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GULF®TIMES BUSINESS



QCB GOVERNOR: Page 3

'Celebrating National Day renews belonging, loyalty to homeland and the leadership'



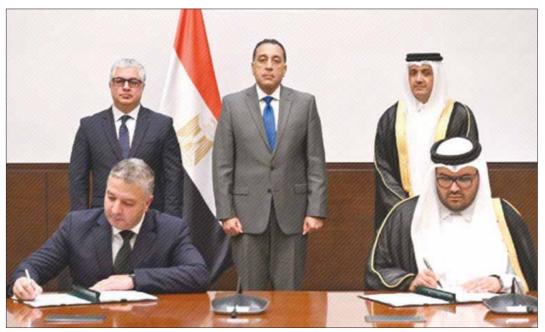
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Officials during the signing ceremony. The project represents the first Qatari industrial investment in the Suez Canal Economic Zone and underscores the deepening economic ties between Cairo and Doha.

Qatar's Al-Mana Holding launches 1st industrial investment in Suez Canal Economic Zone

Mostafa Madbouly has witnessed the signing of a landmark agreement with Qatar's Al-Mana Holding Group to establish a sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) production facility in Ain Sokhna.

The project represents the first Qatari industrial investment in the Suez Canal Economic Zone (SC-Zone) and underscores the deepening economic ties between Cairo and Doha.

The new venture, SAf Fly Ltd, will be built with an investment of \$200mn (approximately 9.6bn Egyptian pounds). It will occupy a total area of 100,000sq m, divided between 70,000sq m in the industrial zone and 30,000sq m at Sokhna Port. Once operational, the facility will have an annual production capacity of 200,000 tonnes, including sustainable aviation fuel (HVO), BioPropane, and BioNaphtha, all derived from refining used cooking oils.

Al-Mana Holding has already secured a long-term offtake agreement with Shell Global Aviation, which will purchase the project's entire output. Deliveries of sustainable aviation fuel are scheduled to havin but he are deficed.

to begin by the end of 2027.

Madbouly lauded the project as a significant addition to Egypt's renewable energy portfolio, saying: "This investment strengthens the economic zone's ability to align with global trends toward renewable energy, while supporting the aviation sector under environmental sustainability standards."

He noted that the signing coincides with the Egyptian-Qatari Business Forum in Cairo, reflecting the positive trajectory of bilateral relations and the shared commitment of both governments to expand joint investments and trade.

Walid Gamal el-Din, chairman of the SCZone, emphasised that the zone has become a premier destination for international investors thanks to its advanced infrastructure, diverse energy sources, skilled workforce, and supportive legislative framework.

He highlighted the environmental impact of the SAF project, which is expected to reduce harmful emissions by 50% to 80% compared to conventional fuel. "This agreement with Shell positions the zone as a global supplier of sustainable aviation fuel, boosting Egypt's exports and supporting national plans to substitute im-

ports," he said.

Abdulaziz al-Mana, CEO of Al-Mana Holding Group, expressed his satisfaction with Egypt's investment climate and praised the SCZone and Egyptian government for facilitating the project. "Continuous support from the political leadership in Qatar and Egypt is the driving force behind this success. This partnership reflects the depth of relations between our two countries," he affirmed. Page 3

Al-Kaabi leads Qatar delegation to OAPEC's 115th Ministerial Council meeting



HE the Minister of State for Energy Affairs Saad bin Sherida al-Kaabi led Qatar's delegation at the 115th Ministerial Council meeting of the Organisation of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) held in Kuwait. The meeting addressed a number of issues related to the OAPEC's work in addition to the 2026 draft budget and the ongoing project to develop its work, reorganise its activities, and launch a new identity. OAPEC was established in 1968 and is headquartered in Kuwait.

Commercial Bank launches Qatar's 'first-ever' Metaverse Auto Marketplace on CBQ Mobile

Commercial Bank has launched Qatar's first Metaverse-enabled 'Auto Marketplace' on the CBQ Mobile App.

Through this innovation, customers can now explore a fully interactive, virtual showroom directly from their smartphones. Using Meta Quest (Oculus) virtual reality (VR) headsets, they can immerse themselves in a 3D environment, where detailed digital models bring each vehicle to life.

Beyond exploration, cus-

tomers can also schedule

test drives and apply for vehicle loans from the app, completing their carbuying journey with ease and convenience. Shahnawaz Rashid, Executive General Manager and Head of Retail Banking at Commercial Bank, said: "This launch marks another step in redefining what modern banking can offer. By introducing the Metaverse to our Auto Marketplace, we have reimagined the way custom-

ers discover, experience.



Through the innovation, customers can now explore a fully interactive, virtual showroom directly from their smartphones. Using Meta Quest (Oculus) VR headsets, they can immerse themselves in a 3D environment, where detailed digital models bring each vehicle to life

and purchase cars.
"At Commercial Bank,
our customers are at the
heart of everything we
do, and so we continue
to lead the way in driving meaningful digital
innovation across Oatar's

financial landscape." As a recognised leader in digital banking innovation, Commercial Bank continues to pioneer technologies that enhance customer experiences and redefine banking

in Oatar and the region. From introducing the latest in digital banking solutions to continuously enhancing customer experiences through niometric verification real-time fraud protection, Commercial Bank consistently delivers services that blend security with convenience. With the introduction of Qatar's first Metaverseenabled Auto Marketplace. Commercial Bank once again leverages its awardwinning mobile application to demonstrate its forwardthinking approach, merging immersive technology with financial services to create more intuitive. connected, and engaging customer journeys. This latest innovation reinforces the bank's commitment to staying ahead of the curve, empowering individuals and businesses alike in a rapidly evolving financial landscape and underscores its role as a driving force in digital transformation across Oatar's banking sector.

QBA explores investment opportunities with Syrian Supreme Council for Development

held a meeting with a delegation from Syria as a follow-up to QBA's meeting with Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa, who was in Qatar for the recently concluded Doha Forum 2025. The delegation was headed by Dr Hazem al-Sharaa, vice-president of the Syrian Supreme Council for Economic Development. He was accompanied by Talal al-Hilali, director general of Syria's Investment Authority, and Safwat Raslan, director general of the Syrian Development Fund. Yesterday's meeting comes as a continuation of QBA's meeting last week with President al-Sharaa, aimed at discussing potential investment opportunities in Syria, even as a number of QBA members have already launched concrete economic projects there in the fields of energy, electricity, and real estate. The Syrian delegation was received by QBA chairman HE Sheikh Faisal bin Qassim al-Thani, in the presence of board member Sheikh Nawaf bin Nasser al-Thani, and QBA members Sheikh Mansour bin Jassim al-Thani, Khaled al-Mannai, Mohammed Moataz al-Khavvat. Ramez al-Khayyat, Nabil Abu Issa, Faisal al-Mana, Yousuf al-Mahmoud, and Ihsan al-Khaimi, as well as representatives of Abdulrahman Al Mana Companies, Sheikh Mohammed bin



QBA chairman HE Sheikh Faisal bin Qassim al-Thani joins a delegation from Syria during a meeting held in Doha yesterday.

Hamad al-Thani, Mekdam Holding Group, and other member companies, in addition to QBA general manager Sarah Abdallah.

At the beginning of the meeting, Dr Hazem al-Sharaa stated that Qatar was among the first countries to invest in Syria, following the directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and the Qatari Government, to place Syria on the international invest-

ment map by strengthening international relations and attracting major companies to participate in the reconstruction of Syria. Dr al-Sharaa noted that the Supreme Council for Economic Development aims to achieve economic stability in the country, revitalise and develop the economy, and establish a comprehensive economic map covering the entire Syrian geography.

He said this will be achieved through full supervision of several economic authorities, organisations, and institutions operating within the framework of the state's economic plan. He also confirmed that Syria will launch a completely new currency in the market at the beginning of the new year, in line with the requirements of the current phase.

The council, chaired by the president of the Republic, is responsible for approving general strategies and plans related to investment.

Republic, is responsible for approving general strategies and plans related to investment. Its membership includes the ministers of economy and industry, energy, finance, tourism, communications and information technology, public works and housing, and agriculture, in addition to the head of the General Authority for Land and Sea Ports, among others. Several economic entities are affiliated with the council, most notably the Syrian Investment Authority, the Sovereign Fund, and

the Development Fund.
During the meeting, Dr al-Sharaa focused on current economic projects in Syria that contribute to reconstruction and the development of infrastructure and vital sectors, with particular emphasis on energy, transport, tourism, real estate, health, education, and key industrial sectors such as pharmaceuticals and construc-

tion materials. He also praised the significant investments by Qatari and Saudi companies in the development of power generation stations, as well as the signing of memoranda of understanding to modernise the electricity sector in general. This is in addition to the development of Damascus International Airport and the Damascus Metro project, in co-operation with Qatari and Turkish companies.

For his part, al-Hilali spoke about the development of the legislative framework to attract and guarantee direct investments through the adoption of the best international laws, allowing foreign investors to own 100% of their projects.

Meanwhile, HE Sheikh Faisal stated that Syria represents an investment bank of projects and golden opportunities for investors. He stressed the need to develop joint Qatari-Syrian projects through the establishment of institutions specialised across various sectors, such as industrial, health, tourism, and real estate, among others, given that the state's objective is to create job opportunities and stimulate economic growth. He emphasised that the private sector in both countries can play a prominent role in this



Al-Kaabi meets Egypt's minister of petroleum and mineral resources



HE the Minister of State for Energy Affairs Saad bin Sherida al-Kaabi met in Kuwait Karim Badawy, Egypt's Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources. Discussions during the meeting, which was held on the sidelines of the 115th Ministerial Council meeting of the Organisation of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC), dealt with energy relations and co-operation between Qatar and Egypt and means to enhance them.

Al-Sayed meets delegation of companies specialising in AI from the US



HE the Minister of State for Foreign Trade Affairs Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al-Sayed met with a delegation of US companies specialising in artificial intelligence (AI) during his visit to Doha, organised in collaboration with the Qatar-US Business Council, reports QNA. Discussions during the meeting covered a range of topics of mutual interest, particularly those related to enhancing co-operation in the fields of commerce, technology, and economic strategies, as well as investment opportunities available in the State of Qatar. The meeting also addressed the interest of several leading US companies in exploring long-term investment opportunities in the Qatari market, amid the expansion of technology- and innovation-driven sectors. Representatives from the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) and Invest Qatar participated in the meeting, during which co-operation pathways and the strengthening of US companies' engagement in opportunities available in the country were discussed, contributing to the advancement of the Qatar-US economic partnership.

Chamber calls for strengthening mutual investments between Qatar and Egypt

Qatar Chamber, led by first vicechairman Mohamed bin Towar al-Kuwari, participated in the 'Qatari-Egyptian Investment Forum' held in Cairo yesterday.

The forum was held in the presence of the HE the Minister of State for Foreign Trade Affairs Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al-Sayed and Egypt's Minister of Investment and Foreign Trade Hassan al-Khatib.

In his remarks at the opening session, al-Kuwari stressed the deep and fraternal relations between Qatar and Egypt, noting that the two countries witnessed considerable development at all levels, particularly in the commercial and economic fields. He also highlighted the success of distinguished Qatari investments across various economic sectors in Egypt.

While trade exchange between both countries has recorded growth in recent years, al-Kuwari said it remains below the level of aspirations and does not reflect the full potential and canabilities available in both cour "This places a significant responsibility on the Qatari and Egyptian private sectors to stimulate intra-trade by establishing mutual and joint projects in both countries, as well as by capitalising on the numerous opportunities available for Egyptian companies to operate in the Qatari market or enter economic partnerships with Qatari companies and expand together into global markets," he said. Al-Kuwari lauded the remarkable developments witnessed by the Egyptian economy, as well as the significant boom in infrastructure and development projects, which open broad horizons for investment opportunities for business owners. He noted that these developments encourage Qatari businesspeople to direct their investments toward the Egyptian market. He also expressed



Qatar Chamber first vice-chairman Mohamed bin Towar al-Kuwari delivering his opening remarks during the 'Qatari-Egyptian Investment Forum' held in Cairo yesterday.

his confidence that the coming period will witness greater rapprochement between the Qatari and Egyptian business communities, laying a solid foundation for establishing business alliances and strategic partnerships. Al-Kuwari also underscored the chamber's continued support for enhancing co-operation between the private sectors of both countries by opening channels of communication between representatives of the Oatari private sector, intensifying mutual visits by businesspeople, exploring available investment opportunities, and establishing investment projects between Qatari and Egyptian companies.

Celebrating National Day renews belonging, loyalty to homeland, leadership: QCB Governor

National Day Opportunity to Renew

Loyalty to Nation, Wise Leadership

QNA

HE the Governor of Qatar Central Bank (QCB) Sheikh Bandar bin Mohammed bin Saoud al-Thani said that Qatar's National Day, which falls on December 18 of every year, is an opportunity to renew belonging, loyalty and allegiance to the homeland and the wise leadership, and to express pride in the national identity.

In exclusive statements to Qatar News Agency (QNA) on the occasion of Qatar National Day, HE the QCB Governor said that celebrating this day embodies the spirit of national unity and commemorates the state's founding, as well as those who shaped Qatar's renaissance, pointing out that it is also an affirmation of the country's commitment to the fundamental principles and values upon which it was founded.

HE the QCB Governor highlighted

the outstanding achievements that have been accomplished under the wise leadership and vision of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, which enabled Qatar to occupy an advanced position on the regional and global level. This has been proved by international organisations and institutions that praised the humanitarian and civilisational role played by the State of Qatar in the region and the world as a whole, which is considered a true source of pride.

His Excellency praised the noble meanings reflected in Qatar National Day's 2025 slogan 'With You It Rises, From You It Awaits,' drawn from a speech delivered by His Highness the Amir during his 2016 visit to Qatar University, during which His Highness indicated that Qatar prospers through its people and relies on them to continue growing. His Excellency noted that the slogan affirms the value of Qatari citizens and their role in building the country, encouraging them to continue their journey towards development by giving and serving the community. He pointed out that QCB's achieve-

201.5 ments are in line with the National ments that link the past with the present, which are commemorated Day slogan, which affirms that the State of Qatar's renaissance on Oatar National Day. is built by its people, expecting Regarding QCB's achievements more creativity and innovation for this year, HE the QCB Governor from them. He highlighted the said that 2025 was full of accombank's keenness to invest in Oatari plishments that brought about a talents, recognising the value of qualitative leap in the financial sechuman resources in achieving eq tor in line with the Third National Development Strategy 2024-2030

nomic development, noting that Oatari talents and competencies and Qatar National Vision 2030 constitute one of the supporting (QNV 2030). Significant progress has been made in implementing pillars of the third strategy for the financial sector, and are given the the strategic objectives outlined in highest priority to create a banking the Third Financial Sector Strategy, QCB's 2024-2030 Strategy, the generation of citizens capable of creativity, innovation, and leading FinTech Strategy, and the Environthe banking and financial sector. mental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Strategy for the Financial He stressed that celebrating Qatar's National Day reflects the Sector, he added. HE the Governor of QCB indicated country's connection to its past and its historical and cultural that several pioneering initiatives identity, as recalls the sacrifices were implemented, including the made by its founder, Sheikh Jasissuance of instructions for the establishment and operation of a sim bin Mohammed bin Thani, real estate development escrow the honourable people of Qatar and the leaders who followed the account, as well as instructions for data processing and protection, the founder, noting that it is they who issuance of a sustainable finance laid the foundations of the modern

in force in the State of Qatar. The first auction within the distributors framework was successfully executed, resulting in the issuance of government bonds and sukuk denominated in local currency on behalf of the Ministry of Finance, he continued, adding that the second phase of the primary distributors framework was also successfully implemented through secondary market trading and the listing of Ijara sukuk, following the highly successful launch of the first phase in January 2025. As part of the bank's commitment to supporting emerging national companies in the field of financial technology, which contributes to building an advanced digital financial and banking system, QCB continued to grant licenses to financial technology companies to conduct their services. By the end of September 2025, the number of licensed companies in this field reached 14 companies subject to the supervision and control of QCB in the financial technology sector, in addition to granting approval to several companies to join the regulatory sandbox and the accelerated regulatory sandbox, he added. His Excellency also pointed our that, as part of the bank's commitment to providing effective initiatives that utilise modern technologies such as digitalisation and artificial intelligence, QCB has worked to facilitate transactions and bring basic financial services closer to all segments of society, thereby enhancing financial inclusion in the country. For example, the Apple Pay service was launched for 'Himvan' cardholders. in addition to collaborating with Qatar Airways' Privilege Club to provide a more distinctive experience for Himyan cardholders, enabling them to benefit from the club's advantages, such as earning

circular on financial services for

customers with disabilities and the elderly, in addition to the issuance

of a circular announcing a change

knotes in accordance with the laws

in the fifth issue of the Riyal ban-

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BUSINESS

Luxury Formula 1 goes global

The world's leading motorsport has become a luxury brand as well as a sporting event. I attended the Qatar Grand Prix and learned about the growing appeal of Formula 1

By Fahad Badar

In 2016 Formula 1, the most famous motorsport in the world, was a fading brand. Attendances and viewing figures were down, some races were seen as being predictable, the fan base was overwhelmingly male and older. It was 70 years old as an event, and somewhat under-represented outside the home base of Europe. Since then, under the owner Liberty Media, the fortunes of the sport have been turned around to establish it as a global brand with a huge following and an upmarket cachet. It is a lesson in business strategy as much as sporting appeal.

I attended three days of the Qatar Grand Prix at the end of November, as a guest of the British racing team McLaren. The sport itself is ferociously competitive and the competition is between the manufacturers as well as the drivers. McL aren's drivers Oscar Piastri and Lando Norris finished second and fourth respectively, having earlier each had a chance of winning. I could feel the anguish of the team over a tactical error that let in Max Verstappen of the Red Bull team, who won the race. In the following and final race two weeks later in Abu Dhabi, however, Lando Norris finished third to confirm himself winner of the F1 title for 2025.

As with all modern sports, data analysis has turned much of the tactics into a science. Every detail of the drive, the driver, the track and the weather is captured on data – more than a terabyte of data per race. A team of 40 analysts, in a centre in the UK thousands of miles away, were monitoring the information, and giving feedback on guidance to inform the technicians at the pit stop.

requires exceptional powers of concentration and physical ability. A fascinating detail I learned was that they are trained not to blink while going around a corner - this can lose you vital seconds. You can only blink on the straight sections. It was in 2016 that Liberty Media took over the Formula One Group, which had been run by businessman Bernie Ecclestone for the previous four decades. The new owner realised that the sport had been under-selling itself. With little profile on social media it was struggling to attract the next generation. It wasn't truly global. for example attracted just a niche audience in the US, where there are rival domestic motorsports such as Nascar and Indy 500. Of pivotal influence has been the Netflix series Drive to Survive, which began in 2019. Showing the drama behind the scenes, the

Nascar and Indy 500.
Of pivotal influence has been the Netflix series Drive to Survive, which began in 2019. Showing the drama behind the scenes, the drivers became more recognisably human to a new generation of fans. Following this was the motion picture F1 The Movie, starring Brad Pitt. These initiatives, combined with new sponsors and slick social

media activities, have boosted the fanbase, and attracted many younger people and female fans. The statistics all point in the same direction: This year the fan base reached 826.5mn, up 90mn since 2023. The global TV audience for a race is well over 1bn. Growth in support in the US and in the Gulf states has been noticeable. Between 2007 and 2012 there wasn't a single Grand Prix in the US. There are now three Grand Prix annually in the US, including the innovation of the night race in Las Vegas, and four in the Gulf -Bahrain, Saudia Arabia, Qatar and Abu Dhabi.

For myself, it was fascinating to watch the astutely crafted architecture of a global sporting brand. No opportunity is missed to monetise an event, an item or an

The upmarket packages offer cuisine by Michelin-starred chefs, a chance to meet F1 legends, and members of an F1 team and learn about the science, the technology and the sport.

The tie-ups and spin-offs reveal

ingenuity. There are partnerships with toy companies, for example. Mattel's Hot Wheels brand is clearly a good match - while the range of initiatives co-created with the toy firm LEGO is delightful. Racing drivers have received LEGO models of trophies and even full-scale driveable replica LEGO F1 cars that they drove as part of a parade (thankfully not a race). A sport that is heavily technological offers opportunities for manufacturers to showcase their innovations.

The oil giant Shell, for example, is a long-established sponsor of the Ferrari team, currently worth around €40mn per season. The two firms promote each other's products, and Shell has developed a specialist fuel for F1 cars, which has helped performance. F1 has achieved the commercially lucrative dynamic of a luxury brand, in which the higher the price, the greater the demand. Attending a Grand Prix venue positions an individual as successful. Corporate packages for attending a luxurious few days as a



guest of an F1 team or sponsor can cost more than \$30,000.
This phenomenon is in keeping with a significant commercial trend towards paying a premium for experiences. Much of the activity in new forms of media are to encourage people to attend a live

Some people describe a memorable experience as being 'priceless'. Astute business people have learned how to attach a price tag, and build a global brand.

■ The author is a Qatari banker, with many years of experience in the banking sector in senior positions.

Doha Bank issues \$150mn digital bond with instant settlement

oha Bank has successfully listed its inaugural \$150mn floating rate Digitally Native Notes (DNN) on the London Stock Exchange's International Securities Market (ISM), achieving T+0 instant settlement via Euroclear's Digital Financial Market Infrastructure (D-FMI).

Euroclear's D-FMI facilitates the issuance, distribution and settlement of fully digital international securities using distributed ledger technology (DLT). The deal positions Qatar as one of the frontrunners of digital bond infrastructure in the GCC, supporting the region's broader ambition to modernise financial markets and unlock new channels of digital funding and liquidity, evidenced by Doha Bank's DNN issuance, which has attracted a new investor to the bank.

"The successful issuance of Doha Bank's inaugural DNN marks a significant milestone in our strategy to diversify and strengthen our funding base. By achieving one of the region's first real-time T+0 settlements and leveraging Euroclear's D-FMI Infrastructure, we are embracing innovation that enhances efficiency, deepens market access, attracts new investors, and reinforces confidence in Qatar as a forward-looking financial hub;" said Doha Bank Group CEO Sheikh Abdulrahman bin Fahad al-Thani.

He added: "This achievement reflects strong global investor appetite for Qatar and aligns closely with the Qatar Central Bank's Third Financial Sector Strategy and the Government's vision to advance digital transformation, resilience, and competitiveness of the Qatari capital market. We thank Standard Chartered for their exceptional partnership, and we are pleased to collaborate with Euroclear, the London Stock Exchange, and Citi as the issuing and



Doha Bank Group CEO Sheikh Abdulrahman bin Fahad al-Thani.

paying agent on this landmark digital issuance."

Standard Chartered acted as the Sole Global Coordinator and Sole Arranger, leading the structuring, execution, and distribution of this pioneering digital issuance. The milestone transaction, one of Qatar's earliest digitally native USD bond issuances, sets a new standard by offering instant settlement and advances the region's digital-markets agenda.

Salman Ansari, Global head, Capital Markets, Standard Chartered, said: "Doha Bank's debut digital bond issuance underscores the tangible, real-world efficiencies that cuttingedge digital infrastructure is delivering for capital markets, and the increasing appetite among our clients for this next-gen capability and execution. We are pleased to be the Sole Global Coordinator and Sole Arranger of this landmark digital bond, which reflects the deep relationships that we have with Doha Bank and our market partners."

Sebastien Danloy, Chief Business officer, Euroclear, said: "We are honoured to support Doha Bank's DNN issuance. This transaction demonstrates that same-day execution and settlement are achievable through a neutral, regulated DLT infrastructure that aligns with established market standards, reducing friction and time while maintaining the level of assurance expected by issuers and investors.

"Equally important, integration with traditional secondary-market services and trading venues ensures that investors retain access to liquidity. As similar transactions progress across global markets, Qatar is helping to set a steady pace for digital issuance within the GCC - providing a clear reference point for marke participants in the region." Dame Julia Hoggett, CEO, London Stock Exchange and head of Digital & Securities Markets, LSEG, said: "We are delighted that Doha Bank has chosen the London Stock Exchange as the listing venue for its digital bond and congratulate them on this milestone transaction.

"As one of the largest markets for the listing of fixed income globally, we are also proud to play a key role in the development of digital markets infrastructure to make capital markets globally more efficient for issuers and investors alike. We look forward to continuing our collaboration and supporting the growth of digital funding and liquidity through future initiatives as demonstrated by Doha Bank today."

Built on DLT, the DNN delivers enhanced transparency, decentralised record-keeping, and operational efficiency. The instant, same-day (T+0) settlement demonstrates the real-world potential of digital-market infrastructure to shorten settlement cycles while laying the foundation for frictionless capital markets transactions.

DIC signs agreement with Ibtechar to develop and operate its programmes

QNA Doha

The Digital Incubation Center (DIC) under the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT) announced the signing of an agreement with Ibtechar Digital Solutions LLC, supported by AlchemistX and Innovation Foundry. The initiative aims to develop and implement the operational framework for the centre as part of the ministry's efforts to strengthen innovation and digital entrepreneurship in Qatar.

The agreement was signed by Eman al-Kuwari, Director of Digital Innovation at MCIT, and Nayef al-Ibrahim,
Co-Founder and CEO of Ibtechar.

Eman al-Kuwari stated: "This agreement aims to empower young Qataris and innovators to transform their ideas into successful ventures that contribute to building a diversified and sustainable digital economy. It is a practical step toward strengthening the digital business ecosystem by providing startups with the technical support, mentorship, and collaboration opportunities they need to grow and turn promising ideas into competitive projects at the regional and global levels."

Nayef al-Ibrahim commented: "This partnership marks a pivotal milestone in Ibtechar's journey, as we bring our specialised expertise in designing, developing, and delivering entrepreneurial programmes and innovation-driven initiatives to support the startups housed within the Digital Incubation Center. Through this collaboration, we



The agreement was signed by Eman al-Kuwari, Director of Digital Innovation at MCIT, and Nayef al-Ibrahim, Co-Founder and CEO of Ibtechar.

will empower entrepreneurs to develop robust business models, test their products, and connect with customers and markets more effectively. At Ibtechar, we firmly believe that an integrated ecosystem - bringing together advanced training, tailored mentorship, and specialised technical support - creates a stronger environment for startups to grow and scale, in line with Qatar National Vision 2030 and its commitment to fostering a diversified, knowledge-based economy. We are proud of this partnership and fully committed to supporting the centre's pathway to deliver tangible impact and measurable value for incubated startups." This agreement represents a significant step toward accelerating digital innovation and supporting digital entrepreneurship, aligning with the pillars of the Digital Agenda 2030.

Qatar Duty Free named 'World's Leading Airport Duty Free Operator 2025' at World Travel Awards

Qatar Duty Free (QDF) has been named 'World's Leading Airport Duty Free Operator 2025' at the World Travel Awards Grand Final Gala held in Bahrain. It is the highest award in the category, recognising Qatar Duty Free's outstanding performance and service in the global travel retail industry.

The World Travel Awards celebrate the best in travel and tourism worldwide, based on votes from industry professionals and consumers. The latest win reflects Qatar Duty Free's dedication to creating exceptional shopping experiences for travellers at Hamad International Airport.

Ahead of the global-level win, Qatar Duty Free won the regional round in October, being named 'The Middle East's Leading Airport Duty Free Operator 2025', cementing its reputation as the regional travel retail hub.

Earlier this year, QDF earned several other prestigious honours, including 'Retailer of the Year' at the Frontier Awards and 'World's



The 'World's Leading Airport Duty Free Operator 2025' title is the highest award in the category, recognising Qatar Duty Free's outstanding performance and service in the global travel retail industry.

Best Airport Shopping' at the Skytrax World Airport Awards, further signalling its leadership in the industry.

Thabet Musleh, Chief Retail & Hospitality officer at Qatar Airways Group, said: "Winning at the World Travel Awards is another great moment of recognition for our team. It shows that the hard work,

creativity, and care we put into every detail truly make a difference. We do so much more than just sell products; we create experiences that travellers remember. Rounding off our 25th anniversary with this award proves that Qatar Duty Free is not only leading today but is ready to continue blazing the trail ahead."

Qatar Fintech Hub concludes 'Demo Day 2025' seventh wave

Qatar Fintech Hub (QFTH), supported by Qatar Development Bank (QDB), has concluded the seventh wave of 'Demo Day' of fintech companies graduating from its pre-acceleration and acceleration programmes.

The event was attended by representatives from regulators, business ecosystem partners, and a select group of investors, financial sector leaders, and entrepreneurs. QDB, represented by QFTH, made a strategic announcement regarding the 'Fintech Development Grant' provided by the Qatar Central Bank (QCB), and the launch of the new model of the 'Pre-seed Investment Programme'.

The event, held under the title 'Fintech Transformed: From Vision to Impact', reaffirmed the continued progress of Qatar's financial ecosystem. This year's edition, the largest in terms of participating companies, featured presentations from 20 startups enrolled in the 'pre-acceleration and acceleration programmes.

These startups had undergone weeks of thorough hands-on training and specialised mentorship, covering technical and organisa-



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tional product development, navigating legal and regulatory procedures, preparing for investment, and entering and competing in the market

The seventh wave of companies demonstrated significant maturity and diverse expertise, spanning strategic areas that contribute to the future development of Qatar's financial sector. These areas include Open Banking, Crowdfunding, InsurTech, and Emerging Tech,

in alignment with the objectives of Qatar's National FinTech Strategy and the Third Financial Sector Strategic Plan.

The 'Fintech Development Grant', provided by the QCB through QFTH, will offer cofunding of up to QR1.5mn per company, linked to key milestones in each company's growth journey. The grant aims to enhance technical and regulatory readiness, support product development, and facilitate market entry.

QDB also presented the updated model of the 'Pre-seed Investment Programme' to finance early-stage companies and graduates of QFTH programmes, announcing an increase in direct investment funding to QR730,000 (\$200,000) per company. This comes in addition to other high-quality support services and packages provided by the hub, most notably the opportunity to apply to the 'Talent Community Programme', which is designed to attract specialised talent to work in Qatar by offering premium residential spaces.

The event also witnessed the announcement of the redesign of the QFTH's operating methodology through the introduction of an applied model known as the 'Lab Model'. This model provides a practical pathway for product development and regulatory readiness, enabling companies to transition to the testing environment (sandbox) and initiate the licensing process quickly and effectively.

The hub will also hold discussion sessions with companies to better understand their needs and work to address them through an integrated support ecosystem. The success of

the latest wave marks a continuation of QDB's journey in supporting innovation in the fintech sector. Through QFTH, QDB has successfully graduated seven waves of fintech companies so far, in addition to the support it has provided through investments and financing exceeding QR73mn within the sector, whether through the QFTH or QDB's investment arm.

This reflects QDB's pivotal role in strengthening Qatar's position as a regional centre for fintech, based on strategic partnerships with regulators and financial and technical institutions.

The momentum was further reinforced by recent achievements during QDB's participation in the Singapore FinTech Festival, which resulted in the signing of a strategic agreement with the Global Finance & Technology Network (GFTN) to establish a fintech centre of excellence and support in Qatar, the first-of-its-kind in the region, as well as to host an international fintech forum in Qatar in the future. It represents a significant addition to the supportive ecosystem and advanced infrastructure provided by Qatar.