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SPORT | Page 1

U-17 World Cup motivates next generation of players: Almoez

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Amir congratulates Maldives president

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani sent a cable of congratulations to President of the Republic of Maldives Dr Mohamed Muizzu, on the occasion of his country's Independence Day. His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani also sent a cable of congratulations to President Muizzu. (QNA)

SC lauds Qatar's mediation efforts

Members of the Security Council welcomed, in a press statement, the efforts of Qatar in facilitating the signing of the Declaration of Principles between the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Congo River Alliance/M23 Movement. They added that the Doha talks, facilitated by Qatar, contributed to significant progress on this issue. The council members also renewed their deep appreciation to Qatar for its mediation efforts. (QNA)

Lebanese musician Rahbani dead at 69



Ziad Rahbani, the Lebanese composer and musician who created a distinct Lebanese sound from Western and Arabic musical roots, and whose sardonic critique of the country's sectarian politics rang true to Lebanese across the divides, has died. He was 69. Rahbani was much loved across Lebanon and his words remained relevant across generations, from those who grew up with him during the 1975-90 Civil War to the post-war generation who have struggled to shake the war's legacy. Page 5

Turkiye marks record 50.5C in southeast

Turkiye's environment ministry said yesterday that meteorologists had registered a reading of 50.5C in the southeast of the country, a nationwide record. The record temperature was registered on Friday at Silopi, the ministry said in a post on X.

Greece asks for help in battling wildfires

Greece yesterday requested EU help to battle wildfires that have sprung up in different regions as a lengthy heatwave sent temperatures soaring above 45C and gusts fuelled flames. Winds were fanning fearsome blazes near Athens and other parts, including the Peloponnese peninsula that juts out west from the capital, and on the islands of Crete, Euboea and Kythera.

Rally accident kills three spectators

Three spectators died in central France yesterday after a car driven by a 22-year-old woman racer veered off the road during an auto rally. The driver of the modified Peugeot 208 that hit the spectators and her woman co-driver were taken to hospital but their lives were not in danger. The accident occurred near the town of Ambert. Two men died at the scene and a third man, airlifted to hospital, succumbed to his injuries. Of the three killed two were brothers, aged 70 and 60. Sport Page 3



People gather to receive water supplies amid ongoing clashes on the Thai-Cambodian border, in Oddar Meanchey province, Cambodia, yesterday.

Thailand and Cambodia agree for talks: Trump

Reuters/AFP
Sisaket, Thailand/Washington

US President Donald Trump said yesterday that the leaders of Cambodia and Thailand had agreed to meet immediately to quickly work out a ceasefire, as he sought to broker peace after three days of fighting along their border. Thailand's acting prime minister, Phumtham Wechayachai, thanked Trump and said Thailand "agrees in principle to have a ceasefire in place" but "would like to see sincere intention from the Cambodian side." Phumtham was responding in a Facebook post to a series of social media posts by Trump during a visit to Scotland. Trump said he had spoken to Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet and Phumtham and warned them that he would not make trade deals with either if the border conflict continued. "Both Parties are looking for an immediate Ceasefire and Peace," Trump wrote as he gave a blow-by-blow account of his diplomatic efforts. Thailand and Cambodia exchanged heavy artillery fire for a third straight day yesterday,

as a border conflict that has killed at least 33 people and displaced more than 150,000 from their homes spread across the frontier. Clashes broke out for the first time in the countries' coastal regions where they meet on the Gulf of Thailand, around 250km south-west of the main front lines. "It feels like I'm escaping a war zone," 76-year-old Samlee Sornchai told AFP at a temple shelter for evacuees in the Thai town of Kanthararom, after abandoning his farm near the embattled frontier. Both sides say they are open to a truce, after a long-running border dispute erupted into combat with jets, tanks and ground troops this week, but each has accused the other of undermining armistice efforts. After an urgent United Nations Security Council meeting Friday in New York, Cambodia's UN ambassador Chhea Keo said his country wanted a ceasefire. "Cambodia asked for an immediate cease-fire - unconditionally - and we also call for the peaceful solution of the dispute," he told reporters. As of yesterday, Thailand said seven soldiers and 13 civilians had been killed, while Cambodia said five soldiers and eight civilians had been killed. Page 8

Fish released into waters of Sealine Reserve



The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC), represented by the Natural Reserves Department and the Marine Protection Department, in co-operation with the Aquatic Research Center of the Ministry of Municipality and Environment, carried out an environmental campaign to release a number of fish into the waters of the Sealine Reserve. This initiative is part of a series of steps adopted by the ministry as part of its comprehensive plan to conserve and protect biodiversity in the marine environment of the reserves. Page 2

Netanyahu govt hindering peace deal, says Hamas

●Resistance group rejects Trump remarks on Gaza talks breakdown

AFP/QNA
Gaza City

Palestinian resistance movement Hamas officials expressed surprise yesterday at US President Donald Trump's accusation that the group "didn't really want" a ceasefire and hostage release deal for Gaza. Trump made the allegation of Friday a day after Israel and the United States quit indirect negotiations with Hamas in Qatar that had lasted nearly three weeks. "Trump's remarks are particularly surprising, especially as they come at a time when progress had been made on some of the negotiation files," Hamas official Taher al-Nunu told AFP. "So far, we have not been informed of any issues regarding the files under discussion in the indirect ceasefire negotiations", he added. Nunu, who is close to Hamas's most senior political officials, said he was "surprised" that Israel and the United States had left the talks. Announcing the recall of US mediators on Thursday, Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff accused Hamas of not "acting in good faith". Though not part of the Hamas negotiating team, Hamas politburo member Izzat al-Rishq insisted the group had shown "flexibility" in the talks. "The American statements deliberately ignore the real obstructionist to all agreements, Netanyahu's government, which continues to put obstacles, deceive and evade commitments," he said. Both Hamas officials called on the United States to be more even-handed in its role as mediator in the quest for a ceasefire after more than 21 months of fighting. "We call for an end to the US bias in favour of Netanyahu, who is obstructing



A woman mourns at a funeral of Palestinians killed by Israeli fire at Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, yesterday.

any agreement", Nunu said. Meanwhile, the death toll from the ongoing Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip, which began on October 7, 2023, has risen to 59,733 martyrs in addition to 144,477 wounded. Gaza's civil defence agency said Israeli fire killed 25 people yesterday. More than 100,000 children under the age of two - including 40,000 infants - are facing the imminent threat of mass death within days due to the complete lack of infant formula and nutritional supplements, as Israeli occupation forces continue to close border crossings and prevent the entry of even the most basic necessities.

UAE to resume Gaza airdrops

The United Arab Emirates will resume aid drops over Gaza at once, its foreign minister said yesterday, citing the "critical" humanitarian situation in the blockaded territory, where aid groups have warned of mass starvation. "The humanitarian situation in Gaza has reached a critical and unprecedented level," Emirati Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan said in a post on X. "We will ensure essential aid reaches those most in need, whether through land, air or sea. Pages 4, 5

WHO renews collaboration with HMC tobacco control centre

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has renewed the designation of the Tobacco Control Center as a collaborating centre for treating tobacco dependence for the second consecutive time and for a new four year-round ending in 2029. This step reflects the leading position for Qatar in its efforts in tobacco control across the region. This international recognition, which is one of its kind in the Eastern Mediterranean region, is a confirmation of the leading position of the centre across the region, which was initially designated as a collaborating centre by the WHO in 2017. In her official letter of designation, Dr Hanan Belkhy, the regional director of WHO in the Eastern Mediterranean region, praised the efforts of the Tobacco Control Center at HMC and its services, which comply with best international standards and stated that the centre presents a model in tobacco cessation. Dr Ahmad Mohammad al-Mulla, director of the Tobacco Control Center at HMC, stated: "This recognition is a testament to the tireless efforts of our dedi-



Dr Ahmad Mohammad al-Mulla

cated team, who have spared no effort in providing comprehensive support to individuals seeking to quit smoking, within Qatar and the Eastern Mediterranean region, in an effort to curb the global tobacco epidemic." Dr al-Mulla affirmed that the centre will continue to implement the terms of its agreement with the WHO to deliver tangible benefits to the community. This includes a series of awareness and training programmes aligned with international health agenda, such as raising awareness of the risks of tobacco use in all its forms, and training healthcare professionals to help reduce tobacco use rates



and promote healthier lifestyles in Qatar and the Eastern Mediterranean region. The centre extended its gratitude to Dr Fatima al-Awa, regional adviser for the WHO's Tobacco Free Initiative, and her team at the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office for their close collaboration in executing a high-quality joint action plan. Finally, the centre encourages those who wish to quit smoking to take advantage of its specialised tobacco cessation services, which include one-on-one consultations as well as behavioural and medical treatment options.



Forced labour is punishable crime under Qatari law: MoI

By Shafeeq Alingal
Staff Reporter

Forced and compulsory labour is a punishable crime under the purview of the Qatari law against human trafficking. While addressing a recent awareness webinar on ‘Services of Anti-Human Trafficking Section for the Public,’ Ft Lt Fahad Jassim al-Mansouri, officer at the Technical Office of the Criminal Investigation Department at the General Directorate of Criminal Investigation, said two offenders were punished for forced labour in Qatar.

An individual of Asian nationality, who is owner of a barbershop, in co-operation with his accountant, recruited three individuals of different nationalities to work at the barber-shop. They were then forcibly made to sign promissory notes under the pretext of debt acknowledgment compelling them to work long hours for minimal pay. Arrest warrants were issued by the Public Prosecution, and the accused were referred to the judiciary. The offenders were sentenced to five years imprisonment, fined QR100,000 each, deported from the country, banned from practising barbering, and their items were confiscated.

Ft Lt al-Mansouri cited some recent cases and legal actions against the offenders during

the webinar, which was organised by the Public Relations Department of the Ministry of Interior (MoI) in association with the Criminal Investigation Department and the Preventive Security Department.

“Human trafficking is considered as one of the most heinous crimes committed against individuals, due to its severe psychological, social, economic and security-related consequences. This is especially true given that the victims are often vulnerable groups, driven by harsh living and economic conditions to fall prey to sexual exploitation (such as women and children), forced labour or other forms of human trafficking,” Ft Lt al-Mansouri said.

He explained the Anti Human Trafficking section’s main duties and responsibilities that include combating human trafficking crimes, collecting information and receiving reports and complaints, gathering evidence and conducting investigations to uncover these crimes and take the necessary legal measures, preparing periodic statistics in co-ordination with relevant departments and concerned entities, contributing to public awareness on human trafficking crimes and combating begging in coordination with the concerned entities.

The Investigation and Follow-up Branch receives reports and complaints related to human trafficking crimes and begging-related

offences, gathers evidence and conducts investigations to identify such crimes. Also, it takes necessary actions in accordance with the law, follows up on case files and completing required procedures, follows up on cases referred to the Public Prosecution and judiciary and ensures compliance with judicial decisions.

Common procedures include following up on the Public Prosecution’s decisions and ensuring their implementation. Victims are referred to the Humanitarian Care Shelter, when necessary, in co-ordination with the Labour Department. Suspects are detained based on orders from the Public Prosecution, and arrangements are made to ensure their and the victims’ attendance at investigation and court sessions. Upon the conclusion of the case, the suspects are referred to the competent authority for sentence execution, and steps are taken either to regularise the victims’ status in the country or facilitate their departure if they so wish. Upon receiving information, a complaint or a report indicating a suspected case of human trafficking, it is verified whether there is suspicion or existing evidence confirming the crime of human trafficking. Once confirmed, a permanent case is filed and the victims’ statements are recorded. Evidence is gathered and necessary investigations are conducted to apprehend the suspects.

Al-Khulaifi meets UK official

HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi met in London on Friday with UK National Security Adviser Jonathan Powell. The meeting discussed aspects of bilateral co-operation and ways to enhance and strengthen them. The two sides also addressed the latest regional and international development, particularly the situation in the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories. (QNA)

Kyrgyz FM meets Qatar’s ambassador in Bishkek



Kyrgyz Foreign Minister Jeenbek Moldokanovich Kulubayev met with Qatar’s ambassador in Bishkek Ali bin Jaber al-Marri. The meeting dealt with discussing bilateral co-operation. (QNA)



QNB is committed to facilitating easy and convenient access to its banking services and products for the elderly and people with special needs.

QNB facilitates access to banking services for elderly, people with special needs

QNB Group has continued to attach importance to the elderly and people with special needs by developing facilities and products to improve their access to banking services and enable them to perform their financial transactions with the highest levels of ease and security.

QNB has also launched initiatives to enable them to unleash their potential as partners in development.

Yousef Mahmoud al-Neama, group chief business officer, said: “At QNB, we are committed to facilitating easy and convenient access to our banking services and products for the elderly and people with special needs. We have also provided all necessary facilities and services through our branches and e-channels to offer them an exceptional banking experience.”

Heba al-Tamimi, senior executive vice-president – QNB Group Communications, said: “QNB Group relentlessly supports the integration of the elderly and people with special needs into society, believing in their role as partners in development and reflecting our commitment to Qatar National Vision 2030.”

QNB Group has taken several leading steps to support the elderly, the most recent of which was the launch of a special pensioner loan at the beginning of this year with a 0% interest rate and a value of up to QR300,000 for Qatari retirees, in co-operation with the General Retirement and Social Insurance Authority.

At the level of international branches and subsidiaries, the group offers its elderly customers a range of insurance products that meet the specific needs of this segment. These include the Al Rafiq Retirement programme from QNB Egypt Life Insurance, a savings and investment package designed to help customers achieve financial stability during retirement.

The bank also has successful partnerships with several institutions and centres specialising in elderly care, such as the Centre for Empowerment and Elderly Care. The bank has provided transportation for its employees to provide

all services to the elderly in their homes.

QNB is the first bank in Qatar to launch a banking application in Braille, a unique initiative under the technical supervision and support of the Arab Federation for the Blind. The bank has a fully trained team in the use of sign language to communicate effectively with hearing-impaired customers.

All bank branches have a dedicated entrance to facilitate wheelchair access, designated parking spaces for people with special needs, and signposts for people with visual impairments to guide them to specific paths upon contact. Emergency and evacuation exit commensurate with their needs are also provided, along with priority queuing at branches. These special facilities will be extended to all new and renovated branches.

QNB continues to support several programmes, including the ‘Empowering People with Special Needs through Small Projects Programme’ launched by the Department of the Elderly and People with Special Needs at the Ministry of Social Affairs.

A part of its strategic partnerships in this field, QNB recently launched an early intervention therapeutic programme within its strategic partnership with the Qatar Autism Society, to support children with autism spectrum disorder and their families, enabling them to begin their learning and integration journey from an early age.

QNB attaches special attention to people with special needs, ensuring their rehabilitation and integration into society, given the increasing number of graduates of rehabilitation programmes entering the labour market. Since 2012, QNB has been one of the first financial institutions in the country to prioritise the employment of this segment and provide job opportunities.

The bank has also signed a memorandum of understanding with the Qatar Society for Rehabilitation of Special Needs regarding the recruitment of candidates from this category, preparing them to work in an environment that suits their capabilities and potential.

Fish released into Sealine Reserve to enhance biodiversity

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change’s Department of Natural Reserves and Department of Marine Protection, in co-operation with the Aquatic Research Centre affiliated with the Ministry of Municipality, have carried out an environmental campaign to release a number of fish into the waters of the Sealine Reserve in the south Qatar.

This vital initiative is part of a series of steps adopted by the ministry as part of its comprehensive plan to preserve and protect biodiversity in marine environments within reserves. It aligns with Qatar National Vision 2030 for environmental sustainability and its efforts to ensure the sustainability of natural resources for future generations.

Besides, this campaign is one of the distinctive initiatives aimed at enhancing the local fish stock, which positively con-



tributes to achieving the desired food security. Such fish release operation was carried out after scientific studies were made by the Aquatic Research Centre to ensure the suitability of the natural environment in the reserve for the growth and reproduction of the selected species, guaranteeing the project’s success and a long-term sustainability.

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change plays a

pivotal role in such initiatives through its direct supervision of implementation by its specialised departments. These departments adopt a clear strategy for protecting the marine environment, including safeguarding natural habitats, rehabilitating degraded ecosystems, and reducing human pressures on coasts and marine areas.

The Sealine Reserve enjoys rich biodiversity and unique en-

vironmental conditions, making it an ideal site for such initiatives that balance environmental protection and resource development.

Meanwhile, the ministry further confirms its continued monitoring and follow-up efforts to measure the impact of the fish release on the local ecosystem and will issue periodic reports to ensure maximum benefit from this initiative.



Kahramaa-IAEA workshop on groundwater isotope studies

The Qatar General Electricity and Water Corporation (Kahramaa), in collaboration with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), organised a training workshop on the principles and applications of radioactive and stable isotope studies of water.

These methods are considered among the most prominent scientific techniques worldwide for identifying sources and ages of groundwater.

In a statement, Kahramaa indicated that co-operation with the IAEA began following its participation in the first training workshop held in Vienna, Austria, from July 22-26, 2024, within the framework of the IAEA’s West Asia regional project.

This was followed by participation in a second workshop held



in Oman from Dec 8-12, 2024.

The workshop included hands-on training under the supervision of an IAEA expert on isotope use and data analysis. Additionally, 10 supplementary water samples and ten others for groundwater age determination were collected.

The statement affirmed that

the workshop helped enhance understanding of groundwater cycles by studying recharge sources, flow paths, and water quality analysis, as well as identifying potential sources of pollution and developing feasible action plans that support the sustainable manage-

ment of this vital resource.

The workshop also aimed to raise awareness among professionals and specialists about the importance of groundwater and best practices for its utilisation, as well as identifying areas suitable for safe use without impacting water reserves.

Kahramaa emphasises the importance of strengthening international co-operation with specialised agencies and institutions, believing in the role of knowledge exchange, continuous awareness of the latest developments, capacity building, and the adoption of best practices in addressing issues and challenges to support efforts in protecting water resources and achieving Qatar National Vision 2030 and Kahramaa’s sustainability and water security strategy. (QNA)

GSAS certification for veterinary quarantine facilities at Al Ruwais Port, Hamad Port

The new veterinary quarantine facilities at both Al Ruwais Port and near Hamad Port have obtained the Global Sustainability Assessment System (GSAS) certification with a three-star rating.

This achievement crowns Qatar’s efforts to reinforce environmental sustainability practices across its various development projects, in line with Qatar National Vision 2030 and its goals of promoting green infrastructure.

This accomplishment reflects the Ministry of Municipality’s commitment to applying the highest sustainability standards in the design, construction, and operation of veterinary facilities, ensuring a healthy and safe environment while enhancing operational efficiency in accordance with international best practices.

The GSAS system is the first integrated sustainability assessment system in the Middle East and North Africa region. It was



specifically designed to suit the nature of the built environment in the region and the same system is used to assess major projects such as the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 stadiums and Lusail City. With this rating, the role of veterinary quarantine facilities is further strengthened in supporting sustainable development goals and improving environmental infrastructure



efficiency at the national level. In the meantime, the Ministry of Municipality continues its efforts to enhance the efficiency of veterinary quarantine facilities and expand their operational capacity, as part of its strategy to develop service infrastructure in support of food security and protect the community from transboundary animal diseases.



Qatar's riders shine at 'Summer Showcase' equestrian festival

QNA
Valkenswaard/The Netherlands

Riders from Qatar national equestrian team and Al Shaqab Academy continued to shine on the international stage, delivering outstanding performances at the second edition of the Summer Showjumping Festival, "Summer Showcase", held in Valkenswaard, the Netherlands.

The event saw a strong Qatari presence, with several young and junior riders standing out thanks to their high-level skills and technical proficiency across a range of competition categories, from 60cm to 110cm.

This participation forms part of the team's broader preparation plans for the upcoming season, aimed at gaining valuable experience through exposure to elite-level international competition.



In the 110cm one-star category, riders Mohammed Faisal al-Marri and Ahmed Ali al-Jaber impressed with powerful performances that reflected their strong technical readiness.

Fahad Mansour al-Mahmoud also stood out in the 110cm round, competing with confidence in a highly competitive field.

The 100cm category featured notable results from Qatari riders including Qaqa bin Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, Abdullah



Mohammed al-Marri, Sultan Jasim al-Suwaidi, Abdullah Ahmed al-Musaifri, Khalid Jassim al-Suwaidi, Abdullah Ahmed al-Khalifi, Yousef Abdulrahman al-Muf-tah, and Ali Omar al-Ansari. All showcased promising technical levels, signalling steady progress

in their training development.

In the 80cm round, Qatari riders Ghanem Thamer Khalifa al Maadadi, Hamad Mohammed al-Marri, Salman Faisal al-Marri, Issa Abdullah al-Ghanim, and Tamim Ghanem al-Maadeed delivered confident and composed

performances on the course.

Meanwhile, riders Salman Faisal al-Marri and Hessa al-Jaber excelled in the 60cm category, demonstrating remarkable poise and control throughout the competition.

These results reflect the efforts of Qatar Equestrian and Modern Pentathlon Federation, along with Al Shaqab Academy, in nurturing talent and refining the skills of Qatari riders of all ages through a comprehensive development programme aimed at building a strong foundation for the sport both locally and internationally.

The participation also underscores the Qatari team's ongoing commitment to competing in international events, paving the way for further success in the near future and solidifying its stature in the global equestrian arena.

Zakat Affairs Dept gives QR54.9mn educational aid

The Zakat Affairs Department at the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs provided educational assistance totalling QR54,944,393 during the 2024-2025 academic year. A total of 1,863 students from eligible families within Qatar benefited from the support, which covered various educational levels including private schools, universities, and rehabilitation centres

for persons with disabilities.

Head of the Zakat Disbursement Section Saeed Hadi al-Marri said that the aid was distributed over the two academic semesters of the current year, based on Shariah-compliant criteria, regulations, and approved mechanisms, ensuring that support reached eligible students officially enrolled in their institutions.

He detailed that QR38,122,026

was allocated to cover fees for students in private schools and disability rehabilitation centres, while QR16,822,367 was dedicated to supporting and covering the expenses of university students within Qatar.

Al-Marri emphasised that the tuition assistance project is one of the department's most important social initiatives, given its role in supporting the educational journey of underprivi-

leged students and enabling them to continue their studies and become active members of society.

He concluded by stating that Zakat is a cornerstone of social solidarity and contributes to family and developmental stability, noting that the department continues to receive Zakat funds from contributors year-round through various convenient channels. (QNA)

Aspetar drives innovation at AFC Medical Conference

Aspetar, the official and principal medical partner of the AFC and a close collaborator with FIFA, played a leading role at 8th Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Medical Conference held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Aspetar presented innovative and advanced insights through a distinguished team of 20 sports medicine experts led by CEO Dr Abdulaziz al-Kuwari and surgeon Dr Khalid al-Khelaifi.

During the first day of the three-day conference, Aspetar's experts delivered 27 lectures and workshops out of the total 54 scheduled, significantly contributing to the advancement of Asian football by sharing the latest knowledge and expertise in sports medicine. The invaluable role played by Aspetar in the success of the scientific programme was notably praised by both the AFC general secretary, Dato Windsor John, and the chairman of the AFC Medical Committee, Dr Gursharan Singh, during their opening addresses.

The opening session was chaired by Dr Paul Dijkstra, head of education at Aspetar,



who facilitated discussions on future trends and challenges in sports medicine. The keynote lecture, delivered by Dr Peter Duh, medical director of Aspetar, focused on "Artificial Intelligence: Opening New Horizons for Sports Medicine".

Dr Duh highlighted the transformative role of AI in injury prevention, diagnostics, treatment, and athlete performance enhancement, with an emphasis on machine learning, predictive analytics, AI-powered decision-making algorithms, and the ethical considerations surrounding AI applications in sports healthcare.

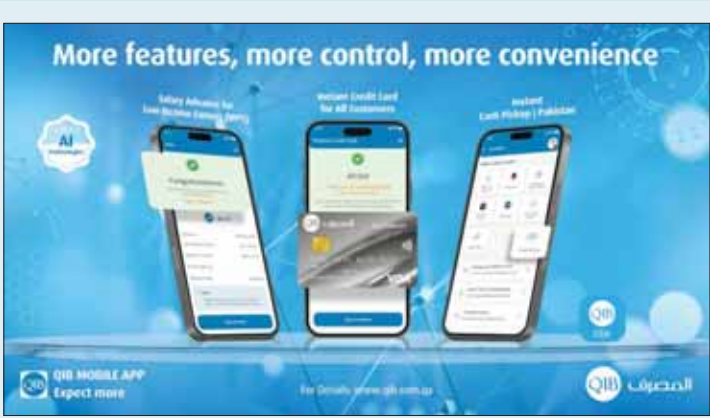
Aspetar's contributions extended to critical areas such as rehabilitation and assessment of anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injuries. Rehabilitation expert Roula Koutsevakaki presented the latest protocols for post-ACL surgery examinations. Dr Mohamed al-Saai, director of the Sports Dentistry Department, emphasised the importance of oral health for athletes and its impact on football performance, outlining the valuable support provided by Aspetar's dental team during competitions.

In addition, specialised sessions on muscle and hamstring injuries featured insights from

experts Rod Whiteley and Dr Christian Eirale, the latter serving as executive director of Aspetar's Sports Medicine Department. Dr Enda King, head of Elite Performance, reviewed effective rehabilitation strategies for hamstring injuries.

Among the lectures that received special attention was the presentation by Dr Omar al-Sairafi, a sports physician at Aspetar, focusing on concussion management. Drawing lessons from the 2022 FIFA World Cup, Dr al-Sairafi shared practical and important guidelines for managing head injuries in football.

The Aspetar booth at the exhibition, held alongside the conference, attracted significant interest from attendees and participants, reflecting widespread recognition of the hospital's outstanding services and its strong support for sports science and medicine. Through its prominent participation, Aspetar reaffirmed its position as a regional leader in medical innovation, scientific research, and knowledge dissemination.



QIB expands mobile app features to enhance customer experience

Qatar Islamic Bank (QIB) has introduced a series of new features to its award-winning mobile app and the QIB Lite App, further strengthening its digital offering and enhancing access to essential financial services for all customers.

QIB has enhanced its 'Instant Credit Card' feature by extending it to all eligible customers without requiring a salary transfer to QIB. The feature enables non-salaried customers to instantly apply for and receive a credit card via the QIB Mobile App, backed by a lien, a temporary hold, on a deposit or account balance. This update simplifies access to credit and offers customers greater flexibility and control over their finances.

Additionally, QIB has expanded its 'Instant Cash Pickup' service to include Pakistan through direct API integration with Habib Bank Limited (HBL) via both QIB Mobile App and QIB Lite App. The cash pickup service enables QIB customers to send money securely to beneficiaries in Pakistan, who can collect the cash instantly from any participating HBL branch. The new corridor builds on the existing cash pickup network covering Jordan, Egypt, and the Philippines, offering valuable remittance options to Qatar's expatriate communities.

Among the newly introduced services, the 'Salary Advance' feature is now available for eligible low-income earners (WPS) through the QIB Mobile App, as well. Customers can instantly access up to 80% of their net salary in just a few steps. The service offers a one-time settlement in the following

month and a fixed monthly profit rate of only 1%, making it a simple, fast, and affordable solution for customers needing short-term liquidity. The service is now available on both QIB Mobile App and QIB Lite App.

D Anand, QIB General Manager - Personal Banking Group, said: "These new features reflect our ongoing efforts to build a more inclusive and responsive digital banking ecosystem. By listening to our customers and understanding their needs, we are continuously delivering solutions that improve financial access, convenience, and control.

"Whether it is helping customers bridge short-term expenses, access credit instantly, or support families abroad, QIB remains committed to customer-centric innovation. The continuous releases of new features are a testament to our promise to always expect more from QIB." With over 320 features and an enhanced user interface, the QIB Mobile App has become the preferred banking channel for QIB customers. The app offers customers full control over their accounts, cards, financing, and transactions, and enables them to fulfil all their banking requirements remotely. Customers can also open new accounts, apply for financing or credit cards, and book deposits instantly and securely. Available on the App Store, Google Play, and Huawei AppGallery, customers can download the QIB Mobile App and self-register using their QID and PIN. For more information, visit www.qib.com.qa

Police Academy gets licence to implement Master's in Security AI programme

The Police Academy has obtained a licence from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) to implement the Master's in Security AI programme. This step reflects confidence in the academic content and development.

The Police Academy explained in a post on its official account on the X platform that this represents a distinguished addition to the list of licensed

programmes at the academy and is in line with the vision of the Ministry of Interior and the strategic direction of the country.

It indicated that the programme has met all approved academic standards, contributing to the preparation of highly qualified security personnel capable of keeping pace with the challenges of modern technology and the requirements

of digital transformation in the security field.

This licence reflects the confidence in the academic level provided by the Police Academy and enhances its position as an academic institution in the country.

According to the Amiri Decree establishing it, the Police Academy aims to: prepare qualified and scientifically trained personnel in legal and police fields, as well

as other fields required by the Ministry of Interior. To prepare researchers in legal and police fields and other specialisations required by the Ministry through specialised higher education programmes. To develop specialised curricula and methods of education and training, keeping pace with the development of knowledge related to legal and police work. The academy also aims to encourage and

support scientific research and the spirit of innovation and creativity to address new developments in the field of security and legal work.

The academy's objectives include preparing and qualifying police force members, working to continuously improve their performance, and ensuring the quality of the programmes offered and their outcomes.

UNRWA chief says Gaza aid airdrops will not stop ‘starvation’

AFP
Jerusalem

The head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees said yesterday that planned airdrops of aid into the Gaza Strip would not solve severe food shortages caused by months of restrictions on the entry of supplies.

“Airdrops will not reverse the deepening starvation. They are expensive, inefficient & can even kill starving civilians,” UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini wrote on X, calling the wave of hunger affecting Gaza “man-made”. An Israeli official told AFP on Friday that aid drops in Gaza would resume soon, adding they would be conducted by the United Arab Emirates and Jordan.

The humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territory has gravely deteriorated in recent days, with international NGOs warning of soaring malnutrition among children. “Lift the siege, open the gates & guarantee safe movements + dignified access to people in need,” Lazzarini said, re-

ferring to the various entry points under Israeli control that regulate access into Gaza. Israel imposed a total blockade on the entry of aid into Gaza on March 2 after talks to extend a ceasefire broke down. It began to allow a trickle of aid to enter again in late May. The UN and NGOs on the ground have decried the severe scarcity facing Gaza’s 2.4mn people, with shortages of food, clean water, medicine and fuel.

Israel’s military said Friday that the country did “not limit the number of trucks going into the Gaza Strip”, and that humanitarian organisations and the UN were not collecting the aid once it was inside the territory.

Humanitarian organisations accuse the Israeli army of imposing excessive restrictions on the goods allowed into Gaza and on the routes made available to transport the aid to distribution points.

The United Arab Emirates, Jordan, France and other countries carried out airdrops in Gaza in 2024, at a time when the transport of aid on land routes also faced restrictions.



Women and children hold up signs as they attend a silent march against war and hunger in the Mawasi area in the east of Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip, yesterday.

Britain spearheads calls for airdrops as Gaza hunger crisis deepens

AFP
Gaza City

International pressure was mounting yesterday for alternative ways to be found to deliver food to hungry Palestinian civilians in Gaza, with Britain vowing to back airdrops.

The UK decision to support the plans of regional partners Jordan and the United Arab Emirates came as pro-Palestinian activists piloted a symbolic aid vessel towards the shores of Gaza in defiance of an Israeli naval blockade.

On the ground, the territory’s civil defence agency said at least 40 more Palestinians had been killed in Israeli military strikes and shootings.

Humanitarian chiefs are deeply sceptical that airdrops can deliver enough food to tackle the deepening hunger crisis facing Gaza’s more than 2mn inhabitants and are instead demanding that Israel allow more overland convoys.

But British Prime Minister Keir Starmer backed the idea, vowing to work with Jordan to restart airdrops - and with France and Germany to develop a plan for a lasting ceasefire.

An Israeli official told AFP on Friday that airdrops in Gaza would resume soon, adding they would be conducted by the United Arab Emirates and Jordan.

Starmer’s office said that in a call with his French and German counterparts, the “prime minister set out how the UK will also be taking forward plans to work with partners such as Jordan to airdrop aid and evacuate children requiring medical assistance”.

The United Arab Emirates said it



Displaced Palestinians at the Nuseirat refugee camp haul food parcels and other items they managed to get from a GHF aid distribution point at the so-called “Netzarim corridor” in the central Gaza Strip, yesterday.

would resume airdrops “immediately”.

“The humanitarian situation in Gaza has reached a critical and unprecedented level,” Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan said in a post on X. “Air drops are resuming once more, immediately.”

A number of Western and Arab governments carried out air drops in Gaza in 2024, at a time when aid deliveries by land also faced Israeli restrictions, but many in the humanitarian community consider them ineffective.

Israel imposed a total blockade on the entry of aid into Gaza on March 2 after talks to extend a ceasefire in the now 21-month-old conflict broke down. In late May, it began to allow a trickle of aid to enter.


Israel’s military insists it does not limit the number of trucks going into the Gaza Strip, and alleges that UN agencies

and relief groups are not collecting the aid once it is inside the territory.

But humanitarian organisations accuse the Israeli army of imposing excessive restrictions, while tightly controlling road access within Gaza.

A separate aid operation is under way through the Israeli and US-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, but has faced fierce international criticism after Israeli fire killed hundreds of Palestinians near distribution points.

Yesterday, pro-Palestinian activist group Freedom Flotilla said its latest aid boat, the Handala, was approaching Gaza and had already got closer than its previous vessel, the Madleen, which was intercepted and boarded by Israeli forces last month. The Israeli military said it was monitoring the situation and was prepared to enforce what it called its “legal maritime security blockade”.



QPPC invites qualified service providers to participate in the following tender:

Companies established for less than two years are not eligible. Companies with ICV score/rating in the ICV portal (<https://icv.qa/en-US>) will be preferred but not compulsory.


SI No.	Tender Reference and Description	(i) Deadline for Submission of Information & Interest for Bidding	(ii) Tender Fee	(iii) Tender Issuance	(iv) Tender Bond	Bid Closing Date
1	Tender No. :096/2025/QPPC Boundary Wall and Excavation Works of Factory Building, Guard Room, Substation, and Generator	28 th July 2025 12:00 Noon Doha LT	QAR. 1,000 (One Thousand)	28 th July 2025	QAR. 200,000 (Two Hundred Thousand)	11 th August 2025 12:00 Noon Doha LT

i Interested bidders to communicate their willingness to bid and contact details to the email: procurement@qppc.net indicating company name, address, telephone, official E-mail..etc. latest by the deadline for Submission of Information & Interest for Bidding indicated above. Reference Number and Description of the tender must be mentioned in the email.
Clarifications: Please send your queries with tender reference and description to email procurement@qppc.net

ii Non-refundable tender fee indicated above is payable to QPPC through Bank Transfer or Cash only latest by the deadline indicated above. Tender link will be sent via email to the confirmed bidders. Bidder to attach copy of tender bond to the offer. **Offer without Tender Bond will not be considered.**

iii **Tender Bond (Bank Guarantee):** Original tender bond must be submitted along with the tender bid by hand to the following address latest by the Tender closing date & time:

Qatar Plastic & Wooden Products Company W.L.L
P. O. BOX 50174
Tel.: +974 44770819
Attention: General Manager
Bank Details: Doha Bank, Corporate Branch,
(IBAN: QA25DOHB02200890830010011000)



QatarEnergy LNG Tender Invitation

No.	TENDER NUMBER / DESCRIPTION	TENDER ISSUE PERIOD	TENDER FEE (QAR)	TENDER BOND (QAR)	TENDER CLOSING DATE
1	LTC/A/STK/7028/25, B72 Material Agreement for the Supply of Wire Mesh & Screen without any commitment	27/07/2025 to 03/08/2025	0	25,000	17/08/2025

Scope of Work:
QatarEnergy LNG invites proposal from reputed suppliers for 5-year Call of Agreement for The Supply of Wire Mesh & Screen without any commitment in terms of quantity and value. For other tender terms & conditions, please refer full tender documents.

Bid Validity: Bid Offer should be valid for 270 calendar days from the Tender Closing Date.

Place for Tender Collection and Bid Submission:
ITT document for this tender will be available in QatarEnergy LNG website under Suppliers tab >Current Open Tenders. The bids shall be submitted through the QatarEnergy LNG online platform (SMART by GEP).

Note: Local Companies (established under the Laws of State of Qatar with local Commercial Registration) are advised to refer to the tender documentation and In-Country Value (ICV) Digital Portal: - <https://icv.qa/en-US/> for details of ICV compliance that may be applicable.

Gunmen storm Iran courthouse, killing six: judiciary

Gunmen stormed a courthouse in southeastern Iran yesterday, killing at least six people, including three law enforcement personnel, the judiciary said, AFP reported from Tehran. At least 22 people were also wounded, most of them civilians, said provincial chief justice Ali Movahedi-Rad, cited by the judiciary’s Mizan Online news outlet. Mizan reported that the number of dead from the “terrorist attack” in the city of Zahedan had risen to six, revising an earlier toll of five. The three attackers had been wearing explosive vests and had tried to enter the building disguised as visitors, Movahedi-Rad said. All three “have been killed according to the announcement of the Quds Headquarters of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps” (IRGC), he added. The dead included three law enforcement members who were protecting the courthouse. Alireza Daliri, deputy police commander of Sistan-Baluchistan province, said the assailants threw a grenade into the building. Iranian media said the attack was claimed by Jaish al-Adl, a Baloch militant group based in Pakistan but active in Iran whose name is Arabic for “Army of Justice”. Located about 1,200 kilometres southeast of the capital Tehran, restive Sistan-Baluchistan province shares a long border with Pakistan and Afghanistan. This province hosts a significant population from the Baloch ethnic minority.



Qatar Chemical Company Limited
Al Dafna – Amwal Tower – First Floor
P.O. 24646 Doha / Qatar – Tel. 44847111 – Fax 44847695
Website: www.qchem.com.qa

ANNOUNCEMENT FOR TENDERS

No.	Document No.	Description	Tender Bond	Bid Closing Date
1.	QC/TC/ENV/96/25	Sale of Metal Scrap at Q-Chem, Q-Chem II, RLOC and RLP on Call-Off Basis for Five Years	QR 45,500/-	12:00 hrs. on 13th August 2025

Brief Scope:
The primary types of metal scrap for sale are Ferrous Metal, Non-Ferrous Metal, and Data Cables. The successful bidder shall be required to collect the available metal scrap from Q-Chem, Q-Chem II, RLOC and RLP sites.

Tender Documents for the above description can be obtained as follows:

A. Pay to Bank and send the original receipt with authorization letter via email
For each tender pay a **non-refundable document fee of QR 1,000/-** Payable to Q-Chem, Bank Account (Contract Services - Tender) – Account Number 001-242007-003 with HSBC Bank) and submit the original receipt with an Authorization letter on Tenderer Company Letterhead with ID copy of the Tenderer representative via email to tadvertising@qchem.com.qa In the authorization letter Tenderer shall nominate a single focal point with contact mobile number, **official email address**, office number, fax number for the communications related to this tender for the transfer and receipt of the tender documents. **The Bank receipt must indicate the tender number and the tenderer name (company name).**

B. Date and Time of Tender documents Issuance via email
Tender documents issuance from **27th July 2025 to 31st July 2025, 8am-12noon**

C. Proposal details
Proposals should be valid for **240 days** from the tender closing date.

D. Submission of Proposals
Guidelines for Electronic Bids Submission is attached in the Tender documents.

Three dead in Israel strike on south Lebanon

AFP
Beirut

The Lebanese health ministry said three people were killed in Israeli strikes on the south yesterday despite a

ceasefire, as the Israeli military said one of them targeted a Hezbollah fighter.
“The Israeli enemy drone strike that targeted a vehicle” in Tyre district “killed one person”, a ministry statement said.
The Israeli military said that it

“struck and eliminated” a Hezbollah commander who was “involved in efforts to rehabilitate the fighter organisation in the area of Bint Jbeil” near the border.
It did not specify where the strike took place.
The Lebanese health ministry

later reported that another Israeli strike in Tyre district, on the town of Debaal, killed two people. The state-run National News Agency reported that it targeted a house.
Israel has kept up its strikes on Lebanon despite a November ceasefire that sought to end over a

year of hostilities with Hezbollah including two months of all-out war.
It has warned it will continue to strike until the fighter group has been disarmed. Under the truce, Hezbollah was to withdraw its fighters north of the

Litani river, about 30 kilometres from the Israeli border, leaving the Lebanese army and UN peacekeepers as the only armed parties in the region. Israel was to withdraw all its troops from Lebanon but has kept them in five areas it deems strategic.

Gaza running out of specialised food to save malnourished children

Reuters
Geneva/Jerusalem

Gaza is on the brink of running out of the specialised therapeutic food needed to save the lives of severely malnourished children, UN and humanitarian agencies say.
“We are now facing a dire situation, that we are running out of therapeutic supplies,” said Salim Owais, a spokesperson for Unicef in Amman, Jordan told Reuters, saying supplies of Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Food (RUTF), a crucial treatment, would be depleted by mid-August if nothing changed.
“That’s really dangerous for children as they face hunger and malnutrition at the moment,” he added.
Owais said Unicef had only enough RUTF left to treat 3,000 children. In the first two weeks of July alone, Unicef treated 5,000 children facing acute malnutrition in Gaza.
Nutrient-dense, high-calorie RUTF supplies, such as high-energy biscuits and peanut paste enriched with milk powder, are critical for treating severe malnutrition.
“Most malnutrition treatment supplies have been consumed and what is left at facilities will run out very soon if not replenished,” a World Health Organisation (WHO) spokesperson said on Thursday.
The WHO said that a programme in Gaza that was aiming to prevent malnutrition among the most vulnerable, including pregnant women and children under five, may have to stop work as it is running out of the nutritional supplements.
Gaza’s food stocks have been running out since Israel, at war with Palestinian Hamas group



Hidaya, a 31-year-old Palestinian mother, carries her sick 18-month-old son Mohammed al-Mutawaq, who is also displaying signs of malnutrition, inside their tent at the Al-Shati refugee camp, west of Gaza City.

since October 2023, cut off all supplies to the territory in March, lifting that blockade in May but with restrictions that it says are needed to prevent aid being diverted to fighter groups.
As a result, international aid agencies say that only a trickle of what is needed, including medicine, is currently reaching people in Gaza.
Israel says it is committed to allowing in aid but must control

it to prevent it from being diverted by fighters. It says it has let enough food into Gaza during the war and blames Hamas for the suffering of Gaza’s 2.2mn people.
COGAT, the Israeli military aid co-ordination agency, in response to e-mailed questions on RUTF supplies said it was working with international organisations to improve the distribution of aid from the crossings where hundreds of aid trucks were waiting.
Save the Children, which runs a clinic that has treated spiking numbers of malnourished children in central Gaza, said it had not been able to bring in its own supplies since February and was relying on UN deliveries.
“If they’re going to run out, that’s also going to affect Unicef partners and other organisations that rely on their supplies to provide that for children,” said Alexandra Saieh, Global Head of Humanitarian Policy and Advocacy at Save the Children.
Unicef said that from April to mid-July, 20,504 children were admitted with acute malnutrition. Of those patients, 3,247 were suffering from severe acute malnutrition, nearly triple the number in the first three months of the year. Severe acute malnutrition can lead to death, and to long-term physical and mental developmental health problems in children who survive.

Sudanese coalition led by RSF announces parallel govt

Reuters
Khartoum

A Sudanese coalition led by the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces announced yesterday the members of a parallel government, a move opposed by the army, its

rival in a 27-month war that could drive the country further towards partition.
RSF leader General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo was announced head of the presidential council, while Abdel Aziz al-Hilu, head of the SPLM-N, one of the country’s largest rebel groups, was made his deputy on a 15-member council. Mohamed Hassan al-Taishi, a civilian politician,

was named prime minister, and regional governors were announced in a press conference from Nyala, the largest city in the Darfur region which the RSF controls most of. The Sudanese army has pushed the paramilitaries out of the centre of the country, while deadly fighting rages over the centrewest Kordofan region and Darfur’s traditional capital of Al-Fashir.

Egypt grand museum delay puts tourism hopes on hold

AFP
Cairo

In the shadow of the Grand Egyptian Museum, souvenir shop owner Mona has been readying for the tourist boom she hoped the long-awaited opening would bring – now once again out of reach.
“I had bet everything on this opening,” she told AFP from her shop, just steps from the iconic pyramids of Giza, which the much-anticipated museum overlooks.
Originally scheduled to fully open this month, the museum was expected to attract up to 5mn visitors annually, fuelling optimism across Cairo’s battered tourism sector.
“We planned our entire summer and fall packages around the museum opening,” said Nadine Ahmed, a 28-year-old agent with Time Travel tours.
“But with group cancellations, refunds and route changes, we’ve lost tens of thousands of dollars.” Though parts of the museum have been open for months, the main draw – the treasures of Tutankhamun – will remain under wraps until the official launch.
Less than three weeks before its July 3 opening, the government announced another delay, this time pushing the landmark event to the final quarter of the year.
Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly cited regional security concerns and the desire to host an



File photo shows visitors touring the Grand Egyptian Museum in Giza on the southwestern outskirts of the capital Cairo.

event of “global scale”.
The vast museum, two decades in the making, has faced repeated delays – from political upheaval and economic crises to the Covid-19 pandemic.
Ahead of the expected launch, Mona, who asked to be identified by her first name only, took out a loan to renovate her store and stock up on goods inspired by the museum’s collection.
A few streets away, Mohamed Mamdouh Khattab, 38, prepared months in advance, hiring and training extra staff and expanding his inventory. “The opening of the museum is a key milestone,” said Khattab, who owns a sprawling bazaar of handcrafted jewellery and ancient replicas.
“It’s a project that should have been launched a long time ago,” said the vendor, whose family has been in the industry since the 1970s. Tourism accounts for about


10% of Egypt’s workforce, but the sector has struggled – from the fallout of the 2011 Arab Spring to militant attacks and the Covid shutdown.
Still, signs of recovery have emerged: Egypt welcomed 3.9mn tourists in the first quarter of 2025, up 25% from the same period last year – itself a record.
At a Giza papyrus workshop, 30-year-old tour guide Sara Mahmoud hopes the opening will revive visitor numbers.
“Big openings have brought a lot of tourism to Egypt before,” she said, pointing to the 2021 Pharaohs’ Golden Parade and the reopening of the Avenue of the Sphinxes.
“These events get people excited – we saw the crowds coming in.” Such momentum could make a real difference, said Ragui Assaad, an economist at the University of Minnesota.

Libya detains 1,500 undocumented migrant workers in raid near Tripoli

AFP
Tripoli

Libyan authorities detained yesterday some 1,500 undocumented migrant workers in a raid on a neighbourhood housing them east of the capital Tripoli, an AFP reporter saw.
“Saturday’s inspections uncovered housing units

where undocumented foreign workers were living,” Libyan labour minister Ali al-Abed, who was present during the raid, told reporters.
“These workers, of various nationalities, had no residency permits, no official passports, and not even health records.”
Libya has been gripped by conflict since the 2011 overthrow and killing of longtime ruler Muammar Gaddafi in a Nato-backed uprising.




الاولية
AL-AWALIA

Invitation to Tender

Tender / Auction Number	Subject	Tender / Auction Document Fees (Non-refundable)	Tender / Auction Bond	Tender/Auction Offer	Closing Date
AL-AWALIA/TD/2025/29	Call-Off Agreement for Quality Assurance, Quality Control and Testing of all construction primary material for Qatar Primary Materials Company Sites ("Services")	1,000 QAR	59,000 QAR	Two Bids (Technical & Commercial)	03 August 2025 01:00 PM
AL-AWALIA/TD/2025/30	Call-Off Agreement for Internal Audit (Co-Sourced) for Qatar Primary Materials Company ("Services")	1,000 QAR	119,000 QAR	Two Bids (Technical & Commercial)	03 August 2025 01:00 PM

In accordance with the following conditions:

- Tender Documents can be collected online by sending email to tender.docs@qpmc.qa along with requested documents in point No.2.
- Tender Documents will be shared only after delivery of Deposit Slip Stamped by Commercial Bank along with Authorization Letter to the delegated person signed by authorized person as per Computer ID, Copy of commercial Registration (CR), Business License and Computer ID.
- Bids are to be submitted in two sealed (in red wax) envelopes (Technical & Commercial) and addressed to Tenders and Auction Committee. Tender reference number and subject are to be clearly written on the envelopes, provided that the last date for submitting bids is one o'clock in the afternoon on the closing day. Any bids submitted after this date and time will not be accepted.
- Tenderers shall submit the proposals to our head office located at: Local, Building No. 108, St. No. 303, Burj Marina Tower, 17th Floor before the closing date. (To get the map of the new building, please scan the QR code below).
- Tender Fees are non-refundable and can be transferred online to Account of Qatar Primary Material Company- Bank A/C (4050-65111-006) at Commercial Bank of Qatar. **IBAN No. (QA 18 CBQA 0000 0000 4050 65111 006).** Tender reference number and subject are to be written on the deposit slip.
- Tender Bond (Bank Guarantee/ Manager Cheque) must be valid for 120 days after closing date and must be submitted in separate & sealed envelope along with technical bid and a photocopy is to be attached with commercial bid.
- Bids without tender bond will be rejected.
- Bids must be valid for 90 days after the closing date.
- Any queries relating to the Tender Documents must only be raised in writing, preferably by email, to the address specified in the respective Tender Document. Any response issued by Qatar Primary Material Company will be in the form of a question and answer and will be distributed to all Tenderers without revealing the identity of the originator of the queries in the Form of Tender Bulletins. Queries must be received at the address specified in the respective ITT Documentation at least five (5) calendar days prior to the Tender closing date. Any queries received after such a date will be ignored.
- The amount of the Performance Bond to be provided by the awarded bidder is (10% of the contract value) and its validity period must remain valid under the contract implementation period and the guarantee period according to the terms of the tender.
- The Technical Bids shall be opened within one week of the closing date.
- Qatar Primary Material Company has the right, during the contract period, to request an increase or decrease in the amounts of the items, works or services by a percentage not exceeding (20%) of the contract value with the same conditions and prices, provided that the increase is of the same type of contracted items, works or services.
- Qatar Primary Material Company's tendering terms and conditions apply.
- For any inquiries about the tender except collecting the documents, please contact tender@qpmc.qa
- Location of the new building



For further Inquiry, please send your queries at email to tender@qpmc.qa or visit Qatar Primary Material Company website @ www.qpmc.qa

شركة قطر للمواد الأولية (ش.م.ع.ق) | مركزها الرئيسي: الدوحة - قطر، منطقة لوسين، برج مارينا، رقم 108، إس.جى. 33204 | هاتف: 9411 4447 | فاكس: 9411 4447 9411
Qatar Primary Materials Company (Q.P.S.C.) | Head Office: Doha-Qatar, Lusail, Marina Tower No.: 108 | CR No.: 33204 | P.O Box: 22095 | Tel: +974 4447 9411
رأس المال المصرح به 200,000,000 ريال القطري | رأس المال المدفوع 200,000,000 ريال القطري | Capital 200,000,000 QAR | Paid Up Capital 200,000,000 QAR | Info@qpmc.qa www.qpmc.qa

CAR’s Touadera reveals bid for third term

Reuters
Bangui

Central African Republic (CAR)’s President Faustin-Archange Touadera said yesterday he will run for a third term later this year, seeking to extend his rule into a second decade after scrapping term limits in 2023.

“Many of you have asked for me, and my answer is yes. I am your candidate for the presidential election of December 2025,” the 68-year-old said at a meeting of his party, the United Hearts Movement, in the capital Bangui.

“We will continue the work of rebuilding our country.”

Since taking office in 2016, Touadera has enlisted outside forces to stay in power amid a persistent civil conflict, including mercenaries from Russia’s Wagner militia, who intervened in 2018 on the side of the government.

Landlocked Central African Republic, roughly the size of France and with a population of around 5.5mn, is deeply impoverished despite being rich in resources including gold, diamonds and timber.



Central African Republic President Faustin-Archange Touadera (left) attends The United Hearts Movement (MCU) conference in Bangui yesterday, where he announced his candidacy for the presidential election scheduled for December 2025.

It has witnessed waves of instability, including coups and rebellions, since independence from France in 1960. Touadera won a second term in 2020, though militants including the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC) have fought to overturn that result.

The army, backed by United Nations peacekeepers and Russian and Rwandan troops, has been fighting the group for years.

Touadera’s current term was

supposed to be his last, but in 2023 the country held a constitutional referendum that abolished the two-term limit and extended the presidential mandate from five to seven years.

Opposition parties and civil society groups have said the new constitution, which was backed by more than 95% of voters, could allow Touadera to stay in power for life. The exact date of the December vote has not been announced.

At least 652 malnourished children ‘died in Nigeria in last six months’

Reuters
Abuja

At least 652 children died from malnutrition in the Nigerian state of Katsina in the first six months of 2025, Medecins Sans Frontieres said, an outcome it said it was due to funding cuts by international donors.

Katsina, in the north of the country, is plagued by insecurity.

“We are currently witnessing massive budget cuts, particularly from the US, the United Kingdom, and the European Union, which are having real impact on

the treatment of malnourished children,” said MSF, also known as Doctors Without Borders.

On Wednesday, the UN food agency said it will be forced to suspend food and nutrition aid for 1.3mn people in Nigeria’s insurgency-hit northeast at the end of July because stocks have run out.

Nigeria has budgeted 200bn naira (\$130mn) this year to cushion the shortfall from the withdrawal of funding to the health sector by the US. MSF said the number of children in Katsina with the most severe form of malnutrition has risen by about 208% this year compared with the same period last year and “unfortunately 652 children have already died in our facilities since the beginning of 2025”.

African armies turn to drones with devastating civilian impact

AFP
Paris

The Easter period usually offers a rare respite in Gedeb, in Ethiopia’s deeply troubled north, but on April 17 death rained from the skies in this sleepy town caught up in a war between rebels and the army.

On this important holiday for Ethiopian Orthodox and Protestant Christians, many families had gathered in the morning to repair the local primary school.

But out of the blue, shortly before 11:00am (1400 GMT), “a drone fired on the crowd and pulverised many people right in front of my eyes”, a resident told AFP.

Ethiopia and many other African nations are increasingly turning to drones as a low-cost means of waging war, often with mixed military results but devastating consequences for civilian populations.

Last year, Ethiopia carried out a total of 54 drone strikes, compared to 62 attacks in Mali, 82 in Burkina Faso and 266 in Sudan, according to data collected by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), a US-based monitor.

According to one of two Gedeb residents contacted by AFP, the strike killed “at least” 50 people, and according to the second, more than 100 - a figure corroborated by several local media outlets.

It is one of the deadliest in a series of drone attacks since the conflict began in August 2023, pitting the Ethiopian army against the Fano, the traditional “self-defence” militias of the Amhara ethnic group.

A shoe seller at the scene, whose nephew was killed instantly, also blamed an armed drone that continued to “hover in the air” some 20 minutes after the strike.

“The sight was horrific: there were heads, torsos and limbs flying everywhere and seriously injured people screaming in pain,” he recalled.

Ethiopian authorities have not released any information about this attack in Amhara, where the security situation makes some areas very difficult to access and communications are subject to significant restrictions.

The Ethiopian army’s use of drones, which began during the bloody Tigray War (2020-2022),



File photo shows a Baykar Bayraktar drone aircraft at the 55th edition of the International Paris Airshow in Le Bourget.

has since spread to the Amhara and Oromia regions amid multiple insurgencies.

In the Amhara region alone, now the hardest-hit, at least 669 people have been killed in more than 70 drone strikes since 2023, according to ACLED data analysed by AFP.

LOW COST

Remotely piloted aircraft used for reconnaissance and strikes - low-cost technologies now ubiquitous in current conflicts and particularly in Ukraine - are generating massive interest in Africa.

Some 30 African governments have acquired drones, according to data cross-referenced by AFP from the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) “Military Balance” and the Center for a New American Security’s Drone Proliferation Dataset.

For decades, wars in Africa had been fought on land, conducted primarily by light and mobile infantry units.

“Drones offer sub-Saharan African militaries more affordable and flexible access to air power, which has been out of reach until now due to its cost and operational complexity,” said Djenabou Cisse, a west African security specialist at the Foundation for Strategic Research.

Countries like China, Turkiye and Iran have the advantage of selling drones “without attaching any political conditionality”, she added.

Among African military commands, the most popular is undoubtedly the Turkish Bayraktar TB2 drone, which, along with its big brother, the Akinci, has dethroned the Chinese Wing Loong in recent years.

The TB2 made a notable appearance in 2019 in Libya, the first African theatre of drone warfare, between the Ankara-backed Government of National Accord and its eastern rival, Marshal Haftar, equipped with Chinese weapons supplied by the United Arab Emirates.

The following year, its deployment in the Karabakh region during the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and then in Ukraine starting in 2022, boosted its popularity.

Orders soared and waiting lists grew. While contract details are kept secret, experts consulted by AFP estimate that a “system” of three drones costs nearly \$6mn - significantly less than the several tens of millions for a fighter jet or combat helicopter.

This offsets its rather average performance, with a range limited

Murder of South African DJ exposes nexus between crime and power

AFP
Johannesburg

On a quiet November night in 2022, DJ Sumbody - a rising star in South Africa’s music scene - was gunned down in a hail of bullets while heading home.

Then in April 2024, engineer Armand Swart was executed in a similar shooting after his company flagged a suspicious government tender in which prices had been inflated by over 4,500%.

But dramatic arrests this week are tying those murders and many more together, exposing a murky underworld where criminals consort with political big-wigs for lucrative state tenders.

The arrests came after explosive allegations by a senior police chief who accused the force and South Africa’s police minister of a cover-up.

Deep-rooted procurement corruption has seeped through every level of government for decades, security researcher David Bruce told AFP.

“The whole issue of killings of whistleblowers and assassinations generally is massively interlinked with that issue,” said Bruce, a consultant with the Institute for Security Studies.

Among those arrested this week are a former Johannesburg police officer at the time of DJ Sumbody’s murder, as well as the prime suspect, a businessman named Katiso Molefe.

British media have reported that a South African man of Molefe’s same name and age was sentenced to four years in prison in the United Kingdom in 2003 for drug trafficking.

Two other men, already in custody for the 2023 attempted murder of former reality TV star turned influencer Tebogo

Thobejane, are also believed to have played a role. It doesn’t end there.

During the raid on Monday, police found prominent Johannesburg politician, Kenny Kunene, at Molefe’s home.

Kunene, a Johannesburg city council member, has since been suspended by his party leader, Sports Minister Gayton McKenzie, though police have not formally implicated him.

Kunene denied any wrongdoing, saying he was merely trying to assist a journalist seeking to interview Molefe.

‘TENDERPRENEURS’

At the centre of the widening web is businessman Vusumuzi ‘Cat’ Matlala, described locally as a “tenderpreneur”, a term referring to individuals who have made fortunes through government contracts.

Also the head of private security firm, Matlala was arrested in May in connection with the 2023 attempt on his ex-partner Thobejane’s life.

Thobejane, famous for her role in the long-running local soap opera Muvhango, earlier this month denied having “snitched” on Matlala.

“I am a victim,” she told local newspaper News24.

In 2024, Matlala secured a \$20mn contract with the national police - now cancelled - despite being implicated in a \$125mn public hospital embezzlement scandal.

The Tembisa hospital case cost whistleblower Babita Deokaran her life in 2021, when she was shot nine times outside her home.

No arrests have been made in Deokaran’s killing, reflecting the impunity that reigns with only 11% of murders solved, according to 2024 police statistics. “All these three cases are linked somehow,” police spokeswoman

Athlenda Mathe said, referring to DJ Sumbody, Swart and Thobejane. Four weapons, including the AK-47 rifle used to kill DJ Sumbody, have been linked through ballistics to at least 10 high-profile cases, she added.

POLICE MINISTER ACCUSED

The implications run deep. KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Commissioner Lieutenant General Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi last month accused colleagues and Police Minister Senzo Mchunu of burying investigations targeting Matlala.

In a bombshell televised press conference, flanked by armed security forces, Mkhwanazi alleged Mchunu had received payments from a corruption suspect and accused prosecutors of delaying justice.

“We do hope that pretty soon we might find some changes with good dedicated prosecutors and we might see arrests happening,” he said, adding that cases of murdered artists would finally “come to the fore”.

President Cyril Ramaphosa has since suspended Mchunu and announced a judicial inquiry into the allegations. But there has been no tangible action.

South Africa faces one of the world’s highest murder rates, averaging more than 75 killings a day.

Politically motivated contract killings have surged 108% over the past decade, according to a 2024 report by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime.

Studies show hiring a contract killer can cost as little as \$145 in the country all too accustomed to violence. “It’s easier to silence someone with a bullet than contend with an investigation,” said Chad Thomas, head of private investigation company IRS Forensic.

negotiations,” he said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

“With Turkiye, we have a speed that we don’t have elsewhere, not even in Russia or China,” two countries that also supply military equipment, he added.

According to a young Malian surveillance drone pilot, who also wished to remain anonymous, the Turkish aircraft “are easy to pilot, which means we don’t need a long training period”.

In Chad, four Turkish drones have replaced French fighter jets at the forward bases they occupied until N’Djamena ended its military co-operation agreements with France at the end of 2024.

The latter had repeatedly provided air support to help the Chadian government halt the advance of rebels threatening the capital.

The capital N’Djamena is equipped with only five Russian Sukhoi aircraft and as many ageing Mi-24 helicopters.

Contrary to Franco-Chadian relations, “there is no military co-operation agreement (between N’Djamena and Ankara) but a trade agreement that allows us to acquire military equipment”, a Chadian officer said.

Turks are present to provide technical assistance and the former French bases are “entirely in the hands of the Chadian military”, the same source added.

This flexible co-operation on drones clearly illustrates the desire of some African leaders to “assert their sovereignty and greater strategic autonomy,” said researcher Djenabou Cisse.

‘EXTREME FEAR’

On the ground, however, the tactical and strategic gains from the use of drones do not always materialise, several experts said.

“Drones alone cannot defeat an adversary,” Cisse said, adding: “We saw this in Libya, where both

sides had sophisticated drones, and more recently in Sudan, where each side uses drones, but with very unequal capabilities.”

“Not only have these countries failed to fully stabilise but conflicts have often become entrenched or even escalated,” the researcher added.

Drones are proving especially decisive in open terrain, when the enemy is unable to disperse and hide as is the case with militants in the Sahel, according to a detailed study by the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP).

In Ethiopia, they helped turn the tide of the conflict in Tigray at a key moment, giving a decisive advantage to federal forces without, however, securing a definitive victory. In the summer of 2021, a large column of Tigray rebel forces, which reached within 200 kilometres of Addis Ababa and threatened to seize the capital, was stopped by the arsenal of drones deployed by the government.

Analysis of satellite images by Dutch peace organisation PAX at several Ethiopian air bases confirmed the presence of TB2s and, more recently, the Akinci, as well as Chinese Wing Loongs and Iranian Mohajer-6s.

These drones have “significantly increased the Ethiopian army’s intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities, as they can prow for nearly 24 hours, track enemy movements, identify their positions, provide targeting information or directly strike targets” Wim Zwijnenburg, a drone specialist for PAX, told AFP.

While the fighting subsequently focused primarily on Tigray, it continued into 2022 and high tensions remain in the region despite the conclusion of a fragile peace agreement, while other hotbeds of violent insurrection have spread to Amhara and Oromia.



Another file photo shows a drone flying.

Indian police arrest man running ‘fake embassy’

Police in India have arrested a man accused of running a fake embassy from a rented house near New Delhi and duping job seekers out of money with promises of overseas employment.

Harsh Vardhan Jain, 47, was operating an “illegal West Arctic embassy by renting a house” in Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh, which neighbours the capital, local police said.

Jain, according to police, claimed to be the ambassador of fictional nations “like West Arctic, Saborga, Poulvia, Lodonia”. He allegedly used vehicles with fake diplomatic plates and shared doctored photos of himself with Indian leaders to bolster his claims.

“His main activities involved acting as a broker to secure work in foreign countries for compa-

nies and private individuals, as well as operating a hawala (money transfer) racket through shell companies,” the police said in a statement following his arrest earlier this week.

He is also accused of money laundering.

During a raid on Jain’s property, police said they recovered \$53,500 in cash in addition to doctored passports and forged documents bearing stamps of India’s foreign ministry.

Westarctica, cited by the police as one of the countries Jain claimed to be representing, is a US-registered nonprofit “dedicated to studying and preserving this vast, magnificent, desolate region” of Western Antarctica.

In a statement, it said it had appointed Jain as its “Honorary Consul to India” after he had made a “generous donation”. – **AFP**

Mexico launches lottery to support migrants in US

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum has announced a lottery to raise money to support migrants caught up in US President Donald Trump’s immigration crackdown.

Nearly 12mn Mexicans live in the United States, where Trump has pursued a tough anti-immigration policy since his return to the White House in January.

The lottery “is dedicated to our migrant brothers and sisters”, said Sheinbaum, who has pledged all necessary consular assistance to Mexicans affected by Trump’s crackdown.

Tickets for the lottery, with a prize pot of nearly 425mn pesos (\$23mn), feature a heart surrounded by ears of corn and agave plants with the words “Mexico with an M for migrant”.

The draw will be held on September 15, when Mexico celebrates the start of the war of independence against Spain in 1810. – **AFP**

India’s Modi renews ties with Maldives

AFP
Male

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi wrapped up a visit to the Maldives yesterday, renewing ties by offering infrastructure projects and vital financial assistance to the cash-strapped Indian Ocean nation.

Regional powerhouse India had been concerned that its small, yet strategically located neighbour was drifting towards the orbit of its rival China following the 2023 election of President Mohamed Muizzu on an anti-India platform.

Since coming to office, Muizzu has secured the withdrawal of a small contingent of Indian military personnel who operated search-and-rescue aircraft in the archipelago.

However, he has since toned down his anti-India rhetoric, and on Friday he touted the

two nations’ collaboration on security and trade.

“India has long stood as the Maldives’ closest and most trusted partner,” Muizzu said in a banquet speech alongside Modi, whom he met with twice last year. “We deeply value the friendship of India and are grateful for the timely assistance your country has extended to us in moments of need.”

Shortly after his arrival on Friday, Modi unveiled a \$565mn credit line for the Maldives, which is facing a severe foreign exchange shortage despite its thriving tourism industry.

India also reduced annual repayments of an earlier credit line from \$51mn to \$29mn, and the two sides discussed a potential free-trade agreement.

Muizzu said the new credit line would bolster the Maldives’ security forces, and improve healthcare, housing and education.

During his two-day trip, Modi also inaugu-

White House eyes other universities after Columbia

Reuters
Washington

The White House is seeking fines from several universities that it says failed to stop antisemitism on campus, including Harvard University, in exchange for restoring federal funding, a Trump administration official said on Friday.

The administration is in talks with several universities, including Cornell, Duke, Northwestern and Brown, the source said, confirming a report in the *Wall Street Journal*.

The official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the administration is close to strik-

ing deals with Northwestern and Brown and potentially Cornell.

A deal with Harvard, the country’s oldest and richest university, is a key target for the White House, the official added.

A spokesperson for Cornell declined to comment.

Other universities did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Trump and his team have undertaken a broad campaign to leverage federal funding to force change at US universities, which the Republican president says are gripped by antisemitic and “radical left” ideologies.

Trump has targeted several universities since returning to office in January over the

pro-Palestinian student protest movement that roiled college campuses last year.

Columbia University said on Wednesday that it will pay more than \$200mn to the US government in a settlement with the administration to resolve federal probes and have most of its suspended federal funding restored.

The Trump administration has welcomed the Columbia deal, with officials believing the university set the standard on how to reach an agreement, the official said.

Harvard has taken a different approach, suing the federal government in a bid to get suspended federal grants restored.

Trump keeps low profile in Scotland as protesters rally against his visit

AFP/Reuters
Turnberry, Scotland

US President Donald Trump kept a low profile on his Scottish golf course yesterday, ahead of meetings with top British and European leaders, as questions swirled at home about his ties to disgraced financier Jeffrey Epstein.

Trump arrived on Friday on a visit that has triggered protests in Scotland, with hundreds lining the streets of the capital Edinburgh waving placards reading: “NOT MY PRESIDENT”.

Frustrated by continued questions about his administration’s handling of investigative files related to Epstein’s criminal charges and his 2019 death in prison, Trump told reporters to focus on bigger issues and other people.

“You make it a very big thing over something that’s not a big thing,” Trump said. “Don’t talk about Trump. What you should be talking about is the fact that we have the greatest six months in the history of a presidency.”

White House officials hope some time out of the limelight will allow the Epstein controversy to die down, two sources familiar with the matter told Reuters.

Hundreds of protesters took to the streets in major cities.

Trump played at his Turnberry resort with son Eric and US ambassador to the UK Warren Stephens, waving to photographers following his arrival in his mother’s birth country on Friday evening.

His presence has turned the picturesque and normally quiet area of southwest Scotland into a virtual fortress, with roads closed and police checkpoints in place.

Police officers – some on quad bikes and others on foot with sniffer dogs – patrolled the famous course and the sandy beaches and grass dunes that flank it.

Secret Service snipers were positioned at vantage points while some other golfers on the course



A child holds a placard as anti-Trump demonstrators gather during a rally in Edinburgh. – **Reuters**

were patted down by security personnel.

The 79-year-old Trump touched down on Friday at nearby Prestwick Airport as hundreds of onlookers came out to see Air Force One and catch a glimpse of its famous passenger.

The president has professed a love of Scotland, but his controversial politics and business investments in the country have made for an uneasy relationship.

Speaking to reporters on the tarmac, Trump immediately waded into the debate surrounding high levels of irregular migration, and lashed out at renewable energy efforts.

“You better get your act together or you’re not going to have Europe anymore,” he said, adding that migration was “killing” the continent.

“Stop the windmills. You’re ruining your countries,” he added.

Trump’s five-day visit, which is set to mix leisure with business and diplomacy, has divided the local community.

Several hundred protesters demonstrated outside the US consulate in the capital Edinburgh

and in the city of Aberdeen, near where Trump owns another golf resort.

The protests were organised by the Stop Trump Coalition.

Participants held placards with slogans like “Scotland hates Trump” and waved Palestinian flags.

“I am here because of fascism in America under Trump’s rule. I am here because of genocide in Gaza that is being funded and enabled by British and American governments,” said 44-year-old Amy Hanlon in Aberdeen.

Cat Cutmore, 31, an Edinburgh resident, said she felt compelled to protest Trump’s visit given her deep concerns about the worsening situation in Gaza after 21 months of war and what she sees as the US president’s attacks on democratic principles.

“There comes a point where if you roll out the red carpet to somebody who has put citizens of his own country and people who are seeking asylum into prison camps, you’re complicit,” she said.

Janet MacLeod Trotter, another Edinburgh resident and author



Trump is seen at the Trump Turnberry Golf Courses, in Turnberry on the south west coast of Scotland. – **AFP**

of historical fiction, said she was particularly angry that Trump was capitalising on his mother’s name, which she shares.

On the trip, Trump will open a golf course near Aberdeen named after his mother, Mary Anne MacLeod, who was born and raised on a Scottish island before emigrating to the United States.

“We’re just fed up with the way that he’s using political clout to browbeat people around the world... he’s coming here and using that as a gimmick to help his business interests,” Trotter said.

Gabriele Negro, an Italian who works at the University of Edinburgh, said he was there to send a signal that he, like others, did not agree with Trump’s immigration policies and stance on Gaza.

No demonstrations could be seen near Turnberry.

Not everyone was against his visit.

At Prestwick Airport on Friday evening, a boy held a sign that read “Welcome Trump” while a man waved a flag emblazoned with Trump’s most famous slogan – “Make America Great Again”.

“I think the best thing about

suing an injunction in a nationwide class action of children who would be denied citizenship under the policy.

A federal appeals court in California said on Wednesday that Trump’s executive order violated the citizenship clause of the US Constitution’s 14th Amendment by denying citizenship to many persons born in the US, and blocked its enforcement nationwide.

Trump signed the executive order on January 20, his first day back in office, as part of his crackdown on immigration.

The executive order directed federal agencies to refuse to recognise the citizenship of US-born children who do not have at least one parent who is an American citizen or lawful permanent resident, also known as a “green card” holder.

It was swiftly challenged in court by

rated a new defence ministry headquarters and several India-funded infrastructure projects, including roads and a 4,000-unit housing scheme.

Modi’s visit had set “a clear path for the future of Maldives-India relations”, Muizzu wrote on X yesterday as the Indian leader left the capital Male after 60th Independence Day celebrations.

“Our relationship continues to grow, shaped by people-to-people ties and cooperation in various sectors,” Modi wrote in his own post on X. “India remains committed to supporting the aspirations of the Maldivian people.”

Known for its luxury tourism and pristine beaches, the Maldives is also a geopolitical hotspot, with key global shipping lanes passing through its 1,192 islands, stretching across 800km of the equator.

China and India are the Maldives’ two largest bilateral lenders.

Nasa says it will lose 20% of workforce

The US space agency Nasa will lose about 3,900 employees under Donald Trump’s sweeping effort to trim the federal workforce – at the same time as the president prioritises plans for crewed missions to the Moon and Mars.

In an e-mailed statement, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (Nasa) said that around 3,000 employees took part in the second round of its deferred resignation programme, which closed late on Friday.

Combined with the 870 who joined the first round and regular staff departures, the agency’s civil servant workforce is set to drop from more than 18,000 before Trump took office in January to roughly 14,000 – a more than 20% decrease.

Those leaving Nasa on the deferred resignation programme will be placed on administrative leave until an agreed departure date.

An agency spokesperson said the figures could shift slightly in the coming weeks.

“Safety remains a top priority for our agency as we balance the need to become a more streamlined and more efficient organisation and work to ensure we remain fully capable of pursuing a Golden Era of exploration and innovation, including to the Moon and Mars,” the agency said.

Earlier this year, the Trump administration’s proposed Nasa budget put a return to the Moon and a journey to Mars front and centre, slashing science and climate programmes.

The White House says it wants to focus on “beating China back to the Moon and putting the first human on Mars”.

China is aiming for its first crewed lunar landing by 2030, while the US programme, called Artemis, has faced repeated delays.

Nasa is still run by an acting administrator after the administration’s initial pick to lead the agency, tech billionaire Jared Isaacman – endorsed by former Trump adviser Elon Musk – was ultimately rejected by the Republican president. – **AFP**

Colombia slams mass deportation from Ecuador

Colombia’s foreign ministry has criticised Ecuador for deporting large numbers of Colombian citizens without a formal protocol, describing it as a “unfriendly gesture”, while Quito said the removals followed legal procedures and upheld human rights standards.

On Thursday, the Colombian government reported that authorities in the neighbouring country had announced plans to deport Colombians currently imprisoned in various Ecuadorian penitentiaries.

Ecuador’s foreign ministry said in a statement that it had notified Colombia via diplomatic channels. – **Reuters**

Judge reaffirms nationwide injunction blocking Trump executive order on birthright citizenship

Reuters
Washington

A federal judge in Massachusetts has ruled that a nationwide injunction he issued in February that blocked President Donald Trump’s executive order limiting birthright citizenship should remain in place.

In a written ruling, US District Judge Leo Sorokin in Boston said his earlier nationwide injunction was the only way to provide complete relief to a coalition of Democratic-led states that brought the lawsuit before him, rejecting the Trump administration’s argument that a narrower ruling was warranted because of a June decision from the US Supreme Court.

Sorokin wrote that the evidence before him “does not support a finding that any narrower option would feasibly and adequately protect the plaintiffs from the injuries they have shown they are likely to suffer if the unlawful policy announced in the Executive Order takes effect during the pendency of this lawsuit”.

White House spokeswoman Abigail Jackson said in a statement that “courts are misinterpreting the purpose and the text” of the US Constitution’s 14th Amendment.

“We look forward to being vindicated on appeal,” Jackson said.

New Jersey Attorney-General Matthew J. Platkin, a Democrat, said in a statement that the states were thrilled with the decision.

“American-born babies are American,

just as they have been at every other time in our nation’s history. The president cannot change that legal rule with the stroke of a pen.”

The Supreme Court’s June 27 ruling in litigation over Trump’s birthright citizenship order limited the ability of judges to issue so-called “universal” injunctions – in which a single district court judge can block enforcement of a federal policy across the country – and directed lower courts that had blocked the Republican president’s policy nationally to reconsider the scope of their orders.

However, the ruling contained exceptions allowing courts to potentially still block it across the country again.

That has already allowed a judge in New Hampshire to once again halt Trump’s order from taking effect by is-

Democratic attorneys-general from 22 states and immigrant rights advocates who argued it was unconstitutional.

Last week, the states had argued at a hearing before Sorokin that a nationwide injunction was essential.

They said restricting birthright citizenship in some states but not others would make it difficult to administer federal benefits programmes like Medicaid.

A patchwork approach would also lead to confusion among immigrant parents and a surge of people moving to states where Trump’s executive order is on hold, straining resources, they argued.

The Justice Department had countered that the states, by continuing to advocate for universal relief, had failed to come to grips with the Supreme Court’s decision.

Thailand, Cambodia ‘agree to hold immediate ceasefire talks’: Trump

Reuters
Bangkok/Washington/Samraong, Cambodia

US President Donald Trump said yesterday that the leaders of Cambodia and Thailand had agreed to meet immediately to quickly work out a ceasefire, as he sought to broker peace after three days of fighting along their border.

Thailand’s acting prime minister, Phumtham Wechayachai, thanked Trump and said that Thailand “agrees in principle to have a ceasefire in place” but “would like to see sincere intention from the Cambodian side”.

Phumtham was responding in a Facebook post to a series of social media posts by Trump during a visit to Scotland (**see report on Page 7**).

Trump said he had spoken to Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet and Phumtham and warned them that he would not make trade deals with either if the border conflict continued.

“Both Parties are looking for an immediate Ceasefire and Peace,” Trump wrote

as he gave a blow-by-blow account of his diplomatic efforts.

Phumtham also said he had asked Trump “to convey to the Cambodian side that Thailand wants to convene a bilateral dialogue as soon as possible to bring forth measures and procedures for the ceasefire and the eventual peaceful resolution of the conflict”.

More than 30 people have been killed and more than 130,000 people displaced in the worst fighting between the Southeast Asian neighbours in 13 years.

Before Trump spoke to the two leaders, clashes on the Thai-Cambodian border persisted into a third day and new flash-points emerged as both sides said they had acted in self-defence in the border dispute and called on the other to cease fighting and start negotiations.

There were clashes early yesterday, both sides said, in the neighbouring Thai coastal province of Trat and Cambodia’s Pursat Province, a new front more than 100km from other conflict points along the long-contested border.

The countries have faced off since the killing of a Cambodian soldier late in

May during a brief skirmish.

Troops on both sides of the border were reinforced amid a full-blown diplomatic crisis that brought Thailand’s fragile coalition government to the brink of collapse.

As of yesterday, Thailand said seven soldiers and 13 civilians had been killed, while Cambodia said five soldiers and eight civilians had been killed.

Trump’s direct involvement yesterday followed US calls for restraint on both sides.

He said he spoke to each leader and relayed messages back and forth.

“They have agreed to immediately meet and quickly work out a Ceasefire and, ultimately, PEACE!” Trump wrote, saying both countries wanted to get back to the “Trading Table”.

He has sought to reach separate deals with dozens of countries in response to his announcement of wide-ranging tariffs on imports to the US.

“When all is done, and Peace is at hand, I look forward to concluding our Trading Agreements with both!” Trump said.

He offered no details on the ceasefire

negotiations he said Thailand and Cambodia had agreed to hold.

The White House did not immediately respond to questions on the timing and venue for talks and the Thai and Cambodian embassies in Washington also did not immediately respond.

Thailand’s ambassador to the United Nations told a Security Council meeting on Friday that soldiers had been injured by newly planted land mines in Thai territory on two occasions since mid-July – claims that Cambodia has strongly denied – and said Cambodia had then launched attacks on Thursday morning.

“Thailand urges Cambodia to immediately cease all hostilities and acts of aggression, and resume dialogue in good faith,” Cherdchai Chaivaivid told the council in remarks that were released to media.

In a statement issued yesterday, Cambodia’s defence ministry said that Thailand had launched “a deliberate, unprovoked, and unlawful military attack” and was mobilising troops and military equipment on the border.

“These deliberate military preparations

reveal Thailand’s intent to expand its aggression and further violate Cambodia’s sovereignty,” it said.

Cambodia called for the international community to “condemn Thailand’s aggression in the strongest terms” and to prevent an expansion of its military activities, while Bangkok reiterated it wanted to resolve the dispute bilaterally.

Thailand and Cambodia have bickered for decades over jurisdiction of various undemarcated points along their 817km land border, with ownership of the ancient Hindu temples Ta Moan Thom and the 11th century Preah Vihear central to the disputes.

Preah Vihear was awarded to Cambodia by the International Court of Justice in 1962, but tension escalated in 2008 after Cambodia attempted to list it as a Unesco World Heritage site.

That led to skirmishes over several years and at least a dozen deaths.

Cambodia in June said it had asked the court to resolve its disputes with Thailand, which says it has never recognised the court’s jurisdiction and prefers a bilateral approach.

Thousands rally in Malaysia to call for prime minister’s resignation

Reuters/AFP
Kuala Lumpur

Thousands of people rallied in the Malaysian capital yesterday to demand the resignation of Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, as public discontent grows over rising living costs and allegations of failing to deliver promised reforms.

Protesters – mostly wearing black t-shirts and bandannas carrying the slogan “Turun Anwar” or “Step Down Anwar” – marched through the heart of Kuala Lumpur, before converging in the city’s Dataran Merdeka (Independence Square) to hear speeches by top opposition leaders.

Police estimated at least 18,000 were in attendance.

Anwar, who campaigned on a reformist platform before taking office in November 2022, has faced criticism over measures aimed at boosting government revenue, including an expanded sales and services tax and subsidy adjustments that some fear could lead to a spike in consumer prices.

Protester Nur Shahirah Leman, 23, a member of an Islamic students’ group, said that she is worried that new taxes as well as higher electricity tariffs imposed on large businesses would eventually be passed down to consumers.

“These taxes are levied on manufacturers, so it would automatically affect the prices of food,” she said.

“He (Anwar) has already governed the country for three years and has yet to fulfil the promises he made,” said protester Fauzi Mahmud, 35, from Selangor just outside the capital.

Anwar “has been to many countries to bring investments, but we have yet to see



Protesters gather near Kuala Lumpur’s Merdeka Square during a protest against Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim. - **AFP**

anything”, Fauzi told AFP, referring to the premier’s recent trips, including to Russia and Europe.

“The cost of living is still high,” the engineer said.

Anwar has also faced claims of judicial interference and doubts over his commitment to anti-corruption efforts, after prosecutors dropped graft charges against several figures allied to the government and following a recent delay in the appointment of the country’s top judges.

Anwar has repeatedly denied interfering in the courts.

Former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad, who turned 100 this month, joined the rally and accused Anwar of misusing his position to prosecute political rivals, charg-

es the premier has previously rejected.

“It’s been three years, what have the people got? I think he (Anwar) enjoys seeing us suffer,” he said. “Enough, please, step down.”

“Those who are innocent are charged, those who have done wrong are let go,” Mahathir told the crowd.

Mahathir and Anwar, his former protégé-turned-rival, have been locked in an intense feud that has dominated Malaysian politics for nearly three decades.

The pair mended fences to oust the long-ruling Barisan Nasional government in 2018, but their coalition collapsed in less than two years amid infighting.

Anwar was appointed premier on a reformist ticket and promised to tackle graft,

nepotism and cronyism within the Southeast Asian nation’s fractured political system.

Days ahead of the rally, the premier laid out a string of populist measures aimed at addressing concerns, including a 100 Malaysian ringgit (\$24) cash handout for all adult citizens and a promise to cut fuel prices.

On Wednesday Anwar also added that about 18mn Malaysian motorists would be eligible to purchase subsidised medium-octane fuel at 1.99 ringgit per litre, compared to the current price of 2.05 ringgit.

Political analysts viewed the announcements as a strategic move to appease increasing public frustration and dissuade people from joining yesterday’s march.

Norhamizah Mohamed, 48, from Besut on the northeast coast said that she came to protest to ensure that “Anwar does what he promised in the election manifesto”.

“It’s not that we don’t like him, but we don’t like the way he is running the country,” she told AFP. “Only after we had decided to do this protest he announced the goodies for the people.”

Yesterday’s protest also comes as political parties gradually gear up for elections, which by law have to be held no later than mid-February 2028.

A recent survey by Malaysia-based independent Merdeka Centre for Opinion Research found the majority of Malaysian voters gave Anwar a positive approval rating of 55%.

Reasons included the easing of political turmoil in recent years as well as efforts to significantly raise Malaysia’s profile through this year’s chairmanship of the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Hong Kong issues arrest warrants for 19 overseas activists

Hong Kong’s national security police announced arrest warrants for 19 activists based overseas, accusing them of subversion under a stringent national security law, marking the largest such tally yet.

They are accused of organising or participating in the “Hong Kong Parliament”, a group that authorities in the Asian financial hub say aimed to subvert state power, under the law Beijing imposed in 2020 following months of pro-democracy protests in 2019.

The activists are accused of having launched a referendum or run as candidates in the unofficial “Hong Kong Parliament” group, which authorities say aims at achieving self-determination and drafting a “Hong Kong constitution”.

Police, who said the organisation sought to overthrow the governments of China and Hong Kong by unlawful means, said they are still investigating and further arrests may follow.

Among those named are businessman Elmer Yuen, commentator Victor Ho, and activists Johnny Fok and Tony Choi.

Four of them are subject to previous arrest warrants, each carrying a bounty of HK\$1mn (\$127,000).

Among the remaining 15, for each of whom police are offering a bounty of HK\$200,000 (\$25,480), are those said to have organised or run in the election and sworn in as its councillors.

None of the accused could be reached for comment.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio has condemned the move, which he said targeted some US-based individuals.

“We will not tolerate the Hong Kong government’s attempts to apply its national security laws to silence or intimidate Americans or anyone on US soil,” he wrote in a statement, calling it “a form of transnational repression”.

The UK’s Foreign and Home Secretaries also condemned the move in a joint statement, calling the arrests “another example of transnational repression” and saying it damages Hong Kong’s international reputation.

“(The UK) will not tolerate attempts by foreign governments to coerce, intimidate, harass or harm their critics overseas,” it said in a statement on Friday.

In response, the Chinese embassy in the UK said the British government’s remarks “constitute a gross interference” in China’s internal affairs and the rule of law in Hong Kong.

“China urges the UK to abandon its colonial mentality, stop interfering in Hong Kong affairs... stop shielding criminals,” it said.

The former British colony returned to Chinese rule in 1997 with the guarantee of a high degree of autonomy, including freedom of speech, under a “one country, two systems” formula.

Critics of the national security law say authorities are using it to stifle dissent.

Chinese and Hong Kong officials have repeatedly said the law was vital to restore stability after the city was rocked for months by sometimes violent anti-government and anti-China protests in 2019.

Police reiterated that national security offences were serious crimes with extraterritorial reach and urged the wanted individuals to return to Hong Kong and surrender. - **Reuters**

China urges global consensus on balancing AI development, security

AFP/Reuters
Shanghai

China’s Premier Li Qiang has warned that artificial intelligence (AI) development must be weighed against the security risks, saying that global consensus was urgently needed even as the tech race between Beijing and Washington shows no sign of abating.

His remarks came just days after US President Donald Trump unveiled an aggressive low-regulation strategy aimed at cementing US dominance in the fast-moving field, promising to “remove red tape and onerous regulation” that could hinder private sector AI development.

Opening the World AI Conference (WAIC) in Shanghai yesterday, Li emphasised the need for governance and open-source development, announcing the establishment of a Chinese-led body for international AI co-operation.

“The risks and challenges brought by artificial intelligence have drawn widespread attention... how to find a balance between development and security urgently requires further consen-

sus from the entire society,” the premier said.

He gave no further details about the newly announced organisation, though state media later reported “the preliminary consideration” was that it would be headquartered in Shanghai.

The organisation would “promote global governance featuring extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits”, state news agency Xinhua reported, without elaborating on its setup or mechanisms.

At a time when AI is being integrated across virtually all industries, its uses have raised major questions, including about the spread of misinformation, its impact on employment and the potential loss of technological control.

In a speech at the WAIC yesterday, Nobel Prize-winning physicist Geoffrey Hinton compared the situation to keeping “a very cute tiger cub as a pet”.

To survive, he said, you need to ensure you can train it not to kill you when it grows up.

The enormous strides AI technology has made in recent years have seen it move to the forefront of the US-China rivalry.

Premier Li said that China

would “actively promote” the development of open-source AI, adding Beijing was willing to share advances with other countries, particularly developing ones.

“If we engage in technological monopolies, controls and blockage, artificial intelligence will become the preserve of a few countries and a few enterprises,” he said.

Vice-Foreign Minister Ma Zhaoxu warned against “unilateralism and protectionism” at a later meeting.

Washington has expanded its efforts in recent years to curb exports of state-of-the-art chips to China, concerned that they can be used to advance Beijing’s military systems and erode US tech dominance.

Li, in his speech, highlighted “insufficient supply of computing power and chips” as a bottleneck to AI progress.

China has made AI a pillar of its plans for technological self-reliance, with the government pledging a raft of measures to boost the sector.

In January, Chinese startup DeepSeek unveiled an AI model that performed as well as top US systems despite using less powerful chips.



People watch humanoid robots boxing at an exhibition during the World Artificial Intelligence Conference in Shanghai. - **AFP**

In a video message played at the WAIC opening ceremony, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that AI governance would be “a defining test of international co-operation”.

The ceremony saw the French president’s AI envoy, Anne Bouverot, underscore “an urgent need” for global action and for the United Nations to play a “leading role”.

Bouverot called for a framework “that is open, transparent and effective, giving each and everyone an opportunity to have their views taken into account”.

Li’s speech “posed a clear contrast to the Trump administration’s ‘America First’ view on AI” and the US measures announced this week, said WAIC attendee George Chen, a partner at Washington-based policy consultancy The Asia Group.

“The world is now clearly divided into at least three camps: the United States and its allies, China (and perhaps many Belt and Road or Global South countries), and the EU – which prefers regulating AI through legislation, like the EU AI Act,” Chen told AFP.

At an AI summit in Paris in February, 58 countries including China, France and India – as well as the European Union and African Union Commission – called for enhanced co-ordination on AI governance.

However, the United States warned against “excessive regulation”, and alongside the United Kingdom, refused to sign the summit’s appeal for an “open”, “inclusive” and “ethical” AI.

Taiwanese voters reject attempt to recall opposition lawmakers

Taiwanese voters have rejected an attempt to oust 24 opposition lawmakers, an official tally showed, dealing a blow to President Lai Ching-te’s party and its hopes for taking control of parliament.

Civic groups backed by Lai’s Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) had sought to unseat 24 lawmakers belonging to the main

opposition Kuomintang (KMT) party, who they accuse of being in cahoots with China.

The KMT, which advocates closer ties with Beijing, controls parliament with the help of the Taiwan People’s Party (TPP) and has slammed the unprecedented recall effort as a DPP power grab.

A few hours after polling stations closed

across Taiwan, the Central Election Commission’s official vote count showed none of the recalls had succeeded.

Recall elections for another seven KMT lawmakers will be held on August 23.

However, the DPP needed a minimum of 12 KMT lawmakers recalled to gain temporary control of the parliament.

Public opinion has been split over the recalls, a legal process that allows voters to oust elected officials before the end of their term.

The campaign targeting KMT lawmakers has dominated politics, newspaper headlines and social media feeds for months. - **AFP**

Frustration, Gaza alarm drove Macron to go it alone on Palestine recognition

Reuters
Paris

President Emmanuel Macron's announcement that France would become the first Western member of the United Nations Security Council to recognise a Palestinian state in September has caused diplomatic ructions from the Middle East through Europe to Washington.

But it did not come out of the blue.

When Macron visited the Egyptian town of Al Arish on the border with Gaza in April, he was struck by the mounting humanitarian crisis and made clear on his return home that Paris would soon opt for recognition.

Working with Saudi Arabia, Macron came up with a plan to have France plus G7 allies Britain and Canada recognise Palestinian statehood, while pushing Arab states to adopt a softer stance towards Israel through a United Nations conference. But despite weeks of talks he failed to get others on board.

Three diplomats said London did not want to face the wrath of the United States, and Ottawa took a similar stance, leaving Macron to go it alone.

"It became increasingly apparent that we could not wait to get partners on board," said a French diplomat, adding France will work to get more states on board ahead of conference on a two-state solution in September.

Domestically Macron was under rising pressure to do something amid widespread anger at the harrowing images coming out of Gaza. Although with both Europe's biggest Muslim and Jewish communities and a polarised political landscape, there was no obvious course of action that would satisfy all sides.

Israel and its staunch supporter the United States have blasted France's move, branding it a reward for Hamas.

Macron had discussed the matter extensively with both Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in advance.

Trump said on Friday that France's decision didn't "carry any



Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas (right) meets with the then-French Economy Minister Emmanuel Macron in the West Bank city of Ramallah on September 7, 2015. (Reuters)

weight" but added Macron was "a good guy".

French officials previously considered an announcement at a conference scheduled for June at the United Nations, co-hosted by France and Saudi Arabia, to sketch out a roadmap to a viable Palestinian state while also ensuring Israel's security. But the conference was postponed amid intense US diplo-

matic pressure and after Israeli air strikes on Iran.

Macron's announcement on Thursday is linked to a rescheduled and rejigged version of the UN conference, now planned to take place tomorrow and the day after.

That meeting will be at ministerial level, but Paris decided it would hold a second event with heads of state and government on the side-

lines of the United Nations General Assembly in September, where Macron will announce formal recognition.

Some analysts say Macron has used the carrot of recognition to extract concessions from Mahmoud Abbas, the president of the Palestinian Authority which is a moderate rival to Hamas, and other regional players.

"Macron here is acting as a catalyst to get the Palestinians to deliver on the needed reforms, to get the Arabs to deliver on a stabilisation force and the disarming of Hamas," said Rym Momtaz, editor-in-chief of the Strategic Europe blog run by the Carnegie Europe think tank.

Others say while recognition has symbolic value, there will still be no functioning Palestinian state whenever the war in Gaza comes to an end.

"Recognition by a European heavyweight like France is indicative of the rising frustration with Israel's intransigent policies," said Amjad Iraqi, senior analyst at International Crisis Group.

"What's the point of recognising a state if they're doing little to stop

it from turning into ruins?"

French officials point to months of intense Israeli lobbying to try to prevent Macron's move – and Netanyahu's fierce criticism of it – as evidence that it matters a lot to Israeli leaders.

Sources familiar with the matter say Israel's warnings to France had ranged from scaling back intelligence-sharing to complicating Paris' regional initiatives – even hinting at possible annexation of parts of the West Bank.

But French officials concluded that Netanyahu would do whatever he thought was in his interests in the West Bank anyway, regardless of what France did on recognition.

Israel's parliament voted on Wednesday in favour of a non-binding declaration urging the government to apply Israeli law to the West Bank, widely seen as a de facto annexation of the territory. That added to the urgency in Paris.

"If there is a moment in history to recognise a Palestinian state, even if it's just symbolic, then I would say that moment has probably come," said a senior French official.

Orban: Multi-speed EU integration model needed to save bloc

AFP
Budapest

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban said yesterday that the European Union (EU) was at risk of "falling apart", claiming that only a multi-speed integration model could save the bloc.

The central idea of a multi-speed union is allowing some members to go faster – or slower – towards European integration with regard to certain policies and topics. The nationalist leader, known for wielding veto rights in the EU and criticising Brussels,

made the remarks after delivering his yearly speech at a summer university in Baile Tusnad, a town in Romania's Transylvania region, home to a sizeable ethnic Hungarian minority.

Answering a question on what he would do if he were head of the European commission, Orban said he would give rights back to nation states and start building a "Europe of concentric circles".

The first such circle would be focused on security and could include Turkiye and Ukraine, both of which have ambitions of joining the EU, said Orban, who has raised a series of objections and obstacles to Ukraine's EU integration.

The second circle would include economic integration and the Schengen free movement area, in which he says Hungary should stay.

The third would be the current eurozone, and the fourth would be a circle of "constitutional institutions" for those member states striving for an "ever closer union".

"Building this Europe made up of concentric circles is the only way to save the European Union. Otherwise, it'll fall apart, disintegrate, and start connecting to external reference points, like the British," Orban argued.

The Hungarian premier cited migration as an example, as Hun-



Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban reacts after delivering his speech to ethnic Hungarians, at Balvanyos Summer University, in Baile Tusnad, Romania, yesterday. (Reuters)

gary and a few other countries have been seeking an opt-out from the bloc's common asylum policy.

Orban also reiterated his threat to veto the next long-term EU budget unless Brussels unfreezes billions of euros in bloc funding

it withheld over corruption and rule-of-law concerns.

"The adoption of the new seven-year budget requires unanimity. And until we get our outstanding money, there will be no new European budget," he said, vowing

not to "make any concessions on our sovereignty."

The European Commission recently presented plans for a €2tn (\$2.3tn) budget for 2028-34 that aims to boost the bloc's competitiveness and defence capabilities.

German minister invites magnate Berlusconi to mull ProSieben bid

Reuters
Berlin

Germany's culture minister said yesterday he had invited Italian media magnate Pier Silvio Berlusconi to a meeting to discuss his company's bid to buy TV group ProSiebenSat.1, adding the German firm's journalistic independence must be preserved.

"A change of ownership at a media group like ProSiebenSat.1 would be far more than business as usual. The potential takeover would influence the media power structure of our country," Minister of State for Culture Wolfram Weimer told Reuters.

Strong private, independent television groups were important to Germany, he said: "A change in ownership must not lead to a restriction of journalistic independence. Media power is never neutral – whoever buys it bears political responsibility."

A government source and a source from Berlusconi's company said the men had agreed to hold the meeting after the summer break.

The German government source said the government also wanted to ensure that ProSieben's headquarters remained in Germany and jobs were protected.

The Berlusconi family's MFE-MediaForEurope declined to comment.

Pier Silvio Berlusconi heads the media empire of his late father Silvio Berlusconi, who served as Italy's prime minister in three separate stints from 1994-2011. The elder Berlusconi's critics at the time accused him of using his control over media properties to further his political aims.

MFE-MediaForEurope owns around 30% of ProSieben. It made a cash-and-share bid for the German group in March as part of a push to create a pan-European broadcaster.

That move triggered an all-cash counter-bid by ProSieben's second-largest investor PPF, which owns private TV stations across six Eastern European countries. ProSieben called that counter-bid financially "inadequate", and Berlusconi has said his company may yet raise its bid.



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio (right) greets his Pakistani counterpart Ishaq Dar at the Department of State in Washington, DC. (AFP)

Pakistan 'close to US trade deal'

Reuters
Washington

Pakistani Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar has said the United States and Pakistan were "very close" to a trade deal that could come within days as he met with Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

"I think we are very close to finalising a deal with US. Our teams have been here in Washington, discussing, having virtual meetings and a committee has been tasked by the prime minister to fine-tune now," Dar said in a discussion at the Atlantic Council think tank in Washington.

"It's not going to be months, not even weeks, I would say (just) days," he said.

Under US President Donald Trump, Washington has attempted to renegotiate trade agreements

with many countries that he threatened with tariffs over what he calls unfair trade relations. Many economists dispute Trump's characterisation. The US State Department and Pakistan's foreign ministry, in separate statements after Rubio's meeting with Dar, said the two stressed in their discussion the importance of expanding trade and ties in critical minerals and mining. A post by Rubio on X after the meeting and the State Department's statement mentioned no timeline for finalising a trade deal.

The Pakistan foreign ministry also said Dar "appreciated the pivotal role" by Trump and Rubio "in de-escalating tensions between Pakistan and India by facilitating a ceasefire." The State Department statement did not mention India.

Trump has repeatedly taken credit for the India-Pakistan ceasefire he announced on social media on May 10 after Washington held

talks with both sides. India disputes Trump's claims that the ceasefire resulted from his intervention and trade threats.

India's position is that New Delhi and Islamabad must resolve problems directly with no outside involvement.

An April 22 militant attack in India-administered Kashmir killed 26 men and sparked heavy fighting between the nuclear-armed Asian neighbours in the latest escalation of a decades-old rivalry.

India struck Pakistan on May 7, leading Pakistan to strike back two days later with the hostilities between the two killing dozens across three days. The ceasefire was declared on May 10.

New Delhi blamed the April attack on Pakistan, which denied responsibility and called for a neutral investigation. Washington condemned the attack but did not blame Islamabad.

Russia seizes two villages in central Ukraine

AFP
Moscow

Russia yesterday said it had wrested two villages in Ukraine, including one in the central Dnipropetrovsk region, marking a fresh advance into an area largely spared seizures of land since Moscow launched its offensive in 2022.

Overnight strikes by both sides meanwhile claimed six lives – four in central Ukraine and two in western Russia, according to officials in both countries.

The Russian army said its forces had "liberated the settlement of Maliyevka" in Dnipropetrovsk weeks after it seized the first village in the region – not one of the Ukrainian territories annexed by Russia.

In a separate message yesterday, Moscow said it had "liberated the settlement of Zeleny Gai" in Donetsk region on the border with Dnipropetrovsk, adding that it was an important stronghold used by Ukraine to protect the area.

Further north in Kharkiv, a Russian strike destroyed a large boiler room that will be impossible to repair before winter, while in Sumy, another strike hit a regional administration building, local authorities said.

Supported by swarms of drones, Russia gains new settlements almost daily, but they are normally reduced to rubble and emptied of inhabitants after months of fighting.

The summer offensive comes despite a call from the United States to cease violence and peace talks in Istanbul, which so far have yielded no breakthroughs.

Further Russian advances could harm Ukraine's economy and energy supplies as Dnipropetrovsk and Donetsk, which has been occupied since 2014, are part of Ukraine's mining heartland, particularly for coal that powers the electricity grid.

Ukrainian authorities have already been ordering civilians with children to flee a front line that is creeping closer.

Deeper Russian advances could mean more attacks on one of Ukraine's largest cities, Dnipro, though Russian troops are around 200km away.

Dnipropetrovsk is not one of the five Ukrainian regions – Donetsk, Kherson, Lugansk, Zaporizhzhia and Crimea – that Moscow has publicly claimed as Russian territory.

CHAIRMAN

Abdullah bin Khalifa al-Attiyah

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Faisal Abdulhameed al-Mudahka

Deputy Managing Editor

K T Chacko

- P.O.Box 2888, Doha, Qatar
- editor@gulf-times.com
- 44350478 (News),
- 44466404 (Sport),
- 44466636 (Home delivery)
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GULF TIMES

US-Japan trade deal averts worst for global economy

Japan’s trade agreement with the US could serve as the benchmark for many other deals currently being negotiated with Washington, and the global economy could just about support the 15% level agreed overnight, economists said.

Tokyo’s deal with the US lowers tariffs on auto imports to 15% from levies totalling 27.5% previously. Duties that were due to come into effect on other Japanese goods from August 1 will also be cut to 15% from 25%.

The deal with the world’s fourth-largest economy, which includes commitments for US-bound investment and loans, is the most significant of a clutch of pacts US President Donald Trump has concluded to date. It raises pressure on China and the European Union, which both face crucial August deadlines.

Although 15% is still a significant duty, such a level is still manageable and less damaging than the volatility created by the uncertainty, which has made it near impossible for firms to plan investments, some economists argue.

“Average tariffs for the US were around 2.5% for 2024 (while) currently, average tariffs stand around 17%,” Mohit Kumar at Jefferies said, referring to the rise in global duties since Trump’s so-called “Liberation Day” announcement on April 2.

“Our base case remains that when the dust settles, we could see average tariffs around 15%, though recent deals suggest that this number could be slightly higher,” Kumar said. “While a negative from a macro point of view, the world can live with 15% or so tariffs.”

Financial markets heaved a sigh of relief on Wednesday. Japan’s Nikkei stock index jumped 3.5% on the deal but European shares were also higher, driven by automakers, on growing optimism that workable deals are possible.

The US-Japan deal will put more pressure on other major Asia exporters to secure better deals'

news has really helped to ease investor fears that tariffs are about to snap back higher on August 1,” Deutsche Bank’s Jim Reid said.

“But of course, the threat of much higher tariffs still remains for several large economies, including the 30% on the EU, 35% on Canada and 50% on Brazil,” Reid added. “We also know from experience that we might not know the outcome until hours before the deadline.”

Longer-term US inflation expectations eased a touch on the deal, suggesting that trade agreements could alleviate some price fears and give the US Federal Reserve room to lower interest rates later this year.

However, markets continue to see a close to zero chance of a Fed rate cut next week and the first move is not fully priced in until October.

The EU, which negotiates trade deals on behalf of its 27 members, could be next. Trump has said he will impose 30% tariffs by August 1, triggering threats of retaliatory measures from the EU.

Such a level would be economically debilitating for a bloc that relies heavily on trade and would wipe out whole chunks of transatlantic commerce. The EU originally hoped it could secure a tariff of around 10% but has since accepted the outcome is likely to be several points higher at least.

Pressures also remain high on China, which is facing an August 12 deadline before tariffs could snap back to 145% on the US side and 125% on the Chinese side without a deal or a negotiated extension.

“The US-Japan deal will put more pressure on other major Asia exporters to secure better deals,” ING said. “We’ve already seen trade deals with the Philippines and Indonesia. Before 1 August, there should be more deals struck with Asian exporters.” — Reuters

“It looks like the benchmark for major economies is going to be 10-15% and a somewhat higher level for smaller economies,” Derek Halpenny, head of research at MUFG in London, said.

Volvo Car stocks jumped more than 10% while Germany’s Porsche, BMW, Mercedes-Benz and Volkswagen, all with significant US sales, rose between 4% and 7%.

“This more positive trade means that dollar-denominated energy revenues generate fewer roubles for the Russian budget. Russian businesses also argue it is making exports more expensive to buyers in dollars and other currencies.”

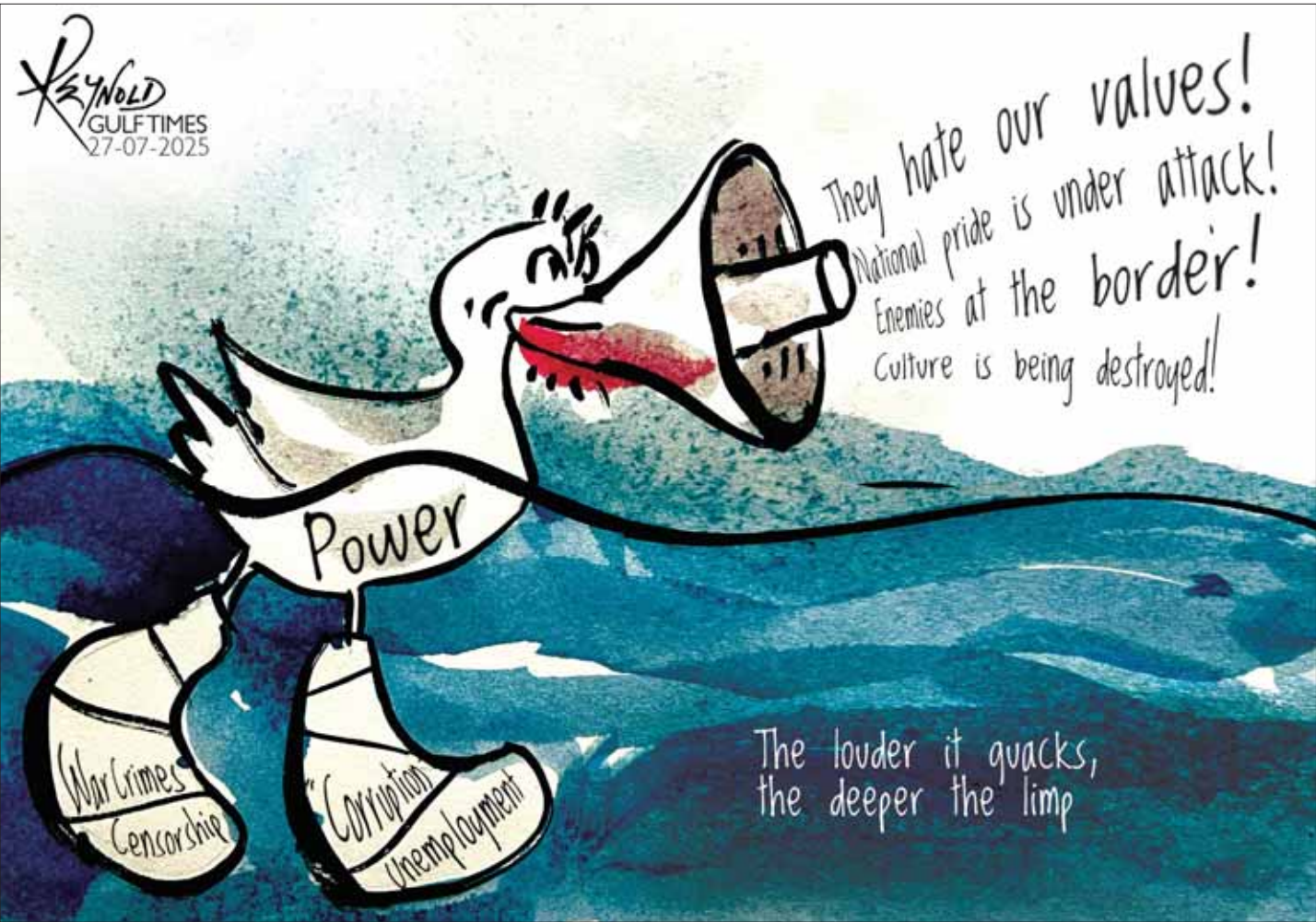
But President Vladimir Putin’s central bank governor, Elvira Nabiullina, argues that a softer currency would be a sign of economic vulnerability.

Nabiullina, who on Friday announced the latest interest rate decision, says the exchange rate is not just there to please exporters, stressing that the strong rouble is a product of the tight monetary policy needed to fight stubbornly high inflation.

The following explains some of the factors behind the rouble’s rise and its implications.

The rouble has strengthened about 45% against the dollar this year. The rise is driven primarily by the central bank’s tight monetary policy and optimism after US-Russia talks in February raised hopes for a peace settlement in Ukraine.

Interest rates on rouble deposits have also soared above 20%, making the currency attractive to savers and as a speculative trade for its yield. At the same time,



Why Russian rouble is outperforming US dollar and what it means

Reuters
Moscow

The Russian rouble’s 45% rise against the US dollar since the start of the year has made it one of the world’s best performing currencies — but the sharp appreciation is proving to be a double-edged sword for the heavily sanctioned Russian economy.

The strength of the rouble means that dollar-denominated energy revenues generate fewer roubles for the Russian budget. Russian businesses also argue it is making exports more expensive to buyers in dollars and other currencies.

But President Vladimir Putin’s central bank governor, Elvira Nabiullina, argues that a softer currency would be a sign of economic vulnerability.

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high borrowing costs have slowed imports, reducing demand for foreign currency.

The weakness of the US currency, whose index lost 6.6% since President Donald Trump’s “Liberation Day” tariff announcement on April 2, has also helped the rouble.

Although the central bank says there is a freely floating exchange rate, it has been selling the Chinese yuan, its only major intervention tool, to support the rouble. When the rouble strengthens against the yuan, its rate against the dollar strengthens as well to avoid arbitrage.

The stronger rouble helps the regulator fight inflation by making imports cheaper. VTB’s First Deputy CEO Dmitry Pyanov alleged recently this is part of a deliberate strategy.

The rouble is also supported by currency controls introduced after the start of the war in Ukraine to prevent capital flight but recently exporters have been repatriating more foreign currency revenues than they are obliged to.

Since sanctions hit the Moscow Stock Exchange (MOEX) in 2024, the rouble trades over-the-counter against the dollar and euro. Banks report their quotes to the central bank, which uses them to set the official rate.

This market is opaque since only the central bank sees full transaction data. Some smaller, mostly non-Russian banks report quotes to market data providers.

The rouble trades against the yuan on MOEX. Dollar/rouble futures, which also trade on MOEX, provide some market guidance on exchange rate. There is no black market rate for foreign currency in Russia.

The rouble is no longer a major internationally traded currency and many Western companies and banks have left Russia. But Russia remains a top oil and agriculture exporter and the world’s 11th largest economy.

Russia’s push to shift trade into non-Western currencies, especially the yuan, may have implications for the global dominance of the US dollar in the long-term. Major developing economies like China and India are watching closely.

The yuan has overtaken the dollar as Russia’s most traded foreign currency. In 2024, 95% of Russia’s trade with China was settled in yuan and roubles.

Yuan-rouble trading volumes on the Moscow Exchange reached 33tn roubles (\$420bn) in 2024. Russia’s total trade with China hit a record \$245bn. The rouble is up against the yuan by 25% this year.

Energy firms repatriate yuan earnings, while importers use yuan to buy goods. Most analysts now focus on the rouble/yuan rate, not the dollar.

The government wants a weaker rouble to boost budget revenues. The 2025 budget assumes an average rate of 94.3 roubles per dollar, but the current rate is around 78.

If the rouble stays strong, VTB analysts estimate the budget could lose 2.4% of its revenues this year.

Exporters, from oil to metals to agriculture, are also hurting. A stronger rouble makes their revenues shrink. Many officials and business leaders say they would prefer a rate of 100 to the dollar.

Putin has not spoken publicly about the rouble’s strength in recent months.

The public still sees the dollar as the benchmark, even though yuan use is rising. Cash dollars and euros remain available in bank branches, though there are now far fewer exchange offices than in previous decades.

Sanctions have made foreign travel and dollar and euro international transfers harder, reducing demand for cash dollars.

In the first quarter of early 2025, Russians bought about 200bn roubles’ worth of foreign currency, unchanged from a year earlier. High rouble interest rates have made foreign currency savings less attractive.

Analysts have warned for months that the rouble is overvalued, but the currency has defied their forecasts so far.

The central bank is widely expected to cut interest rates at its upcoming meeting. If it does, market rates will fall as well, prompting savers to pull money from rouble deposits. That could weaken the currency.

A bigger test looms in early September, when a 50-day deadline set by US President Donald Trump for Russia to show progress toward peace in Ukraine expires. If new US sanctions targeting buyers of Russian oil follow, the rouble could come under renewed pressure.

The last time the rouble weakened significantly was in November 2024, after Washington sanctioned Gazprombank, which had handled oil and gas payments.

A source close to the central bank pointed to Reuters that when the regulator cut the key rate from 17% to 11% between February and July 2015, the rouble took several months to weaken gradually. This is the regulator’s expectation this time. — Reuters



The strength of the rouble means that dollar-denominated energy revenues generate fewer roubles for the Russian budget.

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Silicon Valley’s \$4bn gamble on defence manufacturing

By Lizette Chapman
Bloomberg

Every month Neros Inc makes hundreds of drones designed to drop warheads on adversaries. By the end of the year, the company wants its new Southern California factory to crank out 10,000 per month. Never mind that Neros only has orders for 36,000 of them for Ukraine.

“If we wait until a buyer comes knocking and asks for a certain quantity of drones built at a certain pace, it will be too late,” said Chief Executive Officer Soren Monroe-Anderson. “The supply chain is the hard part. We are putting in the work now” to be able to produce weapons later, he said.

Neros is one of a growing number of startups betting on the great re-industrialisation of America’s defence base. Dozens of other Silicon Valley industrial companies are building out large manufacturing operations, at the same time the Trump administration pushes to bulk up defence spending. A rough tally of plans by just a few of the better-known startups in the industry shows they’re spending a collective \$4bn and counting over the next few years on shipyards, factories and manufacturing tools and equipment.

Weapons maker Anduril Industries Inc and autonomous ship builder Saronic Technologies are undertaking the largest projects, investing \$1bn and \$2.7bn respectively to build software-operated manufacturing megafactories, capable of producing tens of thousands of AI-powered autonomous ships, aerial drones, fighter jets and other weapons.

They’re joined by other venture-backed players like factory startup Hadrian, drone and defence company Shield AI, satellite firm Astranis Space Technologies Corp, and industrial parts and manufacturing upstart Divergent Technologies Inc. This month, Varda Space Industries Inc, backed by investors like Peter Thiel’s Founders Fund, raised \$187mn to open a lab in California to bolster its drugmaking efforts and frequency of its missions to space.

Meanwhile, other tech leaders have even grander ambitions. The developers of the billionaire-backed futuristic community California Forever are planning to build the largest defence-focused industrial manufacturing park in the US that will also include a shipyard near San Francisco. Another project, Frontier Valley, hopes to construct 5mn square feet of Bay Area manufacturing space.

“This new age of defence is about rapid manufacturing,” said Lux Capital general partner Brandon Reeves, whose firm has backed Anduril, Varda and Hadrian. “Everyone is trying to get to scale.”

The efforts could help address a glaring problem in American national security: the slow speed of US weapons manufacturing compared with China.



Drones being assembled at the Neros headquarters in Los Angeles, California. (Bloomberg)

In most modern -day wartime scenarios, the country that’s able to quickly produce the most autonomous drones, ships and other hardware has a vast advantage, meaning America is poorly positioned. VCs and startups have been vocal about this problem — Joe Lonsdale has invoked the critical role of World War II -era production efforts, and Andreessen Horowitz adviser Matt Cronin has called the issue an “existential threat” to US national security.

But building out industrial infrastructure is a gamble for venture investors who are spending large sums to expand production with no guarantee that famously hard-to-get defence contracts will materialise. VCs have ploughed more than \$70bn into the top 100 defence startups, which have so far secured about \$29bn total in contracts, according to a July report by the Silicon Valley Defence Group.

“It’s a chicken -and -the -egg problem,” said General Catalyst Managing Director Paul Kwan, an investor in Anduril, Saronic and more than a dozen other defence startups planning to expand in advance of contract awards. “Private capital has stepped up. That’s absolutely the investment risk we are taking.”

While startups are making inroads — the Defence Department more than doubled its annual spending on startups in 2024 — the group still represents less than 1% of the overall defence budget, per the report’s tally.

By far, the bulk of defence spending goes to traditional contractors, specifically Lockheed Martin Corp, RTX Corp, Boeing Co, Northrup Grumman Corp and General Dynamics Corp. Known as the “Big Five”, these firms have been around for decades and have deep Washington relationships. And while these legacy companies have the benefit of well -established supply chains and large -scale production facilities, many in Washington and Silicon Valley have complained that they move too slowly,

weighed down by layers of bureaucracy that affect how quickly they can innovate. Startups can boast of their more nimble structures and up -to -the -minute technology, but they usually lack a track record, so it’s often difficult for them to break through the complicated world of Washington procurement that prioritises reliability.

“The market is telling these companies to grow — and investors are backing them. But the Department of Defence has not yet built the contracting infrastructure or funding flexibility to meet the moment,” the Silicon Valley Defence Group writes. The result could be a “two -speed ecosystem” where private capital continues to grow while public funds remain tied to legacy processes and contractors. “Ultimately, this is not sustainable,” the authors say, “and we risk ecosystem momentum collapse.”

One marquee player in defence tech is Epirus Inc, which makes electronic weapons capable of zapping drones out of the sky. The company is prepared to spend as much as \$50mn to build a new facility in Oklahoma this year to make the high -powered microwave devices that can identify and disable hostile drones.

CEO Andy Lowery says he will be able to increase production by 2027 to as many as 100 units a year from the current handful of prototypes now in use. But whether he’ll be able to sell those units once he makes them is less clear.

“We know this is going to be needed, but I’m scared. Where’s the paperwork?” Lowery said. “For me to put a shovel in the ground I want the order.”

The biggest companies in the industry have already decided that building big manufacturing facilities is worth the risk. For example, Anduril, which closed a \$2.5bn funding round last month, is in the process of building out a sprawling megafactory in Ohio. Called Arsenal -1,



A drone flying in the flight test room at the Neros headquarters. (Bloomberg)

the complex is the size of 87 football fields. It will include at least nine buildings and ultimately employ around 4,500 people manufacturing nearly all of Anduril’s drones, missiles, mini -fighter jets and other products.

Arsenal -1 is intended to be the first of several such large -scale undertakings in the coming years, the company has said, as it works toward building advanced manufacturing systems designed to be quickly replicated in other US and allied locations.

Meanwhile, Saronic, which raised \$600mn earlier this year, is spending \$2.5mn to build a modern shipyard it’s calling Port Alpha and an additional \$200mn to renovate an existing shipyard. Saronic CEO and co -founder Dino Mavrookas said his company is “on a mission” to bring back shipbuilding on a scale not seen since World War II, and is seeking to double its employee count to 700 by the end of this year.

So far, Saronic has collected just \$33mn in contracts from the federal government, according to data compiled by Bloomberg Government. But with a new partnership and at least three new ship products this year, Mavrookas expects more.

Shipbuilding, like rocket factory construction, could help the US meet a critical need. America builds less than 1% of the world’s new ships per year, while China produces roughly half. The issue is urgent enough that the Trump administration recently issued an executive order calling for more construction. Companies like Saronic could play a key role in advancing naval technology while helping the US catch up to potential adversaries.

However, even if the orders come in, there’s no guarantee that new Silicon Valley technology will play the role technologists hope it will. As more companies hustle to lock down US

supply chains, design modern factories and staff assembly lines in anticipation of increased demand — they have yet to prove new technology will work as promised, or that the new factories can handle a massive production surge.

“They are untested. I have an open question about whether these companies can actually scale production of these new weapons systems,” said Becca Wasser, defence deputy director for the Center for a New America Security. “They say they can do it, but mass production is really, really hard.”

Moving fast in defence manufacturing requires many pieces of a production puzzle to come together at the same time. Neros, which is backed by Founders Fund and Sequoia Capital, is struggling to find enough rocket motors from a US -based supplier to produce 10,000 drones a month. After working for months to expand production, the startup has located a monthly supply of only around 3,000 motors so far — enough to fulfil its current orders, but well short of its ultimate goal of 1mn a year.

Despite the obvious challenges that come with manufacturing, swathes of Silicon Valley appear undeterred. Y Combinator Managing Director Jared Friedman said a combination of patriotism and a sense of opportunity has galvanised many of the young entrepreneurs that come through the popular tech accelerator. Where software once was the obvious choice for ambitious founders, today a growing number want to make drones, robots, ships and other advanced hardware.

“What’s going to be the next big thing? What smart, young people want to work on,” Friedman said, adding that he expects the revenue to eventually follow the investments. “I’m quite optimistic that investors are predicting the future correctly.”

Smuggled mercury shows extent of illegal Amazon gold mining

By Dan Collyns
Lima

The seizure of one of the largest known mercury shipments in history, moving from mines in Mexico to illegal Amazon gold mining zones, exposes the wide use of the toxic metal in the rainforest, according to authorities.

Peru’s customs agency, SUNAT, found four metric tonnes of illegal mercury in Lima’s port district of Callao, according to a report by the non -profit Environmental Investigations Agency (EIA).

“This SUNAT intervention has prevented this chemical from having a serious impact on people’s health and the environment, as can be seen in several areas of the country devastated by the illegal use of mercury and illicit activities,” SUNAT said in a statement.

The vast transnational smuggling operation trafficked some 200 tonnes of elemental mercury over more than six years, an amount that would have contributed to the production of at least \$8 billion worth of illegal gold, according to the EIA, which worked alongside SUNAT to uncover the network.

“The toxic flow of mercury to the illegal gold mines in the Amazon has been presented and accepted as inevitable for too many years,” said Alexander von Bismarck, Executive Director at EIA US.

“It is time to challenge this status quo that affects Amazonian communities and benefits organised criminals,” he said.

The scheme spanned at least four countries — Mexico, the country of origin, Peru, the destination for three -quarters of the mercury, Colombia and Bolivia — between April 2019 and June 2025.

All four are signatories of the Minamata Convention on Mercury to protect human health by reducing and ultimately eliminating mercury use, and the undeclared shipments were in direct violation of the convention.

Record gold prices have encouraged a flourishing illegal mining trade that damages local nature and biodiversity and is raising significant health concerns.



A truck transports barrels used in gold mining along the road to Delta 1, a mining settlement in the Amazon rainforest of Madre de Dios, Peru. The barrels are commonly repurposed as flotation devices.

With the price of gold surpassing \$3,000 per ounce, mercury, which is used to extract the gold in illegal mines in the Amazon, is worth four times as much.

A highly dangerous neurotoxin, mercury is one of the top 10 chemicals of major public health concern, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO).

It enters the food chain, bioaccumulates and causes developmental delays in children, cognitive impairment and multiple other serious health problems for Amazonian communities.

“To extract gold, rivers and streams are polluted, and territories are plundered,” said Julio Cusurichi, an Indigenous leader and Goldman Environmental Prize winner, in Madre de Dios, the Peruvian Amazon region most heavily impacted by illegal gold mining.

“Mercury pollution even affects fish, which is the

daily diet of our Indigenous communities. Now the contamination is reaching all of us who live in the Madre de Dios region, Indigenous or not,” he said.

Mercury air pollution in parts of Madre de Dios is more than 5.5 times higher than the WHO’s safety levels.

The investigation uncovered a network involving organised crime groups allegedly centred around a mercury trader identified as Juan José Zamorano Davila, based in Querétaro state, Mexico, according to the EIA and Peruvian authorities.

Zamorano allegedly oversaw procurement, concealment, export logistics and financial structuring of the shipments, according to the EIA.

The route begins in Querétaro, where a few active mercury mines, some located within the Sierra Gorda

Unesco Biosphere Reserve that is considered a unique ecosystem of cultural significance, produce dozens of tonnes of mercury each year to feed gold mining demand in the Amazon.

Evidence collected by EIA indicated some of the mines are controlled by the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, one of Mexico most powerful illegal drug networks.

In May, sources from the Querétaro mines told investigators that “mercury fever” has hit the region this year, triggered by record prices of about \$330 per kg offered by mercury traffickers as a consequence of skyrocketing gold prices.

Once smuggled into South America from the Mexican port of Manzanillo, the mercury was moved through ports and companies with alleged ties to organised crime and resold in illegal gold mining zones, including territories controlled by armed criminal groups like the Clan de Golfo (AGC) and the ELN in Colombia.

The mercury found in the port of Callao was hidden in sacks of gravel and falsely declared as crushed stone or decorative rocks to bypass customs.

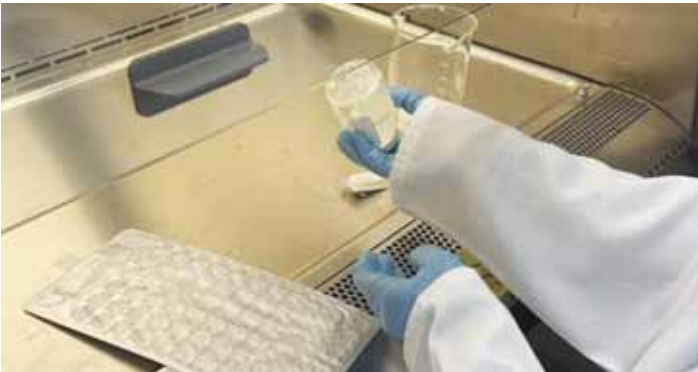
Invoices for the shipments were inflated and misclassified to disguise their contents. Each 20 -tonne container was declared at \$11,000 (about 20 times higher than legitimate gravel prices) despite actually containing mercury worth up to \$2mn.

The container intercepted in Peru tested positive for mercury vapour levels 480 times above safety thresholds.

The shipment was marked as destined for Bolivia, passed through the port of Callao and, the investigation showed, was diverted through Peru’s southern city of Arequipa, a distribution hub for destinations such as Madre de Dios.

Similar shipments were traced to Colombia as well as Bolivia, often routed through the US port of Houston, Texas, creating a potential jurisdiction issue in the United States.

The routes underscore the global nature of the trafficking operation and also bring attention to limited inspection in transshipment scenarios, the report said. — Thomson Reuters Foundation



MoECC organises summer training for university students

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC)'s Environmental Monitoring and Inspection Department is organising a training programme for a number of students from the Environmental and Biological Sciences Department at Qatar University's College of Arts and Sciences.

The programme is taking place from June 15-August 7 as part of the ministry's summer training programme for university students.

The programme aims to enhance the students' analytical and re-



search skills through introducing them to scientific research mechanisms and methodologies used in their fields of study.

The programme also provides the students with the opportunity to gain insight into the work of the Environmental Monitoring and Inspection Department and its laboratories.



Blind table tennis takes the spotlight at QF's Ladies Night

The Qatar Cultural Centre for the Blind hosted a blind table tennis activation at Qatar Foundation (QF)'s Ladies Night at Education City Stadium, highlighting the power of inclusive sport and encouraging women and girls to stay active.

The QF Ladies Night offers a vibrant, inclusive space for women and girls aged six and above to try new sports and connect with others through a variety of free fitness classes and activities.

"Qatar Foundation has been a pioneer in supporting Qatari women in sports," Maryam al-Kuwari, the events and activities supervisor at the Qatar Cultural Centre for the Blind, said. "This collaboration helps promote sports for blind women as part of a healthy lifestyle, while also increasing awareness and acceptance of inclusive athletic opportunities."

"This partnership provides a socially inclusive and culturally sensitive space for blind girls to engage in physical activity," she said. "It fosters their integration and empowers them through safe and supportive sporting environments."

Blind table tennis is an adapted form of the sport played on a longer table with raised side edges and a ball that contains a bell for sound-based tracking.

Players use rectangular bats and roll the ball under a wooden barrier that replaces the traditional net.

The game relies entirely on auditory cues, with players using sound to follow and respond to the ball's movement.

"I have been playing table tennis for one year," said participant Amal Adam. "My friends taught me how to play, and it's very enjoyable. We have to rely on our ears - we listen because we can't see - so we need to concentrate on the sound. I play with lots of friends."

"I'm very happy to be here at the Education City Stadium and I am enjoying it a lot," she said. "It's my first time at QF's Ladies Night, and it's a special experience for me. I'd definitely like to come back."

Providing advice to others who are visually impaired, she added: "I encourage others to try the sport if they get the chance. My advice is to keep going - do whatever you enjoy, just give it a try and don't give up."

"Every journey starts with challenges, but it gets easier," Adam stated.

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The festival at the Easter Square of Souq Waqif runs until August 7. **PICTURES:** Shmeer Rasheed

Local Dates Festival records sales of over 33 tonnes in first two days

The 10th edition of the Local Dates Festival has recorded the sale of more than 33 tonnes in the first two days.

The sales of dates, according to figures shared by Souq Waqif Management on X, stood at 19,408kg on the first day and 14,884kg on the second day.

The festival, which started on Thursday at the Easter Square of Souq Waqif and runs until August 7, features several types of dates and date products along with locally grown fruits.

Held under the auspices of the Ministry of Municipality and the Souq Waqif Management, the festival is open from 4pm-9pm except on Fridays and Saturdays, when it is open from 4pm-10pm.

The annual dates festival features all Qatari varieties, including Al Khalas, Al Khenaizi, Al Shishi, Al Barhi, Al Saqai, Al Razizi, Nabt Saif and Al Lulu.

The festival also sells locally grown fruits, including fig and papaya, and date products like cakes, shakes and ice creams.

