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SPORT | Page 1

Dakar Rally: Nasser al-Attiyah jumps to second, teen Variawa wins third stage

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**Amir, Brazilian president review relations, region**

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani discussed with President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva of the Federative Republic of Brazil, co-operation relations between the two friendly countries and ways to enhance them. This came in a phone call His Highness the Amir received yesterday from President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. During the call, the two sides also discussed regional and international developments, especially those related to developments in the region. (QNA)

**Kahraman exhibition begins at Katara**

Cultural Village Foundation - Katara, officially launched the 5th edition of Katara International Exhibition for Kahraman yesterday. This year's exhibition is being held at Hall 12 with participation of 14 countries, featuring 77 booths. **Page 12**

**Carter body flown to Washington; funeral tomorrow**



Former US president Jimmy Carter's body arrived in Washington yesterday where three days of official mourning will include lying in state at the US Capitol ahead of a Thursday funeral. With military service members standing at attention, Carter's flag-draped casket was carried from Air Force One to a hearse embossed with the presidential seal. Carter, a Democrat served one White House term from 1977-1981.

Today's Gulf Times includes a  
4-page special report on

**THE MICHELIN  
GUIDE DOHA 2025**



## PM meets Alecso participants



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani met yesterday with the participants in the 14th Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (Alecso) Conference of Arab Ministers of Education. HE Sheikh Mohammed welcomed the guests, wishing them success in their meeting in Doha. (QNA) **Page 5**

## Hamas stands by demand for end to war for hostage release

Reuters  
Jerusalem/Cairo

Hamas stood by its demand yesterday that Israel fully end its assault on Gaza under any deal to release hostages, and said US President-elect Donald Trump was rash to say there would be "hell to pay" unless they go free by his Jan 20 inauguration. Officials from the resistance group and Israel have been holding talks with Qatari and Egyptian mediators in the most intensive effort for months to reach a ceasefire in Gaza. The outgoing US administration has called for a final push for a deal before Joe Biden leaves office, and many in the region now view Trump's inauguration as an unofficial deadline.

Hamas says it will free its remaining captives only if Israel agrees to end the war and withdraw all its troops from Gaza. Israel says it will not end the war until Hamas is dismantled and all hostages are free. Hamas official Osama Hamdan, who held a news conference in Algiers, said Israel was to blame for undermining all efforts to reach a deal. He reiterated the Hamas conditions of "a complete end to the aggression and a full withdrawal from lands the occupation invaded". Commenting on Trump's threat, Hamdan said: "I think the

US president must make more disciplined and diplomatic statements." Israel has sent a team of mid-ranking officials to Qatar for talks brokered by Qatari and Egyptian mediators. In one notable step towards a deal, a Hamas official said on Sunday the group had cleared a list submitted by Israel of 34 hostages who could be freed in the initial phase of a truce, alongside Palestinian prisoners held by Israel. The list included female Israeli soldiers, plus elderly, female and minor-aged civilians. Nearly 46,000 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's assault on Gaza, according to health officials in the enclave.

## Shahalil Al Shaqab wins gold in Ajman

The opening stage of the Arabian Horse Tour for the 2025 season concluded in Ajman. The closing ceremony was attended by Sheikh Ammar bin Humaid al-Nuaimi, Crown Prince of Ajman and Chairman of the Executive Council of the Emirate; HE Saad bin Ali al-Kharji, Chairman of Qatar Tourism; and a number of Sheikhs and senior officials. "De Siraj" of the "Dubai Arabian Horse Stud" won the gold medal in the Stallions category. As for the middle-aged fillies championship, "Shahalil Al Shaqab" from Al Shaqab Racing won the gold medal. In the middle-aged colts category, Al Badayer Stud of Sharjah won the gold medal with "Azzam Al Amal"; while "De Hael" from Qatar's "Al Thamer Stud" won the silver medal and "De Shahar" won the bronze medal.



## HMC unveils region first neurocardiac rehab programme

In groundbreaking advancement for patient care, Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) has launched the region's first Neurocardiac Rehabilitation Programme, a pioneering initiative to support patients affected by both cardiac and neurological conditions. This innovative programme, created in collaboration with HMC's Heart Hospital and Qatar Rehabilitation Institute's (QRI) Corporate Rehabilitation Therapy Services, addresses a critical need for integrated care to ensure that neurological recovery aligns with the cardiac needs of patients, significantly enhancing the quality of life. Led by Dr Hanadi al-Hamad, deputy chief, Rehabilitation, Long-Term Care, and Geriatrics, and lead of Corporate Rehabilitation Therapy Services, the programme aims to meet the needs

of patients with comorbid cardiac and neurological conditions, whose needs may not be fully met by traditional models that focus on either heart or neurological recovery, leaving many patients without comprehensive care. The Neurocardiac Rehabilitation Programme integrates neurorehabilitation and cardiac rehabilitation expertise, providing patients with seamless, multidisciplinary care. Through state-of-the-art diagnostic and therapeutic tools such as telemetry, ECG analysis, exercise testing, precise exercise prescriptions, dosage calculations and advanced screening techniques, this programme delivers customised treatment plans to optimise patient recovery and long-term health. Dr Hanadi al-Hamad emphasised the programme's transformative impact and said: "The launch of neurocardiac rehabilitation



The programme is created in collaboration with Heart Hospital and Qatar Rehabilitation Institute.

represents a critical milestone in our pursuit of holistic patient care. By addressing the dual needs of patients with both cardiac and neurological conditions, we are not only advancing individual health outcomes but also setting a new standard for integrated rehabilitation services." The Neurocardiac Rehabilitation

Programme is a key pillar of the 'Cardio Adapted Rehabilitation Excellence' initiative, an innovative corporate-wide effort that embeds cardiovascular principles into all rehabilitation practices, ensuring that patients not only recover but also build resilience against future health issues. Dr Nidal Asaad, CEO and

medical director of HMC's Heart Hospital, stated: "The launch of neurocardiac rehabilitation is a transformative step in providing accessible, integrated care. By addressing both cardiac and neurological challenges, this initiative enhances patient outcomes and establishes a new model for rehabilitation services."

## Qatar, partners working on Gaza ceasefire: MoFA

● MoFA official spokesperson: Regional efforts underway to lift Syria sanctions

By Tawfik Lamari  
Staff Reporter

HE Dr Majid bin Mohammed al-Ansari, Official Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said yesterday that Qatar has been continuing its efforts 'in various ways and means' in order to reach a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. Dr al-Ansari stressed in the weekly media briefing organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), that all mediators (Qatar, the US and Egypt) are making great efforts to end the war in Gaza. Regarding the ongoing indirect negotiations in Doha, Dr al-Ansari stressed that the negotiations are being held at the technical level, whether in Doha or Cairo. Regarding the Syrian issue, Dr al-Ansari said that Qatar welcomed the US administration's decision to suspend some sanctions on Syria, hoping that they would be lifted completely and permanently. He said: "We welcome the suspension of some US sanctions on Syria, and this is a partial step," hoping that the sanctions would be lifted permanently to facilitate the economic cycle. Regarding the Qatari role in this context, he said that there is a general regional position to work on lifting the sanctions on Syria, and the Qatari effort is part of this regional effort. Dr al-Ansari pointed out that reports of transporting Qatari gas to Syria are media speculation, stressing that the state's focus at this stage is on providing humanitarian aid to the Syrian people. He said that Qatar is committed to supporting the Syrian people from both the humanitarian and technical aspects. He referred to the statements made by HE Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi, Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, during the visit of the Syrian delegation to Doha, and his confirmation of the continuation of the air bridge and the resumption of flights to Syria's international airport yesterday.



HE Dr Majid al-Ansari addressing the media yesterday.

The official spokesperson stressed that the state's current focus is on ensuring stability in the sisterly Syrian Arab Republic. "Ensuring the realisation of the aspirations of the Syrian people who are emerging from a war that has destroyed many of their capabilities. As well as ensuring that Qatar supports the freedom and stability of the Syrian people and the interim administration, and that this administration keeps pace with the aspirations of the Syrians." Regarding Qatar's technical support for the rehabilitation of the Syrian airport, Dr al-Ansari confirmed that in response to the request of the brothers in the Syrian Arab Republic, a technical delegation from Qatar Airways was assigned to assess the condition of the airport and identify the obstacles that were standing in the way of the re-opening of Damascus International Airport. The team provided technical assistance, he added. The official explained that the total Qatari aid to Syria through the air bridge has reached 231 tonnes, and this airlift is ongoing. He pointed out that the relevant authorities in Qatar are working with their counterparts in Syria to resolve the electricity issue there. HE Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani, Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, will meet tomorrow with Ian Borg, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Tourism of Malta, he added.





## Qatar, Cuba hold political consultations



The third round of political consultations between the foreign ministries of Qatar and Cuba was held in Doha yesterday. HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi and Cuba's First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Gerardo Penalver Portal headed the session. During the talks, they discussed bilateral relations and ways to support and enhance them. In addition, they discussed issues of common interest. **(QNA)**

## Health minister meets Cuban first deputy FM



HE the Minister of Public Health Mansoor bin Ebrahim bin Saad al-Mahmoud has met with the visiting First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Cuba, Gerardo Penalver Portal. Talks during the meeting focused on bilateral relations and ways to boost them in the field of health. **(QNA)**

# Tech, VC pioneers to headline discussions at Web Summit

Three of the world's technology and venture capital (VC) pioneers will headline Web Summit Qatar slated from Feb 23-26 at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre (DECC).

Alexis Ohanian, founder and general partner of Seven Seven Six and co-founder of Reddit; Eduardo Saverin, co-founder of Facebook and B Capital; and Laura Chambers, CEO of Mozilla Corporation; will join over 15,000 attendees to explore the future of innovation, investment, and technology in 2025.

Ohanian will discuss his journey from co-founding Reddit – a now-public company with a more than \$25bn market cap that has reshaped online communities – to creating Seven Seven Six, a VC firm that is built like a modern technology company and is redefining early-stage investments. In 2025, Seven Seven Six's portfolio

includes Angel City Football Club, now the most valuable women's sports team in the world; Riverside, a podcasting platform that allows users to record remote podcasts and video interviews with studio-quality audio and video; Feastables, a snack brand with trusted ingredients from MrBeast; and Stoke Space, a space company developing fully reusable rockets.

According to Saverin, while deep tech investment across the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) has lagged, the region has the potential to become a leader in cutting-edge technologies. Under Chambers' leadership, Mozilla continues to champion open Internet values, such as choice, privacy, and transparency while exploring new opportunities in the tech landscape, including privacy-preserving advertising and AI ethics.

Other Web Summit 2025 speakers include Almar Latour, CEO of



Alexis Ohanian, founder and general partner of Seven Seven Six and co-founder of Reddit.

Dow Jones; Sara Sabry, founder of the Deep Space Initiative; Brian Robbins, CEO of Paramount Pictures; Joy Robins, Global Chief Advertising officer at the *New York Times*; Yassine Saidi, Chief Prod-



Eduardo Saverin, co-founder of Facebook and B Capital.

uct officer at Under Armour; Andrew Feldman, co-founder & CEO at Cerebras Systems; and Raj Gan-guly, co-founder and co-CEO of B Capital, among others.

Web Summit CEO Paddy Cos-



Laura Chambers, CEO of Mozilla Corporation.

grave said: "We're thrilled to welcome Alexis to Doha this February. His extensive experience in building transformative companies, combined with his dedication to fostering inclusive innovation,

will bring invaluable insights that align perfectly with the entrepreneurial energy fuelling the Middle East's tech ecosystem. "Alexis will be joining an amazing group of speakers, including some of the biggest names in tech and innovation, like B Capital's Eduardo Saverin and Mozilla CEO Laura Chambers."

Earlier last month, a Runway to Web Summit event in Doha set the stage for local tech communities ahead of the main event, encouraging innovation and growth. Cosgrave, along with Qatar Development Bank CEO Abdulrahman Hesham al-Sowaidi, gathered to discuss the future of technology and its growing impact on Qatar's tech ecosystem. They were joined by local startups, including Skip-Cash, Adeer, Wqtah, and Kafy, who spoke about their experiences at past Web Summit events, and their plans for the future.

## Ministry launches updated version of advertising licensing services online

The Ministry of Municipality's Information Systems Department has launched an updated version of the Advertisement Licensing Services (issuance, renewal, and cancellation) on the ministry's online portal.

This initiative aims to enhance efficiency, improve performance, and raise service quality as part of the ministry's comprehensive digital transformation project.

In a post on its official account on "X", the Ministry of Municipality has outlined the steps to benefit from this service. These include visiting the Ministry of Municipality's website, accessing the National Authentication System, navigating to the electronic services section, selecting the required service (issuance, renewal, or cancellation), filling out the application, and paying the fees electronically. The licence will be issued within one or two working days.

The ministry specified the obligations and conditions for placing advertisements, which include maintaining the advertisement boards during the licensing period, placing the advertisement at the location specified in the licence, writing the licence number on the advertisement board, and ensuring renewal or cancellation before the licence expires.

The new service offers several advantages, including electronic payment options, electronic integration with government entities, ease and speed in completing applications, fast processing within one or two working days, the ability to print advertisement licences, and smart notifications to remind beneficiaries about renewal or cancellation.

# MoPH intensifies awareness campaigns on asthma, COPD

The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) is intensifying efforts to raise awareness about asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

Continuous awareness initiatives contribute to reducing the health and social burden of chronic diseases, improving patients' quality of life, and empowering individuals to make informed health decisions and adopt preventive behaviours.

These measures also encourage preventive behaviours that reduce the likelihood of illness and provide guidance on managing the condition effectively.

Sheikh Dr Mohamed bin Hamad al-Thani, director of the Non-Communicable Diseases Prevention Programmes Department, MoPH, said: "Intensifying awareness surrounding asthma and COPD reflects our ongoing commitment to enhancing health awareness about these diseases and providing necessary support for patients and their families. Through this initiative, we aim to empower the community to take effective preventive steps."

The primary goals of the awareness campaign include promoting early diagnosis and helping individuals recognise symptoms early so they can promptly seek medical

assistance and minimise complications. Additionally, the campaign seeks to educate the public on preventive measures, such as reducing environmental risk factors like pollution and adopting healthy lifestyle practices.

The ministry is implementing a range of awareness activities, including publishing digital and printed media materials, videos, and sharing educational messages via social media. These efforts are part of a comprehensive awareness strategy designed to reduce the prevalence of asthma and COPD, ultimately enhancing the overall health of the community.

In Qatar, the prevalence of asth-

ma among children is estimated at about 20%, mirroring the global rate, with a noticeable increase among males compared to females. Factors such as obesity, respiratory infections, and family history significantly influence cases. Between 2005 and 2017, Qatar saw a notable increase in asthma cases.

As for COPD, it encompasses respiratory conditions such as chronic bronchitis and emphysema. Smoking remains the primary cause of COPD, although environmental pollution and genetic factors may also contribute. COPD is responsible for approximately three million deaths annually worldwide.



Sheikh Dr Mohamed bin Hamad al-Thani

## Old Doha Port boosts global presence through strategic maritime ties

By Joey Aguilar  
Staff Reporter

Old Doha Port has strengthened its position as a premier maritime destination through key international and local partnerships aimed at attracting high-profile maritime events and enhancing Qatar's yachting appeal.

Old Doha Port CEO Mohamed Abdulla al-Mulla told *Gulf Times* that a key partnership is with Yas Marina in Abu Dhabi, established

at the Dubai International Boat Show in March 2024. "This agreement offers reciprocal benefits to marina members, including complimentary docking and discounts at select facilities, aiming to bolster maritime tourism between Qatar and the UAE," he said, highlighting the port's proactive approach to fostering global connections.

Al-Mulla noted that they also secured multiple agreements with global yacht companies during the Monaco Yacht Show in September 2023. This, he pointed out, aims to put Old Doha Port firmly on the in-

ternational yachting map, attracting luxury vessels and solidifying Qatar's status as a top-tier destination.

He said the port's collaboration extends to international entities, particularly members of the Superyacht Builders Association such as Azimut-Benetti and Heesen. According to al-Mulla, these relationships were instrumental in bringing high-profile exhibitors and yachts to the inaugural Qatar Boat Show last year, showcasing the port's ability to host globally recognised maritime events.

"Through strategic agreements with Yas Marina and other Gulf stakeholders, Old Doha Port has positioned itself as a leader in luxury maritime experiences in the Gulf. These partnerships underscore the port's commitment to excellence and innovation, aligning with Qatar's vision to become a global hub for tourism and culture. "Such efforts elevate the port's prominence on the international stage while driving the growth of Qatar's maritime tourism sector," he said.

Locally, al-Mulla added that Old

Doha Port has taken the initiative to unite Qatar's marinas, bringing together Ronautica Middle East (operator of The Pearl Island Marinas), Banana Island Resort Doha, Aura Group (Beefbar Marina), and Resort and Leisure Company WLL (Corinthia Yacht Club, Porto Arabia) through a recently signed Memorandum of Understanding.

He said this agreement aims to offer private yacht owners enhanced benefits, including hassle-free dockage, and access to an array of diverse dining, activities, and other exclusive offerings.

## QU students develop AI technologies to improve healthcare

As part of its efforts to promote innovation in the healthcare sector, Qatar University (QU) has developed AI technologies to improve healthcare.

According to an official statement from QU, a team of students from the Department of Electrical Engineering at the College of Engineering, including Hamad al-Yafei, Mohammed Nour and Abdulla al-Obaidan, under the supervision of Dr Muhammad Salman Khan, associate professor at QU, successfully designed and developed advanced AI models for classifying adventitious lung sounds, contributing to more accurate diagnosis of

respiratory diseases. Lung sounds, also referred to as respiratory or breath sounds, are fundamental indicators for diagnosing respiratory diseases. Traditional auscultation using a stethoscope requires significant skill and experience to accurately identify abnormalities. However, human errors or time constraints may lead to delayed or inaccurate diagnoses. This is where AI plays a transformative role, enabling the analysis of lung sounds through machine learning and deep learning algorithms to provide rapid and precise diagnoses of abnormalities.

The project began with a comprehensive review of scientific lit-

erature to identify key challenges and solutions in the field. The students utilised an internationally recognised dataset, widely recognised by the research community, which contained both normal and abnormal lung sounds. They processed and analysed this dataset using advanced signal processing and acoustic feature extraction techniques. The outcome was AI models trained to classify lung sounds with high accuracy, paving the way for wide applications in healthcare systems.

The project featured a unique collaboration between the College of Engineering and the College of Medicine, co-mentored by



Dr Maha Desouki, section head of Pre-Clinical Education. Through this initiative, the engineering students had the opportunity to visit the clinical skills lab at the College of Medicine, where they trained on using medical manikins to record and analyse both normal and abnormal lung sounds. This initiative

aligns with QU's vision to support the nation's knowledge-based economy and strengthen its research capabilities in vital fields.

"This collaboration between students and researchers represents a significant step toward enhancing healthcare outcomes and advancing medical technologies.



# QRCS gets stamp of approval for the quality of its services

In continued pursuit of its journey towards excellence and leadership, the Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) has passed the independent audit of its Quality Management System (QMS) under the ISO 9001:2015 international standard.

For the third consecutive year, the audit was conducted by experts from Bureau Veritas International, one of the world's largest and widely recognised certification companies.

The QRCS said in a press release yesterday that this achievement is an official testimony to the quality of services provided by the QRCS for the beneficiaries both in Qatar and beyond.

The audit included a comprehensive review of the work systems and processes adopted by the QRCS to ensure the best humanitarian and social services across its various divisions, including

General Secretariat, Volunteering and Local Development Division, Relief and International Development Division, and Support Services Division.

QRCS projects and programmes were evaluated across areas of work (health, shelter, water and sanitation, food security, education, and livelihoods), as well as local and international scopes of work, with 14 foreign representation offices/missions that enhance its response to the growing humanitarian needs.

QRCS president Yousef bin Ali al-Khater stressed the importance of this achievement.

"We are proud of what have been done, but we keep having an eye on more and more," he said. "Currently, the QRCS is going through a comprehensive institutional transformational episode, under its new 2025-30 strategy, which focuses more on promoting qual-



ity, transparency, and innovation standards in all its activities and services."

"We believe this transformation will enable us to provide more effective and sustainable humanitarian services," he said.

"Being Qatar's humanitarian arm, the QRCS serves as a dedicated auxiliary to the government in its humanitarian efforts," al-Khater added. "Maintaining the ISO certification is evidence of our continued commitment to the highest standards of quality and

QRCS president Yousef bin Ali al-Khater.

effectiveness. It represents the bright image of the Qatari humanitarian sector."

The QRCS adopts the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS), actively contributing to the quality and trustworthiness standards of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). - **QNA**

## QC to implement 700 projects for Yemen's families



The office of Qatar Charity (QC) in Yemen is to implement 700 economic empowerment projects in Yemen during 2025, with a total budget of QR2.6mn, aimed at supporting vulnerable groups, including the mothers of orphans, and is expected to benefit about 5,000 individuals.

This initiative builds upon years of successfully implementing income-generating projects, empowering vulnerable groups to overcome challenges and build a more secure future.

As part of the Protection and Livelihood Support Project, 13 sewing, embroidery, and bag-making machines were recently provided to widows and women in need, to create job opportunities and enhance their role in community development.

To empower Yemen's most vulnerable, particularly widows, the project provided sewing training to achieve self-sufficiency for their families and enable them to produce.

In addition to training and sewing machines, beneficiaries received tailoring tools, fabrics, production materials, and a solar-powered system to operate the machines.

Over the past five years, the QC's Yemen office has implemented hundreds of income-generating projects for the most vulnerable, with a total value of about QR15.6mn. - **QNA**



The conference to be held on January 11-12.

## Al Jazeera Media Institute to host second annual AI conference

The Al Jazeera Media Institute will hold the second edition of the Al Jazeera Artificial Intelligence in Media Conference, on January 11-12 at Grand Sheraton Doha.

The conference aims to discuss the latest developments in artificial intelligence (AI) and their impact on the media industry, and showcase advanced applications that contribute to verifying news, analysing data, and enhancing media production, reflecting the important role of technology in shaping the contours of modern journalism.

Through this conference, the institute aims to create a space for meaningful dialogue between technology experts and media organisations on the responsible and effective use of AI, ensuring that core journalistic values are preserved while adapting to technological advancements.

"We want to ensure the pres-

ervation of core journalistic values and adapt to technological developments," said Al Jazeera Media Institute director Eman al-Amri. "The conference provides an opportunity to blend in-depth discussions with practical application. It features scientific sessions and debates on the ethical and professional challenges related to the use of artificial intelligence."

The Artificial Intelligence in Media Conference includes dialogue sessions and specialised workshops, bringing together global experts, along with speakers from leading technology companies such as Microsoft, Google, IBM, and Cisco.

Conference sessions will focus on exploring the latest intelligent tools used in news gathering and verification, detecting deepfakes, and presenting successful Arab and global experiences in employing AI in journalism.

These case studies include those of Al Jazeera, Reuters, the Washington Post, the Associated Press, and No Border News.

The conference will discuss issues with future dimensions, such as algorithmic bias and its impact on the integrity of media content, the impact of AI on media professionals, and ways to build trust between the public and content produced using intelligent tools.

## QMC wraps up workshop on podcasting

The Qatar Media Centre (QMC) of the Ministry of Culture yesterday concluded a workshop on podcasting.

The two-day event was primarily dedicated to youngsters and teenagers.

Presented by trainer Fahd al-Kaabi, the workshop shed light on the essential skills and technologies required for a successful art of podcasting amid the massive competition for such kind of media, in order to achieve excel-

lence through leveraging cutting-edge technologies.

The workshop featured an introduction to podcasts and their types, whether individual, conversational, or documentary, as well as the technologies needed to create an impactful content.

QMC director Iman al-Kaabi said that the workshop was held as part of the centre's quest for providing novel and outstanding ideas in media rehabilitation and training. - **QNA**



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## QIB introduces innovative features to its mobile apps

**Q**atar Islamic Bank (QIB) has introduced a series of new features in its QIB mobile app and Lite app, bringing enhanced functionality and convenience to its customers.

The updates represent QIB's ongoing commitment to revolutionising the banking experience through innovative solutions that meet the evolving needs of its customers in Qatar.

In another significant move to expand the transfer experience, QIB has launched a Cash Pickup Transfer service, enabling customers to send money to beneficiaries in the Philippines and Egypt without requiring a bank account.

Customers can enjoy benefiting from competitive exchange rates and instant cash transfer simply and securely to send funds abroad to their family and friends who can collect their money from 22,000 agent locations, including all BDO Unibank branches in the Philippines and all Banque Misr branches in Egypt.

The service addresses the needs of a large segment of the population who may not have traditional banking services, making money transfers more inclusive and direct.

Among the key additions is the ability for customers to use their Absher points to load funds onto their new or existing prepaid cards. This new option allows users to transform their loyalty points into a usable cash balance, giving them more ways to make purchases and manage their finances on the go. By integrating this functionality into the QIB mobile app, the bank continues to



offer customers more accessible and rewarding banking options. In addition, customers can now instantly apply for the Hadiyati (Gift) card through the QIB mobile app.

The QIB Hadiyati card is the perfect gift—convenient, secure, and flexible. As a one-time loaded prepaid card, it offers ease of use at any Visa-powered merchant, both in Qatar and abroad.

Additionally, QIB has expanded access to its Family Shield WPS Takaful policy through the QIB Lite app. This expansion makes the policy more widely available to workers, offering affordable Takaful plan for just QR10 per month. The service's integration into the QIB Lite App enables users to secure their families' future instantly, providing greater peace of mind.

D Anand, QIB general manager – Personal Banking Group, said: “At QIB, we are dedicated to providing practical solutions that address the diverse financial needs of our customers. These new features simplify everyday banking tasks while offering more options for fi-

nancial management. With each update, we strive to create a seamless digital experience that is tailored to our customers' lifestyles, making banking faster, more accessible, and more personalised.”

With over 300 features and a refined user experience, the QIB mobile app has become the preferred banking channel for most customers, offering a comprehensive and user-friendly platform for all their banking needs.

The app offers customers the ability to have full control of their accounts, cards, and transactions and to fulfil all their banking requirements remotely. In addition, QIB customers can open a new account, apply for personal financing, or a credit card, or open additional accounts instantly via the QIB mobile app.

Available on the App Store, Google Play, and Huawei AppGallery, customers can download the QIB mobile app and easily self-register using their active ATM/debit card number and PIN.

For more details, visit [www.qib.qa/en-MobileApp](http://www.qib.qa/en-MobileApp)



## Al Wakra and Al Wukair project set to transform drainage treatment

By Shafeeq Alingal  
Staff Reporter

**T**he Main Drainage Tunnel in Al Wakra and Al Wukair will bring in a remarkable facelift for drainage treatment in the South.

The main drainage tunnel, according to the official website of the Public Works Authority (Ashghal), will accommodate the drainage flows from the current and future drainage network in different areas in Al Wakra and Al Wukair and transfer these flows to Al Wakra and Al Wukair Sewage Treatment Works.

The main drainage tunnel, which will operate by gravity, will extend from Al Khuwaytim to the Birkat Al Awamer areas with a total length of about 13.3km and a diameter of 4.5m. The project is expected to be completed in the second quarter of 2025, according to Ashghal website.

The excavation works are carried out by two deep Tunnel Boring Machines (TBMs) at a depth of about 60m underground. The TBMs incorporate advanced technologies since they were specifically designed to suit the geological characteristics of Qatar, to ensure the efficiency of the excavation process and provide the maximum safety standards for workers. This is in addition to guaranteeing that no damage will be caused to the services or facilities surrounding the tunnel.



The project includes the construction of eight shafts from land to the bottom of the tunnel, with depths ranging from 50 to 63m underground. These shafts are made to execute the deep excavation works and carry out inspections and periodic maintenance of the tunnel.

The sewage treatment will treat wastewater from various localities in Al Wakra and Al Wukair. The project features a Terminal Pump

Station with an Odour Control Facility, sludge treatment units and Treated Sewage Effluent management units.

The design life of the main drainage tunnel is about 100 years. The tunnel's innovative design adopts the best construction practices and will be implemented by international standards of health, safety, environment and sustainability management.

## Omani delegation visits Ministry of Environment



**A** delegation from Oman's Environment Authority visited the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, where they discussed ways to enhance co-operation and exchange expertise between the two sides, especially in the areas of preserving the local environment and sustaining biodiversity.

The delegation was briefed on the Qatari experience in the field of wildlife propagation and preserving the environment and its biodiversity.

The delegation also visited the Southern Reserve and listened to a detailed explanation about its management and the importance of its sustainability. The organising of visits dedicated to hunting and falconry enthusiasts was discussed to ensure the preservation of the reserve's biodiversity.

The tour included a visit to a number of other reserves affiliated with the Natural Reserves Administration, including Al Shahaniya Reserve and Al Reem Biosphere Reserve.

Officials from the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change gave a detailed presentation on the ministry's efforts and plans related to preserving the environment through expanding the establishment of natural reserves.

They noted that the State has allocated 27% of Qatar's land area and 2% of its marine area as na-

ture reserves, with future plans to increase these percentages in line with the recommendations of international agreements approved by the UN.

The visit also included a tour of the Rawdat Al Faras Houbara Breeding Center, affiliated with the Office of Foreign Reserves, where the delegation learned about the centre's work mechanisms and the stages of bird production.

The tour also included viewing the centre's facilities, including medical facilities for treating the bird, egg incubators, artificial insemination facilities, and feed buildings.

The delegation praised the role played by the centre in preserving and breeding the endangered Houbara bird.

The Omani delegation included a number of environmental specialists, including Khamis bin Saeed al-Hashemi, Saeed bin Hamad al-Rashdi, and Khaleeja bint Hamoud al-Jabriya.

The delegation members expressed their appreciation for the efforts of Qatar and the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change in preserving the environment and its biodiversity, appreciating the experience of nature reserves as an effective means of achieving environmental sustainability, and stressed the importance of enhancing joint co-operation in this field. **(QNA)**

### Closure at Rawdat Rashed Interchange

The Public Works Authority (Ashghal) has announced temporary road closure at Rawdat Rashed Interchange (Exit 31) on Salwa Road heading towards Rawdat Rashed and Al Sheehaniya from 12am until 5am on January 8. The closure that will be implemented in co-ordination with the General Directorate of Traffic has been announced to implement routine road maintenance. Ashghal has urged road users to reroute to nearby adjacent streets to reach their destinations. Ashghal will install road signs advising motorists of the temporary closure and has requested all to follow and abide by the speed limit to ensure safety.



## Aquatic Research Centre plays key role in enhancing local fish stocks

**T**he Aquatic Research Centre at the Ministry of Municipality is working on developing fish production and increasing the stock of economically valuable fish through advanced research and innovative initiatives.

The centre contributes to enhancing food security, protecting biodiversity, and ensuring the sustainability of marine resources, in alignment with Qatar National Vision 2030. Accordingly, the ministry has released a video on its official X account showing the processes of producing and releasing baby fish into certain areas across the country within the local waters to enhance local fish production, especially from the varieties of fish with high economic value such as Seabass, Hamour, and Safi among others.



The baby fish is produced and fostered at the centre until reaching certain adequate size, then prepared for transporting to be

released at the targeted spots in areas that support the growth and multiplication of these particular types of fish.







HE Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhater delivering her opening speech at the conference.

# Qatar spotlights challenges faced in education sector



**Q**atar has chaired the 14th session of the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (Alecso) Conference for Arab Ministers of Education, held under the title, “Inclusive Education and Empowering Teachers: A Strategic Vision for Education in the Arab World”.

The conference was organised by Alecso in partnership with Qatar’s Ministry of Education and Higher Education, as well as Qatar National Commission for Education, Culture, and Science.

In her opening speech, HE the Minister of Education and Higher Education and Chairperson of Qatar National Commission for Education, Culture, and Science, Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhater, highlighted numerous challenges faced by the education sector worldwide, including in Arab countries.

She acknowledged the notable progress made since beginning of millennium in improving academic achievement and ensuring equal access to formal education. However, she also pointed out the barriers encountered, especially in keeping pace with rapidly advancing digital technology, expansion of scientific disciplines, and the need to train teachers capable of transferring knowledge to the next generation.

She explained that this conference represents an effort to enhance and develop the quality of education by providing an opportunity to exchange successful experiences and build effective partnerships between Arab countries. It also aims to review emerging trends in education and find innovative solutions to overcome challenges, ensuring a brighter future for future generations.

HE AlKhater emphasised that

the theme of this year’s conference reflects an ambitious and renewed vision to achieve inclusive education as a fundamental right for all, and to empower teachers to become effective leaders in education.

She also stressed that education is a central pillar in achieving sustainable development and social justice due to its positive impact on building and developing individuals’ capacities. It equips learners with the skills, knowledge, and values needed to drive the desired changes towards a more sustainable and prosperous future. High-quality education requires attention to teachers, who are the cornerstone of the educational process. This requires continuous training, professional development, and support, which enhances teachers’ abilities to keep up with modern educational trends and technological developments, improving student outcomes.

She highlighted Qatar’s initiatives aimed at empowering teachers both before and during their service, including Tamheen, Tamkeen, and Leaders Pathway programmes through Teach for Qatar foundation, which prepares training programmes designed for those looking to transition into the teaching profession and contribute to building the future.

HE AlKhater mentioned that numerous UN reports have indicated that 15mn children have left school due to escalating conflicts in the region, with the number expected to rise to 20mn in the next five years. She expressed hope that these conflicts, including the genocide against Palestinian people, will be resolved, allowing students to return to their schools and contribute to the development of their societies.

Moreover, she reviewed the significant efforts of Qatar Fund for Development, which has provided over \$1bn in educational aid to more than 60 countries, as well as the work of ‘Education Above All’ foundation through its ‘Educate a Child’ initiative, which has enrolled over 15mn children in 57 countries around the world. These efforts reflect Qatar’s steadfast commitment to supporting education both domestically and internationally.

Director-General of Alecso Dr Mohamed Ould Amar said in a speech that Qatar sets a model to be emulated in supporting and developing the education sector at all levels, appreciating the efforts of the Ministry of Education in adopting pioneering educational initiatives that enabled it to lead the global ranking of quality and excellence in education.

Minister Plenipotentiary and Director of the Education Department at the Arab League Dr Faraj al-Ajmi said that teachers play a pivotal role in promoting comprehensive education.

Moroccan Minister of National Education, Preschool, and Sports Mohamed Saad Berrada, president of the 13th Alecso conference, said that the Doha conference’s theme was chosen to highlight the importance of supporting efforts for the reform and development underway here, as part of joint efforts to advance education in Arab countries.

In her remarks on the sidelines of the conference sessions, Assistant Undersecretary for Educational Affairs Maha Zayed Qaqaa al-Ruwaili emphasised that this event focuses in particular on discussing the best ways to develop educational policies, infrastructure, educational structures, human cadres, and curricula. **(QNA)**

## Jordan minister praises Qatar’s educational initiatives in several countries

**J**ordan’s Minister of Education, Higher Education and Scientific Research, Azmy Mahafzah, has emphasised that Qatar has provided initiatives and contributions of utmost importance in the fields of education, and has helped countries that need support to develop their educational systems, indicating that these efforts were not limited to the education sector only but several contributions in different fields were positively reflected on the general situation.

In special remarks to Qatar News Agency (QNA), Mahafzah said that these educational initiatives and projects provided by Qatar have a positive impact on the educational system in various countries that need assistance. He praised Qatar’s education sector, which has witnessed remarkable progress during the past period, confirming the extent of the efforts made and that they are moving in the right direction.

Regarding his participation in the 14th Alecso Conference of Arab Ministers of Education, currently hosted by Doha, he said that this conference addresses important educational issues such as comprehensive education experiences, empowering teachers, inclusive education, promoting the Arabic language and giving it the necessary attention, developing curricula, and other important educational issues. He reviewed the impor-

tance of the documents included during the conference, which benefits all countries.

He indicated that the documents presented are a summary of the experiences of specialists in the educational process, which constitute a priority and a roadmap for countries interested in reforming their educational systems.

He added that the conference addresses issues related to poverty in learning and education in times of crises, digitisation of education, and the importance of digital transformation, especially since world countries attach utmost importance to the digital transformation file, and seek to use technology, especially artificial intelligence.

He highlighted the importance of the education issue, which is an important goal, an investment in the future, and a major economic empowerment tool, to which the countries of the world give great care, appreciating Qatar’s efforts to properly host this conference, which deals with educational files of utmost significance.

In another context, the Jordanian minister addressed the importance of enhancing the skills that students need when entering the labour market. He stressed the need to address shortcomings and enhance vocational and technical education, which usually begins in schools and continues in universities.

He pointed out that in Jordan

there is a technical vocational education programme (BTEC) that aims to better qualify students for the labour market and focuses on practical training and applied skills. It includes dozens of specialisations and works to enhance the skills that the student needs to keep pace with the requirements of the labour market. He stressed the importance of transforming education and enhancing the skills that students need when joining the labour market. He emphasised that the countries that succeeded in this are those that were able to educate generations and provide them with skills and facilitated several matters that could have been faced in the future by addressing all challenges.

Regarding the integration of technology into the education sector in Jordan, he indicated that Jordan is in the process of transforming and developing the infrastructure to keep pace with the requirements of the era and that work is underway to use educational platforms and to digitise curricula, in response to modern scientific development using technology and artificial intelligence, in addition to the importance of developing teachers to use modern technology.

Mahafzah said managing the educational process is an issue that requires investment in technology. He indicated that the digital transformation project is a priority, and that work is being done on it. **(QNA)**

## Al Noor Center for Blind holds debate on ‘Braille in digital era’



**A**l Noor Center for the Blind, in collaboration with QatarDebate Center organised a debate on Braille in the digital era yesterday.

Held at the premises of Wifaq Family Consulting Center with the participation of the centre’s members with visual impairments attending inclusive schools, the debate was intended to highlight the nexus between modern technology and Braille mode and to discuss the opportunities generated from leveraging digital technologies in exchange of relying on Braille as a key vehicle for learning and engagement.

Acting Director of the Community Awareness Department at Al Noor Center for the Blind, Abdul Aziz al-Binali, stated that organising this debate reflects the centre’s commitment to highlighting challenges and opportunities of cutting-edge technologies for persons with visual impairment, stressing that creating equilibrium between these technologies and Braille mode is essential to en-



sure its effectiveness as a basic tool for learning.

Communications Manager at QatarDebate Center Reem al-Musallam said this co-operation underlines the shared vision to support the community segments, especially those who need to be significantly empowered to express their voices, affirming that fusing Braille with cutting-edge technologies ensures a wide inclusivity and real equality.

The centre’s affiliates have been rehabilitated through professional workshops to advance

their debating skills to be further convincing and influential to ensure the topics remain impactful, highlighted al-Musallam.

The workshop featured a significant interaction on the part of attendees who admired the depth of discussions, which came as part of the centre’s initiatives to mark World Braille Day, with the aim of supporting persons with visual impairment and honing their skills.

Al Noor Center for the Blind is a member of the Qatar Foundation for Social Work. **(QNA)**

## Alecso conference calls for enhanced joint Arab action in education

**T**he Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (Alecso) concluded yesterday the 14th Conference for Arab Ministers of Education held under the theme “Comprehensive Education and Empowerment of Teachers: A Strategic Vision for Education in the Arab World”.

The conference issued the “Doha Declaration”, which reaffirmed commitment to the principles and practical guidelines for advancing education systems across the Arab world. The declaration emphasised fostering more just and prosperous societies and underscored the significance of enhancing joint Arab action in education to drive transformative changes in the region’s education systems. The “Doha Declaration” outlined several key recommendations, including the development of national policies that promote inclusive education and ensure the integration of all groups. It called for consolidating national and regional efforts to guarantee the continuity of education dur-

ing emergencies and crises. The declaration also stressed the importance of implementing comprehensive teacher training programmes to enhance their skills continuously while improving their economic and social conditions.

Additionally, the declaration highlighted the need to invest in the technological infrastructure required for digital education, ensuring its accessibility across all regions to bridge the digital divide. It urged the establishment of specialised programmes to support education in emergency situations and the creation of innovative solutions to maintain the continuity of the educational process.

The declaration called for greater co-operation among Arab countries and partnerships with regional and international institutions to leverage successful experiences. It urged an increase in financial allocations to the education sector and ensuring the sustainability of educational projects to achieve inclusive education. Moreover, it advocated for supporting

scientific research in education, developing comprehensive evaluation systems to enhance the quality and outcomes of education, and updating curricula to align with modern demands and labour market requirements while fostering creativity and innovation. Classroom and extracurricular programmes were also addressed, with a focus on promoting the values of citizenship, tolerance, national identity, and Arab heritage. In his closing remarks at the three-day conference, Director-General of Alecso Dr Mohamed Ould Amar emphasised the critical nature of the topics discussed by participants in tackling the pressing challenges facing education in the Arab world.

At the conclusion of the conference, the Alecso Awards for Excellence in Education were presented to the ministers of education and heads of delegations from participating Arab countries. It was also announced that the 15th Alecso Conference of Arab Ministers of Education will be hosted by Libya. **(QNA)**

## Jordan and Syria to combat arms and drugs smuggling

Reuters  
Amman

**J**ordan and Syria have agreed to form a joint security committee to secure their border, combat arms and drug smuggling and work to prevent the resurgence of Islamic State fighters, the Jordanian foreign minister said yesterday.

Western anti-narcotics officials say the addictive, amphetamine-type stimulant known as captagon has for years been mass-produced in Syria and that Jordan is a transit route to some Gulf states. Jordan’s army has conducted several pre-emptive air strikes in Syria since 2023 that Jordanian officials say targeted militias accused of links to the drug trade, as well as the militias’



Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad Hassan al-Shibani and Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi during a press conference in Amman, yesterday.

facilities. “We discussed securing the borders, especially the threat of arms and drugs smuggling and the resurgence of Islamic State. Our security is one, we will co-ordinate together to combat these mutual challenges,” Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi told a joint press conference with Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad Hassan al-Shibani.





Ghana's new President John Mahama holds state sword after taking the oath of office at his inauguration at the Independence Square in Accra, yesterday.

# Ghana's Mahama sworn in after presidential comeback

AFP  
Accra

Ghana yesterday swore in president-elect John Mahama in the capital Accra before some 20 regional leaders as he promises to lift the West African gold and cocoa producer out of the doldrums. Mahama won 56% of the vote in the nation's presidential election on December 9, defeating ruling party candidate and Vice President Mahamudu Bawumia, who secured 41%. He takes over from outgoing president Nana Akufo-Addo, who served two terms in power. "Today should mark the opportunity to reset our country," the 66-year-old new president, wearing the West African country's national dress, told a jubilant crowd decked in the green, red, black and white hues of his National Democratic Congress (NDC) party. Energy radiated from Accra's Black Star Square, as a sea of elate faces waved Ghanaian and NDC flags, chanted and broke into spontaneous dance to the beat



Ghanaians cheers on the arrival of President John Mahama, at his inauguration as Ghana's new president in Accra, yesterday.

of drums and the blaring honk of vuvuzelas. Among those present were Nigerian President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Senegal's Bassirou Diomaye Faye, Burkina Faso's leader Ibrahim Traore, Kenyan President William Ruto, President Felix Tshisekedi of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Gabon's Brice Oligui Nguema. Presidents Julius Maada Bio of Sierra Leone and Mamadi Doumbouya of Guinea as well as former leaders and officials also attended the inauguration. Mahama was sworn in along-

side Jane Naana Opoku-Agyemang, the first woman to become vice president in Ghana. The landslide comeback for former president Mahama ended eight years in power for the New Patriotic Party (NPP) under President Nana Akufo-Addo, whose last term was marked by Ghana's worst economic turmoil in years, an International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout and a debt default. Mahama, who led Ghana from 2012 to early 2017, had previously failed twice to win back the presidency but in December's election managed to tap into expectations

of change among Ghanaians. On Black Star Square, supporters of the elected leader exuded joy, hope and optimism. "I've never been so proud to be Ghanaian," said Akosua Nyarko, 28, a teacher from the southern city of Cape Coast. "The energy here is amazing... This is the dawn of a new era!" Mohammed Abubakar, a 50-year-old farmer from Tamale in northern Ghana, said he was confident Mahama would prioritise rural development. "Coming here to Accra for this historic event is a dream come true," the farmer said, adding that Mahama's "leadership gives me hope that my children will have a better future". Kwame Ansah, a 34-year-old trader from the city of Kumasi in Ghana's Ashanti region, said he was ready to support Mahama whom he called a "man of the people". "I believe he will deliver on his promise to create more jobs and improve healthcare," Ansah said. The economy became a major election issue after Ghana defaulted on its debt and entered into a \$3bn deal with the IMF.

## Guinea jails opposition figure for 2 years for 'insulting' junta chief

AFP  
Conakry

A Guinean court yesterday handed an opposition figure two years in prison for "insulting and defaming" the head of the ruling junta, prompting condemnation from the opposition and Amnesty International. The sentencing of Aliou Bah, who heads the Liberal Democratic Movement (MoDel), is the latest in a crackdown on freedoms under the junta of General Mamady Doumbouya, who overthrew the civilian president Alpha Conde in a 2021 coup. Since then, a number of opposition figures

have been arrested, brought before the courts or forced into exile. Bah was accused of having "called on (Guinean) religious leaders to break their silence" on the situation in the country during meetings, and of describing the junta's ruling National Committee of Reconciliation and Development (CNRD) as "incompetent", according to his defence. He was arrested in late December as he travelled to neighbouring Sierra Leone and was later detained for "insulting and defaming" Doumbouya. The court in Kaloum, the administrative and business district of the capital Conakry, handed Bah two years in prison on Tuesday, according to an AFP journalist.

During the trial, Bah's lawyers condemned "false allegations" and denounced "a trial of freedom of opinion". Rights group Amnesty International said the sentencing was "contrary to the principles of international law on freedom of expression" and called for Bah to be released immediately in a post on X. Opposition figure and former prime minister Cellou Dalein Diallo denounced a "judicial farce". "This absurd sentence, worthy of the most liberticidal regimes, could only be interpreted as an open declaration of war against freedom of speech and an orchestrated intimidation attempt to silence any opposition," he wrote on Facebook.

# US says kills 10 Al Shebaab fighters in Somalia air strike

AFP  
Nairobi

The US conducted an air strike in southern Somalia, killing 10 members of the Al Shebaab militant group, US military authorities said yesterday. The Al Qaeda-linked Al Shebaab has been waging a bloody insurgency against Somalia's fragile federal government for more than 17 years. The raid took place on December 31 in Beer Xaani, roughly 35 kilometres from the port city of Kismayo town, the US Africa Command (US AFRICOM) said in a statement. It was conducted "at the request" of the Somali government, AFRICOM said. "The initial post-strike assessment indicated the air strike killed 10 Al Shebaab militants while no civilians were harmed," it said. The strike on Al Shebaab fol-

lows an attack by the Islamic State group to the country's north, which was repelled by government forces. AFRICOM will "continue to assess the results of this air strike and will provide additional information as appropriate". Al Shebaab carried out numerous attacks in the capital Mogadishu and other parts of the country last year, while the government pressed on with an offensive aimed at eradicating the militants. Washington has invested massively for several decades in the fight against the armed rebellion. During his first term, US President-elect Donald Trump announced the withdrawal of US troops from Somalia, a decision reversed by his successor Joe Biden. Somalia is one of the poorest nations on the planet, enduring decades of civil war and frequent climate disasters in addition to militants' violence.

# Sao Tome and Principe president dismisses govt, blaming 'inability'

AFP  
Libreville

Sao Tome and Principe's president has dismissed the government over an "inability" to resolve problems facing the tiny West African state and "frequent" absences by the prime minister. The decision by President Carlos Vila Nova was announced in a decree dated Monday and published on the presidency's Facebook page. It highlighted a "notable inability" by Prime Minister Patrice Trovoada's government "to provide solutions" to the country in the face of "the scale of existing problems". It also pointed to "frequent and prolonged periods of absence by

the prime minister... from the national territory". Both the president and premier are members of the centre-right Independent Democratic Action (ADI) party, which won parliamentary elections in 2022. The party has 72 hours to propose a replacement as prime minister, the decree said. Sao Tome, a desperately poor former Portuguese colony in the Gulf of Guinea that gained independence in 1975, has a history of coup attempts. In November 2022, Trovoada announced the army had thwarted a coup. That followed attempted coups in 2003 and 2009, after which the country stabilised and won praise for its political stability and parliamentary democracy.

**At least 46 kidnapped in Nigeria's Zamfara state**

Gunmen kidnapped at least 46 people, including women and children, in a raid on Gana town in Nigeria's northwest Zamfara state, residents and a local traditional leader said yesterday, Reuters reported from Abuja. The attack, which follows a similar mass kidnapping in the state last month, occurred at about 2200 GMT on Sunday, with dozens of gunmen on motorbikes unleashing a barrage of gunfire on the community and setting fire to several homes and businesses, residents said. Zamfara police spokesperson Yazid Abubakar was unavailable for comment when contacted by Reuters. Efforts to reach him by phone and text message were unsuccessful. Northwest Nigeria has been plagued by armed gangs, known locally as bandits, who routinely terrorise communities, leaving a trail of death and kidnapping victims, including residents, farmers, students and motorists, who are often held for ransom.

# Macron irks allies, left with Africa 'forgot to say thank you' jibe

AFP  
N'Djamena

President Emmanuel Macron yesterday faced accusations from France's remaining allies in West Africa of showing contempt towards Africans and from the left at home of neo-colonialism after la-

menting that African countries "forgot to say thank you" for France's decade-long military deployment to fight an insurgency. France has been on the back foot in its former colonial territory of the Sahel region of francophone West Africa after military coups in Mali in 2020, followed by a second putsch in 2021, Burkina Faso in 2022 and Niger in 2023 forced the withdrawal of French troops. As Russia stepped up its influence in all three countries, Paris retained warmer relations with Senegal and Chad but now both of those countries have announced that French troops should leave. France, under then president Francois Hollande, in 2013 began a military operation in Mali and the Sahel region to fight an insurgency. Fifty-eight French troops lost their lives in the operation, which was first known as Serval and then Barkhane. "I think that they forgot to say 'thank you'. It does not matter, it will come with time," Macron said in a speech to French ambassadors on Monday. "We did the right thing," he said of the military deployment, adding that "none" of the states of the Sahel region would be "sovereign" today without that intervention. "We left because there were coups d'etat, because we were there at the request of sovereign states that had asked France to come," Macron added. "France no longer had a place there because we are not the assistants of putschists." Macron also said that it was France that had itself suggested



File photo shows France's President Emmanuel Macron welcoming Chad president Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno (left) prior to a working lunch at the Elysee palace in Paris.

that a reorganisation of its presence was needed in the African countries. "As we are very polite, we let them make the announcement first," he said. Chad's President Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno accused Macron of being "in the wrong era", saying he wanted "to express my outrage" on remarks "which border on contempt for Africa and Africans". At the end of November, Chad, which hosted Paris's last military bases in the Sahel, ended the defence and security agreements that linked it with the former colonial power, saying they were "obsolete".

Around a thousand French military personnel were stationed in the country and are in the process of being withdrawn. The Chad leader added that the decision to end the military co-operation agreement with France was "entirely a sovereign decision of Chad. There is no ambiguity in this." Chad's acting foreign minister Abderaman Koulamallah earlier said that the remarks showed a "contemptuous attitude towards Africa and Africans," adding that French leaders "had to learn to respect Africans". Koulamallah noted the "key role"

played by Africa and Chad in the liberation of France during World War I and II, which "France has never truly recognised". Senegal Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko meanwhile lashed out at Macron for suggesting African countries needed to show gratitude towards France. "France has neither the capacity nor the legitimacy to ensure Africa's security and sovereignty. On the contrary, it has often contributed to destabilising certain African countries such as Libya with disastrous consequences for the stability and security of the Sahel," he said. Also referring to sacrifices of African troops in the fight against Nazi Germany in World War II, he added: "If African soldiers, sometimes forcibly mobilised, mistreated and ultimately betrayed, had not deployed during World War II to defend France, it would perhaps still be German today." Senegal announced late last year the end of all French and foreign military presence on its soil in 2025. In France, the hard-left France Unbowed (LFI) said the president's remarks reveal "a neo-colonial paternalism that is simply intolerable." "Such remarks are politically inconsistent and diplomatically totally irresponsible and further weaken our relations with the nations of West Africa," it added. A French diplomatic source, asking not to be named, said that Macron's quote had been taken "out of context" and had been targeting the countries where the coups took place, especially Mali, rather than Chad or Senegal.

**ANNOUNCEMENT**

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holder of  
**Nepal Passport No. PA2616654**  
**QID No. 27252403971**  
  
hereby change my name  
  
from  
**HIRA BAHADUR DAMAI**  
  
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**HIRA BAHADUR PARIYAR**

Any objection, please contact  
**THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE FOR NATIONALITY AFFAIRS**  
within 15 days from the publication of this notice.



# Meta shelves US fact-checking ahead of Trump’s return to White House

Reuters/AFP  
Washington

Social media company Meta Platforms has scrapped its US fact-checking programme and reduced curbs on discussions around contentious topics such as immigration and gender identity, bowing to criticism from conservatives as President-elect Donald Trump prepares to take office for a second time.

“We’re going to get rid of fact-checkers (that) have just been too politically biased and have destroyed more trust than they’ve created, especially in the US,” Meta founder and chief executive Mark Zuckerberg said in a post.

The move is Meta’s biggest overhaul of its approach to managing political content on its services in recent memory and comes as Zuckerberg has signalled a desire to mend fences with Trump.

The changes will affect Facebook, Instagram and Threads, three of the world’s biggest social media platforms with more than 3bn users globally.

Last week, Meta elevated Republican policy executive Joel Kaplan as global affairs head and on Monday announced it had elected Dana White, chief executive of Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) and a close friend of Trump, to its board.

“We’ve reached a point where it’s just too many mistakes and too much censorship. It’s time to get back to our roots around free expression,” Zuckerberg said in a video.

He acknowledged the role of the recent US elections in his thinking, saying that they “feel like a cultural tipping point, towards once again prioritising speech”.

In place of a formal fact-checking programme to address dubious claims posted on Meta’s platforms, Zuckerberg instead plans to implement a system of “commu-

nity notes” similar to that used on Elon Musk-owned X.

Meta also will focus its automated systems on removing “high-severity violations” and illegal content such as terrorism and illicit drugs, Zuckerberg said.

It will stop proactively scanning for hate speech and other types of rules-breaking, and review such posts only in response to user reports.

The company will move safety teams overseeing content policies and review out of California, including to Texas, he added.

A Meta spokesperson declined to say which specific teams would be moving to Texas and whether any would be moving to other places.

The spokesperson also declined to cite examples of mistakes or bias on the part of fact-checkers.

The demise of the fact-checking programme, started in 2016, caught partner organisations by surprise.

“We didn’t know that this move was happening and it comes as a shock to us. This is definitely going to affect us,” said Jesse Stiller, managing editor at Check Your Fact.

The head of the International Fact-Checking Network, Angie Drobnic Holan, challenged Zuckerberg’s characterisation of its members as biased or censorious.

“Fact-checking journalism has never censored or removed posts; it’s added information and context to controversial claims, and it’s debunked hoax content and conspiracies. The fact-checkers used by Meta follow a Code of Principles requiring nonpartisanship and transparency,” she said in a statement.

Other partners, including AFP, did not immediately respond to requests for comment, while Reuters declined to comment.

Meta’s independent Oversight Board welcomed the move. Zuckerberg in recent months has ex-

pressed regret over certain content moderation actions on topics including the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

Meta also donated \$1mn to Trump’s inaugural fund, in a departure from its past practice.

“This is a major step back for content moderation at a time when disinformation and harmful content are evolving faster than ever,” said Ross Burley, co-founder for non-profit Centre for Information Resilience. “This move seems more about political appeasement than smart policy.”

For now, Meta is only planning the changes for the US market, with no immediate plans to end its fact-checking programme in places like the EU that take a more active approach to regulation of tech companies, a spokesperson told Reuters.

“They have come a long way – Meta. The man (Zuckerberg) was very impressive,” Trump said when asked about the company’s plan to end fact-checking.

## Venezuela opposition leader meets Biden

Reuters/AFP  
Washington/Caracas

Venezuelan opposition leader Edmundo Gonzalez, who says he won a July presidential election and is recognised by multiple countries as president-elect, has said that he had a fruitful meeting with US President Joe Biden and spoke at length with President-elect Donald Trump’s security adviser.

“The people of Venezuela deserve a peaceful transfer of power to the true winner of their presidential election,” Biden said on X, saying that Gonzalez should be taking the oath of office in four days, when incumbent President Nicolas Maduro is set to officially begin his third term in office.

Gonzalez’s visit to Washington comes as part of a regional tour just days before Maduro, recognised by Venezuela’s top court and electoral authority as the winner of the election, is set to be inaugurated on January 10.

“We had a long, fruitful and cordial conversation with President Biden and his team,” Gonzalez told journalists after meeting Biden at the White House.

The Venezuelan government said in a statement it was “grotesque” that Biden was backing a “violent project” to usurp the country’s democracy.

The opposition has published detailed vote tallies it says show a resounding win for Gonzalez and international observers have said the vote was unfair.

The government has not published detailed vote tallies.

Later in the afternoon Gonzalez said on X that he



Gonzalez with Biden at the White House. - Reuters

had a long meeting with Mike Waltz, Trump’s national security adviser.

“Among various issues that we talked about in detail was the civic protest of Venezuelans this January 9,” Gonzalez added. “He guaranteed that the United States and the world will be alert about what happens in our country.”

Maduro’s government has said repeatedly that the arrest of Gonzalez, who has been living in exile in Spain, will be sought if the opposition leader enters Venezuela.

Popular opposition figurehead Maria Corina Machado has meanwhile called for mass protests tomorrow, the day before the inauguration of Venezuela’s next president.



A person is seen walking through a snowbank on the National Mall in Washington, DC. - AFP

## Frigid temps hit US cities behind major winter storm

AFP  
Washington

Frigid temperatures across a large US area complicated efforts yesterday at restoring power and clearing roads after a major winter storm plowed through the central plains to the Atlantic coast.

The storm, which contributed to at least five traffic deaths, blanketed cities from Wichita to the US capital Washington in snow and ice, prompting mass travel disruptions and closures.

More than 190,000 customers remained without electricity from Missouri to Virginia as of morning yesterday, according to the Power-

outage.us tracker, with temperatures below freezing across the area.

Air travel was broadly returning to normal after several days of widespread cancellations and delays.

Schools and federal government offices in the US capital area remained closed, after an uncommon accumulation of several inches of snow.

In particularly hard-hit Louisville, Kentucky, Mayor Craig Greenberg implored residents to continue avoiding unnecessary travel as crews continued to clear highways and roads.

The National Weather Service (NWS) branch located in the city warned that with cold air settling

in behind the storm, temperatures could fall into the single digits and possibly below zero degrees Fahrenheit (-18° Celsius) by tonight.

Compounding the possible threats, it warned another winter system was likely to deliver more snow to the region Friday into Saturday.

Chilly winds blowing over the Great Lakes were also expected to bring additional so-called lake effect snow to Pennsylvania and New York, where some areas already saw multiple feet in the previous few days.

Texas, which typically experiences mild winters, was also under winter storm watch for a system set to move into the area late today.

The state’s NWS Fort Worth office said snow accumulations of 3-6” (8-15cm) could be expected in and north of the heavily populated Dallas area.

Texas Governor Greg Abbott said on Monday that he had activated emergency response resources ahead of the storm.

## ‘More than 5,600 killed last year in Haiti gang violence’

Soaring gang violence in Haiti left more than 5,600 people dead last year – over 1,000 more than in 2023 – while thousands more were injured or kidnapped, the United Nations said yesterday.

Gangs control most of the capital Port-au-Prince. The poor Caribbean country has been mired for decades by political instability, made worse in recent years by gangs that have grown in strength.

“These figures alone cannot capture the absolute horrors being perpetrated in Haiti but they show the unrelenting violence to which people are being subjected,” UN rights chief Volker Turk said in a statement.

Despite a Kenyan-led police support mission, backed by the United States and UN, violence has continued to burgeon.

Yesterday’s statement said at least 207 people were killed in early December in a massacre orchestrated by the leader of the powerful Wharf Jeremie gang in the Cite Soleil area of the capital.

Many of the victims were older people accused of involvement in voodoo and accused by a gang leader of poisoning his child.

The suspects were taken to a “training centre” where many were dismembered or burned after being killed.

The UN rights office in 2024 had documented 315 lynchings of gang members and people allegedly associated with gangs, on some occasions reportedly facilitated by Haitian police officers.

In addition, it said, there were 281 cases of alleged summary executions involving specialised police units last year.

“It has long been clear that impunity for human rights violations and abuses, as well as corruption, remain prevalent in Haiti,” Turk said.

“Restoring the rule of law must be a priority,” he said, calling for the Kenyan-led mission to be granted “the logistical and financial support it requires to successfully implement its mandate”. - AFP

# Trump sets out his territorial ambitions

AFP/Reuters  
Palm Beach

Donald Trump threatened military action to secure the Panama Canal and economic force against neighbouring Canada, in a press conference yesterday, a day after Congress certified his election victory.

The Republican billionaire had gathered reporters in southern Florida to announce a \$20bn Emirati investment in US technology but his remarks quickly became a rally-style rant as he returned at length to many of his campaign themes.

“Since we won the election, the whole perception of the whole world is different. People from other countries have called me. They said, ‘Thank you, thank you,’” Trump said as he set out his agenda for the coming four years.

However, the president-elect hammered President Joe Biden over the 2025 transition, claiming that the White House was “trying everything they can to make it more difficult”.

Trump, 78, has not acknowledged his 2020 defeat and refused to participate in the transfer of power to Biden.

On the international stage, the incoming president announced that he is planning to rename the Gulf of Mexico the “Gulf of America” and threatened the US’s southern neighbour with massive tariffs if it does not halt illegal entries across the border.

“It covers a lot of territory,” he said of the Gulf. “‘The Gulf of America.’ What a beautiful name.”

His promise to rename the Gulf echoed his previous vow to revert the name of Denali, the highest mountain peak in North America, to Mount McKinley.

Former president Barack Obama changed the name of the Alaskan mountain in deference to Native Americans.

Typically, the US Board of Geographic Names sets geographic names, though presidents have also renamed geographic features via executive action.

On the Panama Canal, he repeated his criticism of the decision to allow local control of the Central American waterway by then-president Jimmy Carter, who died in December.

Mexican and Panamanian authorities did not immediately comment.

Panamanian President Jose Raul Mulino has previously rejected the notion of turning the canal back to the US, which had owned it before handing over control to Panama in 1999.

Asked whether he could assure the world that he would not use



Trump at Mar-a-Lago in Palm Beach. - Reuters

military or economic coercion as he tries to gain control of the Panama Canal and Greenland, Trump said: “No, I can’t assure you on either of those two. But I can say this, we need them for economic security.”

Denmark has said that Greenland is not for sale.

Asked if he would use military force to bring Canada to heel, the incoming president said “no, economic force”.

As with many of Trump’s pronouncements, it was difficult at times to separate humour or bombast from genuine policy, but Trump said that eliminating the “artificially drawn” US-Canada border would be a boon to national security.

He hammered Biden over the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and US foreign policy in Ukraine and Syria, repeating a familiar false claim that America “had no wars” in his first term.

“We defeated ISIS. We had no wars. Now I’m going into a world that’s burning with Russia and Ukraine and Israel,” Trump said, referring to the Islamic State (IS) militant group.

Much of the event was focused on criticism of Biden, whom Trump baselessly accused of being behind the multiple legal challenges he faces – including the possible release of a federal report into his efforts to overturn 2020 election and sentencing set for Friday in his New York hush money case.

Trump, who returns to the White House on January 20, hit his rival on inflation and vowed to overturn the Democrat’s executive order banning offshore oil and gas development off swathes of US coastline.

Trump also said that North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) members should spend 5% of their gross domestic product on defence, a significant increase from the current 2% target.

“I think Nato should have 5%,” he said. “They can all afford it, but they should be at 5%, not 2%.”

The press conference came a day after Congress counted and certified Trump’s state-by-state

### New York appeals court denies Trump bid to halt hush money sentencing

A New York appellate court has denied President-elect Donald Trump’s bid to halt his sentencing on Friday for his conviction on criminal charges stemming from hush money paid to an adult entertainment actor. Trump’s request to the Appellate Division, a mid-level state appeals court, represented a last-ditch effort by Trump to block the trial judge’s ruling on Monday to proceed with the sentencing, scheduled for 10 days before his inauguration. In his Monday ruling, Justice Juan Merchan rejected a request from Trump’s lawyers to delay the sentencing while they appealed two of the judge’s previous rulings upholding the Manhattan jury’s May guilty verdict on 34 felony counts of falsifying business records. The judge called Trump’s delay request mostly “a repetition of the arguments he has raised numerous times in the past”. In scheduling Trump’s sentencing for Friday, Merchan said he was not inclined to send Trump to prison.

The judge said a sentence of unconditional discharge, effectively putting a judgment of guilt on his record without a fine or probation, would be the most practical approach given Trump’s looming return to the presidency. - Reuters

electoral college votes, officially naming him the next president, on the fourth anniversary of the 2021 US Capitol riot by a pro-Trump mob.

Trump has promised to pardon many of his supporters who stormed Congress and was asked if that would extend to people who had assaulted police.

He dodged the question and claimed falsely that the crowd at the Capitol had been unarmed.

Trump Jr visits Greenland - Page 11

## Smith ‘blocked’ from releasing report on probe

A US judge temporarily blocked Special Counsel Jack Smith from releasing a report on his investigations into President-elect Donald Trump for his mishandling of classified documents and attempts to overturn the 2020 presidential election, a court order showed yesterday.

US District Judge Aileen Cannon, who presided over the now-dismissed case accusing Trump of illegally holding onto classified documents, directed the Justice Department not to release the report until a federal appeals court rules on a request from Trump’s two former co-defendants in the case.

Lawyers for the co-defendants, Walt Nauta and Carlos De Oliveira, who were charged with obstructing the documents investigation, moved late on Monday to block release of the report.

Nauta and De Oliveira argued the report would improperly interfere in their case, which remains ongoing.

Trump’s lawyers separately wrote to Attorney-General Merrick Garland to urge him not to publish the report, arguing that it would interfere with the presidential transition.

Smith led both the classified documents case against Trump and a second prosecution accusing Trump of attempting to overturn his defeat in the 2020 election. Both cases have since been dropped.

Justice Department regulations require Smith, who plans to wrap up his probe before Trump returns to office on January 20, to submit a final report to Garland.

Garland has previously pledged to make public all reports from special counsels during his tenure.

Cannon, a Trump appointee, dismissed the case against Trump and his two co-defendants in July 2024 after ruling that Smith was improperly appointed.

Cannon said her order blocking publication of the report would hold until three days after the Atlanta-based US Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit rules on the request from Trump’s former co-defendants.

Nauta and De Oliveira have asked the appeals court to stop the Justice Department from releasing the report until it rules on the underlying issue of Smith’s appointment, a decision that may take months. - Reuters



# Former Cambodian opposition MP shot dead in Bangkok: Thai media

AFP  
Bangkok

A former Cambodian opposition MP and French citizen was shot dead by a gunman on a motorcycle in Bangkok yesterday, Thai media reported. “Lim Kimya... died at the scene. Officers with the Metropolitan Police Bureau have launched a manhunt for the assassin,” the *Bangkok Post* reported, adding that the deceased was a dual Cambodian-French national. Thai police confirmed the death of a Cambodian man without identifying him as Lim Kimya, telling AFP “we are currently investigating the motives and will provide more information at a later time”. Multiple Thai media outlets reported that a gunman on a motorcycle opened fire on Lim Kimya as he arrived in the Thai capital from the Cambodian city of Siem Reap by bus, accompanied by his French wife and a Cambodian uncle. An AFP photojournalist saw

blood at the scene near the popular Khao San Road area of Bangkok. “This brazen shooting of a former CNRP MP on the streets of Bangkok has all the hallmarks of a political assassination, and looks to be a significant escalation in the use of transnational repression,” said Phil Robertson, director of Asia Human Rights Labour Advocates. “The French government must aggressively pursue justice for their citizen, Lim Kimya, and leave no stone unturned in pressing the Thai government to effectively and thoroughly investigate this assassination, no matter where the path leads.” Lim Kimya was elected as an opposition member of Cambodia’s parliament following a general poll in 2013 in which the ruling party under former leader Hun Sen almost lost to its then-rival, the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP). The CNRP, which was founded in 2012 by opposition leaders Sam Rainsy and Kem Sokha and once



Central Investigation Bureau members stand near the spot where a Cambodian MP was reportedly shot, in Bangkok yesterday.



Blood is pictured where a Cambodian MP was reportedly shot, in Bangkok yesterday.

considered the sole viable opponent to the ruling Cambodian People’s Party (CPP), was dissolved by court order in 2017. Scores of opposition politicians and MPs, including Lim Kimya, were banned from political activities following the party’s dissolution. Rights groups have accused Hun Sen — who

ruled Cambodia for nearly four decades before stepping down in 2023 and handing power to his eldest son, Hun Manet — of using the legal system to crush any opposition to his rule. Scores of opposition politicians and activists were convicted and jailed during his time in power, with challengers forced to flee and

freedom of expression stifled. Kem Sokha was arrested and was sentenced in 2023 to 27 years in prison for treason — a charge he has repeatedly denied — and was immediately placed under house arrest. Sam Rainsy lives in exile in France. Despite holding French citizenship, Lim Kimya did not join the dozens of lawmakers who fled

abroad after Kem Sokha was detained. Lim Kimya told AFP at the time in Phnom Penh: “I will never give up politics”. His fatal shooting comes the same day that the still influential Hun Sen called for a new law to label anyone who attempts to topple his son Hun Manet’s government as “terrorists”.

# Quake in China’s Tibet kills 126 with tremors felt in Nepal, India

AFP  
Beijing

A devastating earthquake in China’s remote Tibet region killed at least 126 people and damaged thousands of buildings on Tuesday, state media reported, with tremors also felt in neighbouring Nepal’s capital Kathmandu and parts of India. Videos published by China’s state broadcaster CCTV showed houses destroyed with walls torn apart. Rescue workers waded through rubble strewn across the ruins in the aftermath, footage showed, while some gave locals thick blankets to keep warm in subzero temperatures. The quake struck rural, high-altitude Tingri county, about 80km north of Mount Everest near China’s border with Nepal, at around 9am on Tuesday. “Here the houses are made from dirt so when the earthquake came... lots of houses collapsed,” said 34-year-old Sangji Dangzhi, whose supermarket in Tingri suffered considerable damage. Speaking to AFP by phone, Sangji described the situation as “very serious”, with ambulances taking people to hospital throughout the day. Surveillance images published by CCTV showed people running through a store’s aisles as shelves shook violently, sending objects like toys tumbling to the ground. At least 126 people have been confirmed dead and 188 others injured as of 7pm, CCTV said. Twenty-eight people in critical condition were transferred to hospital for treatment and 3,609 houses had collapsed, it added. The China Earthquake Networks Center (CENC) measured the quake’s magnitude as 6.8, while the US Geological Survey reported it as 7.1. When tourist Meng Linggang arrived in the town of Lhatse, 65km from the epicentre, “the buildings had cracked open”. “Some of the older houses collapsed, and a large part of the



Rescue teams work amid rubble in the aftermath of an earthquake in a location given as Shigatse City, Tibet Autonomous Region, China, yesterday.

buildings made from bricks had cracked open, with big fissures,” the 23-year-old told AFP. Videos geolocated by AFP to Lhatse showed debris scattered in front of streetside eateries. “There were quite a few (rescue vehicles). One after the other they arrived,” Meng added. The area most affected is surrounded by mountainous terrain on the Chinese side of Mount Everest. Tingri, the epicentre, is home to around 62,000 people, and is much less developed than urban centres like Tibet’s capital Lhasa. Many of the fallen houses appeared to be constructed using traditional materials such as stone, mud bricks and wooden beams. CCTV, citing the emergency command centre, reported that the earthquake emergency response status in the region was raised to the highest level. Chinese President Xi Jinping has called for “all-out search and rescue efforts, minimising casualties to the greatest extent possible, properly resettling affected residents, and ensuring their safety and warmth through the winter”, the state broadcaster said.

Temperatures in Tingri are projected to drop to -16C overnight, according to the China Meteorological Administration. Authorities said more than 3,400 rescuers and over 340 medical workers had been deployed. Aid including cotton tents, quilts and cold-weather equipment had been dispatched by central authorities, state news agency Xinhua said. Tingri is under the administration of the prefecture-level city of Shigatse, home to the traditional seat of the Panchen Lama, one of the most important spiritual figures in Tibetan Buddhism after the Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama said he was “deeply saddened”. “I offer my prayers for those who have lost their lives and extend my wishes for a swift recovery to all who have been injured,” the exiled spiritual leader said in a statement. Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed his “sincerest condolences”, saying Russia “shares the grief of those who have lost relatives and close ones”. As well as Kathmandu, areas around Lobuche — in the high



Damage in Lhatse County in Shigatse city in China’s Tibet.

mountains near Everest in Nepal — were also rattled by the tremor and aftershocks. “It shook quite strongly here, everyone is awake,” said government official Jagat Prasad Bhusal in Namche region, which lies closer to Everest. Security forces had been deployed but no damage or deaths had been reported so far, Nepali home ministry spokesman Rishi Ram Tiwari said. Nepal lies on a major geological faultline where the Indian tectonic plate pushes up into the Eurasian plate, forming the Himalayas, and earthquakes are a regular occurrence. In 2015, nearly 9,000 people

died and more than 22,000 were injured when a 7.8-magnitude quake struck Nepal, destroying more than half a million homes. Some tremors were felt in Bihar state in India but no injuries were reported. Tuesday’s quake was the most powerful recorded within a 200-kilometre (124-mile) radius in the last five years, the CENC said. A quake in December 2023 in northwest China killed 148 people and displaced thousands in Gansu province. It was China’s deadliest since 2014, when more than 600 people were killed in southwestern Yunnan province.

## Singapore empowers police to freeze bank accounts in scam crackdown

Reuters  
Singapore

Singapore passed a new law yesterday allowing police to freeze bank accounts of scam victims as a “last resort” measure to prevent further losses. The law empowers police to issue restriction orders to banks if they assess that it is necessary to protect a victim who is likely to make bank transfers to a scammer, withdraw money and give it to a scammer, or apply for draw-down from a credit facility to benefit a fraudster. The wealthy Asian financial hub has been a major target of scammers, with 26,587 cases recorded in the first half of 2024 accounting for S\$385.6mn (\$283.34mn) in losses, according to police statistics. Scam victims lost S\$651.8mn in 2023, with a record loss of S\$660.7mn in 2022. Police will consider factors such as whether or not the victim has transferred money to the scammer and is still communicating with the scammer. These curb orders last for 30 days and police can renew the restriction up to five times or lift the order. The orders will by default be issued to Singapore’s seven major retail banks: OCBC, DBS, UOB, Maybank, Standard Chartered, Citibank and HSBC. Other banks can also be included. Sun Xueling, the minister of state for home affairs, said the intent was to “ensure that this is done as quickly as possible” and restriction orders should be imposed or lifted within hours and not days. “Speed is of the essence in order to protect these individuals and minimise losses, which in some cases might involve all of the victim’s life savings,” Sun said in parliament on Tuesday. She added that authorities could not succour the victim indefinitely and if that person persisted in making transfers to scammers after the maximum restriction order period, “the responsibility must lie with the individual”.

# South Korea investigators get new warrant to arrest President Yoon

AFP  
Seoul

South Korean anti-graft investigators secured a new court-ordered arrest warrant Tuesday for impeached President Yoon Suk-yeol, whose failed martial law bid threw the country into turmoil. The former star prosecutor has refused questioning three times after his bungled December 3 martial law decree plunged South Korea into its worst political crisis in decades. As anti-graft officials and police got a fresh warrant from the same court that issued the first order, Yoon was believed to be holed up in his residence surrounded by hundreds of guards preventing his detention. “The arrest warrant re-requested for the suspect Yoon was issued today in the afternoon,” the Joint Investigation Headquarters said in a statement. Seoul Western District Court

declined to confirm when contacted by AFP. The Corruption Investigation Office (CIO), which is leading the probe into the president, has kept secret the length of the second warrant it requested after an initial seven-day warrant expired at the end of Monday. If investigators are able to detain Yoon, he would become the first sitting South Korean president to be arrested. But they would only have 48 hours to either request another arrest warrant, in order to keep him in detention, or be forced to release him. Yoon’s legal team did not immediately respond to a request for comment late yesterday. But after news of the fresh warrant broke, Yoon supporters said they would descend on his residence in the capital Seoul to rally around the impeached leader. “We just heard that the new warrant was issued by the court. We are heading to Yoon’s residence right now. Those living in the countryside will join us in



A large screen shows an image of impeached South Korea president Yoon Suk-yeol as light sticks held by his supporters are seen during a rally near his residence in Seoul.

the early morning as well,” Rhee Kang-san, 35, told AFP. Opposition party lawmaker Yoon Kun-young told local media Yoon’s residence was “turning into a fortress”, claiming guards were installing barbed wire and vehicle

barricades. The anti-graft officials have sought more time and help because of the difficulties they have faced, including being met by hundreds of security forces when they entered Yoon’s presidential residence on Friday.

Yoon is being investigated on charges of insurrection and, if formally arrested and convicted, faces prison or, at worst, the death penalty. His lawyers have repeatedly said the initial warrant was “unlawful”, pledging to take further legal action against it. They have argued the CIO lacks the authority to investigate because insurrection is not included in the list of offences it can probe. South Korea has found itself in uncharted territory regardless of the outcome of Yoon’s case — its sitting president will either be arrested, or he will have evaded court-ordered detention. Experts said the chances of Yoon’s arrest were rising. “I assume that the arrest will happen. A number of conservative politicians already disowned Yoon — to them now, he is more of a liability rather than an asset,” Vladimir Tikhonov, professor of Korean studies at the University of Oslo, told AFP. The new warrant has left those opposed to Yoon more positive

that he will be brought to justice. “We will all stand together in this fight. I truly hope for Yoon’s arrest,” said Bae Hoon, 46, who had stayed in front of Yoon’s residence for two nights in frigid weather. CIO chief Oh Dong-woon apologised on Tuesday for the failed first arrest attempt, saying he was “heartbroken”. He also said he was unsure if Yoon was still inside the presidential residence. “I am considering various possibilities,” he said in response to a lawmaker when asked if Yoon had fled. Yoon’s presidential guards refused to budge during a six-hour standoff at his residence on Friday. The CIO was set up less than four years ago and has fewer than 100 staff, who are yet to prosecute a single case. South Korea’s opposition Democratic Party told AFP on Monday it had submitted a legal complaint against acting president Choi Sang-mok for “dereliction of duty” after he failed to support Yoon’s arrest as they requested.



## Hit by rain and snow



A drone view shows floodwater covering Worcestershire New Road cricket ground, the home of Worcestershire County Cricket Club, in Worcester, Britain.



Snow and ice cover a car parked in a car park at the summit of Holme Moss in the Peak District, in northern England, after snow and rain continued to fall across parts of the United Kingdom.

# Church of England faces uncharted waters as Welby’s tenure ends

Reuters  
London

Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby ended his duties on Monday after quitting amid an abuse cover-up scandal, but his interim successor is facing scrutiny in a similar case, leaving the Church of England on uncertain ground.

Welby, 69, announced his resignation in November after an independent inquiry found he

had taken insufficient action to bring to justice one of the institution’s worst abusers, a man who volunteered at Christian summer camps decades ago. The man, John Smyth, died in 2018.

Welby, head of the Church of England and leader of the 85mn Anglicans worldwide, said on resigning that he must take “personal and institutional responsibility” for a lack of action on the “heinous abuses”.

He laid down his bishop’s crozier, or pastoral staff, on the altar at

the centuries-old Lambeth Palace in London on Monday, a symbolic act marking the end of his ministry as the archbishop of Canterbury, the latest statement from his office said.

The Church is grappling with declining religious faith in Britain and internal divisions. A British Social Attitudes (BSA) report in 2019 said Britons were becoming steadily more secular, with just over one third of the public identifying as Christian. In 1983, when the BSA began measuring

religious identity, that figure was 66%. Archbishop of York Stephen Cottrell, the Church’s second most senior cleric, will take over Welby’s official functions until Welby’s successor is picked. That process could take six months. Cottrell is himself facing scrutiny following a BBC report last month that said he had let a priest keep his job despite knowing the Church had barred him from being alone with children, and that he had paid compensation to a sexual abuse victim.

Cottrell has apologised for not

having acted sooner on the case, saying he suspended the priest, David Tudor, at the first opportunity. The Church in October banned Tudor for life from ministry.

Reuters has not been able to contact Tudor. The Church’s Christmas festivities were overshadowed by the scandals. Cottrell said in his Christmas Day sermon that the Church must “strip off her finery and kneel in penitence and adoration”.

One of Welby’s predecessors,

George Carey, stepped down as a priest last month following allegations of mishandling Tudor’s case. “The current situation creates a worrying vulnerability for the church,” said Linda Woodhead, head of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at King’s College London. “The church could soon find itself with no archbishop at the helm.”

“This would create significant problems, even in the safeguarding realm, let alone other aspects of church governance.”

# Hundreds of young workers sue McDonald’s alleging harassment

AFP  
London

More than 700 young workers are suing McDonald’s UK after widespread harassment claims were exposed in the media in 2023, law firm Leigh Day said yesterday. Leigh Day is seeking compensation from the US fast-food giant on behalf of current and former

staff who were aged under 20 when working at McDonald’s. “Clients have described experiences of discrimination, racism, ableism, and harassment,” the legal firm said in a press release, saying more than 450 restaurants were involved.

It follows a BBC investigation in July 2023 highlighting the testimonies of those affected. The fast-food chain is one of Britain’s largest employers with around 170,000 staff, many of whom are

young workers, including teenagers.

“Those allegations described are abhorrent, unacceptable and there is no place for them in McDonald’s,” Alistair Macrow, chief executive of McDonald’s UK and Ireland, told British MPs yesterday when questioned about the claims during a hearing over the separate issue of employment rights. He added that 29 workers have been dismissed over sexual harassment

allegations in the past year. Macrow told a parliamentary committee in November 2023 that he was “absolutely determined to root out any of these behaviours” and the firm opened a specialist unit to investigate the allegations.

But unions told the same parliamentary committee it had not improved the situation. The fast-food giant also said it had set up an online system to allow employees at company-owned and franchised

restaurants to speak up confidentially. The law firm said another young worker claimed to have been repeatedly pestered for sex, and another claim involved a manager touching young staff inappropriately during shifts. McDonald’s UK faced harassment claims in 2019 when the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union alleged that more than 1,000 female employees had been victims of sexual harassment and abuse.

## Sri Lanka president to visit China ahead of budget

AFP  
Colombo

Sri Lanka’s president will travel to the island’s largest bilateral lender China next week ahead of his first national budget, the information minister said yesterday.

The visit comes a month ahead of President Anura Kumara Dissanayake’s first budget, which is expected to outline his plans to sustain the country’s painful recovery from its worst economic meltdown in 2022.

Dissanayake will begin a three-day visit on January 14, said Nalinda Jayatissa. It will be his second foreign trip - after visiting regional powerhouse India last month - since being elected in September.

## The visit comes a month ahead of President Anura Kumara Dissanayake’s first budget, which is expected to outline his recovery plans from its worst economic meltdown in 2022

China accounted for more than half of Sri Lanka’s \$14bn debt borrowed from other governments at the time the island defaulted on its sovereign debt in 2022 when Colombo ran out of foreign exchange to pay for essential imports such as food, fuel and medicines.

Leftist Dissanayake has already endorsed a \$2.9bn, four-year IMF bailout loan program negotiated by his predecessor in 2023, and plans to maintain high taxation to shore up state revenue.

After much delay, the Sri Lankan government concluded a restructuring of both bilateral loans and international sovereign bonds last month, ending its bankrupt status.

Official sources said Sri Lanka was likely to seek more financial assistance from China. The two countries are also due to sign several agreements, including closer cooperation between state media organisations.

Dissanayake will be accompanied by Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath and Transport Minister Bimal Rathnayake.

## Ski resort in Gulmarg



Skiers ski in a snow-covered field in Gulmarg, a ski resort and one of the main tourist attractions in Indian-administered Kashmir.

## Indonesia welcomes Brics entry

Indonesia welcomed yesterday Brazil’s announcement that it had become a full member of Brics, a bloc of developing economies increasingly seen as a counterweight to the West. The Brazilian foreign ministry said in a statement on Monday that southeast Asia’s most populous country “shares with the other members the will to reform the institutions of global governance and contribute positively to co-operation within the Global South”.

Brazil, which holds the rotating presidency of the grouping in 2025, said Indonesia’s bid to join the bloc had been approved during a summit in 2023 in Johannesburg. Indonesia in turn said it “welcomes” the announcement of its inclusion.

“This achievement shows Indonesia’s increasingly active role in global issues and commitment to strengthening multilateral co-operation to create a global structure that is more inclusive and fair,” the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement on Tuesday. Brics was created in 2009 by

founding members Brazil, Russia, India and China. South Africa joined the following year. The bloc was expanded again last year with Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia and the United Arab Emirates becoming full members.

Indonesia sees its Brics membership as “a strategic step to improve the collaborations and co-operation with other developing nations, based on the principle of equality, mutual respect, and sustainable development”, the Jakarta statement said.

It also expressed Indonesia’s “gratitude to Russia”, the 2024 Brics chair, “for its support and leadership in facilitating Indonesia’s joining”, as well as to Brazil. During its presidency, Brazil aims to boost co-operation between countries of the “Global South” and reform multilateral institutions. One of the objectives, according to the government of left-wing President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, is the “development of means of payment” to facilitate trade between member countries. **AFP**

# Top brands bought cotton grown by children in India

AFP  
New Delhi

Some of the best-known global apparel brands procured cotton grown in Indian farms that employ child and bonded labourers, a report by a US-based rights group alleged yesterday.

An investigation by Transparentem into the working conditions on 90 cotton farms in India’s Madhya Pradesh state between 2022 and 2023 revealed “widespread use of child labour and illegal adolescent labour”,

the New York-based non-profit said.

Transparentem said the “grave abuses” unearthed by its investigation “appear to be endemic to the region” and likely extended to other farms in the area.

Under Indian law, children under 14 are prohibited from working in most situations, while those between 14 and 18 are barred from being employed in hazardous occupations.

But a mix of lax enforcement and poverty means more than 10mn Indian children between five and 14 continue to work, most of them in the farming sec-

tor. The investigators also found “indicators of forced labour” and “abusive working conditions”. Many are trapped by the long-outlawed practice of bonded labour, dubbed “debt slavery” by rights campaigners, in which victims are forced to work to pay back borrowed cash while interest keeps mounting.

In its 2024 “List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor”, the US Department of Labor identified child labour in cotton produced in India.

According to Transparentem, the investigated farms supplied their produce to three Indian

companies. They in turn sold cotton-based products to several high-profile buyers such as Adidas, H&M and The Gap.

All three companies told Transparentem that they were part of sourcing arrangements that ensured their cotton inputs are not linked to forced labour.

Transparentem said in late 2023 it contacted 60 international buyers and the three Indian suppliers they sourced material from “to present the findings of its investigation and provide recommendations for remediation”.

Several of them responded by

saying that they were already participating in ethical cotton-sourcing initiatives, the advocacy group said, adding that “many started collaborating on responsible actions”.

The owners of the investigated farms, the report said, also sold cotton in the open market - therefore making it “highly likely” that many of the farms are “connected to the supply chains of several other companies” in the country.

“The investigation uncovered grave abuses that appear to be endemic to the region,” Transparentem said.



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GULF TIMES

Euro-dollar 1:1  
seen as Trump 2.0  
set to begin

The euro has been blighted by the prospect that Europe's economy will suffer if President-elect Donald Trump imposes tariffs on US imports, potentially leading policymakers to cut interest rates more aggressively. Signs of stagnating growth in Germany and France, the bloc's two biggest economies, have also contributed to the selling. The common currency kicked off the year on a grim note, and hedge funds see it hurtling toward parity with the dollar – if not lower – in the coming months.

The negative sentiment has been building for a while, with hedge funds having held bearish positions on the common currency since late September, according to Commodity Futures Trading Commission data. Asset managers have also pared bullish bets.

The euro declined about 1.3% last week to trail all but two of its Group-of-10 peers as jitters about Europe's economic growth outlook and the prospect of more US tariffs rattled investors.

Selling momentum may gain traction if the region's growth prospects weaken further, with the common currency ranking among the most liquid assets to trade.

Since the euro came into existence in 1999, the currency has traded at equal value to the US dollar only a handful of times.

The last instance was in 2022, after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine sparked an energy crisis in Europe and provoked fears of a recession, plunging the currency pair to a 1:1 ratio for the first time in two decades.

Europe is one of  
the regions most  
vulnerable to  
Trump's threat to  
increase tariffs  
on US imports

market's already weakening economy.

The euro's weakness is also related to the broad-based strength of the US dollar. Demand for assets denominated in the US currency has been growing on expectations that the Trump administration's policies will stoke economic growth and corporate profits in the US.

The relative outperformance of US assets is a trend that's weighed on most major currencies in the year to date.

In the wake of the US election, at least 10 banks are now expecting a weaker euro, with some even predicting a move below the 1:1 threshold in 2025.

But the expectation of parity is not unanimous.

There's still a lot of uncertainty about the magnitude and speed with which Trump's policy proposals might be implemented. And there's some optimism that they'd be met with measures to stimulate economic growth in Europe.

Hitting parity is psychologically significant for investors and policymakers and could spur a period of volatility for the euro as billions in options bets are likely to be linked to it.

But the risk that a country could tumble out of the euro remains alive, if remote, and a fall to parity could embolden populist politicians who oppose the single currency.

Already Germany's right-wing AfD party is planning an election campaign advocating the country's exit from the EU and the single currency.

Policymakers often welcome a weaker currency as a means to stimulate economic growth because it makes exports more competitive – though that positive impact may be diminished if the US imposes tariffs on those goods.

But a weaker euro also makes it more expensive to import raw materials and could reignite price pressures. That would prove to be a headache for the European Central Bank, which had been hoping post-pandemic inflation was finally under control.

For consumers, a weaker euro makes it more costly to buy imported goods and vacation outside of the eurozone. Conversely, the tourism sector may benefit from an influx of visitors from the US.

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Trudeau star power dimmed  
after pandemic and Trump

By David Ljunggren  
Ottawa

Justin Trudeau, who said on Monday he would resign as Liberal prime minister once the party names a new leader, led Canada for more than nine years before former allies turned against him.

Trudeau, 53, the son of long-time former prime minister Pierre Trudeau, was born into the public eye and inherited his father's sense of style and showmanship. He is one of the few Canadian leaders to win three consecutive terms in office. During his time in power, Canada overcame two major crises: the pandemic and then-US president Donald Trump's demand to renegotiate the trilateral trade deal with Mexico. Trudeau is an avowed feminist committed to gender parity in his cabinets who was ultimately brought down by an ugly breakup with former finance minister Chrystia Freeland, the most powerful woman in his political life.

Trudeau took over as Liberal leader in 2013 when the party was in deep trouble and had been reduced to third place in the House of Commons for the first time.

Yet by pushing an upbeat message of "sunny ways", and taking advantage of voter fatigue with the Conservative government, Trudeau propelled his party into power in the 2015 election.

Trudeau was a media sensation and found his face – not to mention his sharp suits and colourful socks – splashed across magazines around the world. On his first foreign trip in November 2015, he was mobbed in a Manila conference centre and had to be whisked away by his security team.

There was also substance. The highlight of his first term proved to be the successful renegotiation of the trilateral trade treaty with the United States and Mexico.

The Canadian side, led by then-foreign minister Freeland,



Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau being inoculated with AstraZeneca's vaccine against coronavirus disease at a pharmacy in Ottawa, Ontario, on April 23, 2021. (Reuters)

managed to preserve an agreement that was crucial for the economy.

"Trudeau handled that with aplomb and great strategy and was able to get a new deal. So I think that's going to serve him well in the history books," said historian JDM Stewart, author of two books on Canadian prime ministers.

Trudeau also spent heavily on social programmes, including a commitment to ensure the availability of affordable child care.

Trudeau's initial popularity helped him survive calamities that could have sunk other Canadian politicians. In 2017, the ethics commissioner ruled Trudeau had broken conflict-of-interest rules by accepting a vacation, gifts and flights from the Aga Khan. It was the first time a prime minister had been found to have committed such a transgression. During the 2019 election campaign, it emerged that he had posed in blackface when younger.

He apologised repeatedly, blaming his privileged background. The Liberals retained power, albeit with a minority government that left them reliant on other parties to stay in power.

Within months, the pandemic struck and Trudeau appeared

every day on television for months to reassure Canadians. Yet legislators knocking on doors reported he was starting to put voters off. His approval ratings never recovered.

"One of the reasons why he's very unpopular right now is that he's been over-exposed," said Stewart, speaking shortly before Trudeau announced his resignation.

"When you have a big personality... you're going to probably end up rubbing a few people the wrong way after nine years. They've just had enough of you."

Trudeau called a snap election in 2021, hoping to be rewarded for his handling of the pandemic. The gambit backfired and the result was another minority government.

The prime minister remained as upbeat and talkative as ever, yet few people realised the effort it took him.

"I always understood that I'm an introvert who learned how to be an extrovert to succeed in politics," he told the Toronto Star in 2021.

One aide told Reuters that Trudeau is so shy he found it difficult to look people in the eye, even those closest to him.

Trudeau's discomfort with

people he did not know well started to cause issues within the party. In books written after they left government, three ministers complained how hard it had been to get past his inner circle.

One reason for Trudeau's caution could be tied to his upbringing as the son of Pierre Trudeau.

"The younger Trudeau has constantly lived with the reality that he is extraordinarily famous and thus most people have always wanted something from him," journalist and author Steve Paikin said in July 2024.

Pierre Trudeau also courted the limelight and his love of fast cars, flashy clothes and romantic interests sparked a late-1960s phenomenon known as "Trudeaumania", a term also used to describe the son's early impact on the media. There were other, more complex, similarities between the men.

"What he inherited from his father, in my opinion, was stubbornness, like not seeing the writing on the wall here," said University of Toronto politics professor Nelson Wiseman, referring to Trudeau's insistence until the end that he was the right man to lead the Liberals.

Trudeau spun his background as a positive, saying those who grew up in fortunate circumstances were obliged to help their community. He worked as a teacher before entering politics.

"It was my way of doing things, my way of having an impact. And it turns out I was pretty good at it, and I am pretty good at it," he told US late-night television host Stephen Colbert in September 2024. But even those close to Trudeau say he had problems managing personal relationships. In February 2019, former justice minister Jody Wilson-Raybould accused

Trudeau and other officials of inappropriately pressuring her to help construction company SNC-Lavalin avoid a corruption trial. She resigned and Treasury Board President Jane Philpott also quit, citing a loss of confidence in Trudeau. The incident was damaging for a prime minister who described himself as a feminist.

The strains of being prime minister also spread into Trudeau's personal life. In August 2023, he announced he and wife Sophie were separating after 18 years of marriage. The couple, who have three children, had talked frankly about difficulties in their relationship and in recent years were seen together less often in public. The fateful moment in Trudeau's downfall turned out to be a clash in December with Freeland, who was then finance minister and his main cabinet ally. She quit on December 16 after Trudeau tried to demote her, a move that aides said shocked him.

The resignation set off new calls for Trudeau to step aside as opposition parties called for a no-confidence vote in parliament that Trudeau would not have survived.

- Reuters



Canadian PM Justin Trudeau having a word with US president Donald Trump during a Nato Plenary Session at the Nato summit in Watford, near London, on December 4, 2019. (Reuters)



# Trump Junior flies into Greenland after father says he wants to take it

■ **Greenland must decide own future: Denmark**

Reuters  
Copenhagen

Donald Trump's eldest son Donald Jr arrived in Greenland's capital Nuuk on a private visit yesterday, a day after the US President-elect reiterated his interest in taking control of the island, an autonomous territory of Denmark.

The president-elect, who takes office on January 20, has signalled he would pursue a foreign policy unbound by diplomatic niceties, threatening to take control of the Panama Canal.

Last month he said US control of Greenland was an "absolute necessity" and on Monday he posted on his Truth Social platform: "MAKE GREENLAND GREAT AGAIN!"

"Greenland is an incredible place, and the people will benefit tremendously if, and when, it becomes part of our Nation," he wrote.

Donald Trump Jr flew in his father's "Trump Force One" private plane for a visit expected to last 4-5 hours. No meetings were scheduled with government officials on the island, which has a population of just 57,000.

"Greenland coming in hot... Well, actually, really really cold!!!!," Trump Jr said in a post on X along with a video from the cockpit as the plane prepared to land between snow-covered mountains.

"We're really happy to be here. We're here as tourists to see this incredible place," he told local broadcaster KNR upon arrival, adding that he had originally planned to

visit last spring. He said he had spoken to his father, "and he says hello to everyone in Greenland".

In 2019, Trump postponed a scheduled visit to Denmark after Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen rebuffed his idea of the US purchasing Greenland, which was a Danish colony until 1953 and is now a semi-sovereign territory under the Danish realm.

Greenland Prime Minister Mute Egede has stated that the island is not for sale and in his New Year speech stepped up a push for independence.

"Our future and fight for independence is our business," Egede said in a Facebook post yesterday.

"While others, including Danes and Americans, are entitled to their opinions, we should not be caught up in the hysteria and let exter-



Donald Trump Jr visits Nuuk, Greenland, yesterday. (Reuters)

nal pressures distract us from our path."

Denmark, a Nato ally, has seen relations with Greenland worsen in recent years, prompted by allegations of historic mistreatment of residents under Danish rule.

On Monday, Egede postponed a meeting with Denmark's King Frederik scheduled to take place in Copenhagen today. No reason was given for the postponement.

Frederiksen told broadcaster TV2

yesterday: "We need very close co-operation with the Americans.

"On the other hand, I would like to encourage everyone to respect that the Greenlanders are a people, it is their country, and only Greenland can determine and define Greenland's future."

Greenland straddles the shortest route between Europe and North America and is strategically important for the US military and its ballistic missile early-warning system.

It boasts mineral, oil and natural gas wealth, but development has been slow, leaving its economy reliant on fishing and subsidies from Denmark.

Aaja Chemnitz, a Greenlandic member of the Danish parliament, said a US takeover should be rejected.

"I don't want to be a pawn in Trump's hot dreams of expanding his empire to include our country," she wrote.



A view of Greenland with the Trump Force One on the tarmac. (Reuters)

US President-elect Donald Trump says he wants to make Greenland a part of the United States, renewing an interest first expressed in 2019 when he offered to buy the sprawling Arctic island from Denmark - and was rebuffed.

The mostly ice-covered island of just 57,000 people, which boasts vast mineral resources and is strategically important for the US military, has been a part of Denmark for over 600 years. Greenland Prime Minister Mute Egede, who recently has stepped up a push for independence from Denmark, has repeatedly said the island is not for sale and that it is up to its people to decide their future.

"While others, including Danes and Americans, are entitled to their opinions, we should not be caught up in the hysteria and let external pressures distract us from our path," Egede said yesterday.

The island, a former colony of Denmark, became a formal territory of the Nordic kingdom in 1953 and is subject to the Danish constitution, meaning that any change to its legal status would require a constitutional amendment.

In 2009, the island was granted broad self-governing autonomy, including the right to declare independence from Denmark through a referendum. In 2019, both Greenland and Denmark rejected Trump's offer to buy the island. When Greenland was still a colony, the US under then-

## Can Trump buy Greenland?

president Harry Truman sought to buy the island as a strategic asset during the Cold War for \$100mn in gold, but Copenhagen declined to sell.

If Greenland becomes independent, it could choose to become associated with the United States.

While the majority of Greenlanders want independence, few see full independence as viable given their economic dependence on Denmark, which is part of the affluent European Union.

One option could be to form a so-called "free association" pact with the United States, similar to the status of Pacific island nations Marshall Islands, Micronesia and Palau.

"Greenland is talking about becoming independent from Denmark, but no Greenlanders want to just switch to a new colonial master," said Ulrik Pram Gad, a senior researcher and expert on Greenland at the Danish Institute for International Studies. He finds it unlikely Greenland will vote for independence without ensuring the welfare of its population.

Last week, Egede urged the people of Greenland to break free from "the shackles of colonialism" and shape their own future. Greenland has strategic significance for the US military and its ballistic missile early-warning system since the shortest route from Europe to North

America runs via the Arctic island. The US military maintains a permanent presence at the Pituffik air base in Greenland's northwest.

The United States has expressed interest in a greater military presence, including placing radars in Greenland to monitor the waters between the island, Iceland and Britain that are a gateway for Russian navy vessels and nuclear submarines. Greenland is geographically part of the North American continent, and it is vital for the United States to avoid any other major powers establishing a foothold on the Arctic island, according to senior researcher Ulrik Pram.

The island, whose capital Nuuk is closer to New York than the Danish capital Copenhagen, also boasts mineral, oil and natural gas wealth, but development has been slow. Greenland has banned extraction of oil and natural gas for environmental reasons, and development of its mining sector has been snarled in red tape and opposition from indigenous people. This has kept Greenland's economy reliant on fishing, which accounts for over 95% of exports, and annual subsidies from Denmark, which cover roughly half of the public budget. In total, Denmark spends just under \$1bn each year on Greenland.

An independence movement has

gained traction in Greenland in recent years.

A majority of Greenland's inhabitants support independence, but are divided over the timing and potential impact on living standards. Greenlandic politicians have since 2019 repeatedly said they are interested in strengthening cooperation and trade with the United States.

"Our future and fight for independence is our business," Egede said.

Aaja Chemnitz, a Greenlandic member of the Danish parliament, said the idea of a US takeover should be firmly rejected. "I don't want to be a pawn in Trump's hot dreams of expanding his empire to include our country," she wrote. The renewed interest comes amid heightened tensions between Greenland and Denmark, following revelations of historical misconduct by the former colonial ruler.

Trump's 2019 offer to buy the island was firmly rejected by Denmark, a close Nato ally of the United States, and labelled as "absurd" by Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen.

When asked about Trump's renewed interest yesterday, Frederiksen said: "We need very close co-operation with the Americans." She added: "On the other hand, I would like to encourage everyone to respect that the Greenlanders are a people, it is their country, and only Greenland can determine and define Greenland's future."

## Don't eat your Christmas tree, warns Belgium food agency

Some things may go without saying, but just in case... Belgium's food agency issued a public health warning as the festive season wrapped up yesterday: don't eat your Christmas tree. The unusual message came after the city of Ghent, an environmentalist stronghold in the country's northern Flanders region, raised eyebrows by posting tips for recycling the conifers on the dinner table. Pointing with enthusiasm to examples from Scandinavia, the town website suggested needles could be stripped, blanched and dried - for use in making flavoured butter, for instance. Asked what they thought of the idea, the reply from Belgium's federal agency for food chain security, AFSCA, was a resounding "No". "Christmas trees are not destined to enter the food chain," it said in a statement. "There is no way to ensure that eating Christmas trees is safe - either for people or animals," it said, citing the likely presence of pesticides on most trees cultivated for the season. "What's more, there is no easy way for consumers to tell if Christmas trees have been treated with flame retardant - and not knowing that could have serious, even fatal consequences," the agency warned. "In short, there are many reasons not to promote nor encourage the re-use of Christmas trees in the food chain," it said.

## Jean-Marie Le Pen, architect of French far-right surge, dies at 96

Jean-Marie Le Pen, an extreme right-winger who haunted the French political establishment for decades, died yesterday aged 96, dividing opinion until the end. While the left decried him as a "fascist", many admitted he had succeeded in moving France's political dial to the right. Under his leadership the National Front party, which he co-founded with former Waffen-SS members and neo-Nazi sympathisers, defended a staunchly anti-immigration agenda, with many accusing him of being a xenophobe, racist and anti-Semite. He once dismissed the Holocaust as a "detail" of history. Le Pen, who had been in a care home for several weeks, died at midday yesterday "surrounded by his loved ones", his family said in a statement to AFP. His daughter Marine, who sparked a family feud by kicking him out of his own party, was on a plane from the cyclone-hit French archipelago of Mayotte when his death was announced. Le Pen's views often sparked massive rejection, even disgust, among mainstream parties, but his electoral success was undeniable. In 2002, he created a huge surprise when he made it to the second-round of the presidential election, having seen off the Socialist favourite Lionel Jospin before losing to conservative Jacques Chirac. Marine Le Pen took the party's leadership in 2011 and pushed her father out four years later, seeking to distance her movement from his extremist reputation. The revamped party, since renamed National Rally (RN), has had significant electoral successes. It clocked up strong gains in last year's European Parliament elections, and became the largest single party in a subsequent general election in France, but was not invited to join government. Jordan Bardella, RN party chief and the right-hand man of Marine Le Pen, said in a carefully-worded tribute yesterday that Jean-Marie Le Pen had "always served France and defended its identity and sovereignty", calling him "a tribune of the people". On the hard left, the leader of the LFI party Jean-Luc Melenchon said that with Le Pen's death "the fight against the man is over", though "the fight against the hatred, the racism, the Islamophobia and anti-



Jean-Marie Le Pen during an interview with Reuters in Montrouge, France, in 2018.

Semitism that he spread carries on." Francois Ruffin, a left-wing member of parliament, meanwhile called Le Pen "a fascist from another era who is now gone" but who had left behind "his heirs, who are very much here". The office of President Emmanuel Macron said drily that "history will judge" Le Pen's role in France. "The president sends his condolences to his family," it added in a statement. There was no reaction so far from Macron in person. Prime Minister Francois Bayrou said that anybody who had fought against Le Pen in politics had found out "what a fighter he was". Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau, a hardline right-winger, said that "whatever one's opinion of Jean-Marie Le Pen may be, there can be no doubt that he made a mark on his times." He added: "A page in French political history has been turned." French daily Liberation said that Le Pen had "turned his name and his family into a political empire" and "managed to force his racist, xenophobic and nationalist identity ideas into the heart of the political debate". The *Le Monde* newspaper said that Le Pen had "embraced all of the ups and downs of French extreme-right history" throughout his career. Daily La Croix called him "the man who caused the extreme right to take root in France".

## US slaps sanctions on key Orban aide; Hungary to take it up with Trump

Reuters  
Budapest

The United States imposed sanctions on a senior member of the Hungarian government for alleged corruption, the US Treasury said yesterday, a move Budapest said it would challenge when President-elect Donald Trump takes power.

Accusations of corruption and cronyism have dogged Prime Minister Viktor Orban since he came to power in 2010, while Budapest's relations with Washington have become increasingly strained during the presidency of Joe Biden, due in part to Budapest's warm ties with Moscow despite the war in Ukraine.

Orban has repeatedly denied allegations of corruption. The sanctions target Antal Rogan (*pictured*), a close aide of Orban who has run his cabinet office since 2015.

Rogan has been close to Orban for decades, running his government's media machine and helping orchestrate his election campaigns. He currently also oversees the secret services of Hungary, a Nato member.

The US Treasury accused Rogan of using his role to secure financial benefits for himself and his political allies.

"Those closely connected to the ruling political party have acquired massive empires of holdings," US Ambassador to Hun-



gary David Pressman told a news conference. "Antal Rogan is a primary architect, implementer, and beneficiary of this system of corruption."

Pressman has been an outspoken critic of Orban's government during his time in Budapest, lambasting it for strengthening ties with Russia.

Orban's cabinet office, which Rogan leads, dismissed the move as the "last, petty revenge of the outgoing, unsuccessful American ambassador".

"After January 20 the United States of America will have a new government and a new president. After their inauguration we will take the necessary legal steps," it said in an e-mailed statement.

Orban and his Fidesz party have been among Trump's most vocal supporters in Europe. Trump returns to the White House on January 20.

In 2023, the United States imposed sanctions on five Bulgarian government officials for corruption.





Snapshots from the opening of the 5th Katara International Amber Exhibition yesterday.

# 5th Katara International Amber Exhibition opens



The fifth edition of Katara International Amber Exhibition was inaugurated yesterday afternoon by Katara – the Cultural Village general manager Prof Khalid bin Ibrahim al-Sulaiti. The exhibition is organised by Katara in Hall 12 and features 77 booths representing 14 countries from around the world. The opening ceremony was attended by a number of ambassadors, members of the diplomatic corps in Qatar, representatives of the participating companies, and many amber traders, enthusiasts, and cultural heritage lovers. The exhibition is the largest of its kind in Qatar and the region. It brings together exhibitors and participants from across the world and runs until January 10. The exhibition showcases a wide range of luxury products and rare amber-crafted artefacts.



Prof al-Sulaiti expressed his delight at the launch of the fifth edition of the exhibition. He stressed that the event reflects Katara's commitment to supporting cultural heritage and developing traditional amber craftsmanship. The exhibition has become an international economic platform that blends heritage and innovation, highlighting the significance of amber as a cultural and economic treasure for Qatar and participating countries. The exhibition presents rare collections of prayer beads, amber stones, and innovative handcrafted items, catering to the diverse tastes and preferences of its visitors. "We take pride in hosting this international exhibition for the fifth consecutive year," Prof al-Sulaiti said. "It has attracted wide participation from exhibitors and experts worldwide. We hope this exhibition will enhance cultural and economic exchange and offer visitors unique experiences." Director of cultural affairs and events at Katara, Khalid al-Sayed, praised the distinctive features of this year's exhibition, which includes Gulf, Arab, and international participants, as well as a variety of accompanying activities. He also highlighted the participation of



Amber Testing Laboratory and presence of artists whose works are inspired by the exhibition. In addition, Katara Publishing House is showcasing the latest specialised publications on amber. The opening day saw significant attendance from the public and experts in the amber industry. Many participants expressed their appreciation for Katara's efforts in organising this event. Bader al-Medaires, a supervisor for a booth from Kuwait, said this is his third participation. He noted that the exhibition provides a valuable opportunity for exhibitors to showcase their products, connect with traders, enthusiasts, and experts, and gain insights into the latest innovations in the amber industry. Similarly, Samir Ramou, supervisor for a booth from Germany, expressed his ad-

miration for the professional organisation of the event. He said that the exhibition is an excellent platform for introducing innovative amber products to the Middle Eastern audience, fostering new client relationships, and exploring new markets. His booth showcases German amber products, including prayer beads, jewelry, and heritage-inspired collectibles. Abdulla al-Khelaihi, supervisor for a booth from Qatar, said that he is happy to participate for the third time in the exhibition. He described it as a unique platform that brings together amber traders and enthusiasts from the region and around the world, offering a rare chance to exchange knowledge and skills in the amber industry. The exhibition is open daily from 12 noon-10pm, except Fridays, when it is open from 2pm-11pm.

## Last chance to view Qatar-Morocco Year of Culture exhibits at NMoQ

Moroccan-Dutch designer Mohamed Benchellal's first solo exhibition, "Benchellal: Monumental 'sculpting past tomorrow'" offers a final chance to experience his unique blend of couture and sustainability before it concludes on January 18 at the National Museum of Qatar (NMoQ). The show, which forms part of Qatar Museums (QM)'s Years of Culture initiative, features a new collection of couture dresses designed during Benchellal's Artist Residency at Liwan Design Studios and Labs. The collection is inspired by Qatar's landscapes and architectural wonders, presenting a fusion of traditional craftsmanship and contemporary design. Benchellal's garments are crafted with a focus on slow fashion, using sustainable materials to create a perfect balance between artistry and environmental responsibility. The exhibition highlights the designer's meticulous techniques and innovative designs, elevating the couture dresses to monumental works of art that are placed in dialogue with Qatar's stunning architectural backdrop.



The QM noted that this exhibition offers a unique perspective on the intersection of traditional Arab design and modern couture. By blending futuristic Middle Eastern aesthetics with classic couture, his collection honours both the region's rich heritage and its forward-thinking vision – as sensibility that inspired the accompanying Years of Culture showcase.

Alongside the exhibition, Years of Culture is also hosting a showcase that underlines deep-rooted and evolving fashion trends of Qatar and Morocco and the sustainable nature of many traditional practices. It explores the historical and contemporary connections between Qatari and Moroccan cultures through fashion, with a focus on sustainable garment-making practices. Some of the highlights include a traditional wool daffah (cloak) from the NMoQ collection, adorned with intricate hand-stitched Zari designs. This piece demonstrates the transformation of the daffah from a practical garment into an object of cultural beauty and adornment. As part of the collaboration with M7, Qatari designer and Mhefhef brand founder Mashael al-Naimi created a modern interpretation of the Bisht. Her creation – a handwoven Tusar silk abaya inspired by the architectural elegance of Morocco's Kasbah Gate – reimagines the Bisht with contemporary sophistication while paying homage to its heritage.



## Competition gets tougher for falcons at Marmi 2025

The Haddad Al Tahaddi and Al Tala'a competitions continued yesterday as part of the ongoing 16th Qatar International Falcons and Hunting Festival (Marmi 2025). Marmi 2025, organised by the Al Gannas Qatari Society under the patronage HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani and supported by the Sports and Social Activities Support Fund (Daam), runs until February 1, featuring extensive participation across various competitions. During the evening session of the Haddad Al Tahaddi, Al Gharbia Team from Group 6 secured qualification and victory. Marmi Festival director Metaib Mubarak al-Qahtani awarded the winning team with a cash prize of QR100,000 alongside a trophy marking their advancement to the finals. This brings the total number of finalists in Haddad Al Tahaddi to six. Haddad Al Tahaddi Committee head Shawi al-Kaabi hailed the high level of performance in Group 6, which captivated the large festival audience. Spectators witnessed intense interactions between the homing pigeons and falcons, with the falcons managing to catch only one pigeon. Despite favourable hunting weather, the competition remained fierce, with the majority of pigeons safely returning to their nests in Umm Ebairiya. Al-Kaabi praised the dedication and discipline of falconers from Qatar and the GCC states, noting the impressive turnout of 27 out of 31 falconers in the group. He encouraged competitors to arrive early and be well-prepared to maintain the excitement and energy of the festival in Sealine. He also announced that Group 7 competitions would take place today. In the morning session yesterday, Groups 11 through 15 competed in Al Tala'a tournament, resulting in the qualification of Mohamed Ghalib al-Dosari, whose falcon spotted the prey in just one minute and five seconds, and Barzan Team, whose falcon spotted it in one minute and 34 seconds.

