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BUSINESS | Page 1

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Mediators ‘concerned’  
about Israel opening  
one-way Gaza exit

Gaza mediators Egypt and Qatar and six other Muslim-majority countries said yesterday they were concerned about Israel stating it would open a one-way crossing for Palestinians to exit the Strip. The foreign ministers of Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkiye and the United Arab Emirates “expressed their deep concern regarding the statements issued by the Israeli side concerning the opening of the Rafah crossing in one direction with the aim of transferring residents of the Gaza Strip to” Egypt, they said in a joint statement. (AFP)

Colombia, EGC  
Group vow  
peace after  
Doha mediation

Qatar announced yesterday the signing of a “Commitment to Peace” by the Colombian government and the Self-Designated EGC Group, following two rounds of mediation in Doha. The signing ceremony was attended by HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi. Also present from international partners were State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway, Andreas Kravik; Assistant Foreign Minister of the Swiss Confederation, Tim Enderlin; and Assistant Foreign Minister of Spain, Alberto Ucelay. The ‘Commitment’ reflects consensus, responsibility, and a commitment to alleviating the suffering of the civilian population, ending the armed conflict, and paving the way for both parties to build a sustainable peace. (QNA) Page 2

Netflix to buy Warner  
Bros in \$72bn deal

Netflix said yesterday it will buy film and TV studio Warner Bros Discovery for \$72bn, the industry’s biggest consolidation deal this decade. The acquisition, which will face regulatory scrutiny by the Trump administration and is opposed by top names in Hollywood, gives Netflix access to a vast film catalogue as well as the prestigious streaming service HBO Max. Business Page 2



Qatar to face Switzerland,  
Canada at 2026 World Cup

By Sahana Bidappa  
Doha

Qatar will open their FIFA World Cup 2026 campaign against Switzerland at Levi’s Stadium in Santa Clara, California, on June 13. The Asian champions will then face co-hosts Canada in Vancouver before moving to Seattle to take on the winner of European Play-Off A, which features Italy, Northern Ireland, Wales or Bosnia and Herzegovina.

At the draw ceremony in Washington last night, Qatar avoided the big guns from Pot 1, though they could still face four-time winners Italy, who are favourites to emerge from European Play-Off A despite struggling in the qualification stage.

Italy finished as Group I runners-up and have been forced into the qualifying play-offs for the third consecutive time. The Azzurri will play Northern Ireland in the semi-final on March 26, 2026, in Bergamo. If they progress, they will face the winner of Wales versus Bosnia and Herzegovina in the final.

The 2022 World Cup hosts Qatar secured their first-ever qualification on merit in October,

2026 World Cup draw - the 12 groups

Group A:	Mexico, South Africa, South Korea, a qualifier
Group B:	Canada, a qualifier, Qatar, Switzerland
Group C:	Brazil, Morocco, Haiti, Scotland
Group D:	United States, Paraguay, Australia, a qualifier
Group E:	Germany, Curacao, Ivory Coast, Ecuador
Group F:	Netherlands, Japan, a qualifier, Tunisia
Group G:	Belgium, Egypt, Iran, New Zealand
Group H:	Spain, Cape Verde, Saudi Arabia, Uruguay
Group I:	France, Senegal, qualifier, Norway
Group J:	Argentina, Algeria, Austria, Jordan
Group K:	Portugal, a qualifier, Uzbekistan, Colombia
Group L:	England, Croatia, Ghana, Panama

edging the United Arab Emirates 2-1 in Doha to top Group A of Asia’s fourth-round play-offs. Goals from Boualem Khoukhi and Pedro Miguel sent fans into raptures at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium, marking a milestone for a team who had previously appeared only as hosts.

The Qataris will aim to improve on their debut World Cup performance, where they lost all three group games and scored just one goal. Their prospects have been boosted by the arrival of Spanish coach Julen Lopetegui in May. The former Spain and Real Madrid coach replaced Luis Garcia after a poor start to Asian qualifying. Under Lopetegui,

Qatar have enjoyed a fine run to secure a spot at the global finals.

This will be Lopetegui’s first time coaching a team at the World Cup. He led Spain to Russia 2018 but was famously dismissed on the eve of the tournament after it emerged he had already signed a deal to take over at Real Madrid.

Meanwhile, reigning champions Argentina will face Algeria, Austria and first-time qualifiers Jordan in group J. Five-time winners Brazil play 2022 semi-finalists Morocco as well as Scotland and Haiti in group C, while France are in Group I take on Senegal, Norway and a qualifier from the play-offs. Sport Pages 1, 4

Amir to open  
Doha Forum  
2025 today

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani will patronise the opening of the 23rd edition of the Doha Forum at Sheraton Doha Hotel today.

The forum, held under the patronage of His Highness the Amir with the theme “Justice in Action: Beyond Promises to Progress”, will bring together a lineup of heads of states and governments, heads of regional and international organisations, and other distinguished guests.

The forum will once again convene policymakers, and global experts including new speakers, partners, and programme sessions focused on today’s most pressing international challenges.

Mubarak Ajlan al-Kuwari, executive director, Doha Forum, said: “In a world facing overlapping crises, the call for fair, accountable, and collective governance is more urgent than ever. As a convener of diverse voices, Doha Forum stands as a leading platform to explore how diplomacy, development, and humanitarian action can intersect to deliver measurable, inclusive progress.”

The 2025 edition is expected to welcome over 6,000 participants from more than 150 countries. As a leading platform for international dialogue, Doha Forum continues to serve as a space where diplomacy meets action – advancing collaboration, accountability, and shared global progress.

This year’s forum is convened at a pivotal moment marked by intensifying geopolitical tensions, deepening humanitarian needs, and accelerating technological disruption, underscoring the need for responsible, collaborative solutions to shared global challenges.

Doha Forum 2025 will feature distinguished speakers, from heads of state and senior ministers to global policy leaders, including: HE Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani, Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Qatar; John Dramani



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani

Mahama, President of Ghana; Ahmed al-Sharaa, President of Syria; Nawaf Salam, Prime Minister of Lebanon; Nechirvan Idris Barzani, President of Kurdistan region of Iraq; Hakan Fidan, Turkey’s Minister of Foreign Affairs; José Manuel Albares, Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Union, and Co-operation, Spain; Yusuf Maitama Tuggar, Foreign Minister of Nigeria; Sara Beysolow Nyaniti, Foreign Minister of Liberia; Giorgos Gerapetritis, Foreign Minister of Greece; Borge Brende, President and CEO, World Economic Forum; Hillary Clinton, former US secretary of state; and Bill Gates, Chair of the Gates Foundation and Founder of Microsoft.

Developed in collaboration with leading think tanks and global institutions, the 2025 programme features several high profile sessions including:

The Gaza Reckoning: Reassessing Global Responsibilities and Pathways to Peace - with the International Crisis Group, examining regional and global actors’ responsibilities in conflict resolution and long-term stabilisation.

Gulf-EU Relations in the Age of Strategic Isolation – with the Centre for International Policy Research, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, and Gulf Research Center, assessing shifting geopolitical dynamics and opportunities for renewed cooperation. To Page 3

Katara welcomes Arab Cup fans



Contributing to Qatar’s festive atmosphere during the FIFA Arab Cup 2025, Katara presents a diverse entertainment programme designed to offer visitors a rich cultural and recreational experience. Highlights include live match broadcasts at the Katara Corniche and Wisdom Square. The lineup also features daily art performances, children’s entertainment, open art exhibitions, and musical showcases, warmly welcoming fans from across the Arab world. (Supplied picture) Page 12

Qatar: The Gulf’s  
indispensable mediator

Manama  
communicate latest  
to acknowledge the  
country’s pivotal  
role in peace

By Kamran Rehmat  
Doha

In a region littered with broken ceasefires, weaponised rhetoric and leaders who speak more often of red lines than reconciliation, Qatar has emerged as the Gulf’s most reliable broker of peace.

The Manama Summit’s communicate did more than acknowledge Doha’s diplomatic finesse. It read as an unmistakable affirmation that, while larger states trade threats, it is Qatar that repeatedly



threads its way between warring parties, stitching together the fragile seams of dialogue where others find only dead ends.

The GCC leaders explicitly praised Qatar’s “pivotal role... with regional and international parties and guarantor states”; “efforts to achieve a ceasefire in Gaza and secure the release of hostages and detainees”; and ability to “complete negotiations and solidify the agreement”, enabling the first step toward a just peace.

The timing could hardly be more telling. Barely three months have passed since Israel launched a provocative attack on Qatari territory – an assault on sovereignty that, for most governments, would have triggered retaliatory escalation. Yet Doha did the opposite. Instead of being drawn into the vortex of confrontation, it doubled down on diplomacy, working shoulder to shoulder with Egypt, Turkiye and the United States to pull Gaza back from the abyss.

The result was the closest the region has come to a meaningful ceasefire in years and the release of hostages whose plight had become the war’s most painful symbol.

This, in essence, is why the world increasingly turns to Qatar when the guns refuse to fall silent. Its mediation is not episodic but systemic; not opportunistic but deeply principled. To Page 3



## Amir sends cables of congratulations to king of Thailand

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani sent cables of congratulations to King Maha Vajiralongkorn of the Kingdom of Thailand on the occasion of his country's National Day. **(QNA)**

## Qatar embassy in US hosts official dinner in honour of FIFA president



The embassy of the State of Qatar in the United States, in co-operation with the Kennedy Center, hosted an official dinner in honour of FIFA President Gianni Infantino and members of the FIFA Council, as part of the events surrounding the draw for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, which will be held next year in the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

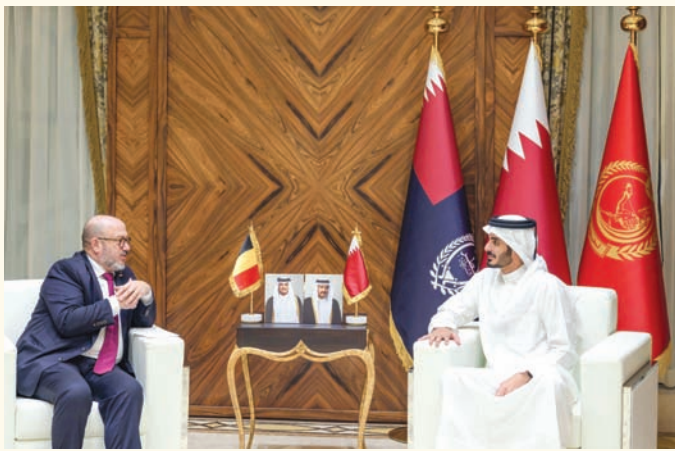
The dinner was attended by ambassador of the State of Qatar to the United States HE Sheikh Mishaal bin Hamad al-

Thani, and President of the Qatar Football Association Jassim bin Rashid al-Buainain. Also in attendance were US Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum, President of the Kennedy Center ambassador Richard Grenell, along with several prominent US officials and members of the diplomatic corps. The evening featured a symbolic moment marking the handover of the match ball from the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 to the United States, co-host of the FIFA World Cup 2026, a gesture signifying the transfer of the tour-

nament's legacy to the next host nation and how Qatar's experience can support co-operation between both countries in staging the world's largest sporting event. The dinner also included discussions on sports diplomacy, ongoing preparations for the 2026 World Cup, and recognition of the pioneering role played by Qatar in elevating the World Cup into a unique opportunity to enhance dialogue, strengthen connections between nations, and bring different cultures closer together. **(QNA)**

## Interior minister meets Belgian counterpart

HE the Minister of Interior and Commander of the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya) Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani met yesterday with Minister of Security and the Interior of the Kingdom of Belgium Bernard Quintin, at the National Command Center (NCC). Discussions during the meeting dealt with co-operation relations between the two friendly countries in security fields and ways to strengthen and develop them, in addition to a number of topics of common interest. **(QNA)**



# Justice minister discusses Qatar's experience in building advanced legal, security framework

**QNA**  
Doha

HE the Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Ibrahim bin Ali al-Mohannadi discussed during a meeting organised by the Police Academy the legal framework of security work in the State of Qatar, and the advanced model adopted by the State in building a modern and effective security system.

HE the minister affirmed that strengthening the legal framework is a fundamental pillar in building a professional security apparatus capable of maintaining security, protecting society, and reinforcing trust between citizens and law-enforcement agencies.

He pointed out that security work in Qatar is grounded in the Constitution, which upholds the rule of law and the protection of security and public order, while guaranteeing public rights and freedoms without discrimination. He said that the execution of security duties takes place within a constitutional framework that balances authority with responsibility, and power with respect for the law, highlighting the development witnessed in the legislative system regulating security work to keep pace with security and technological changes.

HE al-Mohannadi also highlighted the relevant laws, including laws establishing security agencies, the Penal Code, the Criminal Procedure Code, and the laws of traffic, civil defence, and the regulation of entry and exit of expatriates, in addition to laws combating organised crime, human trafficking, money laundering, terrorism financing, and cybercrimes emphasising the integration of these legislations with international



standards. He touched on the legal safeguards that distinguish Qatar's legal system, foremost among them the principle of legality, the respect for human dignity and the criminalisation of torture, judicial oversight, the principle of proportionality in the use of force, and transparency and accountability through human rights reports, grievance mechanisms, and internal oversight.

He emphasised the integration of roles between judicial and security bodies in drafting legislations, developing procedures, and aligning them with emerging developments, especially in the fields of technology and cybercrime, alongside improving the efficiency of human resources and enhancing legal awareness in society to strengthen trust between citizens and security personnel.

He also noted contemporary security challenges, particularly cybercrimes and transnational organised crime, pointing to the state's efforts in developing legislation, establishing specialised cybersecurity entities, and enhancing international cooperation in this domain.

HE al-Mohannadi said that Qatar has succeeded in building an advanced model in legal security, combining efficient security agencies, modern legislation, professionalism in judicial control, and commitment to international standards, adding that this strengthened international confidence in the state's capabilities during the hosting of major events.

At the conclusion, HE the Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs addressed future officers, urging them to make the law a compass of every decision and action, and to combine boldness with discipline, and firmness with respect for rights.

He stressed the importance of advancing legal and technical skills, and of reinforcing trust between security personnel and society, emphasising that achieving security is a national mission in which all state institutions participate, in line with Qatar National Vision 2030 and with the support of wise leadership that has made human beings the focus and ultimate goal of development.



## Mediator countries vow to uphold Colombia-EGC peace commitment

**By Peter Alagos**  
Business Reporter

The Group of Mediator Countries, comprising Qatar, Norway, Spain, and Switzerland, have vowed to work together in maintaining verification and monitoring mechanisms for the "commitment for peace" agreement signed in Doha yesterday between Colombia and the self-designated EGC.

On the sidelines of the signing ceremony, HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz al-Khulaifi told Gulf Times the "necessity to work together collectively on the ground to help and support the concerned parties in fulfilling their obligations". He explained: "We're going to work closely with the parties involved during the implementation phase. As I mentioned before, there are going to be several meetings following up on the signing ceremony today, where mechanisms will be detailed, and that will allow us to go through a sort of very strict monitoring system that will allow us to achieve what we have accomplished today."

Similarly, Norway's Deputy Foreign Minister Andreas Motzfeldt Kravik explained that "productive meetings" in Doha with Colombia and EGC representatives resulted in the recognition of monitoring mechanisms that would ensure "that steps are being taken on both sides to adhere to the agreement".



During the signing ceremony, Dr al-Khulaifi announced the joint statement of the Group of Mediator Countries, which was issued following the conclusion of a round of mediation, held in Doha, between the Government of Colombia and the self-designated EGC concerning the Process for the Demobilisation of the (a)EGC and Peacebuilding with the People in the Territories.

"After the first two rounds of mediation, we are pleased to announce that the Government of Colombia and the self-designated EGC have taken important steps towards peace. The parties have signed a 'Commitment to Peace' that reflects compromise, responsibility, and commitment to alleviate the conditions for the civilian population and end armed conflict.

The declaration represents a step towards the demobilisation of the self-designated EGC and peacebuilding," said Dr al-Khulaifi, citing the statement.

"We commend the concerned parties for their constructive engagement and willingness to

compromise in working towards a sustainable solution through dialogue. This process aims to improve the lives and well-being of those communities affected by the conflict - families who have been exposed to violence, young people who deserve opportunity, and victims who seek truth, justice, reparations, and guarantees of non-repetition. It also provides the parties with a path towards ending the armed conflict and building sustainable peace," the statement further noted.

The statement added: "Still, there will be many hurdles and challenges to overcome. We will continue in our role as mediators in order to assist the parties in making further steps to consolidate trust among themselves and work towards peace. "The implementation of the commitments reached so far by the parties will require sustained discipline, transparency, and trust. We hope to work with all stakeholders - civil society, institutions, and international partners in supporting this process and help ensure its success."

## Google Cloud, MCIT renew strategic alliance at MWC Doha

Google Cloud and Qatar's Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT) yesterday announced the formal renewal of their strategic Master Framework Agreement (MFA). Google Cloud and MCIT conducted the signing at the recent MWC Doha. Through the MCIT's enabling role and its ongoing efforts to localise advanced technologies, this sustained partnership builds on the solid progress achieved since the launch of the Google Cloud Doha region - a hub that has rapidly empowered government ministries and major national enterprises.

The extended agreement further ensures that government entities continue to benefit from secure, scalable, and innovative cloud services, with an enhanced focus

on future-proofing public service delivery through generative AI and advanced data solutions, a statement from Google Cloud explained.

Shortly following the signing, Ghassan Kosta, regional general manager, Google Cloud Qatar, Oman, Bahrain and Iraq, announced the commitment in his keynote presentation to an audience of industry leaders.

The successful execution of the previous agreement has already yielded significant achievements across the Qatari public sector, demonstrating a robust appetite for AI-driven transformation. By renewing this strategic framework, MCIT and Google Cloud are doubling down on their commitment to empower the nation with the latest advancements in artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and

data analytics, directly supporting the country's transition toward a knowledge-based economy. Sami Mohammad al-Shammari, Assistant Undersecretary for Infrastructure and Operations Affairs at the MCIT, stated: "Our reinforced collaboration with Google Cloud has been instrumental in advancing Qatar's digital landscape. By providing cutting-edge and secure cloud solutions, and fostering innovation particularly in AI and data analytics, we are building partnerships that empower our government entities to enhance services, drive efficiency, and accelerate progress across all sectors. We look forward to continuing this fruitful collaboration, further solidifying Qatar's digital future and realising the ambitious goals outlined in Qatar National Vision 2030."

## Behzad Trading Enterprises hosts event for customers in Doha

Behzad Trading Enterprises, a sister concern of ABN Corporation and a trusted name in the Qatar market since 1976, successfully conducted its Chemical Division Customer Meet at Hotel Sharq Village, featuring a technical presentation and interactive session with industry partners. The event was inaugurated by the Chairman, J K Menon, who delivered the keynote address, followed by a welcome note from Jithesh P, Senior Business Development Manager. The technical session was led by Sooraj P and Vyshnav Venugopal. The evening also included appreciation recognitions presented by the Chairman and concluded with a vote of thanks from Abey Raju, Sales Manager, followed by a networking dinner. The meet highlighted Behzad Trading's continued commitment to excellence, innovation, and customer collaboration in Qatar's chemical sector.





## Syrians mark one year since toppling of Assad



Syrians during celebrations marking one year since a lightning offensive that eventually toppled the country's long-time ruler Bashar Assad, in central Hama yesterday.

# Lebanon president says country does not want war with Israel

AFP  
Beirut

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun yesterday told a UN Security Council delegation his country does not want war with Israel, days after civilian representatives from both sides held their first talks in decades.

Hezbollah chief Naim Qassem, whose group refuses to disarm, yesterday backed Lebanon's pursuit of diplomacy but called the inclusion of a civilian representative in talks with Israel a "mis-step".

During Aoun's meeting with UN Security Council ambassadors, the president said the Lebanese "do not want war again, the Lebanese people have suffered enough and there will be no going back", according to a presidency statement.

Aoun called on the envoys to support the Lebanese army's efforts to disarm non-state groups. The army expects to complete the first phase of its government-approved plan by the end of the year.

"The Lebanese army will play its full role... The international



Lebanese President Joseph Aoun (right) greeting Slovenia's UN ambassador Samuel Zbogah ahead of a meeting with United Nations Security Council delegation at the Presidential Palace of Baabda, east of Beirut, yesterday.

community must support and assist it," Aoun said.

He added there was "no going back" on the decision, "even if it requires some time, because the Lebanese are tired of military confrontations".

Despite a November 2024 ceasefire that was supposed to end more than a year of hostilities

between Israel and Hezbollah, Israel has kept up strikes on Lebanon and has also maintained troops in five south Lebanon areas it deems strategic.

On Wednesday, civilian representatives from Lebanon and Israel joined the meetings of a committee tasked with monitoring the ceasefire, a move Aoun

has said was to avoid a second war on Lebanon.

In a televised address, Hezbollah chief Qassem said his group supports the state's decision to choose "diplomacy to end the aggression and implement" the ceasefire, but he strongly criticised the inclusion of a civilian representative.

"We consider this measure an additional misstep on top of the sin" of the government's decision in August to task the army with disarming Hezbollah, he said.

"This concession will not change the enemy's position, nor its aggression or occupation," he added, urging authorities to reconsider.

Aoun emphasised yesterday "the need to pressure the Israeli side to implement the ceasefire and withdraw, and expressed his hope for pressure from the delegation".

He said that any outcome from these talks "depends primarily on Israel's position, upon which the negotiations will either reach practical results or fail".

The committee will hold a new round of talks, with the civilian representatives included, starting Dec 19.

## Amir to open Doha Forum 2025 today

From Page 1

Navigating Disruptions to Global Health Financing: Strategic Partnerships to Reclaim Country Ownership - with the Gates Foundation, exploring how new collaborations can strengthen primary healthcare amid significant aid cuts threatening recent gains.

AI as a Double-Edged Sword: Strategies for Responsible Use in

the Military Domain - with the Jeju Peace Institute, addressing governance gaps and rising security risks associated with AI in defence.

US-China Relations: Navigating the Risks and Opportunities of a Changing Global Order - with the Center for China and Globalisation, exploring how intensifying competition is reshaping trade, diplomacy, and global power dynamics.

## Qatar: The Gulf's indispensable mediator

From Page 1

Its diplomats, often working behind closed doors, understand that peace is rarely achieved through grandstanding. It is achieved in the quiet room, over long nights, when adversaries need an honest broker who neither flatters nor humiliates.

Consider the breadth of Qatar's mediation portfolio.

Take Central Africa: In November, Doha hosted the signing of the Doha Framework Agreement for Peace between the Democratic Republic of Congo and the M23 Movement, a breakthrough that few believed possible. That deal did not materialise from thin air; it sat atop months of negotiation following the Doha Declaration of Principles earlier in the year. In a conflict defined by deep mistrust, Qatar managed to get both sides to commit to dialogue, to acknowledge the roots of their grievances, and to begin the long work of reconciliation. For a Gulf state thousands of miles away, this is no small feat.

Or look eastward to South Asia, where decades of hostility between Pakistan and Afghanistan had calcified into something approaching inevitability. Yet here too, Qatar, working with Türkiye, helped shepherd the two nations into agreeing an immediate ceasefire and establishing mechanisms for sustained stability. It is easy to underestimate this achievement, but anyone familiar with the political landscape knows

how rare it is for these neighbours to agree on anything at all, let alone steps toward de-escalation. Then there is Ukraine and Russia, a theatre of conflict where even humanitarian gestures have become political landmines. Qatar, undeterred, facilitated the reunification of children with their families and supported prisoner exchanges, actions that require trust from both sides.

This is the point: Qatar talks to everyone, and everyone talks to Qatar. In a world of splintered alliances, this is a diplomatic superpower.

Critics sometimes see Doha's foreign policy as ambitious for its size; the reality is far simpler. Qatar has internalised an uncomfortable truth: in today's world, small states must build their own security. And the most sustainable form of security is not military might. It is relevance. Qatar is relevant because it is useful. It is useful because it lowers temperatures in a region that perpetually runs hot. And it does so consistently enough that even in moments of acute tension such as the September strike it refuses to abandon the moral and strategic logic of mediation.

The Gulf needs this steadiness. The wider Middle East needs it even more. And as global crises multiply, the international system may find that Qatar's brand of diplomacy - patient, principled and unafraid to stand alone - is precisely the kind of quiet power that keeps the world from tearing further apart.

## Heavy Israeli bombing across Gaza despite truce

QNA  
Gaza

Israeli occupation forces carried out heavy air and artillery bombardment across several areas of the Gaza Strip overnight and into the morning, in a renewed violation of the ceasefire agreement that entered into force on Oct 10.

The Palestinian news agency (WAFA) reported that Israeli helicopters opened intense fire inside the so-called "yellow line" in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip, while Israeli artillery shelled the northeastern areas of the city.

Israeli warplanes also carried out strikes on neighbourhoods in Gaza City in the north, Rafah in the south, and the Maghazi refugee camp in central Gaza, directly targeting homes and infrastructure.

At the same time, Israeli naval vessels opened fire off the coast

of Khan Younis, further escalating tensions along the coastal enclave.

WAFA added that earlier on Thursday, Israeli occupation forces carried out a heavy and sustained bombardment on Rafah, alongside extensive demolition operations.

Since the ceasefire took effect on Oct 10, Israel has continued to violate the agreement on a near-daily basis, resulting in the deaths and injuries of dozens of Palestinians, amid growing international concern over the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip.

●The Ramallah-based Palestinian health ministry said that Israeli forces killed a man in the northern occupied West Bank yesterday.

"Bahaa Abdel-Rahman Rashid (38 years old) was killed by Israeli fire in the town of Odala, south of Nablus," the ministry said in a statement.

## GCC warns of implications of EU's proposed corporate sustainability legislation

The Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) states expressed their deep concern regarding the two directives known as the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive and the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive, for which a package of amendments was recently submitted by the European Parliament to the trilogue negotiations. The GCC states stressed that their concern arises from the fact that the proposed legislation would require major European and international companies to follow the European Union's own definition of sustainability. It would further oblige these companies to comply with legislation related to human rights

and environment, and to submit climate plans that go beyond the obligations established under international climate agreements. In addition, companies would be required to report on the sustainability impacts of their operations and would be subject to penalties for non-compliance. The GCC states further noted that, despite the simplifications proposed by the European Parliament, aimed at alleviating the burdens of certain provisions and removing others, these changes still fall short of the GCC States' expectations and continue to constitute a source of harm and a potential source of wide-ranging risks to the interests of GCC companies operating in the European market. This is

particularly concerning in light of the new regulatory environment the legislation would establish, which could negatively affect the competitiveness and continuity of those companies' operations. The GCC states affirmed that they continue to pursue their efforts as active participants in all UN bodies concerned with human rights, the environment, and climate change, and that they have aligned their national legislation with the principles of these organisations while safeguarding their sovereign rights. They also submit their reports with full transparency, on a regular and consistent basis, across various international fora and conferences under the auspices of the UN. This commitment is reflected

in their accession to the Paris Agreement and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, as well as in their adoption of national regulations to protect the environment and regulate emissions, and their participation in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanisms on human rights. The GCC states also affirmed that, despite their efforts to fulfil their obligations to the international community in general, and to the European Union in particular, in ensuring the reliable and dependable delivery of energy supplies to Europe, they expect that continued discussion and negotiation among EU institutions on this legislation could negatively affect the continuity of those supplies.

## Festival film shows Gaza circus yearning for 'one more show'

AFP  
Cairo

Amid bombed-out buildings, Palestinian circus performers juggled and cartwheel and tried to spread joy despite war and famine, as shown in a documentary screened at the Cairo International Film Festival. Shot during the summer of 2024, as war raged in Gaza, *One More Show*, co-directed by Egyptian Mai Saad and Palestinian Ahmed el-Danaf, followed the daily life of the Free Gaza Circus. Danaf, 26 - who is still in the devastated Palestinian enclave - recorded footage of the clowns, jugglers and stilt walkers to bring Saad's idea to life. "It was the first time I heard

someone want to make a film about daily life, not just the bombing and the suffering," he told AFP, in a text message. "The obstacles in front of me were quite clear: communications down, difficulties moving around, constant danger and the lack of equipment. But I felt we had to see it through." Slowly but surely, the footage was fed to Saad in Cairo, who put the film together over the course of a year. "Everything we see in the news is from above - you only see people as these numbers, numbers, numbers... I wanted to make a film from below, from among the people," the 41-year-old director told AFP. The result is a heartfelt film in which humour, fatigue and the

innocence of childhood are woven together, all under the incessant fear of Israeli air strikes. Performers are seen taking turns scraping what little face paint they have left, helping each other prepare for a show in a school-turned-shelter. Dozens of children gather around a clown with a bright red nose, singing, laughing and clapping along. The point "was for these kids to see something besides the war and destruction that surrounds them all the time", troupe founder Youssef Khedr told AFP by phone from Gaza. A few weeks into filming, Israeli forces separated north Gaza from the rest of the tiny Palestinian territory. Short distances became

impassable, and the directors had to rely on footage shot by the performers themselves as they escaped to shelters, scrambled to put any kind of show together, or spent terrifying nights under air strikes. Khedr - who specialises in gymnastics and parkour - fled the circus tent in Gaza City and headed south. From his tent in southern Gaza, he told AFP he "did his best to keep training" so he could continue performing. But, as the humanitarian conditions in Gaza worsened, the potatoes and eggs that some performers are seen preparing soon became a luxury. In July, the circus announced it was suspending activities because of "the severe famine", saying they

could not "offer psychological support to those who haven't had a bite to eat to ease their hunger". By August, the UN confirmed that famine had set in in Gaza City, the main urban hub in the territory, where the health ministry says 157 children have starved to death. "Even we as artists have been exhausted by hunger," Khedr said. "There were days when we couldn't find anything to eat. I would buy 20 grams of sugar for \$15, and sometimes all we had was formula milk," he added. More than 70,000 people have since been killed in Gaza by the Israeli military, according to the Hamas-run territory's health ministry. Since the war began, two of the troupe's performers have been killed and three injured in strikes.

The building in northern Gaza where they used to rehearse and host workshops was destroyed. After a fragile truce went into effect in October, the circus performances began again, but with far fewer resources than before. Danaf spent months shuttling from shelter to shelter to find an internet connection so he could send Saad the footage. He could not make it in person to the premiere, as Palestinians are not permitted to leave Gaza. But, in a way, he did make it to the red carpet. Saad carried a tablet with a video call through the premiere and onto stage when the film won the Youssef Cherif Rizkallah Audience Award. The award's \$20,000 prize money will go towards rebuilding a centre for the circus in Gaza, Saad told AFP.





# DPS Monarch production ‘Raabta’ celebrates knowledge and harmony



DPS Monarch International School hosted its annual production, ‘Raabta – The Ties that Heal’, a transformative journey that unfolds across five enchanting realms, narrating a timeless tale of family warmth, sparking joy of friendship, strength of knowledge, powerful unity of teamwork, and harmony, healing connections that transcend lifetimes.

The evening commenced with a welcome dance, followed by a prayer and the national anthems of India and Qatar. Indian embassy’s deputy chief of mission Sandeep Kumar was the chief guest, renowned Indian composer, singer and pianist Stephen Devassy was the guest of honour



and the school’s patron Aisha bint Mohammad bin Hammam, the special guest.

The newly elected executive committee of DPS Monarch, comprising president Yasir Nainar, vice president George Thomas and directors Harish Kanjani, Rocky Fernandes, Gopi Varadhan, Sreedharan Kunhiramath, and Sonny Varghese were felicitated.

Antony Binu Alapatt, school and

science stream topper of Grade XII (AY 2024–25), and Anaswara Anil, school topper of Grade X (AY 2024–25), received the M Kanjani Memorial Award. The top ten rank holders of the Grade X CBSE Board Examinations and the Grade XII school toppers were awarded merit scholarships.

The highlight of the evening was a spellbinding performance by Stephen Devassy and the first

batch of students of the Stephen Devassy Music Academy which recently opened its doors exclusively for students of DPS Monarch.

The school yearbook, Reflections, was released afterwards.

The annual production reminded the gathering of the invisible bonds that unites – love, friendship, knowledge, teamwork, and the shared spirit that defines

humanity. Through light, dance, music, and storytelling, the Annual Day took the audience on a luminous journey through five realms – each representing a bond that nurtures, strengthens, and heals.

The event concluded with a celebratory curtain call, where the cast and crew were acknowledged for their dedication and creativity.

Vice president George Tho-

mas, appreciated the spectacular annual production, expressing gratitude to the leadership team comprising principal Meenal Bakshi, Secondary and Senior Secondary vice principal Madhu Upal, Middle School headmaster Kapil Christopher, Kindergarten and Primary headmistress Avlin Blossom, teachers, students, and parents for making the event a resounding success.

## DPS-MIS girls excel in debate competition



Participants from DPS-Modern Indian School (DPS-MIS) excelled in the Qatar Preparatory School Debate League (QPSDL)’s Girls Debate Competition. With nine students competing across three teams, Shikha Rajesh secured the third best speaker award while Jonel Zabrana Antin, Yashvii Jain, and Sampriya Sanjay were ranked 7th among the best speakers. Further, three senior students, Saara B, Vyasti Singh (XI A), and Nandini Pathak (XI K) represented the school on the official judging panel.

## BPS student shines in English Olympiad

Birla Public School (BPS) student Tanvir Kaur Dhillon (Grade 2C, pictured) gave an outstanding performance in the SOF International English Olympiad 2024-25. She secured an international score of 39, a zonal rank of five, regional rank of five, and school rank of one, scoring 36/40 with 97.70 percentile. She was awarded a cash prize, a gold medal and certificate of distinction. Principal Dr Anand R Nair, vice principal Edna S Fernandez, headmistress Josephine Fernandes and teachers congratulated the achiever.



## MES emerges runner-up at KnowTech Expo



MES Indian School emerged as the runner-up in KnowTech 2025 - The Knowledge and Technology Expo, organised by RSC Qatar, and participated by 14 schools across Qatar. The winners from MES were Estha Mariyam (first, seminar presentation); Minha Manaf, Diya Mariyam (first, quiz); Fathima Abdul Gafoor, Atheequr Rahman (second, legendary); Shahan Muhammed, Harinand Sudheesh (second, science still model); Ain Vaibhav, Anirudh

Kalarikkal Arun, Aarif Muhammed, Abdul Hadi Khaleelullah (third, science working model). Principal Dr Hameeda Kadar lauded the students and staff for their dedication and reaffirmed the school’s commitment to nurturing future innovators through holistic and technology-integrated education. Teachers Thasriya, Regin, Anagha and Vijitha from the Department of Science trained the students for the event.

## BPS team wins runners-up award in film fest

A team of three students from Birla Public School (BPS) won the runners-up award at the Students Short Film Contest organised by the Indian Cultural Centre (ICC) Film Club, Qatar. The short film, titled *The Weights We Carry*, distinguished itself among more than 40 entries submitted by Indian students across Qatar. The film was directed and written by Drishti Jain (Grade X), who also played the lead role and co-edited the project. She collaborated with Raj Dave (Grade XII), who served as the videographer and co-editor, and Benita Biju (Grade X), who contributed as an actress and co-writer. The BPS team was awarded a trophy and a cash prize of QR1,500. The principal along with the senior leadership team and the entire school community, lauded the students on their achievement.



## BPS finishes runners-up in ICC Criio women’s cricket festival



Birla Public School (BPS) finished as runners-up in the ICC Criio Women’s Cricket Festival organised by the Qatar Cricket Association and featuring teams from across the country. International Cricket Council (ICC) chairman Jay Shah presented the trophy and congratulated the outstanding efforts of the participants. The team was trained by coach Rajesh Jadhav and teacher in-charge Neha Khas.





# MES Indian School marks Annual Day

MES Indian School celebrated its 51st Annual Day, Mesmerise 2025, with a vibrant display of student talent over two days.

The grand spectacle of music, dance, and cultural amalgamation and celebration of the institution's landmark achievements brought together over 6,500 attendees each day. As many as 3,500 students participated in about 90 stage performances.

Indian ambassador Vipul and embassy's counsellor Dr Vaibhav A Tandale were the chief guests. In his address, ambassador Vipul lauded the school for its commitment to academic and co-scholastic excellence, while urging students to utilise the revolution of technology ethically in the larger interest of the community, and cautioning them against its misuse for self-serving and adverse purposes.

Dr Tandale inspired students with an anecdote that underscored the importance of nurturing one's passion and love in cultivating independent thought. He encouraged the young learners to embrace a forward-thinking mindset, grounded in scientific inquiry and technological innovation.

School president B M Sidhique, said: "Our aim is the holistic development of every child – from Kindergarten to Grade 12. With state-of-the-art facilities, enriching programmes, and a nurturing environment, we endeavour to shape learners who are intellectually curious, physically active, emotionally balanced, and morally grounded."

General secretary Dr Najeeb K P recalled the school's transformative journey over the last five



decades and paid tribute to the founders, faculty, and staff whose dedication has propelled the institution to new heights. Principal Dr Hameeda Kadar in her annual report showcased the landmarks of academic year 2024-25, and highlighted the outstanding accomplishments of students across curricular and co-curricular domains.

Students who emerged Qatar toppers in the Science, Commerce, and Humanities streams in Class XII CBSE Examinations for

2024-2025 were presented with cash awards, gold coins, commemorative mementos, and certificates.

The school toppers, subject toppers who achieved 100% marks, received gold medals, cash awards, and mementos, while students who secured A1 grades in all subjects in the Class X and XII CBSE examinations for 2024-25 received awards and mementos. Subject teachers whose guidance and dedication led students to achieve 100%

marks in their respective subjects were honoured during the award ceremony.

Students, as well as a teacher who demonstrated outstanding performance on the international stage in sports and games, were given special recognition. Also honoured were students who earned a place in the Guinness Book of Records, and staff members who served the institution for 30, 25, 20, 15, and 10 years. The cultural segment of the programme reflected the artistic

expression of students in youthful brilliance, showcasing their exceptional talent, creativity, and confidence on stage. A magnificent Elephant Float, crafted by the school's Art Department, was ceremoniously paraded to the venue, accompanied by the captivating rhythms of the traditional Chenda Melam. Marking both the commencement and conclusion of the event, this grand spectacle emerged as the centre of attraction.

Student representatives,

Nadiya Jaleel and Mohammed Kamal Ali Badran, welcome the gathering on the first and second days, respectively. The proceedings concluded with votes of thanks proposed by Arshad Aman, Mohammed Abdul Muqeet, and Jonah Jijo.

Cultural co-ordinators Anver K and Sumitha Abdul Nassar and section co-ordinators Harshan V, Umadevi, Sijlla Das and Dharini Selvi Siva Backiyarajan were instrumental in the success of the grand event.

## Filipino students lead Qatar to Oxford debate contest finals

Filipino students from the Philippine School Doha (PSD) and the Beta Cambridge School (BCS) have achieved a milestone for both Qatar and their home country after qualifying to represent Qatar at the Oxford Schools Debating Competition Finals Day, set to take place on March 14, 2026, at the Oxford Union in the UK.

The students secured Qatar top two teams during the Oxford Schools Debating Competition Qatar, hosted on November 1, 2025, by Vocara Institute, in partnership with the Oxford Union and Qatar University.

From BCS, the team of 'Top 1 Best Speaker' Abbey Catalan and 'Top 16th Best Speaker' Lauren Tansio emerged as the champion.

Meanwhile, the team from PSD, composed of 'Top 3 Best Speaker' Timothy Jeremiah Rivera and 'Top 18th Best Speaker' Nathaniel Angelo Ruiz, finished as strong runners-up. They competed against 110 participants, representing 29 teams from 16 schools across Qatar.

This year marks the first time that any school from Qatar has qualified to attend the Oxford



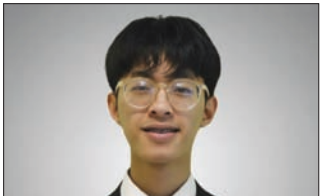
Abbey Catalan



Lauren Tansio



Timothy Jeremiah Rivera



Nathaniel Angelo Ruiz

Schools Debating Competition Finals Day in Oxford. Notably, PSD is the first Filipino school outside the Philippines to qualify for the UK Finals Day.

It also becomes the second Filipino school ever to reach this level, following Ateneo de Manila Senior High School, which competed at the Oxford Schools Finals Day in 2022 and 2023 after advancing through the Hong Kong regional rounds.

The dual achievement highlights both Qatar's growing debate

excellence and the outstanding global calibre of Filipino students in international academic competition. It also reflects the growing strength of Qatar's debate community, the increasing visibility of Filipino academic excellence abroad, and the powerful impact of cross-national educational collaboration. Both schools will proudly carry the flag of Qatar and the Filipino community in one of the most prestigious debating stages in the world in March 2026, a statement added.



## BPS holds workshop on vocal health for teachers

Birla Public School (BPS) conducted a workshop on Vocology – the science of voice and vocal health – aimed at helping teachers maintain strong, healthy, and sustainable voices in their day-to-day professional life.

The session led by renowned vocologist Fr Dr Paul Poovathingal, focused on the importance of proper vocal care, especially for educators who rely heavily on their voice as a teaching tool.

The resource person introduced participants to a series of effective vocal warm-up exercises, breathing techniques, and posture practices that can significantly reduce strain and improve vocal endurance.



Teachers actively participated in practical demonstrations and gained insights into preventing common vocal issues caused by prolonged speaking.

The resource person also high-

lighted the role of hydration, proper rest, and mindful voice use in maintaining long-term vocal health. Principal Dr Anand R Nair thanked Fr Dr Poovathingal for his enriching session.

**Doha student wins gold in Commonwealth essay contest**



Kavan Amarasinghe (**pictured**), an 18-year-old student of Stafford Sri Lankan School Doha, has won a gold award in the 2025 Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition (QCEC). Amarasinghe's achievement marks his third consecutive recognition in the world's oldest international writing competition, having previously earned a silver award in 2023 and a bronze award in 2024. The 2025 edition of the competition received more than 50,000 entries from students across the Commonwealth's 56 member nations. Only a select group of young writers attain Gold status each year, placing the Doha-based student among the top emerging voices in global youth literature, a statement added.

**IIS observes India's Constitution Day**



Ideal Indian School (IIS) celebrated Constitution Day of India with an event aimed to educate students about the significance of the Indian Constitution, its core values, and the invaluable contributions of the leaders who shaped it, with special recognition of its architect Dr B R Ambedkar. Activities were conducted across all sections during both morning and evening sessions to help students understand fundamental principles such as justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity. These activities included a special morning assembly, colouring the national flag of India, writing

and reading the Preamble to the Constitution, poster making, a Constitution quiz, and watching an introductory video on the Constitution of India. Through speeches, presentations, and interactive

tasks, students developed a deeper understanding of their rights and responsibilities, fostering civic awareness and inspiring them to become responsible and conscientious citizens of the nation.

**RPS celebrates Annual Day**



Rajagiri Public School (RPS), Doha, celebrated its Annual Day - Revue 2025 on November 26 and 27, on a grand scale at the Abu Hamour campus auditorium. Indian embassy first secretary Harish Pandey was the chief guest.

The guests of honour were Rajagiri Group of Institutions (Kerala) manager Benny Nalkara and RPS, Doha, managing director George Jacob.

The celebration featured a blend of cultural performances, musical presentations, thematic productions, and creative showcases by students from KG to Grade 12.

The theme of the event resonated with imagination, unity and the spirit of innovation that Rajagiri Public School continues to nurture. Revue 2025 concluded on a note of pride and joy as



parents, guests, and the school community applauded the hard

work behind the lively and well co-ordinated programmes.





## CMU-Q hosts ‘Business Innovation Challenge’ for high school students

Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar (CMU-Q), a Qatar Foundation partner university, hosted the inaugural Business Innovation Challenge, a two-day competition to introduce top high school students and school counsellors to the university's rigorous Business Administration programme.

The challenge saw 78 students forming 26 teams from 15 public and private high schools across Qatar. The participants tackled a business case that presented a real-world challenge: developing a financially sustainable and operationally practical solution to reduce single-use plastic and paper cups in Qatar. The student teams worked to devise solu-

tions, and top teams advanced to a final round where they presented their ideas to a panel of judges.

The event underscored the quantitative, analytical approach central to CMU-Q's Business Administration programme. The degree programme has been offered at CMU-Q since 2004, and graduates are now working across Qatar in leadership roles in government, business and non-profit organisations. Three alumni – all executives at Qatar Investment Authority – served as judges in the final round.

“This weekend, you worked on a business case based on a real-world problem, and this is exactly the type of challenge we present to our students,” said Michael Trick,

dean CMU-Q, at the closing ceremony. “We challenge our students to apply their knowledge, get creative, and find solutions and new ways forward. Today, you have experienced a small taste of what it is like to be a CMU-Q student.”

The challenge was held in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and sponsored by the Commercial Bank of Qatar.

The three winning teams were from Almaha Academy for Boys, American School of Doha, and Doha College. An additional CBQ Award was presented to a team from Ahmad Bin Hanbal Secondary School for Boys, for demonstrating exceptional creativity and potential.

## Doha College alumna elected new Oxford Union president

Doha College alumna and former head girl, Arwa (Class of 2024), has been elected president of the Oxford Union, one of the world's oldest and most prestigious debating societies.

Her appointment places her among an influential group of past presidents, including former British prime ministers William Gladstone, H H Asquith, and Pakistan's former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, a Doha College statement said.

Arwa's election marks a significant personal achievement and a milestone for Doha College's alumni community. It reflects not only her outstanding leadership and intellect, but also her dedication to public discourse, global issues and principled debate – pillars that define the Oxford Union and resonate strongly with the values of Doha College.

Reflecting on the news, principal David Tongue commented: “She follows in the footsteps of numerous global leaders who have previously held this prestigious post”.

Arwa joined Doha College in her early years and quickly became known for her curiosity, academic excellence and passion for championing pupil voice. As head girl, she played a central role in representing Sixth Form pupils, supporting College initiatives,



and contributing to whole-school events. Her leadership style, shaped by empathy, integrity and intellectual rigour, resonates clearly in the path she has taken at Oxford.

“Her achievement demonstrates the value of a Doha College education – rooted in British academic tradition, enriched by an international context and strengthened by our not-for-profit ethos. It reflects our commitment to enabling every pupil to thrive, pursue their ambitions

confidently and step into the world ready to make a meaningful impact,” it was explained.

“Arwa's accomplishment is also a source of inspiration for current Doha College pupils, showcasing the power of aspiration and determination. Her journey from Doha College to one of the most distinguished debating platforms in the world highlights the opportunities available to young people who are supported, encouraged and challenged to reach their full potential.”

## CPD session focuses on engineering and law



Indian Institute of Quantity Surveyors (IIQS) - Qatar hosted a CPD Session #11/2025, titled ‘From Engineering to Law: A Reflection on Two Mindsets’. The session explored the intersection between engineering thinking and legal reasoning within the construction, claims, and dispute-resolution environment. The keynote session was delivered by Abduljabbar SaifAldeen, a noted legal expert and a respected arbitrator, mediator, and expert witness. His presentation offered insights on how

professionals can better understand both technical and legal perspectives to navigate complex project and dispute scenarios. The event was formally opened by chapter president Abdul Basith and proceedings co-ordinated by Venkat. Following the presentation and interactive discussions, Dilip Shenoy delivered a vote of thanks. The session was attended by advisory board member Kiran Kumar, along with managing committee members Avinash Gaikvad, Fanis, and Sathyaprakash.



### MES students shine at GU-Q's MUN

A team of senior students of MES Indian School delivered an exceptional performance at the recently concluded Model United Nations (MUN) Conference hosted by Georgetown University – Qatar (GU-Q).

The event witnessed the participation of nearly 550 student delegates representing around 23 schools, making it a platform for diplomatic dialogue, critical thinking, and global awareness. MES delegation comprised of

Sayed Zakariya, Muhamad Hilal, Muhammad Shan Shefy, Johan Juttas, Jacob Soni, Zidan Shuhaib, Reyhan Mohammed, Aisha Maryam, P Varunavi, Ziya Zameen, Nithyasri Manohar, Abel Peter Saji, Pranathi Reddy, Syed Dawar Abbas, Zoona Shaheer, Rihab Shameer and Merin Elizabeth Paul.

The student delegates actively engaged in debates across a range of committees, representing diverse nations such as France, Indonesia, Uganda, Kenya, Slovakia,

Algeria, Pakistan, Romania, China, and Tunisia.

Mohammad Shan Shefy received the Outstanding Diplomacy Award, while Merin Elizabeth Paul and Pranathi Reddy Paramaiahgari received Honourable Mentions. Principal Dr Hameeda Kadar, facilitated the delegation and commended the awardees. Mammadhan Mambally, chief co-ordinator for Students' External Activities, mentored the participants and co-ordinated the school's participation in the event.

### Qatar Tamizhar Sangam organises ‘Women's Fun Fiesta’



As part of its silver jubilee celebrations, Indian socio-cultural organisation Qatar Tamizhar Sangam (QTS) organised a special, women-exclusive event titled ‘Women's Fun Fiesta Celebration.’ The event witnessed participation of around 200 women, grouped into four teams - Red, Green, Purple, and Blue. After a series of fun games, the Red team emerged winners, followed by the Purple team as runners-up. Indian embassy second secretary Bindu N Nair was the chief guest. The games were co-ordinated by QTS joint cultural secretary Radhika and benevolent secretary Brama. The managing committee members, subcommittee members, and volunteers ensured a successful event. QTS vice president Paramasivam Ramesh delivered a special address, and subcommittee member Vasanthi proposed a vote of thanks.

## IEEE-SQC takes part in Asean chartered engineers conferment

Some 13 members of Institute of Integrated Electrical Engineers State of Qatar Chapter (IEEE-SQC) attended the 17th Asean Chartered Professional Engineers (ACPE) Conferment Ceremony, held in the Philippines on November 21.

The event, organised by the IEEE of the Philippines, Inc brought together engineering leaders, practitioners, and newly qualified Asean professionals, aims to elevate regional engineering standards.

The conferment took place in three batches, honouring more than 170 engineering professionals, including those in Qatar, who successfully met the Asean standards for professional practice and

mobility. The IEEE-SQC members at the ceremony benefitted from the chapter's ACPE mentoring programme.

These include Apolinario B Comia, Arjen R Martinez, Antonio T Agcaolli, Marivic C Araneta, Timoteo B Belandres Jr, Joemar A Pagulayan, Ralph Prince R Sorra, Jeffrey Z Zablan, Raymundo Y Zapanta Jr, Marvin S Asual, Russel E Inandan, Nathaniel N Leal, and Joseph A Santos.

The Chapter's mentoring programme produced more than 220 successful ACPE since 2009.

Robert U Mabulay, IEEE-SQC adviser and national vice-president for Internal Affairs, was also present.





## Trump favourite reclaims narrow lead in Honduras election

Right-wing Honduran presidential candidate backed by Donald Trump reclaimed a narrow lead over his rival on Thursday, on the fourth day of a plodding vote count.

With over 86% of the votes counted, the race was still too early to call.

Trump-backed businessman Nasty Asfura was leading with 40.24% compared to 39.41% for fellow right-winger and TV personality Salvador Nasralla, according to the National Electoral Council (CNE).

The CNE has come under fire from the US president after announcing on Monday that a partial count showed the two men locked in a "technical tie".

Nasralla alleged fraud after Asfura pulled narrowly past him overnight.

Nasralla, in a post on X, said the screen displaying the vote data went blank at 3.24am and alleged "an algorithm changed the data", giving the higher tally to Asfura after Nasralla had been leading the vote count since Tuesday.

The results are being updated on the electoral body's website.

In a press conference on Thursday, the CNE electoral council defended the process and said voting records considered inconsistent were not part of the formal count and would be reviewed.

"There are cases where the records of the polling stations have presented insurmountable inconsistencies," said CNE head Ana Paola Hall, adding the recount would require time but be delivered within the legal deadline – December 30.

"The results delivered by the CNE will be final," she added, calling for patience. "Haste is sometimes the enemy of legitimacy."

"All of this will complete... the final count to 100%," said Hall, who asked the candidates for patience as the count continues.

The CNE has vowed that the end result will "scrupulously respect the popular will".

Trump, who routinely casts doubt on the integrity of elections whose results he disapproves of, accused Honduran authorities of "trying to change" the results, and threatened there would be "hell to pay" if they did.

Later in the day, US Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau amplified Trump's message, posting on X that "democracy is on trial" in the Honduran election and calling on all parties to "uphold the independence" of the CNE to ensure transparency.

"The world's eyes, including ours, are on Honduras," he added.

Honduras is one of Latin America's most impoverished and violent countries, and many citizens have fled north to the United States to escape those hardships, including minors fearing forced recruitment by gangs.

On Tuesday, the CNE said ballots were still coming in from remote areas – some only accessible by donkey or boat – and the declaration of a winner may still be days away.

The CNE, which has frequently been accused by parties of political favouritism, legally has one month to announce a winner. – **AFP/Reuters**

# Trump strategy shifts from global role, vows 'resistance' in Europe

AFP/Reuters  
Washington

President Donald Trump laid out a radical realignment of US foreign policy yesterday, shifting the long-time superpower's focus from global to regional, brutally criticising Europe as facing "civilizational erasure" and putting a top priority on eliminating mass migration.

The national security strategy, meant to flesh out Trump's norms-shattering worldview, elevates Latin America to the top of the US agenda in a sharp reorientation from longstanding US calls to focus on Asia to face a rising China.

"In everything we do, we are putting America First," Trump said in a preamble to the long-awaited paper.

Breaking with decades of attempts to be the sole superpower, the strategy said that the "United States rejects the ill-fated concept of global domination for itself".

It said that the United States would also prevent other powers, namely China, from dominating but added: "This does not mean wasting blood and treasure to curtail the influence of all the world's great and middle powers."

The strategy called for a "readjustment of our global military presence to address urgent threats in our Hemisphere", starting with migration.

"The era of mass migration must end," the strategy said.

The strategy made clear that the United States under Trump would aggressively pursue similar objectives in Europe, in line

with far-right parties' agendas.

In extraordinary language in addressing close allies, the strategy said the administration would be "cultivating resistance to Europe's current trajectory within European nations".

Germany quickly hit back, saying that it does not need "outside advice".

The strategy pointed to Europe's slide in share of the global economy – which is the result largely of the rise of China and other emerging powers – and said: "This economic decline is eclipsed by the real and more stark prospect of civilisational erasure."

"Should present trends continue, the continent will be unrecognisable in 20 years or less."

As Trump seeks an end to the Ukraine war that would likely favour Russia gaining territory, the strategy accused Europeans of weakness and said that the US should focus on "ending the perception, and preventing the reality, of Nato as a perpetually expanding alliance".

Since returning to office in January, Trump has ordered sweeping curbs on migration, after a political career built on fanning fears that America's white majority is losing its status.

The strategy speaks in bold terms of pressing US dominance in Latin America, where the Trump administration has been striking alleged drug traffickers at sea, intervening to bring down leftist leaders including in Venezuela, and loudly seeking to take charge of key resources such as the Panama Canal.

The strategy cast Trump as modernis-

ing the two-century-old Monroe Doctrine, in which the then young United States declared Latin America off-limits to rival powers.

"We will assert and enforce a 'Trump Corollary' to the Monroe Doctrine," it said.

The strategy paid comparatively little attention to the Middle East, which has long consumed Washington.

Pointing to US efforts to increase energy supply at home and not in the oil-rich Gulf, the strategy said: "America's historic reason for focusing on the Middle East will recede."

The paper said it was a US priority for Israel to be secure, but stopped short of the fulsome language on Israel used even in the first Trump administration.

On China, the strategy repeated calls for a "free and open" Asia-Pacific region but focused more on the nation as an economic competitor.

After much speculation on whether Trump would budge on Taiwan, the self-ruling democracy claimed by Beijing, the strategy made clear that the US supports the decades-old status quo, but called on allies Japan and South Korea to contribute more to ensure Taiwan's defence from China.

"Deterring a conflict over Taiwan, ideally by preserving military overmatch, is a priority," according to the document.

"We will build a military capable of denying aggression anywhere," in the chain of islands stretching from Japan to Southeast Asia, according to the latest strategy document. "But the American military cannot, and should not have to, do this alone. Our

allies must step up and spend – and more importantly do – much more for collective defence."

That will reinforce "US and allies' capacity to deny any attempt to seize Taiwan" or any other steps that would "make defending that island impossible".

China views democratically governed Taiwan as its own, and Beijing has never renounced the use of force to bring Taiwan under its control.

China also has vast regional claims, including almost the entire South China Sea, which are disputed by many of its smaller neighbours.

The United States, like most countries, has no formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan. However, Washington is the island's most important international backer and is bound by law to provide Taiwan with the means to defend itself.

The Trump administration sees instability near Taiwan as a risk because of Taiwan's dominance in semiconductor manufacturing and because a significant share of world trade passes through nearby waters, according to the document.

The strategy predictably puts little focus on Africa, saying the United States should transition away from "liberal ideology" and an "aid-focused relationship" and emphasise goals such as securing critical minerals.

US presidents usually release a National Security Strategy in each White House term.

The last, released by Joe Biden in 2022, prioritised winning a competitive edge over China while constraining a "dangerous" Russia.

## Meta partners with news outlets to expand AI content

Meta has announced that it will integrate content from major news organisations into its artificial intelligence (AI) assistant to provide Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp users with real-time information.

The social media giant said Meta AI will offer breaking news, entertainment and lifestyle stories when users ask news-related questions, drawing from partnerships with outlets including CNN, Fox News, *Le Monde*, *People* and *USA Today*.

The feature will allow users to access "more diverse content sources" and receive links to partner websites to dive deeper into stories, Meta said in a blog post.

Meta said the expansion aims to make its AI assistant "more responsive, accurate, and balanced" by incorporating diverse viewpoints, acknowledging that "real-time events can be challenging for current AI systems to keep up with".

The initial partnerships span mainstream and conservative-leaning publications, including the *Daily Caller* and the *Washington Examiner*.

Meta AI is available across the company's platforms, serving billions of users globally.

The announcement comes as AI companies, including ChatGPT and Google's Gemini, increasingly move to incorporate live web content and news feeds.

Meta has had a hot and cold relationship with the news media over the years.

The company founded by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004 declared that news was a very small share of user engagement on the company's platforms and began shutting down the Facebook News tab in markets like the United States, Britain and France.

This also saw the end of multi-million dollar deals with leading news organisations. – **AFP**

## US panel scraps hepatitis B vaccine recommendation

AFP/Reuters  
Washington

An advisory panel appointed by the Trump administration's vaccine-sceptic health secretary voted yesterday to stop recommending all newborns receive a hepatitis B vaccine.

The move to end recommending universal vaccination against hepatitis B for newborns, which has been in place for three decades, is the panel's latest contentious decision to overturn longstanding medical advice since its overhaul by Health Secretary Robert F Kennedy Jr.

The Advisory Committee on Immunisation Practices (ACIP) voted to keep the birth dose only for infants whose mothers test positive for the virus, replacing the 1991 universal recommendation that has protected all children from hepatitis B infections, which can lead to serious liver disease.

For infants of mothers who test negative, the panel recommended that parents, in consultation with a healthcare provider, should decide when or if their child will begin the vaccine series.

Under the scrapped recommendation, the birth dose is followed by two more vaccines, at 1-2 months and 6-18 months.

The committee recommended parents offer the first dose no sooner than two months of age and that parents test children for hepatitis B antibodies before deciding to give subsequent shots.

Public health experts decried



The Advisory Committee on Immunisation Practices votes on the recommendation of the childhood hepatitis B vaccine schedule, at the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, in Atlanta, Georgia.

– **Reuters**

the move, saying that a decision to shift to shared clinical decision-making would create obstacles to the use of vaccines, and that parents already have control over the care of their children.

Dr William Schaffner, preventative medicine and infectious diseases specialist at Vanderbilt University Medical Centre and a former committee member, said US medical organisations have not supported the move.

"I think you'll see the American Academy of Paediatrics, the American College of Obstetri-

cians and Gynaecologists and other major societies continue to recommend the vaccine at birth," he said.

The committee advises the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on which public health recommendations to adopt.

The recommendations affect US health insurance coverage and play a key role in assisting physicians who are choosing appropriate vaccines for patients.

Kennedy, who founded the anti-vaccine group Children's Health Defence, in June fired the previous 17 independent experts

and replaced them with a group that largely supports his views as part of an effort to remake US vaccine policy.

This is the most far reaching of the changes, which include dropping broad recommendations for the coronavirus (Covid-19) vaccine, cutting funding for mRNA vaccines, and advising pregnant mothers against taking Tylenol saying, without scientific proof, that studies suggest a link to autism.

During the two-day meeting, two members of the committee argued vociferously against the change, saying there was no data to support it and that there were decades of information on the safety and efficacy of the vaccine.

"We will see more children and adolescents and adults infected with hepatitis B," said Joseph Hibbeln, a former National Institutes of Health official.

Many committee members argued that there was no data that showed the vaccine is safe and said that the US was out of step with its peer countries.

"People should be very, very suspicious when people tell them that something is safe, especially a vaccine," said committee member Retsef Levi, a mathematician at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends all babies receive the hepatitis B vaccine as soon as possible after birth, followed by two or three doses of the shot at least four weeks apart.

It says 95% of infected newborns will go on to develop chronic hepatitis.

## Fire forces 169 to evacuate plane at Brazil airport

A fire on the tarmac at Sao Paulo international airport, Brazil's largest, prompted the evacuation of 169 passengers from a Latam Airlines plane overnight on Thursday, the airline said. Passengers exited the aircraft via the boarding bridge and evacuation slides

after the fire hit external equipment on the tarmac before departure for a domestic flight to Porto Alegre in southern Brazil. "There were no injuries and the situation was quickly brought under control," Latam said, adding that smoke from the fire had triggered safety protocols. – **AFP**

# Supreme Court allows Texas to use voting map adding five districts

AFP/Reuters  
Washington

The US Supreme Court has allowed Texas to use redrawn congressional districts for the 2026 midterm elections, boosting the hopes of President Donald Trump's Republicans to retain control of the House of Representatives.

The push by Texas, which carves out five more Republican-friendly districts and came at the behest of Trump, launched a series of similar efforts in states around the country.

The decision by the conservative-dominated high court stayed a lower ruling which had said the redrawn maps "unconstitutionally" sort voters based on race.

"Texas needs certainty on which map will govern the 2026 midterm elections, so I will not delay the Court's order," Justice Samuel Alito, one of six conservatives on

the bench, wrote in his concurring opinion.

The three liberal justices all dissented with the order, which was unsigned.

"The District Court conducted a nine-day hearing... and after considering all the evidence, it held that the answer was clear. Texas largely divided its citizens along racial lines to create its new pro-Republican House map," Justice Elena Kagan wrote in her dissent.

While the ruling is technically only a temporary halt to the lower court ruling, with a candidate filing deadline next week in Texas, it effectively ensures that the Republican-favoured map will be in effect for the 2026 midterms.

US electoral districts are traditionally drawn following the national census, taken once per decade to reflect the changing population.

The next census is not scheduled until 2030, but Republican-ruled Texas, under

pressure from Trump, decided to redraw its congressional maps mid-decade to yield more Republican districts.

Texas Governor Greg Abbott celebrated the decision.

"We won! Texas is officially – and legally – more red," he wrote on X.

Democrats voiced disappointment with the ruling.

"The right-wing Supreme Court majority has once again shredded its credibility by rubber-stamping a racially gerrymandered map in Texas," US House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries said in a statement. "Republicans know the extremists can only win by cheating. The people of California and beyond will prevent that from happening."

Democratic lawmakers in Texas expressed anger.

"The Supreme Court failed Texas voters today, and they failed American democracy. This is what the end of the Voting

Rights Act looks like: courts that won't protect minority communities even when the evidence is staring them in the face," said Gene Wu, the Democratic State House minority leader, referring to the landmark 1965 US law that barred racial discrimination in voting.

"Latino and Black voters are being punished for how we vote, plain and simple," State Representative Ramón Romero Jr said.

The US Supreme Court has previously permitted so-called partisan gerrymandering, but the situation becomes more complicated when a person's race is involved due to civil rights legislation.

Democratic-run California has also approved a new electoral map that would also create five districts more likely to vote for the left-leaning party.

Those maps have also been challenged in court by the Republican Party of California, in a lawsuit that has received the

backing of the Trump administration and which claims race was also unlawfully used.

Republicans currently hold slim majorities in both chambers of Congress.

Ceding control of either the House or Senate to the Democrats in the November 2026 elections would endanger Trump's legislative agenda and open the door to Democratic-led congressional investigations targeting the president.

US Attorney-General Pam Bondi, whose Justice Department filed a brief supporting the new Texas maps, hailed Thursday's ruling.

"Federal courts have no right to interfere with a State's decision to redraw legislative maps for partisan reasons," Bondi said in a statement on X.

Republicans in North Carolina have also redrawn that state's map, while efforts are underway in Indiana, Missouri, and elsewhere.





# Deadly cyclone dents Sri Lanka's peak tourism season

Reuters  
Kandy

November-January are usually the busiest season for Herath Gedara Rohan Anil Kumara's three-bedroom home-stay in Sri Lanka's hill country, famed for its tea plantations, historic sites and quaint villages. But after Cyclone Ditwah tore through the island last week, killing nearly 500 people, Kumara now finds himself in a relief centre, uncertain when he can rebuild his business.

His now-damaged house used to earn him more than \$30 a night, enough to support his family, but

the 37-year-old has been forced to cancel all bookings for December and January. "I'm still getting inquiries, but we can't accept them," Kumara said from the Kithulbedda relief centre, where he moved with his family of six last Friday. "I don't know when we will be able to rebuild and return to normal."

His story underscores the vulnerability of small operators who form the backbone of Sri Lanka's tourism industry, the country's third-largest foreign exchange earner after remittances and apparel, amounting to 4% of GDP. A revival in tourism has helped Sri Lanka recover from its debilitating economic crisis, which peaked

- **Cyclone Ditwah hits Sri Lanka's peak tourism season**
- **Small operators, backbone of tourism, suffer most**
- **Cancellations low at about 1% for now, says hoteliers**
- **Tourism is country's third-largest foreign exchange earner**

in 2022, but the extensive damage caused by Cyclone Ditwah has been a setback.

It has affected nearly 10% of Sri Lanka's 22mn population, damaged or destroyed thousands of houses and killed at least 486, with hundreds still missing.

The cyclone also hit roads, power lines, and telecom networks, alongside significant losses to agriculture. The Hotels Association

of Sri Lanka, however, is hopeful of a fast recovery because cancellations have remained low at about 1%, said association president Asoka Hettigoda.

"Hotels across the island are operational," he told Reuters. "Even in Kandy and Nuwara Eliya (among the worst-affected areas), tourists are safe and enjoying their stay, though access is still difficult due to blocked roads." Tourist arrivals

crossed 2mn by mid-November, and the government hopes to reach 2.6mn by the end of the year, the highest since the Covid-19 pandemic, driven by visitors from India, Russia, Germany, France, and the UK. Authorities have airlifted stranded tourists, waived fees for overstaying visas, and allowed free flight rescheduling. The industry is also pushing for an expanded visa-free programme and launch-

ing social media campaigns to reassure travellers. Tour guides have adjusted itineraries to avoid the worst-hit areas. For Estelle Burgess, a 71-year-old tourist from Australia, the cyclone became just another chapter in her Sri Lankan adventure. She arrived about a week ago and plans to stay for another six days. "We're hoping the weather improves so we can enjoy the beach," Burgess said outside Kandy's Temple of the Tooth, one of Sri Lanka's most sacred Buddhist shrines and a Unesco World Heritage Site.

"Sri Lanka truly is an adventure. You never know what's going to happen next."

# Xi woos Macron with sightseeing trip, but little in the way of deals

Reuters  
Beijing

Chinese leader Xi Jinping accompanied French President Emmanuel Macron to Chengdu yesterday, a rare gesture seemingly reserved for the head of Europe's second-largest economy that highlights Beijing's focus on Paris in its ties with the European Union.

Even when US President Donald Trump made a landmark visit to China early during his first term in 2017, and Xi lavished him with a private dinner within Beijing's Forbidden City, the trip was confined to the Chinese capital. But despite the apparent bonhomie between Xi and Macron, the French president's visit so far has resulted in little beyond bolstering Beijing's diplomatic credentials, as world leaders turn to China seeking economic assurances due to Trump's tariffs, analysts say. It has also provided Macron with a chance to project statesmanship after a tough summer in domestic politics.

Investors are watching to see whether a day that began with the French president surprising fellow joggers in the city's Jincheng Lake Park, before joining Xi at a historic dam site, will end with major commercial deals or a thaw in EU-China trade tensions, given that Macron has been joined on his fourth state visit to China by the heads of some of France's biggest firms.

A meeting in the Chinese capital on Thursday only resulted in 12 co-operation agreements covering areas such as population ageing, nuclear energy and panda conservation, and no monetary total was disclosed. "I think they (France) thought that Xi would be in a position to offer a lot because Europe is really preparing this economic



Macron plays table tennis during a meeting with Chinese and French table tennis players and students at Sichuan University.



French President Macron runs following a visit to Sichuan University.

security doctrine," said Alicia Garcia-Herrero, senior fellow at the think-tank Bruegel. "Macron probably felt that given his weight and the fact that France is clearly the one that is pushing the most on economic security, that they would get a deal, but nope."

Still, the French president will

take the publicity win from receiving a rock-star welcome from students at Sichuan University, who crowded around him before a speech in which he urged China to reflect on its role in global affairs. "We are at a moment of unprecedented rupture," Macron said. "The world we built after World



French President Emmanuel Macron, his wife Brigitte Macron, Chinese President Xi Jinping and his wife Peng Liyuan visit the Duijiangyan site, a designated Unesco World Heritage site, in Duijiangyan, in southwestern China's Sichuan province yesterday.

**Xi joins Macron for trip to southwest China; rare for Chinese leader to accompany his guests beyond Beijing; China is constrained due to ongoing negotiations with US, EU**

War II, which was based on what we call multilateralism and therefore co-operation between powers is cracking, fracturing."

Macron also took aim at China's notion that the West's power is waning.

"Plenty of people will try to tell you that Europe is old," he said. "That the rich countries you find in the G7 are arrogant. That the West is looking down on the Global South. But all of that is a narrative, a fabrication."

Beijing may see friendly ties with France as a way into expanding its influence within the 27-strong EU, but is very constrained in its ability to offer Paris major concessions.

The Chinese leader was not expected to sign off on a long-anticipated 500-jet Airbus order, for example, as that would reduce China's leverage in trade talks with the US, which is pressing for new Boeing commitments.

Xi is also unlikely to ease conditions for French cognac makers or pork producers, as doing so would weaken Beijing's negotiating posi-



People gather to see French President Emmanuel Macron at the University of Sichuan after a meeting with students in Chengdu.

tion with Brussels over tariffs on Chinese-made electric vehicles.

Nor can Xi offer Macron a breakthrough on the war in Ukraine for him to take back to Europe, with China having recently reaffirmed its support for Russia. Recent visits by Spain's King Felipe VI and German Finance Minister Lars Klingbeil were similarly low on tangible outcomes.

Chinese government advisers say Beijing feels it has the upper hand and is waiting for Brussels to yield and accept a minimum price plan for its EVs rather than the tariffs currently levied on them. "They (the EU) now recognise the complexity of the issue."

After Trump became president again, they realised they are too dependent on the US... Europe is now in need of more reciprocal trade with China," one adviser said, requesting anonymity as he is not authorised to speak with media.

"The EU should really reflect

on its China policy and not tie it too closely to Russia and Ukraine," he added. Xi also did not raise the prospect of a trade deal with the EU with Macron - which China's top diplomat Wang Yi brought up when Estonia's foreign minister visited last month and the Chinese commerce ministry has touted - despite talks over a landmark EU-China investment pact having been frozen since 2021.

The vote on whether to adopt the European Commission's EV tariffs divided the member states, with France voting in favour of the duties while Germany, Europe's biggest economy, voted against. China could seek to exploit such divisions.

"It is interesting that they (China) keep raising it (a trade deal) with the member states," said a European Commission official. "We have no plans whatsoever to have any kind of trade agreement with China," they added, also requesting anonymity.

## Flooding kills two as Vietnam hit by dozens of landslides

Heavy rain in Vietnam triggered flooding that killed at least two people and caused more than a dozen landslides, state media said Friday, adding to what authorities called the "most unusual" year of natural disasters in the country's history.

South-central Vietnam has been lashed by weeks of heavy rain, submerging hundreds of thousands of homes in coastal tourism hotspots and causing deadly landslides in mountainous regions. Downpours inundated thousands more homes in Lam Dong province on Thursday and killed at least two people, the Voice of Vietnam news outlet reported. It added that 16 landslides struck the province, damaging roads and bridges and forcing the evacuation of hundreds of homes. Floodwaters up to two-metres deep were still sloshing through Ham Thang commune in Lam Dong yesterday, resident Pham Thi Ngoc Yen told AFP, adding authorities were delivering food and water by boat. **-AFP**

## Survivors pick up pieces in flood-hit Indonesia as more rain predicted

AFP  
Tukka, Indonesia

Survivors in Indonesia were piecing back shattered lives yesterday after devastating floods killed more than 1,600 people across five countries, with fears of fresh misery as more rain looms. Indonesia has borne the brunt of the disaster, with its toll rising to 846 dead and 547 missing, authorities said. Many are in the island of Sumatra's northern Aceh province where more than 800,000 people have also been displaced.

On Indonesia's Sumatra island, many survivors were counting the cost of the deluge that started last week, leading to destructive flash-flooding and landslides.

"Our house was covered by soil up to the ceiling," said Rumita Larasbiua. "Around the house, there were piles of wood."

The 42-year-old government contractor, now sheltering in a school, told AFP that recovering from the flood's impact "could take more than a year." Hendra Vrame-nia, 37, had fled his village in Kam-

pung Dalam in southeastern Aceh and feared that people in remote areas now risked starvation. "This is a calamity we must face," he said of the disaster.

Indonesia's meteorological agency warned Aceh could see "very heavy rain" through Saturday, with North and West Sumatra also at risk. It was again raining hard in Aceh's capital, Banda Aceh, an AFP correspondent said. Indonesian flood victims said further rain was likely to bring fresh misery. "We are still worried... If the rain comes again, where can we go? Where can we evacuate?" asked Rumita.

An aid organisation working in Sumatra said some flood areas were still unreachable, adding the "disaster situation is complex". "The situation is very dire and heartbreaking due to the difficulty in accessing aid," said Nanang Subana Dirja, Chief Executive of Islamic Relief Indonesia.

"In some places, water still has not receded. Power outages and unstable signals often disrupt communication for us and our staff," Nanang said. In Sri Lanka, authorities said floodwaters had begun to recede, but residents face a mam-



A damage bunny doll is being sun-dried next to a villager affected by flash floods clearing mud from his home in Central Tapanuli, North Sumatra province, yesterday.

moth clean-up. In the central town of Gampola, residents worked to clear the mud and fix water damage. "We are getting volunteers from other areas to help with this clean-up," cleric Faleeldeen Qadiri told AFP at the Gate Jumma Mosque.

"It takes 10 men a whole day to clean one house," said a volunteer, who gave his name as Rinas. "No one can do this without help."

Two separate weather systems dumped massive rainfall on Sri Lanka and Sumatra as well as parts of southern Thailand and northern Malaysia last week. The latest downpour this week in Vietnam prompted authorities on Friday to label 2025 as "the year with the most unusual natural disasters in history". Across Asia seasonal monsoons bring rainfall that farm-

ers depend on, but climate change is making the phenomenon more erratic, unpredictable and deadly throughout the region. Environmentalists and Indonesia's government have also pointed to the role forest loss played in the flash flooding and landslides that washed torrents of mud into villages and stranded residents on rooftops.

Indonesia is among the countries with the largest annual forest loss due to mining, plantations and fires, and has seen the clearance of large tracts of its lush rainforest in recent decades. Jakarta on Wednesday said it was revoking environmental permits of several companies suspected of worsening the disaster's impact, and have launched a probe.

Should evidence show corporate involvement in illegal logging or land clearing, which aggravated the disaster, "investigations could escalate to criminal prosecution", said Environment Minister Hanif Faisol Nurofiq. The scale of the disaster has made relief efforts challenging. Indonesia's government this week insisted it could handle the fallout, despite public outcry that not enough was being done.



# Drones were spotted near Zelensky flight path to Dublin: Irish media

Reuters  
Dublin

An Irish navy ship spotted up to five drones operating near the flight path of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's aircraft as he arrived for a state visit to Ireland on Monday, local media reported.

The sighting triggered a major security alert amid fears it was an attempt to interfere with the flight path, the *Irish Times* reported. It quoted unnamed sources as saying the aircraft, which arrived slightly early, was not in any danger.

The Ukrainian delegation arrived late on Monday and departed late the next day as part of a trip to help drum up support in Europe for Kyiv as

Russia presses on with its war in Ukraine. Ukrainian media quoted an adviser to Zelensky, Dmytro Lytvyn, as saying that Ukrainian officials were made aware of the drones, but no action was deemed necessary.

"The host side is responsible for security," Lytvyn was quoted as saying. "According to their data, there were indeed such drones, but this did not affect the visit and there was no need to force any change to the visit."

Drone flights, the origin of which are mostly unknown, have recently disrupted airspace operations in Europe. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has called the incursions "hybrid warfare".

The Journal website, which first reported the spotting of the drones at Dublin airport, said

they reached the location where Zelensky's plane was expected to be at the exact moment it had been due to pass.

It said enquiries were being carried out to determine whether the drones took off from land or from an undetected ship. They were first spotted northeast of Dublin, around 20km from the airport, both news outlets reported. Ireland's Defence Forces said it had no comment on the specifics of any alleged incidents for operational security reasons.

"However, Defence Forces support to the security operation, led by An Garda Siochana (police), was successfully deployed in multiple means ultimately leading to a safe and successful visit," a spokesperson said in a statement.

## Foggy days



People walk on a foggy winter morning beside the River Thames at Richmond Lock, in London, Britain.

# Putin, Modi agree to expand India-Russia trade, relations

Reuters  
New Delhi

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi agreed yesterday to expand and diversify trade beyond oil and defence despite Western pressure on New Delhi to scale back its decades-old close ties with Moscow.

India, the world's top buyer of Russian arms and seaborne oil, has rolled out the red carpet for Putin during his two-day state visit, his first to New Delhi since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The trip coincides with New Delhi's talks with the US on a trade deal to cut punitive tariffs imposed by President Donald Trump on its goods over India's purchases of Russian oil.

Russia has said it wants to import more Indian goods in an effort to grow trade to \$100bn by 2030. It has so far been skewed in Moscow's favour due to New Delhi's energy imports. Describing India's enduring partnership with Russia as "a guiding star", Modi said: "Based on mutual respect and deep trust, these relations have always stood the test of time."

"...we have agreed on an economic co-operation programme for the period up to 2030. This will make our trade and investment more diversified, balanced, and sustainable," he told reporters, with Putin by his side.

Modi, who warmly embraced Putin on the airport tarmac when he arrived on Thursday, also reiterated India's support for a peaceful resolution to the war in Ukraine. Putin said Russia would continue to ensure "uninterrupted fuel supplies" to India, signalling a defiant stance in the face of US sanctions, and also flagged a project under-way to build India's largest nuclear power plant at Kudankulam.



Russian President Vladimir Putin speaks with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi after he arrived to attend his ceremonial reception at the Rashtrapati Bhavan presidential palace in New Delhi, yesterday.

A joint statement issued following the summit said: "The leaders emphasised that in the current complex, tense, and uncertain geopolitical situation, Russian-Indian ties remain resilient to external pressure."

Putin received a ceremonial welcome yesterday on the forecourt of

Rashtrapati Bhavan, the colonial-era presidential palace, with a 21-gun salute as his convoy drove in. A large business and government delegation has accompanied Putin. Among the deals signed, the two countries agreed to help Indians move to Russia for work, to set up a joint venture fertiliser plant in



Russian oligarch Oleg Deripaska attends the India-Russia trade forum in New Delhi.

Russia, and boost co-operation in agriculture, healthcare and shipping.

They also agreed to reshape their defence ties to take account of New Delhi's push for self-reliance through joint research and development, as well as the production of advanced defence platforms. This would include joint production in India of spare parts, components, assemblies, and other products for servicing Russian weapons and military equipment.

In an interview with broadcaster India Today aired late on Thursday, Putin challenged US pressure on India not to buy Russian fuel. "If the US has the right to buy our (nuclear) fuel, why shouldn't India have the same privilege?" he said, adding that he would discuss the matter with Trump. Energy trade with India is "running smoothly" despite a minor dip in the first nine months of 2025, he said.

India has said Trump's tariffs are unjustified and unreasonable, noting continued US trade with Moscow. The US and European Union still import billions of dollars worth of Russian energy and commodities, ranging from liquefied natural gas to enriched uranium, despite economic sanctions.



CEO of Russia's gas company Novatek, attends the India-Russia trade forum in New Delhi.

Since European countries have sought to cut their reliance on Russian energy over the Ukraine war, India ramped up its purchases of discounted Russian crude, only to reduce them under pressure from US tariffs and sanctions this year. "India faces a conundrum; by taking steps to strengthen ties with Moscow or Washington, New Delhi risks setting back ties with the other," Michael Kugelman, senior fellow at Washington's Atlantic Council think-tank, wrote in *Foreign Policy* magazine.

## TikTok to comply with 'upsetting' Australian under-16 ban

AFP  
Sydney

TikTok said yesterday it will comply with Australia's imminent ban on under-16s joining social media on the day it comes into force, but told users the changes "may be upsetting". Australia's world-first legislation comes into effect December 10, curbing the world's most popular social media platforms and websites, including TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube.

Companies face fines of A\$49.5mn (US\$32mn) if they fail to take "reasonable steps" to comply. TikTok will block under-16s in Australia on the day the law comes into effect, it said, meaning they will no longer be able to hold or create an account.

"Teens with an existing account will be notified that they will no longer be able to use their existing account, which will become inactive," it said. "If they previously published content, it will no longer be available for others to view on TikTok."

The social media giant said youngsters who have been blocked can submit an appeal to prove their age, including by facial images, credit card authorisation or official ID. "We understand that these changes may be upsetting, but they are necessary to ensure that TikTok complies with Australian law," the company said in a statement.

**TikTok will block under-16s in Australia on the day the law comes into effect, it said, meaning they will no longer be able to hold or create an account**

## Indian air travel crippled as IndiGo hit with 'operational crisis'

Reuters  
Mumbai

Air travel across India was in turmoil for a fourth day yesterday after IndiGo cancelled around 500 flights, including all departures from New Delhi, prompting the government to announce special relief measures for the country's largest airline.

In a bid to improve air travel safety, Indian authorities have introduced new stricter regulations limiting pilot flying times and placing tighter restrictions on their operation of night-time flights. But IndiGo admitted it failed to plan properly ahead of a November 1 deadline for the measures' introduction. And with air travel now approaching its December peak, that has forced widespread flight cancellations this week that have stranded thousands of travellers.

Yesterday, the airline, which accounts for over 60% of domestic air travel in the world's most populous nation, apologised to its customers. "These last few days we have a serious operational crisis," it said in a statement. "While this will not get resolved overnight, we assure you we will do everything in our capacity to help you in the meantime."

Following a request by IndiGo, India's civil aviation authorities granted it a temporary exemption from some of the new rules on Friday to help it deal with the crisis. IndiGo had earlier flagged that it did not expect to

fully restore operations until February 10, though on Friday it said there should be "progressive improvement" from Saturday. Other major Indian airlines, including Air India and Akasa, have not had to cancel flights due to the new rules.

Yesterday, Delhi airport announced all IndiGo departures were cancelled for the day, a number that a source put at 235 flights. Chennai airport also announced all departing IndiGo flights were annulled. The airline cancelled 165 flights in Mumbai, 102 in Bengaluru, 92 in Hyderabad, airport sources, who declined to be named, said. Other major metro airports saw IndiGo flights up to 6pm cancelled yesterday.

At many airports across the country, crowds of stranded passengers voiced their frustrations, aggressively arguing with staff. Social media platforms and local media were flooded with videos of angry travellers. "Down with IndiGo! Down with IndiGo!" a group of passengers at Bengaluru airport shouted in protest, a video post on X showed.

Another video showed a father shouting at IndiGo crew members, demanding a sanitary pad for his daughter. A post on X from earlier Friday morning showed dozens of young children sitting inside a Delhi airport terminal. "Kids waiting since 4am for their IndiGo (flight)... hungry, tired, sleepy," read the post's caption.

Shares of IndiGo dropped nearly 3% yesterday, taking their weekly slump to 10.3%. India's main opposition party has demanded a discussion on the issue in parliament. The



A boy cries as he waits with his family outside the Indigo airlines ticketing counter at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport, after several IndiGo airlines flights were cancelled, in Mumbai, yesterday.

new pilot duty rules mandate that pilots can only make two night-time landings per week, down from six previously.

That provision was put on hold for IndiGo until February 10 by India's civil aviation regulator. The airline was also temporarily exempted from a rule specifying maximum

flight duty periods for pilots doing some night flying. IndiGo said it will offer waivers on all cancellations and booking changes for travel between December 5 and December 15. The airline has also arranged ground transportation and thousands of hotel rooms for stranded customers, it said.

Teens who fall under the law will have a choice of confirming their age, downloading their information, deleting their account, or asking for a reminder to recover their TikTok accounts when they turn 16. TikTok urged parents to "have conversations" with their teens to ensure they are truthful about their age.

"We understand that these changes may be upsetting, but they are necessary to ensure that TikTok complies with Australian law"

An internet rights group last week launched a legal challenge to halt the ban. The Digital Freedom Project said it had challenged the laws in Australia's High Court, calling them an "unfair" assault on freedom of speech. Australia's restrictions have generated interest around the world as regulators wrestle with the potential dangers of social media. Malaysia indicated it was planning to block children under 16 from signing up to social media accounts next year, while New Zealand will introduce a similar ban.



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Seoul’s N-sub gamble raises prospect of underwater arms race in Asia

South Korea’s pursuit of nuclear-powered submarines is gaining traction following President Donald Trump’s endorsement, ending decades of US resistance in a move that could reshape Asia’s security landscape and escalate an underwater arms race. Seoul has long sought to join the elite group of nations operating nuclear submarines to counter North Korea. Trump’s approval removed a key barrier by granting access to fuel under a nuclear agreement between the countries.

Still, South Korea’s rapidly developing programme could irk China and pressure Japan to develop similar capabilities, analysts and former military officials say.

“Submarines are highly effective attack systems. An arms race in the region is inevitable,” said Choi Il, a retired South Korean Navy submarine captain. Seoul argues nuclear propulsion is crucial to counter North Korea’s undersea threats, including submarine-launched ballistic missiles. It has repeatedly said it will not acquire nuclear weapons and respects the non-proliferation regime.

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung on Wednesday described the deal as a major achievement from his meeting with Trump and said it would enhance security flexibility and defence autonomy.

South Korea’s nuclear subs could pressure Japan to develop similar capabilities

Korea’s military has said it is closely monitoring. Russia and North Korea have said they are beefing up defence co-operation, but have not provided details on technical cooperation on defence.

South Korean lawmaker and defence expert Yu Yong-weon said since nuclear-powered submarines are faster and can remain underwater far longer than diesel-powered equivalents, they would enhance monitoring of North Korean submarines.

Seoul’s acquisition could also push Japan to rethink its stance, Yu said. Tokyo was shocked to learn about Trump’s support for Seoul’s programme, figuring Japan would be ahead of South Korea were the US to back such an ambition in the region, according to a person briefed on government discussions.

Japan’s Defence Ministry declined to comment. Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi recently said that shifting to nuclear propulsion was an option, though the ministry said no studies were currently underway. A Japanese official said if Tokyo does pursue nuclear submarines, it will ask the US for the necessary help. Japan’s smaller diesel submarines suit shallow waters, but nuclear submarines could extend operations into the Pacific and pave the way for a future second-strike capability, said a Tokyo-based naval expert, who like other sources, requested anonymity due to the issue’s sensitivity.

South Korea’s ambitions align with US objectives to counter China’s military influence. US Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Daryl Caudle described China as a “pacing threat” and said recently in Seoul he anticipates South Korea’s nuclear submarines playing a future role in regional deterrence. China’s reaction to Seoul’s plans has been muted, but Washington-based think tank 38 North warned that could rapidly change. President Lee assured Chinese President Xi Jinping last month the submarines would be defensive and to deter North Korea, according to Wi Sung-lac, South Korea’s national security adviser.

“Other countries may not welcome this, but we have our position. We can explain and persuade,” Wi said.

North Korean state media warned that Seoul’s submarine plan could trigger a “nuclear domino” effect. Cheong Seong-chang of the Sejong Institute, a think-tank, suggested Japan and South Korea might jointly develop nuclear submarines with US help, aligning with Washington’s regional security interests.

Only the US, Russia, China, France, India and the United Kingdom currently possess nuclear-powered submarines. Australia has plans to develop a fleet with help from the US and Britain under the 2021 AUKUS agreement.

South Korea first explored the idea in 1994 during a crisis over North Korea’s nuclear programme, but technical challenges stalled progress, the Sejong Institute said. — Reuters

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Europe must stop squandering the power of its purse

By Liesbeth Casier, Joren Verschaeve and Christophe Deboffe  
Geneva

Public procurement accounts for about 14% of the European Union’s GDP, making it one of the bloc’s most powerful tools for shaping markets and advancing its policy goals. But a recent evaluation by the European Commission confirms what many governments and businesses already suspected: the current framework has fallen short of making public spending simpler, more strategic, and greener. With over 75% of public contracts still lacking environmental criteria, it is no wonder that spending is so poorly aligned with the EU’s stated industrial and climate objectives.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has made procurement reform a central part of the EU’s new strategic agenda, linking it to the proposed Industrial Accelerator Act and the goal of creating “Made in Europe” markets for clean technologies. In her latest state of the union address, she emphasised the need to boost domestic production and decarbonisation together, not at the expense of one another. Similarly, Stephane Sejourne, a European Commission executive vice-president, has highlighted public procurement’s potential as a lever for ensuring competitiveness, resilience, and economic security.

But to promote competitiveness and meaningful climate leadership, sustainability must become a requirement in public tenders, not an optional add-on. Otherwise, companies building clean steel plants or producing low-carbon cement will still lose out to cheaper, higher-emissions competitors.

These heavy industries are central to Europe’s competitiveness and job creation, and they are doing exactly what Europe’s strategies demand: decarbonising supply chains, investing in innovation, and creating skilled local jobs. But they need a stable incentive that rewards decarbonisation and fosters reliable markets for clean products. As the German Steel Association warns, Europe risks losing competitiveness unless public procurement creates reliable demand for low-carbon materials.



European Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen attends a press conference during the meeting of Nato Ministers of Foreign Affairs at Nato headquarters in Brussels on Wednesday. (AFP)

While many public buyers are trying to incorporate green criteria, the current legal framework remains too fragmented and complex to facilitate the mainstreaming of strategic, climate-aligned procurement. This leaves cleaner firms facing inconsistent demand and unclear expectations. Public procurement should be a strategic instrument that rewards performance, not just compliance. But outdated habits and administrative caution still hinder innovation, benefiting higher-emissions competitors.

Making matters worse, competition in EU procurement has declined overall, especially for smaller tenders. The European Court of Auditors found that single-bid contracts rose from 24% in 2011 to 42% in 2021, while the recent Commission evaluation shows that large contracts still attract strong participation. Simplification is needed, not to lower standards, but to make green procurement easier and more consistent.

Other economies have moved more decisively. Under the President Joe Biden’s administration, the US Inflation Reduction Act used public spending to promote clean manufacturing and domestic resilience. And in the United Kingdom, a new procurement act embeds “social value” and climate considerations into public

tenders, creating clearer incentives for innovation and sustainability. Both show how procurement can create “leading markets” for clean materials, a goal that is central to the Industrial Accelerator Act.

While that act aims to boost domestic demand for low-carbon technologies, the procurement directive should ensure coherence with sectoral legislation and translate these ambitions into consistent, implementable rules. Done right, this can promote a shift to procurement that rewards quality and innovation. Europe risks falling behind not for lack of technology, but for lack of alignment between its industrial, climate, and procurement policies.

If implemented well, procurement reforms could unlock more competitive, consistent, and resilient public spending without raising budgets. That means awarding contracts based on real value for money and making green public procurement the default, thus sending a clear market signal that quality, life-cycle costs, and wider societal benefits matter more than the lowest initial bid. It also means agreeing on common environmental criteria and robust standards across the single market, so that buyers and suppliers adhere to the same rules, making implementation easier and competition fairer. And it means

harmonising requirements in key sectors, reducing complexity for public buyers, and giving companies the certainty they need to plan and invest.

Some countries are already showing what’s possible. Lithuania scaled green procurement from 5% to over 90% of contract value in just three years, combining clear criteria with training and oversight. Portugal has introduced binding environmental standards in high-priority sectors. And Ireland uses embodied carbon targets to procure cleaner, higher-performance public buildings. The first Irish tender using the CO2 Performance Ladder – a best-practice tool for green public procurement – cut emissions by 21% compared to a conventional approach, offering proof that the right criteria can drive measurable results.

The EU already has the tools to do better. Using them can unlock benefits that extend beyond driving clean industrial innovation. Consider, for example, that air pollution costs Europe an estimated €600bn (\$696bn) per year. According to the consultancy Carbone 4, aligning procurement with sustainability could cut carbon dioxide emissions by 34mn metric tonnes annually, mobilise €86bn for green industries, and create 384,000 high-quality jobs. And the same dynamic occurs locally: when the French city of Dinan added green and social criteria to its cleaning services contract, it cut costs by 20%, reduced water use, and created jobs for unemployed residents.

At a time when demands on constrained public budgets are rising, strategic procurement can strengthen businesses, reduce emissions, protect public health, and promote economic growth at the same time. Why not reform the rules to make it the norm? [This commentary is signed by Paolo Campanella and Gijs Termeer] – Project Syndicate

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The critical-minerals race is putting the planet at risk

By Johanna Sydow and Nsama Chikwanka  
Berlin

The environmental and human toll of mineral extraction is becoming clearer – and more alarming – by the day. Roughly 60% of Ghana’s waterways are now heavily polluted due to gold mining along riverbanks. In Peru, many communities have lost access to safe drinking water after environmental protections were weakened and regulatory controls were suspended to facilitate new mining projects, contaminating even the Rimac River, which supplies water to the capital, Lima.

These environmental crises are exacerbated by deepening inequality and social divides in many mining-dependent countries. The Global Atlas of Environmental Justice has documented more than 900 mining-related conflicts around the world, about 85% of which involve the use or pollution of rivers, lakes, and groundwater.

Against this backdrop, major economies are rapidly reshaping resource geopolitics. The US, while attempting to stabilise the fossil-fuel-based global economy, is also scrambling to secure the minerals it needs for electric vehicles, renewable energy, weapons systems, digital infrastructure, and construction, often through coercion and aggressive negotiating tactics. In its quest to reduce dependence on China, which dominates the processing of rare-earth elements, environmental and humanitarian considerations are increasingly brushed aside.

In Europe, industry groups are lobbying for further deregulation, with fossil-fuel companies like ExxonMobil, TotalEnergies, and Siemens using misleading tactics to undermine newly established mechanisms designed to protect the rights of communities in resource-producing regions. We should be worried that the companies and countries which helped drive global warming, environmental degradation, and human-rights abuses now seek to dominate the mineral sector. Allowing them to do so will put all of humanity, not just vulnerable populations, at risk.

Governments must not remain passive. They must reclaim responsibility for steering the primary driver of mining expansion: demand. Reducing material consumption, especially in developed countries, remains the most effective way to protect vital ecosystems and prevent the long-term harms that extraction inevitably causes.

Yet despite overwhelming evidence that ramping up resource extraction threatens water supplies and public safety, governments around the world are weakening environmental protections in a bid to lure foreign investment, thereby endangering the very ecosystems that sustain all life on Earth. From an economic perspective, this approach is profoundly short-sighted.

In fact, recent research shows that responsible practices are not just morally right but economically sound. A new report by the UN Development Programme, based on five years of data from 235 multinationals, shows that companies that strengthen their human-rights record tend to perform better over the long run. Governments should therefore be wary of industry claims that profitability requires rolling back environmental regulations or ignoring human rights.

When people cannot trust political leaders to protect their rights, they are highly likely to resist, with the resulting social conflict causing investment to falter. The backlash against Rio Tinto’s Jadar lithium-mining project in Serbia is a prime example. Many Serbians believed their government was putting corporate interests first by pushing ahead with the project despite its failure to meet even basic sustainability standards. The public outcry halted development and left the company facing steep losses.

Only robust legal frameworks, backed by effective enforcement, can create the conditions for stable and rights-respecting development. That means safeguarding Indigenous rights; ensuring the free, prior, and informed consent of all affected communities; protecting water resources; undertaking spatial planning, establishing no-go zones; and conducting independent, participatory, and transparent social and environmental impact assessments.

Given today’s heightened geopolitical tensions, multilateral forums such as COP and the UNEA remain essential for countering global fragmentation and advancing shared solutions. Mineral-rich countries should work together to raise their environmental standards, just as oil-producing countries jointly influence global prices. Through collective action, they can prevent a destructive race to the bottom and ensure that local communities, particularly Indigenous peoples and other rights holders, are heard.

At a time when clean drinking water is growing scarcer, glaciers are melting, and agriculture is increasingly under threat, co-ordinated international action is no longer optional. A resolution that Colombia and Oman introduced for December’s UNEA, calling for a binding minerals treaty, represents an important step toward fairer global standards.

Initiated by Colombia and co-sponsored by countries like Zambia, which understand all too well the costs of extractive industries, the proposal calls for co-operation across the entire mineral production chain to reduce environmental harm and protect the rights of Indigenous peoples and other affected communities. By placing responsibility on resource-consuming countries, it aims to ensure that the burden of reform does not fall solely on mineral-producing economies. Importantly, it also addresses the dangers posed by tailings dams and other mining waste, which have led to devastating failures and hundreds of deaths.

Taken together, these measures offer a rare opportunity to begin correcting the inequalities that have long defined mineral extraction. All countries, especially mineral producers that have historically been excluded from the negotiating table, should seize this moment. UNEA7 provides a window for achieving resource justice. – Project Syndicate

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# Sweden ends aid to four African nations to boost support for Ukraine

Reuters/AFP  
Stockholm

Sweden will phase out development aid to five countries in coming years and use the money to increase support for Ukraine, the government said yesterday.

The Nordic country plans to phase out aid to Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Mozambique, Liberia and Bolivia, Minister for International Development Co-operation and Foreign Trade Benjamin Dousa said.

“Ukraine is Sweden’s most important foreign policy and aid policy priority, and therefore the government is going to increase aid to Ukraine to at least 10bn crowns (\$1.06bn) in 2026,” he said. “There isn’t a secret printing press for banknotes for aid purposes and the money has to come from somewhere.”

Dousa added that Sweden would close its embassies in Bolivia, Liberia and Zimbabwe, where the main focus was development aid.

The government said the measures would free up more than 2bn crowns over the next two years that could be diverted

to Ukraine, to be used in such projects as rebuilding the country’s energy infrastructure.

Sweden has already cut aid to more than 10 countries since the current government took power in 2022, including Burkina Faso and Mali.

Sweden is a major donor of humanitarian aid, with a budget of 56bn crowns a year over the last three years.

The government has said it will cut that to 53bn crowns a year for the period 2026-28 and has re-prioritised spending, including using some of the money to pay for the costs of immigration and repatriation of migrants.

Dousa insisted the change would not affect Sweden’s humanitarian aid, and said the decision was in line with the aid priorities of the minority government, which is backed by the anti-immigration Sweden Democrats.

“For far too long, Swedish aid has been too scattered. We have been like a water sprinkler, and the result is that we have had insufficient oversight,” he said. “In many cases, we don’t even know if our support has been of any use at all.”

## Rain disrupts Athens transport, schools

Schools in Athens were shut yesterday as a storm front lashed the Greek capital and other parts of the country, flooding roads and disrupting transport. Fire department unionist Costas Tsigas said the hardest-hit zone, the western side of the greater Athens area, had received “tonnes” of rainwater that blocked roads with debris. The storm forced the temporary closure of the motorway to the city of Corinth. -**AFP**

# Ancient Roman slaves ‘often ate better than ordinary people’

Reuters  
Rome

While slaves in the ancient Roman city of Pompeii were considered no more than “speaking tools”, some received better food than ordinary people, Italy’s culture ministry said yesterday, citing evidence from recent excavations.

Amphora jugs with fava beans and a large bowl with fruits – pears, apples and sorbs – were found on the first floor of a servants’ quarter of a large villa in Civita Giuliana, a northern suburb of ancient Pompeii, the statement said.

The slaves lived on the ground floor, in rat-infested 16sqm cells that contained up to three people, but archaeologists think their nutrition was enhanced to keep up their productivity, the statement said.

“It could thus happen that the slaves of the villas around Pompeii were better fed than many formally free citizens, whose families lacked the bare minimum to live on and who were therefore forced to beg from the city’s notables,” the ministry said.

Ordinary working-class people typically relied on a simple wheat-based diet.

The findings expose “the absurdity of the ancient slave system”, the director of the Pompeii Archaeological Park, Gabriel Zuchtriegel, was quoted as saying in the statement, which noted ancient Romans referred to slaves as speaking tools.

The once-thriving city of Pompeii, near Naples, and its surroundings were destroyed by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79CE, but its remains have survived after being submerged for centuries by a thick blanket of ash and lava.

# German lawmakers approve new military service model

AFP/Reuters  
Berlin

German lawmakers backed yesterday a new scheme for military service as the country seeks to bolster its long ill-equipped and understaffed armed forces following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

The reform stops short of introducing conscription but will include mandatory screening of all 18-year-old men and measures such as higher pay aimed at making service more attractive.

Conservative Chancellor Friedrich Merz says he wants Germany to have Europe’s strongest conventional army, at a time when the Trump administration has questioned its commitment to defending its traditional European allies.

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) targets call for Germany to eventually boast a total military strength of 460,000 – made up of 260,000 active soldiers and 200,000 reservists.

The Bundeswehr is currently far from those figures, with around only 182,000 active soldiers and about 49,000 reservists.

Defence Minister Boris Pistorius of the centre-left Social Democrats (SPD) had urged MPs to back the law, saying that it was a “decisive step for our ability to defend ourselves”.

“Our allies are looking to us,” he added. The law was approved by 323 MPs, with 272 voting against and one abstention.

The defence ministry will report recruitment figures to parliament every six months.

The law will now progress to the upper house, which is expected to sign off on it before Christmas.

The plans had caused a row within Merz’s coalition, with some in his own CDU/CSU conservative alliance demanding a quicker return to conscription, while Pistorius and the SPD advocated a voluntary model – at least for now. Pistorius told MPs that if the new measures fail to draw enough recruits then parliament would have to discuss at least a partial reintroduction of conscription.

Both the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) and the far-left Die Linke opposed the law.

AfD MP Heinrich Koch said there was a widespread “fear that our children will be sent

to conflicts outside our borders”, for example in Ukraine.

The government has denied that its plans would force anyone into active service abroad.

“Young people have other plans than serving in a ‘Merz regiment’ to protect the capital of the rich,” said Desiree Becker from Die Linke, pointing to anti-conscription protests outside parliament.

This year, the defence ministry expects about 15,000 new recruits, 5,000 more than last year.

By 2031, the government hopes to nearly triple the number of new volunteers each year to 40,000.

In a move not seen since conscription was suspended in 2011, all men born after January 1, 2008, will undergo medical evaluation, phased in as capacity allows.

Both 18-year-old men and women will receive requests to declare willingness to serve, though only men must respond.

Germany’s move follows a broader European trend, as France, Italy and Belgium expand voluntary service while Nordic and Baltic states strengthen mandatory conscription in response to Russian aggression.

# Drone sparks blaze on skyscraper in Chechnya

A building housing government offices in Russia’s tightly controlled Chechen Republic was hit by a drone yesterday, causing a burning rupture that spanned multiple floors, according to Russian state media and social media videos.

Ukraine frequently targets the Russian republic in the Caucasus, but its drones rarely reach urban areas and especially the capital Grozny’s city centre, where the incident struck.

Neither local nor federal Russian authorities confirmed the blast, but Russian state broadcaster RT quoted a law enforcement source as saying that the attack had been carried out by a Ukrainian drone.

No casualties were reported. Russian aviation agency Rosaviatsya had closed Grozny airport earlier yesterday over security concerns for a few hours, it said on social media.

Multiple social media videos showed smoke billowing from a ruptured glass tower, with windows blown out across at least five floors on one side.

Independent reporting from Chechnya, described by some rights groups as a “state within a state”, is near impossible due to restrictions imposed by authorities there.

The Muslim-majority region, ruled by Kremlin loyalist Ramzan Kadyrov since 2007, maintains tight security amid fears of a militant resurgence after two civil wars against Russia in the 1990s.

Russian media outlets said the building housed the Chechen security council and was about 800m away from Kadyrov’s residence, as well as next to the secret service FSB’s local branch. -**AFP**

# German president visits UK city bombed in WWII

AFP  
Coventry, United Kingdom

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier on Friday took part in a wreath-laying ceremony in Coventry, a central English city that was heavily bombed by Germany’s air force during World War II.

The ceremony took place on the third and last day of a state visit to the United Kingdom, where Steinmeier has sought to bolster ties between the former foes as Europe attempts to unite amid the ongoing war in Ukraine.

“Today, the arch enemies of the past have become close friends,” Germany’s official head of state said in a speech to the British parliament on Thursday, where he referenced his upcoming Coventry visit. “Today, we stand side by side. Not against each other, but rather with each other – for freedom, democracy and the values that define Europe.”

The German president was ac-



Steinmeier delivers a statement inside the ruins of Coventry cathedral in Coventry, central England, the final day of a three-day state visit to the UK by the German president. -**AFP**

companied by the Duke of Kent, first cousin of the late Queen Elizabeth II, for the ceremony at the ruins of Coventry Cathedral, which was mostly destroyed during a major bombing raid by the Luftwaffe.

The raid on the night of November 14, 1940 was the single most concentrated attack on a

British city in World War II, Coventry City Council said.

Codenamed Moonlight Sonata, it lasted for 11 hours and involved nearly 500 German bombers, destroyed over 43,000 homes as well as the cathedral and killed at least 554 people.

Coventry was targeted because it was an important indus-

trial centre for arms production at the time.

The city is twinned with two German cities, Kiel and Dresden, both of which were heavily bombed by Allied forces during the war.

“It was important to me during this state visit to have room for remembrance. And when one remembers the Second World War here in Britain, in the United Kingdom, one must do so in Coventry,” Steinmeier told German media at the cathedral’s ruins. “This visit is also a sign that we no longer want to talk about the past and who was right or wrong back then, but above all about the future of our relations.”

Steinmeier’s state visit, the first by a German president in 27 years, follows a trip by Britain’s King Charles III to Germany in March 2023, his first overseas trip as monarch and the first to Germany by a British king in over a decade.

On Wednesday, Charles hosted Steinmeier at a banquet at Windsor Castle, where both hailed their countries’ deep ties.

# French town offers €1,000 birth bonuses to save local clinic

AFP  
Orleans

A small French town is to offer expectant mothers €1,000 from next year to give birth at the local maternity ward in a bid to save it from closing.

The initiative from January 1 comes as birth rates dwindle nationwide, and countryside hospitals increasingly close their maternity units.

The labour ward in Saint-Amand-Montrond in central France is among around 20 in the country that does not meet the legally required 300 births a year to stay open.

Management projects just 226 births at the ward by the end of the year.

Councillors approved the plan late on Thursday to offer future mothers vouchers worth €1,000 (\$1,160) to spend at local businesses if they agreed to bring their child into the world in the town, instead of travelling to a bigger hospital.

“We’re not paying women to have babies, we’re giving money to women who are already pregnant and decide to give birth in Saint-Armand,” right-wing mayor Emmanuel Riotte told AFP.

He said that mothers would have to come in for prenatal check-ups first.

“Of course complicated births will have to be redirected to a specialised hospital, as has been done for decades,” said the mayor of the town of around 10,000 residents.

Some doctors are against the idea.

Four doctor unions – representing anaesthesiologists, obstetricians and emergency physicians – have warned that patients should not be choosing where to give birth solely based on monetary compensation, warning of the risk in case of complications.

“When a maternity ward is threatened with closure, it’s not for economic reasons but for safety reasons,” they said this week in a joint statement.

Anne Wernet, of the national anaesthesiologist union, told AFP that rural maternities, which often had trouble attracting qualified staff, should be closing in the interest of mothers and newborns.

In small countryside clinics, “nothing happens for a long time and when there’s a problem, there’s no one there to deal

with it properly”, she said.

Local politicians view hospitals as key job providers.

In Saint-Amand-Montrond, the maternity ward employs 34 people out of 675 working for the hospital and nursing home. The number of maternity wards has dropped by around a fifth in the past decade, to 457 in 2023.

The lower house of parliament earlier this year backed a bill to stop the closure of rural obstetrics clinics, but the senate is still to examine it.

Fertility rates are in decline across the European Union, including in France.

However, women in France on average gave birth to 1.6 children in 2023, the second-highest fertility rate in the bloc after Bulgaria, according to EU statistics.

# Eurovision faces budget squeeze after walkouts over Israel’s participation

Reuters  
Geneva

The Eurovision Song Contest was facing a potential budget squeeze after Spain, the Netherlands, Ireland and Slovenia said they would withdraw from next year’s competition in protest at Israel’s participation.

The planned boycott brought to a head a row that has overshadowed the past two contests, and followed threats by the four they would pull out if the organiser did not exclude Israel over the conduct of its war against Hamas in Gaza.

The walkout by Spain, one of the “big five” backers of the contest, and two of Europe’s wealthiest countries, raises the prospect of less sponsorship income and viewers for the extravaganza that draws millions of viewers worldwide.

Austria will host the next edition in May, and national broadcaster ORF said that the loss of the four would be felt – but would not prevent a successful show.

“Overall, it would of course be a financial burden if several countries did not participate, but we had already taken this into account,” ORF chief Roland Weissmann said.

Members of the contest organiser, the

European Broadcasting Union, on Thursday resisted calls by critics for a vote on Israel’s participation, instead passing new rules aimed at discouraging governments from influencing the competition.

“There are no winners here regardless of whether Israel’s in or out, the whole thing feels a little bit toxic now,” said Eurovision expert Paul Jordan, who noted the walkouts would hit the budget and viewership.

The contest is mostly financed by contributions from broadcasters, the hosts, and sponsorship and revenue from the event, according to the Eurovision website.

It does not disclose details of how much each country pays.

Contributions from some 40 participating broadcasters are divvied up on the principle that the strongest shoulder the biggest burden.

It also includes a contribution from the host broadcaster generally worth between €10-20mn.

The host city also contributes, buttressed by revenues from sponsorship, ticket sales, televoting and merchandise.

About 5.8mn viewers in Spain watched Eurovision 2025, Spanish broadcaster RTVE said.

In the Netherlands, an average of 3.4mn

people tuned in, Dutch broadcaster Avro-Tros said.

Both declined to give details on their financial contributions.

Irish broadcaster RTE said it had paid an annual EBU fee to participate in the 2025 contest of €100,270.

Contest director Martin Green says Eurovision is financially secure, and that any loss of audience could be compensated by the return of Bulgaria, Romania and Moldova next year.

Still, the combined population of the four protesting nations is over 2-1/2 times that of the three returners, with combined economic output many times greater.





### NAQ signs MoU with Archive of the President of Kazakhstan

The National Archives of Qatar (NAQ) has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Archive of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, aimed at strengthening bilateral co-operation and exchanging expertise in the fields of documentation and archives, as well as supporting joint efforts to preserve national memory. On the sidelines of the signing, a meeting was held between NAQ Secretary-General Dr Ahmed Abdullah al-Buainain and Aliya Mustafina, the director of the Archive of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The meeting discussed prospects for joint co-operation and opportunities for exchanging expertise and knowledge in developing modern digitisation systems, preserving historical documents, and enhancing institutional work within the archival sector. - QNA



### Fish auction back at Old Doha Port

Fish auctions were once a vibrant daily ritual for Qatar's fishermen a gathering where the freshest catch, the spirit of community, and the rhythm of the sea came together. Old Doha Port proudly brought this tradition back to life yesterday at the Fishermen's Hub at Al Bandar, honouring the heritage while creating a lively experience for visitors and families to enjoy. A timeless practice revived... where history meets the heartbeat of the sea once again. The auction takes place daily until December 18, from 4pm-8pm at the Mina Cut (opposite to Chabrat Al Mina).



The 15th Katara Traditional Dhows Festival continues to welcome visitors in a maritime setting that celebrates Qatari heritage. The festival offers rich experiences showcasing traditional crafts, wooden works, and maritime collectibles. (Supplied pictures)

# Katara brings the world together

Katara Cultural Village is witnessing an exceptional cultural season throughout December, bringing together global arts, Arab operatic events, and heritage activities.

According to Katara, these three main pillars, held in parallel with the atmosphere of the Arab Cup 2025, serve as an artistic celebration of creativity, identity, and heritage in one place.

Art lovers will be treated to the opening of the 7th edition of the Qatar International Arts Festival (QIAF) tomorrow, running until December 12 under the theme *Sustainability and Innovation in Art*, in collaboration with Maps International.

The festival offers a global creative platform attracting more than 450 artists from 70 countries.

Their participation spans interactive workshops, live performances, international art exhibitions, cultural evenings, an art conference, a networking dinner, an art fashion show, and an art auction.

The event concludes on December 12 with an awards ceremony.

December 8 will see Katara launching the Arab Opera events, bringing together Arab artists, musicians, and opera houses for a series of artistic and training activities.

The programme begins with an official opening, featuring a tribute to Egyptian composer Omar Khairat, followed by a performance by the Cairo Symphony Orchestra, conducted by maestro Ahmed Atef.

The activities include training workshops in opera and scenography, the unveiling of the "Katara: City of Arab Opera" model, and the launch of a dedicated digital platform for Arab opera houses.

Katara will also host the second meeting of Arab opera house directors, ending with a joint musical performance featuring the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra and the Cairo Symphony Orchestra.

Meanwhile, the 15th Katara Traditional Dhows Festival continues to welcome visitors in a maritime setting that celebrates Qatari heritage.

The festival offers rich experiences showcasing traditional crafts, wooden works, and maritime collectibles.

The traditional food corner run by Qatari productive families is one of the highlights of the festival, attracting strong interest from locals and Arab visitors arriving at Katara during the Arab Cup 2025.

Among the standout participants this year is Chef Asma from the Ghasham Café pavilion, who noted that her participation in the festival continues for the sixth consecutive year as part of ongoing efforts to support Qatari culinary identity and introduce visitors to authentic local cuisine.

"We are here at the Katara Traditional Dhows Festival, and this is our sixth participation as a productive family offering traditional Qatari dishes," she said. "We provide all types of Qatari foods, hot drinks, and juices, and we offer a buffet service that includes all traditional dishes – prepared entirely by Qatari hands."

She lauded the excellent organisation this year.

"Turnout has been wonderful, thanks to the efforts of the Katara Festival management," Chef Asma said. "Setting up a dedicated traditional food corner in a lively spot at the heart of the festival is one of the best initiatives – direct support for Qatari productive families."

She also noted the strong attendance from various Arab nationalities amid the influx of fans for the Arab Cup.

"It's an honour for visitors to taste Qatari food," she said. "Everything we serve here is made by Qatari hands, and we meet all requests with love."

As part of Qatar's festive atmosphere during the Arab Cup 2025, Katara has prepared a diverse entertainment programme offering visitors a rich cultural and recreational experience.

The activities include daily art performances, children's entertainment, open art exhibitions, and musical showcases welcoming fans from across the Arab world.

Organisers said these events transform Katara into a vibrant cultural hub, blending the joy of the arts with the spirit of sporting competition in an atmosphere suitable for all families.



PMFG board members, speakers, partners and sponsors.

## Sidra Medicine conference marks milestone for precision medicine

The Precision Medicine and the Future of Genomics (PMFG) Summit 2025 concluded after three days of high-level discussions, scientific exchange, and strategic collaboration, new international partnerships bringing together global leaders, startups and young scientists in genomics, healthcare innovation, and biomedical research.

This year's edition welcomed more than 1,000 participants, reflecting the growing regional and international interest in advancing precision medicine and shaping the future of personalised healthcare.

The summit also brought together 38 sponsors and 11 partners, who played a pivotal role in supporting its vision and

amplifying its scientific and societal impact.

A highlight of this year's summit was the strategic partnership with the Qatar Precision Health Institute, which strengthened the summit's mission to integrate precision health solutions within Qatar's healthcare and research ecosystem.

This partnership underscored the im-



Chairs of PMFG 2025 - Prof Khalid Fakhro, Dr Ammira Akil, Dr Sonia Davila and Muhammad Hameed.

portance of cross-sector collaboration in driving innovation in genomics and translating advanced research into practical applications that benefit patients and the wider community.

Prof Khalid Fakhro, chief research officer at Sidra Medicine and chair of the Precision Medicine Programme, said: "PMFG 2025 stands as a testament to what we can achieve when science, collaboration, and innovation come together with a shared purpose."

"We look forward to building on the momentum of this year's summit and invite all stakeholders to continue joining us on

this journey to shape the future of precision health in Qatar and beyond," he said.

PMFG 2025 closed on a strong note, reinforcing Qatar's position as a regional leader in precision medicine and genomic innovation.

The summit fostered valuable partnerships, sparked forward-looking dialogue, and set the foundation for continued progress in the integration of genomics into clinical care.

Sidra Medicine extends its appreciation to all speakers, sponsors, partners, and attendees whose support contributed to the success of this year's edition.