machines to assist passengers. Travellers are encouraged to use the bag wrapping facilities available in the terminal to protect their luggage. Passengers should not carry prohibited items, such as liquids, aerosols, and gels exceeding 100ml, unless stored in a clear, re-sealable plastic bag. Electronic

items larger than mobile phones must be removed from bags during X-ray screening. Bags should never be left unattended. Any unattended bags will be promptly removed for security reasons. Lithium-powered devices: Small vehicles powered by lithium batteries, such as hoverboards, are prohibited for carriage.

Park in the short-term car park and get special discounted rates for long stays (using pre-book option only), ensuring proximity to the terminal. Valet parking is also available. Vehicles should not

be left unattended at the curbside. Unattended vehicles may be towed by authorities. For extended drop-off times, kindly use the short-term car park facility.

Download the 'HIAQatar' mobile app to stay updated on flight status, baggage claim, boarding gate directions, and more. The app also offers details about food, beverage, and retail options from Qatar Duty Free. Leverage the airport's innovative QR code way-finding solution to navigate the terminal with ease, a statement added.

GCAA hosts third meeting of Qatar-EU Joint Committee



The General Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) hosted in Doha the third meeting of the Joint Committee between the State of Qatar and the European Union (EU). The meeting was co-chaired by Acting Director of Mohammed Faleh al-Hajri, Acting Director of the General Civil Aviation Authority, and the Head of the Aviation Affairs Unit at the European Commission Carlos Bermejo Acosta. The meeting discussed issues related to the implementation of the provisions of the Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement signed between the two parties, and the current status of the ratification process. A number of issues of common interest between the State of Qatar and the European Union (EU) were also discussed, most notably market developments, fair competition, and the exchange of information on financial transparency, in addition to exploring ways to achieve net zero carbon emissions in the aviation sector. **(QNA)**

In brief

Visit Qatar joins FIFA Intercontinental Cup as official 'Tournament Supporter'

QNA
Doha

Visit Qatar has announced an official partnership to support the FIFA Intercontinental Cup 2024, taking place in Qatar on December 11, 14, and 18, 2024, at Lusail Stadium and Stadium 974. In a statement, Qatar Tourism highlighted that this partnership reinforces Qatar's status as a leading global sports hub, following its successful hosting of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, and numerous prestigious sporting events over the past two decades.

Through this collaboration, Visit Qatar reinforces the country's position as a prime destination for international sports events, further driving economic growth and attracting visitors from around the world.

Acclaimed Qatari artist bridges cultures through art

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

Acclaimed Qatari artist Bouthayna al-Muftah highlighted the power of art in fostering dialogue and cultural exchange at the recently held Doha Forum, citing the transformative impact of artistic expression in connecting diverse audiences.

Drawing from her collaborative experiences with Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, al-Muftah noted that her first immersive installation, 'Echoes', debuted in the museum's project space, say-

ing: "It was a very nice exchange of knowledge between artist and curator," she pointed out. "They learned about my work, and I learned from them, especially in creating my first immersive installation."

She said "Echoes", which debuted at Mathaf in 2018, explores human interaction amidst rapid technological advancements.

The international reach of al-Muftah's work was further underscored by 'Echoes' inclusion in the "Our World is Burning" exhibition at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris. This international exposure, she noted, allowed her to share a piece of Qa-

tari culture with a global audience, fostering cross-cultural understanding.

At the panel discussion "Promoting Dialogue and Diversity Through Art," she discussed how partnerships with museums, especially with Mathaf, influenced her artistic vision and broadened her understanding of art's impact. Echoes served as a main example, inviting viewers to step into the artwork and leave their own mark.

The exhibition, deeply rooted in personal memories and family stories, incorporated Arabic script and mirrors, creating a reflective

experience that blended personal narrative with shared cultural memory.

Al-Muftah's "Aubusson Tapestry" project, part of the Qatar - France Year of Culture 2020, saw her combining traditional Qatari textile traditions with the renowned French tapestry techniques of Aubusson.

"This was the same with the 'Aubusson Tapestry' (project) that I spoke about before. It brings forgotten narratives from my art and combining it with traditional craftsmanship in the tapestry, it's a really nice way of curating this cultural diplomacy," she said.

A graduate of Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts in Qatar, al-Muftah has developed a multidisciplinary approach that includes printmaking, typography, drawing, and book-binding.

Al-Muftah said her work often integrates Qatari oral traditions and collective memory, with Arabic script playing a central role but not always in the literal form. She added that her use of script evolves beyond calligraphy into typographic expressions, rooted in journalism and archival practices.

Some of al-Muftah's notable works like Um al Salasil Wil Tha-



Bouthayna al-Muftah

hab, a portrait series depicting life in Qatari neighbourhoods, and her bookbinding projects further showcase her dedication to preserving and reimagining cultural traditions (Source: Mathaf).



Ministry of Municipality, Qatar University sign up to study agricultural loss and food waste

The Ministry of Municipality and Qatar University signed a memorandum of understanding to implement a comprehensive study on identifying agricultural loss and food waste in Qatar, as part of the ministry's efforts to enhance co-operation with government and private institutions to achieve the goals of the National Food Security Strategy 2030 and translate its pillars into reality through multiple partnerships and agreements.

The memorandum, which came during the launch ceremony of the National Food Security Strategy of the State of Qatar 2030, was signed by Director of the Food Security Department at the Ministry of Municipality Dr Masoud Jarallah al-Marri, and Dr Hamad Abdulrahman al-Ibrahim from Qatar University.

Dr al-Marri explained that the National Food Security Strategy 2030, which was prepared in close co-operation with relevant authorities from the public and private sectors, aims to achieve sustainability and ensure food security for the country. He pointed out that this strategy is based on guiding principles that include promoting healthy and consumer habits, ensuring safety and quality, achieving environmental sustainability, adapting to climate change, and building effective partnerships.

He added that the national strategy includes 17 initiatives distributed over three main pillars, supported by 146 measures to ensure effective implementation.

The first pillar is local production and local markets, and aims to promote sustainable practices for local production, adopt effective methods to improve environmental sustainability, encourage investment and innovation in the field of local food, in addition to implement policies that stimulate trade, marketing and pricing.

The second pillar focuses on strategic stocks and alert systems, as it seeks to improve and expand the strategic stock of food commodities, establish and manage a strategic stock of agricultural inputs, and develop central alert systems to monitor risks and response mechanisms.

Meanwhile, the third pillar targets international trade and investment, focusing on enhancing capabilities in global trade, diversifying import sources, and supporting the competitiveness of local production. This will contribute to Qatar's access to additional international markets. Additionally, it aims to expand the storage facilities at Hamad Port, transforming it into a regional hub for food trade and manufacturing.

Al-Marri emphasised that these pillars aim to build a sustainable food security system that meets the needs of the Qatari community safely and efficiently, thereby strengthening the country's position in achieving food security and sustainable development. (QNA)

QM welcomes Urban Truck Art Collective



Qatar Museums (QM) has welcomed Urban Truck Art Collective, renowned for their dynamic and colourful artistry from Karachi, Pakistan, bringing their iconic craftsmanship to Doha. As part of the future Art Mill Museum's Manzar: Art and Architecture from Pakistan 1940s to Today exhibition, the live art project will see artists painting and decorating the truck at the National Museum of Qatar's (NMoQ) Drop-off Area until December 16.

Supported by Seashore and Qatar Auto Museum, the live-painting experience offers the public a unique opportunity to watch the creative process in real-time, as the artists bring this extraordinary art form to life before their eyes, all while celebrating the colourful world of Pakistani truck art.

The live-painting initiative complements Manzar exhibition, on view until January 31, 2025, the first comprehensive exhibition in Qatar dedicated to exploring the artistic and architectural movements of Pakistan.

Organised by the future Art Mill Museum and presented at NMoQ, the exhibition features more than 200 works, including commissioned pieces by contemporary artists and architects, offering an immersive experience of Pakistan's rich cultural heritage. Caroline Hancock, Art Mill Museum senior curator of modern and contemporary art and co-curator of Mazar, said: "Urban Truck Art is bringing to life in Qatar a long-standing common practice of decoration in Pakistan on everyday modes of transporta-

tion, cooking utensils and other objects, or advertising. "The inspiration is also embraced by artists in the exhibition in the galleries referencing the Urban Vernacular and what is often known as Karachi Pop from the 1990s onwards. This engaging project allows better understanding of the deep cultural stories behind the designs."

The truck is provided by Seashore with support from Qatar Auto Museum. Public Art Planning specialist Dimitrije Bugarski said: "What makes this live-painting project so exciting is how it gives people the chance to see the creative process up close - watching a piece of art unfold in real-time brings a whole new level of engagement."

Once completed, the truck will remain on display at NMoQ until the spring. Seashore Group vice-chairman Saqr Saeed al-Mohammadi, said: "Through our support for projects such as the Manzar exhibition and the Urban Truck Art event, we aim to celebrate creativity while reflecting our dedication to supporting cultural growth and Qatar's vision for the future."

Urban Truck Art will be holding a special workshop at NMoQ, organised by Public Art at Qatar Museums and Art Mill Museum. The workshop builds on its first phase, held at Liwan Design Studios and Labs - Clay Lab, under the guidance of Noora al-Melhim, where participants crafted clay tiles. These tiles will be brought to life during the second phase on December 15, as participants paint their creations alongside the Urban Truck Art Collective.

MGD unveils Mine Diamond Festival

In light of the upcoming holiday season, Malabar Gold & Diamonds (MGD), the sixth largest jewellery retailer globally with over 370 showrooms across 13 countries, has unveiled exclusive offers as part of their Mine Diamond Festival.

Customers can get free cash vouchers on the purchase of diamond or precious gem jewellery. The brand has also unveiled their latest Season's Gifting collection, featuring trendy and lightweight jewellery. The limited period offer can be availed across all MGD showrooms until January 4, 2025.

As part of the Mine Diamond Festival, customers will be eligible for a free cash voucher worth QR100 for every diamond or precious gem worth QR3,000. The voucher is equivalent to cash and can be used for the purchase of gold or diamond jewellery, gold coins or gold bars.

"The mesmerising collection of diamond jewellery from the Mine brand, crafted exclusively with natural diamonds that are internationally certified, is some of the most sought-after array of jewellery from Malabar Gold & Diamonds," a statement said.

MGD is also offering 100% value on diamond exchange across all its showrooms, making diamond jewellery attractive not only as an adornment but as an investment as well. The Season's Gifting features special, light-weight designs in 18K gold, diamond and precious gem jewellery across MGD's brands such as Mine diamond jewellery, Era uncut diamond jewellery and Precia precious gem jewellery.

"Diamond jewellery has seen a remarkable rise in popularity over the years, a trend we've observed across all the regions we



operate in. At Malabar Gold & Diamonds, we've consistently stayed ahead of the curve, offering a diverse and stunning collection of diamond jewellery that caters to our customers' ever-evolving preferences," international operations managing director Shamlal Ahamed said.

"MGD has customer-friendly policies along with the 'Malabar Promise' of incomparable quality and service assurance. Recently, the brand further strengthened its commitment by introducing a 100% exchange value on diamonds, positioning diamonds as an investment, as appealing as gold.

"The 'Malabar Promise' also includes transparent pricing, assured lifetime maintenance from any of the showrooms across 13 countries, guaranteed buyback, tested and certified diamonds, 100% value on gold exchange, 916 hallmarked



jewellery, responsible sourcing, fair price policy, and fair labour practices," the statement added.

UDST hosts first-aid training for NGOs

University of Doha for Science and Technology (UDST), through its Continuing and Professional Education Directorate (CPE), conducted a complimentary first-aid training course for employees and representatives of local non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

This initiative is part of UDST's ongoing commitment to community engagement, aimed at equipping individuals and organisations with essential life-saving skills, a statement said. The training brought together participants from Qatar News Agency (QNA), Ehsan, Qatar Cancer Society (QCS), and Al Noor - reflecting UDST's dedication to building partnerships and initiatives that promote community well-being and safety.

The course covered fundamental first aid techniques, empowering NGO employees to respond effectively to emergencies and support their missions to serve society.

Hamad al-Kuwari, director of the CPE Directorate, stated: "This first-aid training course exemplifies our efforts to enhance community safety. By equipping NGO employees with practical skills, we contribute to building a safer and more resilient society." This initiative highlights CPE



Directorate's role in empowering local organisations through practical, skill-based training and highlights UDST's commitment to strengthening community engagement. By offering these train-

ings, UDST reaffirms its dedication to lifelong learning and its mission to support the broader community in achieving growth and development, the statement added.



Zulal Resort named 'Spa of the Year'

Zulal Wellness Resort by Chiva-Som, the Middle East's first and largest immersive wellness destination, has been named 'Spa of the Year' at the Ohlala Spa and Wellness Awards 2024. The annual awards celebrated the finest in luxury spa and wellness offerings across Qatar, a statement said.

This award recognises the resort's unique approach to wellness, blending the ancient wisdom of Traditional Arabic and Islamic Medicine (TAIM) with innovative therapies to provide an immersive and holistic experience. Guests can unwind in the tranquil herb garden, enjoy a state-of-the-art hydrothermal suite with hot and cold water therapies, and rejuvenate in steam, dry heat, ice, and Himalayan salt inhalation rooms. These carefully curated spaces are designed to cleanse both body and mind, enhancing every wellness journey.

Ammar Samad, general manager of Zulal Wellness Resort, said: "This award reflects our pride in offering world-class facilities, all designed to provide guests with an exceptional spa experience. By blending the timeless principles of TAIM with innovative wellness practices, we've created a sanctuary where guests can truly rejuvenate. This recognition motivates us to keep raising the bar for wellness in Qatar and beyond."



20% of budget allocated for education, health

From Page 1

Allocations for salaries and wages are set to rise by 5.5% in 2025 compared to 2024, totalling QR67.5bn.

Current expenditures will see

a 6.3% increase, while secondary capital expenditures are expected to grow by 7.7%.

Meanwhile, major capital expenditure allocations will experience a modest 1.4% increase to ensure the ongoing implementa-

tion of strategic and developmental projects.

According to Ministry of Finance, al-Kuwari will provide further details on Qatar's general budget for the 2025 fiscal year at a press conference on Sunday.

Israel slammed by media groups over 'massacre' of Gaza journalists

AFP
Paris

Israel has been accused of carrying out a "massacre" of journalists in Gaza in two separate reports from media freedom organisations this week that analysed the deaths of reporters worldwide this year. According to calculations from Paris-based Reporters Without Borders (RSF) published yesterday, the Israeli army killed 18 journalists as they were working this year - 16 in Gaza and two in Lebanon - around a third of the total worldwide of 54.

"Palestine is the most dangerous country for journalists, recording a higher death toll than any other country over the past five years," RSF said in its annual report, which covers data up to December 1.

The organisation has filed four complaints with the International Criminal Court (ICC) for "war crimes committed against journalists by the Israeli army".

It said that in total "more than 145" journalists had been killed by the Israeli army in Gaza since the start of the war there in October 2023, with 35 of them working at the time of their deaths.

RSF described the number of killings as "an unprecedented massacre".

With foreign reporters prevented from entering the territory and local reporters being deliberately targeted, Gaza was "a place where journalism itself is threatened with extinction", RSF said.

In a separate report published Tuesday, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) said that 104 journalists were killed worldwide in 2024, with more than half of them in Gaza.

The IFJ and RSF figures vary because of different methodologies used to calculate the tolls, but the IFJ used similar language to condemn Israel's military.

"The war in Gaza and Lebanon once again highlights the massacre suffered by Palestinian (55), Lebanese (6) and Syrian (1) media professionals, representing 60 percent of all journalists killed in 2024," the IFJ said. Israel denies that it intentionally harms journalists, but admits that some have been killed in air strikes on military targets. "We don't accept these figures. We don't believe they are correct," Israeli government spokesman David Mercer told a press conference on Wednesday.

Al Jazeera, which has been banned in Israel, says the Israeli military has been deliberately targeting its staff since the start of the war because of the channel's coverage.

In Lebanon, the two deaths counted this year by RSF were caused by a October 25 Israeli strike on a tourism complex in the southern town of Hasbaya where more than a dozen journalists working for Lebanese and Arab media outlets were sleeping. Human Rights Watch condemned it as "apparent war crime". No results have been published from a review promised over the killing of a Reuters journalist and the wounding of six other reporters, including two AFP staff in Lebanon in October 2023, the Committee to Protect Journalists highlighted on the one-year anniversary of the attack.

An investigation by AFP and Reuters over that incident concluded that the journalists, who were all wearing helmets and bulletproof vests marked "Press" in an area without obvious militant activity, were targeted by Israeli tank fire. RSF only records journalist deaths in its report if they have been "proven to be directly related to their professional activity". Following the 16 deaths in Gaza, the deadliest countries for journalists in 2024 were Pakistan with seven deaths, followed by Bangladesh and Mexico with five each. In 2023, the number of journalists killed worldwide stood at 45 in the same January-December period.

New Syria leaders vow to search for abducted US journalist Tice

AFP
Damascus

Syria's new leadership said yesterday it was searching for abducted US journalist Austin Tice and had secured the release of another American it said had been held by the ousted government.

In 2022, US President Joe Biden accused Syria of holding Tice, a freelance photojournalist detained near Damascus a decade earlier, and demanded that the government of Bashar al-Assad release him.

The transitional government, which took the helm in Syria after Assad's ouster on Sunday, said that "the search for American citizen Austin Tice is ongoing".

"We confirm our readiness to co-operate directly with the US administration to search for American citizens disappeared

by the former Assad regime," the transitional government's department of political affairs added in a statement on Telegram. In recent days, Syrian residents and armed men have broken into government prisons, freeing inmates, some of whom have spent decades behind bars.

The political department's statement said that another US citizen, Travis Timmerman, "has been released and secured". Residents of the Al-Zyabiyeh neighbourhood of Damascus said they had found Timmerman wandering around without shoes.

"The municipality guard, Mousa Rifai, found him so we brought him to our house and fed him and he slept for about an hour," said Ziyad Nedda. "He was held in the Palestine Branch, he wouldn't stop saying it. 'I was held in the Palestine Branch in Damascus'," he said.

The "Palestine Branch," also

known as Branch 235, was a prison operated by the Syrian intelligence services under Assad. According to US media reports, 29-year-old Timmerman was last seen in Budapest, Hungary, in early June.

Tice was working for Agence France-Presse, McClatchy News, *The Washington Post*, CBS and other media outlets when he was detained at a checkpoint in Daraya, a suburb of Damascus, on August 14, 2012.

On Friday, the missing journalist's mother Debra told reporters her son is believed to be alive and is being "treated well" without providing further details.

The rebel forces, led by the Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), appointed an interim prime minister on Tuesday to lead Syria until March. Assad fled the country over the weekend, ending a half-century of his family's iron-fisted rule.

Chemical weapons watchdog warns of dangers of Syria strikes

AFP
The Hague

Strikes on Syrian chemical weapons sites risk contaminating and destroying valuable evidence, the head of the international watchdog warned yesterday, admitting that the group did not yet know whether sites have been affected.

There has been widespread global concern about the fate of Syria's stockpile of chemical weapons since the dramatic overthrow of Bashar al-Assad. On Monday, Israel said it had struck "remaining chemical weapons or long-range missiles and rockets in order that they will not fall in the hands of extremists" in Syria.

The director-general of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Fernando Arias, said his group was "following closely" reports of strikes on military facilities. "We do not know yet whether these

strikes have affected chemical weapons-related sites. Such air strikes could create a risk of contamination," said Arias in a speech.

"Another real risk would be the destruction of valuable evidence for investigations by different independent international bodies related to past use of chemical weapons," he added. In 2014, the OPCW set up what it called a "fact-finding mission" to investigate chemical weapons use in Syria. This team has issued 21 reports covering 74 instances of alleged chemical weapons use, according to the OPCW. Investigators concluded that chemical weapons were used or likely used in 20 instances.

"Additionally, we also have to consider the risk of any dangerous chemicals or equipment being lost, without any control" amid the air strikes, warned Arias in his speech. Syria agreed to join the OPCW in 2013 shortly after an alleged chemical gas attack killed

more than 1,400 people near Damascus. It handed over its declared stockpile for destruction but the OPCW has always been concerned that the declaration made by Damascus was incomplete and that more weapons remained.

Taking control of Syria, the Islamist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) group pledged its "readiness to co-operate with the international community in everything related to monitoring weapons and sensitive areas". The group also said it would safeguard the country's remaining chemical weapons stockpiles and ensure they would not be used against citizens.

Arias acknowledged he had heard "positive signals" from within Syria but has not yet had official contact with the new authorities. The change of government "may present an opportunity... to obtain clarifications on the full extent and scope of the Syrian chemical weapons programme", said Arias.

Spanish Human Rights Association awards Palestinian reporters in Gaza

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

The Spanish Human Rights Association, in its 42nd edition, awarded the 2024 Honorary Human Rights Prize to Palestinian journalists, victims of the genocide in the Gaza Strip. The award was received on behalf of the Palestinian journalists by Alaraby TV correspondent in Madrid, Muath Hamed, who appeared visibly moved during the ceremony.

He stated: "There are no words that can describe the suffering of my fellow journalists in the face of death, nor words that can capture their determination to bring the truth to the world. These are the true heroes who face death at every moment."

Hamed used the opportunity to present detailed statistics on the number of journalists who have been martyred, imprisoned, and injured in the Gaza Strip, along with documentation of media institutions destroyed during the genocide. He also conveyed a special message from journalists working in Gaza to the conference



attendees, stating: "Our mission continues to carry the voice of Gaza to the world."

The Association for Human Rights in Spain (APDH-E) has held its 42nd Human Rights Awards ceremony for 2024, which was attended by societal and political figures, including members of parliament and ministers from the Spanish government.

The event featured praise for the commitment and contributions of

prominent individuals and institutions in defending human rights.

It is worth noting that the Association for Human Rights in Spain (APDH-E) is one of the oldest human rights organisations in Europe.

Founded in 1948, it has been committed since its inception to defending human rights in general and supporting journalists in particular, recognising them as the frontline in exposing violations.

Panel warns about threats to international education

The need for higher education that is relevant to students' lives, accessible to everyone, and interconnected on a global scale has been emphasised by experts at a Qatar Foundation (QF)-led discussion during the Doha Forum 2024.

Moderated by Francisco Marmolejo, president of Higher Education and Education Adviser, QF, the session brought together educators from east and west to explore the opportunities, challenges, and risks surrounding globalised learning and international education, in a world that has become increasingly polarised.

The discussion delved into issues such as the impact of rising nationalism, "anti-intellectualism", and cost on higher education worldwide, and how it can both benefit and come under threat from Artificial Intelligence. Among the perspectives shared was that of the American University of Afghanistan (AUAF), from which students, faculty, and staff evacuated to Qatar have continued their learning journey at QF's Education City, through a strategic partnership between Qatar Fund for Development, QF, and the university.

"The arrival of the Afghan students into our ecosystem of education has been very refreshing in many ways," said Marmolejo. "I'm sure it has helped to change the lives of many of our students just by getting a sense of the challenges and the struggles that these students who have become part of our community have brought with them."

Ambassador Said T Jawad, chair-



Some of the panellists at the event.

man of AUAF, stressed the importance of international partnerships in higher education, saying: "There are problems that cannot be solved through one model and in one place - there is every reason to be collaborating, both in terms of our needs as institutions and in terms of solving human problems."

Dr Fanta Aw, director and CEO of NAFSA: Association of International Educators, told the panel that higher education should not "let a good crisis go to waste", and that organisations and institutions in the non-education sphere can work in collaboration with the higher education sector to harness opportunities."

Universities have a responsibility to serve their societies as well as their learners, according to Dr Lynn Pasquerella, president of the American Association of Colleges and Universities, who warned: "Unless we provide access for all

students, we are not fulfilling our obligations to our students and to our societies, and we are violating that social compact."

Dr Ahmad Dallal, president of the American University of Cairo, cited several reasons for his view that "international education has a big problem" - violence leading to student and faculty deaths; increasing nationalism "and the ideological projects being imposed on institutions of higher education"; the cost of education and its "return on investment"; and technology."

The panellists also spoke about the uniqueness of the international education model at QF's Education City - where branch campuses of international universities stand alongside QF's Hamad Bin Khalifa University - and how it stands as an example of collaborative learning through enabling students from more than 120 countries to have multiple educational experiences.

BYH Exhibition slated to commence in April

QNA
Doha

The 6th edition of the Build Your House (BYH) Exhibition, will run at Qatar National Convention Center (QNCC) from April 28 to May 1, and will introduce a new co-located exhibition, Inspire Exhibition for Decor and Gifts.

Exhibition organiser NeXTfair said that this edition of Qatar's premier event for the home building

and construction sector, will be the largest and most comprehensive in its history, occupying four halls. It added that building on the resounding success of its previous edition, which saw over 15,000 visitors and deals worth QR800mn, BYH 2025 aims to surpass all expectations.

Designed as a one-stop destination for everything related to home construction, smart technologies, and interior design, this years exhibition will elevate the visitor experience with the launch of Inspire for Home. This new exhibition will

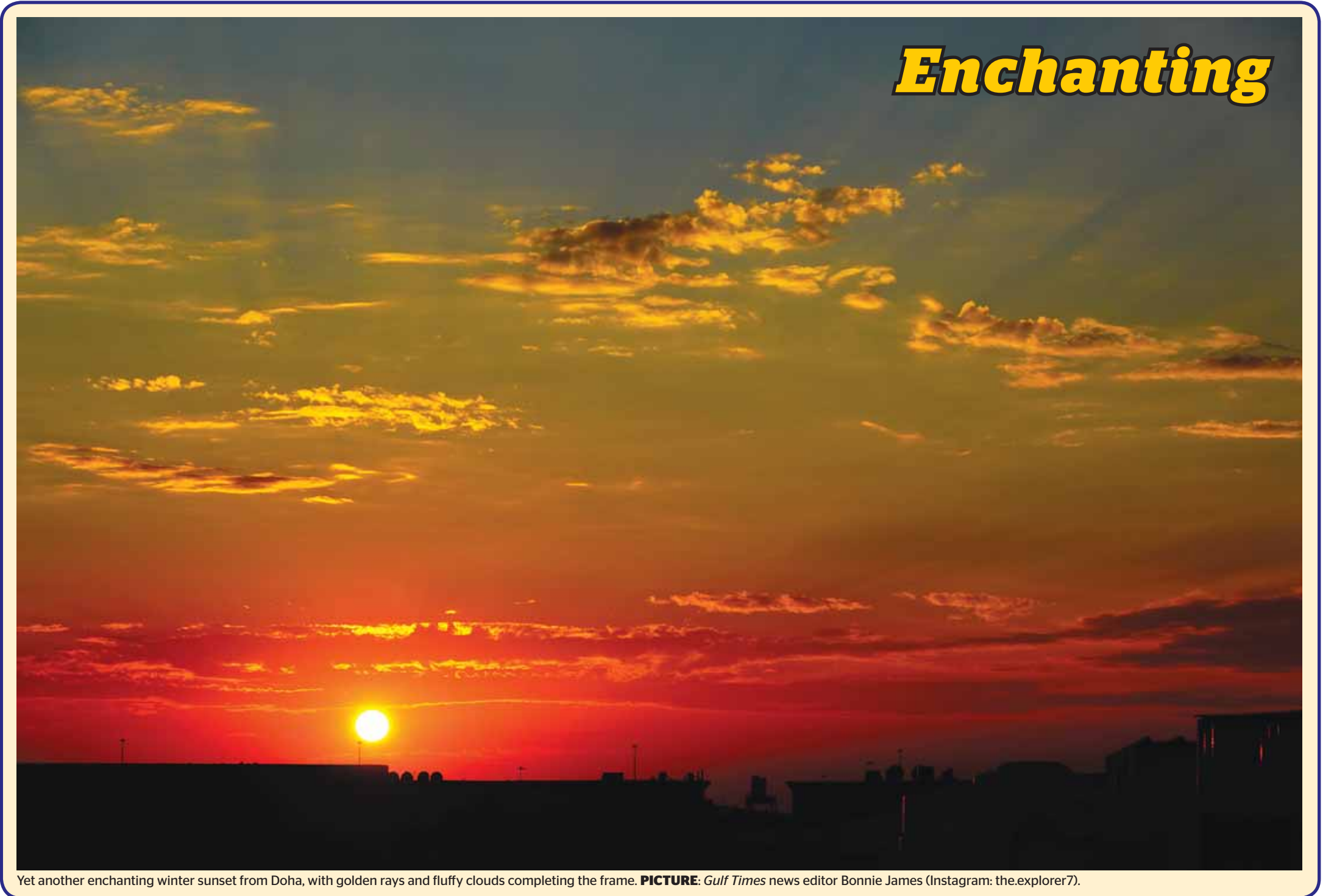
focus on home decor, lifestyle, and gifting solutions, further enhancing the events reputation as a comprehensive platform for homeowners and professionals alike.

BYH 2025 will feature over 250 exhibitors from more than 10 countries and 40+ industry speakers, offering a vibrant platform for innovation and expertise. Expected to attract 16,000 visitors, the event reinforces its position as a cornerstone of Qatar's home-building and construction industry.

Closure at Wholesale Market intersection



The Public Works Authority (Ashghal) has announced a temporary partial closure of the Wholesale Market Intersection from 12am to 5pm on December 16-17, in co-ordination with the General Directorate of Traffic to carry road marking maintenance work. During the closure, road users of Wholesale Market Intersection can use all free right lanes and reroute to nearby adjacent streets and use alternative roads to reach their destinations. Ashghal will install road signs advising motorists of the temporary closure and requested all to abide by the speed limit to ensure safety.



Yet another enchanting winter sunset from Doha, with golden rays and fluffy clouds completing the frame. **PICTURE:** Gulf Times news editor Bonnie James (Instagram: the.explorer7).

BUQ celebrates World Urdu Day

Bazm-e-Urdu Qatar (BUQ), established in 1959, celebrated World Urdu Day with a grand literary programme. The special event featured three key segments: a book launch, a seminar on Urdu prose, and a poetry symposium. The programme was presided over by general secretary, poet, and writer Iftekhar Raghieb. Renowned editor and writer Syed Mohammed Yaqoub, who was visiting from Pakistan, was the chief guest. Bazm's members, including Dr Wasi-ul-Haq Wasi and Jamshed Ansari, were guests of honour, while president Mohammed Rafique Shad Akolvi served as the master of the ceremony. The evening began with the recitation of the Holy Qur'an by Mohammed Rafique Shad Akolvi, followed by a welcome address by joint secretary Fayaz Bukhari Kamal.



Pakistan Arts Society general secretary Adeel Akbar introduced the chief guest, detailing his literary journey and decades-long contributions to Urdu publishing. The first segment featured a series of essays, beginning with a write-up by Rahbar Kisan Inter-

national chief editor Haroon-ur-Rasheed Qureshi. The essay was about Syed Abdul Hye, BUQ's senior patron since 1959, offering an engaging account of his arrival in Qatar 65 years ago and his role in promoting Urdu literature and culture.

The audience responded with warm applause, appreciating the personal perspective on Abdul Hye and the rich historical account. Akolvi followed with a comprehensive essay on the evolution of the Urdu language and literature. His well-researched

piece explored the contributions of various poets and writers, providing a scholarly overview that resonated with the audience. The prose session concluded with a humorous character sketch of poet Wazir Ahmed

Wazir, presented by BUQ chairman Dr Faisal Hanif. The vivid portrayal brought laughter and applause from the audience, as well as commendations from the chief guest and others on stage. The second segment marked the launch of Yaqoub's latest book, a travelogue of the US. The author formally presented his book to Dr Hanif. The evening culminated in a symposium featuring 17 poets - Azhar Azmi, Suhail Ahmed Wafa, Sobia Khan, Azfar Gardai-zi, Shahzeb Shahab, Samreen Nadeem Samar, Prof Dr Shama Parveen, Anwar Ali Rana, Fayaz Bukhari Kamal, Jamshed Ansari, Dr Wasi-ul-Haq Wasi, Wazir Ahmed Wazir, Sheraz Ahmed Bakali, Muzaffar Nayab, Mansoor Azmi, Raghieb, and Akolvi. BUQ's media secretary and treasurer Irshad Ahmed proposed a vote of thanks.

MES Indian School observes French Day

The school principal stressed on the importance and benefits of learning an international language for the students

The department of French at MES Indian School observed French Day. Institut Français du Qatar's deputy counsellor for co-operation and cultural affairs Chrystelle Schaeigis and deputy director and attache for linguistic co-operation Margo Girard were the chief guests. Addressing the gathering, school principal, Dr Hameeda Kadar stressed on the importance and benefits of learning an international language for the students as it opens the vistas of exploring the world and comes in handy for the youngsters in their pursuit of acquiring worldly knowledge and wisdom.



Winners of the Spell-Bee competition held for the students of classes III - X as a part of the Golden Jubilee celebration of the school were awarded trophies and certificates. A cultural segment consisting of

group songs, a dance performance, a short play (*L'Accent Grave*) a fun event of tongue twisters and a cho-

ral recitation of the poem, 'Déjeuner du Matin' was carried out for the students studying the French lan-

guage. Department co-ordinator Radhika Rajendran co-ordinated the programme.

Department co-ordinator Radhika Rajendran co-ordinated the programme.



IIS 40th annual sports day concludes

The 40th annual sports day of Ideal Indian School concluded with participation of a large number of students. President Dr Hassan Kunhi M P was the chief guest at the prize distribution ceremony. Principal Shaik Shamim Saheb and the heads of all sections were present. The choir performed the school anthem. Dr Kunhi presented the annual sports report, highlighting the school's achievements. The principal lauded the department of physical education for its outstanding contributions to sports and games. Students were recognised for their exceptional

performances in national and international sports meets. The Junior Section performed a yoga display. Boys' Section sports secretary Mohammed Af-fan Azad welcomed the gathering and Girls' Section sports secretary Lehen Shah proposed a vote of thanks. The head girl, along with the four house captains of the Girls' Section, lowered the school flag and handed it over to the chief guest who formally declared the meet closed. The programme was co-ordinated by Boys' Section vice-principal Azam Khan and Physical Education head Nowfal V M.



Bhavan's marks 15th annual day

Bhavan's Public School commemorated its 15th annual day with a spectacular event, that commenced with a welcome dance, followed by a welcome song by the choir. President P N Baburajan welcomed the gathering. Principal M P Philip presented the annual report. Chairman J K Menon delivered the presidential address. Indian embassy first secretary Eish Singhal was the chief guest. Qatar Ministry of Labour's labour relations specialist Khalid Abdul Rehman Fakhroo was the

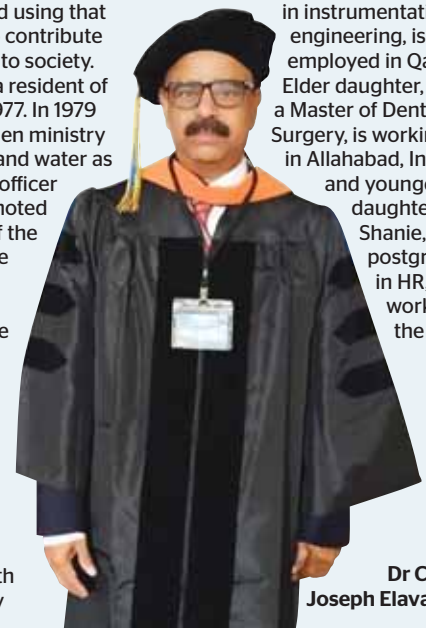
guest of honour. The highlights included the felicitation of outstanding students and staff for their achievements, the unveiling of the school magazine by the chief guest, and the presentation of mementos to guests. The evening concluded with a series of cultural performances by the students. Vice-chairman R O Abdul Kader, administration director Anjana Menon and other members of the management committee were also present. Academic co-ordinator Mujeeb Rahman proposed a vote of thanks.



Knowledge is power and age no bar

Indian expatriate Clarence Joseph Elavathingal, a Qatar resident for 47 years, has earned a doctorate in psychology at the age of 68. "This achievement reflects my lifelong passion for learning and my commitment to making a positive impact in the lives of others," Dr Elavathingal told *Gulf Times*. His pursuit for the doctoral degree started in 2014 when he joined the University of Liverpool for a Master's Degree in Psychology of human minds as an adult student through distance education programme. Subsequently, he opted for another Master's from a different continent and this time it was from Africa, Unicaf University Zambia. "Then I joined Atlantic International University, US, for my doctoral degree. Choosing universities from different continents gave me chances in learning behaviours of different peoples and a perfect blend of their diverse cultures," explained Dr Elavathingal, who travelled to all the relevant continents in pursuit of his studies. "My continued journey to earn this degree was not just about academic pursuit, but also about a personal dedication to understanding the complexities of human behaviour and using that knowledge to contribute meaningfully to society. "I have been a resident of Qatar since 1977. In 1979 I joined the then ministry of electricity and water as a purchasing officer and was promoted to the head of the local purchase department after a few years. I left the job in 1991 and started a business with a Qatari partner. "My long years of stay in Qatar have been enriching, both professionally

and personally, as I have had the opportunity to engage with diverse communities, to develop a deeper appreciation of their cultural backgrounds. "Along with my business I enjoyed being engaged in social activities, including humanitarian services for repatriating mortal remains and counselling community members in their problems. "In addition to my academic pursuits, I have always prioritised social work. I dedicate a significant amount of my time to volunteer efforts, advocating for those in need and working to promote mental well-being in underserved communities. "Whether through supporting mental health initiatives, helping marginalised groups, or mentoring others, I have strived to make a lasting difference through both formal and informal channels. "This doctorate degree reflects my lifelong commitment to growth, learning, and service to others. I hope to continue using my skills and knowledge to inspire and support others, proving that it's never too late to pursue your dreams and contribute to the betterment of society," added Dr Elavathingal. His wife Roby is a science graduate. The couple have a son and two daughters. Son Winnie, a postgraduate in instrumentation engineering, is employed in Qatar. Elder daughter, Jennie, a Master of Dental Surgery, is working in Allahabad, India, and younger daughter, Shanie, a postgraduate in HR, is working in the US.



Dr Clarence Joseph Elavathingal

Adhan contest winner



Mohammad Umair Mujeeb of MES Indian School won second position in the Interschool Adhan Competition at Edison Global Academy as part of the 'My values define my Identity' project initiative.

Farewell to Majeed Haji



Qatar KMCC Kalpetta Mandalam treasurer E C Majeed Haji, who is returning home for good after a long expat stint, was given a farewell. The native of Millumukku in Kerala's Wayanad district has worked tirelessly for the movement since the inception of Qatar KMCC, a statement said. Mandalam president Nasser Ammara presided over the function. Wayanad Kalpetta constituency assembly general secretary P K Hashir, state councillor Naufal Meppadi and others spoke.

Award winners feted



Outreach Qatar felicitated its members, ICBF M Kanjani Awardee of 2024 P N Baburajan, ICBF Humanitarian Awardee of 2024 V S Mannangi, and ICBF Appreciation Awardees Nivedita Ketkar, Santhosh Pillai, Mehul Patel and Mani Bharati. Indian embassy first secretary Sachin Dinkar Shankpal, the chief guest, said Outreach Qatar is indeed a special beautiful family as stated by students Rayyan Mohammed and Nathania Vipin during their speeches. He stressed being strongest does not imply physically strong, but mentally empowered.

Indian Paralympic gold medallist honoured

Padma Shri awardee and India's first Paralympic gold medallist, Muralikant Petkar, was felicitated by the Indian Cultural Centre (ICC) in Doha. A symbol of resilience, Petkar's incredible journey — from serving in the Indian army and enduring eight bullet injuries during the war to winning gold for India in the 1972 Paralympics — inspires generations. During his visit, Petkar interacted with the Indian diaspora,

sharing his experiences and motivating the youth to pursue excellence with determination. Accompanying him was his son, Arjun Petkar, who is actively involved in nurturing young sports talent. He also shared insights, encouraging the attendees to support and guide budding athletes. The duo visited the 3-2-1 Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum, where Petkar's remarkable achievements are showcased.



ECONOMY

India-UK free trade pact talks to resume by Jan-end

India and Britain will resume free trade agreement talks by January-end, an Indian government source said. This development comes after British Prime Minister Keir Starmer's office said last month that talks would be restarted in the "new year". The previous Conservative government held years-long trade talks with New Delhi, but they ended in March without a deal, with an official saying an agreement could not be finalised before the Indian elections. Total trade between India and Britain, currently the world's fifth - and sixth-largest economies, respectively, was worth \$19.27bn in the 10 months to October, with Indian exports to Britain valued at \$12.18bn.

PEOPLE

China's customs chief, trade veteran dies of sudden illness

China's customs chief Yu Jianhua, a top trade negotiator who navigated the country through the trade war during Donald Trump's previous presidential term, has died of an undisclosed sudden illness. The 63-year-old abruptly fell ill on Tuesday and emergency rescue efforts failed to save him, the General Administration of Customs said in a statement. Yu had attended a few engagements this month, including a meeting with senior Chinese officials from the northeastern province of Jilin in Beijing on the day he died, according to Hong Kong media reports. A statement on the meeting on the website of the Jilin provincial government has since been removed.

DECISION

Thai PM pledges measures to boost support, economy

Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra yesterday pledged new populist measures in an attempt to shore up support for her government and boost an economy held back by high household debt, tight lending and tepid consumption. Paetongtarn said her administration would provide soft loans for community businesses, funds for villages, cheap housing for low-income workers in Bangkok, energy price cuts and a flat rate for urban rail travel. She added the government would regulate underground businesses that accounted for 49% of gross domestic product, a move aimed at protecting consumers and generating government income.

TRIAL

Widow acquitted of murdering tycoon

A Japanese court yesterday ruled that the widow of an elderly real estate mogul was not guilty of murdering him just months into their marriage. Jiji Press and other local outlets said Saki Sudo, now 28, was acquitted by a district court in western Japan, which could not immediately confirm the verdict. Kosuke Nozaki died after ingesting a lethal dose of a drug in 2018 at age 77. Prosecutors had accused Sudo of killing Nozaki. In his will, he reportedly said he wanted to donate his entire estate of an estimated 1.3bn yen to the city of Tanabe in Wakayama prefecture where he lived.

Samsung accuses India antitrust body of detaining staff, unlawful data seizure

Reuters
New Delhi

Samsung has accused India's competition watchdog of unlawfully detaining its employees and seizing data in a raid carried out in connection with an antitrust investigation on Amazon and Walmart's Flipkart, a legal filing shows. Samsung is embroiled in the Competition Commission of India's (CCI) investigation that in August concluded that the South Korean giant and other smartphone companies broke anti-trust laws by colluding with Amazon and Flipkart to exclusively launch products online. Samsung's October 11 filing in the high court in northern city of Chandigarh seeks to quash the investigation findings related to conduct of the company, arguing the CCI had illegally seized material from its employees during a 2022 raid at one of Amazon's vendors.

Samsung and the CCI did not respond to queries.

Samsung has obtained an injunction from the high court that has put on hold the CCI proceedings, but the court has not yet ruled on its requests to return the data seized and to not allow the commission to rely on it.

The CCI has challenged Samsung and 22 other parties that have won similar injunctions from high courts across India, and last week asked the Supreme Court to hear all challenges together, saying the companies were trying to scuttle the investigation.

The CCI investigation had found that Amazon and Flipkart both breached competition laws by favouring select sellers on their platforms. Amazon and Flipkart have repeatedly denied wrongdoing, even as brick-and-mortar retailers continue to complain about their deep discounting and other practices.

In its court filing Samsung also asserted that it was wrongly found to have breached competition laws in collusion with Amazon and Flipkart, even though it had been cooperating with the watchdog and providing information only as a third-party in the case.

The inclusion of smartphone makers in the Amazon and Flipkart investigation could increase legal and compliance headaches for the likes of Samsung.

In the August investigation reports, the CCI noted that Samsung was involved in the practice of exclusive phone launches on Amazon and Flipkart, saying "exclusivity in business is anathema" and against free and fair competition.

Indian farmers demand MSP for crops



Farmers shouting slogans march during a protest against the central government demanding minimum support price (MSP) for their crops, in Amritsar, India, yesterday.

Tesla restarts search for New Delhi showroom

Reuters
New Delhi

Elon Musk's Tesla has resumed its search for showroom space in New Delhi, two sources said, in the first sign it is rethinking entering the Indian market after putting its investment plans on hold earlier this year.

Musk said in April he would meet Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a trip where he was to potentially announce an investment of \$2bn-\$3bn in India. However, he called off his visit at the last moment after Tesla decided to sack 10% of its staff amid falling sales. Tesla, which had paused its search for a showroom in India in recent months, is now in early-stage talks with DLF to help secure space in the capital region, said the two sources, who have direct knowledge of the situation.

A third source said it is not certain that Tesla's talks with India's biggest property developer will lead to a deal and the electric vehicle giant is also in discussions with others.

Tesla and DLF did not respond to requests for comment.

One of the sources said Tesla is looking for 3,000 to 5,000 square feet to create a consumer experience centre as well as a space three times larger for its delivery and service operations.

Tesla is evaluating multiple locations including DLF's Avenue Mall in southern Delhi and the Cyber Hub office and retail complex in nearby Gurugram city, the source added.

Foreign retailers including Japan's Uniqlo, Spain's Mango and Britain's Marks and Spencer also have outlets in the Avenue Mall, where Tesla is looking to secure an 8,000 square feet showroom space, the second source said.

Tesla's search is still "exploratory" and

nothing has been finalised, the first source said.

It was not immediately clear whether Tesla will consider importing cars at the tax rate of as high as 100% or if it will make investment commitments under India's new policy, which would allow it to import certain EVs at a lower rate of 15%. After Tesla did not deliver on earlier investment plans, India's government is trying to relax certain provisions of its policy to attract automakers such as Hyundai Motor and Toyota which have expressed initial interest.

India's EV market is small, making up about 2% of total car sales of 4mn last year, but the government wants to increase the share to 30% by 2030.

Tesla's showroom hunt comes as Musk's Starlink is also considering entering India after winning a lobbying battle against billionaire Mukesh Ambani over how New Delhi should allocate spectrum for the service.

Indian troops shoot dead seven Maoist militants

Indian troops shot dead seven Maoist militants in a fierce gun battle yesterday, as security forces step up efforts to crush the long-running armed conflict. More than 10,000 people have died in the decades-long insurgency waged by the Naxalite movement, as the Maoist militants are known, who say they are fighting for the rights of marginalised Indigenous people in India's resource-rich central regions. The insurgency has drastically shrunk in recent years and a crackdown by security forces has killed over 200 militants this year, according to government data. The latest gun battle took place in a remote forested area of Bastar region in Chhattisgarh state. "So far seven bodies of Maoists, who were in their uniforms, have been recovered during search operations," a police inspector general P Sunderraj said, adding that the toll was likely to rise.

King Charles visits Apple UK headquarters



Britain's King Charles III listens to Apple chief executive Tim Cook (left) as they visit the firm's UK headquarters, in London.

UK seeks designer for memorial to late queen

AFP
London

The UK government yesterday launched a search for a team to design a "historic" memorial to pay lasting tribute to the late Queen Elizabeth II.

The monument will be erected in central London's sprawling St James's Park, not far from the queen's main home in Buckingham Palace.

The nation's beloved queen died in September 2022 after more than 70 years on the throne, and was succeeded by her eldest son, who became King Charles III.

The "permanent memorial to the UK's longest-serving monarch" will be "one of the most significant design projects in recent British his-

tory", a government statement said. St James's Park is the oldest of the royal parks, flanked on either end by Buckingham Palace and the Horse Guards Parade.

It will have a provisional budget of £23mn-£46mn (\$29mn-\$58mn), including the cost of constructing a new bridge across the park's lake.

"This National Memorial will provide a permanent tribute to the late Queen's legacy, offering space for reflection as well as celebration," said senior Cabinet Minister Pat McFadden.

"We want the very best architects and designers to come forward with their ideas for how this historic project should look," he added.

The Queen Elizabeth Memorial Committee said it was seeking "a design that is beautiful, inclusive and sustainable".

Australia to charge tech firms for news content if they do not pay

Reuters
Sydney

Australia's centre-left government yesterday said it planned new rules that would charge big tech firms millions of dollars if they did not pay Australian media companies for news hosted on their platforms.

The move piles pressure on global tech giants such as Facebook-owner Meta Platforms and Alphabet's Google to pay publishers for content or face the risk of paying millions to continue operations in Australia.

"The news bargaining initiative

will create a financial incentive for agreement-making between digital platforms and news media businesses in Australia," assistant treasurer and Minister for Financial Services Stephen Jones told a press conference.

The platforms at risk will be significant social media platforms and search engines with an Australian-based revenue in excess of \$250mn, he said.

The charge will be offset for any commercial agreements that are voluntarily entered into between the platforms and news media businesses, Jones added.

Tech companies condemned the plan.

"The proposal fails to account for the realities of how our platforms work, specifically that most people don't come to our platforms for news content and that news publishers voluntarily choose to post content on our platforms because they receive value from doing so," a Meta spokesman said after Jones' remarks.

A spokesperson for Google said the government's decision "risks ongoing viability of commercial deals with news publishers in Australia".

The proposed new rules come as Australia toughens its approach to the mostly US-domiciled tech giants.

Last month it became the first country to ban children under the age of 16 from social media, in a move seen as setting a benchmark for other governments' handling of Big Tech.

Canberra also plans to threaten the companies with fines for failing to stamp out scams.

Google, ByteDance through TikTok, and Meta through its various platforms would fall within the scope of the charges under the new rules. However X, formerly Twitter, would not be covered, Jones said.

In 2021, Australia passed laws to make the US tech giants, such as Google and Meta, compensate

media companies for the links that lure readers and advertising revenue.

After the move Meta briefly blocked users from reposting news articles, but later struck deals with several Australian media firms, such as News Corporation and national broadcaster Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

It has said since it will not renew those arrangements beyond 2024.

Meta, which also owns Instagram, Threads and WhatsApp, has been scaling back its promotion of news and political content globally to drive traffic and says news links are now a fraction of users' feeds.

This year it said it would discon-

tinue the news tab on Facebook in Australia and the US, adding that it had cancelled the tab last year in Britain, France and Germany.

In 2023, Meta blocked users in Canada from reposting news content after its government took similar action.

Australia news organisations, including Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, are expected to benefit from the new rules.

Following Jones' announcement, News Corporation Australia executive chairman Michael Miller said he would contact Meta and TikTok immediately to seek a commercial relationship with News Corporation Australia.



Somalia, Ethiopia agree to resolve Somaliland row

AFP/Reuters
Addis Ababa/Ankara

Somalia and Ethiopia have said they would work together to resolve a dispute over Addis Ababa's plan to build a port in the breakaway region of Somaliland, which had drawn in regional powers and threatened to further destabilise the Horn of Africa.

The two countries' leaders said they had agreed to find commercial arrangements to allow landlocked Ethiopia "reliable, secure and sustainable access to and from the sea" after talks on Wednesday mediated by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud had flown into Ankara for the talks following two previous rounds that made little progress.

Speaking in the Turkish capital after the agreement, Mohamud said the neighbours had "mutual interests in co-operating together".

"We belong to a region where peace and stability is first priority for our people's lives," he said.

The meeting was their first since January when Ethiopia said it would lease a port in Somalia's breakaway northern region of Somaliland in exchange for recognising the area's independence.

Mogadishu rejected the deal and threatened to expel Ethiopian troops who were

stationed in Somalia to fight insurgents. Somalia opposes international recognition of Somaliland, which has governed itself and enjoyed comparative peace and stability since declaring independence in 1991.

In a joint statement released late on Wednesday, Somalia and Ethiopia said they had agreed to start technical negotiations by the end of February next year, and to conclude them within four months.

They did not go into detail. "This joint declaration focuses on the future, not the past," Erdogan said at a press conference in Ankara afterwards.

The African Union (AU) has meanwhile urged Ethiopia and Somalia to implement the agreement "without delay", calling the deal an "important act".

AU Commission chairman Moussa Faki Mahamat stressed the "important act" taken by the leaders to find a deal but emphasised the urgency to "implement, without delay, the relevant measures adopted".

He did not give any indication in the statement, posted on X, of what measures had been agreed.

East Africa's regional bloc IGAD (the Intergovernmental Authority on Development) also welcomed the agreement as an "important step".

It "demonstrates a commitment to resolving bilateral issues amicably", IGAD executive secretary Workneh Gebeyehu said.

According to the text of the accord published by Türkiye, the parties agreed "to put



Erdogan with Mohamud and Ahmed following a press conference in Ankara. - Reuters

aside differences of opinion and contentious issues, and to move resolutely forward in co-operation towards common prosperity".

They agreed to work closely together on commercial arrangements and bilateral agreements that would ensure Ethiopia's "reliable, safe and sustainable access" to the sea "under the sovereign authority of the Federal Republic of Somalia".

To that end, it said they would start technical talks no later than the end of February which would be completed "within four months", with any differences to be dealt with "through dialogue, where necessary with Türkiye's support".

However, there was no detail on how the agreement might impact the controversial memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Somaliland and Ethiopia, which has never been made public.

Ethiopian authorities did not immediately respond to AFP's requests for comment about the future of the agreement with Somaliland.

A source close to the Somaliland government said nothing had changed regard-

ing the agreement with Ethiopia, noting: "Agreeing to work together to resolve their dispute is not the same as walking away from the MoU".

While Abiy has repeatedly insisted that his country must have coastal access, he told parliament earlier this year that Ethiopia had "no interest in getting involved in a war" over access to the sea.

In response, Mogadishu has strengthened its ties with Egypt, Ethiopia's long-time rival.

Somalia expelled Ethiopia's ambassador in April and said Ethiopian troops would be excluded from a new African Union peacekeeping force against Islamist Al Shebaab insurgents that is due to be deployed on January 1.

Ethiopia, which has the second largest population in Africa with 120mn people, lost access to the sea when Eritrea gained independence in 1993.

Türkiye has close ties with both Ethiopia and Somalia, training Somalia's security forces and supplying development assistance in return for a foothold on a key global shipping route.

Latin America, Caribbean launch alliance to battle organised crime

The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) has announced the launch of a regional security alliance against crime that brings together 18 governments across Latin America and the Caribbean as well as several international finance institutions.

"Security needs to be part of the solution for our economic progress," IDB president Ilan Goldfajn told reporters ahead of the project's launch in Barbados, saying that countries worried about the cost of crime had requested the initiative.

"Organised crime has no national borders," he said. "We're trying to organise ourselves into a regional initiative."

Crime costs on average 3.4% of gross domestic product across the region, according to a recent IDB study, amounting to nearly 80% of public budgets for education, double social assistance and 12 times research and development spending.

The IDB is providing \$1bn in financing for projects aligned with the initiative next year, Goldfajn added, and plans to mobilise public and private donors to raise more funds.

The IDB said projects include the regional sharing of criminal records among alliance members, and meetings to discuss money laundering tied to illegal mining in the Amazon.

Goldfajn said the plan has a strong social focus, looking to reduce communities' vulnerabilities, as well as strengthening police, state justice institutions and hitting financial crime.

The alliance has notable regional exceptions such as the United States, which Goldfajn said would not participate.

He said that the IDB is in talks with Mexico and Colombia, two other exceptions, which could join later.

The alliance includes the Organisation of American States, the Caribbean Community (Caricom), Interpol, the World Bank and regional development banks.

Last year, Caricom leaders declared violent crime a public health issue and pledged a series of measures such as regional arrest warrants, a ban on assault weapons and support for a Mexican lawsuit seeking to hold US gunmakers accountable for illegal trafficking to criminal groups outside its borders.

The case has gone to the US Supreme Court.

Some 51% of traced firearms in Central America come from the United States, according to US government data, as well as 68% in Mexico and 80% across the Caribbean. - Reuters

Niger suspends BBC for 3 months

Niger's ruling junta has announced that it was suspending BBC radio for three months, accusing it of airing "erroneous information likely to destabilise social peace and undermine the morale of the troops" fighting religious militants. The measure by Communications Minister Sidi Mohamed Raliou will enter into force "with immediate effect", the leadership said. The military government has banned several Western media outlets since it seized power in a July 2023 coup. - AFP

Zimbabwe at risk of another dry season

Zimbabwe appears to be heading into another dry spell that could worsen hunger for millions of people already suffering from an El Nino-induced drought, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) said.

The drought in southern Africa that started early this year has been the worst in decades and prompted Zimbabwe and neighbouring countries to declare a state of disaster.

Rainfall was forecast to resume in October, which is normally the start of a six-month rainy season. However, so far Zimbabwe has received only a few days of rain in late November.

"We are worried. You can see the ground in front of us is bone dry," said WFP country director Barbara Clemens during a food distribution event in Chivi, southern Zimbabwe.

Families in the district are already skipping meals to preserve the little food they have.

Georgina Maphosa, 74, said she feared worse hunger next year after the maize crop she planted in late November failed to germinate.

"I can now afford to eat once a day. I had hoped that this season would be better, but my early crop is already a write-off," said Maphosa.

More than half of Zimbabwe's population of 16mn was in need of food aid this year, the government said in May.

Zimbabwe has failed to feed itself since 2000, when former president Robert Mugabe led land reforms that disrupted production, while climate change has worsened the country's ability to grow enough food. - Reuters

Time names Trump 'Person of the Year' again

AFP/Reuters
New York

Time magazine has named US President-elect Donald Trump its "person of the year", marking the second time he has won the accolade, in acknowledgement of the mogul's stunning political comeback.

Trump, who defeated Vice-President Kamala Harris in the November 5 election, adorns the magazine's title cover sporting his distinctive red tie and striking a commanding pose.

"For marshalling a comeback of historic proportions, for driving a once-in-a-generation political realignment, for reshaping the American presidency and altering America's role in the world, Donald Trump is Time's 2024 - Person of the Year," the magazine said.

This year saw Trump convicted on charges of business fraud and nearly assassinated twice - and will end with him preparing to return to the White House with Republican majorities in both chambers of Congress.

"We are witnessing a resurgence of populism, a widening mistrust in the institutions that defined the last century, and an eroding faith that liberal values will lead to better lives for most people. Trump is both agent and beneficiary of it all," the magazine added.

Trump rang the opening bell at the New York Stock Exchange to applause from traders yesterday, flanked by his wife Melania Trump and Vice-President-elect JD Vance, with his Time magazine cover displayed prominently behind him.

The bell-ringing signifies the start of the trading day at the world's largest stock exchange and is considered an honour.

It has historically been reserved for company executives celebrating an initial public offering or other major corporate milestones, but celebrities and politicians like Ronald Reagan, Nelson Mandela and Arnold Schwarzenegger have also rung it.

In remarks before the markets opened, Trump sounded a note of caution about the



A photo of US President-elect Trump on the cover of Time magazine is displayed outside the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) yesterday. - AFP

promises he made on the campaign trail to bring down stubbornly high US grocery prices.

"It's hard to bring things down once they're up," Trump says. "You know, it's very hard."

The magazine's award, given out annually, is an acknowledgement of the year's most influential figure.

Past winners include Taylor Swift and Volodymyr Zelensky - and Trump himself, in 2016, after his shock defeat of Hillary Clinton.

Mock versions of Time magazine covers featuring Trump were displayed prominently in several of the president-elect's members clubs ahead of his first "person of the year" title in 2016.

Having dominated the news events of

2024, Trump's influence is set to continue when he assumes the presidency in January.

This time around, Trump is promising mass expulsions of undocumented immigrants and major tariffs that threaten to shake up not just the US economy, but those of key trade partners.

He has cast doubt on continued support for Ukraine in its fight against the Russian invasion, and has already become something of a shadow president, feting foreign leaders at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida.

His comeback was unthinkable a few years ago. After his supporters stormed the US Capitol in an attempt to overturn his 2020 election loss, it seemed like Republicans might be ready to wash their hands of the brash outsider who had taken over the party.

Criminal cases were launched over his efforts to overturn the 2020 election, and he was found liable in civil court for sexual abuse.

He remains a polarising figure in US and world politics.

Yet none of that prevented him from rising back up to the top of the Republican ticket, and then going on to win in the general election against Harris.

Harris was among those shortlisted for the award, alongside Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Russian economist Yulia Navalnaya, the widow of late opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

The latest "Person of the Year" issue features a wide-ranging interview with Trump, conducted on November 25 at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida.

In it, Trump sharply criticised Ukraine's use of US-supplied missiles deep into Russian territory.

He also said he will have a "big discussion" about ending childhood vaccination programmes with vaccine sceptic Robert F. Kennedy Jr, his nominee to run the Department of Health and Human Services, and his new administration could scrap some vaccines.

Judge shot dead in Acapulco

A senior judge was assassinated in the Mexican resort city of Acapulco on Wednesday, a day after the country's president convened security officials there to address a wave of violence. Edmundo Roman Pinzon, the former head of the highest court in Mexico's Guerrero state, home to Acapulco, was gunned down on Wednesday afternoon in his car, according to images of the crime scene shared in local media reports.

Guerrero's security ministry and attorney-general's offices announced investigations into the murder.

"We will not allow this crime to go unpunished," Guerrero Governor Evelyn Salgado wrote on social media.

Acapulco was once one of Mexico's most popular tourist draws, famed for its sun-kissed beaches and cliff divers.

However, for years the city has been plagued by cartel violence, driving most international visitors away, while the surrounding state of Guerrero has witnessed a recent surge of mostly gang-related mayhem, including the assassination of politicians and political candidates.

In October, the mayor of the state capital of Chilpancingo was murdered just days after taking office in a killing that sparked outrage due to the especially brutal nature of his assassination.

Just a day before Pinzon's murder, President Claudia Sheinbaum hosted security officials and governors in Acapulco.

Sheinbaum, who took office in October, has promised to replicate nationally the success she had as mayor of Mexico City in bringing down the sprawling capital's murder rate.

However, her first two months in office have been marked by an outbreak of cartel violence in several hotspots, including in the state of Sinaloa, where homicides have surged despite the deployment of hundreds of soldiers.

Spiralling violence, much of it linked to drug trafficking, has seen more than 450,000 people murdered in Mexico since 2006, when the government launched an offensive against organised crime.

Sheinbaum has ruled out launching a new "war on drugs", as the controversial programme was known. - AFP/Reuters

Biden grants clemency to nearly 1,500 people

AFP
Washington

Outgoing US President Joe Biden said yesterday that he had commuted the sentences of nearly 1,500 people and pardoned 39 others, in what the White House called the largest single-day act of clemency in the nation's history.

"America was built on the promise of possibility and second chances," he said in a statement announcing the action. "As president, I have the great privilege of extending mercy to people who have demonstrated remorse and rehabilitation."

With their days in power ticking down, lame-duck presidents often issue a flurry of such acts of clemency, which are only applicable to federal crimes.

The White House said the nearly 1,500 people granted commuted sentences - "the most ever in a single day" - had been serving them at home for at least one year.

"These commutation recipients, who were placed on home confinement during the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, have successfully reintegrated into their families and communities and have shown that they deserve a second chance," Biden said.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), which had launched a campaign urging Biden



Biden: America was built on the promise of possibility and second chances.

to take such action, praised the move in a statement.

"We are thrilled that President Biden has allowed people to remain with their families and communities, where they belong," said Cynthia W Roseberry, director of policy and government affairs at the ACLU's Justice Division.

The mass clemency was announced over a week after the president pardoned his son Hunter, something he had previously promised not to do, prompting outrage from both Republican opponents and many Democratic allies.

Hunter Biden pleaded guilty in a tax evasion trial in September and was facing up to 17 years in prison.

He had separately been convicted of federal gun charges, for which he was facing 25 years in prison.

The president's controversial pardon of his son followed in the footsteps of his predecessors, who also gave reprieves on their way out the door to family and well-connected allies.

Bill Clinton, for example, granted a pardon on his last day in office to his half-brother Roger, who had served time in prison on drug charges, while Donald Trump pardoned his son-in-law's wealthy father, Charles Kushner.

The White House said those getting relief from the president yesterday included a "decorated military veteran and pilot who spends much of his time helping his fellow church members".

A nurse "who has led emergency response for several natural disasters" and an addiction counsellor "who volunteers his time" were also singled out for relief.

"Together, these actions build on the president's record of criminal justice reform to help reunite families, strengthen communities, and reintegrate individuals back into society," the White House said. "The president has issued more sentence commutations at this point in his presidency than any of his recent predecessors at the same point in their first terms."

Macron postpones naming new PM

Reuters/AFP
Paris

French President Emmanuel Macron (*pictured*) has postponed the nomination of a new prime minister until morning today, his office said yesterday.

"The statement naming the prime minister will be published tomorrow morning," the Elysee presidential palace said after Macron returned early from a trip to Poland.

Macron said two days ago he wanted to name a new head of government within 48 hours.

The new team is due to replace the one led by Michel Barnier, who resigned last week after far-right and leftist lawmakers voted to topple his government, plunging France into its second major political crisis in six months.

Macron left France yesterday on a day-long trip to key EU and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) ally Poland but shortened the visit, an aide said, heightening expectations of an announcement later in the day.

Despite the reported 48-hour promise, Macron has been notorious for taking his time over such decisions and it was far from certain the announcement would not drag into the weekend.

Whoever is named will be the sixth prime minister of Macron's mandate after last week's toppling of Barnier, who lasted only three months.

Every premier under Macron has served successively less time in office.

Macron remains confronted with the complex political equation that emerged from July's snap parliamentary poll: how to secure a government against a no-confidence vote in a bitterly divided lower house where no party or alliance has a majority.

Greens leader Marine Tondelier urged Macron to "get out of his comfort zone" as he casts around for a name.

"The French public want a bit of enthusiasm, momentum, fresh wind, something new," she told France 2 television.

At issue in the search for a new prime minister are both policies and personalities.

Mainstream parties invited by Macron on Tuesday, ranging from the conservative Republicans to Socialists, Greens and Communists on the left, disagree deeply.

One totemic issue is whether to maintain Macron's much-criticised 2023 pensions reform, seen by centrists and the right as necessary to balance the budget but blasted by the left as unjust.

Macron's rumoured top pick, veteran centrist Francois Bayrou, raises hackles on the left - wary of continuing the president's policies - and on the right, where he is disliked by influential former president Nicolas Sarkozy.

"It's jammed" as Macron looks for a deal with



Socialists and Greens to avoid a new no-confidence vote, a person close to the president told AFP, adding that a pact could be "a vain hope".

Another senior figure in Macron's camp said informal talks with the two parties on Wednesday had not been conclusive.

Beyond Bayrou, prime ministerial contenders include former Socialist prime minister Bernard Cazeneuve, current Defence Minister Sebastien Lecornu, a Macron loyalist, and former foreign minister Jean-Yves Le Drian.

Another name being discussed in the media is Roland Lescure, a former industry minister.

Amidst the suspense, the parties shut out of Tuesday's talks have attacked those involved as weak.

The Socialists' openness to co-operation has been denounced by Jean-Luc Melancon, figurehead of the hard-left France Unbowed (LFI) - the other key force in the broad New Popular Front (NFP) left alliance.

"No coalition deals! No deal not to vote no confidence! Return to reason and come home!" Melancon urged on Tuesday.

Polls indicate the public is fed up with the crisis. Just over two-thirds of respondents to one Elabe poll published on Wednesday said they want politicians to reach a deal not to overthrow a new government.

However, confidence is limited, with around the same number saying they did not believe the political class could reach agreement.

In a separate IFOP poll, far-right National Rally (RN) figurehead Marine Le Pen was credited with 35% support in the first round of a future presidential election - well ahead of any likely opponent.

She has said she is "not unhappy" that her far-right party was left out of the horse-trading around the government, appearing for now to benefit from the chaos rather than suffer blame for bringing last week's no-confidence vote over the line.

Bulgaria, Romania to fully join Schengen after 13-year wait

AFP/Reuters
Sofia

EU states have cleared Bulgaria and Romania to become full members of the borderless Schengen zone from the start of next year following a more than 13-year wait for the two eastern European nations.

The two countries, both members of the European Union since 2007, were partially integrated into the free movement zone in March, opening up travel by air and sea without border checks.

However, Austria - until this week - held up their full entry over migration concerns, which meant that controls still applied at their land routes.

Vienna announced on Monday that it would not use its veto at yesterday's meeting of EU ministers, paving the way for the two to become full members from January 1, 2025.

"It is a historic moment to finally welcome Bulgaria and Romania," said Interior Minister Sandor Pinter of Hungary, whose country holds the EU's rotating presidency.

Bucharest and Sofia fulfilled all technical criteria set out by Brussels in 2010, but spent more than a decade waiting to join the Schengen zone as various member states blocked their entry.

Romania and Bulgaria "strongly" welcomed their full entry.

"This is a historic decision, marking the end of the process of accession of the two countries to the EU free movement area, a key objective of both Bulgaria and Romania since their accession to the European Union," the two countries said in a statement.

Since 2022, their applications have been held up by Austria, which had for years complained about hosting a disproportionate number of undocumented migrants as a result of poorly protected external Schengen borders.

Austria dropped its objections after the three countries signed a "border protection package" agreement in Budapest.



A banner reading 'Welcome to Schengen' is displayed at the arrivals section of Henri Coanda International Airport in Otopeni near Bucharest. - Reuters

The agreement, signed last month, foresees the joint deployment of border guards to the Bulgarian-Turkish border and temporary border controls on land routes for an initial period of six months.

Romanian President Klaus Iohannis said yesterday's decision was a "recognition of our years-long efforts and progress achieved".

"Romania assures that we will continue to act fully responsible for protecting and strengthening the EU's external borders," he said, adding that the country's Schengen accession would "strengthen EU security and unity".

Romanian Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu said the accession meant "a major benefit for our economy and faster journeys home for the millions of Romanians living and travelling in the EU".

Created in 1985, the Schengen zone comprises 29 members - 25 of the 27 European Union member states as well as Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein.

It is the world's biggest area without internal border controls, where more than 400mn people can travel freely inside the zone.

Croatia, which joined the EU after Romania and Bulgaria, beat the two ex-Communist countries amid the bloc's poorest to the punch in January 2023 by becoming

ing Schengen's 27th member.

Admission to Schengen symbolises a "question of dignity, of belonging to the European Union", according to foreign policy analyst Stefan Popescu.

Since the end of March, Romanians and Bulgarians no longer had to go through checkpoints at airports and seaports.

However, truckers and cross-border workers, tired of the long queues at land border crossings, were furious.

"Currently they wait between 12-20 hours at the various border crossings," Dimitar Dimitrov, president of the Chamber of Bulgarian Transporters, told AFP, welcoming yesterday's long-awaited announcement.

It will also make travel "much easier, both for outgoing and incoming tourists", according to Emil Abazov, management board member of the Association of Bulgarian Tour Operators and Travel Agents (ABTTA).

"We are happy that our business will be placed on an equal footing with other EU countries," he told AFP.

Although the Schengen agreements guarantee free travel, several members including Germany and the Netherlands have recently increased controls to stem illegal immigration.

EU revokes Vanuatu's visa-free travel over its 'golden passport' scheme

The European Union has revoked a visa-free travel agreement with a country over its "golden passport" programme for the first time, ending the deal with the Pacific archipelago of Vanuatu due to concerns over its scheme.

The programme enabled foreigners to acquire Vanuatu citizenship and a passport by making a minimum investment of \$130,000.

This granted them visa-free access to the EU under the visa waiver agreement the country had with the 27-nation bloc.

The EU had already suspended Vanuatu's visa exemption in 2022.

An EU official said the end of the agreement with Vanuatu, announced in an EU statement, marked the first time the EU has withdrawn the visa exemption of a country for operating "golden passport" schemes.

The European Commission has repeatedly expressed concern that such programmes create security vulnerabilities and facilitate money laundering.

Vanuatu's Brussels embassy was not immediately available for comment.

In a report released this month, the EU said it was monitoring other visa-free countries, including eastern European as well as Eastern Caribbean states, offering a similar scheme. - Reuters



Ex-PM Khan, wife indicted in another graft case

A Pakistani court has indicted imprisoned former prime minister Imran Khan and his wife on fresh charges of illegally selling state gifts, local broadcaster Geo reported.

The indictment was the latest in dozens of cases against the 72-year-old former cricket star, who has been in jail since late last year.

Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi have already been granted bail in the case, which is one of a series of state treasury charges known as "Toshakhana".

These charges revolve around allegations that Khan and his wife illegally procured and then sold gifts worth more than 140mn rupees (\$501,000) in state possession, which he received during his 2018-22 premiership.

They have denied committing an offence.

Khan and Bibi were both handed a 14-year sentence on those charges days before a national election earlier this year, following a three-year sentence handed to him in late 2023 in another version of the same case.

However, their sentences have been suspended in appeals at the high court.

The gifts included diamond jewellery and seven watches, six of them Rolexes - the most expensive being valued at 85mn rupees (\$305,000).

Earlier this month, Khan was also indicted on charges of inciting attacks against the military, a case stemming from deadly anti-government rallies led by his party last year.

Bibi also led a protest march by thousands of supporters in the capital Islamabad on November 25, escalating a face-off with the government and its military backers.

Khan has been fighting court cases since he was ousted from power in 2022.

He and his party say the cases were made up to keep him out of politics at the behest of the military after he had fallen out with the army's generals. - Reuters

Miss Netherlands pageant is scrapped after 35 years

The Miss Netherlands beauty pageant is being scrapped after 35 years, organisers said yesterday, transforming into a new platform dealing with mental health and sharing positive stories.

"Times have changed and we are changing with the times," the organisers of the pageant said in a statement.

Instead of running the competition, director Monica van Ee has set up a platform entitled "no longer of this time".

This platform aims to share stories of successful women but also those struggling with, among other things, social media and unrealistic beauty standards.

"No more crowns, but stories that inspire. No dresses, but dreams that come to life," organisers said.

Van Ee said in a blog post on the new platform that her involvement in the pageant aimed to give young woman a springboard and show others what was possible.

"Perhaps a sash and a crown are no longer of this time. But women who support each other and help each other, that is timeless for us," she said.

Van Ee said the new platform should be "a place to show your authentic self and a world where we celebrate real life. Without the pressure to conform to a perfect image". - AFP

Nato chief calls for defence surge to avoid 'big war' with Russia

Reuters/AFP
Brussels

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) head Mark Rutte has warned the US-led transatlantic alliance that it was not ready for the threats it would face from Russia in the coming years and called for a shift to a wartime mindset - with much higher defence spending.

Rutte said future spending would have to be much higher than the current alliance target of 2% of national wealth as measured by gross domestic product (GDP).

"Russia is preparing for long-term confrontation, with Ukraine and with us," Rutte said in a speech in Brussels.

"We are not ready for what is com-

ing our way in four to five years," the Nato secretary-general said, adding: "It is time to shift to a wartime mindset, and turbocharge our defence production and defence spending."

"Danger is moving towards us at full speed," Rutte warned.

The alliance estimates 23 of its 32 members will meet the 2% target this year.

"During the Cold War, Europeans spent far more than 3% of their GDP on defence," Rutte said. "We are going to need a lot more than 2%."

Nato members are grappling with renewed pressure from US President-elect Donald Trump, who has demanded that America's allies to spend 3% of GDP on defence.

Rutte, a former Dutch prime minister,

said that the alliance must step up on defence production, calling on governments to "stop creating barriers between each other and between industries, banks and pension funds".

He sent a message to the defence industry: "There is money on the table, and it will only increase. So dare to innovate and take risks."

The Nato chief also warned of a "co-ordinated campaign to destabilise our societies" including cyberattacks and assassination attempts.

Rutte also cautioned about China's ambitions, saying that Beijing is substantially building up its forces "with no transparency and no limitations".

Russia's war in Ukraine has jolted the Western military alliance to strengthen its

eastern flank and ramp up spending.

However, despite increases in defence budgets, Nato countries still do not match Moscow's arms production.

Rutte insisted that there was no "imminent military threat"; but said Nato needed to move "faster and fiercer" to bulk up defences and stave off the risk of future conflict.

The plea for action comes as Russia is making gains on the front line in Ukraine against Kyiv's fatigued forces.

"Every day, this war causes more devastation and death. Every week, there are over 10,000 killed or wounded on all sides in Ukraine," Rutte said. "Over 1mn casualties since February 2022."

"We are not at war. But we are certainly not at peace, either," he added.

Serbian shooter who killed nine sentenced to 20 years in prison

Reuters/AFP
Belgrade

A man who killed nine people and wounded 12 in one of the two mass shootings in Serbia last year that shocked the country and triggered the biggest protests in years was found guilty and sentenced yesterday to 20 years in prison.

Uros Blazic, who was 20 when he committed the crime, gunned down his victims, the youngest of whom was aged 14, in the villages of Dubona and Malo Orasje, 50km from Belgrade on May 4 last year.

Twelve others were wounded in the shooting, which came just a day after a 13-year-old student killed nine of his classmates and a security guard at his school in the centre of the capital.

The back-to-back shooting shocked Serbians and saw President Aleksandar Vucic vow to launch a large-scale disarmament plan to remove hundreds of thousands of guns from the country.

Both rampages shocked Serbia and triggered protests that eventually led to a snap election at the end of the year.

A court in the city of Smederevo found Blazic guilty and sentenced

him to 20 years in prison for murder and illegal weapons possession among other things, RTS state TV reported.

The verdict and the sentence are not final and Blazic has the right to appeal.

The maximum sentence in Serbia is 40 years but because Blazic was 20 when he committed the crime, the maximum punishment he could receive was 20 years, according to Serbian law.

Had he been older he would have faced a life term.

Sasa Panic, father of two of the people killed by Blazic - Kristina, 18, and Milan, 22 - told RTS that

he was unhappy with the outcome.

"There is no appropriate punishment (for what he did). Even death penalty would be too mild," Panic told RTS.

The lawyer for the victims' families, Stefan Stefanovic, stated that he was satisfied that Blazic received the maximum sentence but not with its length.

"The families did not receive full justice. What else needs to happen for the executive and legislative authorities to change the law?" Stefanovic said.

The attacker's father, Radisa Blazic, was also jailed 20 years

after being found guilty of illegal possession of firearms.

The prosecutor accused him of "creating the conditions for the crime" by acquiring the weapon used in the massacre and other firearms found in his home.

Blazic's trial - at a high-security court typically reserved for organised crime and war crimes cases - was completed in four months, a record for Serbia.

Blazic, in his closing statement, told the court: "These are heinous acts that I committed. I deserve the harshest punishment. I can only say that I am guilty and ready to face the consequences."



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The crisis that Germany needs

Germany is the poster child for everything that is wrong with the European economy. GDP is on track to fall for a second straight year. Energy-intensive industries like chemicals and metalwork are in the tank. National champions such as Volkswagen and ThyssenKrupp have announced unprecedented job cuts and factory closures.

The best way to understand these problems is as a negative consequence of Germany's own prior economic success and of the institutional underpinnings of those earlier achievements. The German economy's current malaise is further evidence of this.

In the aftermath of World War II – a period of upheaval and crisis but also of renovation and opportunity – what was then West Germany developed a set of economic and political institutions ideally suited to the conditions of the time. To capitalise on its existing prowess in quality manufacturing, policymakers put in place successful vocational training and apprenticeship programmes that expanded the supply of skilled mechanics and technicians.

To exploit rapidly growing world trade and penetrate global export markets, German industry doubled down on the production of motor vehicles and capital goods, fields where it had developed a pronounced comparative advantage.

At the same time, West Germany built a bank-based financial system to channel funds to dominant firms in these sectors. To ensure harmony in its large companies and limit workplace disruptions, it developed a system of management codetermination that gave workers' representatives input into C-suite decisions.

Finally, to limit disruptive politics, and specifically to check the kind of political extremism and parliamentary fragmentation that had haunted Germany in the past, a proportional electoral system was put in place so that all mainstream parties had a voice, subject to a 5% minimum threshold for parliamentary representation (to limit the influence of fringe parties).

There is a serious mismatch between Germany's current economic situation and its institutional inheritance

The happy result of this alignment of institutions and opportunities was the Wirtschaftswunder, the growth miracle of the third quarter of the twentieth century, when West Germany outperformed its major advanced-economy rivals (with the sole exception of Japan).

Unfortunately, these same institutions and arrangements proved exceedingly difficult to modify when circumstances changed. Focusing on quality manufacturing became problematic with the rise of new competitors, including China, yet German firms remained heavily invested in the strategy.

Attempts to alter workplace organisation, much less close down uneconomical plants, were stymied by codetermination. Funding startups in new sectors was not the natural inclination of dusty banks accustomed to dealing with long-established customers engaged in familiar lines of business. And a proportional electoral system with a 5% threshold yielded unsatisfactory results and unstable coalitions when voters moved to the extremes, positioning the Alternative for Germany on the right and the Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance on the left to earn parliamentary representation, while leaving the more moderate Free Democrats at risk of being shut out.

The solutions, it would seem, are obvious: Invest more in higher education and less in old-fashioned apprenticeships and vocational training so that Germany can become a leader in automation and artificial intelligence. Develop a venture capital industry to take risks that banks are unwilling to shoulder. Use macroeconomic policies to stimulate spending instead of relying on tariff-ridden export markets. Rethink codetermination and a mixed-member proportional electoral system that has outlived its usefulness.

Not least, release the "debt brake," another inheritance from the past, which limits public spending. Doing so will permit the government to invest more in research and development and in infrastructure, two critical determinants of economic success in the twenty-first century.

Imagining such changes may be easy, but implementing them is not. Change is always hard, of course. But it is especially hard when one seeks to modify a set of institutions and arrangements whose successful operation, in each case, depends on the operation of the others. Attempting to do so is akin to replacing a Volkswagen's transmission while the engine is running.

To take one example, German banks, which rely on their existing customer relationships, are most comfortable when lending to long-established firms doing business in long-established ways. In turn, those firms perform best when they have long-standing relationships with banks on which they can rely for finance.

Replace those established firms with startups, and the banks, lacking the expertise of venture funds, will be at sea. If they lend nonetheless, they are at risk of going under. Replace banks with venture capital funds, which have little interest in stodgy metal-bending firms, and those firms will lose access to the external finance on which they depend. Such is the nature of Germany's institutional gridlock.

The bad news, then, is that there is a serious mismatch between Germany's current economic situation and its institutional inheritance, and that there are major obstacles to altering the latter to realign it with the former. The good news is that a crisis that prompts a wholesale rethink of that institutional inheritance could conceivably break the logjam. Maybe this is just the crisis that Germany needs. – Project Syndicate

Raising morale in Zaporizhzhia



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky (second right) visiting one of the divisions of the 14th Rocket Artillery Brigade named after Petro Kalnyshchyn in the Zaporizhzhia region yesterday. (AFP)

Climate change forged a new reality in 2024: 'This is life now'

By **Clair Ni Chonghaile and Diana Baptista**
London/Mexico City

Intolerable heat. Unsurvivable storms. Inescapable floods. In 2024, billions of people across the world faced climatic conditions that broke record after record: logging ever more highs for heat, floods, storms, fire and drought.

As the year drew to a close, the conclusion was both blatant and bleak: 2024 was the hottest year since records began, according to European climate scientists.

But it may not hold this dubious honour for long. "This is life now and it's not going to get easier. It's only going to get harder. That's what climate change means," said Andrew Pershing, chief programs officer at Climate Central, a US-based non-profit climate advocacy group.

"Because we continue to pollute the atmosphere, we're going to get, year after year, warmer and warmer oceans, warmer and warmer lands, bigger and badder storms." Others use still bolder language.

"We are on the brink of an irreversible climate disaster," said the 2024 State of the Climate report.

Here's how that looked this year, what 2025 holds, and why there are still reasons to be hopeful.

This was the first year when the planet was more than 1.5 degrees Celsius hotter than it was in the 1850-1900 pre-industrial period, a time when humans did not burn fossil fuels on a mass scale, according to the European Union's Copernicus Climate Change Service.

The sheer number of days of extreme heat endured by billions of people – from the desert town of Phoenix, Arizona to the desert town of Phalodi in India's Rajasthan – was startling.

Sunday, July 21, was the hottest day ever.

Until Monday, July 22.

The day after dipped a smidgen cooler. These consecutive records came during Earth's hottest season on record – June to August – according to Climate Central.

Those three months exposed billions of people to extreme heat, heavy rain, deadly floods, storms and wildfires.

Friederike Otto of World Weather Attribution, a global team that examines the role of climate change in extreme weather, said heatwaves were a "game changer".

The world has not caught up: many deaths go unrecorded while some African countries lack an official definition for a heatwave, meaning heat action plans don't kick in, she said.

"There is a huge amount of awareness that needs to be had to even adapt to today's heat extremes but, of course, we will see worse," Otto told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Between June 16-24, more than 60% of the world's population suffered from climate change-driven extreme heat.

This included 619mn in India, where more than 40,000 people suffered heatstroke and 100+ died over the summer.

Birds fell from the sky as temperatures neared 50C (122F). Millions were affected: from China to Nigeria, Bangladesh to Brazil, Ethiopia to Egypt, Americans and Europeans, too.

Climate Central said one in four people had no break from exceptional heat from June to August, the highs made at least three times more likely by climate change.

During those months, 180 cities in the Northern Hemisphere had at least one dangerous extreme heatwave – a phenomenon made 21 times more likely by human action, Climate Central said.

"The number of days where you are starting to push the physiological limits of human survival (are rising)," said Pershing, citing Pakistan and the Persian Gulf as two areas that neared breaking point this year.

Hundreds died during the Hajj

pilgrimage to Makkah as Saudi Arabia topped 50C (122F). In the US Midwest and Northeast, Americans broiled under a heat dome when high pressure trapped hot air overhead.

Nasa's Earth Observatory said extreme heat was often exacerbated by hot nights, a dearth of green space or air con, or a surfeit of concrete, which absorbs heat.

Heat and drought fuelled wildfires this year, with blazes in the Mediterranean, United States and Latin America. Fires burned from the Siberian Arctic to Brazil's Pantanal wetlands.

"(The Pantanal) is a wet area that is not supposed to burn for months on end so that is probably something I would look out for next year where we see wildfires in ecosystems that are not traditionally burning ecosystems," said Otto.

The "new normal" hits the vulnerable hardest.

"The people who are succumbing to heat-related deaths are not the millionaires and billionaires," said Pershing.

"If you are a reasonably well-to-do person you can afford air conditioning, you have a vehicle that can get you where you need to go, you have ways to keep yourself cool. If you don't have access to these things or you lose them because of a power outage or another storm, that creates these additional vulnerabilities."

In Africa, nearly 93% of the workforce faces extreme heat.

On the Arabian Peninsula, it is more than 83% of workers.

European and Central Asian workers could be next in line.

For Otto, the answer to this fast-spreading risk lies in empathy, putting the poor and vulnerable – "the vast majority of the global population" – at the centre of climate action.

"In Bangladesh, when you put the survival of the poorest in the centre of the action, you actually have a society that is really well-equipped to deal with tropical cyclones," she said.

"People know what to do and there are drills and practices." Silver linings, though, are rare.

"Empathy is in short supply," said Otto.

Ocean temperatures also hit alarming levels in 2024, wreaking havoc on land and sea.

Hurricane Milton came barely two weeks after Hurricane Helene, with abnormally warm waters in the Gulf of Mexico turbo-charging the twin storms that lashed the US Southeast.

"In that some places in the Gulf of Mexico ... temperatures were 400 times more likely because of climate change," Pershing said.

Climate Central found a similar link between October's floods in Spain and unusually warm waters in the Tropical Atlantic.

Human-driven climate change made these elevated sea surface temperatures up to 300 times more likely, Climate Central said.

Otto said this year's extremes, notably Europe's floods, illustrated a "failure of imagination" and a refusal to adapt.

"We don't just need the weather forecast or warnings. We need drills. We have to practice survival wherever heavy floods can happen and they can happen everywhere," she said.

Infrastructure also failed. "The way that we have canalised rivers and sealed all the surfaces ... will mean disastrous damages every time there is a flood ... There is always this short-termism that it's expensive to fix it now but of course it will save lots of money and livelihoods later," she said.

For Pershing, adaptation is "an exercise in imagination because we haven't seen these kinds of events before ... That is the challenge of climate change: we're going to be confronted year after year with conditions we've never experienced."

Nobody expects a quick end to extreme weather but Otto is hopeful that humans may change their polluting ways.

"That is a reason for optimism ... clinging to fossil fuels (is) increasing inequality and destroying livelihoods but it increasingly makes less sense ... for national economies."

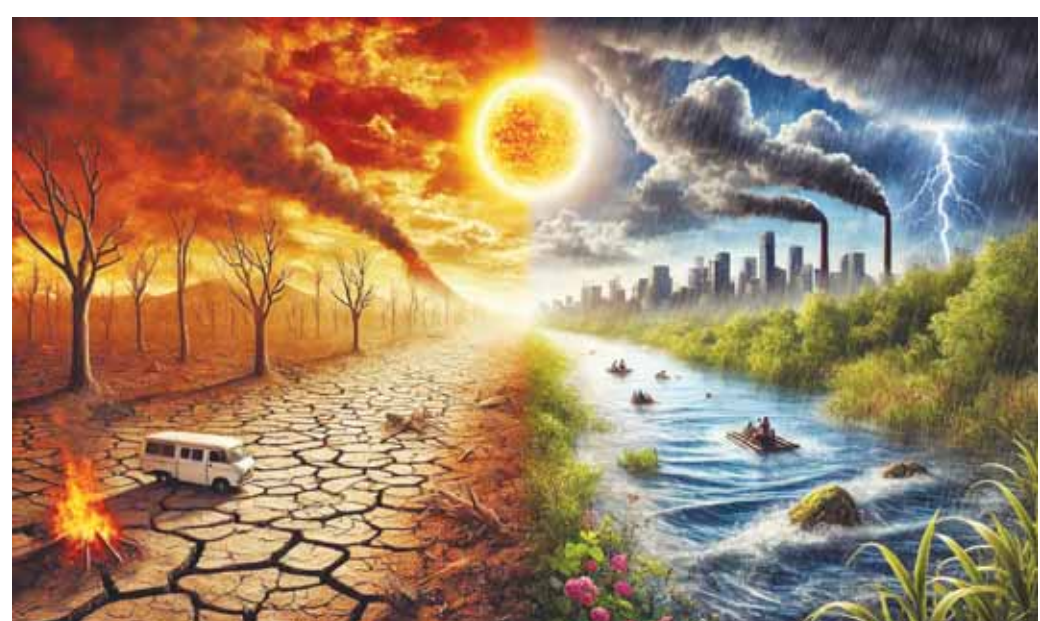
In another upbeat note, Otto said better preparations in Europe meant fewer deaths in this year's floods than previously.

But ocean temperatures are a key concern for 2025. "The amount of heat stored in the ocean ... really has my attention because we are not quite sure if there is something different going on in the climate system," said Pershing.

Another risk – complacency. "People do have a way of getting used to conditions and you can kinda get numb to it," Pershing said.

And complacency can breed paralysis.

"This was the hottest year, last year was the hottest year – probably next year will be the hottest year again," said Otto. – Thomson Reuters Foundation



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Our need for guidance

All praise be to Allah Who guides whomsoever He Wills to the Straight Path. Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon the Messenger of Allah, who calls for the pleasure of His Lord and guides to the best way.

People's need for guidance is greater than their need for food and water because food and water are needed so that man would lead this short evanescent life; however, guidance is the basis of the everlasting and continuous life.

Shaykh-ul-Islam Ahmad ibn Taymiyah, may Allah have mercy upon him, said: "A servant is always in need that Allah would guide him to the Straight Path. Accordingly, he is forced to fulfil the exact meaning of this invocation, because there is neither salvation from torment nor reaching happiness without this guidance. So, whoever misses guidance shall be either from those upon whom Allah has evoked His Anger or those who are astray, and this guidance can only happen through the Guidance of Allah."

Ibn Taymiyah, may Allah have mercy upon him, also said: "Allah The Exalted said to His Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam* (may Allah exalt his mention), after Al-Hudaybiyah Peace Treaty and Ar-Ridwan Pledge of Allegiance: {Indeed, We have given you, [O Muhammad], a clear conquest. That Allah may forgive for you what preceded of your sin and what will follow and complete His favour upon you and guide you to a straight path} [Qur'an 48:1-2]

So, if that was the Prophet's state at the end of his life or close to it, how would be the state of others?

Ibn Taymiyah, may Allah have mercy upon him, said: "The servant's need for seeking guidance is necessary to achieve happiness, salvation [from punishment], and success unlike his need for sustenance and victory, as Allah provides him with sustenance, and when his sustenance ends, he would die. Death is inevitable so if the servant was of the people of guidance, he would be happy before and after death, and death will be a means to eternal happiness. Victory is likewise if it is predestined for him to be killed after a defeat, he dies as a martyr, and then killing would be a perfect grace.

"Hence, it becomes evident that the need for guidance is greater than the need for victory and sustenance; rather, there is no comparison between them, because if he is guided, he shall be of the pious people. Allah Says (what means): {And whoever fears Allah - He will make for him a way out. And will provide for him from where he does not expect.} [Qur'an 65:2-3] He would be of those who support Allah and His Messenger, and whoever supports Allah, Allah would support him and he would be counted from the soldiers of Allah, who are always victorious; therefore, this *Du'aa'* (invocation) is needed. The *Du'aa'* also includes sustenance and victory, because if a person is guided, and then guides others whether by words, actions or vision, then complete guidance would be the greatest cause to bring about sustenance and victory.

"So, it becomes clear that this *Du'aa'* is comprehensive for every needed matter. This also shows that *Surat Al-Faatihah* is incomparable and its virtue over other speech is greater than the virtue of *Rukoo'* (bowing down) and *Sujood* (prostration) over other acts of submission."

Therefore, it would be better for a Muslim to persist in invoking Allah for guidance, because asking for guidance from Allah The Exalted, and seeking help from Him to reach guidance makes a person follow the path of pleasing Allah and Paradise. If a person is guided, he still needs day and night to invoke his Lord for guidance and for making him firm on it and increasing in it, and continuing to sticking to it while he is in dire need in every moment for this invocation to be answered.

Hence, a Muslim should frequently ask Allah for guidance while he supplicates Him in all his prayers, obligatory or supererogatory, several times a day.

Ibn al-Qayyim, may Allah have mercy upon him, said: "Since invoking Allah for guidance to the Straight Path was the most sublime requests, to obtain the most honorable graces, Allah The Exalted taught His Slaves how to invoke Him and commanded them to begin their invocations to Him by thanking Him, praising Him, and Glorifying Him, then mentioning their worship to Him and singling Him out with monotheism, as these are two means to meet their needs:

1- Invoking Allah the Exalted with His Names and Attributes.

2- Invoking Allah the Exalted with worshipping and seeking help from Him.

Those two means can hardly make invocations unaccepted.

The first half of *Surat Al-Faatihah* included those two types of invocation, then invocation came at the second half with asking Allah The Exalted for guidance and following the Path of those whom Allah granted straightness and happiness in this worldly life and the hereafter."

Allah The Exalted commands us to ask Him for guidance as was reported in the *Qudsi Hadith*: "O My Slaves all of you are astray except those whom I have guided, so ask Me for guidance and I shall guide you."

One of the great bounties which Allah The Exalted granted to His Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, is what Allah Says in the Qur'an (which means): {And He found you unaware and guided [you]} [Qur'an 93:7]

The meaning is that the Prophet *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, was not aware of this revelation before Allah The Exalted revealed it to him, as Allah The Exalted Says (what means): [And thus We have revealed to you an inspiration of Our command. You did not know what is the Book or [what is] faith.] [Qur'an 42:52]

The Messenger Asks Allah for Guidance:

The Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, used to invoke Allah frequently for guidance: "*Allahumma inni as-alukal-huda, wat-tuqa, wal-'afa, wal-ghina* (O Allah! I beseech You for guidance, piety, chastity, and contentment)."

Imam Muslim reported in his Saheeh from the *Hadith* of 'Aa'ishah (the Mother of the believers) (may Allah be pleased with her) that she said: "The Prophet of Allah, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, used to start his prayer when he got up at night with: *Allahuma rabba jabra'ila wa mika'ila wa israfila fatiras-samawati wal-ardh, 'alim al-ghaibi wash-shahahad, anta tahkumu baina 'ibadika fima kanu feehi yakhtalifun, ihdini limakhtulifa fihiminal-haqqi bi-idhnika imaka tahdiman tashaa-u ila siratin mustaqeem.* (O



Allah, Lord of Jibra'il, Mika'il, and Israfil, Originator of the heavens and the earth, Knower of the unseen and the seen, You judge between Your slaves concerning that wherein they differ. Guide me concerning that wherein they differ of the truth by Your leave, for You guide whomsoever You will to a straight path.)" That was the introduction of night prayer in the middle of the night while his tongue was saying: "Guide me".

An-Nasaa'i and others reported with an authentic chain of narration from the Hadeeth of Jabir, may Allah be pleased with him, who said: When the Messenger of Allah, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, started his prayer, he would say the Takbeer and then say: "*Imna Salati wa nosoki wa mahyaya wa mamati Lillahi Rabbil-'Alameen La Shareeka Lah, Wabidhalika Omerto Wa Ana Awwalul-Muslimeen. Allahumma Ihdini Li ahsanil-'A mali wa ahsanil-Akhlaaqi La Yahdi Li ahsaneha illa Ant*" [Verily my prayer, my sacrifice, my living, and my dying are for Allah, the Lord of the worlds; There is no partner with Him and this is what I have been commanded (to profess and believe) and I am of the believers. O Allah, guide me to the righteous deeds and manners, for none would guide to them but You.]"

At-Tirmidhi reported on the authority of Ibn 'Aabbas, may Allah be pleased with him, that he, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, used to say between the two prostrations: "O Allah! Forgive me, bestow mercy on me, enrich me, guide me, and grant me sustenance."

'Abdullah ibn 'Umar, may Allah be pleased with him, narrated: "Whenever I prayed with the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, I heard him saying at the end of *Salah*: "*Allahumma ighfir li Khata-i wa 'amadi Allahumma ihdini Lisalihil-'Amaali wal-Akhlaaqi Imnahu la Yahdi Lisalihih wa la yasrifu Sayi'ha Illa Ant* (O Allah, forgive my sins whether committed inadvertently and deliberately, O Allah, guide me to the righteous deeds and manners, for verily none but You guides to the best and none but You turn away its worst)."

He used to commend his companions, may Allah be pleased with them, and advise them to invoke Allah for guidance. 'Ali, may Allah be pleased with him, said: The Messenger of Allah, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, said to me: "Say: O Allah, guide me, direct me to the right thing; and remember with guidance, guiding you

to the Straight Path and with correctness, the correctness of shooting."

Allah Is the True Guide:

Al-Khattaabi said: The Guide: is the One who grants guidance to whomever He wills of His Slaves and honors them with the light of Tawheed (monotheism) as Allah The Exalted says (what means): [And guides whom He wills to a straight path] [Qur'an 10:25]

He was the One who guided all creatures to their interests and inspired them as to how to ask for sustenance and how to guard themselves against harm and destruction as Allah The Exalted Says (what means): [He who gave each thing its form and then guided [it]] [Qur'an 20:50]

Allah The Exalted Says (what means): [And indeed is Allah the Guide of those who have believed to a straight path.] [Qur'an 22: 54]

Ibn Jareer, may Allah have mercy upon him, said: "Verily, Allah is the Guide of those who believe in Allah and His Messenger to the intended truth and clear truth."

Allah The Exalted Says (what means): [But sufficient is your Lord as a Guide.] [Qur'an 25:31]

Ibn Jareer, may Allah have mercy upon him, said: "Allah The Exalted says to His Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*: O Muhammad, Your Lord is sufficient for you as a Guide to guide you to the truth, and enlighten you with the righteousness."

As-Sa'di, may Allah have mercy upon him said: "The Guide: i.e., the One who guides His Slaves to all benefits and averts them from all harms, teach them what they do not know, guide them to the truth and correctness, inspire them with piety, make their hearts turning to Him and obedient to His Commands."

Types of Guidance:

Al-Qurtubi, may Allah have mercy upon him said: "Guidance is of two types:

1- Guidance of showing the way: This is the type of guidance which the Messengers and their followers are capable of. Allah The Exalted Says (what means): {And for every people is a guide.} [Qur'an 13:7] He also Says (what means): {And indeed, [O Muhammad] you guide to a straight path.} [Qur'an 42:52]

So, He (Allah) affirmed guidance to them which means guiding, calling, and warning.

2- Guidance of support and success: which comes directly and exclusively from Allah, as He Says to His Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, what means: [Indeed, [O Muhammad] you do not guide whom you like] [Qur'an 28: 56] Guidance according to this type means creating faith in the heart.

Al-Fayrooz Aabaadi said: "Guidance of Allah to man is of four types:

First: Guidance which He granted to every *Mukallaf* (person capable of religious assignments and who is accountable for his deeds) in terms of reasoning, smartness, and necessary knowledge, and granted it to everything according to its capacity. Allah The Exalted Says (what means): {Our Lord is He who gave each thing its form and then guided [it]} [Qur'an 20: 50]

Second: Guidance which was granted to people due to their invocations for Him as was reported on the tongues of Prophets and as reported in the Qur'an and the like

which is intended with His Saying: {And We made them leaders guiding by Our command.} [Qur'an 21: 73]

Third type: Success that is granted to those who are guided which is intended by the Saying of Allah (which means): {And those who are guided - He increases them in guidance.} [Qur'an 47: 17] and His Saying (which means): {And whoever believes in Allah - He will guide his heart.} [Qur'an 64: 11]

Fourth type: Guidance in the Hereafter to Paradise, which is intended by the Saying of Allah (which means): {Praise to Allah, who has guided us to this.} [Qur'an 7:43]

These four types of guidance are correlated, so if a person is not guided by the first, he shall not have the second, but he is not legally competent. And whoever does not get the second type of guidance shall neither get the third nor the fourth type).

A Guidance Causes another Guidance:

Allah The Exalted Says (what means): {And those who are guided - He increases them in guidance and gives them their righteousness.} [Qur'an 47:17]

Ibn Jareer, may Allah have mercy upon him, said: "Allah The Exalted says: As for those whom Allah guided to follow the truth and expanded their hearts to believe in Him and His Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, from among those who have listened to you, O Muhammad the Qur'an you recited to them and what they heard from you (has truly increased their guidance) He said: Allah increased their faith along with their faith that they have already had, and a clarification of the truth which you brought to them from Allah in addition to the clarification that they have already had."

Ibn Katheer, may Allah have mercy upon him said about the interpretation of this verse: "That is to say, those who wanted guidance, Allah granted it to them by guiding them to it, made them firm on it, and increased it for them (and granted them piety); i.e., guided them to righteousness."

Ibn al-Qayyim, may Allah have mercy upon him, said: "Guidance brings about guidance and misguidance brings about misguidance; righteous deeds generate righteous deeds, and whenever you do them, your guidance increases. Actions of misguidance are on the contrary, because Allah the Exalted loves righteous actions and rewards for them with guidance and success and hates the actions of misguidance and recompenses for them with error and misery."

He also said: "Verily, if a servant believes in the Qur'an, follows its guidance in total, accepts its commands and believes in its narrations, that will be a cause for another type of guidance in details, as guidance is endless even if a person reaches the top [And Allah increases those who were guided, in guidance.} [Qur'an 58:76]

O Allah! Guide us and make guidance easy for us. Praise be to Allah the Lord of all the Worlds.

Article source: <http://www.islamweb.net/emainpage/>



Contentment is a sign of wealth

If people become content with the little they have, then there will be no poor or deprived persons among them. If a person is content with what Allah, The Almighty, has given him, he will be powerful and in no need of others, even if he does not possess a lot in this life.

Ash-Shaafi'i, may Allah have mercy upon him, said: "I knew that contentment is the core of richness, and I adhered to it, so I never stood at anybody's door, or begged anyone. Consequently, I became rich without a *dirham*, passing by people as if I were a king."

The Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam* (may Allah exalt his mention), advised his *Ummah* (nation) to have contentment when he said: "If you are content with what Allah has given you, you will be the richest person."

He, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, would supplicate Allah the Almighty, saying: "*Allaahuma qarni 'ni bima razaqtani wa baarik li feehi wakhluf 'ala kulli ghaa'ibatin li bikhayr* [O Allah, make me content with what You have provided me, bless it for me and grant me good thing in compensation for whatever I miss]"

A person who is content with what Allah, The Almighty, provides for him, will enjoy tranquility, satisfaction and peace of mind as he does not long for what others have or desire what he does not possess. Accordingly, Allah, The Almighty, as well as people, will love him, and the following *Hadith* of the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, would apply to him: "Do not incline to the worldly life and Allah will love you. Have no desire for what people possess, and people will love you."

Moreover, a person cannot reach the degree of the thankful unless he becomes content with the provision that he receives. This meaning is indicated by the saying of the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, to Abu Hurairah, may Allah be pleased with him: "O Abu Hurairah! Be pious, and you will be the most worshipping person. Be content, and you will be the most thankful person. Love for people what you love for yourself, and you will be a [true] believer."

A content person, therefore, has a virtuous self as he does not hurt his pride for the sake of a worldly

gain that will soon vanish. Such people are the ones whom Allah, The Almighty, praised in His Saying (which means): {[Charity is] for the poor who have been restricted for the cause of Allah, unable to move about in the land. An ignorant [person] would think them self-sufficient because of their restraint, but you will know them by their [characteristic] sign. They do not ask people persistently [or at all]. And whatever you spend of good - indeed, Allah is Knowing of it.} [Qur'an 2:273]

Also, the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, gave us glad tidings as he said: "Successful is the person who adopted Islam, has been provided with what is just sufficient for his needs, and been made content by Allah with what He has given him."

'Umar ibn al-Khattaab, may Allah be pleased with him, said: "Greed is [in essence] poverty and despair [of what others have] is richness. Anyone who despairs of [i.e. does not long for] what is possessed by others, becomes in no need of it."

An amazing story in this regard is mentioned in the book of *Al-Ihya'*:

Al-Khaleel ibn Ahmad al-Faraaheedi, may Allah have mercy upon him, refused to be the private tutor of the son of the ruler of Al-Ahwaaz. He brought out dry bread to show the messenger of the ruler, and said, "As long as I find this, I am in no need of Sulaymaan [the ruler]. Then, he said some poetic verses, which mean,

"Inform Sulaymaan that I enjoy ease and richness, although I have no wealth.

I keep my pride as I see no one die of hunger, or remain in the same state all his life.

We realise that poverty lies in souls not in properties, as does richness."

Indeed, the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, was truthful when he said: "Richness is not the abundance of wealth; rather, it is self-contentment."

O Allah, make us content with what You have given us and make us the most contented people of what You have decreed to us of provisions!

Article source: <http://www.islamweb.net/emainpage/>

The most hope-inspiring verses in the Qur'an

Scholars have spoken a lot about the most hope-inspiring verses in the Qur'an which opens the door of hope wide before sinners like us, and their hearts will soften with the remembrance of Allah The Almighty.

First verse

'Ali, may Allah be pleased with him, said: "The most hope-inspiring verse in the Qur'an is the verse in which Allah The Almighty Says (what means): {And whatever strikes you of disaster - it is for what your hands have earned; but He pardons much.} [Qur'an 42:30] Then, he commented, 'If He expiates my sins by afflictions and pardons much, so what should remain after His expiation and pardon?'"

Second verse

Allah The Almighty Says (what means): {And let not those among you who are blessed with graces and wealth swear not to give [aid] to their relatives and the needy and those who left their homes for Allah's Cause. Let them pardon and overlook. Would you not like (it) that Allah should forgive you? And Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.} [Qur'an 24:22]

This verse calls for the utmost kindness and benevolence to kindred. It commands Muslims to forgive the faults of their brothers. This is an aspect of the forbearance, generosity and kindness of Allah The Almighty to His slaves, despite their wronging themselves.

This verse was revealed in relation to Abu Bakr As-Siddeeq, may Allah be pleased with him, when he took oath not to financially support Mistah ibn Uthaathah, may Allah be pleased with him, a relative of Abu Bakr, after Mistah had been involved in the incident of slandering 'Aa'ishah, may Allah be pleased with her, the daughter of Abu Bakr.

When Allah The Almighty revealed the innocence of 'Aa'ishah, the Mother of the Believers - may Allah be pleased with her, and the situation became stable and those who were involved in the slander had received the due corporal punishment,

Allah The Almighty started softening the heart of Abu Bakr, may Allah be pleased with him, towards his relative Mistah ibn Uthaathah who was his maternal cousin.

Mistah, may Allah be pleased with him, was poor and had no means of livelihood except the financial support of Abu Bakr. He was one of the *Muhaajiroon* (Emigrants). He made a mistake and received the due punishment for it. Abu Bakr, may Allah be pleased with him, was known for his charitable deeds and generosity towards relatives and non-relatives. So, when this verse was revealed until the part of {Would you not like that Allah should forgive you? And Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.} which indicates that the reward will match the deed - in other words, as you forgive people who wrong you, Allah will forgive you - Abu Bakr said, "Yes! By Allah, we like You (O Allah) to forgive us." Then, he resumed his support to Mistah and said, "By Allah, I will never stop this support," the opposite of his previous statement in which he declared that he would never help Mistah again.

This is why Abu Bakr As-Siddeeq, may Allah be pleased with him, was (known as) the most truthful. 'Abdullah ibn al-Mubaarak, may Allah have mercy upon him, said: "This is the most hope-inspiring verse in the Qur'an." Some scholars said that this is the most hope-inspiring verse clarifying the kindness of Allah The Almighty towards the slandering sinners.

Finally, we have to do two things: First, we should thank Allah The Almighty for His vast mercy and forbearance.

Second, we should remember that just as merciful Allah The Almighty is, He is also severe in punishment. Allah The Almighty Says (what means): {[O Muhammad], inform My servants that it is I who am the Forgiving, the Merciful. And that it is My punishment which is the painful punishment.} [Qur'an 15:49-50] Thus, the hearts of believers stand between the two states of fear and hope.

Article source: <http://www.islamweb.net/emainpage/>

Transport minister tours Doha Metro



HE the Minister of Transport Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah bin Mohammed al-Thani toured the Doha Metro project yesterday and was briefed on the operational processes of its stations. According to a statement from the Ministry of Transport, he was also briefed on the functioning of the operation facility of the Doha Metro, which includes the metro's Integrated Control Centre, and train maintenance depot. Professionals representing Qatar Rail also briefed HE Sheikh Mohammed on the technical capabilities and the network's monitoring and control systems.

Rawdat Al Hamama Park opened to public

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In remarks during the opening, al-Sada stressed that the opening of Rawdat Al Hamama Public Park reflects the attention that the ministry pays to establishing and developing world class public parks and gardens.

He pointed out the increase in the number of public parks in Qatar, from 56 in 2010 to 147 in 2024, a 163% increase, while green spaces



increased from 2,614,994sq m in 2010 to 18,049,246sq m in 2024, bringing the individual's share of green space from 1.0sq m in 2010 to 5.6sq m in 2024.

Al-Sada said the Ministry of Municipality's public parks, "pla-

zas" and green spaces on the Corniche have exceeded 3mn sq m, noting that the total number of trees and shrubs planted across the country within the "10mn Trees Initiative" reached 840,000 trees and shrubs, creating about

500,000sq m of green spaces.

Rawdat Al Hamama Public Park is a sustainable and environmentally friendly model that enhances the quality of life and contributes to humanising cities, as part of the ongoing efforts to enhance

sustainability and develop recreational infrastructure in Qatar, in line with the Qatar National Vision 2030, which seeks to achieve green and sustainable cities.

The Park extends over a total area of 176,000sq m, including

138,000sq m of green spaces that makes 80% of the total area.

It has 1,042 trees of 21 local and international species, and features modern facilities including an automatic irrigation system using 100% treated water.

Museum documents music legacy in Qatar

The Music Affairs Centre of the Ministry of Culture is participating in the events marking the Qatar National Day (QND), currently held at Darb Al Saai in Umm Salal, through the music museum.

The museum navigates through the history of music in Qatar by showcasing the most renowned music instruments in the ancient times, along with their evolution and legacies.

Researcher in music heritage and supervisor of the music museum at Darb Al Saai, Faisal al-Tamimi, highlighted to the Qatar News Agency (QNA) that the creation of a music museum was intended to document music in Qatar.

He said emphasised that prior to the debut of music instruments that help documentation, things were unclear, hence, it became necessary to collect a significant bulk of information about music with all its bands composers, lyricists, and singers who lived the Qatari music, as well as instruments that have been used since that time, he highlighted.

Al-Tamimi added that the museum chose limited



exhibits due to the nature of participation at Darb Al Saai, in terms of space and duration, by focusing on folklore arts that underpin music in Qatar and relies primarily on percussion instruments, which were introduced along with their names and roles to provide an overall panorama.

He noted the existence of a special section for books about music, both eastern and western, along with two pavilions devoted to honouring the late Qatari artists who made an indelible footprint on Qatari music. - QNA

Sana Qatar illuminates aspects of history

The Ministry of Culture meticulously sought to present various facets of Qatar's history and heritage through a myriad of cultural events as part of the ongoing Qatar National Day (QND) celebrations, which will continue until December 18 at Darb Al Saai in Umm Salal.

For the first time this year, the ministry has introduced a new event under the title "Sana Qatar", aimed at highlighting various aspects of Qatar's history and heritage.

This initiative showcases a range of documentary films, interactive games, and large-scale display screens.

In his speech to the Qatar News Agency (QNA), Sana Qatar event

supervisor Anas al-Shayji highlighted that the event is a digital art exhibition that focuses on immersive video experiences, utilising advanced display technologies and awe-inspiring digital content.

It enables the audience to engage with a new realm of artistic exploration, moving beyond passive observation to create a deeper and more personal connection.

Al-Shayji said that the exhibition comprises three distinct sections, each dedicated to showcasing the history and progress of the nation through digital displays on expansive screens adorning the event's walls.

The first section, titled "From the Qatari environment", invites children to draw images inspired

by animals and birds native to Qatar, which are then scanned and projected onto the large electronic screens.

The second section, known as the "Coffee Section", is designed in an extremely modern fashion, reflecting the technological aspect of the exhibit, offering visitors a spatial journey akin to navigating the electronic universe, while the third section, titled "Al Baraaha" largely comprises three-dimensional screens, where three short films about Qatar are presented: from Qatar, the sea, and the sword.

Al-Shayji indicated that the title of the exhibition, Sana, meaning radiant light, symbolically alludes to the cultural renaissance currently unfolding in Qatar. - QNA

Fairmont Doha celebrates QND with tribute by Qatari artist duo

Fairmont Doha is presenting "In Love with the Homeland", an exhibition by Qatari artists Bashayer al-Badr and Maryam al-Tajer, until January 8 in celebration of Qatar National Day (QND).

The event highlights the beauty of Arabic calligraphy in an artistic tribute that tells the story of cultural pride, honour, and the enduring connection between Qatar's land and its people, a statement said yesterday.

The exhibition, located in the Dôme Lounge within the iconic Fairmont Doha at Katara Towers, features a collection of evocative artworks by al-Badr and al-Tajer, each echoing Qatar's resilience, wisdom, and aspirations.

Through the heartfelt narrative of Arabic calligraphy, each piece illustrates the intricate ties that connect Qataris to their shared history and values.



Maryam al-Tajer



Bashayer al-Badr

"This exhibition aligns perfectly with our commitment to celebrating Qatar's rich culture, heritage, and values," said Fairmont Doha managing director Andrew Steele, while inviting art enthusiasts and the public to experience the beautiful showcase and connect with the soul of Qatar.

Al-Badr is passionate about Arabic calligraphy, and her internationally recognised work redefines this ancient art form.

A Qatari national with a background in law from Qatar University, her journey into calligraphy

began as a personal exploration, evolving into an artistic expression that bridges heritage and modernity.

Through meticulous detail and free-flowing creativity, her work offers a contemporary interpretation of Islamic art that honours its roots while embracing innovation, deeply resonating with the pride and dignity of Arab identity.

Al-Tajer, rooted in a background of graphic design, turned to abstract calligraphy as a therapeutic and reflective practice.

A fine arts graduate from Virginia Commonwealth University and a current MFA (Master's in Fine Arts) design candidate, al-Tajer's contemporary work explores profound human introspection.

Her non-legible calligraphy invites interpretation, prompting both Arabic speakers and non-Arabic speakers to decipher its meaning and form their own narratives - an engagement that underscores her ability to connect diverse audiences through the universal language of art.

"In Love with the Homeland" is a complimentary exhibition open to hotel guests and the public daily from 10am-10pm, until January 8.



FIFA Intercontinental Cup Qatar trophies on display

Football fans enjoyed last night a special preview of the FIFA Intercontinental Cup Qatar 2024 trophies at Place Vendome Mall.

The tournament kicked off on December 11, with CF Pachuca claiming the FIFA Derby of the Americas Cup Qatar 2024 after a 3-0 win against Botafogo.

Tomorrow CF Pachuca will square off against Al Ahly FC in Stadium 974 for the FIFA Challenger Cup Qatar 2024. The winner will contend with Real Madrid CF for the FIFA Intercontinental Cup Qatar 2024, taking place on December 18 at the iconic Lusail Stadium.

Tickets for the FIFA Intercontinental Cup Qatar 2024 are available online at FIC24.qa

Fans can purchase up to six tickets per person, with a variety of accessible options provided for disabled fans.

Disabled fans interested in acquiring accessible seats are asked to e-mail accessibility-fic@sc.qa

Prior to kick-off, fans will also be treated to a wide variety of cultural and entertainment activities at the stadium fan zones.

Follow @FICQatar on X and Instagram and visit FIC24.qa for all tournament related information.

