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SPORT | Page 1

Wathnan's Fallen Angel reclaims the spotlight in Prix Rothschild

Media City Qatar holds strategic Japan roadshow

Media City Qatar has successfully held a strategic roadshow spanning from Osaka to Tokyo in Japan, engaging top leaders across media, gaming, and creative sectors to scale their businesses in the Middle East through Media City Qatar. The visit was designed to attract Japanese companies to Qatar by offering insight into the country's growing media ecosystem, world-class infrastructure, and tailored business incentives. The delegation was led by CEO of Media City Qatar, Jassim Mohamed al-Khori. **Business Page 1**

Tasweer festival to run until Sept 20

Tasweer Photo Festival Qatar announced the launch of its 2025 Open Call for the Single Image and Project Awards, running from August 1 to September 20, 2025. The two award categories offer participants the chance to engage with the broader artistic community and gain international recognition. Director of Tasweer, Khalifa al-Obaidly, said that with the launch of the 2025 Tasweer Awards, they reaffirm their mission to nurture and support the region's image-makers at every stage of their careers. **Page 3**

Ukrainian drones hit Sochi oil depot

A Ukrainian drone attack sparked a fire at an oil depot in Sochi, the Russian resort that hosted the 2014 Winter Olympic which is 400km from the Ukrainian border, authorities said yesterday. "Sochi suffered a drone attack by the Kyiv regime last night," an official said. He said drone wreckage hit an "oil tank, which caused a fire" during the nighttime attack. Air traffic was briefly suspended at Sochi airport, Russia's air transport regulator Rosaviatsia said. Ukrainian authorities have not commented on the fire. **Page 11**

Iran removes zeros from plunging rial



The economic commission of Iran's parliament revived long-delayed plans yesterday to cut four zeros from the country's plunging currency, as part of efforts to simplify financial transactions. "Today's meeting of the economic commission approved the name 'rial' as the national currency, as well as the removal of four zeros," said the parliament's website. Under the proposed system, one rial would be equivalent to 10,000 at the current value and subdivided into 100 gherans. **Page 4**

54 migrants die, dozens missing in shipwreck

At least 54 migrants died when a boat carrying around 150 people sank off Yemen's coast in bad weather yesterday, with dozens still unaccounted for, health officials said. The boat capsized off the Ahwar district in Yemen's southern Abyan province on the Arabian Sea. A provincial official said 10 of the around 150 people on board were rescued - nine Ethiopians and one Yemeni - but dozens remained missing. Migrants cross the Bab al-Mandab strait that separates Djibouti and Eritrea from Yemen each year on flimsy boats in the hope of reaching Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries in the hope of finding work. **Page 5**

Pro-Palestinian rally in Sydney



Demonstrators march across the Sydney Harbour Bridge during a pro-Palestinian rally, in Sydney, yesterday.

OIC condemns storming of Al-Aqsa Mosque by Israeli extremist minister

QNA
Jeddah

The Organisation of Islamic Co-operation (OIC) strongly condemned the storming of the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound by extremist minister Itamar Ben-Gvir and settlers yesterday, under the protection of Israeli occupation forces.

In a statement, the OIC held the Israeli occupation government fully responsible for the consequences of these systematic attacks, which constitute a provocation to the feelings of Muslims around the world and a serious threat to security and stability in the region.

The OIC urged the international community to assume its responsibilities, take immediate action to halt these grave violations, and ensure the preservation of the historical and legal status quo at Islamic and Christian holy sites in occupied Jerusalem.

AFP adds from Ankara: Turkiye yesterday blasted the Israeli government minister for conducting a Jewish prayer on the Al-Aqsa compound in east Jerusalem.

In a highly controversial move, Israel's far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir publicly conducted a Jewish prayer at the mosque's compound, which is Islam's third-holiest site.

"We strongly condemn the raid carried out on the Al-Aqsa Mosque by certain Israeli ministers, under the protection of Israeli police and accompanied by groups of Israeli settlers," the Turkish foreign ministry said in a statement.

"The security of Al-Aqsa Mosque and the preservation of Jerusalem's sacred identity are not only regional priorities but also a primary responsibility on behalf of humanity's collective conscience," it said.

Jewish religious rituals are prohibited in the compound by a long-standing agreement between Israel and Jordan, custodian of the site.

In recent years, the understanding, known as the "status quo" has been repeatedly violated by Jewish visitors, including members of Israel's parliament.

6 more die of hunger in Gaza; starvation death toll reaches 175

Reuters
Cairo

Six more people died of starvation or malnutrition in Gaza over the past 24 hours, its health ministry said yesterday as Israel said it allowed a delivery of fuel to the enclave, in the throes of a humanitarian disaster after almost two years of war.

The new deaths raised the toll of those dying from what international humanitarian agencies say may be an unfolding famine to 175, including 93 children, since the war began, the ministry said.

Egypt's state-affiliated Al Qahera News TV said two trucks carrying 107 tonnes of diesel were set to enter Gaza, months after Israel severely restricted aid access to the enclave before easing it somewhat as starvation began to spread.

COGAT, the Israeli military agency that co-ordinates aid, said later in the day that four tankers of UN fuel had entered to help in operations of hospitals, bakeries, public kitchens and other essential services.

Gaza's health ministry has said fuel shortages have severely impaired hospital services, forcing doctors to focus on treating only critically ill or injured patients.

Fuel shipments have been rare since March, when Israel restricted the flow of aid into the enclave in what it said was pressure on Hamas to free the remaining hostages.

In response to a rising international uproar, Israel announced steps last week to let more aid reach the population, including pausing fighting for part of the day in some areas, approving air drops and announcing protected routes for aid convoys.

UN agencies say airdrops are insufficient and that Israel must let in far more aid by land and open up access to the territory to prevent starvation among its 2.2mn people, most of whom are displaced amidst vast swathes of rubble.

Meanwhile, Belgium's air force dropped the first in a series of its aid packages into Gaza yesterday in a joint operation with Jordan.

France on Friday started to air-drop 40 tonnes of humanitarian aid.

Palestinian local health authorities said at least 40 people had been killed by Israeli gunfire and air strikes across the coastal enclave yesterday. Deaths included persons trying to make their way to aid distribution points in southern and central areas of Gaza, Palestinian medics said.

According to Israeli officials, 50 hostages now remain in Gaza, only 20 of whom are believed to be alive.

Gaza massacre toll climbs to 60,839

Medical sources in Gaza Strip announced yesterday that the death toll has risen to 60,839 — most of them women and children — since the start of the Israeli aggression on the Strip on October 7, 2023. The same source reported that the number of injured has climbed to 149,588 since the beginning of the assault.



A Palestinian family share a bowl of lentil soup outside their tent in the Daraj neighbourhood in Gaza City, yesterday.

Qatar fintech market sees upward trend driven by funding, policy

Qatar's fintech market is witnessing substantial growth, driven by a combination of robust investment, favourable government policies, and a surge in innovative ideas and services, according to a report by the Investment Promotion Agency Qatar (Invest Qatar) and Qatar Financial Centre (QFC).

Titled 'Qatar's FinTech Ecosystem: Trends and Opportunities', the report examines fintech trends in the regional and global scene, and provides a comprehensive analysis of the country's rapidly evolving fintech ecosystem.

"It highlights key national strategies, initiatives, and value propositions, serving as a comprehensive guide for stakeholders seeking to navigate the dynamic fintech landscape," the report explained.

Qatar offers comprehensive funding support for fintech companies, guiding them from their very early stages all the way to potentially listing on the QSE

The number of fintech companies in Qatar is set to grow considerably in the coming years, backed by increasing national funding efforts, the report stated. Fintech led all sectors in venture funding in Qatar in 2024, grabbing "40%" of the country's total investment and showing an impressive "581%" increase in funding compared to the previous year. The Qatar Investment Authority's (QIA) $1bn-fund of funds programme is expected to further boost venture capital investments in the sector, the report stated.

Qatar's readiness for fintech is clear, creating many opportunities in areas like digital payments, SME-enabling tech, insurance technology (Insurtech), ethical and green fintech, and regulatory technology (RegTech).

The country is also focusing on tools that help businesses, such as those using distributed ledger technology (DLT), and solutions for people who don't have full access to traditional banking services, like crowdfunding and embedded finance (underbanked tech).

Qatar offers comprehensive funding support for fintech companies, guiding them from their very early stages all the way to potentially listing on the Qatar Stock Exchange (QSE). This includes various funding amounts, from small seed investments of $10,000 to $250,000, up to larger 'Series C' investments of over $10mn. Support comes from various sources, including angel investors, accelerators, crowdfunding platforms, and institutions like Doha Tech Angels, venture capitalists, and the Qatar Development Bank (QDB).

Also, Qatar stands out regionally due to its comprehensive and well-organised support system for fintech. This includes forward-thinking regulations for Islamic fintech, with new 'Buy-Now-Pay-Later' models being tested under ethical guidelines. The 2024 QFC Digital Assets Framework is also significant, setting up legal rules for smart contracts and digital asset storage.

The report emphasised that government efforts are well-coordinated: The Qatar Central Bank (QCB) operates a 'sandbox' "for live-market experimentation under regulatory oversight, with a clear progression pathway to licensing." On the other hand, the QFC "offers fintech-friendly legal and tax frameworks, fast-track licensing and 100% foreign ownership, facilitating easier market entry and scale for regional and global players."

Similarly, the QIA's first venture capital fund of funds is designed to attract top venture capital firms and entrepreneurs to Qatar, aiming to boost the growth of early-stage fintech and Islamic technology startups, the report pointed out.

QATAR

NHRC reiterates condemnation of Israeli attacks on Palestinians

The National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) reiterated its condemnation of the serious attacks that the Israeli occupation has been continuously committing against the Palestinian people since Oct 7, 2023, in a flagrant violation of all rules of international humanitarian law and international human rights law obligations, including repeated deliberate attacks against civilians and civilian facilities.

The committee said in a statement that these attacks resulted in the killing of more than 60,000 civilians — the majority of whom were women and children, and the injury of at least 148,722 people in the Gaza Strip, in addition to the injury of over 7,500 civilians in the West Bank during the occupation's raids, arrests and colonist attacks.

In this context, HE the Chairperson of National Human Rights Committee Maryam bint Abdullah al-Attiyah affirmed that the Israeli occupation's ongoing attacks against the Gaza Strip have created an extremely difficult humanitarian reality, such as depriving civilians from their most basic human rights necessary for survival, such as food, safe water, healthcare and adequate housing, by deliberate targeting of homes, hospitals and civilian institutions.


NHRC Chairperson HE Maryam bint Abdullah al-Attiyah.

HE al-Attiyah expressed her deep concern about the policy of starving civilians practised by the Israeli occupation authorities through the deliberate denial of access to food and the imposition of severe obstacles and restrictions on relief organisation's work, pointing out that these restrictions led food indicators to exceed the threshold of famine and caused death among the population, especially among children, as a result of hunger and severe malnutrition.

She stressed the need for an immediate and comprehensive cessation of attacks against civilians and civilian facilities, and an end to the occupation's policy of starvation and the deliberate denial of basic rights, including the elimination of restrictions imposed on the work of humanitarian organisations to enable them to provide relief assistance to those in need.

HE the NHRC chairperson welcomed the role that Qatar plays in addressing the humanitarian impact of the Israeli occupation's attacks against the residents of the Gaza Strip, in addition to the country's mediation efforts, in cooperation with Egypt and the US, to achieve a comprehensive and sustainable ceasefire. She called on the international community to act immediately and decisively to end the dire humanitarian conditions that the people of the Gaza Strip are facing.

She also warned of the danger of overlooking genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity that the Israeli occupation has been repeatedly committing against the Palestinian people, calling for international criminal measures to hold those responsible for these grave violations accountable and to prevent their impunity.

The international silence regarding these crimes constitutes a crime in itself, fostering impunity, undermining international efforts to establish criminal justice, and weakening the principles of international law, she continued.

HE al-Attiyah expressed the committee's serious concern about the current situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, particularly in the Gaza Strip, warning that the continuation of this situation threatens the credibility of the entire international system, including human rights mechanisms. (**QNA**)



Awqaf concludes its 2025 summer training programme

The Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs , represented by the Human Resources Department, concluded its 2025 summer training programme with a closing ceremony that honoured 73 high school and university students, along with supervisors from the Training and Administrative Development Section and supervisors from the departments that hosted the trainees.

The ceremony featured presentations by participating students, showcasing the most prominent administrative and technical skills they acquired during their training period, as well as what they learned about the ministry's vision, mission, and services it provides to the community.

The students praised the programme's comprehensive content, which helped enhance their professional skills, train them for the workplace, and leverage AI techniques in preparing reports and presentations. They also learned about the ministry's mission of advocacy and community service.

For his part, Director of the Human Resources Department Mohammed Hassan al-Maliki commended the students' commitment and eagerness to utilise their summer vacation to acquire practical skills. He noted that the program is part of the ministry's efforts to support the human development pillar of Qatar National Vision 2030 by preparing a generation qualified to enter the labour market.

Al-Maliki urged participants to continue developing their skills and reinforce the practical values they had learned, such as punctuality, teamwork, effective communication, preparing correspondence and reports, and managing meetings.

For her part, Head of Awqaf's Training and Administrative Development Section, Salwa Abdullah al-Badr al-Mutawa'ah confirmed that 33 male students and 40 female students participated in the programme, and were distributed according to their preferences among four main departments within the ministry: the Information Systems Department, the Religious Call and Guidance Department, the Zakat Affairs Department, and the General Department of Endowments.

Al-Mutawa'ah explained that the 2025 summer training programme focused on developing participants' skills in communication and dealing with the public, mastering archiving, analysing statistics, and using AI applications, with periodic weekly assessments to measure progress and motivate outstanding performance. (**QNA**)

Libyan VP meets Qatar envoy


Vice-President of the Presidential Council of Libya, Abdullah al-Lafi, met with Qatar's ambassador in Tripoli, Dr Khaled Mohammed bin Zabin al-Dosari. The meeting discussed bilateral relations. (**QNA**)

QNA chief meets Peru envoy


HE the Director-General of Qatar News Agency (QNA) Ahmed bin Saeed al-Rumaihi met yesterday with Peru's ambassador to Qatar Gonzalo Voto Bernales. During the meeting, they discussed areas of co-operation between the two countries in the field of media. (**QNA**)



Ministry of Awqaf wraps up Arabic course in Tatarstan

The Sheikh Abdulla Bin Zaid Al Mahmoud Islamic Cultural Centre (Fanar), a Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs affiliate, concluded its Arabic language teaching skills development course, which targeted 15 teachers from Tatarstan's Islamic schools.

Under the patronage of HE the Minister of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs Ghanem bin Shaheen al-Ghanem, a closing ceremony was held at Fanar's headquarters yesterday, which reflected the deep cultural and religious ties between Qatar and Tatarstan.

Part of the ministry's ongoing efforts to promote the Arabic language and strengthen Islamic culture globally, the course aimed to train teachers and enhance their linguistic and educational skills, along with their Islamic knowledge. It ran from July 6-Aug 3.





In a speech delivered on behalf of Fanar Director Dr Saleh Ali al-Marri, his assistant Sultan Saad al-Badr said that the course aligns with Qatar's vision and the Awqaf Ministry's mission to support the Arabic language and foster cultural connections with the Islamic world. He noted that this programme is part of a series of Fanar's international initiatives carried out in countries such as Russia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In addition to its academic component, the programme featured cultural visits, scholarly gatherings, and field tours to Qatar's Islamic and heritage landmarks, deepening participants' understanding of Islamic culture.

The closing ceremony included a video presentation about the course, as well as a speech delivered by one of the course's participants on behalf of himself and his colleagues, expressing their gratitude to Qatar's government and people, for the care and attention they received during the programme.

At the end of the event, participants were honoured and received their certificates, in the presence of Assistant Undersecretary for Islamic Affairs Khalid Shaheen al-Ghanim, in addition to Dr al-Marri. (**QNA**)

Ministry of Commerce and Industry shuts down car company for violating Consumer Protection Law

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry issued an administrative decision to shut down Al Jaidah Automotive Company for 30 days due to failure to provide spare parts and delays in after-sales services, in violation of Article 16 of Law No 8 of 2008 on Consumer Protection.

In a statement yesterday, the ministry clarified that Administrative Decision No 18/2025 was issued after 29 repeated violations of the same nature were recorded against the company. Despite multiple prior warnings, the company failed to take the necessary corrective actions, prompting the ministry to implement the closure.

The ministry emphasised that this decision is part of its ongoing regulatory efforts to safeguard consumer rights and enforce compliance with laws and regulations, particularly those related to after-sales service and the provision of essential spare parts to ensure product safety and quality.

The ministry affirmed that it will continue to conduct inspection and oversight campaigns and take legal measures against any violations of the Consumer Protection Law, in order to uphold a fair commercial environment that protects the rights of all parties.

It also urged all citizens and residents to report any violations by contacting the call centre at 16001 or through the ministry's social media platforms. (**QNA**)

Municipalities intensify inspections in 2nd quarter

All the municipalities across the country intensified their inspections in the areas of health, public, and technical aspects during the second quarter of 2025 (April-June), resulting in the detection of a number of violations and the closure of several non-compliant food establishments.

These efforts also included effective campaigns to combat insects and rodents, improvements in customer service levels, and expedited procedures for issuing advertising permits, all in line with the commitment to enhance public safety and improve service quality.

These efforts included carrying out 85,284 inspection visits in the field of health control on food establishments, 39,486 visits in the area of public control, and 29,287 visits in technical inspection. Collectively, these resulted in issuing 8,466 violations across these three municipal control sections, in addition to the closure of 27 non-compliant food establishments.

Meanwhile, 59,136 pest and rodent control service requests were carried out, 9,964 customer service requests were received, and 17,217 advertising permit requests were processed. (**QNA**)

Waldorf Astoria Doha West Bay names new executive pastry chef

Waldorf Astoria Doha West Bay has announced Alessandra Banfi as its new executive pastry chef. Known for her creative style, international experience, and deep love for pastry, chef Alessandra brings a fresh and inspiring approach to the hotel's dessert offerings.

Born in Maracaibo, Venezuela, from a Greek mother and an Italian father, chef Alessandra was surrounded by diverse cultures and food traditions from a young age. She discovered her love for pastry at the age of 12 and has followed that passion ever since. Throughout her career, she has worked in reputable hotels in Greece and the UAE. She represented Greece at the prestigious Valrhona C3 pastry competition in Paris. She has also supported culinary teams in New York and Dubai, learning and growing with each experience.

Besides her career in hospitality, chef Alessandra is also a successful entrepreneur and educator. She founded 'The Cookie Method', an online pastry class and business school that successfully reached many students around the world.

Her first cookbook named 'ABC' which was a calendar recipe book, released in 2021, was a success and sold out quickly. She is now working on her second book, which will focus on her favourite treat - cookies.

Mentored by world-famous pastry chef, Antonio Bachour, chef Alessandra is known for her beautiful dessert designs and bold flavours, especially while using high-quality cocoa products.

Chef Alessandra is excited to explore local flavours and ingredients, combining them with her personal style to create new and exciting desserts for hotel guests and visitors.

"It is an honour to be part of Waldorf Astoria Doha West Bay," said Chef Alessandra. "Qatar has a warm and rich culture that inspires me. I look forward to using that inspiration in my work to create desserts for all palates."


Chef Alessandra Banfi.

Doha Municipality ensures quality and safety of food items at dates festival

Doha Municipality Health Control Section of the Municipal Control Department is participating at the 10th Local Dates Festival, organised by the Ministry of Municipality and the Souq Waqif Management.

The municipality's participation focuses on carrying out intensive inspection and health control campaigns targeting farms and food companies taking part in the festival, which showcase dates and date-related products, alongside a variety of fruits and other food items. These efforts aim to ensure adherence to the proper health practices in food handling and to protect consumers from any potential risks.

In addition, the municipality provides guidance and health awareness to workers in these establishments to enhance the safety of the displayed products and raise nutritional and health awareness among those working in the sector.

Such efforts are part of the supervisory and educational role played by Doha Municipality, in line with the Ministry of Municipality's strategy to enhance food security and achieve the highest standards of food safety across the country.





Tasweer Photo Festival Qatar announces open call for 2025 awards

Tasweer Photo Festival Qatar announced the launch of its 2025 Open Call for the Single Image and Project Awards, running from Aug 1-Sept 20.

The latest edition of this biannual initiative continues to celebrate and support photographers aged 18 and above living in Western Asia and North Africa (WANA) by offering funding, exposure, and professional development opportunities through two distinct award categories.

"With the launch of the 2025 Tasweer Awards, we reaffirm our mission to nurture and support the region's image-makers at every stage of their careers," said, Tasweer director Khalifa al-Obaidly in a press statement.

"These awards not only provide financial and curatorial support but also serve as a powerful platform for sharing personal and collective narratives through photography. Tasweer remains deeply committed to fostering a thriving visual arts community in the WANA region, grounded in collaboration and creative expression," he added.

The two awards categories offer participants the chance to engage with the broader artistic community and gain international recognition, contributing to the growth of photography and visual culture across the WANA region.

2025 Tasweer Award Categories are:

Tasweer Single Image Award
Open to photographers of all levels, this award invites submissions of a single photographic image that conveys a personal experience or narrative. Each selected photographer will receive a QR2,000 cash prize and will have their work featured in Tasweer exhibitions, with further visibility through online and public programming.

Tasweer Project Award
Awarded photographers will receive a QR30,000 grant to initiate, develop, or complete a photographic project. Recipients will benefit from exhibition opportunities at the fourth edition of Tasweer Photo Festival in 2027, as well as curatorial guidance, mentorship, and the chance to showcase their work through in-person and digital platforms, including publications and public programmes.

The Tasweer Photo Festival Awards continues to serve as a vital platform for both emerging and established photographers, championing the role of photography in shaping and sharing regional perspectives with a global audience.

Heart of Scorpion to converge with Moon in Qatar's skies this month

People in Qatar and the Arab region are poised to witness the phenomenon of the star Antares (the Heart of the Scorpion) reaching its closest apparent point to the Moon twice this month. They can, likewise, observe this celestial phenomenon during this period by gazing at the southern horizon after sunset, Qatar Calendar House (QCH) has reported.

Astronomy expert at QCH, Dr Bashir Marzouq, said that the star Antares will appear next to the Moon for the first time this evening (Aug 4).

People in Qatar can enjoy beholding Antares and the Moon together with the naked eye, high on the southern horizon of Qatar's sky after sunset today, and until before Antares sets, Dr Marzouq said.

It is noted that the sunset time today will be at 6:18pm, while Antares is expected to set at 12:19am Doha local time.

Dr Marzouq further elucidated that, as for the evening of Sunday, Aug 31, the star will converge with the Moon for the second time during August, with an angular separation of about one degree.

People in Qatar can enjoy gazing at Antares and the Moon together with the naked eye high on the southwestern horizon of Qatar's sky from sunset on Sunday, Aug 31 at 5:55pm, while Antares is expected to set at 10:33pm Doha local time, he said.

Overall, Marzouq said that the very significance of these celestial phenomena lies in the fact that it is a good opportunity to ensure the accuracy of the astronomical calculations used to determine the orbits of planets, stars, and the Moon, in addition to the opportunity to enjoy beholding and photographing the Moon and the star Antares together at their closest point in the sky.

These celestial phenomena, he said, serve as a guide for astronomy enthusiasts and those interested in identifying the celestial bodies they observe in Qatar's skies. (**QNA**)

SRK fans in Qatar upbeat after star wins National Film Award

By Shafeeq Alingal
Staff Reporter

Indian fans in Doha are upbeat and elated after their favourite star Shah Rukh Khan won the National Film Award- one of the oldest and most prestigious accolades in the Indian film industry. Many in Doha see the achievement as an emotional milestone that boosts their sense of pride and respect towards Khan, who is among India's most iconic stars and an integral part of the movie culture.

Fans told *Gulf Times* that the recognition adds much to his invincible aura, which he earned through decades long hard work and dedication. "He has evolved into a brand, not only in India but across the globe. His journey from the film *Deewana* to becoming an international icon is a testament to relentless ambition, unmatched charismatic personality and fearless choices," said Hasin Ahmed.

Khan, 59, won the recognition for his dual role in the 2023 movie *Jawan*. Directed by Indian film maker Atlee, the blockbuster portrayed the current issues in India with a focus on rampant corruption. He was conferred with the award after a legendary career spanning more than 30 years-an achievement that many see as long overdue.

"His journey from telefilms to ruling the silver screen has been nothing short of legendary. In *Jawan*, he didn't just play a vigilante, he embodied the voice of the unheard, the fury of the betrayed, and the hope of a nation. And the world took notice," said RJ Sameer.

"I am overjoyed to hear that he has won a National Award for his incredible performance in *Jawan*. This film resonated with me on so many levels, and I still remember the thrill of managing to secure four tickets to see it in theatres with my friends. The anticipation was electric and


Poster of Jawaan movie from Shah Rukh Khan official Insta account.

when he made his grand entry on screen, the entire audience erupted in applause, giving him a standing ovation," said Naziya Amir.

In Doha, the response to his films is nothing short of euphoric. His films are met with thunderous applause. "Every release feels like a festival, with fans gathering to celebrate his artistry. The atmosphere in the theatre is charged with excitement, as we cheer for our beloved King Khan. His films have a unique way of bringing people together, and the magic of SRK continues to inspire and unite fans across the globe," Amir noted.

"The desert air shimmered with pride as the King of Bollywood stood tall, not just as an actor, but as a symbol of resilience, reinvention and relentless passion," Sameer continued.

"This award is not just for *Jawan*. It is for *Swades*, *Chak De! India*, *My Name Is Khan*, for every time he made us believe in something bigger than ourselves," he added.

Khan is one of the most beloved and influential figures in Indian cinema. "He denied the traditional formulas written by Bollywood's so-called 'trade pundits'. From redefining stardom to building a brand rooted in charisma, intelligence, and emotional connection, Shah Rukh Khan became much more than just the 'King of Romance'. He became a heartthrob for millions across the globe," Hasin added.

Syrian Media Club, QPC hold seminar on sectarian rhetoric among Syrians

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

A seminar was held at the Qatar Press Center (QPC) in which a select group of researchers and intellectuals participated. Speakers included Dr Marwan Qabalan, Director of the Political Studies Unit at the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, and Dr Mudar al-Dibs, a Syrian writer and researcher. It was moderated by media personality Rula Haidar.

Haidar emphasised that the seminar was held at a critical time following a significant escalation in sectarian rhetoric among Syrians, particularly in the wake of the events in Sweida, which she described as a "breaking point", reflecting the depth of the crises Syrians are experiencing at this sensitive stage.

Dr Qabalan emphasised that sectarian discourse in Syria is not a recent phenomenon, but rather has deep roots in the country's history, albeit to varying degrees.

He pointed out that the former Syrian regime worked to taint national identity with a single ideological colour, which led to a major rift in the relationship between state and society.


Syrian Media Club



From left: Rula Haidar, Dr Marwan Qabalan, Dr Mudar al-Dibs.

He explained that the Syrian military establishment has witnessed major defections since the beginning of the revolution, among the reasons for which were the sense of marginalisation felt by large segments of the population due to their lack of representation in state institutions.

He noted that the alliances that emerged to confront the regime during the revolution were not sectarian, but rather encompassed diverse sectarian factions. This demonstrates that the division in Syria was, at its core, social and class-based rather than sectarian. It was more of a conflict between the countryside and the city, which controlled the regime.

He explained that the absence of social justice and the monopolisation of power and wealth by a particular group led to a state of general discontent, which quickly transformed into a clear sectarian divide after the outbreak of the Syrian revolution, especially with the regime's use of this rhetoric as a means of defence and fragmentation of the revolutionary street.

Dr Qabalan pointed out that one of the most prominent manifestations of the crisis today is the weakness of a unifying national identity, resulting from the absence of a state of justice and law. Citizens feel that the relationship between them and the state is purely administrative, limited to routine transactions and interests.

He explained that the Syrian state, despite everything it has been through, has remained institutionally viable. He noted that basic services, such as electricity, have not been interrupted, indicating that institutions continue to function, even if their effectiveness is weak.

He warned that the absence of the state does not only mean the absence of institutions, but also the absence of a state of citizenship, equality, and equal opportunity, which forces citizens to resort to sub-identities such as sect or tribe in search of protection and belonging.

In this context, he emphasised that the current regime must succeed in its mission, warning against the occurrence of uncontrollable chaos, as has happened before. He called on all segments of the Syrian population to stand behind the new regime and help it achieve stability.

Dr al-Dibs emphasised that sectarian rhetoric cannot arise in a sound political context. Where real politics exist, sectarian and tribal tendencies naturally collapse. He said: "What we are experiencing today is a direct result of the collapse of the nation-state project and the decline of political discourse in favour of identity-based and emotional discourse."

He believed that the moment of sectarian rhetoric's explosion — as evidenced by the events in Sweida — reflects the fragility of Syrian national identity. He warned that transforming every historical or symbolic event into a sectarian occasion is extremely dangerous and weakens any unity.

Renewed clashes in south Syria kill four: monitor

AFP
Damascus

Renewed sectarian clashes in southern Syria's Druze-majority Sweida province killed at least four people yesterday, a war monitor said, as Damascus accused local groups of violating last month's ceasefire.

The province witnessed deadly clashes between Druze fighters and Sunni Bedouins in July that drew the intervention of government forces and tribal fighters who came to support the Bedouins.

A ceasefire put an end to the week of bloodshed — which killed 1,400 people, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights — but the situation remained tense, flaring into violence again yesterday.

The Observatory said three Syrian security forces personnel were killed "as clashes erupted with local factions around Tal Hadid in the western Sweida countryside".

The Observatory also reported the death of a "local fighter".

Tal Hadid, controlled by government security forces, is a "key control point" at a relatively high altitude, according to the monitor, allowing whoever holds it to overlook neighbouring areas.

Fighting also erupted around the city of Thaala, the Observatory said. "Following bombardment of the area with shells and heavy weapons launched from areas under the control of government forces, while the sound of explosions and gunfire was heard in various parts of Sweida city".

Syrian state-run news agency SANA accused Druze groups loyal to influential spiritual leader Hikmat al-Hijri of breaching the ceasefire by attacking government troops in Tal Hadid, killing one security forces officer and injuring others.

In a statement, the Syrian interior ministry accused local groups of "launching treacherous attacks against internal security forces in several locations and striking some villages with rockets and mortars, resulting in the killing and wounding of a number of security personnel".

A security source told Syrian state television that government forces regained control of Tal Hadid and other areas that were attacked yesterday.

According to the monitor and Sweida locals, Damascus has been imposing a siege on the province, with the Observatory saying the government wants to "force inhabitants to comply".

On Friday, Sweida residents held protests across the province to demand the withdrawal of government forces and the opening of an aid corridor from neighbouring Jordan.

The road linking Sweida to Damascus has been cut off since July 20.

Damascus accuses Druze groups of cutting it, but the Observatory says armed groups allied with the government took control of the area and have been blocking travel.

The UN was able to send some aid convoys to the province, but an interior ministry source told Syrian state television on Sunday that the humanitarian corridor was temporarily closed "until the area is secured after outlaw groups violated the ceasefire".

The government has said it will investigate July's violence in Sweida, and a committee in charge of the inquiry held its first meeting on Saturday.

Israeli strike damages PRCS headquarters



A view shows damaged property after a reported Israeli strike, at what the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) says is their headquarters, in a location given as Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip, in this handout photo released yesterday.

Moroccan aid for Palestinians



Humanitarian aid packages bound for Palestinians in the Gaza Strip are loaded into the back of a Royal Moroccan Air Force C-130 Hercules military transport aircraft at Kenitra Air Base north of Rabat on Saturday, to be eventually unloaded at Israel's Ben Gurion airport and transported to the Kerem Shalom crossing. As part of the humanitarian airlift launched from Kenitra, Morocco dispatched to Gaza 37 tonnes of aid out of a planned total of 180 tonnes including food for children and infants, medicine, surgical equipment, as well as tents and blankets.

Iran moves to remove zeros from plunging national currency

AFP
Tehran

The economic commission of Iran's parliament revived long-delayed plans yesterday to cut four zeros from the country's plunging currency, as part of efforts to simplify financial transactions.

"Today's meeting of the economic commission approved the name 'rial' as the national currency, as well as the removal of four zeros," said the parliament's website ICANA, quoting Shamseddin Hosseini, the commission's chairman.

Under the proposed system, one rial would be equivalent to 10,000 at the current value and subdivided into 100 gherans, according to ICANA.

The proposed re-denomination was first mooted in 2019 but then shelved. The current bill will have to pass a parliamentary vote and gain the approval of the Guardian Council, a body empowered to vet legislation.

It was not immediately clear when the parliamentary vote would take place.

In May, Iran's Central Bank Governor Mohammad Reza Farzin said he would pursue the plan, noting that the Iranian rial "does not have a favourable image" in the global economy.

The move comes as Iran faces deepening economic challenges, including runaway inflation, a sharply devalued currency, and the prolonged impact of international sanctions.

As of yesterday, the rial was trading at around 920,000 to the US dollar on the street market, according to local media and the Bonbast website that monitors unofficial exchange rates.



This picture shows old Iranian bank notes of one million, 500,000, and 100,000 rials (left) and the new banknotes with four zeros removed (right). The economic commission of Iran's parliament revived long-delayed plans yesterday to cut four zeros from the country's plunging currency, as part of efforts to simplify financial transactions.

In practice, Iranians have long abandoned the rial in everyday transactions, using the toman instead. One toman equals 10 rials.

Iran's economy has long been under severe strain due to sweeping US sanctions since Washington's 2018 withdrawal from a landmark nuclear deal during US President Donald Trump's first term in office.

Upon returning to office in January, Trump revived his "maximum pressure" sanctions campaign on Tehran.

In June, Iranian lawmakers approved new economy minister Ali Madanizadeh after his predecessor, Abdolnaser Hemmati, was ousted in a no-confidence vote for failing to address the country's economic woes.

The same month Israel launched an unprecedented attack on Iran's nuclear and military infrastructure, beginning a deadly 12-day war.

QATAR FUND FOR DEVELOPMENT
صندوق قطر للتنمية

QFFD announces the following Public Tender:

SN	TENDER NO.	TENDER NAME	TENDER FEE (USD)	TENDER BOND (USD)	CLOSING DATE
1	QFFD/PFP-O/PDS/0077/05-2025	PROVISION OF PROJECT MANAGEMENTCONSULTANCY SERVICES ON CALL OF BASIS FOR (3) YEARS FOR QFFD PROJECTS	$ 500	$ 40,000	17-September-2025

- Tender Document of the above Tender is available for collection via email from **the date of this advertisement until Bid closing date.**
- Interested parties shall first deposit the appropriate Tender Fee (non-refundable) as mentioned above; payable to:

  Bank Name: Al-Rayan Bank
  Account Name: Qatar Fund for Development
  Account Number: 0003-102031-202
  IBAN: QA14MAFR00000000000003102031202

  (Company Name, Tender Name & Tender Number must be mentioned in the deposit slip)
- The Tender document will be issued upon receiving a copy of the Commercial Registration, Classification Certificate (if any) and proof of payment via email: overseas.tender@qatarfund.org.qa.
- Tender document submitted should be accompanied with a Tender Bond in accordance with the tender document shall be issued by a local Qatari Bank or by an international Bank confirmed and endorsed by any local Qatari Banks valid for 180 days from date of closing date.
- The Closing time will be no later than 12:00 noon, on the closing date mentioned above; any offer arriving thereafter will not be considered.
- Tender document to be submitted at:
  SECRETARY, TENDER COMMITTEE
  Qatar Fund for Development
  L9 Floor, Laffan Tower
  P.O. Box 23366
  Doha, Qatar

Iran sets up new defence council

Reuters
Dubai

Iran's top security body approved the establishment of a National Defence Council yesterday, according to state media, following a short air war with Israel in June that was Iran's most acute military challenge since the 1980s war with Iraq.

"The new defence body will review defence plans and enhance the capabilities of Iran's armed forces in a centralised manner," the Supreme National Security Council's Secretariat was quoted as saying by state media.

The defence council will be chaired by Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, and consists of the heads of the three government branches, senior armed forces commanders, and relevant ministries.

Yesterday, the commander-in-chief of Iran's military, Amir Hatami, warned that threats from Israel persist and should not be underestimated.

Beating the heat in Dubai



People enjoy the beach during the summer heat in Dubai yesterday.



Aid packages dropped from an airplane descend over Gaza, in Zawayda, in the central Gaza Strip yesterday.

Hamas says will only allow ICRC access to hostages if aid corridors opened

AFP
Gaza City

Hamas said yesterday that it would only allow the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to provide aid to Israeli hostages on the condition that humanitarian corridors are opened to Gaza.

"(We) are ready to respond positively (to) any request by the Red Cross to deliver food and medicine to enemy prisoners. However, we condition our acceptance on the opening of humanitarian corridors... for the passage of food and medicine... across all areas of the Gaza Strip," Hamas's military wing wrote in a statement.

The response came after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu requested that the ICRC help provide food to the hostages held in Gaza, and after the agency issued a "call to be granted access to the hostages" in a statement posted on X.

Netanyahu's office said he spoke to the ICRC co-ordinator for the region, Julien Lerisson, and "requested his involvement in providing food to our hostages and... immediate medical treatment".

The ICRC said in a statement it was "appalled by the harrowing videos" and reiterated its "call to be granted access to the hostages".

The Al-Qassam Brigades said it did "not intentionally starve" the hostages, but they would not receive any special food privileges "amid the crime of starvation and siege" in Gaza.

Earlier in the day, tens of thousands of people had rallied in the coastal hub of Tel Aviv to call on Netanyahu's government to secure the release of the remaining captives.

EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said that "large-scale humanitarian aid must be allowed to reach those in need".

Israel has heavily restricted the entry of aid into Gaza, while UN agencies, humanitarian groups and analysts say that much of what Israel does allow in is looted or diverted in chaotic circumstances.

Many desperate Palestinians are left to risk their lives seeking what aid is distributed through controlled channels.

Yesterday, Gaza's civil defence agency said Israeli fire killed nine Palestinians who were waiting to collect food rations from a site operated by the US- and Israeli-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF) near the southern city of Rafah.

"The soldiers opened fire on people. I was there, no one posed any threat" to the Israeli forces, 31-year-old witness Jabr al-Shaer told AFP by phone.

Palestinians across West Bank protest Gaza war

AFP
Ramallah

Thousands of Palestinians protested in the occupied West Bank's major cities yesterday against the war in Gaza and in support of Palestinians held in Israeli prisons.

One of the largest marches took place in Ramallah, the seat of the Palestinian Authority located just north of Jerusalem, with hundreds gathering at the main square, waving Palestinian flags.

Many protesters carried photos of Palestinians killed or imprisoned by Israel, as well as photos depicting the hunger crisis unfolding in the Gaza Strip, where UN-backed experts have warned that a "famine is unfolding".

"My son is in (Israel's) Megido prison and he suffers from many things, such as the lack of medicine the lack of food," Rula Ghanem, a Palestinian academic and writer who took part in the march, told AFP.

She told AFP that her son had lost 10 kilograms and suffered from scabies in jail.

The number of Palestinians jailed by Israel skyrocketed after the start of the war in Gaza, some for violent acts, but some also for posting political statements on social media, the Palestinian Commission of Detainees' and Ex-Detainees' Affairs says.

The commission's spokesman Thaer Shriteh told AFP: "The international community is a partner in all this suffering, as long as it does not intervene quickly to save the Palestinian people and save the prisoners inside the prisons and detention centre." A group of protesters dressed as skeletons and carried dolls around to symbolise the Gaza war's dire effect on children, who are most at risk of malnutrition.

Israel has heavily restricted the entry of aid into Gaza, which was already under blockade for 15 years before the war began.

UN agencies, humanitarian groups and analysts say that much of the trickle of food aid that Israel allows in is looted or diverted in chaotic circumstances.

"We hope that our stand today will have an impact in supporting our people in Gaza and the hungry children in Gaza," said 39-year-old Tagreed Ziada, one of the protesters at the Ramallah march.

Protests were held yesterday in other major Palestinian cities such as Nablus in the north and Hebron in the south, with many government employees receiving a day off to attend the demonstrations.



Demonstrators, some dressed in human skeleton costumes, carry bloodied bundles and raise pictures of Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails, during a protest in solidarity with the people of the Gaza Strip and Palestinian detainees, in the occupied-West Bank city of Ramallah yesterday.

At least 54 migrants die as boat sinks off Yemen, dozens missing

Reuters
Aden

At least 54 migrants died when a boat carrying around 150 people sank off Yemen's coast in bad weather yesterday, with dozens still unaccounted for, health officials said.

The boat capsized off the Ahwar district in Yemen's southern Abyan province on the Arabian Sea, security sources said.

Abdul Qadir Bajameel, a provincial health official, said 10 of the around 150 people on board were rescued — nine Ethiopians and one Yemeni — but dozens remained missing. Two medics said rescuers were still looking for survivors.

The International Organisation for Migration says Yemen continues to witness a significant increase in the influx of irregular migrants arriving from Africa.

Migrants cross the Bab al-Mandab strait that separates Djibouti and Eritrea from Yemen each year on flimsy boats in the hope of reaching Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries in the hope of finding work.

The IOM describes the route from the Horn of Africa to Yemen as "one of the world's busiest and most perilous mixed migration routes". It said it recorded the arrival of more than 60,000 migrants in Yemen last year.

Arab League workshop on data analysis using AI

A training workshop on scientific research techniques and data analysis using artificial intelligence (AI) began yesterday at the headquarters of the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States in Cairo.

The five-day workshop aims to provide researchers with advanced tools and methodologies that leverage AI to improve all processes related to scientific research and data analysis. It also offers theoretical presentations on scientific research methodologies in research preparation and practical applications using various AI tools, such as data search and analysis, and extracting results through working groups.

The workshop is organised by the Social Field Studies and Surveys Unit of the Social Affairs Sector of the League of Arab States, in co-operation with the Permanent Delegation of Libya to the League, and with support from the Arab Gulf Programme for Development (AGFUND). Thirty researchers and students from Libya, as well as students studying scientific and academic disciplines at universities and colleges in Egypt, are participating in the workshop. (**QNA**)

مناقصة
Tender

تدعو شركة مناطق الاقتصادية (مناطق) الشركات المحلية والعالمية للاشتراك بالمناقصة الآتية

MANATEQ (Economic Zones Company) would like to invite competent local and/or international Companies for the following Open Tender.

رقم المناقصة Tender No.	موضوع المناقصة Tender Subject	قيمة التأمين الابتدائي Tender Bond	رسوم المناقصة/ غير مستردة Tender Fee / Non-refundable	موعد الإغلاق Closing Date
TC 09/2025	أعمال طرق المرحلة الثانية من تعديلات أراضي التخزين المفتوح الحالية بمنطقة الكرعانة Modification of Al Karaana Existing Open Yard Road Works Phase 2	800,000.00 QR	5,000.00 QR	9th Sep. 2025

Description of work :
Road works for phase 2 of the modifications of the existing open yard storage area in Al Karaana Zone including the assosiated grading and earth works

Collection Date and Location:
Starting 4th August 2025 (09:00am to 02:00 pm)
MANATEQ Headquarters - Small and Medium Industeries Zone (Operations Division).

وصف العمل:
أعمال الطرق للمرحلة الثانية من تعديلات منطقة التخزين المفتوح الحالية في منطقة الكرعانة، بما في ذلك أعمال التسوية والأعمال الأرضية المرتبطة بها

موعد ومكان استلام وثائق المناقصة
بدءًا من 4 أغسطس 2025 (9 صباحًا حتى الـ 2 ظهرًا)
المقر الرئيسي لشركة مناطق بمنطقة الصناعات الصغيرة والمتوسطة (إدارة العمليات).

Email: opstendering@manateq.qa البريد الإلكتروني:

The "Project Breif" booklet includes further details about the project and can be downloded free of charge using the QR Code or the below link

يحتوي كتيب «نبذة عن المشروع» على مزيد من المعلومات عن المشروع، ويمكن الحصول عليه مجانا من خلال هذا الكود أو الرابط أدناه.

https://portal.manateq.qa/PBRF-TC-09-2025.pdf

Tender Fees could be paid through a cheque, payable to 'Economic Zones Company QSC (Manateq) ~ or electronically as per below:

يتم دفع رسوم المناقصة من خلال شيك قابل للدفع بإسم شركة المناطق الاقتصادية (مناطق) أو عن طريق تحويل بنكي للحساب التالي:

Account Name : Economic Zones Company - Manateq
Bank : Qatar National Bank **Account No.** : 0013-026499-001
IBAN No. : QA19QNBA000000000013026499001 **SWIFT CODE** : QNBAQAQA

Collect the tender documents must comply with the following:
1 - Delegation for receiving tender documents.
2 - Copy of representative ID.
3 - Tender fees bank account depositing slip

لتحصيل وثائق المناقصة يتعين الإلتزام بما يلي :
١- احضار تفويض لاستلام وثائق المناقصة.
٢- صورة من البطاقة الشخصية للمندوب الذي سوف يحصل على وثائق المناقصة.
٣- ايصال ايداع رسوم وثائق المناقصة.

Submission location
Secretary Tenders Committee, Economic Zones Company, in the above address.
P.O.Box: 29000 - Doha - Qatar.

موقع التسليم
أمين سر لجنة المناقصات، شركة المناطق الاقتصادية، في العنوان الموضح أعلاه
صندوق بريد: 29000- الدوحة - قطر

تحتفظ شركة المناطق الاقتصادية بكامل حقها في تعديل شروط المناقصة في أي وقت بدون إبداء أسباب و/ أو إلغاء المناقصة بدون إبداء أسباب وبدون أدنى مسئولية عليها في هذا الصدد أياً كان نوعها او مصدرها
Economic Zones Company reserves its right in modifying terms of the tender at any time and\or cancelling the tender at any time without need of providing reasons and without any responsibility on its part whatever its kind

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Alfardan Exchange
Wins the Arab Banks Awards & Commendations of Excellence 2025



Alfardan Exchange has been honored with the "Arab Banks Awards & Commendations of Excellence 2025", during a gala ceremony held at the InterContinental Phoenicia Hotel in Beirut, Lebanon on July 18, 2025. The event was attended by a group of ministers, distinguished guests, and prominent figures from the Arab banking and financial sector. Presented by the World Union of Arab Bankers, this distinction recognizes Alfardan Exchange as the strongest provider of currency exchange and remittance services in Qatar for 2025.

In this context, Mr. Bashar Al-Waqfi, CEO of Alfardan Exchange, stated:

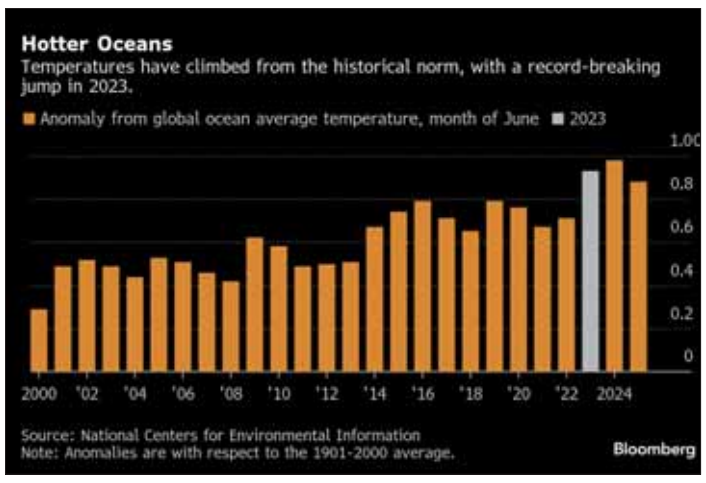
"This honor reflects Alfardan Exchange's commitment to delivering safe and reliable financial services to our valued clients and stands as a testament to their trust in us and our dedication to excellence. Our ongoing goal is to provide innovative financial solutions that meet the highest standards of quality and professionalism in the Qatari market. I would also like to extend my gratitude and appreciation to the Qatar Central Bank for its continued support of the exchange sector by enacting regulations that encourage improved service quality and innovation."

Alfardan Exchange continues to expand and enhance its services in response to its clients' evolving needs, adopting the latest technologies and upholding transparency and integrity in all financial transactions. These efforts support the company's vision to be the premier choice for financial services in Qatar.



WORLD

‘Unprecedented’ ocean heatwaves suggest climate tipping point



By Danielle Bochove
Bloomberg

The world’s oceans experienced a staggering amount of warming in 2023, as vast marine heat waves affected 96% of their surface, breaking records for intensity, longevity and scale, according to a new study.

That could mark a turning point in the way the oceans behave, potentially signaling a tipping point after which average sea temperatures will be reset higher and some ecosystems may not recover, say the authors of the study, which was published Thursday in the journal *Science*.

“The ocean going to a new normal — that controls everything,” said Zhenzhong Zeng, an Earth systems scientist at China’s Southern University of Science and Technology, who led the work. “Once we destroy it, then maybe it cannot go back.”

Ninety per cent of the 2023 oceanic heating anomalies occurred in the North Atlantic, Tropical Eastern Pacific, North Pacific and Southwest Pacific. The average length of the heat waves was 120 days — four times the average length between 1980 and 2023, according to Tianyun Dong, lead author on the paper and an Earth systems scientist at China’s Eastern Institute of Technology. The North Atlantic marine heat wave, which began in 2022, stretched for 525 days.

“The ocean has a long memory,” Dong said. It plays a key role regulating global temperatures by storing and gradually releasing large amounts of heat, but because it is slower to react than the atmosphere, the impact of long-term heat changes can be both delayed and enormous.

The researchers used a combination of real-world measurements from the ocean, satellite data and computer modeling to determine the scope and causes of the heating. The highest temperature spike was seen in the Tropical Eastern Pacific, which was 1.63C hotter than normal. While the onset of the El Niño weather phase likely contributed to that, a key finding of the paper is the extent to which different drivers played a role in marine heatwaves in different locations. Other factors include increased solar radiation from reduced cloud cover; weaker winds; and changes in ocean currents — factors which can themselves be caused by global warming. Taken together, they show climate change is having an intensifying impact on the oceans.

What the paper doesn’t explain is why so many drivers came together in 2023, resulting in so many smashed records, said Zeng. It may be that these changes are beginning to reinforce each other in ways that are not yet understood. Identifying such feedback loops, and figuring out their mechanics, is critical to understanding future heat events, he said.

In the near term, a marine heat wave can be devastating for humans who depend on the ocean for their livelihood, like fishing communities. “It can also fuel stronger hurricanes and storms along the coast,” said Yuntian Chen, a researcher in mechanics at China’s Eastern Institute of Technology and one of the study’s authors.

And if ocean heat reaches a tipping point, some species won’t recover. There are already concerns this could be the case for some of the world’s largest coral reefs. That has other ramifications: The loss of coral and kelp, for example, reduces the ocean’s ability to sequester carbon, which leads to more heating.

The hottest year on record was 2023 — until 2024, when the Earth’s average temperature reached 1.55C above the pre-industrial average, according to the World Meteorological Organisation, and when the average ocean temperatures hit a new high. This year is unlikely to break the annual record again, but is expected to come close. June 2025 was the third-warmest June in 176 years, after 2024 and 2023, according to a recent report by the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The WMO tracks global temperatures based on six international datasets, including one run by NOAA, whose NCEI Coastal Water Temperature Guide was decommissioned by the US government in May. Zeng’s team relied on NOAA data for its work, some of which is no longer available.

The cutbacks are “a disaster,” he said. “We are all living on the same planet. The climate is really changing.”


Beached and dead coral around Lizard Island on the Great Barrier Reef near Cairns, Australia. (**AFP**)

Why India has vowed to protect farmers against tariff threats

US President Donald Trump on Thursday slapped a 25% tariff on Indian goods after prolonged talks that got bogged down over access to India’s labour-intensive agricultural sector, which New Delhi has pledged to protect.
The United States is pressing India to open its markets to a wide range of American products, including dairy, poultry, corn, soybeans, rice, wheat, ethanol, fruits and nuts. While India is willing to provide greater access for US dry fruits and apples, it is holding back on corn, soybeans, wheat, and dairy products.
A key reason for this resistance is that most US corn and soybeans are genetically modified (GM), and India does not permit the import of GM food crops.
GM crops are widely perceived in India as harmful to human health and the environment, and several groups affiliated with Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are opposing their introduction.
The commercial cultivation of a high-yielding GM mustard variety that India developed itself is currently not allowed due to an ongoing legal battle.
Like GM crops, dairy is also a highly sensitive issue, as it provides a livelihood for millions of farmers, including many who are landless or smallholders. The dairy industry helps sustain farmers even during erratic monsoon seasons, which can cause significant fluctuations in crop production.
In India, where a large proportion of the population is vegetarian, food choices are strongly influenced by cultural and dietary preferences. Indian consumers are particularly concerned that cattle in the US are often fed animal by-products — a practice that conflicts with Indian food habits.
India is self-sufficient in most farm goods, with the exception of vegetable oils. After liberalising cooking oil imports over three decades ago, the country now has to import nearly two-thirds of its supply to meet demand.
India does not want to repeat this mistake with other basic foods, which account for nearly half of its consumer price index.
Though agriculture makes up just 16% of India’s nearly $3.9tn economy, it is the lifeblood for nearly half the country’s 1.4bn people. Four years ago, this powerful voting bloc forced Modi’s government into a rare retreat on a set of controversial farm laws.
Some in power fear a flood of cheaper US imports would bring down local prices and hand opposition parties an opportunity to sharpen its attack on the government. New Delhi is also worried that a trade deal with the US could also force it to open its agricultural sector to other countries.
The vast disparity in the scale of farming makes it difficult for Indian farmers to compete with their US counterparts.
The average Indian farm is a 1.08 hectares (2.67 acres), compared to 187 hectares in the US. For dairy farmers, the difference is even more dramatic — a small herd of two or three animals versus hundreds or more in the US.
Many Indian farmers also rely on traditional, unmechanised techniques, while American agriculture has developed into a highly efficient, tech-driven industry.
One of India’s key goals with its Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) programme is to reduce energy imports and support domestic farmers by using sugarcane and corn for biofuel production.
Indian companies have invested heavily in new distilleries, and farmers have expanded corn cultivation to meet the rising demand. India recently achieved its ambitious target of a 20% ethanol blend in petrol.
With state assembly elections approaching in Bihar — a major corn-producing state in the east — allowing US ethanol imports would lower local corn prices. This would probably anger farmers and turn them against the BJP ahead of the election and also undermine the growing distillery sector.

Peacekeepers, Al-Shabaab clash over key town

AFP
Mogadishu

International peacekeepers are battling radical fighters to retake a strategic Somali town, the African Union mission in the country said yesterday.

Since the beginning of 2024, the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Shabaab group has seized dozens of towns and villages in an offensive which has reversed nearly all of the gains made by the troubled Horn of Africa nation’s army in 2022 and 2023.

After a string of defeats, the African Union Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM) on Friday launched a major offensive to retake the town of Bariire, located some 100km west of Mogadishu in the Bas-Shabelle region. Home to a significant military operational base, Bariire fell to Al-Shabaab in March without a fight after Somalia’s soldiers retreated, with the jihadists destroying a bridge vital to the military’s supply lines.

ANNOUNCEMENT

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THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE FOR NATIONALITY AFFAIRS
within 15 days from the publication of this notice.

World far off from a landmark goal to triple renewables

By John Ainger
Bloomberg

A landmark pledge made by countries less than two years ago to triple the world’s renewable capacity by 2030 already looks in danger of not being met, a new report finds.

Targets put forward by national governments for the rollout of technologies like wind and solar will bring global installations far short of what countries committed to at the United Nations COP28 summit in 2023, according to Ember, a climate think tank. The renewable goal was agreed in Dubai as part of a hard-fought deal to commit to a transition away from fossil fuel.

Ember calculated the world will hit just 7.4 terawatts of renewable energy capacity by 2030, a little more than double the 3.4 terawatts installed in 2022, based on national targets. The world needs 11 terawatts in order to meet the tripling goal.

“There is a real disconnect between the sort of high level agreement to sign pledges at COP and then the reality of how electricity planning is done,” Katye Altieri, global electricity analyst at Ember, said. “National targets send policy signals to the market and I think countries have lost sight of that.”

The findings underscore the key issue facing international climate talks, and one that will likely dominate the COP30 summit in the Brazilian city of Belem this November: Countries are very good at talking the talk once a year, but bad at actually implementing the promises they’ve made.



Since Dubai in 2023, there are few signs the world is transitioning away from fossil fuels. Scaling up renewables was supposed to help tackle the demand-side of the equation: the more wind and solar can meet the world’s energy needs, the less countries will need to extract gas, oil and coal.

Ember’s research found only 22 countries have revised their renewable targets since Dubai, and most of those nations are in the European Union, which campaigned for the renewables pledge and have put new laws in place to achieve its objective to cut emissions by 55% by 2030 from 1990 levels.

Group-of-20 nations like China and South Africa are expected to still come forward with more ambitious climate targets this year, but others like Canada, Russia and Turkiye have yet to do so, and probably won’t before the summit in Belem, according to Ember.

The US, which hasn’t put forward a 2030 renewable target, is very unlikely to do so. President Donald Trump is withdrawing the US from the Paris Agreement and rolling back many of the clean energy programs put in place under Joe Biden, such as the Inflation Reduction Act.

Altieri noted China alone could make a sizeable difference in the global renewable goal, but it won’t be enough to make up for shortfalls elsewhere.

Among some glimmers of good news: India hasn’t updated its ambition, but Delhi’s 2030 target of 500 gigawatts of fossil fuel-free energy is aligned with the tripling goal, the report found. Perhaps surprisingly, Saudi Arabia is also on track for meeting its share, too.

Brazil’s COP30 summit comes 10 years after the Paris Agreement and is seen as the first that will herald a new age of climate diplomacy, one that will focus on implementing the promises made instead of writing the rules to do so. A few days before the conference, the UN will publish its synthesis of countries’ national climate plans and how far off the world currently is from the 1.5C goal. It will be up to Brazil to steer negotiators on the best way to close that gap, including by scaling up clean energy.

For Ember’s Altieri, it won’t take much to get the clean energy transition to snowball, but targets are needed to make sure that countries think about where they place renewables and the kind of infrastructure, like grids and battery storage, that’s needed to accompany it.

“It’s not about target setting for the sake of target setting,” she said. “The economics are there for every country in the world.”

Ex-Ivory Coast president’s party members ‘kidnapped’

AFP
Abidjan

Former Ivory Coast president Laurent Gbagbo’s political party said yesterday that six of its members have been arrested in what it decried as a wave of repression ahead of October’s presidential elections. Political tensions are high in the Ivory Coast ahead of the October 25 elections with opposition figures, including Gbagbo, barred from running by court rulings, and several opposition activists arrested in recent weeks.

The African People’s Party (PPA) said the six had been “kidnapped and taken to unknown locations” during the night of Saturday to yesterday. “A wave of repression is sweeping across our leaders and activists,” Sebastien Dano Djedje, executive president of the PPA, said at a press conference yesterday.

He called for the immediate release of the six party members, one of whom was a substitute deputy for a district in the economic capital Abidjan. In addition to Gbagbo, other opposition leaders such as former banker Tidjane Thiam and exiled ex-prime minister Guillaume Soro have been removed from the electoral rolls by court rulings and are unlikely to be able to run in October.

Current President Alassane Ouattara, 83, announced on Tuesday his intention to run for a fourth term.

Federal agency opens probe into former Trump prosecutor Jack Smith

Reuters/AFP
Washington

A US federal agency has opened a formal investigation into former Special Counsel Jack Smith, who oversaw two criminal probes into President Donald Trump following his first term in the White House.

The Office of Special Counsel (OSC) confirmed to Reuters that it was investigating whether Smith violated the Hatch Act, a law prohibiting federal employees from using their position for political activity.

The decision follows a request for a probe by US Senator Tom Cotton, an Arkansas Republican.

The OSC is an independent agency that probes the conduct of federal employees, but it does not have the authority to bring criminal charges.

It is different from the type of Special Counsel's office previously overseen by Smith, who was appointed by the Department of Justice to pursue criminal cases.

The OSC's investigation, which was first reported by the *New York Post*, is the latest in a series of actions taken by Trump and his allies against their perceived political enemies.

Smith, who resigned from his post in January following Trump's election victory, could not immediately be reached for comment.

The most severe penalty under the Hatch Act is termination of employment, which would not apply to Smith as he has already resigned.

Earlier this week Cotton accused Smith of aggressively pursuing his cases against Trump with the aim of hurting his presidential campaign, calling Smith "a political actor masquerading as a public official" in a series of posts on X.

"That's why I've asked this unprecedented interference in the 2024 election be immediately investigated by OSC," Cotton wrote on X.

A former war crimes prosecutor, Smith brought two criminal cases against Trump: one accusing him of illegally retaining classified material and another related to Trump's attempts to overturn his 2020 election loss, an effort that sparked the January 6, 2021, assault on the US Capitol.

Neither case went to trial, having been delayed and buffeted by a series of legal challenges, including a ruling by the Supreme Court's conservative majority that granted former presidents broad immunity from criminal prosecution.

Smith dropped both cases after Trump won the election, citing a longstanding Justice Department policy against prosecuting a sitting president, but issued a report in January saying that the evidence he gathered would have been enough to convict Trump at trial.

Trump denied wrongdoing and assailed the prosecutions as politically motivated attempts to damage his campaign.

Since taking office in January, Trump has taken a number of punitive measures against his perceived enemies.

He has stripped former officials of their security clearances and protective details, targeted law firms involved in past cases against him and pulled federal funding from universities.

Last month the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) opened criminal investigations into its former director James Comey and ex-Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) chief John Brennan, two prominent Trump critics.

Days later Comey's daughter Maurene – a federal prosecutor who handled the case of Jeffrey Epstein, who has been repeatedly linked to Trump – was abruptly fired.


Jack Smith

White House officials justify firing of senior labour official by Trump

Reuters
Washington

Top White House economic advisers have defended President Donald Trump's firing of the head of the Bureau of Labour Statistics (BLS), pushing back against criticism that Trump's action could undermine confidence in official US economic data.

US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer told CBS that Trump had "real concerns" about the data, while Kevin Hassett, director of the National Economic Council, said the president "is right to call for new leadership".

Hassett said on Fox News that the main concern was Friday's BLS report of net downward revisions showing 258,000 fewer jobs had been created in May and June than previously reported.

Trump accused BLS Commissioner Erika McEntarfer of faking the jobs numbers, without providing any evidence of data manipulation.

The BLS compiles the closely watched employment report as well as consumer and producer price data.

The BLS gave no reason for the revised data but noted "monthly revisions result from additional reports received from businesses and government agencies since the last published estimates and from the recalculation of seasonal factors".

McEntarfer responded to her abrupt dismissal on Friday in a post on the Bluesky social media platform, saying that it was "the honour of her life" to serve as BLS commissioner and praising the civil servants who work there.

McEntarfer's firing added to growing concerns about the quality of US economic data published by the federal government and came on the heels of a raft of new US tariffs on dozens of trading partners, sending global stock markets tumbling as Trump presses ahead with plans to reorder the global economy.


Trump accused BLS Commissioner Erika McEntarfer (*right*) of faking the jobs numbers.



"I think what we need is a fresh set of eyes at the BLS, somebody who can clean this thing up," Hassett said on *Fox News Sunday*.

In an interview with CBS's *Face the Nation*, Greer acknowledged that there were always revisions of job numbers, "but sometimes you see these revisions go in really extreme ways".

Brian Moynihan, chief executive of the Bank of America, said that large revisions of economic data could undermine public confidence and that government officials should develop ways of improving data quality.

"They can get this data, I think, other ways and I think that's where the focus ought to be: how do we get the data to be more resilient and more predictable and more understandable?" he said on CBS. "Because what bounces around is restatements... that creates doubt about it."

Critics, including former leaders of the BLS, slammed Trump's move and called on Congress to investigate McEntarfer's removal, saying that it would shake trust in a respected statistical agency.

"It undermines credibility," said William Beach, a former BLS commissioner and co-chair of the group Friends of the BLS.

"There is no way for a commissioner to rig the jobs numbers," he said. "Every year we've revised the numbers. When I was commissioner, we had a 500,000 job revision during President Trump's first term," he said on CNN's *State of the Union*.

"And why do we do that? Because firms are created or firms go out of business, and we don't really know that during the course of the year, until we reconcile against a real full count of all the businesses."

Former Treasury secretary Larry Summers, who worked in both the Clinton and Obama administrations, also criticised McEntarfer's firing.

"This is a preposterous charge. These numbers are put together by teams of literally hundreds of people following detailed procedures that are in manuals," Summers said on ABC's *This Week*.

The BLS surveys 121,000 employers – businesses and government agencies – each month, seeking their total payroll employment during the week in which the 12th day of the month falls.

The response rate has fallen sharply over the last several years since the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, from 80.3% in October 2020 to about 67.1% in July.

Knowing that, the BLS allows late-arriving employer submissions, and revisions to earlier submissions, to be taken into account over the next two months.

That means each month's initial estimate of employment for the immediately preceding month also contains revisions to the two months before that as well, because by the third month the response rate has typically climbed to around 92%.

The revisions in Friday's report were, however, large by historic standards.

The downward revision of 125,000 jobs for May was the largest between a second estimate and third estimate since a 492,000 reduction for March 2020, which was the largest ever and was reported in June 2020 for the payrolls report for May 2020.

Aside from that revision, Friday's revision for May was the largest for a change from the second estimate to the third estimate since a 127,000 job downward revision in March 1983, according to BLS data.

Former Fox News host confirmed as top Washington prosecutor


Jeanine Pirro

AFP
Washington

The US Senate has confirmed former television personality and judge Jeanine Pirro to a key US judiciary post, making her the latest Donald Trump-nominated Fox News host to join the government.

Pirro was confirmed to become the US Attorney for the District of Columbia in a 50-45 vote, as Trump urged the Republican-led Senate to work through the weekend to approve his nominations over six months after he returned to the White House.

Pirro was named to the position in an interim capacity by Trump – who has made a habit of filling powerful government posts with right-wing television network hosts and hardline loyalists – in May.

The brash 74-year-old former district attorney of New York's Westchester County was previously described by Trump as being "in a class by herself".

She made a name for herself hosting weekend television show *Judge Jeanine Pirro* (2008-2011) and then Fox News Channel's *Justice with Judge Jeanine*, which ran for 11 years.

She was a co-host of Fox News's show *The Five* until she assumed her interim post, considered one of the most powerful US attorney roles.

Pirro will join the ranks of other cable news hires like Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth, who co-hosted *Fox & Friends Weekend*, and Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy, a former reality TV show competitor and Fox Business co-host.

Dick Durbin, the top Democrat on the Senate's Judiciary Committee, said that Pirro "should never be a permanent US Attorney", calling her pick a "rubber stamp for Donald Trump".

Durbin cited Pirro's promotion of conspiracy theories in relation to the 2020 election, which Trump lost to Joe Biden.

After touting unfounded allegations of election fraud in 2020, Pirro was named a defendant in a defamation lawsuit filed by Dominion Voting Systems, which said Fox broadcast false statements about the company.

Fox News settled the case for nearly $800mn.

She has also authored several books, including *Liars, Leakers, and Liberals: The Case Against the Anti-Trump Conspiracy*, from 2018.

The *Washington Post* described the book as "sycophantic" in its support for Trump.

Her ex-husband Albert Pirro was convicted of tax evasion when she was a district attorney in New York. He was pardoned by Trump during his first presidential term.

As part of the spate of expedited confirmation votes, Trump's former lawyer Emil Bove became a federal appellate judge last week.

Fantastic Four stretches lead to second week at N America box office

AFP
Los Angeles

The Fantastic Four: First Steps, Disney's debut of the rebooted Marvel Comics franchise, continued to outperform the competition for a second straight weekend at the North American box office, industry estimates showed yesterday.

Actor-of-the-moment Pedro Pascal, Vanessa Kirby, Emmy-winner Ebon Moss-Bachrach and Joseph Quinn star as the titular team of superheroes, who must save a retro-futuristic world from the evil Galactus.

The film pulled in an estimated $40mn in the Friday-through-Sunday period, a 66% drop from the prior weekend, for a two-week global total of $368mn.

Universal's family-friendly animation sequel *The Bad Guys 2*, about a squad of goofy animal criminals actually doing good in their rebranded lives, debuted in second spot, earning $22.2mn.

"This is a good opening for an animation follow-up sequel," said David A Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research.

The film edged out Paramount's reboot of *Naked Gun*, a slapstick comedy starring Liam Neeson as Frank Drebin Jr, son of the bumbling police lieutenant from the original 1980s movie and related television series *Police Squad!*

It pulled in $17mn in its opening weekend.

Superman, the latest big-budget action film featuring the iconic superhero from Warner Bros and DC Studios, slipped from second to fourth at $13.9mn, Exhibitor Relations said.

That puts the global take of the film, starring David Corenswet as the Man of Steel, at $551mn.

Jurassic World: Rebirth – the latest installment in the blockbuster dinosaur saga – finished in fifth place with $8.7mn. Its worldwide total stands at $765mn after five weeks in theatres.

Independent horror film *Together*, which premiered at this year's Sundance Film Festival and was picked up by Neon, claimed sixth spot in its debut weekend with $6.8mn.

"This is a very good opening for an indie horror pic," Gross said.

US museum denies White House pressure to change impeachment display

AFP
Washington

The recent removal of a placard at the National Museum of American History that detailed Donald Trump's two impeachments did not come after White House pressure, the museum's parent organisation said on Saturday.

The placard was meant to be temporary and "did not meet the museum's standards in appearance, location, timeline, and overall presentation", the Smithsonian Institution said in a statement on X.

"It was not consistent with other sections in the exhibit and moreover blocked the view of the objects inside its case. For these reasons, we removed the placard.

"We were not asked by any Administration or other government official to remove content from the exhibit."

The Smithsonian statement came after the *Washington Post* reported on Thursday that the museum last month removed the placard describing Trump's impeachments and reverted to old signage that said "only three presidents have seriously faced removal" – Andrew Johnson, Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton.

The *Post* said the removal stemmed from a Smithsonian content review after the White House pressured the organisation to remove a director of one of its art museums.

Trump is the only American president to have been impeached twice – first in 2019 for abuse of power and obstruction of Congress, then in 2021 for inciting an insurrection. He was acquitted by the Senate both times.

Since starting his second term in January, the Republican has moved to control major cultural institutions, while slashing arts and humanities funding.

In March, Trump signed an executive order to "restore the Smithsonian Institution to its rightful place as a symbol of inspiration and American greatness" and "remove improper ideology".

The order accused the institution of having "come under the influence of a divisive, race-centered ideology" and argued the shift has promoted narratives that portray American values as "inherently harmful and oppressive".

The impeachment exhibit "will be updated in the coming weeks to reflect all impeachment proceedings in our nation's history", the Smithsonian said in its statement.



An updated information plate is displayed at an Impeachment exhibit in the 'Limits of Presidential Power' section within 'The American Presidency: A Glorious Burden' exhibition inside the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. **– *Reuters***

WORLD

China, Russia start joint drills in Sea of Japan

Reuters/AFP
Moscow/Beijing

The Russian and Chinese navies are carrying out artillery and anti-submarine drills in the Sea of Japan as part of scheduled joint exercises, the Russian Pacific Fleet was quoted as saying yesterday.

The drills are taking place two days after US President Donald Trump said he had ordered two nuclear submarines to be positioned in "the appropriate regions" in response to remarks by former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev.

However, they were scheduled well before Trump's action.

Interfax news agency quoted the Pacific Fleet as saying that Russian and Chinese vessels were moving in a joint detachment including a large Russian anti-submarine ship and two Chinese destroyers.

It said diesel-electric submarines from the two countries were also involved, as well as a Chinese submarine rescue ship.

The manoeuvres are part of exercises titled "Maritime Interaction-2025" which are scheduled to end tomorrow.

Russia and China, which signed a "no-limits" strategic partnership shortly before Russia went to war in Ukraine in 2022, conduct regular military exercises to rehearse co-ordination between their armed forces and send a deterrent signal to adversaries.

China's defence ministry said in a statement yesterday that the two sides will hold "submarine rescue, joint anti-submarine, air defence and anti-missile operations, and maritime combat".

After the drills, the two countries will conduct naval patrols in "relevant waters of the Pacific".

China and Russia have carried out annual drills for several years, with the "Joint Sea" exercises beginning in 2012.

Last year's drills were held along China's southern coast.

The Chinese defence ministry said on Friday that this year's exercises were aimed at "further deepening the comprehensive strategic partnership" of the two countries.

Trump said that his submarine order on Friday was made in response to what he called "highly provocative" remarks by Russia's Medvedev about the risk of war between the nuclear-armed adversaries.

Russia and the United States have by far the biggest nuclear arsenals in the world.

It is extremely rare for either country to discuss the deployment and location of its nuclear submarines.

Trump's comments came at a time of mounting tension with Moscow as he grows frustrated at the lack of progress towards ending the Ukraine war.

China has never denounced Russia's more than three-year war nor called for it to withdraw its troops, and many of Ukraine's allies, including the United States, believe that Beijing has provided support to Moscow.

China insists it is a neutral party, regularly calling for an end to the fighting while also accusing Western countries of prolonging the conflict by arming Ukraine.

Woman arrested after travelling with child stuffed into suitcase

A New Zealand woman was arrested yesterday after travelling on a bus with a two-year-old girl trapped in her luggage.

Detective Inspector Simon Harrison said the woman had been charged with ill-treatment and neglect of a child.

Police were called to a bus depot in Kaiwaka – 100km north of Auckland – after the bus driver became concerned about a bag moving during a scheduled stop.

"When the driver opened the suitcase, they discovered the two-year-old girl," Harrison said. "The little girl was reported to be very hot, but otherwise appeared physically unharmed."

The luggage had been stored beneath the bus passengers, in a separate compartment.

Harrison said the girl is in hospital undergoing an extensive medical assessment.

A 27-year-old woman was arrested.

Harrison said the driver prevented "what could have been a far worse outcome".

He said further charges are possible.

New Zealand's Minister for Children Oranga Tamariki had been notified. – ***AFP***

El Salvador's Bukele defends ending term limit

AFP
San Salvador

El Salvador's president has defended a constitutional reform granting him the right to seek indefinite re-election, slamming critics who say that it represents growing authoritarianism in the Central American nation.

"Ninety per cent of developed countries allow the indefinite re-election of their head of government, and no one bats an eye. But when a small, poor country like El Salvador tries to do the same, suddenly it's the end of democracy," Bukele wrote in English on X.

El Salvador's Congress, dominated by Bukele's New Ideas party, passed the reform on Thursday.

It also extends presidential terms from five to six years.

Bukele, 44, who has been president since 2019 and was re-elected in 2024 with 85% of the vote, now holds near-total control over the country's institutions – in what the opposition calls a "dictatorship".

He enjoys enormous domestic support for his tough campaign against criminal gangs, but has been sharply criticised by international and local rights groups over his approach.

Bukele has notably supported US President Donald Trump's deportation campaign, taking in hundreds of expelled Venezuelan migrants under contentious legal grounds and housing them at the country's notorious CECOT penitentiary.

The constitutional reforms came after a wave of arrests targeting human rights defenders and government critics, prompting dozens of journalists and humanitarian workers to flee the country.

One of the few opposition lawmakers in the unicameral legislature, Marcela Villatoro, criticised the reforms on Thursday, saying: "Today, democracy has died in El Salvador."

Bukele argued that the changes brought El Salvador into line with parliamentary systems where the prime minister can hold office indefinitely.

Critics will "rush to point out that 'a parliamentary system isn't the same as a presidential one,' as if that technicality justifies the double standard", he wrote in his post.

"But let's be honest, that's just a pretext. Because if El Salvador declared itself a parliamentary monarchy with the exact same rules as the UK, Spain, or Denmark, they still wouldn't support it," he added, claiming critics would "go ballistic if that happened".

With its reform, El Salvador joins Nicaragua and Venezuela as Latin American nations without presidential term limits.

Four out of five trapped workers at Codelco's El Teniente mine dead

Reuters/AFP
Santiago

Four of five trapped workers at Codelco's El Teniente copper mine have been found dead, the company said yesterday, as rescue teams work to clear underground passages that collapsed in a strong tremor last week.

The latest fatality brings the total death toll from the accident to five, including one person who died at the time of the incident on Thursday evening.

Codelco discovered the first trapped worker on Saturday and another two early yesterday.

A fourth worker was discovered later in the morning, said El Teniente general manager Andes Music.

"We worked overnight with the utmost care, looking metre by metre," he told a press conference. "I also don't want to create false hopes. Let's hope our rescue workers continue to make progress."

Music said earlier that the discovery of the remains "deeply saddens us, but it also tells us that we are in the right place" to find the others.

As of early yesterday, rescue teams had cleared 24m of blocked passages, out of 90m that Codelco officials previously said could be necessary to reach the trapped workers, in the new Andesita section of the mine.

The collapse occurred on Thursday around 5.30pm local time, caused by one of the largest tremors ever recorded at El Teniente with the impact of a 4.2 magnitude quake.



A helmet with the names of the miners trapped in the El Teniente mine complex, operated by Chilean state-run copper producer Codelco, is displayed during a candlelight vigil as rescue teams continue efforts to reach those trapped following a tremor at the Andesita unit, outside Codelco's offices in Rancagua, Chile. – ***Reuters***

Codelco is investigating whether the cause was mining activity or natural tectonic shifts in the earthquake-prone country.

Thursday's quake resulted in an initial toll of one dead and nine injured.

President Gabriel Boric visited miners' relatives on Saturday and vowed to "complete the search".

"Codelco has all the resources, experience and technology to carry out" the search, he said.

Work has been suspended at El Teniente, which began operating in the early 1900s and boasts more than 4,500km of underground tunnels.

Last year, the site produced 356,000 metric tonnes of copper – nearly 7% of the total for Chile.

Chile is the world's largest copper producer, responsible for nearly a quarter of global supply with about 5.3mn metric tonnes in 2024.

The metal is critical for wiring, motors and renewable energy technology.

Top Trump aide accuses India of financing Russia's war in Ukraine

Reuters
Washington

A top aide to President Donald Trump has accused India of effectively financing Russia's war in Ukraine by purchasing oil from Moscow, after the US leader escalated pressure on New Delhi to stop buying Russian oil.

"What he (Trump) said very clearly is that it is not acceptable for India to continue financing this war by purchasing the oil from Russia," said Stephen Miller, deputy chief of staff at the White House and one of Trump's most influential aides.

Miller's criticism was some of the strongest yet by the Trump administration about one of the United States' major partners in the Indo-Pacific.

"People will be shocked to learn that India is basically tied with China in purchasing Russian oil. That's an astonishing fact," Miller said on Fox News's *Sunday Morning Futures*.

The Indian embassy in Washington did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Indian government sources told Reuters on Saturday that New Delhi will keep purchasing oil from Moscow despite US threats.

A 25% tariff on Indian products went into effect on Friday as a result of its purchase of military equipment and energy from Russia.

Vietnam flooding death toll rises to 10: authorities

The death toll from floods in Vietnam's mountainous north has risen to 10, disaster authorities said yesterday.

Rain led to flooding in recent days in the provinces of Son La, Phu Tho, Tuyen Quang and especially Dien Bien, isolating several communities.

The agriculture ministry confirmed 10 people were killed and seven others injured in Dien Bien province's Tia Dinh and Xa Dung communes.

State media quoted local authorities as saying rain was heavy from Thursday to Saturday, triggering flash floods.

On Saturday, local authorities deployed helicopters to access isolated communities and deliver basic necessities.

Residents were relocated to safe areas while electricity and telecommunication services were mostly restored by evening yesterday.

In late July, similar flash floods claimed five lives in Son La province, inundating crops and washing away poultry and cattle.

Vietnam is now in its tropical storm season, which often causes deadly floods and landslides. – ***AFP***

Crackdown leaves LA's undocumented migrants on brink of homelessness

By Romain Fonsegrives
AFP

When her husband was arrested in an immigration raid near Los Angeles last month, "Martha" was abruptly separated from the father of her two daughters.

She also lost the salary that allowed her to keep a roof over their heads.

"He's the pillar of the family... he was the only one working," said the undocumented woman, using a pseudonym for fear of reprisals. "He's no longer here to help us, to support me and my daughters."

Los Angeles, where one-third of residents are immigrants – and thousands are undocumented – has been destabilised by intensifying Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids under the Trump administration.

Since returning to power, US President Donald Trump has delivered on promises to launch a wide-ranging deportation drive, targeting undocumented migrants but also ensnaring many others in its net.

After her husband's arrest, 39-year-old Martha has joined the ranks of people barely managing to avoid ending up on the streets of Los Angeles County – a region with prohibitively high housing prices, and the largest number of homeless people in the United States outside New York.

Her 700sq-foot apartment in Buena Park, a suburb of the California metropolis, costs $2,050 per month.

After her husband's arrest, she urgently found a minimum-wage night job in a factory to cover their most pressing needs.

It pays just enough to keep them afloat, but has left Martha unable to cover a range of obligations.



'Martha' poses with a decorative item from her living room display shelf. – ***AFP***

"I have to pay car insurance, phone, rent, and their expenses," she said, pointing to her six- and seven-year-old daughters, who need school supplies for the new academic year. "That's a lot of expenses."

How long can she keep up this punishing schedule, which allows her barely three hours of sleep on returning from the factory before having to wake and look after her daughters?

"I couldn't tell you," she said, staring blankly into space.

Los Angeles has seen some of the worst of the ICE raids.

Squads of masked agents have targeted hardware stores, car washes and bus stops, arresting more than 2,200 people in June.

About 60% of these had no prior criminal records, according to internal ICE documents analysed by AFP.

Trump's anti-immigration offensive is taking an added toll on Latino workers, who were already among the worst-affected victims of the region's housing crisis, said Andrea Gonzalez, deputy director of the CLEAN Carwash Workers Centre, a labour rights non-profit.

"A bigger storm is brewing. It's not just about the people that got picked up, it's about the people that are left behind as well," she said. "There is a concern that people are going to end up on the streets."

Her organisation is helping over 300 struggling households whose incomes have dropped, either because a family member has been arrested or because they are too afraid to return to work.

It has distributed more than $30,000 to help around 20 families who are unable to afford their rent, but covering everyone's needs is simply "not sustainable," said Gonzalez.

Local Democratic Party leaders are trying to establish financial aid for affected families.

Los Angeles County is planning a dedicated fund to tackle the problem, and city officials will also launch a fund using philanthropic donations rather than taxpayer money.

Some families should receive "a couple hundred" dollars, Mayor Karen Bass said last month.

However, for Gonzalez, these initiatives do not "even scratch the surface" of what is needed, representing less than 10% of most affected families' rent requirements.

She called for a "moratorium on evictions" similar to one introduced during the early days of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

Otherwise, Los Angeles' homeless population – currently numbered at 72,000, which is down slightly in the past two years – risks rising again, she warned.

"What we're living through right now is an emergency," said Gonzalez.

Maria Martinez's undocumented immigrant husband was arrested in June at a carwash in Pomona, a suburb east of Los Angeles.

Since then, the 59-year-old has had to rely on help from her children to pay her $1,800 rent.

Her $1,000 disability allowance falls far short.

"It is stressful," she said. "We're just getting by."

Four workers dead in Japan after falling into manhole

Four workers have died in Japan after falling into a manhole near Tokyo as they inspected sewage pipes, authorities said yesterday.

The incident comes after a huge sinkhole swallowed a truck driver near the capital in January after a road collapsed because of corroded sewage pipes, sparking a nationwide inspection.

The workers – all men in their fifties – were checking pipes in the city of Gyoda north of Tokyo on Saturday when one fell down the manhole, followed by three more who tried to save him, the local fire department told AFP.

The department said rescuers detected hydrogen sulphide – a gas toxic in high concentrations – coming out of the manhole.

However, city officials refused to be drawn on the cause of the initial fall.

"Detailed circumstances leading up to the accident are still unknown, so it's too early for us to say anything about our responsibility," a Gyoda city official said on condition of anonymity.

The four workers were retrieved and taken to the hospital where they were pronounced dead, according to local media reports.

Around 10 workers were at the scene of the inspection, ordered to clean the pipes of wastewater and sludge if necessary. – ***AFP***

Australia's Victoria state seeks to enshrine work from home in law

The premier of the Australian state of Victoria has announced plans to enshrine working from home in law, saying it should be "a right, not a request".

Under Jacinta Allan's plan, workers would be entitled to work from home at least two days per week, if the job allows.

"We're doing that because we know what the evidence tells us – workers are more productive, it saves time for families, it saves money for families," Allan said, launching the proposed policy at the Labor Party's state conference. "This change will mean that any worker who can reasonably do their job from home has the right to do so for at least two days a week."

Allan said that the policy would now go out for consultation with workers, employers and unions, and that it was vital to "get the details of this important change right".

Allan said the move could save the average worker $110 a week, cut congestion on roads, and keep more women in the workforce.

The measure is likely to come before the state parliament next year. – ***AFP***

Man dies after falling at Oasis gig in London

AFP
London

A man in his 40s has died after falling at a Oasis concert at London's Wembley stadium, the police said yesterday.

Brothers Liam and Noel Gallagher, who brought the iconic Britpop band back together for a blockbuster world tour this year, told the BBC that they were "shocked and saddened" by the fan's death at the Saturday evening gig.

According to a spokesperson for the London Metropolitan Police, officers and medics were called to the scene after 10pm (2100 GMT) following "reports that a person had been injured" at the packed stadium.

"A man – aged in his 40s – was found with injuries consistent with a fall. He was sadly pronounced dead at the scene," the spokesperson said, urging any witnesses to come forward.

"Our thoughts go out to his family," a spokesperson for Wembley said, while adding that "tonight's Oasis concert will go ahead as planned".

Yesterday's gig will be Oasis's last London date of the band's 41-gig reunion world tour after 16 years of estrangement between the famously volatile Gallaghers.

The tour has sold around 900,000 tickets, with the group heading to Edinburgh next before its international leg takes them to the United States, Japan, Australia and Brazil.

UK's FCA moots up to £18bn redress scheme for motor finance claims

Reuters
London

Britain's Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) has proposed a redress scheme for consumers with motor finance compensation claims following last week's Supreme Court ruling, estimating the cost at between £9bn and £18bn ($12bn and $24bn).

Friday's court decision had calmed the industry's worst fears about the size of the bill it would face over improperly disclosed commissions on car loans – a sum analysts had estimated could run to tens of billions of pounds.

However, after considering that ruling, which was largely seen as a victory for the banks, the FCA still proposed an industry-wide redress scheme for certain types of compensation claims.

"At this stage, we think it is unlikely that the cost of any scheme, including administrative costs, would be materially lower than £9bn and it could be materially higher," the FCA said in a statement.

It said the total cost was hard to estimate.

It cautioned that any estimates were indicative and susceptible to change, but it said those in the middle of the £9bn-£18bn range were "more plausible".

Some level of further compensation payout had still been expected by banks after Friday's ruling, placing investor focus on the FCA's decision over whether to launch a full redress scheme, what it might look like, and how much it would cost.

Lenders, including Lloyds Banking Group, Close Brothers, Barclays and the UK arms of Santander and Bank of Ireland, have already set aside nearly £2bn between them to cover potential motor finance compensation claims.

The FCA said firms should now refresh estimates of their liabilities, increase provisions where necessary, and keep markets informed.

Prior to the Supreme Court ruling, which overturned a previous court decision, there were fears the cost of redress could rival that of a payment protection insurance mis-selling scandal, which cost lenders over £40bn between 2011 and 2019.

The proposed motor finance scheme would cover so-called discretionary commission arrangements – those where the broker could adjust the interest rate offered to a customer – if they had not been properly disclosed.

The consultation will also look at which non-discretionary commission arrangements should be included.

The regulator said agreements dating back to 2007 should be considered and it would publish a consultation by early October, with an expectation that people start receiving compensation in 2026.

"Our consultation will cover how firms should assess whether the relationship between the lender and borrower was unfair for the purposes of our scheme," the statement said. "Any redress scheme must be fair to consumers who have lost out and ensure the integrity of the motor finance market, so it works well for future consumers."

The consultation will also look at how interest is calculated on compensation, saying it estimated a simple annual rate of around 3% would be applicable.

The regulator said it had not decided whether the scheme should require customers to opt in, or be automatically involved unless they opt out.

India wraps up mass pilgrimage in Kashmir

AFP
Srinagar

More than 400,000 Hindus took part in a month-long pilgrimage in contested Indian-administered Kashmir, authorities said, shrugging off security worries weeks after conflict with Pakistan.

The pilgrimage began on July 3 and closes officially on Aug 9, but organisers said that lashing rains had damaged narrow paths forcing a premature end.

Official Vijay Kumar Bidhuri said in a statement late on Saturday that 415,000 pilgrims had taken part.

Many of the faithful began their trek to the Amarnath ice pillar from near Pahalgam, where gunmen on April 22 killed 26 mostly tourists in the region.

New Delhi said the gunmen were backed by Pakistan, claims Islamabad rejected – triggering a series of tit-for-tat diplomatic measures that escalated into a four-day conflict.

It was the worst standoff by the nuclear-armed nations since 1999, with more than 70 people killed in missile, drone and artillery fire on both sides, before a May 10 ceasefire.

New Delhi last week said that three Pakistani men who carried out the Pahalgam attack were killed during a gun battle on July 28 in forests adjacent to the hills where the cave shrine is located.

A few devotees may still visit the cave, but the numbers this year fall short of the estimated half a million devotees who took part in 2024.

Officials appealed to Hindus to undertake the pilgrimage, ramping up security for the event by deploying 45,000 troops with high-tech surveillance tools overseeing the gruelling trek to the cave.

Yesterday, Indian forces exchanged fire with gunmen for a third day in Kulgam, far from the Amarnath pilgrimage route.

Soldiers have killed two militants, a senior police officer said.

Kashmir has been divided between the India and Pakistan since their independence from British rule in 1947, with both administering it in part and claiming in full.

Rebel groups have fought Indian forces for decades, demanding Kashmir's independence or its merger with Pakistan.

More clashes and arrests at UK immigration protests

AFP
Manchester

Further scuffles broke out at anti-immigration protests in the UK late on Saturday, with police making several arrests.

Demonstrators calling for mass "remigration" gathered in central Manchester, northwest England, for a march organised by the far-right "Britain First" group, which was confronted by anti-racism groups.

Meanwhile in central London, rival demonstrators converged outside a hotel housing asylum-seekers, following similar recent events that have occasionally turned violent.

In Manchester, the two groups clashed briefly at the start of the protest before police split them up, according to an AFP journalist at the scene.

"Send them back, don't let them in – just stop them coming in, we've got hotels full of immigrants and we've got our own homeless people in the streets begging for food but nowhere to live," said protester Brendan O'Reilly, 66.

Counter-protester Judy, a 60-year-old retired nurse, told AFP that she was there "because I don't want to see people full of hate on the streets of Manchester".

"Do they want them all to go back or is it just people with brown skin? I suspect it's just people with brown skin that they want to re-migrate," she added.



Police scuffle with protesters during a demonstration, outside the Britannia Hotel in Canary Wharf, London, yesterday, over its use to house asylum-seekers. – *AFP*

In London, similar clashes erupted outside a hotel in the Barbican neighbourhood before police intervened.

Metropolitan Police wrote on X that officers had cleared a junction where counter-protesters had assembled in breach of the conditions in place.

"There have been nine arrests so far, with seven of them for breaching Public Order Act conditions," added the police force.

There have been several flashpoints around the UK in recent weeks, most notably in the northeast London neighbourhood of Epping.

People smugglers who advertise on social media risk jail

People smugglers who use social media to promote their services to migrants seeking to enter Britain illegally could face five years in prison under plans announced by the government.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer's Labour government is under huge political and public pressure to cut the number of migrants arriving illegally in small boats from France.

More than 25,000 people have made the crossing so far this year.

Analysis by the interior ministry showed around 80% of migrants arriving on small boats had used social media during their journey to find or communicate with people smugglers.

Under a new offence, which will be added to legislation already passing through parliament, individuals who post online to advertise services that facilitate a breach of immigration laws will face fines and prison sentences of up to five years.

It is already an offence to facilitate illegal immigration to Britain, but the government said its latest plan would give law enforcement agencies another option to disrupt the criminal gangs that organise the crossings.

Last month, the government launched a sanctions regime allowing it to freeze assets, impose travel bans and block access to the country's financial system for individuals and entities involved in enabling irregular migration. – ***Reuters***

Bangladesh protest victim testifies at ex-PM trial

The first witness in the trial of Bangladesh's fugitive ex-prime minister Sheikh Hasina gave evidence yesterday, a man shot in the face during protests that toppled her last year.

Hasina, 77, who has defied court orders to return from India to attend her trial on charges amounting to crimes against humanity, is accused of ordering a deadly crackdown in a failed bid to crush the student-led uprising.

Up to 1,400 people were killed between July and August 2024, according to the United Nations.

The first witness, among the 11 cases that the prosecution is expected to present to the court, was Khokon Chandra Barman, whose story reflects the violence of the protests.

The 23-year-old wears a mask to conceal his face, which was ripped apart by gunshot during the culmination of the protests on August 5, 2024, the same day that Hasina fled Dhaka by helicopter.

"I want justice for the ordeal I've been going through, and for my fellow protesters who sacrificed their lives," he told the court.

Barman lost his left eye, while his right eye was damaged, as well as his lips, nose and teeth.

A video showing Barman's blood-covered face was played in court, with the opening statements aired on the state-run broadcaster.

Prosecutors have filed five charges against Hasina – including failure to prevent mass murder – which amount to crimes against humanity under Bangladeshi law.

"Sheikh Hasina was the nucleus around whom all the crimes committed during the July-August uprising revolved," chief prosecutor Tajul Islam told the court yesterday.

Hasina is on trial in absentia alongside two other accused.

One, her former interior minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal, is also a fugitive.

The other, Chowdhury Abdullah al-Mamun, the former inspector general of police, is in custody. He has pleaded guilty.

Attorney-General Md Asaduzzaman said he wanted a "fair trial", speaking to reporters outside the court.

Amir Hossain, the state-appointed lawyer for Hasina, noted that Barman was shot during the chaotic final day of the weeks-long protests.

He pointed out that several police officers were also killed in clashes with protesters and it was "unclear who actually shot Barman". – ***AFP***

Bollywood filmmakers try to cash in on latest India-Pakistan battle

By Seema Sinha
AFP

Indian filmmakers are locking up the rights to movie titles that can profit from the patriotism fanned by a four-day conflict with Pakistan, which killed more than 70 people.

The nuclear-armed rivals exchanged artillery, drone and air strikes in May, after India blamed Pakistan for an armed attack on tourists in Indian-administered Kashmir.

The fighting came to an end when US President Donald Trump announced a surprise ceasefire.

Now, some Bollywood filmmakers see an opportunity to cash in on the battle.

India tagged its military action against Pakistan "Operation Sindoor", the Hindi word for vermilion, which married Hindu women wear on their foreheads.

The name was seen as a symbol of Delhi's determination to avenge those widowed in the April 22 attack in Kashmir's Pahalgam, which sparked the hostilities.

Film studios have registered a slew of titles evoking the operation, including *Mission Sindoor*, *Sindoor: The Revenge*, *The Pahalgam Terror*, and *Sindoor Operation*.

"It's a story which needs to be told," said director Vivek Agnihotri.

"If it was Hollywood, they would have made 10 films on this subject. People want to know what happened behind the scenes," he told AFP.

Agnihotri struck box office success with his 2022 release, *The Kashmir Files*, based on the mass flight of Hindus from Kashmir in the 1990s.

The ruling right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party gave that film a glowing endorsement, despite accusations that it aimed to stir up hatred against India's minority Muslims.

Since Hindu nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi took office in 2014, some critics say Bollywood is increasingly promoting his government's ideology.

Raja Sen, a film critic and screenwriter, said filmmakers felt emboldened by an amenable government.

"We tried to wage a war and then we quietened down when Mr Trump asked us to. So what is the valour here?" Sen told AFP of the Pakistan clashes.

Anil Sharma, known for directing rabble-rousing movies, criticised the apparent rush to make films related to the Pahalgam attack.

"This is herd mentality... these are seasonal filmmakers, they have their constraints," he said. "I don't wait for an incident to happen and then make a film based on that. A subject should evoke feelings and only then cinema happens."

Sharma's historical action flick *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha* (2001) and its sequel *Gadar 2* (2023), both featuring Sunny Deol in lead roles, were big hits.

In Bollywood, filmmakers often seek to time releases for national holidays like Independence Day, which are associated with heightened patriotic fervour.

Fighter, featuring big stars Hrithik Roshan and Deepika Padukone, was released on the eve of India's Republic Day on January 25 last year.

Though not a factual retelling, it drew heavily from India's 2019 airstrike on Pakistan's Balakot.

The film received mixed-to-positive reviews but raked in $28mn in India, making it the fourth highest-grossing Hindi film of that year.

This year, *Chhaava*, a drama based on the life of Sambhaji Maharaj, a ruler of the Maratha Empire, became the highest-grossing film so far this year.

It also generated significant criticism for fuelling anti-Muslim bias.

"This is at a time when cinema is aggressively painting Muslim kings and leaders in violent light," said Sen. "This is where those who are telling the stories need to be responsible about which stories they choose to tell."

Sen said filmmakers were reluctant to choose topics that are "against the establishment".

"If the public is flooded with dozens of films that are all trying to serve an agenda, without the other side allowed to make itself heard, then that propaganda and misinformation enters the public psyche," he said.

Acclaimed director Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra said true patriotism is promoting peace and harmony through the medium of cinema.

Mehra's socio-political drama *Rang De Basanti* (2006) won the National Film Award for Best Popular Film and was chosen as India's official entry for the Golden Globe Awards and the Academy Awards in the Best Foreign Language Film category.

"How we can arrive at peace and build a better society? How we can learn to love our neighbours?" he asked. "For me that is patriotism."

COMMENT

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GULF TIMES

Dmitry Medvedev: Russia's hawkish former president

Former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev, whose comments prompted US President Donald Trump to move two nuclear submarines, was once seen as a liberal reformer but has become one of the Kremlin's most prominent anti-Western hawks.

The 59-year-old, who served as head of state between 2008 and 2012, sought "friendly" ties with Europe and the United States during his single term but faded into obscurity after handing the post back to President Vladimir Putin.

Demoted to prime minister in 2012 and then made deputy head of Russia's security council in 2020 — a largely advisory role — Medvedev began espousing hardline views on social media shortly after Moscow launched its Ukraine offensive.

In public statements since the conflict began he has described Westerners as "degenerates", declared that "Ukraine is, of course, Russia" and raised the possibility of using nuclear weapons against Russia's enemies.

In June, after the US launched air strikes on nuclear facilities in Moscow-allied Iran, Medvedev suggested that "a number of countries" were willing to provide Tehran with nuclear warheads, prompting an angry Trump to accuse him of "casually" threatening a nuclear strike.

On Thursday, Medvedev alluded to Moscow's semi-automatic "Dead Hand" nuclear arms control system in a Telegram post criticising Trump.

Medvedev's critics have derided his posts as an attempt to retain political relevance in Russia's crowded elite circles, but Trump has taken the threats seriously.

"Based on the highly provocative statements," Trump said on Friday: "I have ordered two nuclear submarines to be positioned in the appropriate regions, just in case these foolish and inflammatory statements are more than just that."

Medvedev's often incendiary posts contrast sharply with his public image in office, when he declared Russia did not want confrontation with "any country" as part of his foreign policy doctrine.

Born in Putin's home town of Leningrad, he owes his entire political career to the former KGB figure

In 2010, he signed a nuclear arms reduction treaty with US President Barack Obama, while in 2011 he brought Russia into the World Trade Organisation after 18 years of negotiations.

On his watch, Moscow also abstained in a key UN Security Council vote on Libya in 2011 that paved the way for a Nato-led military intervention, a decision Putin has relentlessly criticised since.

But it was always clear who was the senior partner in a pairing dubbed Batman and Robin by a secret US cable.

Medvedev's first act after winning a 2008 presidential election on the back of Putin's support was to appoint the Russian strongman as prime minister, giving Putin broad decision-making power.

While some in the West greeted Medvedev's arrival, others saw him as simply a placeholder for Putin, who was able to circumvent constitutional term limits and remain in de facto power.

In 2008 Russia sent troops into Georgia, fracturing relations with the West, a decision that Medvedev insisted he made but that a top general claimed was planned by Putin before Medvedev was even inaugurated.

His trademark modernisation programme was marked by bold statements but was also mercilessly mocked by commentators for being short on actions as Putin held real power.

Medvedev, born in Putin's home town of Leningrad, owes his entire political career to the former KGB agent.

Putin took his protege to Moscow after being appointed prime minister in 1999 and Medvedev rapidly rose to become chairman of gas giant Gazprom. He also served as chief of staff at the Kremlin and as first deputy prime minister.

After taking office, he said Russia's economy had reached a "dead end" and required urgent reform.

But cynics pointed out that such words counted for little when Russia was still dominated by Putin, and Medvedev himself played down the idea there was any radical difference in their visions.

After championing anti-corruption measures while in office, Medvedev was himself accused of graft in 2017, when late opposition leader Alexei Navalny alleged he had built a luxury property empire using embezzled funds.

Navalny was labelled an "extremist" by Russian authorities in 2021.

While liberals and the West hoped Medvedev would reverse the increase in state control and erosion of civil liberties during Putin's previous rule, he showed little desire for a radical break with Putin's legacy.

"Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin really is modern Russia's most popular, experienced and successful politician," Medvedev said during an attempt to explain why he was standing down in favour of Putin in 2012. — Reuters

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How the LatAm-GPT is building culturally relevant AI for the region

- **LatAm-GPT aims to reflect Latin America's culture**
- **Trained on nearly 3 million regional documents**
- **Aims to use AI to preserve Indigenous languages**

By David Feliba
Buenos Aires

"Tell me the most recent relevant books and novels from Chile."

That was the prompt Chilean engineers at the state-run National Center for Artificial Intelligence (CENIA) gave OpenAI's ChatGPT to test its grasp of Latin America culture.

But when the chatbot replied with only titles by renowned Chilean poet Pablo Neruda and not much else, researchers were not impressed.

"It seemed like it only knew Neruda's work," said Carlos Aspillaga, a computer science engineer at CENIA, who worked on the project.

"The model lacked diversity and wasn't locally accurate. Worse, some of the books it mentioned didn't even exist, or had factual errors."

The exchange highlighted a key limitation of mainstream AI, revealing that it struggles with regional precision and nuance.

That means its responses can lack accuracy or contain mistakes when addressing highly localised matters, particularly in small countries with languages other than English.

Mainstream large language models, though equipped with multilingual capabilities, are predominantly trained on English-language content that still dominates the internet.

Much of the data related to Latin America comes from Spain, or is translated from texts originally written in English, which could explain why the models often fail to produce content that feels authentic or culturally grounded to Latin American users.

That realisation sparked CENIA's two-year effort to create a GPT-style language model rooted in Latin America and one that reflects the region's diverse culture and languages.

The result is LatAm-GPT, set to launch this September as the first large language model in the region.

Built with input from more than 30 regional institutions, and developed specifically for Latin America, it is a milestone in a global AI race that could leaving emerging economies behind.

"What's crucial for Latin America is to jump on this technology now," Aspillaga told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

"We're at a point where it's still feasible to adopt and adapt existing techniques. Maybe in five years, that window would close. This lets us start building our own know-how," he said.

Building cultural nuance

Unlike widely known models like OpenAI's ChatGPT or Meta's LLaMA, LatAm-GPT flips the dynamic of relying heavily English language and global North datasets.

It is exposed heavily to Latin American data, with an important focus on local languages, idioms and expressions.

The team is also working on preserving Indigenous languages.

The first version of LatAm-GPT includes around 70bn tokens — words and word fragments — in Spanish, Portuguese and English.

It draws from more than 8 terabytes of regional data and nearly 3mn documents, including books, Wikipedia entries, and a myriad of texts obtained through partnerships with libraries and universities across Latin America and Spain.

The largest economies in the region — Brazil and Mexico — contributed the bulk of this material.

While smaller in scale than the most advanced global models, its architecture is closer to ChatGPT-2 than the current GPT-4, but LatAm-GPT's edge lies elsewhere. It is not the quantity, but the quality of the data and its relevance.

"We're feeding the model concentrated knowledge about Latin America," said Aspillaga.

"Global models aim to cover all the world's knowledge. We're focused on a niche where we can actually outperform them."

CENIA researchers believe LatAm-GPT could be especially useful in schools and other local applications that need accuracy on regional affairs.

"Right now, the available models aren't accurate or complete when it comes to local issues. They don't understand how locals speak or think," Aspillaga said.

"It shouldn't be the person who adapts to the technology, it should be the technology adapting to them."

Indigenous languages

Another goal of the centre is to help preserve endangered Indigenous languages.

One of its most prominent projects has taken place 3,700km off the Chilean coast, on Easter Island (Rapa Nui), often described as the most remote inhabited place on Earth.

There, researchers worked with the local community to build an AI-powered translator for the Rapa Nui language, part of a broader strategy to revitalise and digitally preserve it.

"Rapa Nui is currently at risk because there are very few fluent speakers," said Jackeline Rapu, who leads the Rapa Nui Language Academy.

"This digital repository is really important. It supports all the linguistic revitalisation efforts we've been working on and helps young people reconnect with the language."

Latin America is not alone in building home-grown models and AI-powered tools.

Around the world, governments are racing to create AI systems tailored to local languages and needs.

The United Arab Emirates government, for example, has launched Falcon and Jais to advance Arabic AI.

India is developing BharatGPT to support more than 14 regional languages, led by public universities and backed by the Department of Science & Technology, in partnership with AI firm CoRover.

In South Korea, tech giant Naver Corporation has introduced HyperCLOVA for Korean, while AI Singapore, a national program funded by Singapore's government, is building SEA-LION to serve Southeast Asia.

LatAm-GPT's development also reflects growing political momentum for AI cooperation in the region.

In April, Chile and Brazil signed a memorandum of understanding to jointly advance AI research, with Brazil officially joining the LatAm-GPT initiative.

Last year, Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva unveiled a national AI strategy that includes investing more than $4bn by 2028 to boost the industry, while Argentina has expressed ambitions to become a global AI and data hub.

Today, major platforms offer slightly more nuanced answers to prompts about Chilean literature.

The same query today no longer just mentions Neruda, but also brings up other renowned authors like Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral or Chilean writer Jose Donoso.

"When it comes to AI, we're always going to be behind countries like the United States, but that doesn't mean we can't do something useful, and that's our ultimate goal," Aspillaga said. — Thomson Reuters Foundation



An illustration of a mobile phone showing a chat between a user and an AI chatbot. (**Thomson Reuters Foundation**)

Peace offering? Donald Trump's Nobel obsession

AFP
Washington

A craving for international prestige, a decade-long Obama rivalry and perhaps a dash of provocation: a mercurial melange of factors is at play in Donald Trump's obsession with the Nobel Peace Prize.

"It's well past time that President Trump was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize," White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told reporters on July 31, prompting reactions of disbelief and sarcasm from the Republican leader's opponents.

Since his January 20 return to power, the US president "has brokered, on average, one peace deal or ceasefire per month," Leavitt said, citing as examples his mediations between India and Pakistan; Cambodia and Thailand; Egypt and Ethiopia; Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC); Serbia and Kosovo; and others.

His leading spokeswoman also mentioned Iran, where Trump ordered US strikes against the Islamic republic's nuclear facilities, as evidence of decisions Leavitt claims have contributed to world peace.

She made no mention of the conflict in Ukraine, which Trump pledged multiple times to end on "day one" of his term, or the war in Gaza, which rumbles on and for which the US supplies Israel with weapons.

For some foreign leaders, mentioning the prestigious award has become a sign of diplomatic goodwill toward an American president who envisions himself as a peacemaker.

Pakistan nominated Trump for the Nobel Peace Prize, as did Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

During an early July meeting at the White House, a journalist asked the presidents of Liberia, Senegal, Mauritania, Guinea-Bissau, and Gabon whether Trump deserved the award.

Basking in the flattering responses from the African leaders, a smiling Trump said: "We could do this all day long."

Tens of thousands of people can offer a nomination to the Nobel committee, including lawmakers, ministers, certain university professors, former laureates and members of the committee themselves.

Nominations are due by January 31, with the announcement coming in October — this year on the 10th of the month.

Law professor Anat Alon-Beck, who is an Israeli-American, submitted Trump's name to the committee's five members, who were appointed by the Norwegian Parliament.



US President Donald Trump sarcastically said if his name was Obama, he would have won the Nobel in 10 seconds. (**Reuters**)

The assistant professor at Case Western Reserve University School of Law told AFP she did so because of the "extraordinary leadership" and "strategic brilliance" he has shown, in her opinion, in advancing peace and securing the release of hostages held in the Gaza Strip.

For some, the prospect of handing the prize to someone who has upended the international order is untenable.

US history and politics researcher Emma Shortis wrote on news site The Conversation: "Of course Trump does not deserve it."

The American president disagrees.

"I deserve it, but they will never give it to me," Trump told reporters in February as he hosted Netanyahu at the White House, lamenting not ticking the Nobel box in his life.

"No, I won't get a Nobel Peace Prize no matter what I do, including Russia/Ukraine, and Israel/Iran, whatever those outcomes may be," Trump griped on his Truth Social platform in June.

"But the people know, and that's all that matters to me!"

Trump is well-known as someone who is particularly fond of accolades and prizes, Garret Martin, a professor of international relations at American University, told AFP, "so he would welcome this major international recognition."

And since the beginning of his presidential ambitions 10 years ago, "he has put himself in opposition to Barack Obama, who famously won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009," Martin added.

The prize awarded to the Democratic former president, barely nine months after he took office, sparked heated debate — and continues to do so.

"If I were named Obama I would have had the Nobel Prize given to me in 10 seconds," Trump bellyached in October 2024, during the final stretch of the presidential campaign.

Three other US presidents have also been so honoured: Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and Jimmy Carter.

The prize was also awarded to Henry Kissinger in 1973 for his efforts to help end the war in Vietnam. The choice of the one-time US secretary of state was heavily criticised.

The full list of Nobel Peace Prize nominees is confidential — except for individual announcements by sponsors — but their number is made public. In 2025, there are 338 nominees. Some betting sites have Trump in second place to win, behind Yulia Navalnaya, the widow of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

Pakistan's education rights activist Malala Yousafzai is the youngest Nobel recipient to date, having received the award in 2014 at the age of 17.

Bolsonaro backers rally to hail Trump for pressure

AFP
Rio de Janeiro

Thousands of fervent supporters of Brazilian ex-president Jair Bolsonaro took to the streets yesterday, showing support for US President Donald Trump's pressure campaign against the trial of his right-wing ally.

Bolsonaro is currently being tried in the capital Brasilia for plotting a coup after failing to win re-election in 2022 against leftist Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

"I am here to defend our people against censorship and judges who act arbitrarily," Valdeciria Galvao, a stenographer attending a rally in Brasilia, told AFP.

Most of the demonstrators were dressed in green and yellow, the national colours of Brazil and Bolsonaro's party, while some held US flags or signs reading "Thank you Trump."

Rallies were organised in several cities including Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

Bolsonaro, 70, was unable to participate as he has been court-ordered to stay home on evenings and weekends, and not to use social media, as his trial plays out.

Accused of conspiring to remain in power despite his electoral defeat by Lula, he faces a heavy prison sentence in the trial, which is expected to be concluded in the coming weeks.

On Wednesday, the US Treasury Department imposed financial sanctions on Brazilian Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes, who is presiding over the trial and is despised by Bolsonaro supporters for his fight against disinformation, which they say amounts to censorship.

That same day Trump, who has branded the trial a "witch hunt," slapped cumulative 50% tariffs on several Brazilian imports as he wielded US economic might to punish the country.



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (left) meets with Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in Islamabad yesterday. (**Reuters**)

Pakistan, Iran set $10bn trade target, sign 12 agreements

Pakistan and Iran have agreed to expand their bilateral trade to $10bn "at the earliest," Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif announced in a joint statement with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian.

The commitment was made as the two countries signed 12 agreements and memoranda of understanding (MoUs) aimed at deepening economic co-operation. "Both sides signed several documents to be turned into formal agreements, with delegations set to hold further talks to realise the $10bn trade target," the state-run Associated Press of Pakistan reported.

Earlier, during bilateral talks, the two leaders reviewed political, economic, cultural, and religious ties and agreed on measures to strengthen them further.

At the joint press briefing, Sharif also condemned Israel's June 13 strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities, which Tehran says killed 610 people.

President Asif Ali Zardari also hosted his Iranian counterpart at Aiwan-e-Sadr yesterday during the latter's two-day visit to Pakistan.

According to an official statement, the two leaders reaffirmed their commitment to broaden collaboration across diverse fields and stressed the need to further strengthen bilateral relations in mutually beneficial areas.



A handout photograph released by the Mayor of Sochi Andrey Proshunin in his Telegram channel yesterday shows firefighters working at a fuel depot outside Sochi after an overnight Ukrainian drone attack. (**AFP**)

Ukrainian drones spark fire at Sochi oil depot

AFP
Moscow

A Ukrainian drone attack sparked a fire at an oil depot in Sochi, the Russian resort that hosted the 2014 Winter Olympic which is 400km (250 miles) from the Ukrainian border, authorities said yesterday.

Ukraine has regularly hit Russian oil and gas infrastructure in response to attacks on its own territory since Russia began its offensive in February 2022.

"Sochi suffered a drone attack by the Kyiv regime last night," the governor of Russia's Krasnodar region, Veniamin Kondratiev, said on Telegram.

He said drone wreckage hit an "oil tank, which caused a fire" during the nighttime attack.

Sochi's mayor, Andrei Proshunin, said there were no victims and that the fire was put out several hours later.

Images, broadcast by Russian media but whose authenticity AFP could not verify, showed flames and thick plumes of black smoke rising from the site.

Air traffic was briefly suspended at Sochi airport, Russia's air transport regulator Rosaviatsia said.

Ukrainian authorities have not commented on the fire.

Air strikes on Sochi are relatively rare compared to some other Russian cities.

However, Ukrainian drone attacks killed two people there late last month, according to local authorities.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Sunday that the two sides were preparing a prisoner exchange that would see 1,200 Ukrainian troops return home, following talks with Russia in Istanbul in July.

Kyiv has said it will intensify its air strikes against Russia in response to an increase in Russian attacks on its territory in recent weeks, which have killed dozens of civilians.

The Russian defence ministry said meanwhile that three Ukrainian drones had been intercepted in the Leningrad region, which includes the Baltic port of Saint Petersburg.

Overnight strikes by Russia inside Ukraine also left several people injured, authorities said.

One missile wounded seven people in a residential district of Mykolaiv, a city near the Black Sea in southern Ukraine, Prime Minister Yulia Svyrydenko said.

Three other people were injured in the northeastern Kharkiv region, she added, while authorities also reported injuries in the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions in the south.

"The Russians continue to wage war not against Ukrainian forces, but against Ukrainian civilians," Svyrydenko said.

Last week, US President Donald Trump gave his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin a 10-day ultimatum, until next Friday, to end the conflict in Ukraine.

The air strikes and fighting have not abated, however, and the Kremlin has rejected the idea of a lasting ceasefire in Ukraine, which it sees as a gift to Kyiv's troops.

Pope's 'Jubilee of Youth' ends with mass for a million pilgrims

Pope Leo XIV presided over a final mass in Rome for over one million young people yesterday, the culmination of a pilgrimage that has drawn Catholics from across the world.

"Aspire to great things, to holiness, wherever you are. Do not settle for less," Pope Leo told the crowd.

The week-long "Jubilee of Youth" — a highlight of the Jubilee holy year — was an enormous undertaking for the Vatican, with a half a million young pilgrims in Rome for most of the week.

On Saturday night, before a twilight vigil led by the Pope, organisers said there were 800,000 people in the vast, open-air space on Rome's eastern outskirts, and yesterday the Vatican said that number had grown to one million.

Most of them spent the night in tents, in sleeping bags or on mats in anticipation of Sunday's mass.

Among them was New Yorker Christofer Delano, who said he was "so happy to see Pope Leo" but stunned by the crowds.

"I didn't expect to see all these people. I knew there was going to be a lot of people — I didn't know it was going to be this many," he told AFP.

In his homily, the first US Pope and former missionary encouraged the gathered youth to "spread your enthusiasm and the witness of your faith to everyone you meet!"

The Vatican has sought to highlight pilgrims who travelled to Rome from war-torn regions, and Leo said in his Angelus prayer: "We are closer than ever to young people who suffer the most serious evils which are caused by other human beings."

"We are with the young people of Gaza. We are with the young people of Ukraine, with those of every land bloodied by war," said the 69-year-old pontiff.

"My young brothers and sisters, you are the sign that a different world is possible, a world of fraternity and friendship where conflicts are not resolved with weapons but with dialogue."

The colourful event was accompanied by music from a choir, and about 450 bishops and 700 priests, all in green robes.

A towering cross dominated the massive golden arch covering the stage where the Pope led mass.

Italian pilgrim Tommaso Benedetti said the Pope had passed his "first test" in the eyes of young people during the youth jubilee.

"We feel quite satisfied. There were many references to peace, which is a theme that is very close to our hearts as young people," Benedetti told AFP.



Pope Leo XIV waves to the crowd as he leaves after leading a mass in the Tor Vergata district of Rome, as part of Jubilee of Youth. (**AFP**)

The young pilgrims — from 146 different countries, according to the Vatican — have filled Rome's streets since Monday, chanting, singing and waving flags of their countries.

The festive atmosphere reached a peak Saturday ahead of the vigil presided over by Leo, with Italian broadcaster Rai dubbing it a Catholic "Woodstock".

Hundreds of thousands camped out at the dusty venue, strumming guitars or singing, as music blasted from the stage where a series of religious bands entertained the crowds.

Leo was greeted with deafening screams and applause after his arrival by helicopter and as he toured the grounds in his popemobile, with many people running to catch a better glimpse of the new Pope.

Roads leading to the Tor Vegata venue, about a 40 minute drive from the centre of Rome, were packed, making Leo's choice of helicopter transportation on both Saturday and yesterday more efficient.

At over 500,000 square metres, the grounds were the size of around 70 football fields.

British student Andy Hewellyn sat in front of a huge video screen — a prime spot, as he could not even see the stage far away.

"I'm so happy to be here, even if I'm a bit far from the Pope. I knew what to expect!" he told AFP.

"The main thing is that we're all together."

The youth pilgrimage came about three months after the start of Leo's papacy and 25 years after John Paul II organised the last such youth gathering in Rome.

It was announced by Pope Francis during World Youth Day in Lisbon in 2023.

The Church planned a series of events for the young pilgrims over the course of the week, including turning the Circus Maximus — where chariot races were held in ancient Rome — into an open-air confessional.

QATAR

Ghanim al-Muftah celebrates Qatar's inclusive vision, championing 'Purple Saturday' for all

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

Renowned Qatari motivational speaker, philanthropist, and YouTube streamer Ghanim al-Muftah has lauded Qatar's commitment to being a disability-friendly nation, highlighting its seamless accessibility and the newly launched "Purple Saturday" initiative.

In a post shared by Visit Qatar on its Facebook page, al-Muftah offered a personal glimpse into his daily experiences in the nation.

"Ever wondered what a day in Qatar looks like for me? Let me show you," he said. "It's smooth, welcoming, and seamless in every step of the way."

He elaborated on the thoughtful design of Qatar's public spaces.

"Accessible sidewalks, inclusive facilities, everything is thoughtfully designed so you can move freely and feel at ease," al-Muftah said. "I'm proud of my country's initiatives and its incredible efforts to create spaces to serve everyone."

His praise extended to the "Purple Saturday" initiative, which he described as more than just an event for people with disabilities.

"'Purple Saturday' is not just for people with disabilities, it is for all of us: individuals, families, and institutions. It's a call to build a community that embraces everyone with all their differences," al-Muftah stressed.

The initiative, a high-impact endeavour dedicated to empowering individuals with special needs, was recently launched by Qatar Tourism in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Development and Family and the Ministry of Industry and Commerce.

The inaugural event was held at the 2025 Qatar Toy Festival, taking place at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre, and the initiative is slated to be celebrated annually on the last Saturday of July.

It is learnt that this move by Qatar aligns with a broader regional movement, as "Purple Saturday" was originally launched by the Authority of People with Disabilities in Saudi Arabia in 2021.



Ghanim al-Muftah cites Qatar's seamless accessibility for people with disabilities. – ***Screengrab***

Its expansion to cover the entire GCC region signifies a powerful display of solidarity and unity in advocating for inclusivity.

According to Visit Qatar, "Purple Saturday" in Qatar serves to unite stakeholders from both the public and private sectors.

Their collective aim is to champion accessibility, raise awareness, and foster greater community participation for all.

Qatar Tourism highlighted the initiative as a pivotal moment in a growing movement towards enhanced inclusivity, fuelled by multi-sector collaboration and a unified vision for universal accessibility.







QF's Ability Friendly Programme wraps up summer camp

The Ability Friendly Programme under Qatar Foundation (QF)'s Pre-University Education (PUE) has concluded its summer camp designed to support people with disabilities.

The programme is part of the QF's broader efforts to promote inclusion by providing sport-specific activities for children and adults with special needs and disabilities, empowering them to discover their potential, develop essential skills, and build meaningful social connections.

The camp offered a programme featuring a variety of educational and recreational activities, including sensory sessions, arts and crafts, swimming, football, horse riding, as well as engaging field trips and meaningful experiences that foster personal growth and social engagement.

Mohamed Elfarsisi, a football coach in the QF's Ability Friendly Programme (AFP), said: "This year's summer camp marked a significant shift, with a stronger focus on promoting independence among participants. For the first time, parents and guardians were not present during the camp, an important new step introduced this year."

"We focused on promoting true social inclusion," he said. "Many of the camp's activities took place in public spaces, allowing participants to fully engage with their surroundings. We aimed to deliver a clear message that people with disabilities are an integral part of society, sharing the same interests and experiences as everyone else."

Elfarsisi also noted that the camp prioritised effective inclusion of both children and adults by assigning a dedicated support person to each participant, whether a coach or behavioural specialist, ensuring everyone received the appropriate level of guidance throughout the various activities.

Maha al-Marri, the mother of seven-year-old Saleh al-Marri, who has Down syndrome, observed a noticeable improvement in her son's skills and behaviour following his participation in the camp.

"This is the third time my son Saleh has participated in the AFP's summer camp," she said. "I consider it a rare and valuable opportunity, especially given the limited number of programs and activities specifically designed for individuals with disabilities and the scarcity of qualified specialists to support them."

"At first, I had some concerns about not being allowed to accompany my child," al-Marri added. "However, I decided to give it a try, especially since the programme collaborates with centres that specialise in behaviour modification."

Salem Saeed al-Aida, a 10-year-old participant in the camp with autism, said: "I've been taking part in the Ability Friendly Programme for five years now, and every year I learn something new."

"This year, I really enjoyed the activities, especially swimming, which is my favourite," he said.

"I also played football, did some drawing, and made sure to stay active and have fun during the summer break," al-Aida added. "I consider autism a superpower because each of us has our own unique way of expressing ourselves and communicating. The camp helped me connect with other participants, and I made new friends."





