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Plane crash: Amir sends condolences to US president

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani sent a cable of condolences to President of the United States of America Donald Trump on the victims of a passenger plane collision with a military helicopter in Washington. His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani and HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani also sent separate cables of condolences to President Trump.

67 die as copter collides with US passenger jet

The US Army helicopter that collided with a passenger jet near Washington was being operated on a training flight by a "fairly experienced crew" with night-vision goggles, US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said yesterday. The Black Hawk helicopter struck an American Airlines passenger jet near Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport, with both aircraft plunging into the Potomac River. Authorities have said there were no survivors. American Airlines said 60 passengers and four crew members were aboard the jet, while US officials said the helicopter was carrying three soldiers on a training flight.

Page 8

Ooredoo to build submarine cables connecting GCC countries, Iraq

Ooredoo Group has signed a "historic" agreement to build a new submarine cable connecting seven countries in the region - Qatar, Oman, the UAE, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Iraq - with Alcatel Submarine Networks (ASN). The Fibre in Gulf (FIG) project will provide all GCC countries with a low latency, shorter and secure route to a new corridor connecting Europe with up to 24 fibre pairs and a capacity of up to 720Tbps. This advanced infrastructure will deliver exceptional connectivity benefits to hyperscalers, business customers, governments.

Business Page 1

Amir reassures Syrian president of Qatar's steadfast support

Amir hold talks with Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa in Damascus

QNA
Damascus

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani met yesterday with President of the sisterly Syrian Arab Republic Ahmed al-Sharaa at the People's Palace in the capital Damascus.

At the outset of the meeting, His Highness the Amir congratulated the Syrian president on the victory of the Syrian revolution and on being named president of the transitional period.

His Highness reiterated Qatar's

position in support of the unity, sovereignty and independence of Syria, praising the efforts exerted by the new Syrian administration to achieve stability, preserve the capabilities of the State and secure the needs of the Syrian people.

His Highness the Amir highlighted the urgent need to form a government that represents all segments of the Syrian people to consolidate stability and move forward with reconstruction, development and prosperity projects, affirming that Qatar will continue to stand with the Syrian brethren to achieve their goals for which

they fought to reach a state of unity, justice and freedom.

For his part, President al-Sharaa welcomed the visit of His Highness the Amir, underlining that this visit reflects the steadfast and supportive positions of Qatar at all stages for the Syrian people and its keenness to strengthen relations between the two countries.

He also underscored that the next stage will witness strategic co-operation between the two countries in various fields, noting his country's aspiration to benefit from Qatari experiences to achieve the desired renaissance in Syria.

To Page 5, Page 12

Amir affirms optimism about Syria's future

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani expressed his optimism about the future of Syria and relations between the two countries, noting that his meeting with president of the sisterly Syrian Arab Republic, Ahmed al-Sharaa, was moulded by positive spirit. Posting on X platform, His Highness the Amir thanked al-Sharaa for the warm reception and generous

hospitality in Damascus, hoping a brighter future for Syria and the relationship between the two nations. His Highness the Amir emphasised that he would tirelessly work with the international community toward backing the will of the people of Syria in achieving everything for which they have sacrificed in the past years.

PM conveys Amir's condolences on death of Prince Mohammed al-Saud

On behalf of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani conveyed condolences on the death of Prince Mohammed bin Fahd bin Abdulaziz al-Saud, to the sons of the deceased and the royal family. HE Sheikh Mohammed also conveyed the condolences of His Highness the Father Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani and His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani. (QNA)

PM opens DJWE 2025

The 21st edition of the Doha Jewellery & Watches Exhibition (DJWE), was opened yesterday by HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre, where it will run until February 5. As many as 500 brands from 32 countries are participating in DJWE 2025, organised by Qatar Tourism and brought by Visit Qatar. Page 12

Sharaa vows to form inclusive govt

Reuters
Damascus

Syria's newly appointed president, Ahmed al-Sharaa, said yesterday he will form an inclusive transitional government representing diverse communities that will build institutions and run the country until it can hold free and fair elections.

Al-Sharaa addressed the nation in his first speech since being appointed president for the transitional period.

The armed group that led the offensive, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, has since set up an interim government that has welcomed a steady stream of senior

Al-Sharaa delivers a speech at the Presidential Palace in Damascus in this handout image released yesterday.

Western and Arab diplomatic delegations keen to help stabilise the country after 13 years of civil war.

Al-Sharaa in his speech said

he would form a small legislative body to fill the parliamentary void until new elections were held, after the Syrian parliament was dissolved on Wednesday.

He said he would also in the coming days announce the formation of a committee that would prepare to hold a national dialogue conference that would be a platform for Syrians to discuss the future political programme of the nation.

That would be followed by a "constitutional declaration," he said, in an apparent reference to the process of drafting a new Syrian constitution.

He has previously said the process of drafting a new constitution and holding elections may take up to four years.

Prisoners, hostages freed

AFP
Gaza/Jerusalem

Buses carrying freed Palestinian prisoners arrived to cheers in the occupied West Bank yesterday, after the release of three Israeli hostages and five Thais by resistance forces in Gaza.

At around dusk, two buses carrying the inmates left from the West Bank's Ofer Prison after Israel said it had received assurances from mediators over the future "safe release" of captives.

Hundreds of joyous Palestinians greeted them when they arrived in Ramallah.

Flashing a victory sign, the first to disembark from the bus was Zakaria Zubeidi, 49, a former

Freed Palestinian prisoners react in Ramallah, yesterday.

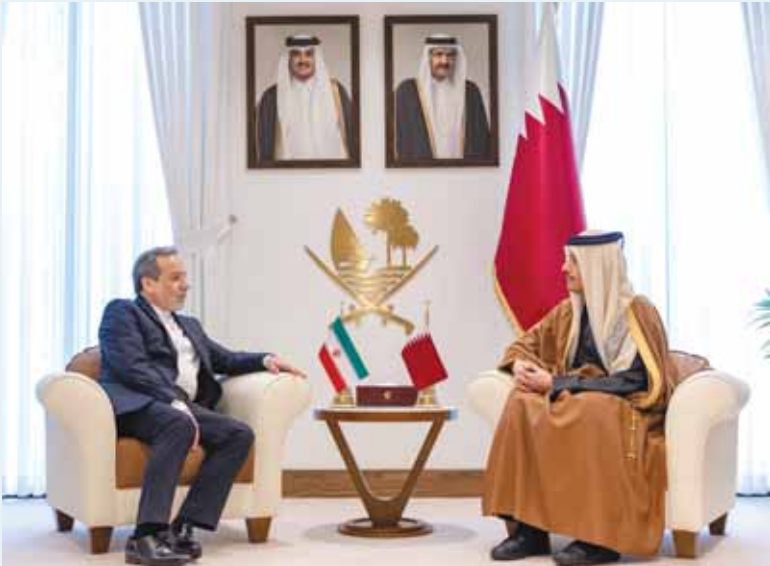
top militant leader jailed for attacks that killed several Israelis.

The cheering crowd immediately hoisted him onto their shoulders. Israel's prison service confirmed it had freed 110 inmates under the latest exchange,

the third hostage-prisoner swap under a January 19 ceasefire deal aimed at ending the war in Gaza.

Another hostage and prisoner release is scheduled for tomorrow, with three Israeli men due to be set free.

PM meets Iranian FM and Botswana’s energy minister



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani received yesterday Dr Abbas Araghchi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, who is currently visiting the country. During the meeting, they reviewed relations between the two countries and ways to support and enhance them, developments in the Gaza Strip, the occupied Palestinian territories and Syria, in addition to a number of topics of common interest. HE the Prime Minister affirmed, during the meeting, the continuation of Qatar’s efforts to reduce escalation and resolve conflicts, including its regional efforts in co-operation with partners to support stability and peace in the region. HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani also met yesterday with Minister of Minerals and Energy of the Republic of Botswana, Bogolo Joy Kinyinwendo, who is on a visit to Qatar. They discussed relations between the two countries and ways to support and enhance them, in addition to a number of topics of mutual interest. **(QNA)**



Amir sends cables of condolences to Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani and HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani sent cables of condolences to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on the death of Princess Watfa bint Mohammed al-Abdulrahman al-Saud.

■ His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani also sent cables of condolences to the Custodian of Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the death of Prince Mohammed bin Fahd bin Abdulaziz al-Saud. **(QNA)**

Minister of state meets Turkiye’s Deputy FM



HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad met yesterday with Deputy Interior Minister of the Republic of Turkiye Munir Karaloglu. Talks during the meeting dealt with the two countries’ bilateral ties and ways to further enhance them. The two sides also discussed bolstering humanitarian and development co-operation and ways to provide humanitarian assistance in the Gaza Strip and Syria, in addition to a host of topics of mutual interest. **(QNA)**

Minister of Transport, Libyan counterpart sign update to bilateral air services deal

HE the Minister of Transport, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulla bin Mohammed al-Thani and Libyan Minister of Transport, Muhammad Salem al-Shahoubi yesterday signed an update to the air services agreement inked by the State of Qatar and the State of Libya on April 28, 2004. Signed at the Ministry’s premises, the update further liberalises the provisions of the agreement to keep pace with the developments of the civil aviation industry and aligns with Qatar’s endeavours to enhance connection with world countries through new air services agreements, allowing for the Qatari national carrier to expand its network and fly to more destinations



worldwide. Following the signing ceremony, the two ministers discussed bilateral relations in transportation, civil aviation, air transportation activities, and ways to enhance them. The ceremony and the

meeting were attended by in charge of managing the Qatar Civil Aviation Authority (QCAA), Mohammed Faleh al-Hajri, and Head of the Libyan Civil Aviation Authority Dr Mohammed Shalibak. **(QNA)**

Qatar’s permanent representative to UN meets UN special envoy for Syria

HE the Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the United Nations Sheikha Alya Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani met with United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen. During the meeting, Qatar’s continued support for the efforts of the Office of the UN Special Envoy to Syria in facilitating a comprehensive political process led by Syria was emphasised. HE Sheikha Alya reiterated Qatar’s firm position in supporting the choices of the brotherly Syrian people and providing all forms of assistance to achieve their aspirations for progress and prosperity. She also stressed Qatar’s keenness to lift the sanctions as a basic step to support security and stability in the sisterly Syrian Arab Republic. **(QNA)**

‘Amir’s visit to Damascus opens new avenues for bilateral co-operation’

Syrian Minister of Interior Ali Keda (**pictured**) emphasised that the visit of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani to Damascus carries significant meaning, underscoring the importance of unity within the Arab world and strengthening the bilateral relations between the two countries.

Speaking to Qatar News Agency (QNA), he stated that the Amir’s visit plays a key role in opening new opportunities for economic and political co-operation between the two nations, marking an important step for Arab countries to contribute to Syria’s reconstruction and support its economic and social stability. He highlighted the visit’s contribution to furthering co-operation between the Ministries of Interior of Qatar and Syria,



especially in areas such as counter-terrorism, organised crime, and other sectors.

Ali Keda added that the political support for this visit will positively impact regional security, strengthen Syria’s role within the Council of Arab Interior Ministers, and facilitate discussions on exchanging expertise and best practices

in policing, forensic science, and security technologies between the two nations. He also praised Qatar’s ongoing efforts during years of the Syrian revolution.

He continued, saying that Qatar’s role in supporting the Syrian people over the past years has been comprehensive, spanning political, humanitarian, and other aspects. Qatar’s efforts have left a significant impact in providing political, diplomatic, and humanitarian support to Syria and its people. In closing, Ali Keda expressed his sincere thanks and appreciation to State of Qatar’s leadership, government, and people for their unwavering support to the Syrian people throughout the revolution, noting Qatar’s consistent position in backing the legitimate demands of Syrians for freedom and dignity. **(QNA)**

Visit to enhance agri co-operation: Syrian minister

QNA
Damascus

Syrian Minister of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform Mohammed Taha al-Ahmad hailed the visit of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani to Damascus, as the first Arab leader to visit the Syrian capital since the fall of the former regime, describing it as historic.

Speaking to Qatar News Agency (QNA) al-Ahmad said: “We are counting heavily on this historic visit to strengthen and consolidate Syrian-Qatari relations, and

we also emphasise the international importance of this visit and what the indications it carries of Qatar’s honourable position and its prompt action to extend a helping hand and stand by the Arab brethren.”

He explained that this visit will contribute to strengthening co-operation relations between the two brotherly countries, which will have a positive impact on the economic and agricultural aspects, especially since Qatar has made great strides in agricultural technologies, establishing food security systems and securing local consumption requirements, “and has even become a leader

in this field as is the case in several other fields.” He continued: “We hope that this visit would contribute to establishing balanced and remarkable relations between the two brotherly countries, and open the door to coordination, especially in the fields of trade, investment and economy, in addition to agricultural.”

The Syrian minister of agriculture and agrarian Reform stressed his country’s desire to enhance and develop co-operation with Qatar in many fields, especially agriculture and energy, especially with Qatar’s advanced experience and outstanding international reputation in these fields.

MoL hosts workshop on job nationalisation in private sector

QNA
Doha

The Ministry of Labour organised a consultative workshop yesterday to discuss the Job Nationalisation Plan for the private sector in 2025, focusing on the construction, tourism, and financial services sectors. The event brought together a large number of representatives from companies and institutions operating within these key sectors. This workshop is part of a series of consultative sessions launched by the ministry to strengthen partnerships, foster co-operation, and exchange ideas with the private sector.

The workshop aims to explore best practices for attracting national talent while addressing the challenges facing stakeholders in the Job Nationalisation Plan and increasing Qatari participation in the labour market. Discussions during the workshop have focused on effective collaboration between the ministry and companies in the construction, tourism, and financial services sectors. Participants have explored ways to support private sector entities in line with the Job Na-

tionalisation Plan, strategies for attracting national talent, and responses to queries from company representatives regarding the implementation of the plan.

In his address, Director of the National Manpower Recruitment Department at the Ministry of Labour Abdulrahman Mohammed Telfat emphasised the ministry’s commitment to working with private sector partners to support business growth and enhance their role in the country’s comprehensive development.

He highlighted the importance of fostering a sustainable and motivating work environment for Qatari men and women, including the children of Qatari women, outlining that job nationalisation extends beyond the three sectors discussed at the workshop and encompasses a broader range of industries, including manufacturing, information technology and digital services, financial services, education, food and agriculture, healthcare, logistics, tourism, and construction.

He noted that additional consultative workshops will be held in the coming week for the remaining sectors covered by the plan, pointing out that the Job Nationalisation Law provides a range of incentives and facilita-

tions for private sector companies to enable them to recruit and effectively integrate national talent.

These incentives include salary support, coverage of contributions to the General Retirement and Social Insurance Authority, and performance-based rewards for companies achieving the highest job nationalisation rates. Telfat announced the establishment of sectoral councils to co-ordinate efforts in developing tailored initiatives for each sector to support job nationalisation. These councils will facilitate ongoing dialogue, enhance collaboration, and align sectoral strategies between the Ministry and private sector companies.

He stressed that the implementation of the Job Nationalisation Law will occur in phases, with tailored approaches for each sector to ensure smooth and gradual integration. Ongoing consultation with the private sector will be vital to addressing any challenges that may arise during the implementation process. This collaborative approach will ultimately contribute to strengthening the national economy and advancing the goals outlined in Qatar National Vision 2030.

Labour ministry fetes participants of university career camp

The Ministry of Labour, in partnership with Qatar University (QU), held a closing ceremony to honour the participants of the Second Career Camp for University Students. Organised in collaboration with the QU’s Career Development Student Association, the camp was supported by the Qatar Career Development Center (QCDC) and sponsored by Qatar International Islamic Bank (QIIB) and Starlink company. The five-day Career Camp aimed to

empower university students approaching graduation by providing them with essential skills and tools to navigate the job market successfully. It offered participants valuable insights into career pathways, professional training opportunities, and the evolving demands of the labour market. The camp featured a comprehensive programme comprising practical workshops, interactive activities, and field visits to professional workplaces. These

initiatives provided students with firsthand exposure to workplace environments, fostering self-development, building confidence, and enhancing critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. Participants also applied their newly acquired knowledge through hands-on projects and engaging workshops, enabling them to develop versatile professional competencies applicable across various industries. **(QNA)**



QRCS hosts meeting of advisory group on disaster management for Mena

QNA
Doha

The Advisory Group on Disaster Management for the Middle East and North Africa (Mena) region held its first meeting of 2025, in Doha, yesterday.

In his opening remarks, Secretary-General of Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS), Faisal Mohamed al-Emadi, highlighted that the advisory group was established in 2012 to support national societies, co-ordinate efforts and share expertise with respect to managing disasters at the Mena level, stating that the first meeting is poised to address numerous interim objectives, foremost of which is presenting the group's activities in 2024, preparing the

workgroup action plans for 2025, deliberating on the outcomes of the meeting of the Secretaries-General and Presidents of national societies, as well as key performance indicators.

Speaking to Qatar News Agency (QNA), al-Emadi stated that the group comprises 17 technical national societies from Arab countries that are vested with the responsibility of developing contingency plans in states, fostering collective coordination among them at the levels of implementation and following-up, in addition to refining the national societies' skills with respect to the urgent intervention operations.

Regarding the priorities for the coming period, he highlighted that such priorities are determined by reality on the ground and not the group, as long as con-

ditions and emergencies normally require amendments to the developed plans, underscoring the flexibility of operations.

He indicated that leveraging the technology in QRCS's relief and humanitarian operations offers time and effort, and largely helps accelerate the response and intervention, especially since obtaining information and communicating it rapidly have an impactful role in identifying the type of humanitarian intervention needed for the injured, along with the required urgent needs, and other related matters and requirements.

For his part, Manager of International affairs at the Saudi Red Crescent Authority (SRCA), Chairman of the group for the period 2024-2025, Abdulrahman al-Athel, said the group with its components, members and operation is capable

of countering the challenges posed by crises and disasters, thanks to its concrete impact and comprehensive alertness plans, stressing that its operation has become a role model among organisations from the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in the region and beyond.

Al-Athel praised the QRCS's efforts in hosting this meeting, underlining that the participation of the Secretary-General of the Arab Red Crescent and Red Cross Organisation, Abdullah bin Suhail al-Muhaidli, in the meeting is a testament to the full harmony and collaboration between the two sides within the components of the international movement.

Al-Athel highlighted to QNA the significance of this meeting in boosting partnership and enduring relationship between national

red crescent and red cross societies in the region when disasters flare up, in addition to discussing critical issues pertaining to strategies and developing joint plans, as well as alertness and response, especially when there is an increasing need for relief and humanitarian interventions, along with the multiple crises, thereby requiring exchange of expertise among those national societies.

Al-Muhaidli underscored to QNA that the Arab Red Crescent and Red Cross Organisation is committed to following up on the plans developed by the Advisory Group on Disaster Management for Mena and its teams throughout the past years, along with its training programmes for 2024, as well as updating its plans and programs for 2025 within the framework of disaster alertness, readiness, and

response in the Arab region and beyond. He added that the group operates numerous professional teams which are meant for developing contingency plans and response, as well as safe accessibility and handling the contamination of weapons. The meeting was attended by the steering committee members, including representatives from SRCA, the Algerian Red Crescent (Vice-Chair of the Group), the Kuwaiti Red Crescent (Committee Adviser), the QRCS, the Iraqi Red Crescent, the Jordanian Red Crescent, the Egyptian Red Crescent, the Libyan Red Crescent, and the Lebanese Red Cross, in addition to representatives from the Regional Office of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) in Mena and the Regional Movement Affairs Team for Mena at ICRC.

Ministry opens Hazm Al Markhiya Park

QNA
Doha

The Ministry of Municipality, represented by the Public Parks Department, yesterday, inaugurated the Hazm Al Markhiya Park, as part of its efforts to promote life quality and offer an enduring and healthy environment for citizens and residents.

To mark this occasion, Assistant Undersecretary for Public Services Affairs at the Ministry of Municipality, Eng Abdullah Ahmed al-Karani, highlighted that opening this park underscores the ministry's keenness to advance public parks and gardens in accordance with world-class standards to be a healthy and recreational destination, as well as playgrounds for children and families.

He stated that the park is an outstanding addition to the recreation facilities in Al Markhiya to boost the services afforded to the residents there, highlighting that its strategic location offers a chance for visitors to enjoy sporting and recreational activities in a secure environment, thereby optimising the life quality and

supporting those activities. The park is situated on a total area of 24,000sq m, of which 14,500sq m equivalent to 60 percent of the parks overall space, are dedicated to cultivated green spaces.

Additionally, it is home to 273 native trees and 421 shrubs, thereby playing a pivotal role in promoting plant biodiversity and enhancing air quality.

By and large, the park offers a designated walking path extending over 585m, alongside a running track measuring 671m in length and is fully outfitted with outdoor fitness area spanning 85sq m for physical exercises.

There is also a cycling path, extending 687m to ensure a safe environment for enthusiasts of this sport, featuring a 454-sq-m children's play area, and divided into sections for children under five and those aged six to twelve, with the highest standards of safety and recreation.

In addition, it is outfitted with facilities such as restrooms, seating, and 44 parking spaces, ensuring easy access and making it an ideal destination for families and individuals. The park supports environmental sustainability by utilizing eco-friendly lighting.



QNA, Cypriot agency sign collaboration agreement

Qatar News Agency (QNA) and Cyprus News Agency (CNA) signed an agreement to enhance co-operation between the two agencies in the field of news exchange and sharing experiences to serve their common goals. The agreement was signed by Director-General of QNA Ahmed bin Saeed al-Rumaihi and Chairman of CNA Andreas Frangos.

The agreement covers several areas, including the exchange of news and media materials such as news items, reports and bulletins in different news fields, as well as technical co-operation, particularly concerning the available methods of transmission and reception to both agencies with the goal of providing optimal services in the aforementioned areas.

In this context, Ahmed bin Saeed al-Rumaihi stressed the importance of enhancing co-operation with CNA, indicating that this agreement will be the beginning of a strong partnership between the two agencies, opening

new horizons for co-operation in the fields of digital media and modern technologies, as it will allow the two sides to exchange experiences and best practices.

For his part, Andreas Frangos commended the co-operation between the two agencies, pointing out that this agreement is considered a gateway not only for exchanging news, but also for sharing experiences and knowledge between the two sides. In an exclusive statement to QNA, the chairman of CNA said that this co-operation comes as an affirmation of the shared values of both agencies in news work, adding that it also opens up broader horizons for news co-operation and benefiting from QNA's expertise.

During his visit to QNA's headquarters, the chairman of CNA was briefed on the agency's training centre, which aims to develop media cadres and raise their efficiency through the implementation of specialized qualitative training programmes. (QNA)



QNL offers engaging events

Qatar National Library (QNL) has announced a series of events during the month of February, including diverse range of workshops, performances and cultural activities that cater to the interests of all segments of society, most notably the Parents to Be Festival. The month kicks off on 1 February with the workshop "A Glimmer of Hope for Lebanon", a creative session designed to express solidarity with Lebanon through art. Attendees can participate by painting canvases or designing postcards that carry messages of hope. On 8 February the Library will celebrate National Sport Day with a full day of activities and games, offering an exciting opportunity for families to engage in entertaining sporting challenges. The key activities offered by QNL is Qatar Reads' "Parents to Be Festival" that will run from 13 to 15 February. This festival aims to empower parents by providing opportunities to connect with experts, explore useful books, and discover products that support them on their parenting journey. The Festival will include a rich lineup of activities and experiences designed to support parents featuring a family market with a curated selection of products and books that meet the needs of parents, in addition to interactive discussion sessions with experts, and a special area for workshops for children and adults.

On 17 February, the Library invites participants to explore the world of Moroccan calligraphy in a hands-on workshop led by Youssef Hussein al-Mallah who will highlight the history and techniques of Moroccan calligraphy, while celebrating renowned calligraphers who mastered the thuluth and Moroccan styles. As for music enthusiasts the experience continues on Feb 20 with a musical evening presented by the Doha String Quartet that will feature Franz Schubert's most famous compositions. Rounding out the month's events, QNL will host the "Write to Inspire: Short Story Writing Workshop" on Feb 22, offering guidance on crafting impactful 500-word stories in Arabic or English. Participants will have the opportunity to submit their stories to be featured in QNL's Short Story Dispenser at the 34th Doha International Book Fair. — QNA

Moroccan exhibition showcases fusion of authenticity, modernity

QNA
Doha

The "Transparency" Exhibition was inaugurated at the Al Markhiya Gallery at the Fire Station, showcasing masterpieces of the contemporary Moroccan artists Hakim Ghazali and Khalid Elbekay.

The station will keep opening its doors to the public until April 4. The inauguration ceremony was attended by Moroccan ambassador to Qatar, Mohamed Setri, alongside several diplomats, intellectuals, and artists.

Showcasing a superb art experience, the exhibition fuses visual arts with art books and offers an innovative masterpiece that combines modernity with authenticity.

Inspired by the Moroccan heritage, Khalid Elbekay incredibly combines precise geometric patterns, intricate arabesque de-



signs, and expressive calligraphy to ultimately build a close connection with the inveterate Moroccan art traditions, whose art simultaneously transcends the cultural borders, reflecting interconnection between eastern and

western impact to illuminate the cultural diversity in his art vision. In his remarks to Qatar News Agency, Elbekay highlighted that the advanced art level in Qatar prompted him to showcase his artworks at the Al Markhiya Gal-



lery, one of the most prestigious galleries in Qatar. He capitalised on Doha in the openness to the East, adding that art activism is dramatically burgeoning with prominent levels, indicating that he showcased artworks during

2015 and 2022 that focused on dialogue between Arab and Western cultures. The artist Hakim Ghazali receives wide recognition regionally, whose artworks fuse impacts of Moroccan conventional arts with contemporary

global visions, including painting, calligraphy, and conceptual art, often exploring themes of cultural identity, spirituality, and the interaction between tradition and modernity, with a career spanning nearly four decades.

Ghazali highlighted to QNA that his artworks debuted at the Al Markhiya Gallery in Qatar, representing the convergence of Eastern and Western arts with professionalism in organisation. He commended the efforts of those in charge of advancing the cultural and art affairs in Qatar through supporting local and Arab artists and hosting them from various territories to showcase their works in Doha.

The Al Markhiya Gallery in Doha is a renowned hub for cultural and art scenes in Qatar and was established in response to the private sector to advance art and innovation, positioning itself as a leading initiative in connecting fine arts with the public.

Qatar Museums unveils exciting events and workshops for Feb

QNA
Doha

Qatar Museums (QM) is set to welcome February with a dynamic array of cultural, educational, and artistic activities designed to engage families, children, and adults alike. The lineup features hands-on workshops, storytelling sessions, immersive camps, and exclusive curator-led tours, offering visitors unique opportunities to explore art, heritage, and creativity in engaging ways.

From the Museum of Islamic Art's interactive storytelling sessions to Mathaf's artistically inspiring workshops, and M7's entrepreneurial courses, February at Qatar Museums promises an enriching experience for all. The Mu-

seum of Islamic Art (MIA) will offer a variety of engaging activities throughout February, catering to different age groups and interests.

Story Time at MIA Library, (3 February), children and parents can enjoy a bilingual storytelling session featuring Pouch by David Ezra Stein.

Planet Teens (18 February), a monthly initiative that connects the museum's collections with environmental awareness. Young participants will engage in discussions, creative crafts, and explore historical artifacts that promote sustainability.

Family Day: Sports in History, (8 February), families are invited to discover the historical significance of sports at MIA Atrium, inspired by the museum's extensive collection. This free event requires no

prior registration. In collaboration with the future Lusail Museum, Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art is hosting a series of workshops and specialised tours as part of the Seeing is Believing: The Art and Influence of Gerome exhibition, running until 22 February.

Workshop: Paint from the East Acrylic for Beginners (13,17 February), a beginner-friendly painting workshop where participants will learn acrylic techniques inspired by Jean-Leon Gerome's art and Eastern culture.

A Workshop: From Painting to Manuscripts (15 February), designed for ages 15-18, this creative writing session explores the relationship between travel literature and visual arts, drawing inspiration from Gerome's work.

Specialised Curatorial Tours by

Lusail Museum (6, 13, & 20 February), these guided tours offer in-depth insights into Gerome's life and artistic influence, touching on themes such as Orientalism, photography, and contemporary artistic interpretations.

Sports and health take centre stage at the 3-2-1 Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum with interactive sessions for children and families.

Storytelling: *Saad and the Magic Herb* (22 February), a captivating storytelling session for children aged 7-11, bringing Shaima al-Harmouzi's tale to life in an engaging way.

Workshop: Staying Healthy and Energized During Ramadan (26 February), a practical session featuring expert-led cooking demonstrations on maintaining health

and nutrition during the Holy Month of Ramadan.

M7 will offer a variety of hands-on workshops aimed at enhancing artistic and entrepreneurial skills.

Tote Bag Making and Designing (1 February), a fun workshop where participants can design and create personalised tote bags using embroidery and sewing techniques.

Creating a Profit and Loss Sheet for Brands (5 February), a must-attend session for creative entrepreneurs looking to understand business expenses, revenue, and profitability.

Create a Cyanotype Inspired by Outdoor Elements (15 February), participants will explore the historic cyanotype printing process, using plant materials to create stunning monochromatic artworks.

For photography enthusiasts, Tasweer presents a unique opportunity to learn from an industry expert.

Masterclass: Museum and Collections Photography with Khalifa al-Obaidly (8 February), held at Fire Station: Artist in Residence, this intensive session will cover techniques for capturing museum objects with precision, focusing on lighting, composition, and texture.

With an extensive lineup of cultural and educational events, Qatar Museums ensures that February is a month filled with inspiration, discovery, and interactive experiences. Whether through art, storytelling, business workshops, or photography masterclasses, visitors of all ages are invited to engage with Qatar's vibrant cultural scene in new and exciting ways.



MoECC monitors update of National Biodiversity Strategy

QNA
Doha

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC), in co-operation with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF), is implementing a project to revise and update the National Biodiversity Strategy within the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, called the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.

Attended by a group of specialists and consultants from inside and outside the Ministry, MoECC held a meeting to follow up the implementation of the project in a step that reflects the commitment of the State of Qatar to preserve the environment, promote sustainability and preserve biodiversity, and support national efforts to meet environmental challenges and achieve relevant international commitments. The components of the project and its implementation mechanisms were reviewed, in ad-

Awareness drive for sea turtle protection

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, through its Wildlife Development Department and in collaboration with Public Relations and Communications Department, has launched an environmental awareness programme to raise awareness about the importance of sea turtles and the need for their protection and conservation. In a statement, the ministry stressed the importance of community involvement in wildlife protection efforts, calling for collective action to safeguard sea turtles and marine environments from the threats they face. This,

Ministry noted, would help enhance biodiversity and ensure its sustainability for future generations. The programme, featuring lectures from experts and specialists in sea turtles and marine environments, aims to highlight the significance of Qatar's marine ecosystem and its vital role in maintaining ecological balance, while also educating the public about the dangers these creatures face and ways to protect them. The program will be delivered in all schools in northern Qatar and will run until the end of February, as part of the Ministry's

ongoing efforts to promote environmental awareness and preserve natural resources, in line with Qatar's National Vision for Sustainable Development. The programme's launch comes ahead of Hawksbill turtle nesting season, which begins in late March each year. This is the only species of sea turtle that nests on Qatar's shores and is classified as one of the most endangered species globally. The Ministry's conservation efforts have resulted in a significant increase in their population, with over 50,000 turtles recorded over the past five years. **(QNA)**



dition to updating the National Biodiversity Strategy in line with the global goals adopted during the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity and aligning it with the Qatar's Third National Development Strategy, and discussing the detailed steps to

implement the action plan according to the schedule, stressing the importance of co-ordination with strategic partners from the public and private sectors to ensure the success of the project.

On this occasion, Director of the Wildlife Development at MoECC Youssef Ibrahim al-Hamar high-

lighted that the project represents a fundamental pillar for achieving sustainable development within the framework of the Qatar National Vision 2030, highlighting the preservation of biological diversity is an essential element in protecting the environment.

He pointed out that the project

is being implemented under the direct supervision of the Ministry in co-operation with the project officer at the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), noting that the National Biodiversity Strategy is in line with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, a global agreement aimed at enhancing the protection of ecosystems and restoring biological balance globally adopted during the 15th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Di-

versity (COP15).

Through this project, Qatar seeks to align its national strategies with this international framework, which strengthens its commitment to protecting the environment and achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Qatar reaffirms, through the project, its firm commitment to environmental sustainability, based on an ambitious national vision and effective international partnerships to ensure the preservation of its natural resources for future generations.

DFI chooses 47 projects for its Fall Grants

Doha Film Institute (DFI) has announced the recipients of its 2024 Fall Grants, which continues to support emerging and established filmmakers from the Arab world and beyond. The longest-serving film development initiative in the region, DFI's Grants programme nurtures first- and second-time filmmakers as well as acclaimed directors from across the world. The grants aim to empower filmmakers by providing the resources they need to bring their unique visions to life. The selection includes an exciting array of projects across various stages of production, reflecting DFI's commitment to nurturing diverse voices and innovative storytelling.

For the 2024 Fall Grants cycle, 47 projects from 23 nations that span a range of genres, including narrative, documentary, experimental films and series content, highlighting the Institutes dedication to fostering creativity and cinematic excellence.

In addition to 11 projects, including feature narratives and documentaries by Qatari and Qatar-based talent, the projects are from: Algeria, Armenia, Belgium, Denmark, Egypt, France, Germany, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Lesotho, Luxembourg, Malta, Mexico, Morocco, Norway, Palestine, South Korea, Spain, Tunisia, UK, and US. This years recipients include 21 women filmmakers and 21 returning grantees.

Commenting on this, DFI CEO Fatma Hassan Alremaihi said: "Our grants programme is a cornerstone of our mission to support filmmakers in realising their artistic potential and telling stories that resonate with audiences worldwide."

Alremaihi added, "Over the years, DFI Grants have enabled the script-to-screen journey of over 850 important projects in cinema from across the world, that has contributed to the advancement of cinema and the empowerment of underrepresented voices. The recipients of this cycle represent a remarkable blend of talent, vision, and cultural richness, who will continue to drive progression of the industry to new heights. We are proud to champion these projects and look forward to seeing them come to fruition." **(QNA)**



MCIT: 'Customs E-Mazad' innovative platform to manage auctions digitally

QNA
Doha

The Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT), through its TASMU Smart Qatar Program, and the General Authority of Customs (GAC) have announced the launch of the digital platform 'Customs e-Mazad', a new smart solution designed to manage the customs auction process in a digital and integrated manner.

Launched at an event celebrating International Customs Day, marked annually on January 26, this new customs auction platform reflects Qatar's commitment to digital transformation and the delivery of the Digital Agenda 2030, which seeks to establish a world-class digital economy and foster innovation in government services, in line with the broader goals of Qatar National Vision 2030.

Commenting on the launch, Director of Digital Innovation Department at MCIT Eman al-Kuwari said: "The launch of 'Customs e-Mazad' highlights Qatar's commitment to harnessing digital innovation as a central pillar of national development and economic diversification, in alignment with the goals of the Digital Agenda 2030. The 'Customs e-Mazad' platform combines cutting-edge technology with robust security measures, contributing to the goals of the Third National Development Strategy, which aims to digitize 90% of citizen services by 2030, and enhance the country's digital infrastructure by providing a user-friendly platform that will enhance transparency, efficiency, and participation in customs auctions for businesses and individuals alike through implementing the latest smart automation technologies, advanced data analytics and integration with key national systems."

For his part, Customs Adviser and head of the Electronic Auction Platform Team at the General Authority of Customs Hassan Ali al-Nuaimi said: "Customs e-Mazad represents a significant leap forward in Qatar's customs operations, enabling the General Authority of



Customs to enhance efficiency and transparency in the customs auction process through the implementation of cutting-edge technology. By automating the entire auction process – from product evaluation to secure payment processing – we are not only reducing operational costs but also making it easier than ever for Qatari residents and businesses to access customs auctions. This platform perfectly aligns with Qatar's broader digital transformation goals and will play a pivotal role in the future of our country's customs operations."

A key feature of the platform is an admin portal that enables the General Authority of Customs to prepare, manage, and oversee each stage of the auction cycle – from product evaluation to the automated listing of goods to secure payment processing. It also offers advanced analytics tools, enhancing operational oversight and data-driven decision-making, enabling more efficient auction strategies and improved management of both financial and user-related data.

Businesses and individuals can participate in upcoming auctions through the 'Customs e-Mazad' platform, by registering using a valid Qatar ID and logging in through the National

Authentication System (Tawtheeq), which helps ensure a safe and secure bidding environment. Auction participants will benefit from a user-friendly website and mobile application, where they can browse goods, place bids, and complete transactions securely. Once registered, users can manage their participation on the platform by adding items to a wish list, receiving notifications for new auctions, viewing their transaction history, and tracking interactions.

Developed by TASMU Smart Qatar in collaboration with the General Authority of Customs, 'Customs e-Mazad' provides a comprehensive upgrade to the customs auction process, replacing the current manual system. The platform will enhance operational efficiency and reduce the General Authority of Customs' storage costs by accelerating the sale of unclaimed goods, increasing the frequency of auctions, and broadening participation.

The platform will also be fully integrated with key national systems – such as warehouse and financial systems as well as the National Authentication System (Tawtheeq) and Al Nadeeb Clearance System to deliver a streamlined, secure, and efficient experience for all users.

Amir’s visit ‘to boost reconstruction and stability efforts’

QNA
Doha

Renowned analysts have underscored the strategic importance of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani’s visit to Syria, marking the resumption of Qatari-Syrian relations after a 13-year hiatus.

Throughout this period, Qatar remained steadfast in its support for the Syrian people and their aspirations, even during times when the international community lost hope for meaningful change in Syria.

They emphasised Qatar’s anticipated role in Syria’s reconstruction and the success of its transitional phase, ensuring long-term stability and facilitating a comprehensive political process that steers the country toward recovery.

Dr Khaled Walid Mahmoud, a political analyst and author, described HH the Amir’s visit as highly symbolic and historically significant, being the first by an Arab leader since the fall of the former regime. He highlighted that the visit represents a turning point in regional dynamics, coinciding with swift political and security shifts in the Middle East, as nations reassess their engagement with Syria based on political, economic, and humanitarian considerations.

From a diplomatic perspective, Dr Mahmoud noted that the visit could serve as a gateway to reopening diplomatic channels and advancing a sustainable political resolution. He pointed to Qatar’s strong ties with key international players, including the United States and Türkiye, positioning it as a trusted mediator in the Syrian context.

On the economic front, Dr Mahmoud stressed that the visit signals potential Qatari involvement in Syria’s reconstruction, particularly in critical sectors such as energy, transportation, and housing. Given Qatar’s extensive expertise in infrastructure development, the country is well-positioned to contribute to rebuilding Syria. Moreover, as one of the world’s largest producers and exporters of natural gas, Qatar may explore investment opportunities in Syria’s energy sector, paving the way for enhanced economic co-operation.

In humanitarian terms, Dr Mahmoud anticipated an increase in Qatar’s aid efforts, whether through direct humanitarian assistance or long-term development initiatives aimed at improving living conditions. He noted that Qatar’s longstanding support for relief efforts in Syria could expand further, fostering more sustainable solutions to the country’s humanitarian crisis amid ongoing security and economic challenges.

Echoing this sentiment, Dr Ahmed Qassim Hussein, a researcher at the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies and editor-in-chief of Arab Policies, described HH the Amir’s visit as a reaffirmation of Qatar’s unwavering stance on Syria. He highlighted that HH the Amir has consistently advocated for the Syrian people’s right to freedom and self-determination on both Arab and international platforms.

Dr Hussein explained that the visit not only strengthens bilateral ties between Doha and Damascus but also signals an evolving Qatari role in Syria’s political, economic, and security spheres. Politically, he noted that Qatar’s support for the new Syrian leadership, headed by Ahmed al-Sharaa, was evident in Doha’s decision to reopen its embassy in Damascus, raising the Qatari flag once again after its closure in July 2011. This move, he emphasised, reflects Qatar’s commitment to restoring diplomatic relations and fostering co-operation with Syria.

Addressing security concerns, Dr Hussein highlighted Qatar’s efforts to support Syria’s stability by reinforcing state institutions based on legal and developmental principles. He referenced a statement from Qatar’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs stressing the im-

portance of consolidating state control over arms under a unified national army, ensuring Syria’s sovereignty and paving the way for a comprehensive political transition. These initiatives, he added, underscore Qatar’s pivotal role in guiding Syria through its transitional phase and promoting long-term stability.

Similarly, Dr Mahjoub al-Zuwairi, Professor of Contemporary Middle East Politics at Qatar University, emphasised the significance of HH the Amir’s visit, calling it a milestone as the first by an Arab or international leader since the success of the Syrian revolution in overthrowing the former regime.

◆ Exclusive Statements to Qatar News Agency ◆



Dr. Khaled Walid Mahmoud
Political Analyst & Author

Visit is Highly Symbolic & Historically Significant & Represents Turning Point in Regional Dynamics

Visit Could Serve as Gateway to Reopening Diplomatic Channels & Advancing Sustainable Political Resolution & Has Economic Impacts



Dr. Mahjoub Al Zuwairi
Professor of Contemporary Middle East Politics at Qatar University

Visit Reaffirms Qatar’s Commitment to Supporting Syria’s Stability at Both Political & Economic Levels & Doha is Dedicated to Reintegrating Syria into Arab World

Qatar Remains Committed to Syria’s Reconstruction, Leveraging Extensive Diplomatic Network & Global Standing



Dr. Ahmed Qassim Hussein
Researcher at Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies

Visit Strengthens Bilateral Ties & Signals Evolving Qatari Role in Syria’s Political, Economic & Security Spheres

Qatar’s Efforts Support Syria’s Stability by Reinforcing State Institutions Based on Legal & Developmental Principles

Qatar and Syria: Advancing a shared commitment

Marking a significant milestone in the steadfast fraternal support extended by Qatar to its brothers in Syria, and reflecting the unwavering commitment of the Qatari leadership, His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani’s visit to Syria stands as the first-of-its-kind by a head of state since the downfall of the previous Syrian regime on December 8, 2024.

HH the Amir was expected to discuss with Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa, the advancement of bilateral relations across various sectors and the establishment of a future partnership for the mutual benefit of both nations and their peoples.

This visit conveys multiple messages, arriving at a crucial juncture in Syria’s history, when the country requires extensive support to rebuild on the foundations of dignity, rights, and legitimate aspirations. It reaffirms Qatar’s enduring solidarity with the Syrian people in their pursuit of peace and justice while expressing readiness to cooperate with the Syrian administration, particularly in efforts to lift sanctions.

Qatar has swiftly initiated high-level communication with the Syrian administration. On January 16, 2025, HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani, visited Damascus and met with al-Sharaa at Al Shaab Palace. They discussed relations between the two countries, avenues for strengthening them, the latest developments in Syria, and other topics of mutual interest.

HE the Prime Minister reiterated Qatar’s steadfast position in support of Syria’s unity, sovereignty, and independence, as well as the aspirations of the Syrian people for a dignified life and the establishment of a state based on institutions and the rule of law.

During a joint press conference with al-Sharaa, HE the Prime Minister welcomed the positive steps taken by the Syrian administration to protect civilians, stabilise state institutions, and ensure the continuous operation of public utilities.

He expressed his pleasure in being in Damascus to mark the resumption of Qatar-Syria ties after nearly 13 years, reaffirming Qatar’s unwavering support for the Syrian people.

On January 5, 2025, a high-level Syrian delegation visited Doha, comprising Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Syrian administration, Asaad al-Shaibani; Minister of Defence, Murhaf Abu Qasra; and Head of the Intelligence Service, Anas Khattab.

The delegation held separate meetings with HE the Prime Minister, HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs, Sheikh Saud bin Abdulrahman bin



State of Qatar
Has Been Swift in Initiating High-level Communication with New Syrian Administration



Visit Signifies Numerous Messages, as it Comes at a Critical Moment in Syria’s History



December 16, 2024
Qatar Resumed Operations at Its Embassy in Damascus & Appointed Charge D’affaires



Inauguration of Al Amal Residential City to Shelter People Affected by Crises & Provide Decent Housing for Displaced Families in Northern Syria



Qatar Welcomed
Steps Aimed to Restructure Syrian State & Foster Consensus & Unity Among All Syrian Parties



Qatar Permanently Uphold Obligations in Standing with Syrian Brothers in Pursuit for Achieving Peace & Stability

Hassan al-Thani, and HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation, Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad.

The meetings focused on Qatar’s steadfast commitment to supporting the Syrian people and identifying their most pressing humanitarian and developmental needs.

The Qatari side received a briefing on the current situation in Syria and the administration’s plans for the coming period.

On Wednesday, the Military Operations Administration in Syria announced a series of measures, including the abrogation of the 2012 constitution and the dissolution of the People’s Assembly and its affiliated committees.

The military administration declared that, at the time, the then Commander-in-Chief of Syria’s Administration, al-Sharaa, would assume the presidency during the transitional period, overseeing the responsibilities of the President of the Syrian Arab Republic and representing the nation on the international stage.

In confirmation of Qatar’s enduring support for Syria, Qatar welcomed these steps aimed at restructuring the Syrian state, fostering consensus and unity among all Syrian parties, and advancing civil peace, security, stability, and the development of a state based on law and institutions.

In a statement on Wednesday, Qatar’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasised that the current critical stage in Syria necessitates the unification of armed forces into a single national army that represents all components of society without exclusion, ensuring the country’s sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity. This move is seen as a step toward a peaceful transfer of power through a comprehensive political process.

The ministry reiterated Qatar’s full support for Syria across all sectors, alongside its active contribution to regional and global efforts aimed at fulfilling the aspirations of the Syrian people for freedom, development, prosperity, and a dignified life.

On December 16, 2024, Qatar resumed operations at its embassy in Damascus and appointed Khalifa Abdullah al-Mahmoud al-Sharif as chargé d’affaires. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted that this move followed a nearly 13-year hiatus, during which diplomatic ties with the Syrian regime were severed in 2011. This decision reaffirmed Qatar’s initial solidarity with the Syrian people’s revolution and its unwavering support for their demands for dignity, freedom, and social justice.

It also underscored Qatar’s firm rejection of all repressive policies previously pursued by the Syrian regime.

As part of its steadfast support for the Syrian people, HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation, Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad, inaugurated the Al Amal residential city project on Wednesday. The initiative aims to provide shelter and dignified housing for displaced families in northern Syria.

Established in collaboration between Qatar Charity (QC) and the Turkish Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH), the residential city comprises 1,400 houses equipped to accommodate more than 8,800 people. It includes essential facilities such as schools, markets, a health centre, and a mosque, marking a significant turning point for hundreds of families transitioning from refugee tents to safe and dignified homes. **(QNA)**

Qatar’s enduring humanitarian support for Syria

Since the crisis erupted in Syria in March 2011, the government and people of Qatar have been keen to support the Syrian people, guided by their humanitarian, moral, and fraternal commitments.

Qatar offered relief aid to refugees and internally displaced people. Since then, the total amount of Qatari aid for the Syrian people has surpassed \$2bn, given through direct government support or through civil society organisations and humanitarian, charitable organisations.

At the 3rd International Pledging Conference for Syria in Kuwait in 2015, Qatar launched an initiative to establish a fund for vocational education and training for Syrians, and pledged during the conference an amount of \$100mn, of which \$20mn was allocated to finance this fund.

In support for the Syrian people in their plight, Doha hosted the 10th meeting of the major donors group for Syria on June 14, 2024, amid the inability of the international community to address the root causes of the crisis at that time, where the humanitarian efforts of Qatar, which was harnessed in favour of supporting the Syrian people, were completed.

Qatar mobilised all state institutions and ministries in a campaign described as the largest donation campaign to support the Syrian people in Darb Al Saai area in Doha, where approximately \$330mn were mobilised as part of a campaign in support of Aleppo, after which Qatar received a letter of thanks and appreciation in writing from the UN, and Doha hosted in early April 2017 a regional meeting that included the UN and 25 Qatari and regional non-governmental organisations from the region, resulting in pledges of \$262mn in support of the humanitarian response for Syria.

In this context, Qatar has been a trail blazer in launching many initiatives that have provided solutions and hope to Syrians during their crisis, including initiatives in the fields of education and vocational training, in partnership with regional and international humanitarian organisations, including an initiative to educate and train Syrian refugees for the benefit of 400,000 children over 5, as well as the Educate A Child initiative, the number of beneficiaries of which reached nearly 985,000 Syrian children, in addition to the efforts of the Qatari government to reunite thousands of Syrians with their families residing in Qatar. Upon the directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, the first aircraft of the Qatari Armed Forces arrived in the Turkish city of Gaziantep on December 10 carrying food,

medical, and shelter supplies provided by the Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD) within an air lift operated by Qatar to aid the Syrian brethren and address the humanitarian situation.

Qatar has consistently provided the required aid to Syrian refugees and displaced people wherever they may be in the context of resolving pressing humanitarian issues. As part of Qatar’s airlift, which is part of its position in support of Syria and its ongoing support of the Syrian people, a plane from the Qatari Armed Forces landed at Beirut Rafic Hariri International Airport on December 23 with humanitarian aid, including food and shelter supplies, provided by the Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD).

The first aircraft to land at Damascus International Airport within the Qatari air bridge, a plane from the Qatari Armed Forces arrived on December 30 with humanitarian aid, including ambulances, food, and medications provided by the QFFD, along with technical assistance to help re-operate the airport and ensure the flow of aid to Syria.

All these various assistance comes within the framework of the airlift operated by Qatar to help its brothers in Syria to settle at the most important stage in the history of their country.

HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad has confirmed the continued support of Qatar to Syria in all fields, especially humanitarian and development to achieve the aspirations of the Syrian people to live in dignity and build a state of institutions and law, stressing that this step will accelerate the arrival of assistance to the beneficiary sectors.

Reaffirming Qatar’s continuous support for the Syrian people, HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani, reiterated enhancing Qatari humanitarian aid. This came in January during his meeting with Syria’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Asaad al-Shaibani and Minister of Defence Murhaf Abu Qasra.

Qatar has always renewed its commitment to its firm principles regarding Arab and humanitarian issues; a principle that guided its support for the brotherly Syrian people, stemming from a comprehensive vision aimed at achieving stability and development and building a state of institutions and law, in response to the aspirations of the Syrian people to a decent life. The Qatari support for Syria is not only a political position, but is rather a part of a broad humanitarian commitment. **(QNA)**

Amir reassures Syrian president of Qatar’s steadfast support

From Page 1

Discussions during the meeting focused the latest developments in Syria and ways to strengthen relations between the two countries in various fields for the benefit, good and development of the two brotherly peoples. The two sides also touched on the latest regional and international developments of mutual interest.

The meeting was attended by HE the Chief of the Amiri Diwan Abdullah bin Mohammed

bin Mubarak al-Khulaifi, HE the Minister of Finance Ali bin Ahmed al-Kuwari, HE the Minister of Education and Higher Education Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhater, and HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi, along with a lineup of senior officials members of the delegation accompanying the Amir.

On the Syrian side, the meeting was attended by Prime Minister Mohammed al-Bashir, Minister of Foreign Affairs and

Expatriates Asaad al-Shaibani, Minister of Defence Murhaf Abu Qasra, and a number of officials.

His Highness the Amir and the Syrian president earlier held a bilateral meeting, to discuss co-operation relations between the two countries and ways to strengthen and develop them.

His Highness the Amir attended the luncheon banquet held by the Syrian President, in honour of His Highness, and the accompanying delegation.



Shura Council participates in meeting of Arab parliament chiefs in Cairo



The Shura Council participated in the 45th meeting of the General Assembly of the Association of Secretaries-General of Arab Parliaments, which was held yesterday at the Egyptian House of Representatives in Cairo. The Shura Council was represented at the meeting by HE the Secretary-General of the Shura Council Nayef bin Mohammed al-Mahmoud. The meeting witnessed the election of the assembly president. Dr Mohammed bin Dakhil al-

Mutairi, the secretary-general of the Saudi Arabian Shura Council, won by acclamation as president of the Association of Secretaries-General of Arab Parliaments. Supplementary elections were also held for members of the Executive Office. During the meeting, the amendment of the association's bylaws was discussed, in addition to a number of topics related to enhancing the work of the association and developing mechanisms for co-operation between the general secretariats of Arab parliaments, which contributes to raising the efficiency of parliamentary performance and exchanging experiences and expertise between legislative institutions in Arab countries. On the sidelines of the participation, HE al-Mahmoud met with the secretary-general of the Egyptian House of Representatives, Ahmed Ezzat Manna, to discuss aspects of co-operation. - QNA



Iran 'ready' for talks on nuclear programme if West is 'serious'

AFP
Tehran

Iran is ready to discuss its nuclear programme if Western countries show they are "serious", the foreign ministry spokesman was quoted as saying in an interview published yesterday. "We have said several times that we are ready for discussions, but only if the other side is serious about this," Esmail Baqaei told the government daily Iran. Tehran has signalled to the West several times recently indicating a willingness to reach an agreement over its nuclear programme.

In an interview with Sky News posted to his official Telegram channel on Tuesday, Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said the new US administration should work to win back Tehran's trust if it wants a new round of nuclear talks. In yesterday's interview, Baqaei expressed hope that new US President Donald Trump would adopt a "realistic approach" towards Iran. During his first term that ended in 2021, Trump pursued a policy of "maximum pressure", withdrawing the United States from a landmark nuclear deal which imposed curbs on Iran's nuclear programme in return for sanctions relief. Asked about the possibility of new talks,

Baqaei was quoted yesterday as saying that Iran's policy would depend on "the actions of the other parties". Tehran adhered to the deal - known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) - until a year after Washington's withdrawal in 2018, but then began rolling back its commitments. Efforts to revive the 2015 nuclear pact have since faltered. Iran has repeatedly expressed willingness to revive the nuclear deal, and President Masoud Pezeshkian, who took office last July, has called for an end to his country's isolation. Before Trump's return to the White House, Iranian officials held nuclear talks

with counterparts from Britain, France and Germany that both sides described as "frank and constructive". In December, the three Western governments accused Tehran of growing its stockpile of highly enriched uranium to "unprecedented levels" without "any credible civilian justification" and discussed the possible reimposition of sanctions. Baqaei warned yesterday that if this happened, Iran's adherence to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) "would no longer have any meaning". Under the NPT, signatory states are obliged to declare their nuclear stockpiles and place them under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Mural on the beauty of purebred Arabian horses inaugurated in Katara

Katara - the Cultural Village inaugurated on Wednesday the mural of the mare AJ Kayya, champion of the Global Champions Arabians Tour 2024 in Katara. The mural was completed by the international artist Fintan Magee, who excelled in embodying the beauty and grace of purebred Arabian horses in an artistic style that reflects the spirit of horsemanship and the antiquity of Arabian horse breeds. The mural aims to highlight the exceptional beauty of Arabian horses and strengthen the cultural and artistic link with the Qatari heritage.

Katara general manager Prof Dr Khalid bin Ibrahim al-Sulaiti stressed that this mural is a qualitative addition to the cultural and artistic scene in Katara, reflecting the status of Arabian horses in Qatari heritage, and enhancing the role of Katara as a leading destination in celebrating art and culture. Several events will be organised alongside the Katara International Arabian Horse Festival 2025, held at Katara corniche, including horse sculptures that highlight the aesthetics of Arabian horses in various creative styles, artistic murals in which six artists will draw paintings directly in front of the audience. These paintings will embody the aesthetic of horses with its artistic and symbolic dimensions, as well as the saddlery painting event in which 15 artists from different nationalities participate. There will also be children's art workshops. - QNA

Dubai airport clocks record 92.3mn passengers

A record 92.3mn passengers travelled through Dubai's international airport last year, its operator said yesterday, extending a post-pandemic tear that exemplifies the city's economic boom. The figure surpassed the previous high of 89.1mn in 2018, Dubai Airports said, despite regional tensions caused by the Gaza war and last April's unprecedented floods that severely disrupted flights. The United Arab Emirates city, located between Asia, Europe and Africa, has now been ranked as the world's busiest international air hub for a decade. More than a quarter of Dubai's GDP in 2023 - 27% - came from its aviation sector, including Emirates and Dubai Airports, according to an economic impact report published by the two state-owned entities in October. In 2023, Dubai airport's passenger numbers outstripped pre-pandemic 2019. In a statement, Dubai's ruler and UAE Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum said the airport was targeting 400 international destinations, up from 272 currently. - AFP



International Honey Exhibition opens at Souq Waqif

The 6th Souq Waqif International Honey Exhibition was opened yesterday at the Eastern Square of the popular destination by the Private Engineering Office managing director Nasser Rashid al-Nuaimi. To run until February 8, the exhibition brings together the best local and international honey sellers. "The exhibition features 60 types of honey from 27 countries. 107 companies are taking part in the exhibition," said Khalid Saif al-Suwaidi, the general supervisor of the exhibition. The exhibition is a prominent promotional and communication platform for honey sellers. The organisers have selected companies that offer the best types of natural honey known for their high quality. The exhibition is an opportunity to enhance the promotion of participating prod-



Private Engineering Office managing director Nasser Rashid al-Nuaimi opening the 6th Souq Waqif International Honey Exhibition yesterday. PICTURES: Thajudheen

ucts and enable exhibitors to display their products to a wide audience, a statement said. Al-Suwaidi said a honey testing laboratory has been set up to measure the moisture content and ensure that natural honey is provided according to the highest international standards. Honey products are also on sale at the exhibition.



Field day held on use of mycorrhizal fungi to improve vegetable crops

The Ministry of Municipality's Agricultural Research Department organised a field day on Wednesday, focusing on the use of mycorrhizal fungi to improve certain vegetable crops and contribute to achieving sustainable food security. The event was attended by agricultural engineers, experts, farm owners, and agriculture sector employees at the ministry. Practical models of advanced

agricultural research conducted in the Plant Research Section were presented, showcasing the use of local mycorrhizal fungi resources to enhance agricultural production, reduce costs, and increase profit margins. The research stressed biological safety and the absence of pesticide and fertiliser residues in agricultural products. Hassan al-Asmakh, the assistant director of the Agricultural Research Department, highlighted the importance of using modern technologies to develop local agricultural production and ensure resource sustainability. Dr Naima Abdelhaleem, an agricultural affairs expert and lead researcher at the Agricultural Research Department, said that

mycorrhizal fungi are among the most essential microorganisms in the agricultural ecosystem. They play a crucial role in enhancing plant health and soil fertility. These fungi are isolated and prepared in the laboratory of the Plant Research Section within the Agricultural Research Department for use as a biofertiliser. This natural approach improves soil health without the need for chemical fertilisers. The research focused on key crops, including vegetables such as tomatoes, peppers, and eggplants, as well as fruit trees such as citrus. Trials conducted in the previous agricultural season on bean crops showed significant improvements, particularly when biochar was used in the soil. Ongoing laboratory experiments in the Plant Research Section are testing the use of mycorrhizal fungi. The results so far indicate a 40% increase in crop productivity, along with noticeable improvements in product quality and resilience to harsh environmental conditions.



Wakra Municipality introduces eco-friendly mosquito traps

Al Wakra Municipality's Cleaning Section has launched a Sustainable Pest Control Initiative, adopting eco-friendly solutions, including distribution of solar-powered traps. These sustainable traps release a calculated amount of carbon dioxide to mimic human exhalation while emitting scents similar to the human body odour. This attracts mosquitoes from long distances into the trap, while making it possible to study and classify them.



UN expert slams Algeria's 'treatment' of rights activists

United Nations rights expert has denounced Algeria's harassment and criminalisation of human rights defenders, highlighting a number of cases including that of independent journalist Merzoug Touati. Mary Lawlor, the UN special rapporteur on human rights defenders, said she is "deeply disappointed" to see the situation had not improved since she visited Algeria in late 2023. "Human rights defenders in different fields of work, some of whom I met, are still being arbitrarily arrested, judicially harassed, intimidated and criminalised for their peaceful activities under vaguely worded provisions, such as 'harming the security of the state,'" she said in a statement. Lawlor, an independent expert appointed by the UN Human Rights Council but who does not speak on behalf of the United Nations, voiced particular concerns about Touati's case.

The independent journalist and rights advocate "has been subjected for years to trials on spurious charges," she said, saying it was "among the most alarming cases I have recently examined". Equally concerning, Lawlor said, were the arrests last year of three human rights lawyers, Toufik Belal, Soufiane Ouali and Omar Boussag, and a young whistleblower, Yuba Manguellet. She also drew attention to the case of the "Association of Families of the Disappeared", set up during the Algerian Civil War in the 1990s to seek answers over the forcible disappearances amid the violence. The organisation had repeatedly been prevented from holding events by huge contingents of police forces surrounding its office in Algiers. "Its female lawyer and members, many of whom are mothers of disappeared persons, have been manhandled and forced to leave the location on these occasions," the statement said. - AFP

Rights groups, legislators push to scrap Tunisia's 'false news' law

AFP
Tunis

Tunisian human rights groups and lawmakers demanded yesterday the repeal or revision of a law criminalising “false news”, saying that it is being used to silence critics.

President Kais Saied enacted Decree 54 in 2022, and authorities have since prosecuted journalists, lawyers and public figures under it.

“The state of freedoms is frightening and the future is dark,” said Bassem Trifi, head of the Tunisian League for Human Rights.

Authorities remained “deaf” to repeated calls to repeal the “repressive decree that they are using to silence any critical voice”, he said, adding about 400 people are being prosecuted under it.

The law mandates five-year prison terms for using communications networks to “produce, spread, disseminate... false news”.

It also provides for 10-year prison sentences “if the targeted person is a public official”.

About 60 lawmakers sought to revise the decree in February 2024, but the parliamentary speaker has yet to respond, said Mohamed Ali, head of the parliament's commission for rights and freedoms.

Some detainees were in “a serious health condition”, Trifi said, citing journalist Mohamed Boughalleb, sentenced in April 2024 to six months in prison but still facing other charges under the decree.

“We have reached an unbearable level of injustice, social unrest and crackdown that threatens to make us relive the 2010, 2011 period,” he added, referring to the revolution that toppled longtime ruler Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.

Zied Dabbar, head of the National Union of Tunisian Journalists, said 24 journalists and media figures were being prosecuted under Decree 54, with five convicted for statements or social media posts.

“We have lost hope in the judiciary,” he said, denouncing “political harassment”.

Last week, a court rejected a request for the release of lawyer Sonia Dahmani, sentenced to eight months and 18 months in prison in separate cases over remarks deemed critical of the government.

Saied, who was elected in 2019, has ruled by decree since a 2021 power grab.

A number of his critics are in jail on charges including “conspiracy against state security”, while others, like rights activist Sihem Ben Sedrine, face corruption allegations. — **AFP**

Alibaba launches advanced AI model to rival GPT-4

Chinese tech and e-commerce giant Alibaba has announced the release of Qwen2.5-Max, an advanced artificial intelligence (AI) model that the company says outperforms several leading AI systems in key benchmarks.

The launch follows Chinese startup DeepSeek's recent release of models that stunned Silicon Valley and challenged assumptions about US dominance in the booming AI sector.

The Qwen team said their new model outperformed DeepSeek V3 in multiple tests, including code generation, while showing competitive results against industry leaders like OpenAI's GPT-4 and Anthropic's Claude-3.5-Sonnet. — **AFP**

India braces for warmer February, sources say

Reuters
Mumbai

India is set to see above-average temperatures in February, with key wheat- and rapeseed-growing states likely to see maximum temperatures up to 5° Celsius above average on some days in a risk to crops, two weather bureau sources said.

As the world's second biggest wheat producer, India is counting on a bumper harvest in 2025 to avoid costly imports, following three straight years of poor crop yields since 2022.

After a sharp, sudden rise in temperatures in February and March shrivelled the crop, India, also the world's second-biggest wheat consumer, was forced to ban exports of the staple in 2022.

Higher temperatures during the grain formation stage could reduce yields for the fourth straight year, trimming overall production and forcing authorities to lower or remove the 40%

Theft, violence in UK retail soar to record levels, survey shows

Reuters
London

Theft and violence against retail workers in Britain soared to record levels last year and are “out of control”, driven partly by criminal gangs, according to a report published yesterday.

Industry body the British Retail Consortium (BRC)'s annual crime survey found more than 20mn incidents of theft were committed in the year to August 31, 2024, which equates to 55,000 a day, costing retailers a total £2.2bn (\$2.7bn).

There were 16mn incidents in 2023.

The BRC said many more incidents in the latest period were linked to organised crime, with gangs systematically targeting stores across the country.

Incidents of violence and abuse in 2023/24 climbed to more than 2,000 per day from 1,300 the year before.

“Retail crime is spiralling out of control. People in retail have been spat on, racially abused, and threatened with machetes. Every day this continues, criminals are getting bolder and more aggressive,” said Helen Dickinson, head of the BRC.

Satisfaction with the police response to incidents is low, with 61% of respondents describing it as “poor” or “very poor”.

“With little faith in police attendance, it is no wonder criminals feel they have a licence to steal, threaten, assault and abuse,” said Dickinson.

The BRC said the amount spent on crime prevention also hit a record high, with retailers investing £1.8bn on measures such as CCTV, security personnel, anti-theft devices and body-worn cameras, up from £1.2bn in 2022/23.

Responding to the report, the police said they had made progress in 2024.

“Over the last year we have made significant strides in our fight against retail crime, strengthening relationships with retailers and greatly improving information shar-

ing which has resulted in a number of high harm offenders being brought to justice,” Assistant Chief Constable Alex Goss, the National Police Chiefs' Council's lead for retail crime, said.

The new Labour government has pledged to address the rise in retail crime through stronger measures to tackle shoplifting and anti-social behaviour.

It also plans to introduce a standalone offence for assaulting a retail worker.

The issue of theft and violence has been raised by many of Britain's biggest retailers over the last year, including Tesco, John Lewis and Primark, echoing similar reports in the United States and elsewhere.



Thai ambassador to Israel Pannabha Chandramya receives the five released hostages. — **Reuters**

Thai premier 'elated' at release of Gaza hostages

AFP
Bangkok

Thailand's Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra has said that she is “elated” at the release of five Thai hostages held in Gaza for over a year.

The Thais were abducted during the events of October 7, 2023 and were released as part of a hostage-prisoner exchange under the Gaza ceasefire deal.

The Israeli prime minister's office named the five Thais released as Watchara Sriaoun, Pongsak Tanna, Sathian Suwanakham, Surasak Lamnau and Bannawat Saethao.

“Elated to get confirmation from our Thai ambassador in Israel who informed me on the phone just now that five of our Thai nationals were indeed released today from Gaza,” Paetongtarn said in a statement in English published on several of her official social media accounts. “The Thai government, including everyone here in Thailand, have long been waiting for this very moment.”

She said the kingdom “deeply appreciates” the work done by Qatar, Egypt, Iran, Türkiye and the United States to secure the

hostages' release, and thanked Israel for taking care of them.

In a separate statement, the Thai foreign ministry said the five would be taken to hospital for medical treatment.

“Thailand calls for the release of all the remaining hostages including a Thai national soonest, so they can safely return to their homeland and to their beloved families,” the ministry added.

Ministry spokesman Nikorn-dej Balankura told reporters that the five would return to Thailand in the next 10 days.

“Though they seem to be in good health, they have been in captivity for 15 months,” he said. “It really depends on their physical conditions as well as paperwork which is going to be done by our embassy. I would think they should be able to return within 10 days.”

A total of 31 Thais were taken captive in the events of October 7, 2023, with 23 released by the end of that year.

Two were confirmed dead in May last year.

The Southeast Asian nation has about 30,000 citizens in Israel, most of them working in the agricultural sector, where they earn significantly higher salaries as farm labourers than they would at home.

Australians among the world's most frustrated over housing: survey

By Christine Chen
Reuters

Dissatisfaction with housing in Australia reached an all-time high last year, ranking among the worst in the world, according to a survey published yesterday, an issue that is expected to dominate a general election due by May.

Over three-quarters of Australians surveyed by pollsters Gallup were dissatisfied with the availability of affordable housing in 2024, compared to a median of 50% in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

“Australians are uniquely dissatisfied with housing compared with residents of other high-income countries,” survey co-authors Benedict Vigers and Madeleine Ambort said.

Gallup surveyed around 140,000 people in 140 countries, including 1,000 Australians, on whether they were satisfied with the availability of “good, affordable housing” where they lived.

The findings placed Australia second only to Türkiye for housing dissatisfaction in the OECD, despite citizens being satisfied with other community basics such as healthcare (71%), schools (66%) and public transport (61%).

Aside from Türkiye in 2024, only Gabon in 2014 has seen greater dissatisfaction over

housing than Australia in the past 10 years.

Gallup said underinvestment in housing and high immigration levels had created one of the world's most expensive markets, further exacerbated in recent years by pandemic-related construction delays.

Between 2002 and 2024, housing prices surged to nine times the average income while rent had more than doubled over a similar period.

“The result is a limited and expensive choice of housing options, which affects younger people and low-income households the most,” Vigers and Ambort said, finding only 16% of adults aged 18-34 were satisfied with housing affordability.

“The gaps between satisfaction with housing and these other community basics have never been wider,” they said.

Housing is the largest contributor to the rising cost of living in Australia and is expected to be a major issue in upcoming elections.

The centre-left Labor government recently passed reforms including a shared equity scheme and tax incentives for developers, to ease cost pressures and achieve a target of building 1.2mn new homes by 2030.

Last week, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese also announced cash bonuses for construction trainees.

‘Counter-terror style’ powers for police to stop migrants to UK

AFP/Reuters
London

The UK government has introduced legislation designed to give law enforcement officials “counter-terror style powers” to break up gangs bringing irregular migrants across the Channel in flimsy boats.

The dangerous crossings are a major and emotional political issue in Britain, with illegal migration contributing towards a rise in support for the hard-right Reform UK party.

Labour's new Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill would allow law enforcement agencies to impose interim orders on suspected people smugglers before they are criminally charged.

It could see them banned from using laptops or mobile phones, accessing social media networks, associating with certain people or accessing their finances under the orders.

“This bill will equip our law enforcement agencies with the powers they need to stop these vile criminals, disrupting their supply chains and bringing more of those who profit from human misery to justice,” said the interior minister, Yvette Cooper.

The legislation will make it illegal to handle items suspected for use in an illegal crossing, such as small boat parts, Cooper's Home Office added, with the crime carrying a prison sentence of up to 14 years.

The bill would also let immigration officers and police seize mobile phones and laptops before arrests are made, including from migrants who have just arrived at the border.

Additionally, it will permit law enforcement to arrest suspected smugglers before the crossing has taken place, “a much earlier stage than is currently

possible”, the Home Office said in a statement.

Other measures include creating a new offence of collecting information to be used by gangs for a crossing, and of endangering another life at sea, such as by preventing rescue efforts.

Both offences would carry a prison sentence of up to five years under the legislation, which is expected to become law by the end of the year.

The Labour Party also plans to retain parts of legislation passed by the previous Conservative government that will disqualify asylum-seekers using modern slavery laws to challenge decisions to remove them, and the power to detain child asylum-seekers for up to 28 days.

Labour had voted against those measures in parliament when legislation on them was passed in 2023.

Last year saw 36,816 people detected crossing the world's busiest shipping lane to southeast England, a 25% increase on 2023 and the second-highest annual total ever recorded.

The journeys – often in overloaded, poorly maintained inflatable vessels that are ill suited to open seas – began on a large scale in 2018.

The crossings featured heavily in last July's general election, which saw Prime Minister Keir Starmer's Labour party end 14 consecutive years of Conservative rule.

The vote also saw Brexit figurehead Nigel Farage's Reform UK party make huge gains.

The new legislation will also formally repeal the previous Tory government's controversial plan to send irregular migrants to Rwanda.

Immigration and asylum is the second most important issue to voters after the economy, ahead of health, according to a tracker poll published by YouGov.

Bangladesh probes spate of turtle deaths

AFP
Cox's Bazar

Bangladeshi scientists are probing the deaths of more than 80 turtles found washed up on the beach over the past week, a government marine research institute said yesterday.

Olive ridley sea turtles are a relatively small and abundant species found in tropical waters the world over and can live for up to 50 years in the wild.

However, their numbers are declining and they have periodically been victim to mass die-off events, including earlier this month in nearby southern India.

More than 80% of the turtles discovered along the coast were females coming ashore to lay eggs, Mohammad Shimul Bhuiyan at the Bangladesh Oceanographic Research Institute told AFP.

“We need more time to determine the cause,” he added.

Sharif Uddin, a scientist at Malaysia-based marine research organisation WorldFish, said that the likely culprit was overfishing and the use of sea-sweeping trawler nets.

“Turtles float on the water to breathe, but once they get entan-



Marine rescuers prepare to bury a dead olive ridley sea turtle at a beach in Cox's Bazar. — **AFP**

gled in fishing nets, they remain underwater for too long and suffocate,” he rold AFP. “It's tragic that they come here to reproduce and end up dying.”

Abid Hossain of the Bangladesh Marine Fisheries Association said that a disruption to the turtle population risked severe

damage to local marine ecology.

“Last year, the marine catch was halved due to an increase in jellyfish in the seawater,” he told AFP. “Turtles eat jellyfish, which helps fish larvae survive.”

“If we want to sustain our fish stocks, we need to save the turtles.”

and chickpeas are planted from October to December and require cold weather conditions during their growth and maturity stages for optimal yields.

“If temperatures remain higher than normal for a prolonged period, it can negatively impact yields by creating moisture stress,” said Ashwini Bansod, vice-president for commodities research at Phillip Capital India, a Mumbai-based brokerage.

Hot and unseasonably warm weather leads to lower production and sharp drawdowns in state reserves.

As a result, wheat prices hit a record 33,250 rupees (\$384.05) per metric tonne earlier this month.

Any drop in the rapeseed crop could force India, the world's biggest vegetable oil importer, to step up its cooking oil imports, said a Mumbai-based trader working at a global trade house.

The area under rapeseed, the country's main oilseed crop, is already down from last year.



67 killed in US air disaster; Trump slams diversity hiring

■ 64 were aboard passenger jet, 3 on US Army helicopter
■ Passengers included American, Russian figure skaters

Reuters
Washington

President Donald Trump implied without evidence federal diversity efforts were at fault yesterday after a regional jet crashed into a US Army helicopter at a Washington airport, killing 67 people in the

deadliest US air disaster in more than 20 years.

The investigation into the crash in the nation's capital has just begun and it was not yet clear why the American Airlines Bombardier carrying 60 passengers and four crew members collided with the Army Black Hawk helicopter as it prepared to land at Reagan Washington National Airport.

US Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy said both aircraft had been flying standard flight patterns and there had been no breakdown in communication.

Radio communications show that air traffic controllers alerted the helicopter about the approach jet and ordered it to change course. There is no evidence that efforts to make the federal workforce more diverse have compromised air safety.

At a White House news conference, Trump criticised the helicopter pilots and said he did not know for sure whether the air traffic controllers involved were to blame.

"We do not know what led to this crash, but we have some very strong opinions and ideas," he said.

Airspace is frequently crowded in the US capital region, home to three commercial airports and several major military facilities, and officials have raised concerns about busy runways at Reagan National Airport, just across the river from Washington. There have been several near-miss incidents



Part of the wreckage is seen as rescue crews search the waters of the Potomac River after a passenger plane on approach to Reagan National Airport crashed into the river after colliding with a US Army helicopter, near Washington, DC, yesterday. (AFP)

that have sparked alarm, including a near-collision in May 2024.

A shortage of air traffic controllers in the United States in recent years has spurred safety concerns.

Trump accused his Democratic predecessor Joe Biden of lowering hiring standards and suggested the Federal Aviation Administration's diversity push could have weakened its capabilities.

Asked if the crash was caused by diversity hiring, he said: "It just could have been." The administration has not provided any proof to back these assertions.

Trump has moved quickly to quash federal diversity initiatives since taking office on January 20, drawing criticism from rights advocates who fear he is rolling back progress the United States has made to overcome its history of discrimination.

Trump read from what he de-

scribed as an FAA document stating that physical and mental disabilities would not on their own disqualify applicants a controller's position. That document was released in 2013 and remained online through Trump's initial 2017-2021 White House term, according to aides to Biden's transportation secretary, Pete Buttigieg.

Buttigieg responded to Trump on X, calling his remarks despicable. "As families grieve, Trump should be leading, not lying."

Trump's remarks contrasted sharply with those of other officials, who said there was no immediate indication why the crash took place.

American Airlines CEO Robert Isom said the pilot of the American Eagle Flight 5342 had about six years of flying experience. The Bombardier CRJ-700 jet was operated by PSA Airlines, a regional subsidiary. It carried 60 passen-

gers and four crew members.

Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth said the helicopter was flown by a "fairly experienced crew" of three soldiers who were wearing night-vision goggles on an annual proficiency training flight. Officials said they were grounding other flights from the Army unit involved in the crash and would reevaluate training exercises in the region.

Passengers on the flight included ice skaters, family and coaches returning from a training camp in Wichita, Kansas, including Russian-born former world champions Yevgenia Shishkova and Vadim Naumov.

Air traffic control recordings appear to capture the final attempted communications with the helicopter, call sign PAT25, before it collided with the jet.

"PAT25, do you have a CRJ in sight? PAT25, pass behind the



US President Donald Trump pauses for a moment of silence to recognise crash victims as he speaks to reporters about the deadly midair collision. (Reuters)

CRJ," an air traffic controller says at 8:47pm (0147 GMT) on Wednesday, according to a recording on liveatc.net.

Seconds later, another aircraft calls in to air traffic control, saying, "Tower, did you see that?" - apparently referring to the crash. An air traffic controller then redirects planes heading to runway 33 to go around.

"I just saw a fireball and then it was just gone. I haven't seen anything since they hit the river," an air traffic controller says.

Webcam video of the crash showed the collision and an explosion lighting up the night sky.

The skaters on board were returning from a training camp in Wichita, governing body US Figure Skating said.

"Skating is a very close-knit and tight community," said a tearful Doug Zeghibe of the Skating Club of Boston, where Shishkova and Naumov coached. Two teen-aged skaters affiliated with the club and their mothers were also aboard the plane, he told reporters. "We have lost family," he said.

Russia's Mash news outlet published a list of 13 skaters, many of them the children of Russian emigres to the US, who it said were believed to have been on the plane.

The Kremlin offered condolences to the families of Russians killed.

The crash is not the first time US skaters have been struck by an air tragedy. All 18 members of the US national team, along with family members and coaches, were killed in February 1961 when a flight operated by Belgian airline Sabena crashed outside Brussels, killing all 72 people aboard.

Washington DC fire chief Don-

nelly said conditions were cold and windy, making the operation "extremely rough" for the 300 responders on the scene.

CBS News reported that a dive team had recovered one of the two data recorders, the so-called black boxes, from the plane.

Virginia Governor Glenn Youngkin told Reuters that the bodies of most of those involved in the collision had been recovered. "Everything was routine up to the point of the accident," he said. "Something went wrong."

It was the deadliest US air disaster since November 2001, when an American Airlines jet crashed after departing from John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York, killing all 260 people on board and five people on the ground.

Reagan National's main runway is the busiest in the United States, with over 800 daily takeoffs and landings. The National Transportation Safety Board has investigated nine accidents or incidents at the airport this century, including two that were fatal, records show.

The airport is only two miles from the White House and half a mile from the Pentagon, where 189 people died when Al Qaeda hijackers crashed American Airlines flight 77 on Sept. 11, 2001.

US Senator Tim Kaine of Virginia said he had long been concerned about the busy airspace, where civilian and military aircraft must navigate the unique security concerns of the US capital.

"I've been praying that there wouldn't be something like last night but kind of dreading in my heart that there would be," he told reporters.

Trump serious about buying Greenland: Rubio

AFP
Washington

US President Donald Trump is serious about seeking to buy Greenland, Secretary of State Marco Rubio said yesterday, after Denmark was rattled by his threats to take over the autonomous Danish territory.

In an interview, Rubio played down the threat of the United States using military force against Denmark, a Nato ally, but said of Trump's remarks on Greenland, "This is not a joke."

"President Trump's put out there what he intends to do, which is to purchase it," Rubio told SiriusXM Radio.

"This is not about acquiring land for the purpose of acquiring land. This is in our national interest and it needs to be solved," Rubio said.

Referring to Nato guarantees to Denmark, Rubio said: "We have a defence agreement with them to protect Greenland if it becomes under assault."

"If we're already on the hook for having to do that, then we might as well have more control over what happens there," he said.

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen has rallied European allies over the threats from Trump, with whom she was said to have had a tense telephone conversation.

Rubio said that while he was not on the phone call with Frederiksen, Trump "just speaks bluntly and frankly with people."

"And ultimately I think diplomacy in many cases works better when you're straightforward as opposed to using platitudes and language that translates to nothing," Rubio said.

Rubio voiced concern that rival China, looking for Arctic access, would gain ground in Greenland through state-run companies.

"It is completely realistic to believe that the Chinese will eventually, maybe even in the short term, try to do in Greenland what they have done at the Panama Canal and in other places," Rubio said.

Mali mine collapse kills 10, many others missing

AFP
Bamako

A landslide at a gold mine in southern Mali has killed around 10 people and left many others missing, most of them women, authorities said yesterday.

Mali, which is among the world's poorest countries, is one of Africa's leading gold producers.

Gold mining sites are regularly the scene of deadly landslides and authorities struggle to control artisanal mining of the precious metal. The accident happened on Wednesday in the village of Danga, where "a landslide trapped a group of gold miners, the majority of whom were women", the governorate of the Koulikoro region said in a Facebook post.

The victims "found themselves trapped in a hole, submerged in muddy water that wreaked devastation", it added.

"Unfortunately, none of them were able to escape".

The statement said the landslide caused "several casualties".

Ousmane Diakite, an official from the regional mines department, told AFP that the provisional toll was "around 10 dead and some missing".

Messages circulating on social media suggested a much higher death toll. "What is certain is that there are no survivors," said the mayor of a nearby town, requesting anonymity to speak more freely.

Photos published by the governorate and on social media show a vast open-air site with upturned earth, punctuated by holes filled with muddy water. The images show men standing on the edge of one of the pits with excavators below.

"No bodies could be recovered" due to the dangerous conditions, the governorate said.

FBI nominee Patel vows no 'political retribution' at FBI

Reuters
Washington

Kash Patel, President Donald Trump's nominee for FBI director, vowed yesterday to protect FBI employees against "political retribution" even as the Trump administration has begun to fire and sideline Justice Department officials who were involved in investigations into the president.

Pressed by Democratic US Senator Richard Blumenthal to commit not to fire FBI agents who worked on investigations into Trump's mishandling of classified documents and attempts to overturn the 2020 election, Patel said "all FBI employees will be protected against political retribution."

The acting attorney general, who oversees the FBI, on Monday fired more than a dozen lawyers who worked on the Trump cases, citing a lack of trust that they could carry out Trump's agenda.

Democrats pressed Patel during his confirmation hearing about his past comments downplaying the January 6, 2021, attack on the US Capitol and threatening investigations of government officials and the news media. Patel did not directly address past remarks, but told the Senate Judiciary Committee "any accusations levelled against me that I would somehow put political bias before the Constitution are grotesquely unfair."

Patel, a conservative firebrand, has been among the most vocal critics of investigations into Trump, depicting them as the work of a "deep state" on law enforcement and intelligence officials bent on undermining the president.

Patel appeared to break with Trump on his sweeping pardons for all of the nearly 1,600 people charged in the Capitol attack, including hundreds who were convicted of assaulting police.

"I have always rejected any vi-



Kash Patel testifies during his confirmation hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee in the Dirksen Senate Office Building yesterday in Washington, DC. (AFP)

olence against law enforcement," Patel said. "I do not agree with the commutation of any sentence of any individual that committed violence against law enforcement."

Patel said any FBI investigations during his tenure would be based on a factual and legal basis.

"There will be no politicisation at the FBI," Patel said. "There will be no retributive action."

The panel's top Democrat, Dick Durbin, told Patel he had "neither the experience nor the temperament nor the judgment" to lead the FBI, pointing to officials in Trump's first administration who condemned him.

"Our nation needs an FBI director who understands the gravity of this mission and is ready on day one, not someone who is consumed by his own personal political grievances," Durbin said. Democrats on their own will not be able to block Patel from being confirmed. Trump has so far succeeded in securing confirmation for one highly controversial nominee, Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth, in a 51-50 vote after Vice-President JD Vance broke a tie caused by three Republican no votes.

Man who burned Qur'an shot dead in Sweden

An Iraqi refugee in Sweden who repeatedly burned the Qur'an in 2023, sparking outrage in Muslim countries, has been shot dead, investigators said yesterday, with Sweden's prime minister suggesting a "foreign power" might have been involved. Prosecutor Rasmus Oman confirmed to AFP that an investigation had been opened into the murder of 38-year-old Salwan Momika (pictured) and that five people had been arrested.

"We're in the very early stages... there's a lot of information gathering. Five people have been detained suspected of involvement in the crime," Oman said. Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson told reporters at a press conference: "I can guarantee that the security services are deeply involved in this because there is obviously a risk that there is also a link to foreign power." A Stockholm court had been

due to rule yesterday whether Momika, a Christian Iraqi, was guilty of inciting ethnic hatred but said it had postponed its ruling until February 3 as a result of his death.

Police responded late Wednesday to a call about a shooting in an apartment building in the city of Sodertalje, south of Stockholm, where Momika lived.

There they found a man who had been shot, and who later died in hospital, a police statement said. Several media outlets reported that the shooting may have been broadcast live on social media. The *Aftonbladet* newspaper said the attacker was able to gain entry into the building through the roof.

In August, Momika and fellow protester Salwan Najem were charged with "agitation against an ethnic group" on four occasions in the summer of 2023. According to the charge sheet, the two desecrated the Qur'an,



including by burning it, while making derogatory remarks about Muslims - on one occasion outside a Stockholm mosque.

"I'm next on the list," Najem wrote on X after Momika's death, telling Swedish media that he had received death threats. Relations between Sweden and several Middle Eastern countries were strained by the pair's protests. Iraqi protesters stormed the Swedish embassy in Baghdad

twice in July 2023, starting fires within the compound on the second occasion.

In August of that year, Sweden's intelligence service Sapo raised its threat level to four on a scale of five, saying the Qur'an burnings had made the country a "prioritised target". The Swedish government condemned the desecrations at the time but noted the country's constitutionally protected freedom of speech and assembly laws.

Deputy Prime Minister Ebba Busch yesterday called the killing "a threat to our free democracy" which "must be met with the full force of society". Many residents in the Hovsjo neighbourhood of Sodertalje that AFP approached about the killing were tight-lipped yesterday. But the owner of a kiosk, a man in his 50s who spoke on condition of anonymity, told AFP: "It wasn't good what he did with the Qur'an, burning it."

‘Return hubs’ back on table as EU mulls migration

AFP
Warsaw

Should the EU set up migrant return centres outside the bloc – and if so, where and for whom? European home affairs ministers began thrashing out the explosive question during talks yesterday in Warsaw.

The “informal meeting” – the EU version of a brainstorming session – comes as hard-right electoral gains in several countries led to a hardening of Brussels’ posture on irregular arrivals.

Currently less than 20 percent of people ordered to leave the bloc are returned to their country of origin, according to EU data.

“That’s why we are working on

new rules, on tighter rules,” said Magnus Brunner, the EU commissioner in charge of migration.

Poland, which took over the EU’s rotating presidency this month, is among a group of immigration hawks pushing for a speedy reform of the bloc’s rules on deportations.

Warsaw has been rattled by what it says is an artificial influx of people orchestrated by neighbouring Belarus as part of a Russian-led hybrid warfare campaign against the West.

In October, the EU leaders called for urgent new legislation on returns and for the European Commission to assess new ways to prevent and counter irregular migration.

Among the more radical ideas

on the table is that of “return hubs” outside the European Union where failed asylum seekers could be sent pending transfer to their country of origin.

The concept is fraught with legal and ethical concerns – that home affairs ministers are expected to try to iron out in Warsaw.

“It’s a complicated subject,” said Francois-Noel Buffet, France’s junior home affairs minister, citing “non-negligible legal aspects”.

Costs, the legal regime applicable to people hosted in these centres and the situation of those who cannot be returned are among the issues to be clarified before hubs could be considered a serious alternative, said a former senior commission official close to the

file. Finding countries willing to host them will be another challenge, the ex-official said, adding that one of the main benefits of the plan was its potential to discourage would-be migrants.

Two Italian-run centres to process some migrants rescued in the Mediterranean in Albania are estimated to cost Rome €160mn (\$175mn) annually.

Italy, along with Denmark, Austria and The Netherlands, is among those pushing for return hubs. But diplomats say consensus is still a long way off.

Some countries back the idea but oppose the creation of hubs at their borders, fearful of witnessing a potential flow of migrants trying to re-enter the EU, diplomats say.

Spain has outright rejected the

idea, citing concerns about the respect for human rights.

Madrid prefers “promoting a preventive migration policy based on bilateral cooperation with the countries of origin and transit” in the fight against people traffickers, according to sources within Spain’s interior ministry.

Contentious deals struck with Tunisia, Libya and others providing aid and investments in return for help with curbing arrivals have been credited with contributing to a marked drop in arrivals.

Detections of irregular migrants entering the European Union fell by 38% last year to the lowest level recorded since 2021, according to the EU’s border agency.

On Wednesday, Brussels promised three billion euros (\$3.1bn)

of financing and investments for Jordan as part of a new “strategic” partnership, which includes co-operation on migration matters.

Hubs could nevertheless be mentioned in a plan to overhaul the EU return system the commission has promised for March, though observers believe the wording is likely to be deliberately vague. Yet, the prospect worries rights groups.

“Before they pursue ill-conceived attempts to shift or off-shore their responsibilities to third countries, EU member states and the European Commission should take a close look at their legal obligations,” dozens of NGOs including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International wrote in November.

Merkel slams Merz over far-right support on immigration bill

AFP
Berlin

Germany’s ex-chancellor Angela Merkel weighed in yesterday on a controversy flaring ahead of February elections, slamming her party successor for relying on far-right support on the flashpoint issue of immigration.

Conservative CDU leader Friedrich Merz sparked outrage Wednesday when he pushed through parliament a resolution demanding sweeping curbs to immigration, relying for the first time on votes from the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD).

Centre-left Chancellor Olaf Scholz and his allies the Greens denounced the vote as a breach of a taboo in post-war Germany against any co-operation with extremist parties.

News site *Der Spiegel judged that “this day will not only change the election campaign but German politics as a whole”.

Critics warned that Merz’s manoeuvre would help legitimise the AfD and pave the way for more co-operation – perhaps even in a government one day, mirroring developments elsewhere in Europe.

Merz argued that pragmatism must trump principle, and pointed to public fears after a series of deadly attacks blamed on asylum seekers, including a knife attack last week on a kindergarten group where the suspect is an Afghan man.

Even though Merz also opposes the AfD, he said that “a right decision doesn’t become wrong just because the wrong people agree to it”.

Merkel, the elder stateswoman of the CDU under whose government more than a million asylum seekers entered the country, begged to differ.

After avoiding any comment on day-to-day politics since leaving office in 2021, she slammed Merz’s tactical manoeuvre as “wrong” – in effect siding with the stance of Scholz and the Greens.

She said democratic parties seeking to prevent such terrible attacks in the future must work together “honestly, moderately in



DIFFERENCE OF OPINION: Angela Merkel (left) and Friedrich Merz.

tone and on the basis of applicable European law”.

CDU General Secretary Carsten Linnemann defended Merz, telling the *Rheinische Post* newspaper that “we value Angela Merkel and know her assessment of migration policy”.

But he added that “those who carry responsibility today must react to the current security situation and the terrible events”, also mentioning a deadly car-ramming at a Christmas market in December.

Veteran Merkel’s criticism of long-time party rival Merz for breaching the parliamentary taboo comes as the campaign heats up towards February 23 elections.

The CDU-CSU bloc of Merz is in the lead, polling at around 30%, followed by the AfD at 20% and then Scholz’s SPD at around 15%.

The AfD has gained support by voicing fears about a migrant influx and a series of attacks that also included deadly stabbings last year where a Syrian and an Afghan man were arrested.

Merz has criticised Merkel’s migration policy and pledged an about-turn, vowing permanent policing on all borders and the rejection of all migrants trying to enter Germany through irregular channels.

Another parliament vote looms Friday, when the CDU will present a bill to restrict asylum rights and boost border police powers, and where it will also seek backing by the AfD and the smaller FDP and BSW parties.

It remains to be seen if Merz’s gamble will end up benefiting him, or the AfD.

The AfD and its allies

cheered the outcome of Wednesday’s vote, with Hungary’s right-wing Prime Minister Viktor Orban writing on X: “Guten Morgen, Deutschland! Welcome to the club!”

Der Spiegel argued Merz’s justification “may sound plausible at first glance” but added that he and his party must have quickly realised that “the price was too high” as they watched AfD politicians cheer the outcome.

Ursula Muench, director of the Academy for Political Education, said that Merz intended to signal to CDU voters worried about immigration that “they do not have to vote for the AfD”.

Bild newspaper argued that “Merz took a huge risk” and weathered “insults from all sides” but drew clear battle lines and brought clarity, which it labelled “gold for democracy”.

FDP chief Christian Lindner said Merkel’s statements showed Merz was dividing his party, but that, “ironically, Mrs Merkel bears great responsibility for the rise of the AfD with her refugee policy”.

The controversy has raised the temperature in the bitter election race and looks set to further complicate the inevitable coalition building talks after the vote.

Opinion polls suggest a victorious CDU-CSU could look to either the SPD or the Greens as their main junior coalition partner, but for now those relations have been poisoned further.

Der Spiegel said that if Merz stuck to his uncompromising course “the only coalition partner he would have left would be the AfD. He himself cannot want that”.

Eurosceptic party quits Norway govt

Reuters
Oslo

Norway’s eurosceptic Centre Party quit the government yesterday in a dispute over the adoption of European Union energy policies, leaving the centre-left Labour Party to rule alone eight months before an election.

The announcement by Finance Minister Trygve Slagsvold Vedum deprives Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Stoere of his only coalition partner and eight of the 20 members of his cabinet, including the defence, finance and justice ministers.

Labour, which has held power since 2021, could now govern alone until the next election is held in September but it lacks a majority in parliament and trails right-wing parties in opinion polls.

Nato member Norway is not part of the European Union but Labour wants to maintain good relations with the EU, partly because of the threat of a trade war between Europe and the United States.

“It would create doubt about the credibility of the agreement (with the EU) at a time when it is more important ever, in my opinion,” Stoere told a press conference.

Labour wants to adopt EU directives on renewable energy consumption, energy performance in buildings and increased overall energy efficiency, government ministers have said.

The Centre Party opposes all three directives, which it says will erode Norwegian autonomy, and has long said power and gas exporter Norway should instead seek to reclaim authority over regulation from the EU.

“The conclusion for us is that the Centre Party does not want to be part of this



Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store addresses a press conference at the Prime Minister’s Office in Oslo yesterday after it became clear that the Centre Party is breaking off the government co-operation with the Labour Party. (AFP)

development,” Vedum told a press conference. “We want to take back more national control.”

Before September’s election, Stoere is seeking a new term as Labour leader despite questions over whether he is the best person to lead the party.

Norwegians narrowly rejected EU membership in referendums held in 1972 and 1994 and the question of joining the bloc remains among the Nordic nation’s most divisive political issues.

Norway is part of the European Economic Area (EEA), allowing the free flow of people, goods, services and capital between the European Union and non-EU states Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein.

Norway is not part of the EU’s customs union, the common agriculture and fisheries policies, the monetary union, trade policy, foreign and security policy and justice and home affairs.

But, to maintain its current relationship with the EU and ensure a level playing field for its industries, Norway has adopted thousands of EU rules and regulations over decades while having little or no say over their formulation.

Two-thirds of Norway’s exports go to the EU, and Labour has said US President Donald Trump’s threat of tariffs and a risk of trans-Atlantic trade war make it essential to nurture the EEA relationship and implement directives coming from Brussels.

Sweden pledges \$1.2bn Ukraine military aid

AFP
Stockholm

Sweden’s government yesterday pledged an additional \$1.2bn in military aid to Ukraine, saying Europe needed to prepare to shoulder a larger part in supporting Kyiv.

Defence Minister Pal Jonson said the package, the country’s 18th since Russia’s 2022 invasion, was the largest to date and was a sign that Sweden was ready to support Ukraine in the “long term”.

“This is also a signal to our other allies that we need to prepare for Europe to take more responsibility for supporting Ukraine,” Jonson told a press conference. Totalling 13.5bn kronor (\$1.2bn), the largest part, 5.9bn kronor, would be dedicated to procuring material from Swedish and foreign industry that would then be donated to Ukraine.

Jonson said the package meant Sweden was moving from donating weapons from stockpiles to purchasing new arms.

One billion kronor had also been earmarked for Ukrainian production of “long-range missiles and long-distance drones”, the government said.

The package also included donations worth 3.3bn kronor from the Swedish Armed Forces, including 16 of Sweden’s Combat Boat 90, doubling the amount of such boats donated to Ukraine. Previously, Sweden has sent its Archer mobile artillery system, 50 of its CV90 armoured combat vehicles and “around 10” Leopard 2 tanks and anti-air missile systems to Ukraine. With this latest package, Swedish military support for Ukraine has totalled 61.9bn kronor (\$5.6bn), according to the government.

Meloni warns probe against her may push away the foreign investors

Italy’s Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni said yesterday an investigation targeting her over the release of a Libyan war crimes suspect was bad publicity that could push away much-needed foreign investment.

“The point is that what is happening above all damages the nation ... That is what frankly drives me a little crazy,” Meloni told a business conference in Milan, speaking via a video link. Italy’s leader has been placed under investigation for aiding and abetting a crime and misuse of public funds in connection with the release and repatriation of senior Libyan police officer Osama Elmasry Njeem.

Njeem was arrested in Turin on January 19 on a warrant from the International Criminal Court (ICC), but freed two days later, officially because of a procedural fault with his arrest, and flown back to Libya on a government plane.

Meloni, renewing her criticism of the judiciary, said the affair was tarnishing Italy’s international image, pointing out that news of her being put under investigation had made it to the front page of the *Financial Times*.

She said that could put off investors such as the Norwegian wealth fund Norges, which she said had recently increased its holdings of Italian sovereign bonds to more than €8bn (\$8.33bn). “After reading this news, do you think that this Norwegian investment fund that has just bought €8bn of Italian government bonds will be more likely to buy 9 (bn), 7 (bn), or maybe zero,” she said.

The investigation into Meloni, which also concerns three other government members, is unlikely to go to trial. Even if judges request it, it would need to be authorised by parliament, where the government has a solid majority. Amid the controversy, and a stagnating economy, Meloni and her conservative allies remain popular. Support for her Brothers of Italy party is at an almost two-year high at more than 30%, an average of opinion polls showed yesterday.

France’s Mistral hails Chinese AI model, launches new release

French AI startup Mistral yesterday hailed Chinese competitor DeepSeek’s R1 model as “great” for the fast-developing sector, while announcing another new release of its own.

Mistral has in the past been hailed for offering models – the engines that power generative AIs – comparable with American giants at a fraction of the cost in energy and cash.

DeepSeek claimed that its R1 release pulled off a similar

feat, causing near panic in the US this week and battering tech stocks.

R1 is “a great and complementary piece of open-source technology,” Mistral said in a statement on its website, referring to the fact that elements of DeepSeek’s technology are available for other researchers to use and build on.

The French firm’s own release yesterday, “Mistral Small 3”, is “competitive with larger

models” including Meta’s Llama or Qwen, developed by Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba, Mistral said.

It added that Small 3 was “the most efficient model of its category” and might be used for tasks ranging from customer service to detecting financial fraud or controlling robots.

The new model “complements large open-source reasoning models like the recent releases of DeepSeek, and can serve

as a strong base model for making reasoning capabilities emerge,” Mistral said.

Like DeepSeek, Mistral offers elements of its technology as open-source tools for other developers.

The French underdog shot to prominence following its 2023 founding by Arthur Mensch, Guillaume Lample and Timothee Lacroix, becoming Europe’s greatest hope of matching US heavyweights.

Mistral took in €600mn

(626mn) in a summer fundraising round, bringing its valuation to around €6bn.

AFP news agency signed a deal with Mistral in mid-January allowing the startup’s chatbot to draw on the news agency’s articles to formulate responses.

Some in the US have accused DeepSeek of simply piggybacking on the work of American AI developers like OpenAI’s ChatGPT models, rather than achieving its high performance independently.

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GULF TIMES

Colombia and how Donald Trump weaponised tariffs

When President Donald Trump learned Colombia had pushed back on US deportations, his threat of a massive trade war laid out the stakes: co-operate, or else.

Tariffs, just as they were during his first term from 2017 to 2021, are Trump's weapon of choice on the global stage.

While it may be too early to tell how successful of a tactic they are against both US allies and rivals such as China, it shows how Trump – who prides himself on his negotiating skills – will not hesitate to take a hard line to get what he wants.

After a rollercoaster Sunday with duelling tariff threats between Washington and Bogota, the White House said Colombian President Gustavo Petro had backed down and accepted the terms of repatriating immigrants from the United States.

Trump had first threatened to levy 25% tariffs on all imported Colombian goods in a heated response to Petro refusing to accept two military planes carrying deported migrants.

It was not clear whether leftist Petro had conceded his demand that the migrants be treated “with dignity.”

Planes sent by Bogota to ferry the migrants would nonetheless return by Monday or yesterday “at the latest,” according to Daniel Garcia Pena, Colombia's ambassador to the United States.

Eddy Acevedo, chief of staff at the nonpartisan Woodrow Wilson Center think tank, said Petro “quickly became aware of the amount of leverage the United States has with Colombia and that his reckless decision could jeopardise.”

“Last year alone, Petro had no problem allowing in 14,000 Colombians that were deported from the United States back to Colombia,” Acevedo said.

White House spokeswoman Karoline Leavitt was quick to declare victory Sunday, saying: “Today's events make clear to the world that America is respected again.”

Trump himself echoed the sentiment on Monday, telling reporters on Air Force One that “it serves the world well to look at” the Colombia spat.

Trump's plan for mass deportations of migrants has put him on a potential collision course with governments across Latin America, the original home of most of the United States' estimated 11mn undocumented migrants.

“The message that's being sent is how willing the Trump administration is to use these tools, and the fact that they got the opportunity to make that point in the first week of the administration, I'm sure, is quite pleasing for them,” said Kevin Whitaker, the former US ambassador to Colombia who now serves as a non-resident fellow at the Atlantic Council.

True to the promises he made on the campaign trail, Trump spent his first week back in power working to implement his “America First” diplomatic credo.

In doing so, he has also threatened to levy tariffs against Canada and Mexico if they did not comply with his immigration demands.

He also announced the United States' withdrawal from the Paris climate agreement and the World Health Organisation (WHO) during a slew of executive orders he signed.

In addition, Trump ordered a pause to US foreign aid – except for Egypt, Israel and emergency food aid – until a complete review is performed to see if it aligns with his agenda.

Trump has also threatened to “take back” control of the Panama Canal, claimed it was in Canada's best interest to become the 51st state, and reaffirmed his desire to annex Greenland, an autonomous territory of Denmark.

In the latter case, Trump has brandished tariffs against a fellow Nato ally.

And at the Davos forum last week, Trump in a video call told the audience of business leaders to be prepared to come and produce goods in the United States, or else get ready to pay tariffs. – AFP

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Trump's tariff gamble: balancing global capital, economic sovereignty

By Harold James

Princeton

While US President Donald Trump has left no doubt about his love of tariffs, the world is still waiting to see precisely what he will do. He has named China, Canada, and Mexico as his first targets, but it remains to be seen whether he wants a grand slam, or more conditional measures linked to other policy issues (such as acquiring TikTok). For now, the only certainty is that his administration will use tariffs to extract concessions where it can.

The issue is complicated, though, because tariffs interact closely with other components of economic policy such as the exchange rate. In theory, higher tariffs should reduce import demand and push up the exchange rate, ultimately making foreign goods cheaper again. This is why Trump previously claimed that tariffs do not actually cost Americans anything, on the grounds that it is America's trade partners who pay.

But trade and exchange-rate policies are generally handled by different agencies – the Departments of Commerce and the Treasury, respectively – and conflict has frequently been a feature of their interactions. In the 1930s, the world ended up deeply divided because trade negotiators claimed that they could do nothing until exchange rates were fixed, while monetary officials argued that no exchange-rate settlement was possible until there had been a general opening of trade. In the

event, protectionism escalated.

Complicating matters further, another mechanism has since come to the fore: the balance of payments. Since a country with a large trade deficit, like the United States, must pay for its imports somehow, it relies on foreigners to buy its securities or invest in its companies. These inflows of foreign funds to the US are running at very high levels, because Americans do not save very much. The country imports savings from the rest of the world to pay for its trade deficit. If it did not, Americans would have to consume less, which would be experienced as a decline in their standard of living.

Higher tariffs jeopardise this arrangement, because the US needs foreign investment to drive its future growth. Former President Joe Biden understood that foreign capital was necessary to “build back better,” and Trump should know that he cannot deliver his promised “golden age” without it. Perhaps that is why some of his first guests in the White House were Masayoshi Son of the Japanese investment giant SoftBank, the Chairman of Oracle, and the CEO of OpenAI, the “big money and high quality people” behind a new \$100bn venture (Stargate) to build AI infrastructure.

The irony should be obvious. Trump's bid to reclaim sovereignty and usher in a “new era of national success” depends on the same combination of technology and globalised finance that eroded the American middle class and turned many Americans into Trump voters in the first place. But this dependence on global capital is not

just ironic; it also leaves America vulnerable. If the foreign money were to dry up, Trump's promised miracle would become a nightmare.

One early warning would be if bond markets grew anxious about America's capacity to repay the large debt it has accumulated. Since 2022, when UK Prime Minister Liz Truss made a similar gamble on growth, the bond market has returned as a force that even Americans cannot ignore. The “exorbitant privilege” of issuing the main global reserve currency does not mean that you can do absolutely anything. Market sentiment can shift, and when it does, it is usually quite dramatic – as in 1931 or 1971. Credibility can fall victim to suspicion and doubt overnight, especially in a world where the US dollar has been weaponised for various political ends.

Foreign funding also could decline if the bright future that has been promised suddenly seems over-hyped, or if the technology disappoints. Many investors already worry that today's sky-high valuations for tech stocks may indicate a bubble. A big bet on this potential new engine of growth will require vast investments, but if the bubble bursts, plenty of projects will become stranded assets.

Yet another reason that foreign funding could end is that certain governments intervene to stop their countries' citizens and firms from investing in the US. This is one potential response to a new trade war or a strong dollar regime. If French wine, German cars, or Chinese cars, aircraft, and solar panels cannot be sold competitively in America, those governments

might start weighing their options, and figures like Son could face more hurdles in trying to bring jobs and investment to the US.

In fact, one of the easiest ways for governments to affect cross-border capital flows is to revise how foreign investments are taxed. With US tech giants already complaining to Trump about the unfavourable tax treatment that they receive elsewhere, notably in Europe, tax policy could become yet another weaponized issue. The OECD's negotiated global corporate minimum tax is clearly under threat, since Trump and congressional Republicans seem eager to cut corporate taxes as much as they can.

If they do, Europeans may have even more reasons to retaliate by increasing taxes not only on foreign companies in Europe, but also on their own corporations' and citizens' investments in the US. Doing so could divert some European funds back to Europe, while making it even more difficult for the US to balance its current account.

Economic fashions are contagious. It is only a matter of time before someone follows Trump's own logic and offers a plan to “Make Europe Great Again.” A US debt crisis could be the perverse result of his administration's campaign against globalism. – Project Syndicate

• Harold James, Professor of History and International Affairs at Princeton University, is the author, most recently, of Seven Crashes: The Economic Crises That Shaped Globalization.



US President Donald Trump speaks at an event to sign the Laken Riley Act, legislation requiring the detention of immigrants living in the US illegally who are accused of theft, at the White House, in Washington, on Wednesday. (Reuters)

The importance of good companionship

Choosing and having good companions is extremely important for many reasons and from many aspects.

1. Mankind cannot live alone; every individual must live and interact with others, and when interacting with others one either influences or is himself influenced.

2. Those people whom you sit with and make your friends are inevitably going to fall into one of two categories. They will either be good individuals - who guide and encourage you towards what is good and help you to accomplish that which Allah has ordered, or they are going to be bad - encouraging you to do what is pleasing to Satan, that which misleads you, and leads you to the Hell-Fire.

3. When the Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, was sent with the mission to establish Islam, he did not do it on his own. Rather, Allah chose for him companions who accompanied him and who carried the Message until it was complete.

These three aspects show the importance of having good companions, companions who are righteous. Such a companion will help you to do what is good and remind you of Allah, he will enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil. These aspects also show the importance of avoiding befriending bad companions, because such a companion will have a bad effect upon you, they help you to do those deeds which are displeasing to Allah and which lead to the Hell-Fire.

The Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, gave a good similitude regarding this. He, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, said: “The case of the good companion and the bad companion is like that of the seller of musk and the blower of the bellows (iron-



smith). As for the seller of musk, he will either give you some of the musk, or you will purchase some from him, or at least you will come away having experienced its good smell. Whereas the blower of the bellows will either burn your clothing, or at least you will come away having experienced its repugnant smell.” [Al-Bukhaari and Muslim]

The Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, explained the matter of good companionship, so that no room is left for doubt or confusion, when he, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, said: “A person is upon the religion of his close friend, so beware whom you befriend.” [Abu Daawood and At-Tirmithi]

This means that a person will be upon the same methodology as his friend, the

same path as his friend, the same nature, manner and behaviour as his friend. So we must be careful whom we befriend. There is an Arabic saying: ‘Your companion is what pulls you to something.’ So if your companion is good, he will pull you towards that which is good. He will order us with what is good and forbid us from what is evil. If he observes us committing sins he would warn us, if he becomes aware of our shortcomings he would advise us, and if he finds a fault in us he would cover it and not disclose it to others. About this, the Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, said: “...Whoever conceals (the fault of) a Muslim, Allah will conceal his fault on the day of Judgment.” [Abu Daawood]

So should you see a fault in your brother, you should wish to remove that

fault from him and not expose it to the people. This is what is required by brotherhood and again stresses the importance of choosing friends who are upon the correct way, who are loyal, and who hide your faults whilst ordering you with good and forbidding you from evil, who stand beside you and support you, and co-operate with you upon all that is good.

This principle is important from the standpoint of how the religion is to be established, and from the standpoint of what brotherhood is and what it does. Indeed, the reason that one takes a companion is to help him establish Islam, and to help him worship Allah. We find a good example in the Prophet Moosaa, may Allah exalt his mention, the one whom Allah chose and spoke to. When Allah sent him to Pharaoh, he (Moosaa), may Allah exalt his mention, said as Allah informs us saying (what means): “And appoint for me a helper from my family, Haaroon - my brother; increase my strength with him, and let him share my task (of conveying Allah’s Message and Prophethood), that we may glorify You much and remember You much.” [Qur’an; 20: 29-34]

Moosaa, may Allah exalt his mention, wanted his brother to support him and help him, protect him and accompany him. This is exactly what the believers do for one another. For the thing that binds the believers together and makes them brothers is the bond of faith. The Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, said: “There are three characteristics; whoever has them will taste the sweetness of faith: That Allah and His Messenger are more beloved to him than all else, that he loves a person and does not love him except for the sake of Allah, and that he would hate

to revert to unbelief just as he would hate to be thrown into the Fire.” [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

Thus the connection between the believers is based upon faith and sincere brotherhood. Beware against taking any companion if such companionship is based upon other than this, for if you were to do that you would then bite your hands in grief. Just as the unjust ones will bite their hands in grief. Allah Says (what means): “And (remember) the Day when the wrong-doer (oppressor, polytheist etc.) will bite at his hand, he will say: ‘Oh! Would that I had taken a path with the Messenger. Ah! Woe to me! Would that I had never taken so-and-so as a friend! He indeed led me astray from the Reminder (the Quran) after it had come to me....’” [Qur’an; 25:27]

And Allah Says (what means): “And whosoever turns away from the remembrance of the Most Beneficent (Allah), We appoint for him Satan to be a Qareen (intimate companion) to him.” [Qur’an; 43:36]

So all of the physical togetherness that you see around you, which is based upon other than faith will be wiped away on that Day, and it will be a source of misery and torture for them. Allah Says (what means): “Friends on that Day will be foes one to another except the pious.” [Qur’an; 43:67]

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



Graciously overlooking people’s faults and the morals of the noble

By ‘Abdur-Rahmaan ibn ‘Abdullah At-Tareef

Most people strive to attain happiness and success. In fact, true success in life lies in a person’s sincerity, his devotion to his Lord, his abidance by the provisions of the *Shari’ah* that his Lord legislated, mirroring the noblest and best morals in his interactions with people, and guarding his tongue against delving into what does not concern him as well as idle talk. The Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam* (may Allah exalt his mention), instructed the Muslims to channel their energy into what benefits them and avoid what harms them. In an authentic *Hadith*, the Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, said: “Part of the perfection of one’s Islam is his leaving that which does not concern him.” [At-Tirmithi: Hasan]

Out of his keenness to instill love and brotherly affection in the members of his nation, the Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, said: “Whoever among you sees an evil and can change it with his hand (by taking action), let him change it with his hand. If he cannot do that, then with his tongue (by speaking out), and if he cannot do that, then with his heart (by hating it and feeling that it is wrong), and that is the weakest form of faith.” [Muslim]

His statement “Whoever sees” is evidence that (the obligation of) forbidding evil is conditional upon actual vision. This means that if an evil is committed in private and a Muslim does not see it but knows about it, then – according to the reported opinion of Imaam Ahmad, may Allah have mercy upon him, in most narrations reported on his authority – he is not required to forbid it nor should he attempt to investigate what he finds suspicious about the perpetrator.

Therefore, it is impermissible for a person to think ill of people or speak ill of them based on his negative assumptions about them regarding their potential committing of evil, because “seeing” is not the same as “assuming”. Moreover, part of a person’s well-being lies in the gracious overlooking people’s sins and faults as long as they do not make them public as well as avoiding scrutinising every insignificant and trivial matter.

It was narrated in *Saheeh Al-Jaami’* that the Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, said: “Whoever pursues the faults of his Muslim brother, Allah will pursue his faults, and if Allah pursues his faults, He will expose him even if he is in the confines of his own home.”

So fear Allah, you who pursue the faults and scandals of others and expose them on social media and in other gatherings and forums, and be aware that the one who pursues people’s faults is of the most wicked and evil people.

An Arab poet said (what means): “The most wicked are those who are preoccupied with people’s faults, just as flies are attracted to filth!”

Make the attainment of happiness in the afterlife one of your goals in this life so that Allah, The Exalted, would conceal your imperfections; there is no such thing as a flawless person! You should also know that your words are recorded and you shall be held accountable for them, and ask your Lord to conceal your faults and flaws.

Imaam Maalik ibn Anas, may Allah have mercy upon him, used to say: “I have met people in this town – i.e. Madinah – who had no faults of their own but spoke about other people’s faults, so people found fault with them. I also met in it people with faults, but they kept quiet about other people’s faults, so other people kept quiet about theirs.” [Majmoo’ Ajzaa’ Al-Hadith]

Keeping quiet about people’s faults is one of the morals of the noble, and the same is true of graciously overlooking the foolishness and lapses of the youth. A wise and astute person is the one who graciously overlooks people’s faults, lapses, and slips of the tongue as long as it does not incur evils.

An Arab poet once said (what means):

“If you find fault with people, they will find more fault with you and divulge what may be hidden of your imperfections. If you discredit people for faults that

they do not have, this is a graver wrongdoing in the sight of Allah and people. If you discredit people for faults that you too have, then how could a one-eyed man find fault with another’s being one-eyed!”

Islam enjoins the concealment of Muslims’ faults and the avoidance of unwarranted suspicions; Allah, The Exalted, Says (what means): {Indeed, those who like that immorality should be spread [or publicised] among those who have believed will have a painful punishment in this world and the Hereafter...} [Qur’an 24:19]

Islam also calls for overlooking people’s faults and lapses and pretending not to have noticed them.

Among the virtues of the gracious overlooking of people’s faults is what Al-Bayhaqi, may Allah have mercy upon him, narrated in Manaagib Al-Imaam Ahmad on the authority of ‘Uthmaan ibn Zaa’idah, may Allah have mercy upon him, who said: “A state of well-being is ten parts, nine of which lie in the gracious overlooking of people’s faults.” He added: “I related this to Ahmad ibn Hanbal, so he said: ‘Rather, a state of well-being is ten parts, all of which lie in the gracious overlooking of people’s faults.’”

The early Arabs often described noble people as showing gracious overlooking of others’ faults and bashfulness in the privacy of their homes and public gatherings.

An Arab poet said (what means): “He is reticent, out of (praiseworthy) bashfulness, so much so that you would assume that he is sick while being perfectly well.” Another poet said (what means): “He is a noble man who graciously turns a blind eye to people’s faults in the privacy of his house, and he is fearless and brave on the battlefield.”

Kuthayyir (also a poet) said (what means): “When one fails to turn a blind eye to his friend’s faults and some of his flaws, he would continue to reproach him until his last breath. He who actively pursues every slip of others will find it, but he will never have a friend!”

Describing Salaahud-Deen al-Ayyoobi, Ibn al-Atheer, may Allah have mercy upon him, said: “He – may Allah have mercy upon him – was a forbearing, well-mannered, humble man who was patient with regard to what he hated, and he often graciously turned a blind eye to his companions’ mistakes. He courteously tolerated listening to what he hated from others without letting them know it or changing his attitude toward them.”

Verily, these are the moral values of the noble and dignified people. If a person wishes to lead a happy life and win people’s love and be regarded as noble, he should adopt these values.

The Arabs repeatedly recited this poetic verse (which means): “The intelligent person is not the master of his people; rather, their master is the one who pretends not to notice their flaws.”

It was narrated on the authority of ‘Aa’ishah, may Allah be pleased with her, that she said: “One day, eleven women sitting together explicitly promised each other not to conceal anything regarding their spouses. One of them said: ‘My husband behaves like a leopard when he enters the house and behaves like a lion when he goes out, and he does not ask about that which he leaves in the house.’” [Al-Bukhari, Chapter: Treating one’s family kindly]

One of the traits of the leopard is that it sleeps a lot, thus indicative of inattention to what goes on around it. Remember, dear reader, all the events that took place during your day and night, contemplate all your interactions with your family members, friends, students, teachers, or others, and see if you have graciously overlooked their mistakes or you held them accountable for every insignificant thing.

If you have not graciously overlooked people’s faults and mistakes in the past, you have in the remaining years of your life new chances that are worth seizing. You can avail yourself of them by adhering to tolerance, gracious overlooking, and turning a blind eye to people’s faults and imperfections.

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

Relatives are more deserving of your kindness, charity

Allah The Almighty has praised those who fulfil the needs of the poor and the needy in different places in His Noble Book. He, The Exalted, also gave great rewards for those who spend in charity. Allah The Exalted Says (what means): {And those within whose wealth is a known right. For the petitioner and the deprived.} [Qur’an 70:24-25] The Lord The Almighty has explained that the reward for such generosity and spending is great; He The Almighty Says (what means): {Believe in Allah and His Messenger and spend out of that in which He has made you successful. For those who have believed among you and spent, there will be a great reward.} [Qur’an 57:7]

As a reward for the greatness of spending in charity, Allah The Almighty has made a special gate to Paradise, and no one can pass through it other than them. In this regard the Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam* (may Allah exalt his mention), said in the authentic *Hadith* (narration): “Whoever is one of the people of charity will be called from the gate of charity.” [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

The reward of charity is multiplied if it is given during the blessed time which Allah The Almighty has endowed with special advantages and virtues. Ramadan is one of such great seasons in which the Muslim should strive to spend in the different ways and avenues of good deeds and righteous acts as much as he can, following the example of the Messenger of Allah. He, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, used to spend more in charity in the month of Ramadan than in any other month. It was proved in the two *Saheehs* (books of authentic narrations) that he, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, was the most generous of people, and he would be even more so in the month of Ramadan when Jibreel (Gabriel), may Allah exalt his mention, met him to study the Qur’an with him. The Messenger of Allah, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, would be more generous than the blowing wind, in doing good. [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

This proves the virtues of spending in Ramadan. These virtues may take a higher noble rank and a more sublime position if one gives charity to his kin and those closely related to him if they are among the needy and poor – it is considered even better than spending on strangers. This can be substantiated by the Saying of Allah The Almighty (which means): {They ask you, [O Muhammad], what they should spend. Say, “Whatever you spend of good is [to be] for parents and relatives.} [Qur’an 2:215]

The most deserving and those who should be given preference are the people who have greater right over you such as parents to whom one has to be very dutiful. Amongst the greatest forms of dutifulness towards them is to spend on them, then other relatives according to the degree of closeness and need. Spending on them is a charity and a way of upholding the ties of kinship. [Tafseer As-Sa’di]

The advice of your Messenger, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*: Abu Talhah, may Allah be pleased with him, had more property than any other amongst the Ansaar (Helpers) in Al-Madinah and the most beloved of his property to him was a garden called Bayruhaa, which was in front of the Mosque of the Prophet. The Messenger of Allah, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, used to go there and drink from its fresh water. Anas, may Allah be pleased with him, said: “When this news was revealed: {Never will you attain the good [reward] until you spend [in the way of Allah] from that which you love.} [Qur’an 3:92]

Abu Talhah, may Allah be pleased with him, said to the Messenger of Allah, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*:

“O Messenger of Allah! Allah The Almighty Says: {Never will you attain the good [reward] until you spend [in the way of Allah] from that which you love} and no doubt, the garden of Bayruhaa’ is the most beloved of all my property to me. So I want

to give it in charity in the cause of Allah. I expect its reward from Allah The Almighty. O Messenger of Allah! Spend it wherever Allah The Almighty instructs you.’ On that, the Messenger of Allah, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, said: ‘That is a good deal! That is a good deal! I heard what you have said (O Abu Talhah), and I recommend that you distribute it among your relatives.’ Abu Talhah said, ‘I will do so, O Messenger of Allah.’ Then Abu Talhah distributed that garden amongst his relatives and cousins.” [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

You may be interested in knowing the reason behind this virtue. Read what the Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, said: “Charity given to a poor person is charity, but charity given to a relative is two things, charity and upholding the ties of kinship.” [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

The eminent scholar Al-Munaawi, may Allah have mercy upon him, said: “It involves two rewards, unlike spending on strangers which has only one reward. The *Hadith* also includes an explicit indication that the action may combine the reward of two actions for it achieves their aims. So, its doer will receive all the rewards that are mentioned about them out of the pure generosity and kindness of Allah The Almighty.” [Faydh Al-Qadeer]

If you would like to know more about who are the most deserving of charity among your relatives, they are divided into two categories:

First: the orphan, because Allah The Almighty Says (what means): {But he has not broken through the difficult pass. And what can make you know what is [breaking through] the difficult pass? It is the freeing of a slave. Or feeding on a day of severe hunger. An orphan of near relationship.} [Qur’an 90:11-15], meaning, an orphan who has a close relationship with you. Spending on orphan relatives takes precedence over spending on others if their need is equal because relatives are more deserving of your goodness. [Mustafa Al-Adawi; Silsilat At-Tafseer]

As-Sayyid Murtadha, may Allah have mercy upon him, said: “This is encouragement for giving precedence to the needy among relatives over strangers.” [Mahaasin At-Ta’weel]

Second: the relative who harbours a grudge against you and dislikes you. The Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, said: “The best charity is that given to a relative who does not like you.” [Ahmad; Al-Albaani: Saheeh]

The wisdom behind this is that it implies a way of forcing the soul to humble itself before its enemies. It is better in reward than that which is spent on a stranger for he (the relative) is the most deserving of good deeds. [Faydh Al-Qadeer]

Others who are like relatives:

1- Neighbours. Allah The Almighty has recommended observing kindness to them with His Exalted Saying: {The neighbour who is near of kin, and the neighbour who is a stranger.} [Qur’an 5:36]

2- Friends and companions for the sake of Allah The Almighty for the Messenger of Allah, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, said: “The best dinars which a man can spend are a dinar which he spends on his children, a dinar which he spends on his riding beast for the sake of Allah, and a dinar which he spends on his companions for the sake of Allah The Almighty.” [At-Tayaalisi; Al-Albaani: Saheeh]

Doing good deeds towards your relatives is in no way limited to charity as some may believe. Rather, it includes various aspects of life. The best action one can do for his relatives is calling them (to Allah The Almighty), giving them sincere advice and teaching them beneficial knowledge of the worldly life and the Hereafter. This is because religious texts have enjoined preferring and giving them precedence over others.

Article source: www.islamweb.net/emainpage/

Amir in Damascus



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani being received by Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa upon arrival yesterday in Damascus, on an official visit. His Highness the Amir and his accompanying delegation were seen off upon departure at Damascus International Airport by al-Sharaa later in the day.

PM officially opens 21st edition of DJWE

By Peter Alagos
Business Reporter

The 21st edition of the Doha Jewellery & Watches Exhibition (DJWE) was opened yesterday by HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre (DECC), where it will run until February 5.

As many as 500 brands from 32 countries are participating in the DJWE 2025, organised by Qatar Tourism and brought by Visit Qatar.

Present at the inauguration were Qatar Tourism and Visit Qatar chairman HE Saad bin Ali al-Kharji, Visit Qatar chief executive (engineer) Abdulaziz Ali al-Mawlawi, as well as various ministers, ambassadors, and other dignitaries.

HE al-Kharji said that the DJWE is a “prime example” of Qatar’s ability to host world-class events that captivate global audiences, showcasing the country’s growing status as a leading MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions) destination in the region.

“This year’s exhibition brings together the world’s most esteemed brands and designers, highlighting the artistry and innovation that define the industry,” he added.

“We are proud to always be among the first financial institutions to support local brands and provide encouraging incentives to Qatari entrepreneurs in all sectors and be a part of their success story,” said QNB Group chief executive Abdulla Mubarak al-Khalifa. “Being the Platinum Sponsor of this prestigious event confirms the values of the QNB brand focused on bringing the culture of excellence and success to our business.”

The week-long exhibition will feature exquisite collections, statement pieces, and innovative designs from over 500 brands, including Alfardan Jewellery, Al Majed Jewellery, Ali Bin Ali Luxury, Amiri Gems, Fifty-One East, Al



Muftah Jewellery, Blue Salon, Bulgari, and Arts and Gems.

In addition, the DJWE 2025 will host a diverse range of international brands and established Qatari designers, such as Ghand Jewellery, Kaltham’s Pavilion, M Royal Collection, Al Ghla Jewellery, and emerging Qatari designers Alya Jewellery and the One & Only Jewellery, continuing its tradition of blending heritage with innovation.

The exhibition will also see the return of the Qatari, Turkish, and Indian pavilions, each highlighting unique craftsmanship. Ali Hussain Alfardan, the vice-chairman of Alfardan Group and president of Alfardan Jewellery, said: “In a historic first, this year’s exhibition marks a significant milestone as several prestigious brands, including Vacheron Constantin, Chopard, and other renowned jewellers, have chosen to showcase their collections at the Doha Jewellery & Watches Exhibition before their appearance at the Geneva International Gem and Jewellery Show.”

“It is a privilege to have contrib-



uted to designing a limited edition watch for Vacheron Constantin to celebrate their 270th anniversary, adding a personal touch to this remarkable milestone,” he said.

“Each year, the DJWE attracts a distinguished audience of collectors, connoisseurs, and clients from Qatar and around the world, reflecting the nation’s growing influence as a global hotspot for luxury,” said Fifty One East chairman and managing director Bader al-Darwish. “At Fifty-One East, we take pride in carefully select-



The 21st edition of the DJWE will run until February 5 at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre. PICTURES: Shaji Kayamkulam



exquisite selection of jewellery and watches from prestigious global brands at the DJWE 2025,” said Al-muftah Jewellery deputy chairman Abdullah al-Muftah.

“This year’s showcase highlights the latest trends from international brands alongside classic designs,” al-Muftah said, adding: “From stunning bridal sets to versatile, everyday jewellery, we bring you collections that resonate with

sophistication and individuality.”

“This year, Bvlgari has the privilege of presenting the exclusive Monete necklace in Qatar for the very first time – a masterpiece that embodies our devotion to timeless craftsmanship and celebrates the profound connection between heritage and creativity,” said Bulgari Middle East, Africa & India managing director Stephane Larher. “This extraordinary creation continues to nourish the dialogue between Rome and the region, a bond that lies at the heart of Bvlgari Maison’s story.”

One of the DJWE’s main collaborations is with Education Above All (EAA), an initiative founded by Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, chairperson of Qatar Foundation.

This year, the EAA Foundation is partnering with Amrapali, a renowned jewellery house, launching an exclusive new jewellery collection entitled “Horizons of Heritage.”

The collection draws inspiration from blending the architectural heritage of the jewelled horizons with the traditional Indian craftsmanship.

On behalf of the EAA, Fatima al-Nameh said: “At Education Above All Foundation, we are committed to transforming lives through quality education. Our efforts have supported more than 22mn children and youth globally, empowering them to overcome barriers and unlock their potential.”

The DJWE timings are from 12 noon to 10pm (Saturday to Wednesday), 2pm-10pm on Thursdays, and 3pm-10pm on Fridays.

Visitors can also enjoy food and beverage (F&B) options inside the exhibition and outside at the course area.

For registration, visit <https://app.micetribec.com/register/workspaces/qbec/events/djwe25/forms/vis?focus=false>

For more information on the DJWE 2025, visit www.djwe.com

Vacheron Constantin showcases heritage, contemporary timepieces



Christophe Ramel at the DJWE 2025 yesterday. PICTURES: Shaji Kayamkulam

By Shafeeq Alingal
Staff Reporter

Spotlight is on the re-edition of the iconic Historiques 222 at Vacheron Constantin, the luxury Swiss watchmaking Maison, at the Doha Jewellery and Watches Exhibition (DJWE) where the brand is celebrating 270 years of watchmaking and craftsmanship.

Vacheron Constantin’s pavilion features a selection of heritage and contemporary timepieces.

“We celebrate 270 years (of) uninterrupted history and dedication to excellence at the DJWE to lend visitors an extraordinary journey into the art of watchmaking,” Christophe Ramel, the managing director of Vacheron Constantin (Middle East, India and Africa), told *Gulf Times* yesterday.

Historiques 222 is a contemporary reimagining of the iconic model affectionately known as the “Jumbo”.

This timepiece features a 37mm stainless steel case, fluted bezel and integrated

bracelet, paired with a blue dial that embodies timeless elegance and modern sophistication.

The caseback bears a signature representing Vacheron Constantin’s 270th anniversary and has been fitted with a transparent sapphire crystal to reveal the in-house Calibre 2455/2.

There is also a curated selection of Vacheron Constantin’s latest creations alongside rare treasures from its Heritage collection, each reflecting Maison’s dedication to technical mastery and artistic sensibility.

The pavilion offers a refined setting where clients and collectors can explore bespoke services, witness the artistry of fine watchmaking, and delve into Maison’s storied legacy.

The Swiss brand celebrates its 270th anniversary under the theme of *The Quest*.

Inspired by this remarkable milestone, Vacheron Constantin blends heritage and innovation at the DJWE to offer visitors an immersive experience in Maison’s exceptional craftsmanship.

“We always try to push for excellence, and it’s never ending quest,” Ramel said. “*The Quest* is a journey that celebrates our enduring commitment to heritage, innovation and the artistry of fine watchmaking.”

“Vacheron Constantin is proud to preserve the legacy of watchmaking, craftsmanship and technical excellence,” he continued. “To mark 270 years of creation, tradition and innovation, the celebrations begin with the reissue of an iconic timepiece, much awaited by its clients, the Historiques 222, cased in stainless steel.”

Founded in 1755, Vacheron Constantin



is the world’s oldest watch manufacturer in continuous production for 270 years, faithfully perpetuating a proud heritage of watchmaking excellence and stylistic sophistication through generations of master craftsmen.

At the pinnacle of Haute Horlogerie and understated elegance, the Maison creates timepieces with unique technical and aesthetic signatures and an extremely high level of finishing touches.

Vacheron Constantin brings to life unparalleled heritage and a spirit of innovation through its collections: Patrimony, Traditionnelle, Métiers d’Art, Overseas, Fifty-six, Historiques and Égérie.

It offers its discerning clientele of connoisseurs the rare opportunity to acquire vintage pieces within the Les Collections assortment, as well as unique and bespoke timepieces by means of its Les Cabinotiers department.

Ramel noted that the DJWE is a platform that helps international brands reach more buyers and clients, adding that the partnership with Alfardan Jewellery has lent the opportunity to enthouse the buyers in Qatar market through boutiques at Villaggio Mall and Place Vendome Mall.