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BUSINESS | Page 1

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SCAN ME!

Amir, Zelensky discuss Ukraine developments

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky discussed the latest developments in Ukraine. This came during a phone call His Highness the Amir received yesterday from the Ukrainian president. During the call, they also discussed regional and international issues of common interest. **(QNA)**

Amir grants PM rank to Khalid bin Mohammed al- Attiyah



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani issued yesterday Amiri Order No 7 of 2025 granting HE **Dr Khalid bin Mohammed al-Attiah** the rank of Prime Minister. The decision was announced in the Official Gazette of the State of Qatar and is effective starting from its date of issue.

Syria urges US to lift all sanctions

Syria yesterday welcomed exemptions from some economic sanctions imposed by the US, but urged a complete lifting to support its recovery, according to a foreign ministry statement on X. European Union sanctions in Syria that obstruct the delivery of humanitarian aid and hinder the country's recovery could be lifted swiftly, France's foreign minister said.

Europe warns Trump over Greenland

European leaders yesterday warned Donald Trump against threatening sovereign borders after the US President-elect refused to rule out military action to take Greenland. Germany's Olaf Scholz said Trump's comments had sparked "notable incomprehension" among EU leaders. Trump has designs on the mineral- and oil-rich Arctic island, an autonomous territory of EU member Denmark. He set off new alarm bells on Tuesday when he refused to rule out military intervention over the Panama Canal and Greenland. **Page 11**

Cabinet okays stipulations for e-commerce

QNA
Doha

The Cabinet held its regular meeting yesterday at the Amiri Diwan, chaired by HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani. Following the meeting, HE the Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Ibrahim bin Ali al-Mohanna-di issued a statement detailing the key decisions and discussions that took place.

The Cabinet also approved, in principle, a draft Cabinet decision on conducting a simplified census and an administrative records-based census for population, housing, and establishments for the year 2025

The Cabinet approved, in principle, a draft decision by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) to determine the conditions and regulations for practising e-commerce that do not require a physical location. This draft decision aims to establish a legal framework for e-commerce, fostering an environment that attracts investors and entrepreneurs while safeguarding the rights of consumers and clients.

The Cabinet considered the topics listed on its agenda, as it was informed of the Shura Council's approval of a draft law regulating travel agencies and air cargo offices.

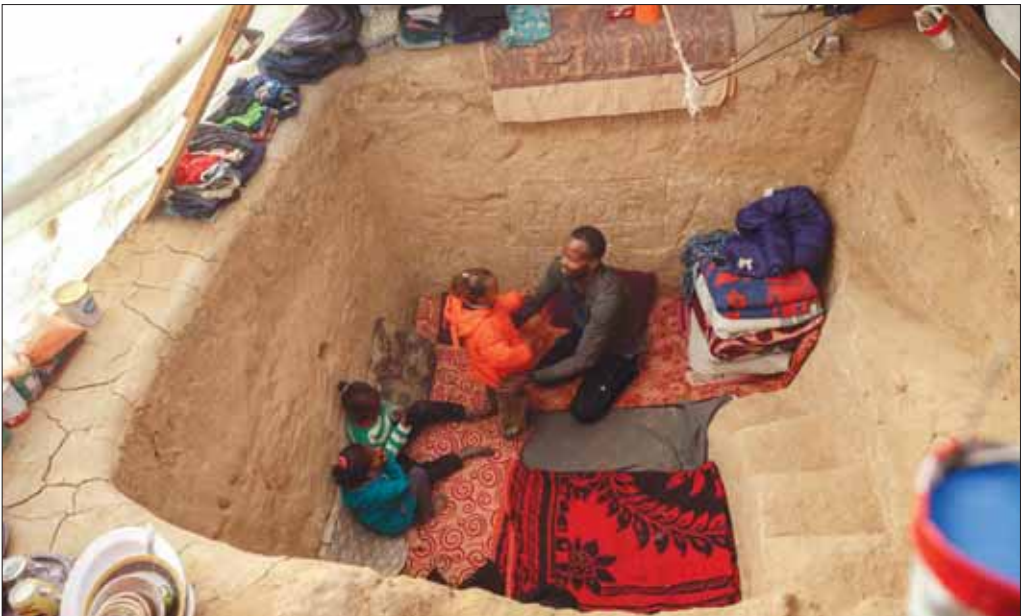
The Cabinet also approved, in principle, a draft Cabinet decision on conducting a simplified

census and an administrative records-based census for population, housing, and establishments for the year 2025. The draft decision aims to meet national needs for statistical information and data efficiently and with a high degree of reliability, and to collect, analyse, and publish social, demographic, and economic data related to the total population, housing, and establishments.

The Cabinet also decided to take the necessary measures to ratify a cooperation agreement on humanitarian aid between the Government of Qatar and the Government of the Republic of Türkiye.

The Cabinet approved a draft agreement on economic, commercial, and technical cooperation between the Government of Qatar and the Government of the Republic of Burundi, as well as a draft memorandum of understanding (MoU) on family policy co-operation between the Ministry of Social Development and Family of the State of Qatar and the Ministry of Culture and Innovation of Hungary.

The Cabinet then reviewed six reports and took the appropriate decisions thereon. These reports included a report on developing a national framework for prevention and safety to address environmental damages and violations, the second report on the work of the technical committee studying the fees for services provided by government entities, the annual report of the State Cases Department for 2024, a report on the strategy of the Qatar Financial Centre (2024-2030), a report on the outcomes of HE Minister of Communications and Information Technology's participation in the 79th session of the UN General Assembly, and a report on the outcomes of the participation of HE Minister of Municipality at the Cityscape Global Exhibition on building future cities.



Palestinian father Tayseer Obaid who was displaced with his family from the north of Gaza Strip, sits with his children in a trench he dug in his tent in an attempt to protect them from the cold and Israeli strikes, in a makeshift camp in Deir Al-Balah yesterday.

Gaza truce deal near: Blinken

- Qatar, US, Egypt intensify truce efforts
- Israeli strikes kill dozens in the Strip

AFP/Reuters
Paris

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said yesterday that a Gaza ceasefire remained close, but reiterated that it may not happen before President Joe Biden hands over power to Donald Trump.

"In the Middle East, we're very close to a ceasefire and hostage deal," Blinken told reporters in Paris.

"I hope that we can get it over the line in the time that we have," said Blinken, who leaves office with Trump's inauguration on January 20.

But if not, he said, "I believe that when we get that deal - and we'll get it - it'll be on the basis of the plan that President Biden put before the world back in May."

A report from Cairo, quoting Palestinian medics said Israeli strikes killed dozens of people across Gaza yesterday, as talks

to halt the fighting continued in Qatar and Israeli troops recovered the body of at least one hostage from a tunnel near the southern city of Rafah.

Palestinian medical workers said an Israeli air strike killed at least 10 people in a multi-storey house in the Sheikh Radwan neighbourhood of Gaza City, while another killed 10 in other parts of the city.

In Deir Al-Balah city in central Gaza, where hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians are sheltering, and in Jabalia, the largest of Gaza's eight historic refugee camps, a total of seven people were killed, they said.

Such mass casualties have become a daily occurrence in Gaza, where some 46,000 Palestinians have now been killed in Israel's 15-month-long assault, according to health officials in the enclave.

As Israel continued its bombardments, the United States, Qatar and Egypt were making intensive efforts to reach a

ceasefire deal, with one source close to the talks saying this was the most serious attempt to reach a deal so far.

"Things are better than ever before, but there is no deal yet," the source told Reuters.

Trump's Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff said overnight he hoped to have good things to report about Israeli hostages held by the time Trump is sworn in as president. A deal would also involve the release of Palestinians held in Israeli jails.

As the talks continued on Wednesday, the Israeli military said troops had recovered the body of Israeli Bedouin hostage Youssef al-Ziyadna, along with evidence that was still being examined suggesting his son Hamza, taken on the same day, may also be dead.

The military clarified that the son's body had not been recovered, although "findings were located related to Hamza... which raise serious concerns for his life" **Page 7**

Wildfires rage out of control near Los Angeles

Reuters
Los Angeles

At least two people were killed as a trio of fast-growing wildfires raged out of control yesterday near Los Angeles, destroying hundreds of buildings, scorching hillsides and prompting officials to order some 70,000 people to evacuate their homes.

Fierce winds were hindering firefighting efforts and fuelling the fires, which have expanded unimpeded since they began on Tuesday.

The biggest blaze had consumed more than 5,000 acres in the picturesque Pacific Palisades neighbourhood, which lies east of Los Angeles between the beach towns of Santa Monica and Malibu and is home to many film, television and music stars. More than 1,000 structures have been destroyed, Los Angeles County Fire Chief Anthony Marrone said.

Another fire, the Eaton fire, had grown to more than 2,000 acres as it burned some 50km inland in Altadena, near Pasadena. Two fatalities were reported there, though officials said they



A firefighter works to extinguish flames as the Eaton Fire burns in Pasadena, California, yesterday.

did not have further details.

The Hurst fire, in Sylmar in the San Fernando Valley northwest of Los Angeles, had exceeded 500 acres. All three fires were 0% contained, officials said.

A "high number" of significant

injuries had occurred among residents who did not need evacuation orders, Marrone said.

Officials warned that the gusty winds were forecast to persist throughout the day.

"We are absolutely not out of

danger yet, with the strong winds that continue to push through the city and the county today," Los Angeles City Fire Chief Kristen Crowley said.

The skies above Los Angeles glowed red and were blanketed by

thick smoke as the sun rose yesterday.

As the flames spread and residents began evacuating after the fires broke out on Tuesday, roads were so jammed that some people abandoned their vehicles to escape the fire. Emergency responders were going door to door to press evacuation orders.

California Governor Gavin Newsom declared a state of emergency on Tuesday.

Approximately 100 of the 1,000 public schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District were shut down, Superintendent Alberto Carvalho told the press conference.

Pacific Palisades is one of the most expensive neighbourhoods in the country. A typical home was valued at \$3.7mn as of the end of 2023, according to Zillow.

Before the fire started, the National Weather Service had issued its highest alert for extreme fire conditions for much of Los Angeles County from Tuesday through Thursday.

With low humidity and dry vegetation due to a lack of rain, the conditions were "about as bad as it gets in terms of fire weather," the service said. **Page 11**



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9th يناير 2025 - 11th يناير 2025

(سيتي سنتر، فيلاجيو، لاند مارك، قطر مول و إزدان الوكرة)
(City Center, Villaggio, Landmark, Mall of Qatar & Ezdan Al Wakrah)

/KG
كغ/ **6.75** OR

طماطم عنقودية، إيران
Tomato bunch, Iran



/KG
كغ/ **16.75** OR

زيتون أسود، أسبانيا
Olives black, Spain



/PACK
بالمغلفة **12.75** OR

دونات ٤* متنوعة
Donuts x4 assorted



/KG
كغ/ **6.75** OR

يوسفى، المغرب
Nadorcott mandarin, Morocco



/KG
كغ/ **13.75** OR

نكتارين، جنوب أفريقيا
Nectarine, South Africa



/KG
كغ/ **14.75** OR

شمش، جنوب أفريقيا
Apricot, South Africa



/KG
كغ/ **26.75** OR

لحم بهر مفروم جنوب أفريقيا
Beef mince, South Africa



/KG
كغ/ **45.75** OR

خروف عربي
Arabic lamb



/KG
كغ/ **59.75** OR

روبيان، الإمارات
Shrimps, UAE



/KG
كغ/ **26.75** OR

جبنة رومى، مصر
Young roomy cheese, Egypt



~~17.00~~
7.75 OR

زيت دوار الشمس نوف ١.٨ لتر
Noof sunflower oil 1.8L



~~46.00~~
25.50 OR

أرز بسمتي بنجاب ه كغ
Punjab Garden basmati rice 5kg



MyCLUB
Cash Back 10%
5 Pieces
~~16.00~~
7.75 OR

مناديل الوجه ١٧٠ منديل
Hala facial tissue 170 sheets



FROZEN

~~16.00~~
10.75 OR

دجاج ساديا ١١٠٠ غم
Sadia chicken 1100g



FROZEN

~~40.00~~
31.50 OR

صدر دجاج بيرلا ٢ كغ
Perla chicken tender breast 2kg



~~23.00~~
9.75 OR

مسحوق الغسيل اريال ١.٥ كغ
Ariel detergent 1.5kg assorted



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60 MINUTES



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Farewell to Philippine ambassador



HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi met yesterday with Philippine ambassador to Qatar Lillibeth V Pono on the occasion of the end of her tenure. HE al-Muraikhi thanked the ambassador for her efforts in supporting and strengthening bilateral relations, wishing her success in her new duties. (QNA)

Al-Misnad meets first deputy FM of Cuba



HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad met yesterday with the visiting First Deputy Foreign Minister of Cuba Gerardo Penalver Portal. The meeting discussed bilateral relations and ways to support and develop them, especially in health, education, culture and development. The meeting was attended by Acting Director of the Department of American Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Jassim Mohamed al-Asmakh. (QNA)

Official

Amir sends cables of condolences to Chinese president

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani sent cables of condolences to Chinese President Xi Jinping on the victims of the earthquake that struck Xizang Region in southwestern China, wishing the injured a speedy recovery. HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani also sent a similar cable of condolences to Premier of the State Council of China Li Qiang. (QNA)

Qatar strongly condemns alleged historic maps of Israel published by occupation government

Qatar has strongly condemned the alleged historic maps of Israel published by official accounts affiliated with the occupation government, which reportedly include parts of the occupied Palestinian territories, as well as Jordan, Lebanon and Syria; considering the publication of these maps a flagrant violation of international legitimacy resolutions and the provisions of international law. In a statement yesterday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs warned that the publication of the alleged maps would hinder the chances of peace in the region, particularly amid the ongoing brutal war on the Gaza Strip. The ministry emphasised the need for the international community to fulfil its legal and moral responsibilities by pressuring the Israeli occupation to comply with international legitimacy resolutions and confront its expansionist ambitions in Arab lands. It reiterated Qatar's firm stance on the justice of the Palestinian cause, the legitimate rights of the brotherly Palestinian people, and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. (QNA)

Al-Khulaifi meets Iranian FM and deputy FM



HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi, met in Tehran yesterday with Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Majid Takht Ravanchi. The two sides discussed bilateral relations and ways to boost them. The deliberations also covered regional and international issues, especially the latest developments in the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories, Syria and Lebanon.



HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi, met in Tehran yesterday with Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi. The meeting discussed co-operation ties between the two countries and ways to bolster them, as well as a range of regional and global issues of shared concern. (QNA)

Second Qatar-Iran security committee meeting convenes

The second Qatar-Iran joint security committee meeting has been held over two days in Tehran. The meeting was co-chaired by Director General of Public Security Major General Mohammed Jassim al-Sulaiti and Deputy Minister of Interior for Security and Police Affairs of Iran Ali Akbar Pourjamshidian. The two sides signed the minutes of the second meeting to enhance co-operation and co-ordination and addressed multiple avenues of security co-operation. (QNA)



MoI official meets chief of Saudi Interpol



HE the Assistant Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior (MoI) for Security Affairs Sheikh Nayef bin Faleh al-Thani met yesterday with Saudi Arabia's Director General of International Police (Saudi Interpol) and head of the National Central Bureau of Interpol Riyadh Brigadier General Abdulmalik bin Ibraheem al-Saqe'h. The meeting discussed several topics of mutual interest and reviewed Qatar-Saudi relations in the security fields, as well as ways to support and enhance them. (QNA)

PHCC records 5.2mn visitors in 2024: official



The Primary Health Corporation (PHCC) received 5.2mn visitors in 2024 while extending various healthcare services at its facilities. Dr Samya al-Abdulla, executive director of operations, senior family medicine consultant at PHCC and deputy national lead for Mental Health and Wellbeing, told local Arabic daily *Arrayah* that these visitors were recorded in various specialties within the corporation. The major share of the visits was recorded by Family Medicine Clinics where more than 3.2mn visitors availed services. The Emergency Care Units for adults and children recorded more than 217,000 while Dental Clinics recorded more than 350,000 visits. Visitors sought services in various dental specialties. These included general dentistry, gum diseases, root canal treatment, oral and dental surgery and dental paediatric treatment. While Eye Clinics recorded nearly 100,000 visits, Ear, Nose and Throat Clinics recorded nearly 50,000 visits



and Dermatology Clinic recorded nearly 50,000 visits. "There has been an increase in the rate of demand for virtual consultations (phone or video), as this year there have been more than 410,000 virtual consultations with an increase of approximately 10% that was marked in 2023," she said. According to the data, absenteeism rates in PHCC clinics mark a significant variation between different specialties. Family Medicine Clinics recorded 28% while dental clinics had the lowest absenteeism rate at 17% with a total absenteeism rate of 29% across all clinics. "This reflects the importance of increasing awareness among patients about the importance of the appointment system. The Opera-

tions Department is taking several measures to improve adherence to appointments including re-evaluating and delivering appointments. The department also raises awareness of the importance of adherence and improves communication with patients through reminder messages, which contributes to providing more effective and quality healthcare to patients," she noted. "PHCC is one of the main pillars of the health system in Qatar. It provides a diverse and integrated range of health services through 31 health centres distributed geographically to cover the needs of citizens and residents in Qatar," she said noting that the corporation has achieved many distinguished accomplishments in the field of healthcare.

Qatar attends inauguration of Ghana's president



Qatar participated in the inauguration ceremony of President of Ghana John Dramani Mahama. Qatar's ambassador in Accra Khalid bin Jabr al-Musallam represented the state at the ceremony. (QNA)

CRA, Google to showcase Qatar's landmarks with street view in maps

The Communications Regulatory Authority (CRA) has announced its collaboration with Google to bring Qatar's landmarks and cultural heritage to the world through Street View in Google Maps. The initiative leverages advanced technology, like 360-degree panoramic views, to enhance navigation and boost tourism, supporting Qatar's digital transformation goals. Street View in Google Maps is a global feature that includes more than 220bn images from more than 100 countries. The collaboration highlights Qatar's commitment to smart city development and innovation in urban planning. "Google Street View" offers an invaluable resource for the people of Qatar, visitors, and businesses. While people in Qatar can benefit from improved navigation, visitors can virtually explore Qatar's landmarks, such as Qatar's museums, Souq Waqif, The Corniche, Al Zubarah Fort, and even experience the thrill of cruising sand dunes in the Inland Sea, before planning their trips. For businesses, particularly in tourism



Engineer Ahmad al-Muslemani, CRA president.

and retail, the platform provides global exposure and engagement opportunities. These efforts reinforce Qatar's position as a leading destination for culture, tourism, and business. As part of this initiative, CRA worked closely with relevant entities in Qatar, including the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Department at the Ministry of Municipality, Qatar Tourism, and national security agencies. Engineer Ahmad Abdulla al-Muslemani, CRA president, said: "This collaboration with Google underscores CRA's commitment to contributing to building a knowledge-based economy and adopting technologies to drive

While people in Qatar can benefit from improved navigation, visitors can virtually explore Qatar's landmarks, such as Qatar's museums, Souq Waqif, The Corniche, Al Zubarah Fort, and even experience the thrill of cruising sand dunes in the Inland Sea

sustainable development and global competitiveness. "By integrating advanced tools like Street View in Google Maps into its smart city and tourism strategies and bringing Qatar's cultural and architectural treasures to a global audience, we are enhancing our leadership in innovation and digital transformation, in line with CRA's strategy and the goals of Qatar National Vision 2030."

Qatar ‘strengthens status as luxury destination with DJWE’

Renowned Indian luxury brand Rose Jewellery, a partner of Alfardan Jewellery, is preparing to participate in Doha Jewellery and Watches Exhibition 2025 at DECC

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

Qatar has firmly established itself as a leading luxury destination, highlighted by the long-standing presence of the annual Doha Jewellery and Watches Exhibition (DJWE), according to Rose Jewellery founder Purnima Sheth.

Also the company’s Luxury Sales senior director, Sheth cited the country’s rapid economic growth, world-class infrastructure, and dedication to providing exceptional experiences are key factors to this status.

“Qatar is constantly striving to innovate and enhance its tourism offerings, with a focus on sustainability and unique experiences,” she told *Gulf Times*. Her remarks come as Rose Jewellery, a partner of Alfardan Jewellery, prepares to participate in the latest edition of DJWE, taking place at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre from January 30-February 5.

Sheth also shared her personal connection to the prestigious event, saying: “Doha is close to my heart as my closest friends who are now family to me are there and because of DJWE I get to see them so often.”

She underlined Rose Jewellery’s consistent participation in DJWE for a decade, stressing the brand’s commitment to the Qatari market and its “dedication to providing discerning clientele with access to unparalleled luxury and elegance”.

It is learnt that Rose has consistently captivated audiences with its stunning collections, showcasing



Purnima Sheth with Rose Jewellery managing director and creative head Biren Vaidya.

ing the finest craftsmanship and most dazzling gemstones.

According to Sheth, Rose will be showcasing three new collections: Opera, a tribute to Art Deco featuring geometric shapes and vibrant gemstones; Colours of Life, a vibrant collection celebrating the beauty of life through a kaleidoscope of gemstones; and Amun-Ra, a debut collection inspired by Ancient Egypt, featuring intricate hieroglyphics and majestic symbols crafted in 18K gold.

She lauded the event as it offers an amazing display of luxury, featuring some of the most prestigious jewellery and watch brands worldwide. Visitors can explore a curated selection of exquisite creations, including an array of diamond pieces, gemstones, intricate timepieces, and innovative designs, each demonstrating the highest level of artistry and craftsmanship.

“The exhibition takes place at the state-of-the-art DECC, providing a sophisticated and elegant setting for this high-profile event. The venue’s contemporary architecture and luxurious interiors

create an atmosphere of refinement and exclusivity.

“DJWE offers a range of exclusive experiences beyond the exhibition floor. VIP lounges provide a haven of tranquillity and personalised service, while private consultations with expert jewellers and watchmakers offer a unique opportunity to explore and acquire exceptional pieces,” Sheth said.

She added that the exhibition also celebrates the rich cultural heritage of Qatar, featuring local talent and craftsmanship. Qatari designers and artisans are given a platform to showcase their unique creations, offering visitors a glimpse into the country’s vibrant artistic scene. According to Sheth, this comes on the heels of Rose Jewellery’s own expansion with the opening of its expansive 21,000sq ft flagship boutique, “The House of Rose”, in Mumbai.

This move, according to the company, solidifies their position as a global Indian luxury brand. It invests heavily in the handcrafting of its one-of-a-kind pieces using consciously sourced diamonds and gemstones.

Awqaf launches 11th edition of Little Muhaddith competition

The Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs, represented by the Department of Da’wa and Religious Guidance, has launched the 11th edition of the Little Muhaddith competition.

The announcement came during a press conference held yesterday at Awqaf’s headquarters in the presence of HE the Awqaf undersecretary Sheikh Dr Khalid bin Mohammed bin Ghanem al-Thani and officials from Awqaf and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE).

The competition is a continuation of the Qur’anic competitions spread throughout Qatar and is the result of co-operation between the Department of Call and Religious Guidance, the General Department of Endowments, Jassim Bin Hamad Secondary School for Boys, Umm Al-Qura Primary School for Boys and Al-Iman Secondary School for Girls.

These efforts come within the framework of the ministry’s message to promote Islamic values and establish high morals and ideals through spreading Islamic culture and caring for the Holy Qur’an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him).

The competition, with its various



HE the Awqaf undersecretary Sheikh Dr Khalid bin Mohammed bin Ghanem al-Thani and officials from Awqaf and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education attending the press conference.



Jassim Abdullah al-Ali, director of the Department of Da’wa and Religious Guidance and Nasser Saleh al-Marri, head of the Islamic Education Department at the Educational Guidance Department at MoEHE addressing the press conference.

ous branches, targets the participation of male and female students of all age groups in all public and private schools in Qatar.

Jassim Abdullah al-Ali, director of the Department of Da’wa and Religious Guidance, said that the

competition is an opportunity to encourage students to memorise Hadiths and participate in school activities. “It creates good role models among students and their parents,” he said.

Al-Ali added that the competition in its new version includes eight categories after adding the three new branches, and said parents can participate in the two categories.

Nasser Saleh al-Marri, head of the Islamic Education Department at the Educational Guidance Department at MoEHE said the competition has raised the educational and pedagogical level of participating students, male and female, and parents. He explained that the competition was not limited to memorising the Hadith but rather focused on understanding its meanings and applying its values in daily life.

Ministry to launch ‘Winter Bazaar’ today

The Ministry of Social Development and Family, represented by the Family Empowerment Department, will launch the ‘Winter Bazaar’ event at the Arab Museum of Modern Art’s garden today.

The ministry said that the event will be held weekly (every Thursday) over three months to be a platform to display the products of productive projects, “From the Homeland” representing the authentic Qatari cultural heritage.

Director of the Family Empowerment Department Fatima al-Nuaimi said that the ‘Winter Bazaar’ is an essential step towards empowering owners of productive projects and highlighting their creativity in various fields, explaining that this event reflects the ministry’s commitment to enhancing the role of women

in community development and supporting national products to build a diverse and sustainable economy in which all members of the society contribute.

The event aims to support national productive projects “From the Homeland” by highlighting the role of owners of productive projects in strengthening the national economy.

The Ministry of Social Development and Family also pays great attention to ensuring equal opportunities for all segments of society, starting with empowering women as an effective social component in various contexts.

Through this event, the ministry seeks to achieve an important aspect of Qatar National Vision 2030, and also supports initiatives that contribute to empowering individuals and creating

sustainable opportunities to enhance their roles in various sectors in order to achieve the principle of community development.

In terms of exhibits, the participating projects are diverse, with ten productive families taking part.

The ministry called on community members to participate in the event, stressing that the ‘Winter Bazaar’ represents part of the national efforts to achieve all pillars of sustainable development in accordance with Qatar National Vision 2030.

It said that the event is expected to contribute to enhancing the role of productive project owners in supporting the national economy, protecting cultural heritage, and providing a sustainable marketing platform that showcases their creativity. (QNA)

QNB reveals winners of National Day Promotion

QNB announced the winners of its recent National Day Promotion, where some 18 winners received 18,000 ‘Life Rewards’ points each, following their applications for new personal or vehicle loans in the period between Dec 1 and 31, 2024.

During the campaign period, which celebrated banking convenience and national pride, customers also benefited from a special interest rate on personal and vehicle loans starting from 3.99% per year, which they can still avail of until end of January 2025.

Commenting on the campaign, Adel Ali al-Malki, senior executive vice-president, QNB Group Retail Banking, said: “At QNB, we ensure that our customers are enjoying every step of their banking experience; this includes providing them with the best interest rate on personal and vehicle loans along many other exclusive and limited benefits. I would like to personally congratulate all the winners of this campaign, and urge other customers to continue benefiting from our limited-time



interest rate offer.”

QNB Group is one of the leading financial institutions in the MEA region and among the most valuable banking brands in the regional market. Present in some 28 countries

across Asia, Europe, and Africa, it offers tailored products and services supported by innovation and backed by a team of over 31,000 professionals dedicated to driving banking excellence worldwide.

‘Honey Exhibition’ opens today as part of Umm Salal Winter Festival

The Ministry of Municipality, represented by the Agricultural Affairs Department, in collaboration with Hassad Food Company, opens the ‘Honey Exhibition’ today, as part of the Umm Salal Winter Festival. The exhibition will run until Saturday, Jan 18, at the Umm Salal Central Market.

The exhibition aims to highlight the remarkable quality of local honey products and to support national farms specialising in beekeeping and high-quality honey production. It also serves as an important platform for farmers to market their products while raising public awareness about honey’s significance as a natural and healthy resource.

Visitors will have the chance to explore a wide variety of Qatari honey, enjoy tastings, and learn about modern beekeeping techniques and innovations. The exhibition highlights the commitment to sustainable

agriculture by supporting local farms that contribute to the growth of the local agricultural sector.

Director of the Agricultural Affairs Department Youssef Khalid al-Khulaifi said: “The Honey Exhibition is a vital step in supporting local farmers and celebrating the quality of their products. Through this exhibition, we aim to encourage investment in beekeeping and increase local production, contributing to economic growth and achieving self-sufficiency”.

General Manager of Aswaq for Food Facilities Management Company Mohamed Ghanim al-Kubaisi said: “We are delighted to provide a premium marketing platform to support local farms, through the Honey Exhibition as part of the Umm Salal Winter Festival, at Umm Salal Central Market. This initiative reaffirms our commitment to enhancing local production and promoting sustainable agriculture, which contributes to achieving food security for the State of Qatar”. (QNA)



Announcement

Opening of the Nomination Period for the Board of Directors Membership of Vodafone Qatar P.Q.S.C.

The Board of Directors of Vodafone Qatar P.Q.S.C. (“Vodafone Qatar” or the “Company”) is pleased to announce the opening of the nomination period for the election of the three (3) independent board members of Vodafone Qatar for a term of three years starting in 2025 and ending in 2027, in accordance with the Commercial Companies Law No. (11) of 2015 and its amendments, the Qatar Financial Markets Authority Governance Code for Companies & Legal Entities Listed on the Main Market (QFMA Board Decision No. (5) of 2016) and the Articles of Association of the Company.

The nomination period shall be open for five (5) days starting from Sunday, 12 January 2025 and closing at 2:00pm on Thursday, 16 January 2025 (“Nomination Period”).

The general and specific qualification conditions along with the requirements for independent board membership and its sub-categories are available on Vodafone Qatar’s website (www.vodafone.qa).

Persons interested in the nomination for independent board membership in Vodafone Qatar are invited to submit the nomination application form and requested documents, available on the official website of Vodafone Qatar (www.vodafone.qa) in hard copies to the Company Secretary at the offices of the Company located in Msheireb Downtown Doha, 4th floor, building 2, Street 981, Zone 3, during morning working hours (starting at 8:30am until 2:00pm) during the Nomination Period.

Remarks:

- Applications submitted after the deadline specified above or not meeting the requirements shall not be considered.
- Elections will take place during the earliest General Assembly meeting of Vodafone Qatar. The invitation to the General Assembly meeting will be published in a local newspaper, on Qatar Stock Exchange website and on Vodafone Qatar’s website at least twenty-one (21) days prior to the meeting date.
- The Company will publish the final list of eligible candidates on its website prior to the General Assembly meeting.

For more information, please call +974 4409 6666.

Abdulla Bin Nasser Al Misnad
Chairman of the Board of Directors
Vodafone Qatar P.Q.S.C.



Pigeons outperform falcons at Marmi 2025

Five participants advanced to the next round of the Al Tala'a competition as part of the 16th edition of the Qatar International Falcons and Hunting Festival (Marmi 2025). Organised by the Qatari Al Gannas Qatari Society and sponsored by HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al Thani, the festival runs until February 1 in Sabkhat Marmi, the Sealine Area, with support from the Social and Sports Activities Support Fund.

The competition benefited from clear horizontal visibility, unlike Tuesday when fog delayed the



start until later in the morning. Consequently, Al Tala'a committee postponed some group com-



petitions at that day. Mohamed Mubarak al-Ali, chairman of Al Tala'a Committee, noted that

yesterday's competitions were highly competitive due to favourable weather. Early starts

allowed for smooth scheduling, benefiting both morning and afternoon events.

He also stressed the importance of participants adhering to schedules, as camera setups and retries for falcons missing their targets require significant time. To ensure fairness, the committee announced a redo for Group 11 due to difficult visibility on Jan 7 and postponed Groups 14 and 15 to Jan 11.

In the afternoon, the seventh group in the Haddad Al Tahaddi failed to catch any of the homing pigeons. The pigeons once again

outperformed the falcons, adding to their successes from the first two days of the challenge.

Between the morning and afternoon events, shooting enthusiasts showcased their skills in a clay pigeon shooting activity open to the public to discover and nurture their talents. The organising committee has also announced upcoming shooting competitions for various age groups.

On Thursday, Al Tala'a qualifiers for Groups 21-25 will take place in the morning, followed by the eighth group's Haddad Al Tahaddi competition in the evening.

St Regis presents midnight supper with orchestra



QPO

In a celebration of the St Regis legacy and Doha's vibrant social scene, The St Regis Doha, in collaboration with the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra, presents 'The Midnight Supper'.

It will take place on January 16 and promises a night of fine dining, live orchestral music, and socialising for Doha's elite.

St Regis Doha is poised to transport Doha's elite to the pinnacle of social grace with the debut of "The Midnight Supper", a captivating evening inspired by the legendary gatherings hosted by Caroline Astor, mother of the hotel's founder, John Jacob Astor IV, during the Gilded Age – an era of unprecedented wealth and social transformation in America.

On January 16, the Grand Ballroom will be transformed into a stage worthy of world-

class performances. Guests will convene in this elegant setting, where a culinary symphony awaits. Orchestrated by the award-winning chefs from Hakkasan, Scalini, Novikov, and Fauchon, the menu will feature exquisite dishes, including king crab with caviar, black cod with truffle, and Wagyu short rib, inviting guests on a gastronomic journey that will tantalise the senses.

The evening will be further elevated by a captivating performance by the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra (QPO) led by the conductor Elias Grandy. Featuring the mesmerising voices of soprano Julia Koci and tenor Lucian Kraznec, the orchestra will present an evening of operatic and orchestral brilliance, showcasing timeless masterpieces from classical composers such as Johan

Strauss, Tchaikovsky, Puccini, Bizet, Verdi, and Rossini. The repertoire for this exclusive evening has been carefully curated by Kurt Meister, QPO executive director.

A dazzling ballet performance by the internationally acclaimed Ildar Young-Gaynutdinov will grace the stage, concluding this unforgettable evening.

"The St Regis Midnight Supper is more than a luxury event. It's a legacy, a tradition celebrated annually at St. Regis properties worldwide. In Doha, we are honoured to launch this exquisite experience, a celebration of refined tastes that resonates with the city's most esteemed clientele," said Marc Matar, multi-property general manager, St Regis Doha and St Regis Marsa Arabia Island, The Pearl-Qatar.

Nissan launches roadside assistance programme in the Middle East

Nissan has introduced a comprehensive manufacturer-backed roadside assist programme, Nissan Assistance in the Middle East to enhance convenience and ownership experiences for customers.

Debuting on the all-new Nissan Patrol, this innovative programme is available to customers in select markets and will be made available across all MY25 models. Nissan Assistance provides five years peace of mind to customers and is currently available at Saleh Al Hamad Al Mana Co, showrooms located across Qatar.

Nissan Assistance, includes a wide range of services tailored to address everyday challenges and unique driving needs. These include onsite support for minor mechanical and electrical faults, flat tire replacement, and towing assistance to the nearest Nissan authorised service centre in the event of a breakdown.

The programme also provides lockout services for lost keys, fuel assistance, and exclusive sand recovery of up to 10 kilometres inside the desert.

Nassim Mourani, general manager of the Automotive Group at Saleh Al Hamad Al Mana Co, said: "With the launch of the Nissan Assistance programme, we are raising the bar for customer care and convenience in the region. This manufacturer-backed roadside assistance service, available



Nissan Assistance, includes a wide range of services tailored to address everyday challenges.

on the all-new Nissan Patrol and soon across all MY25 models, offers unmatched support when it matters most. Whether it's a flat tire, fuel assistance, or even sand recovery, our customers can rely on prompt, professional service, 24/7."

When customers contact the 24/7 multilingual call centre, trained and experienced agents first attempt to resolve issues over the phone, ensuring quick and effective support.

If onsite assistance is required, Nissan's trained technicians promptly reach customers within a short timeframe to provide services such as flat tire replacement or a battery boost.

Customers also benefit from WhatsApp support with live tracking, allowing them to stay informed of their assistance in real time.

For more complex issues and should a vehicle need to be towed to an authorised Nissan service centre, customers enjoy additional conveniences such as complimentary taxi services within city limits. In the event of a breakdown abroad, the programme provides up to three days of hotel accommodation. If repairs exceed 72 hours, customers are further supported with a complimentary flight ticket back to their country of residence, ensuring peace of mind during unexpected situations.

To reach Nissan Assistance, customers can simply scan the QR code conveniently placed in the main warranty booklet or on the driver-side door, to directly connect with support services. Additionally, WhatsApp support is also available, ensuring seamless and immediate access for customers.

Qatar set to host diverse activities in January

Qatar's second week of January 2025 continues to offer a diverse slate of events, from cultural festivals and theatrical performances to sporting competitions and family-friendly attractions.

Marmi Festival 2025 at Sabkhat Marmi in Sealine will run until February 1, highlighting Qatari falconry and hunting. Daily competitions and cultural shows offer an immersive experience. The 5th Kahraman exhibition, which showcases amber from 14 countries at Katara Hall, ends tomorrow (January 10).

Crime in the City, a theatrical production at U Venue, kicked off yesterday (January 8) and runs until January 11. *Al Theyaba* play at Katara Drama Theatre (January 9-11) presents a powerful mix of drama and emotion.

The Doha Marathon by Ooredoo takes place on January 17 at Hotel Park, offering categories for all skill levels. Mawater hosts an event for car enthusiasts at Sealine (until January 27).

Ras Abrouq offers hot-air bal-



Al Theyaba

looning, archery, children's workshops, roaming acts, and a camel parade.

Sealine Season features desert safaris, monster bus rides, ATVs, horse riding, boat trips, and free sports/children's activities. Weekends include fishing, stargazing, and Muay Thai. Live performances by Mohammed al-Bakri and Abdulaziz al-Thuehi (January 10) will be followed by a fireworks display.

Al Wakra Safari Zoo at Old Souq Al Wakra (January 1-February 1)



Al Wakra Zoo

offers wildlife encounters, camel rides, and interactive exhibits.

The Winter Market at Rixos Premium Qetaifan Island North (until February 27) features seasonal food, kids' activities, and artisanal crafts.

Vibrant live shows and endless fun for children will be at Mall of Qatar throughout January.

Shop Qatar 2025 (until February 1) offers discounts, retail experiences, and the chance to win prizes. Daily mall entertainment enhances the shopping experience.



Crime in the City



Kahraman



Marmi Festival 2025



Ooredoo Marathon



Ras Abrouq



Amiri Guard celebrates graduation of new recruits

The Amiri Guard School celebrated yesterday graduation of new recruits from the foundation course No 37. The ceremony was held at the Lahsniyeh camp in the presence of HE the Commander of the Amiri Guard Lt Gen Staff Hazza bin Khalil al-Shahwani. It was also attended by the deputy commander of the Amiri Guard, the inspector general, and several assistants to the commander of the Amiri Guard, as well as commanders and officers of departments and units.

Acting Commander of the Amiri Guard School Captain Hamad Abdullah al-Nabit said that the course is a foundational programme designed to instil values of discipline and loyalty in its members.

He pointed out that the course aims to develop patience and confidence, and enhance physical, psychological, and mental capabilities

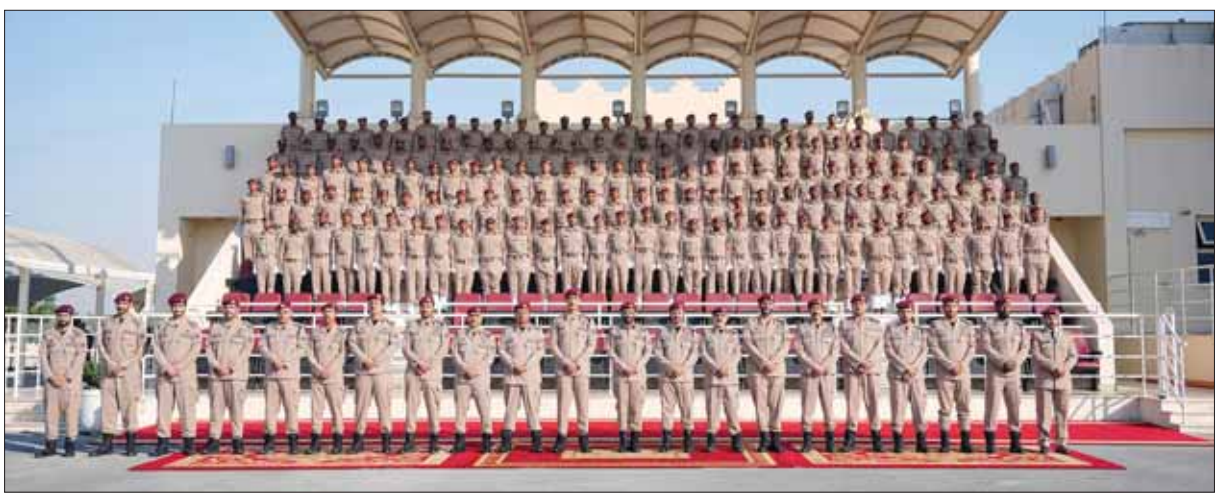
ties by training recruits in military discipline and organisation.

This ensures that recruits become capable and qualified to perform their duties with efficiency and sincerity.

The acting commander of the Amiri Guard School praised the distinguished level demonstrated by the course members during the closing show, reflecting the experience and skills they gained throughout the 16-week course period.

The graduates showcased movement formations, most notably the formation of the Amiri Guard logo and word on the field. The segments also included a display of organisational infantry movements that reflected professionalism and precision in performance.

At the end of the ceremony, the commander of the Amiri Guard honoured top graduates and wished them all the success. (QNA)



QRCS launches food parcel distribution project in Yemen

Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) has launched a food parcel distribution project in Yemen, to ensure food security for 10,745 Internally Displaced People (IDPs), widows and poor families most affected by the bad living conditions in Marib Governorate.

Implemented in partnership with Yemen Red Crescent Society (YRCS), the \$136,308 project involves distributing 1,535 one-month food parcels in Marib and Harib districts.

During the inauguration ceremony, Director of Marib's IDP Camp Management Executive Unit Saif Muthanna announced "the launch of a food parcels project, donated by QRCS and implemented by YRCS. Helping



meet the food needs of 767 families in Marib district, it is one of the most important projects being implemented in the governorate to alleviate the suffering of IDPs."

In turn, head of QRCS's office in Marib Faris al-Aqili praised such crucial projects during difficult times for IDPs.

"The food parcels project is in response to the government's appeal to meet the needs of IDPs and other victims of floods and conflict," said al-Aqili. "In fact, the needs are growing, and all the humanitarian support available in the governorate is not sufficient, with the increasing numbers of IDPs." (QNA)

Qatar Charity signs partnership agreement with Bsporty app



Qatar Charity has entered into a partnership agreement with the Bsporty app, dedicating a portion of the app's revenue to support its initiatives and providing a platform for raising humanitarian donations.

The agreement, according to an official statement from QC, was signed by Ahmad Fakhro, assistant CEO for Resource Development and Communication at QC and Sheikh Saheem al-Thani, founder and CEO of Bsporty.

This collaboration aims to enhance QC's capacity to implement its humanitarian projects,

ultimately improving the lives of vulnerable individuals and families. Fakhro expressed gratitude to Bsporty for its commitment underscoring the importance of this partnership in advancing humanitarian efforts and strengthening co-operation with local institutions in the realm of corporate social responsibility.

"We are proud to sign this Humanitarian Partnership Agreement, which marks a strategic step toward amplifying our collective efforts to serve those in need. We look forward to achieving meaningful outcomes with our partners at Bsporty

and thank them for their belief in our humanitarian mission," he said.

"QC stands as a distinguished platform that reflects the deep sense of duty and compassion of the Qatari people, providing aid both within Qatar and abroad strengthening solidarity and co-operation. At Bsporty, we believe our participation in this initiative is not just a responsibility, but a privilege. Our goal is to raise awareness of humanitarian, cultural, and religious causes while making a tangible contribution to improving the lives of individuals and communities," al-Thani said.

Lebanon to hold presidential vote

Lebanon's parliament will try to elect a president today, with officials seeing better chances of success in a political landscape shaken by Israel's war with Hezbollah and the toppling of the group's ally Bashar al-Assad in neighbouring Syria. Reuters reported from Beirut. The post, reserved for a Maronite Christian in the country's sectarian power-sharing system, has been vacant since Michel Aoun's term ended in October, 2022. None of the political groups in the 128-seat parliament have enough seats to impose their choice, and they have so far been unable to agree on a consensus candidate. The vote marks the first test of Lebanon's power balance since the Hezbollah emerged badly pumelled from the war with Israel. It takes place against a backdrop of change in the wider Middle East, where the Assad-led Syrian state exercised sway over Lebanon for decades, both directly and through allies such as Hezbollah.

Air strike kills two children in West Bank

AFP
Tammun

Palestinian officials said two children were among three people killed in an Israeli air strike on the occupied West Bank yesterday which the military said targeted fighters.

Ahmad Asaad, governor of the northern West Bank city of Tubas, told AFP that the strike hit nearby Tammun village, killing a 23-year-old man and two children, aged eight and 10, all from the same family.

The Palestinian foreign ministry in Ramallah condemned the deadly strike, accusing Israel of harming civilians "under the pretext" of fighting fighters.

The Israeli military said the air force "struck a fighter cell" in the Tammun area.

The Tubas governor said Israeli forces, which have operated in Tammun in recent days, took the bodies of the three Palestinians killed.



Women react during the funeral of Palestinians killed in an Israeli drone strike, in Tammun, near Tubas, occupied West Bank, yesterday.

They later handed them back, the Red Crescent said.

The governor identified the dead as Adam Bsharat, 23, Hamza Bsharat, 10, and Reda Bsharat, eight.

He said they were killed in front of their house, which an AFP journalist said was damaged by shrapnel.

Relative Jalal Bsharat said they had been at home when "the Israeli occupation army targeted them".

He said the strike showed Palestinians are not safe, even in their own

homes. By midday, hours after the strike, Israeli forces were no longer seen in Tammun, the AFP journalist said. It was the second Israeli air strike to hit Tammun in as many days.

On Tuesday, the military said it killed two people in a strike on an "armed fighter cell" that opened fire on Israeli forces who were conducting a raid in the village.

Tammun residents told AFP that Israeli forces had taken one of the bodies.

Nomination period for BilArabi Summit extended

BilArabi, an initiative of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development (QF), has extended the nomination period for speakers at the BilArabi Summit until Jan 10, with the aim of providing the opportunity for the largest possible number of inspiring and innovative ideas for Arabic speakers.

In remarks to Qatar News Agency (QNA), Executive Director of Strategic Initiatives and Programmes at QF Hisham Nourin said that this will provide an opportunity for applicants with innovative ideas and scientific innovations to participate in the summit.

Nourin added that BilArabi initiative reflects

QF's role in providing platforms that enhance knowledge exchange and to find solutions to global challenges.

Those wishing to participate can submit their nominations via a five-minute video clip, including a brief about the speaker, his idea, and its importance, through the link (<https://form.jotform.com/qfdigital/bil-arab>) before Jan 10.

The initiative launched a competition in September 2024 to design its logo, which attracted more than 1,500 entries from the Arab world. The winning design will be announced and its owner honoured during the summit scheduled to be held in April 2025 in Doha. (QNA)



Cambodian police arrest suspect in politician’s Bangkok shooting

AFP
Bangkok

Police in Cambodia arrested a former Thai marine yesterday over the fatal shooting of a Cambodian opposition politician in a brazen attack in downtown Bangkok. Exiled Cambodian opposition figurehead Sam Rainsy accused the country’s powerful former leader Hun Sen of ordering the killing of Lim Kimya, who was also a French citizen.

Lim Kimya was shot dead on Tuesday by a gunman on a motorbike as he arrived in the Thai capital from the Cambodian city of Siem

Reap by bus, accompanied by his French wife. Thai police issued a warrant for the suspected shooter on Wednesday, and in the evening Cambodia said the man had been detained at 1:50pm in Battambang province, which borders Thailand.

“The gunman is a Thai national, and a former Thai marine,” Cambodian National Police spokesman Chhay Kim Khoeun told AFP. Cambodian police named the suspect as Ekkalak Pheanoi - though some Thai media gave his name as Ekkalak Paenoi - and said he would be returned to Thailand, without giving a timetable.

Earlier, Sanong Sangmanee, police chief for the area of Bangkok

where the shooting happened, told AFP they had little information about the suspect except that he worked as a motorbike taxi driver.

Scores of Cambodian opposition activists have fled to Thailand in recent years to avoid alleged repression at home. Some were arrested and deported back to the country. Hun Sen ruled Cambodia with an iron fist for nearly four decades, with rights groups accusing him of using the legal system to crush opposition to his rule. He stepped down and handed power to his son Hun Manet in 2023 but is still seen as a major power in the kingdom. On Tuesday, Hun Sen called for a new law to label anyone who at-

tempts to topple Hun Manet’s government as “terrorists”

Sam Rainsy, Hun Sen’s long-time rival, accused the former Cambodian leader of being behind the killing. “Hun Sen’s hand can be seen behind the assassination of Lim Kimya, just as it has been behind the countless political crimes in Cambodia that have always gone unpunished,” Sam Rainsy said in a statement posted on his Facebook page. He alleged “the motive is the same, as is the modus operandi”. Cambodian government spokesman Pen Bona told AFP the killing was in Thailand “so Thai authorities will handle the case”.

He denied the government was

involved with the killing, saying opposition figures “always accuse the government of everything groundlessly and without any evidence”.

Lim Kimya became an opposition member of Cambodia’s parliament following an election in 2013 in which Hun Sen’s ruling party almost lost to its then-rival, the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP). The CNRP, which was founded in 2012 by Sam Rainsy and Kem Sokha and was once 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 activi-

ties following the party’s dissolution. The now-dissolved CNRP said in a statement it was shocked by “the heinous and inhumane” killing of Lim Kimya. It condemned “the brutal act that badly threatens political freedom”.

Elaine Pearson, the Asia director of Human Rights Watch, urged Thailand to carry out a “thorough independent investigation” into the killing. “What has happened in the last 24 hours really sends a chill down the spine for any Cambodian political activists that Bangkok is not a safe place,” she told AFP. The French embassies in Bangkok and Phnom Penh have so far declined to comment on the killing.

Urgency mounts in search for survivors of Tibet earthquake

More than 400 people trapped by quake have been rescued; At least 126 dead, 188 injured on Tibetan side; Survivors trapped under rubble at risk of hypothermia; Quake destroyed more than 3,000 homes in Tibet’s Shigatse region

Reuters
Beijing

More than 400 people trapped by rubble in earthquake-stricken Tibet have been rescued, Chinese officials said on Wednesday, with an unknown number still unaccounted for in freezing weather a day after a strong tremor rocked the Himalayan foothills.

The epicentre of Tuesday’s magnitude 6.8 quake, one of the region’s most powerful tremors in recent years, was located in Tingri in China’s Tibet, about 80km north of Mount Everest, the world’s highest mountain. It also shook buildings in neighbouring Nepal, Bhutan and India.

Twenty-four hours after the temblor struck, those trapped under rubble would have endured a night in sub-zero temperatures, adding to the pressure on rescuers looking for survivors in an area roughly the size of Cambodia. Temperatures in the high-altitude region dropped as low as -18C overnight. People trapped or those without shelter are at risk of rapid hypothermia and may only be able to live for five to 10 hours even if uninjured, experts say.

Footage broadcast on state television CCTV showed families huddled in rows of blue and green tents quickly erected by soldiers and aid workers in settlements surrounding the epicentre, where hundreds of aftershocks have been recorded. At least 126 people were known to have been killed and 188 injured on the Tibetan side, state broadcaster CCTV reported. No deaths have been reported in Nepal or else-

where. The quake was so strong part of the terrain around the epicentre slipped as much as 1.6m over a distance of 80km, according to an analysis by the United States Geological Survey.

Chinese authorities have yet to announce how many people are still missing. In Nepal, an official told Reuters the quake destroyed a school building in a village near Mount Everest, which straddles the Nepali-Tibetan border. No one was inside at the time.

German climber Jost Kobusch said he was just above the Everest base camp on the Nepali side when the quake struck. His tent shook violently and he saw several avalanches crash down. He was unscathed. “I’m climbing Everest in the winter by myself and ... looks like basically I’m the only mountaineer there, in the base camp there’s nobody,” Kobusch told Reuters in a video call.

His expedition organising company, Satori Adventure, said Kobusch had left the base camp and was descending to Namche Bazaar on Wednesday on the way to Kathmandu. No avalanches have been observed on Everest so far from the Chinese side, state-run Xinhua news agency reported on Wednesday, citing Chinese scientists.

But damage round the epicentre was extensive. An initial survey showed 3,609 homes had been destroyed in the Shigatse region, home to 800,000 people, state media reported late on Tuesday. More than 14,000 rescue personnel had been deployed. More than 46,500 people affected by the quake have been relocated, and 484 tourists in Tingri have been safely transported to the city of Shigatse, local officials said at a press conference on Wednesday.

Home to some 60,000 people, Tingri is Tibet’s most populous county on China’s border with Nepal and is administered from Shigatse, the traditional seat of the Panchen Lama, one of the most important figures in Tibetan Buddhism. No damage has been reported to Shigatse’s Tashilhunpo monastery, state media reported, founded in 1447 by the first Dalai Lama.

The 14th and current Dalai Lama has said he was deeply saddened by the quake, speaking from exile in India where he fled in 1959 after a failed uprising against Chinese rule. China routinely rejects criticism from exiles and rights groups of its rule in Tibet, saying it has



A firefighter conducts search and rescue operation with a rescue dog at a village following the earthquake that struck Tingri county, in Shigatse.

brought much-needed development to a remote region and that it respects Tibetan culture and religion. Russian President Vladimir Putin and Taiwan President Lai Ching-te have also expressed condolences to the earthquake’s victims. Southwestern parts of China, Nepal and northern India are often hit by earthquakes caused by the collision of the Indian and Eurasian tectonic plates, which are pushing up an ancient sea that is now the Qinghai-Tibetan plateau.

As of noon on Wednesday, 646 aftershocks with magnitudes of up to 4.4 continued to jolt the area around the epicentre.

Over the past five years, there have been 29 quakes with magnitudes of 3 or above within 200km of the epicentre of Tuesday’s temblor, according to local earthquake bureau data. Analysis shows a magnitude 5 to 6 quake could occur in the same area in the near future, Meng Hui, deputy head of Tibet’s earthquake administration, said at the news conference.

Tuesday’s quake was the worst in China since a 6.2 magnitude earthquake in 2023 that killed at least 149 people in a remote northwestern region. In 2008, an 8.0-magnitude earthquake hit Sichuan, claiming the lives of at least 70,000 people, the deadliest quake to hit China since the 1976 Tangshan quake that killed at least 242,000.



Tibetan exiles living in Nepal pray for the victims and survivors of the 7.1-magnitude earthquake in southwestern China’s Tibet region.



A drone view shows makeshift tents for quake-affected residents in Shigatse.

China says Taiwan ‘hyped’ sea cable damage claims

AFP
Beijing

China yesterday accused Taiwan’s ruling party of having “deliberately hyped” an incident in which a Chinese-owned ship was suspected of damaging a subsea telecoms cable. Taiwanese authorities this week said they were investigating a Chinese-owned cargo ship suspected of dragging its anchor over an international subsea telecoms cable northeast of the island.

“DPP authorities have... out of thin air deliberately hyped the subsea cable incident as a so-called ‘grey-zone threat’ from the mainland, fully showing they will not let go of unscrupulous ‘anti-China counter-China’ tricks,” state broadcaster CCTV quoted Taiwan Affairs Office spokesman Chen Binhua as saying, referring to the island’s ruling Democratic Progressive Party. Taiwan’s top China policy body, the Mainland Affairs Council, hit back Wednesday, saying the prosecutors’ investigation was “based on relevant evidence” and there was no “anti-China” issue.

The Cameroon-flagged Shunxing39 was intercepted by Taiwan’s coast guard on Friday after Chunghwa Telecom reported damage to a subsea cable that is part of the Trans-Pacific Express Cable System.

Coast guard personnel were unable to board the ship due to rough seas and it was allowed to sail for South Korea. “An analysis of the ship’s historical trajectory has yet to reveal its true intent”, Taiwan’s coast guard said on Tuesday.

“However, the possibility of a Chinese-flag of convenience ship engaging in grey-zone harassment cannot be ruled out”, it added, referring to tactics that fall short of an act of war. Taiwan Affairs Office spokesman Chen dismissed the allegations, saying damage to subsea cables was “a common maritime occurrence” with “more than a hundred incidents” in the world each year.

Hundreds rally for South Korea’s Yoon as new arrest bid beckons

AFP
Seoul

Hundreds of supporters of South Korea’s impeached President Yoon Suk-yeol rallied outside his residence Wednesday as investigators prepared a fresh attempt to arrest him.

Yoon has refused questioning and resisted arrest since his bungled December 3 martial law decree plunged South Korea into its worst political crisis in decades.

Investigators secured a new arrest warrant Tuesday after an initial seven-day order expired. Several hundred members of his base rushed to the presidential residence in central Seoul in response, braving sub-zero temperatures. “A large number of people are coming out to join us. Despite the cold weather, many stayed up all night last night, braving the chill,” Lee Hye-sook, a 57-year-old Yoon supporter, told AFP outside the residence. “With-



A supporter of impeached South Korean president Yoon Suk-yeol stands next to an extendable police barrier in front of a picture of Yoon displayed on a large monitor, expressing Korean words of encouragement for Yoon, during a rally near his residence in Seoul yesterday.

nessing their resilience against the wind and cold, I am confident that President Yoon Suk-yeol will return, and we will prevail.”

Some supporters left flow-

ers outside and ribbons with the Trump-style slogan “Make Korea Great Again”, while others waved American flags at the gates of the compound from where the sus-

pended leader has resisted arrest. Despite a cold weather warning that temperatures were expected to fall to -10C, the suspended president’s supporters were defiant, shouting “impeachment is invalid”. Rival protesters calling for Yoon to be punished waved glowsticks - commonly seen at K-pop concerts - and held placards that read, “Detain, arrest insurrectionist Yoon Suk-yeol”.

Yoon’s legal team said yesterday he remains inside the residential compound, after investigators cast doubt a day earlier on his whereabouts. “Last night, I personally visited the official residence, met the president there, and left,” said his lawyer Yoon Kap-keun, who is unrelated. The Corruption Investigation Office (CIO), which is leading the probe into the president, has kept secret the duration of the new warrant. Yoon would become the first sitting South Korean president to be arrested if investigators are able to detain him.

Yoon’s legal team said they would not comply with the current warrant, but only a stronger one from a different court if approved, accusing investigators of targeting an allegedly liberal-leaning judge for the initial orders. An AFP journalist saw Yoon’s guards walking behind rows of buses and locked entrance gates covered in barbed wire at the residential compound on Wednesday.

CIO chief Oh Dong-woon said on Tuesday the force would “prepare thoroughly” to make sure their second arrest attempt was successful. Acting president Choi Sang-mok warned against violence in the event of another standoff. “Under no circumstances should there be any injuries to citizens or conflicts among government agencies. Please ensure every precaution is taken,” Choi said in a meeting with officials. South Korea’s Constitutional Court has slated January 14 for the start of Yoon’s impeachment trial, which would proceed in his

absence if he does not attend. His legal team said he planned to attend the trial at some stage and lawyer Yoon Kap-keun told reporters on Wednesday “the president’s position... remains unchanged”.

“Of course, issues related to security and safety must be resolved in advance,” he said. National Assembly Speaker Woo Won-shik wrote on X it was distressing to watch Yoon mobilise force to stop his arrest because the “whole world” was watching. Investigators are trying to work out how to tackle an expected wall of security after being stopped by hundreds of Presidential Security Service (PSS) guards last week.

“The number of PSS personnel cannot be disclosed as it is confidential information,” a service spokesperson told AFP. On Wednesday parliament voted down two bills to investigate Yoon and his wife for different charges, failing to get the two-thirds majority they needed.

British universities join retreat from Musk’s X, citing misinformation

By Andy Bruce
Reuters

Universities and other higher education establishments have joined a retreat among British institutions from Elon Musk’s X social media platform, citing its role in spreading misinformation that fuelled race riots last year.

A Reuters survey on Tuesday showed several universities have scaled back usage of X to the bare minimum or quit completely, following scores of academics who

have left the platform. The role of X, formerly Twitter, came under the spotlight in Britain last year during violent racial disturbances.

Musk - a close aide to US President-elect Donald Trump - has since called for Prime Minister Keir Starmer to be jailed and for anti-Muslim activist Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, who co-founded the far-right English Defence League and is known as Tommy Robinson, to be released from prison.

Reuters surveyed X accounts of over 150 universities, their colleges and art conservatoires and contacted those that had made little or

no posts in recent months.

They cited concerns over misinformation, content that promotes violence and declining engagement. “London Business School continually reviews its communications channels and decides which to use based on levels of effective audience engagement,” LBS told Reuters.

It last posted to its 182,000 followers on X in September. It is one of the top-ranked business schools in the world. Reuters was first to report in October that several British police forces had quit X or cut their usage.

The university survey points to a broader withdrawal among public institutions, even though many universities still post regularly to X. At least seven of the University of Cambridge’s 31 colleges have stopped posting to X.

“We know this platform is becoming increasingly toxic, so we will continue to assess our presence on X and monitor emerging alternatives,” said Homerton College, the university’s largest in terms of student numbers. The University of Cambridge told Reuters it continued to use X alongside other channels.

At Oxford, Merton College - the university’s top-ranked college academically - has deleted its X account. It did not respond to a request for comment. Harris Manchester - another Oxford college - last posted on Nov 15 and asked followers to find it on other platforms.

The University of East Anglia said its audience engagement on X had plunged by 80%.

X did not respond to a request for comment. Falmouth University last posted to X in September, while Plymouth Marjon University said it will no longer use it. London

Metropolitan University cited falling engagement for no longer actively posting.

Buckinghamshire New University said X was “no longer a place where we want to encourage conversations with our university”.

Some top arts conservatoires have also stepped away. The Royal Northern College of Music said it was “consciously channelling its energy elsewhere”, while London’s performing arts conservatoire Trinity Lab deleted its X account.

The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama hasn’t posted since August.

US, Canadian and Australian travellers now face UK entry fee

AFP
Heathrow

Visitors to the UK from dozens of countries, including the United States, Canada and Australia, must now pay to enter Britain after a new visa-waiver entry system took effect on Wednesday. The Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) scheme - similar to the ESTA system in the United States - requires visitors who do not need a visa to enter Britain to acquire pre-travel authorisation.

Costing £10 (\$12.50) and allowing stays of up to six months at a time over two years, it first launched in 2023. Now, it has been expanded to include citizens of around 50 more countries and territories, from Argentina, Brazil and New Zealand to Japan, South Korea and Caribbean nations.

With the system kicking in for them on Wednesday, they have been able to apply since last November.

The scheme, aimed at tightening border security, will next be extended to dozens of EU and European countries and territories on April 2.

Those citizens covered by the scheme will be able to apply for the new ETA - which is digitally linked to the traveller’s passport - via an app, from March 5. Around

6mn people from the United States, Canada and Australia visit Britain each year, according to the UK government. Eligible travellers will need one even if they are just using the UK to connect to an onward flight abroad. ETA also applies to children and babies.

Naila Hadi, a US woman in her fifties, told AFP at London’s Heathrow Airport that the new system was “easy” to navigate. “We did it on our phones and they just scanned the passport, because this passport has a chip,... and within 20 minutes we got our approval,” said Hadi, who had arrived from New Jersey with her daughter.

Jackie Day, a 77-year-old arriving from Vancouver, said: “My only quibble is that when I selected the country I was applying from, Canada, I had to pay in US dollars.” “I had to scan the passport, I had to scan my face plus take a picture of my face and fill out basic information about where I live, nothing complicated,” she added.

However, Northern Ireland economy minister Conor Murphy warned that ETA will have a “devastating” impact on tourism in the British province, given that its neighbour the Republic of Ireland is not involved with the scheme. Murphy fears that the cost and red tape will deter international tourists visiting

the Republic from making the journey across the land border to visit Northern Ireland, and has called for a time-limited exemption for people visiting up to seven days.

Heathrow has also opposed the scheme, saying its rollout has reduced the number of passengers transiting through the UK, and that it makes the country “less competitive” and harms economic growth. The new requirement does not apply to British and Irish citizens, those with passports from British overseas territories and legal UK residents.

It does not change the requirements for citizens of countries who need a visa to visit Britain, such as Chinese, Ecuadorian and South African travellers. Previously, most visitors not requiring a visa could arrive at a British airport and proceed through immigration control with their passport. The new UK entry scheme mirrors the imminent ETIAS scheme for visa-exempt nationals travelling to 30 European countries, including France and Germany, which will cost seven euros (\$7.40) and last three years.

The European Commission expects the system - which will apply to around 60 countries, including the United States, Canada, Brazil and the UK - to become operational in the middle of this year.

Covered in snow



People walk with a dog in heavy snow at the summit of Mount Leinster in Carlow, Ireland, yesterday.

Britain sanctions neo-Nazi entity ‘Blood and Honour’

AFP
London

Britain yesterday froze the assets of international neo-Nazi group Blood and Honour, the first use of the UK’s counter-terrorism sanctions to target a far-right entity.

The finance ministry said it had “reasonable grounds” to suspect that Blood and Honour was “promoting and encouraging terrorism, seeking to recruit people for that purpose and making funds available” for terror activities. Under the order, all assets and economic resources in the UK owned or controlled by

Blood and Honour and its aliases, including the violent Combat 18 group, must now be frozen. No person or entity in Britain is allowed to deal with any funds or economic resources belonging to the far-right entity or make funds, financial services or resources available to it unless they obtain a licence.

“The designation of Blood and Honour is a clear signal that the UK works proactively to stop terrorist financing and will take action against any who try to exploit the UK financial system for this activity,” the ministry added.

The group emerged in England in 1987 from the skinhead music scene, according to The Counter

Extremism Project (CEP), a non-profit policy organisation working to combat extremist ideologies.

Founded by Ian Stuart Donaldson, who died in a 1993 car crash, it has since spread across Europe, Russia, Australia, and North America, the CEP noted. Right-wing extremist Anders Behring Breivik, who carried out Norway’s deadliest peacetime attack when he killed 77 people in 2011, told a court there in 2022 he was merely a “foot soldier” for the Blood and Honour movement.

Canada designated it and its violent offshoot Combat 18 as terrorist groups in 2019, while several European countries have banned them.

India names rocket scientist as new space agency chief

Reuters
Bengaluru

India appointed rocket scientist V Narayanan as the new head of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), the government said, a key role as India works to become a space superpower.

Narayanan takes over from S Somanath, who became chairman in 2022 and has been credited with making the 54-year-old space agency more approachable and opening it up to engage with the next generation.

Former colleagues describe Narayanan, who joined ISRO in 1984, as a mild mannered but “strict” scientist with a track record of getting things done. “The appointment is a surprise

because we were expecting an extension for Somanath, but the choice makes sense, given Narayanan’s track record,” said a former ISRO scientist and colleague, who did not want to be named because he is not authorised to speak to the media.

Narayanan, who has a doctorate in aerospace engineering, will take charge as ISRO sets sights on building its own space station by 2035, and putting an Indian on the moon by 2040.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has called on ISRO to make India a profitable space superpower, and the agency has responded by looking to work with the private sector. The Indian government estimates its share of the market is currently just \$8bn, but it is aiming to increase that to \$44bn over the next decade.

The \$400bn global commercial space market is expected to be worth \$1tn by 2030.

Somanath and Narayanan did not immediately respond to requests for comment. Narayanan, who has worked on the key rocket launches such as ISRO’s Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle and led the centre that designs and develops liquid propulsion systems for the agency, will take over on Jan 14 for a two-year term.

He was also the head of the analysis committee tasked with looking into the failure of Chandrayaan-2, where ISRO lost contact with a spacecraft it was trying to land on the moon.

The agency eventually launched the Chandrayaan-3 mission in 2023, becoming the first country to land on the rugged, unexplored south pole of the moon.

R-Day rehearsal



Assam Rifles contingent marches during rehearsals for the upcoming Republic Day parade, in New Delhi, yesterday.

Bangladesh orders banks to assist Britain minister graft probe

AFP
Dhaka

Bangladesh money laundering investigators have ordered the country’s big banks to hand over details of transactions relating to British anti-corruption minister Tulip Siddiq in an ongoing graft probe, officers told AFP.

Siddiq is the niece of former

Bangladeshi premier Sheikh Hasina, who fled abroad last August after a student-led uprising against her iron-fisted tenure. Last month the national anti-corruption commission launched a probe into the alleged embezzlement by Hasina’s family of \$5bn connected to a Russian-funded nuclear power plant.

Two officials from the Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU), speaking to AFP on con-

dition of anonymity, confirmed that Bangladeshi banks had been instructed to furnish any financial records relating to Siddiq. A BFIU document issued Tuesday and seen by AFP showed that banks had also been told to provide transaction records for Hasina, her son and daughter, Siddiq’s two siblings and her mother Sheikh Rehana.

The kickback allegations relate to the \$12.65bn Rooppur nuclear

plant, which was bankrolled by Moscow with a 90 percent loan. “The claims of kickbacks, mismanagement, money laundering, and potential abuse of power raise significant concerns about the integrity of the project and the use of public funds”, the anti-corruption commission said last month when announcing the probe.

The order came a day after British Prime Minister Keir Starmer

revealed that Siddiq had referred herself to his standards adviser. Siddiq insists she has done nothing wrong and a spokesman for Starmer said he retains “full confidence” in her. The referral came after the *Sunday Times* and *Financial Times* newspapers reported that she had lived in properties linked to her aunt Sheikh Hasina’s administration. “In recent weeks I have been the subject of media reporting,

much of it inaccurate, about my financial affairs and my family’s links to the former government of Bangladesh,” Siddiq wrote in her letter to ministerial standards watchdog Laurie Magnus.

“I am clear that I have done nothing wrong,” she added. “However, for the avoidance of doubt, I would like you to independently establish the facts about these matters.”

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TIMES

‘New’ Syria is up against economy ravaged by war

Syria’s economy has been decimated by more than a decade of civil war and sanctions that have severed it from the global financial system. Below is a round up of the current state of the economy and how the conflict has reshaped trade and government finances.

The economy more than halved between 2010 and 2021, official Syrian data cited by the World Bank in spring 2024 showed. However, this was likely an underestimate, the bank said. Its calculations using nighttime light emissions - a proxy for overall economic activity - indicated a sharper 84% contraction between 2010 and 2023.

The World Bank reclassified Syria as a low-income country in 2018. More than 90% of the 23mn Syrians live below the poverty line, according to UN agencies.

World Bank data estimated Syria's economy was \$23.63bn in 2022 - roughly on par with Albania and Armenia, which each have fewer than 3mn inhabitants. Syria’s economic crunch worsened in 2019 when neighbouring Lebanon, with which it has extensive economic and financial ties, descended into crisis. Syria then introduced a plethora of exchange rates for different transactions to safeguard access to scarce hard currency. Following the new rulers’ takeover in December, the central bank pledged to adopt an official unified exchange rate.

Central bank data on Monday showed the official rate at 13,065. That compares to a rate of around 47 to the dollar in March 2011 - as civil war engulfed the country, LSEG data showed.

FX tracking website from Karam Shaar Advisory showed that black market rates soared to 22,000 around Assad’s fall, but on Monday stood at 12,800. The new government appointed Maysaa Sabrine as governor of the central bank on Sunday - the first woman at the helm in its more than 70-year history.

Western governments have frozen hundreds of millions of dollars in Syrian assets since the war began

in central bank vaults, plus 26 tonnes of gold, worth \$2.2bn at current market prices. That is significantly below the \$18.5bn in reserves estimated by the IMF in 2010 and the three months’ import-cover deemed a minimum safe threshold.

Western governments have frozen hundreds of millions of dollars in Syrian assets since the war began, but the exact size and location of these are unclear. Switzerland’s government said some 99mn Swiss francs (\$112mn) worth of frozen Syrian assets are currently in the country. The Syria Report newsletter estimated in April that £163.2mn (\$205.76mn) of frozen assets were in the UK.

Despite the central bank sanctions, Western governments allowed Syria to use frozen funds for humanitarian purposes, such as medicine and food. The new government has said it expects to retrieve up to \$400mn in frozen assets abroad to help fund some reforms, including salary increases of 400% for some public sector employees next month.

Dwindling oil and tourism revenues decimated Syria’s exports from \$18.4bn in 2010 to \$1.8bn in 2021, according to the World Bank. Imports also fell, but by a smaller margin - from \$22.7bn to \$6.5bn due to reliance on imported fuel and food.

The widening gap pressured government finances, prompting it to pay for some imports with illicit cash from sales of an addictive amphetamine-like stimulant commonly known as captagon, or from fuel smuggling, experts said.

Captagon production has become the most valuable economic sector, according to the World Bank, which estimates the total market value of the drug originating from Syria as high as \$5.6bn.

In 2010, Syria exported 380,000 barrels per day (bpd) of oil. This source of hard-currency revenue evaporated after the conflict began in 2011. Various factions - including Islamic State and Kurdish fighters - seized oilfields, while the latter signed deals with US companies. Sanctions made legitimate exports difficult.

The loss left Syria reliant on energy imports - mostly from allies Russia and Iran. Rachel Ziemba, senior adviser on sanctions with risk consultancy Horizon Engage, said the roughly 1-3mn barrels of fuel per month Syria had been getting from Iran stopped in late December as Tehran pulled back.

She added that lack of access to global banking, due to sanctions and the designation of leading rebel group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) as a terrorist organisation, complicates commercial fuel purchases.

Conflict and drought reduced the number of farmers, damaged irrigation and cut access to seeds and fertilisers. Agricultural production sank to record lows in 2021 and 2022, with wheat alone falling to a quarter of the around 4mn tonnes per year pre-war. Syria imported around 1mn tonnes of cereal annually from Russia, but flows stopped after the new rulers took control. Ukraine has signalled willingness to supply, but it is unclear how Syria could pay.

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No penalties for UK firms that used deadly building material

By Tom Bergin
London

When the deadly Grenfell Tower blaze in 2017 led to revelations that high-rise public housing buildings across Britain were wrapped in flammable cladding, the government vowed the building contractors responsible would pay for their negligence.

Seven years on, contractors who fitted cladding panels that didn’t meet fire-safety standards in place when installed have largely escaped financial liability, according to a Reuters review of more than 100 buildings.

Cladding is a skin of insulating materials applied to the walls of a new or existing building to improve its thermal performance. The Grenfell Tower blaze, which killed 72 people, raised public awareness that thousands of buildings in the UK were clad in flammable materials.

To quickly tackle the problem, the British government put up much of the money to allow the replacement of flammable cladding on subsidised public housing. Then, to recoup the taxpayer money spent, the housing ministry said it would work with the buildings’ owners to encourage legal claims against contractors who installed defective cladding.

Under UK law, the owner of a property that has been refurbished in a way that doesn’t meet building regulations in place at the time, can sue the contractors and designers responsible, and in some cases the manufacturer of the materials used, for the costs of remediation.

The Reuters review identified 103 public housing buildings, owned by 26 local councils and not-for-profit housing associations, which had cladding of a type deemed to be non-compliant by the government, the courts or the public inquiry into the Grenfell fire.

Only five of the 26 owners - responsible for 25 of the 103 buildings - said they had sought some compensation from the companies that installed their flammable cladding. Three were successful in recovering some money while two are still in mediation with contractors in cases that haven’t reached court. The total money recovered comprised just 13% of the over £260mn (\$325mn) it cost to re-clad the 103 buildings, Reuters found.

Four lawyers who have represented both building owners and contractors in post-Grenfell cladding cases told Reuters that the rules of the funds the government created to disburse money for remediation inadvertently created disincentives to sue errant builders. If public housing bodies win litigation against contractors, the proceeds must be given to the government, under the rules, while the legal costs of a losing battle have to be shouldered alone.

The National Housing Federation, which represents social housing bodies across Britain, said the government could have increased the number of claims by covering litigation costs and providing legal guidance.

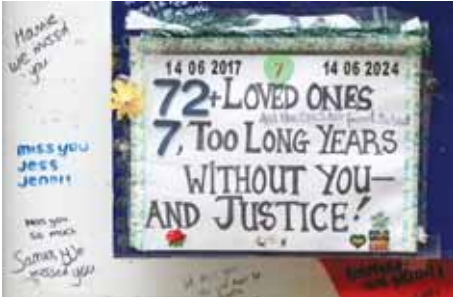
Reuters found no evidence of a deliberate plan by the government to discourage compensation claims.

Still, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government said its national recladding scheme prioritised rapid removal of dangerous cladding over the recovery of costs from contractors. It declined to comment on the criticism that its rules disincentivised lawsuits against those responsible or answer questions about the level of claims against construction firms. It also didn’t comment on whether it would amend the rules of its cladding schemes to facilitate more claims to help recoup taxpayer funds. The Reuters analysis is the first broad review of the extent to which contractors have contributed to the recladding of public housing buildings to which they attached non-compliant cladding, and reveals how few cases have been brought against contractors.

Giles Grover, co-lead of the End Our Cladding Scandal campaign, which comprises groups representing tenants affected by the national crisis, said the low number of compensation claims identified by Reuters came as a disappointment.



Flames and smoke billow as firefighters deal with a fire in the Grenfell Tower apartment block in West London on June 14, 2017. **Below:** Dedications and messages on a wall of condolences near to the covered remains of Grenfell Tower, on the day of the publication of the second report of the UK public inquiry into the deadly fire. (Reuters)



“It’s frustrating that contractors have not paid to fix these blocks, despite all the promises from the government that it would make them pay,” he added.

The Grenfell disaster in Kensington killed dozens of residents when the building’s plastic-filled exterior panels turned a small fire in one apartment into an inferno that consumed the 24-storey high rise in West London.

The government said in 2017 the panels used did not comply with the regulations in place when installed. The official inquiry, which published its final report in September, agreed and noted that none of the companies responsible even argued that the cladding met the regulatory requirements. After the fire, inspections by local councils and housing associations, which provide subsidized housing to lower-income families, found that similar panels, and other forms of cladding that didn’t meet fire regulations, had been installed on buildings across the country.

Over 700 public housing buildings had their cladding replaced following the Grenfell disaster, while about 1,800 still need to be made safe, the government’s spending watchdog said in November. The total cost of remediation will exceed 4 billion pounds, according to government figures.

The watchdog noted that as the public housing owners don’t have the cash available, the government may be on the hook for the bill.

The alternative to public money being used to pay for the remediation is for the owners to sue the building contractors, designers or manufacturers responsible for the original cladding, said Chris Leadbetter, a lawyer at Clyde & Co which has defended building contractors in dozens of cladding cases.

Reuters identified buildings in need of recladding using council statements, media reports, social media posts and other sources. Reuters then established whether the original cladding was compliant when installed using statutory financial accounts, satellite imagery, planning documents, freedom of information requests, minutes of local council meetings and discussions with dozens of lawyers, housing groups and local councils.

Suzannah Nichol, chief executive of Build UK, which represents building companies, said the industry accepted that non-compliant

cladding should not have been installed but said contractors did not have the financial strength to cover all the costs of remediation alone. She said others including designers and product manufacturers were partly to blame and so, should share the financial burden.

“I don’t think any business is going to step up and pay for something if it’s not confident that it’s accountable,” she added.

Construction firms responsible for the non-compliant cladding identified by Reuters, on the 103 public housing buildings reviewed, included British-based companies Willmott Dixon and Alumet, Paris-listed Bouygues SA and United Living, which is owned by US private equity group Apollo. Willmott Dixon, Bouygues and Apollo declined to comment on cladding contracts while Alumet didn’t respond to queries.

Most public housing providers declined to outline their reasons for pursuing or not pursuing cases.

But the rules of the cladding remediation funds the government set up following the Grenfell disaster offer an answer, according to the National Housing Federation and lawyers interviewed.

The government established the first of its funds in 2018 to ensure cash-strapped public housing owners could make their buildings safe as fast as possible. The government said it expected fund recipients to pursue reasonable cases against contractors and repay the government with any compensation received.

The oldest fund, created in 2018, has so far handed out 300 million pounds of taxpayer money to councils and housing associations, official data show. This fund has received less than a million pounds back as a result of compensation claims, according to a Freedom of Information request.

In one case, Sheffield Council decided against suing London-listed Morgan Sindall, which the council said installed non-compliant polyethylene core panels - like the ones used at Grenfell - on its Hanover Tower building.

The council said in a 2020 report that there might be “a public interest” in establishing the facts in court, but that since the government had already covered the costs of recladding, spending money on what would likely be expensive litigation was not in council taxpayers’ interests.

Eric Johnstone, legal director at Brodies solicitors in Edinburgh, said the fact the government didn’t fund litigation but wanted to collect the proceeds of any litigation created a “huge disincentive” for social housing providers to sue.

Morgan Sindall told Reuters it didn’t believe it had any liability regarding Hanover Tower, without elaborating. Sheffield declined to comment on the case.

Just three of the 26 building owners reviewed by Reuters said they had actually received compensation from contractors in respect of cladding claims. The first, Newport City Homes Housing Association in south Wales, initiated its claim before the government established its first cladding fund. Newport City Homes sought the cost of making three buildings safe from building contractor Wates Group, which had installed polyethylene core panels as part of a 2013 refurbishment. The housing association received a 4-million-pound settlement from Wates without even going to court, its accounts show. Wates said it did not knowingly install non-compliant products. It declined to answer questions about Newport or any of the 23 other high rise buildings where Reuters found the company installed polyethylene-core cladding panels.

John Cawthorne, a former firefighter who has lived in Hanover Tower in Sheffield for 33 years, told Reuters he was furious that builders who installed non-compliant cladding on blocks like his across the country weren’t being held to account. Cawthorne said tenants were haunted by the fact that they could have died as easily as the victims of Grenfell.

“I live on the 15th floor of this building. I’m right on top,” the 68-year-old said. “The same thing could have happened here. There’s no question about that. We could have all died.” - Reuters

Greenland independence possible but joining US unlikely, asserts Denmark



Denmark's Foreign Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen answers questions from the media in the Parliament, Christiansborg Castle in Copenhagen yesterday. **Right:** Greenland's Prime Minister Mute Bourup Egede arrives in a van for a private visit to Denmark's King Frederik X at Amalienborg Castle in Copenhagen. **(Reuters)**

Reuters
Copenhagen

Greenland may become independent if its residents want, but is unlikely to become a US state, Denmark's foreign minister said yesterday after US President-elect Donald Trump refused to rule out force to take control of the Arctic island.

Greenland's leader met with the Danish king in Copenhagen, a day after Trump's remarks thrust the fate of the mineral-rich and strategically important island, which is under Danish rule, to the top of world headlines.

Trump, who takes office on January 20, said on Tuesday he would not rule out using military or economic action to make Greenland part of the United States. The same day, Trump's eldest son, Donald Trump Jr, made a private visit to Greenland.

Greenland, part of Nato through the membership of Denmark, has strategic significance for the US military and for its ballistic missile early-warning system since the shortest route from Europe to

North America runs via the Arctic island.

The president-elect has indicated he would pursue a more combative foreign policy that disregards traditional diplomatic formalities.

Greenland, the world's biggest island, has been part of Denmark for 600 years although its 57,000 people now govern their own domestic affairs. The island's government led by Prime Minister Mute Egede aims for eventual independence.

"We fully recognise that Greenland has its own ambitions. If they materialise, Greenland will become independent, though hardly with an ambition to become a federal state in the United States," Danish foreign minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen said.

He told reporters the United States' heightened security concerns in the Arctic were legitimate following increased Russian and Chinese activity in the region.

"I don't think that we're in a foreign policy crisis," he said. "We are open to a dialogue with the Americans on how we can possibly co-operate even more closely than we

do to ensure that the American ambitions are fulfilled."

Still, although Denmark itself played down the seriousness of Trump's threat to its territory, the returning president's openly stated ambition to expand US borders has jolted European allies less than two weeks before he takes office.

France's foreign minister, Jean-Noel Barrot, said Europe would not let other nations attack its sovereign borders, although he did not believe the US would invade.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz expressed surprise at Trump's comments about Greenland and Canada, underlining that European partners unanimously uphold the inviolability of borders.

Greenland's relations with Denmark have lately been strained by allegations of mistreatment of Greenlanders. Egede has said the island is not for sale, while in his New Year speech he stepped up his push for independence. Denmark says the territory's fate can be decided only by Greenlanders.

Greenland's Finance Minister Erik Jensen repeated that Greenland is not for sale. "Our wish is to become independent one day. But

our ambition is not to go from being governed by one country to another."

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said on Tuesday she could not imagine Trump's ambitions would lead to US military intervention in Greenland. Denmark's military capabilities there are limited to four inspection vessels, a Challenger surveillance plane and dog sled patrols.

Responding to Trump's threat of tariffs against Denmark, which according to analysts at Danske Bank could potentially be "quite harmful to Danish companies, Frederiksen said she did not think a trade war with the United States was a good way forward.

Denmark is home to Novo Nordisk, Europe's most valuable company, which makes weight-loss drug Wegovy that has become hugely popular in the United States, the Nordic country's biggest trading partner. The Danish royal palace gave no details of King Frederik's meeting with Greenland's Egede.

While many Greenlanders dream of independence from Denmark, the king remains popular on the island, having spent extended periods there, including a four-month expedition on the ice sheet. Last month, the royal court modified its coat of arms, enlarging a polar bear that symbolises Greenland.

"He's popular in Greenland. So he can clearly be helpful to the Danish-Greenlandic relationship," Damien Degeorges, a Reykjavik-based consultant specialising in Greenland, told Reuters.

Trump already raised the issue of the US taking over Greenland during his first presidency, but his latest remarks still left many Danes baffled.

"I find it extremely ridiculous," said Jeppe Finne Sorenson, a data engineer in the Danish capital. "We have an alliance, we're allies. So this doesn't really respect that."

Blinken dismisses Trump bombast in swan song



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken delivers remarks as French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Jean-Noel Barrot looks on in Paris yesterday. **(Reuters)**

Signing off as America's top diplomat, Antony Blinken was feted yesterday by ally France — and forced to brush aside bombastic remarks by incoming president Donald Trump.

Blinken, on a farewell tour less than two weeks before Trump takes office, visited Paris where President Emmanuel Macron was presenting him with the Legion of Honor, France's highest order of merit. "I would like to tell you that you show the face of the America that we love," French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot told Blinken before the ceremony. But as Blinken looked to highlight President Joe Biden's efforts to nurture alliances, the secretary of state was asked to address threats by Trump against Greenland.

The president-elect has made clear his designs on oil-rich and strategically placed Greenland, an autonomous territory of European Union member Denmark, and refused to rule out military action. Asked about the remarks at a news conference with Barrot, Blinken, without using Trump's name, said: "The idea expressed about Greenland is obviously not a good one, but maybe more important, it's obviously one that's not going to happen."

"So we probably shouldn't waste a lot of time talking about it," Blinken said. Blinken, a longtime Democratic Party policymaker and aide to Biden who generally has steered clear of electoral politics, also played down statements by Elon Musk, the technology entrepreneur joined at the hip with Trump for months.

The South African-born billionaire, who has been tasked by Trump with an initiative to curb government spending, has rattled European politicians by championing the far right in Germany and Britain.

"Private citizens in our country can say what they want," Blinken said. "He, like any American, has the right to express his views."



Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum showing the 1607 map during her daily conference at the National Palace in Mexico City yesterday. **(AFP)**

Mexico president trolls Trump in history lesson: Mexican America 'sounds nice'

Mexico President Claudia Sheinbaum yesterday suggested North America including the United States could be renamed "Mexican America" - an historic name used on an early map of the region - in response to US President-elect Donald Trump's pledge to rename the Gulf of Mexico the "Gulf of America".

"Mexican America, that sounds nice," Sheinbaum joked, pointing at the map from 1607 showing an early portrayal of North America.

The president, who has jostled with Trump in recent weeks, used her daily press conference to give a history lesson, flanked by old maps and former culture minister Jose Alfonso Suarez del Real.

"The fact is that Mexican America is recognised since the 17th century... as the name for the whole northern part of the (American) continent," Suarez del Real said, demonstrating the area on the map.

On the Gulf of Mexico, Suarez del Real said the name was internationally recognised and used as a maritime navigational reference going back hundreds of years.

Trump floated the renaming of the body of water which stretches from Florida to Mexico's Cancun in a Tuesday press conference in which he presented a broad expansionist agenda including the possibility of taking control of the Panama Canal and Greenland.

Sheinbaum also said it was not true that Mexico was "run by the cartels" as Trump said. "In Mexico, the people are in charge," she said, adding "we are addressing the security problem."

Despite the back and forth, Sheinbaum reiterated that she expected the two countries to have a positive relationship.

"I think there will be a good relationship," she said. "President Trump has his way of communicating."

Movie, TV stars flee homes as LA wildfires burn

Film and television stars including Jamie Lee Curtis, Mandy Moore and James Woods were among those forced to evacuate and left wondering whether their homes survived the out-of-control wildfires burning around Los Angeles. The day after Woods evacuated his house in Pacific Palisades, an affluent neighbourhood that sits between the beach towns of Santa Monica and Malibu, he described the scene as an "inferno" where "every house around us was on fire."

"We were literally in the exact epicentre of the fire as it started," Woods, an award-winning actor known for roles in *Salvador*, *Ghosts of Mississippi* and *Any Given Sunday*, said on CNN yesterday. "There was so much chaos. It was like an inferno." Strong, dry

winds have fanned the blaze burning around Pacific Palisades, and the area's narrow, winding streets combined with the rush of thousands of people ordered to evacuate have created long delays and traffic jams for those trying to escape the wildfire.

Some evacuees abandoned their cars on Tuesday.

Among those caught in the traffic was actor Eugene Levy of the television series *Schitt's Creek*. "I couldn't see any flames but the smoke was very dark," he told the *Los Angeles Times*.

Mandy Moore, known for her role in the television series *This is Us*, posted on Instagram that she and her family had evacuated because of the proximity of the flames.

"So gutted for the destruction and loss," she said. "Don't know if our

place made it." Reality TV stars Spencer Pratt and Heidi Montag lost their Pacific Palisades home in the wildfire, according to TMZ, which added that the couple was able to safely evacuate with their children earlier in the day. Pratt shared a video on Instagram earlier in the day of a plane dropping water on a mountainside engulfed with smoke.

Pacific Palisades, dotted with palatial hillside estates, is bordered by the Pacific Ocean and buffeted by the Santa Monica Mountains. With its median home price of \$4.5mn, it is home to many film and music stars as well as the Getty Villa, one of the most popular museums in Los Angeles.

Several other fires - along with the Palisades blaze - are burning around the city.

Political chess or true beliefs? Zuckerberg's surprise Trump pivot

AFP
San Francisco,

The clean cut hair has grown, his college kid's hoodie is now a gold chain, and his politics have swerved hard right.

Mark Zuckerberg, the boss of Facebook and Instagram, on Tuesday accused governments and so-called legacy media of pushing censorship, and vowed to take his world-dominating platforms back to their "roots."

"We're restoring free expression on our platforms," he asserted in a video posted on his social networks on Tuesday, in which he announces the end of fact-checking in the US.

The out-of-the blue pivot to Trumpian talking points has perplexed many of Zuckerberg's closest watchers, but the tech pioneer's sudden alignment with the right wing is not the first time he has moved to preserve his dominance of social media.

And it also might reflect a position that is closer to his political instincts. Since the earliest days of Facebook, Zuckerberg has always been eager to move unencumbered when it comes to advancing the interests of Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and now Threads.

From the outset Zuckerberg has surrounded himself with Silicon Valley's libertarian voices, including long-time advisors Peter Thiel and Marc Andreessen, the latter being Meta's longest-serving board member.

But the success of Facebook as it grew from a college networking site to the world's primary communication platform quickly brought scandal and forced Zuckerberg to act to fend off government intervention.

Fact-checking and tighter content controls, which Zuckerberg said he was "getting rid of" on Tuesday, were born of such scandals. After the 2016 US presidential election, widespread criticism about misinformation on the platform, particularly regarding foreign interference and viral false stories, prompted Facebook to implement a fact-checking program.



This photo illustration created shows an image of Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Meta, and a phone displaying the download page for the Facebook app. **(AFP)**

"The bottom line is: we take misinformation seriously," Zuckerberg wrote at the time.

This initiative represented a significant shift in Facebook's approach to content moderation, which had always been an afterthought, or even a source of scorn, for the disruptors of Silicon Valley.

The subsequent Cambridge Analytica scandal in the late 2010s, which revealed the unauthorized harvesting of millions of Facebook users' personal data, further intensified scrutiny and resulted in Zuckerberg's being hauled before Congress and a beefing up of Facebook content policies.

Since then, Zuckerberg has demonstrated increasing political acumen, managing to avoid significant US government regulation while appearing co-operative with politicians and contrite with an angry public.

And despite the bad headlines, usership of the sites platforms has only increased over the years.

To some Tuesday's shock announcement is still a play to keep the government at bay, except this time the political tide has turned to Trump, who has made repeated threats against Zuckerberg, accusing him of being too supportive of liberal causes.

"This is a case of kissing the ring," said tech analyst Carolina Milanesi. "He's doing what it takes

to make sure that Trump is going to leave him alone."

A more surprising turn is that his pivot rightwards puts Zuckerberg in line with Elon Musk, who has become a close associate of Trump but is a rival to Zuckerberg.

Quite recently, the two men pledged to fight each other in a mixed martial arts cage fight, as their chest-beating rivalry veered into the ridiculous.

"There is kind of this huge, tech-nocratic billionaire meeting of the minds with Trump and the right, and this buying into this idea of censorship," Kate Klonick, Associate Professor of Law at St. John's University Law School, told a Lawfare panel.

Others suggest that Zuckerberg is afraid Musk will get Trump all to himself.

"There's potentially a bit of billionaire jealousy," said Andrew Selepak, media professor at the University of Florida. The stakes are huge, especially as Zuckerberg competes with Musk and other tech giants in advancing artificial intelligence.

But for Selepak, Zuckerberg "seems more sincere" when it comes to Tuesday's U-turn.

"It looks like he's making a political shift, a bit like Musk," who had previously supported Democrats, mainly out of concern about climate change.



Katara Amber promotes local heritage



The 5th edition of the Katara International Amber Exhibition continued its activities yesterday for the second consecutive day, attracting a significant number of visitors and amber enthusiasts from within Qatar and abroad.

The exhibition stands out for its extensive participation of craftsmen, designers, and exhibitors from over 14 countries, who have come to display their unique masterpieces and distinctive amber-based products.

Many exhibitors stressed the importance of this international event, which serves as a regional and global economic platform for marketing amber products. The exhibition features 77 pavilions, each competing to showcase rare and

luxurious collections of prayer beads, amber stones, and related products. These offerings cater to a diverse audience, providing amber lovers with a variety of options to suit different tastes.

Mohamed Ishaq, supervisor of a pavilion, noted that his pavilion features amber stones sourced from Baltic countries such as Russia, Ukraine, and Lithuania, alongside a range of products including prayer beads and accessories used in jewellery and decoration, such as rings and bracelets.

The exhibition also showcases exceptional artistic creations made from amber stones. Several pavilions display antiques, models, and artistic paintings adorned with amber.

Abdulrahman al-Sulaiti, su-

pervisor of another pavilion from Qatar, explained that the paintings and sculptures featured in the exhibition draw inspiration from the Qatari environment, blending Qatari heritage with modern influences. These include depictions of falcons, Arabian Oryx, traditional dhows, horses, and Doha's towering urban landmarks. He noted that all these artistic works are crafted from various types of amber, including Ukrainian, Russian, and Polish amber, as well as amber powder.

The designs are hand-drawn, with colours applied using laser beams and enhanced with amber powder or mosaic pieces. Sculptures, on the other hand, are formed using specialized pressing machines.

Similarly, Dr Hani Youssef Mohamed, supervisor of another Qatari pavilion, described the exhibition as exceptional. It provided the exhibitors with the opportunity to showcase the local techniques for working with amber and to promote the local cultural heritage. He pointed out that collaborating with exhibitors from different countries opens new avenues for development and innovation.

In addition to the displays, the exhibition hosts a series of lectures and dialogue sessions held between 3:30pm and 6:30pm. These sessions explore the cultural and commercial significance of amber, as well as methods for distinguishing between its various types.



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