

DECC, Lusail QNB and Msheireb stations were the busiest across the entire metro network. Within the Lusail Tram network, Legtaifiya Station was the busiest. (QNA)





# NHRC chief calls for urgent action on Gaza humanitarian crisis

QNA  
Jeddah

HE the Chairperson of the National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) and a member of the Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC) of the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation (OIC), Maryam bint Abdullah al-Attayah, affirmed that the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank is experiencing an unprecedented deterioration as a result of the comprehensive siege, acute shortages of food and medicine, and the collapse of essential service systems.

Speaking at three meetings during the IPHRC's 26th session in Jeddah, she noted that conditions facing civilians constitute grave violations of international humanitarian law, including collective punishment and repeated targeting of civilians and vital infrastructure.

Al-Attayah emphasised the meetings provided a platform for unifying OIC perspectives and strengthening approaches grounded in international humanitarian law to protect civilians, support vulnerable groups, and reinforce international accountability.

She stressed that continued targeting of health facilities, schools, and water and electricity sources undermines basic requirements for dignified life and demands urgent international action to ensure civilian protection and halt systematic violations. She under-



HE NHRC Chairperson Maryam bint Abdullah al-Attayah.

scored the importance of integrating mental health and psychosocial support into humanitarian response, particularly for children and women.

Any peace plan for Gaza must respect international law and guarantee fundamental rights, with safe, unconditional, sustained humanitarian access essential to success, she stated. Reconstruction cannot proceed without justice and guarantees of non-recurrence, requiring Palestinian engagement as rightful stakeholders in determining their future.

On accountability, she affirmed that supporting international investigations and cooperating with the International Criminal Court and UN mechanisms is cornerstone to addressing impunity. Documenting violations per international standards, strengthening civil society, and enhancing OIC collective action are indispensable to holding perpetrators accountable.

Al-Attayah highlighted that humanitarian and development dimensions are as important as political pathways, stressing the need for safe humanitarian corridors, special protection for vulnerable groups – particularly women, children, elderly, and persons with disabilities – and restored essential services as minimum conditions for dignified living.

She noted that sustained diplomatic engagement, building on OIC meetings, the Saudi-French conference, and the 2025 New York Peace Summit, represents an important avenue for unifying international positions and supporting Palestinian rights.

Regarding Syria, al-Attayah affirmed that continued conflict necessitates strengthening the IPHRC's monitoring role and producing neutral, periodic reports on violations and humanitarian challenges, in cooperation with national institutions and UN agencies.

She explained that humanitarian priorities should focus on protecting children from violence, displacement, and recruitment; ensuring education access in emergencies; and strengthening health systems through field hospital support and essential medical supplies. Effective coordination among humanitarian actors is critical to avoiding duplication and improving efficiency.

She underscored developing OIC partnership strategies through clear role distribution frameworks and expertise exchange to maximise humanitar-

ian impact. She called for firm commitment to implementation through ceasefire, political process, safe return of displaced persons, humanitarian assistance delivery, and expanded international advocacy.

During the working group meeting on family rights and women's and children's rights, al-Attayah affirmed that girls' right to education is a non-negotiable priority that must not face discrimination or delay, particularly in conflict settings. She stressed the importance of national legislation, education-in-emergencies programs, safe learning environments, psychosocial support, and sustainable financing.

She warned that digital challenges – including Internet addiction, cyber-violence, and online exploitation – threaten children's rights, calling for comprehensive national policies, effective partnerships with technology companies and civil society, and strengthened media literacy.

Al-Attayah emphasised that institutionalising women's role in preventing violent extremism is central to national strategies through their involvement in policymaking, support for women's networks, and enhanced OIC regional co-operation to promote tolerance and moderation.

She concluded that strengthening co-operation among the IPHRC, OIC institutions, UN agencies, and national human rights bodies is fundamental to advancing social policies that place family at the core of the human rights system.

## Interior minister meets German counterpart



HE the Minister of Interior and Commander of the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya) Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani met with German Federal Minister of Interior Alexander Dobrindt. The meeting discussed ways to strengthen bilateral security co-operation, reviewed issues of mutual interest, and explored mechanisms to enhance co-ordination, contributing to the advancement of joint security efforts. (QNA)



## Workshop for mercury assessment under UN Minamata Convention

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC) yesterday held the closing workshop for Qatar's preliminary assessment project under the Minamata Convention on Mercury, in co-operation with the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), the Global Environment Facility (GEF), and the Secretariat of the Minamata Convention.

The workshop reviewed the project's final results, including Qatar's initial national inventory of mercury and its compounds, emission estimates across sectors, and an assessment of the country's legislative framework for mercury management.

The assessment aims to identify mercury emission sources, evaluate and strengthen management regulations, build institutional capacity, assess health and environmental impacts, and develop national strategies to reduce mercury-related risks.

Workshop presentations cov-

ered emission estimates for air, water, and soil releases, identified gaps in national regulations, and outlined future steps for developing a comprehensive mercury management programme aligned with convention requirements and international best practices.

The ministry emphasised that the workshop demonstrates Qatar's commitment to international agreements, particularly the Minamata Convention, which Qatar joined through Decree No 14 of 2021. It stressed the importance of continuing to develop national capacities and enhance regulatory frameworks, consistent with Qatar National Vision 2030 and the National Environment and Climate Change Strategy.

The Minamata Convention, adopted in 2013 and effective since August 2017, is a major international agreement protecting human health and the environment from mercury emissions and waste. (QNA)



# Doha Declaration stresses AI integration to fight corruption

The 11th edition of the Conference of the States Parties to the UN Convention Against Corruption concluded its work in Doha with the adoption of the Doha Declaration 2025.

A statement issued by the conference affirmed that the Doha Declaration delivered a clear message that building the integrity of the future requires the responsible use of technology and the strengthening of international co-operation to address the growing challenges associated with corruption and transnational financial crimes. It noted that the increasing complexity of corruption patterns requires law enforcement and judicial systems to keep pace with these evolving threats, and called on states to leverage digital technologies, including artificial intelligence, to enhance international co-operation and improve the accuracy, efficiency, and objectivity of corruption risk assessment.

The declaration encouraged the use of technologies developed by expert networks, including the Global Operational Network of Anti-Corruption Law Enforcement Authorities of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), enabling the secure and rapid exchange of information, given the critical importance of time in corruption cases and its direct impact on the integrity of investigations.

Acting Executive Director of UNODC John Brandolino said that the new Doha Declaration, with



its focus on artificial intelligence (AI), represents an important recognition of the impact of this technology and a fundamental step toward harnessing its potential in preventing and combating corruption. Meanwhile, the Integrity Advisory Board of the Youth Initiative at UNODC called for the meaningful engagement of youth in anti-corruption frameworks and for monitoring the implementation of the commitments made during the conference.

The conference adopted eleven resolutions, including those related to enhancing transparency in the financing of political parties and election campaigns, promoting integrity among children

and youth through education, examining the role of corruption in facilitating other crimes such as migrant smuggling and environmental crimes, and addressing the future of the peer review mechanism of the UN Convention Against Corruption.

It also adopted a declaration on the next phase of the review mechanism, affirming that the effective implementation of the convention requires review processes that are efficient, effective, and fit for purpose, while drawing on the experience accumulated since the mechanism was launched.

As part of efforts to strengthen partnership with the private sec-

tor, 21 companies joined the conference's newly launched Private Sector Platform, co-led by UNODC and the UN Global Compact, with the aim of supporting the implementation of the Convention and enhancing public-private partnerships. The States Parties also decided to hold the twelfth session of the Conference of the States Parties to the UN Convention Against Corruption in Uzbekistan.

Qatar hosted the Dec 15-19 conference with over 2,500 participants from 192 countries representing governments, international organisations, private sector, civil society, and youth. (QNA)

# MoPH workshop to set health research priorities

The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) organised the National Workshop for Setting Health Research Priorities in Qatar, with participation from research and academic institutions, health-care organisations, and the World Health Organisation.

The workshop featured structured voting sessions on research priorities using scientific evaluation criteria, enabling participants to assess priorities objectively and transparently. Expert-led sessions produced outputs reflecting



national consensus on pressing research directions. Participants analysed voting results, focus-

ing on practical aspects including available capacities, challenges, and implementation requirements

for the selected priorities.

Director of the Health Research Regulations Department Dr

Amany Dahir said the workshop represents "an important step towards enhancing the quality of

health research and strengthening its impact on health policies", supporting Qatar's development and health objectives.

WHO Representative to Qatar Dr Rayana Bou Haka emphasised the importance of continued co-operation between the ministry and WHO in advancing health research in Qatar.

The workshop aims to align national research priorities with Qatar National Vision 2030, best global practices, and the latest scientific methodologies. (QNA)



# Qatar, US reaffirm strategic partnership

From Page 1

**Deals secured this year include:**

- \$96bn deal from Qatar Airways to acquire up to 210 American-made Boeing 787 Dreamliner and 777X aircraft powered by GE Aerospace engines. The Qatar contract will support over 154,000 US jobs annually, totalling over one million jobs in the years to come.
- \$97bn offered by Qatar to US Company Parsons on projects advancing innovation. This deal will also support hundreds of thousands of well-paid jobs across the United States.
- \$8.5bn contract from QatarEnergy with McDermott to advance critical energy infrastructure.
- \$1bn will be invested in the Quantum Joint Venture Agreement with Al Rabban Capital, advancing state-of-the-art quantum technologies.

**Defence and security co-operation**

Qatar and the United States reaffirmed their defence and security partnership as recognised in the September 29 Executive Order assuring the security of Qatar.

Both sides continue to enhance regional deterrence, strengthen joint defence capabilities, and support economic growth through defence investment.

The partnership includes significant military infrastructure upgrades at Al-Udeid Air Base (AUAB) in Qatar, advancing air and maritime security, and increasing Nato interoperability through joint training and operational initiatives. The United States reiterated its commitment to Qatar's security and territorial integrity, while Qatar underscored the value of continued co-operation in addressing shared security challenges.

Qatari defence investment enhances regional deterrence and boosts US defence manufacturing to drive economic growth and well-paid US jobs.

Both sides reaffirmed the statement of intent signed during President Trump's May trip outlining over \$38bn in potential investments including support for burden-sharing at AUAB and future defence capabilities.

They further discussed the establishment of the first bilateral combined command post for air defence, strengthening joint defence capabilities in the Gulf and beyond.

The US Secretary of State welcomed Qatar's procurement of cutting-edge military equipment including innovative defence

technologies as part of the \$2bn deal with General Atomics of remotely piloted aircraft systems. The two sides also reviewed a further \$1bn agreement with Raytheon for the purchase of counter-drone capabilities to protect Qatar.

**Counter-terrorism and law enforcement**

The two governments emphasised their long-standing partnership addressing terrorist threats and crime highlighting their close co-operation in counter-terrorism and law enforcement.

Both sides recognise Qatar's frontline role in global counterterrorism efforts and commitment to international standards in combating terrorist financing and anti-money laundering including.

As the United States prepares to co-host the 2026 FIFA Men's World Cup, Qatar pledges full co-operation and support to the United States to ensure the tournament's success.

Such co-operation includes the recent signing of two memoranda of understanding between the Ministry of Interior and Lekhwiya and the FBI to advance security co-operation mechanisms and coordinate training, information exchange, and capacity-building, in support of both countries' shared interests.

The two sides also signed statements of intent on countering unmanned aerial systems and civil aviation security.

**Culture, sports, and education**

The two countries underscored the importance of deepening cultural and educational co-operation, noting the value of our decades-long academic and educational institutional partnership.

The two governments highlighted the renewal of a memorandum of understanding between Qatar Museums and the Smithsonian Institution as a foundation for expanded collaboration.

Both sides intend to share best practices in the arts through a Strategic Dialogue Working Group on Culture, Sports, and Education, including potential co-operation on the Art in Embassies programme and engagement during Art Basel.

**Enduring strategic partnership**

Qatar and the United States emphasised the importance of their enduring strategic partnership and continued co-operation across key issues. Both sides look forward to the next Strategic Dialogue in Doha in 2026.



Dr Javaid Sheikh, Dr Marco Ameduri and Dr Rachid Bendriss with participating students.

# WCM-Q seminar offers guidance on career choices for students

Health professionals shared their career journeys with foundation and pre-medical students at Weill Cornell Medicine - Qatar (WCM-Q) during the fall edition of the college's Medical Career Seminar series.

The series featured presentations and talks from Dr Javaid Sheikh, dean and professor of psychiatry and population health sciences at WCM-Q, and six distinguished WCM-Q alumni. Each seminar provided valuable insights into each speaker's career and area of speciality, followed by a Q&A session.

This year, an additional interactive component was introduced, with guest speakers including a brief "mystery" medical case in their sessions to encourage students to think, diagnose, and engage as if they were the treating physicians.

Dr Sheikh spoke about his personal and professional journey and the impact of AI on medical practice. "As future physician-scientists, it is essential for our students to start exploring their professional interests early

in their educational journey. With AI increasingly becoming a standard component of medical education and practice, the field of medicine is evolving in unprecedented ways. These are very exciting times for future medical professionals," Dr Sheikh said.

Alumni speakers included Dr Tania Jaber (Class of 2011), an endocrinologist at Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC); Dr Sulaiman al-Shakhs (Class of 2021), a psychiatrist at HMC and a clinical associate of psychiatry at WCM-Q; Dr Salah Majid Mahmoud (Class of 2023), an otolaryngology and head and neck surgery resident at HMC; Dr Tala Abu Samaan (Class of 2024), an internal medicine resident at Tufts Medical Center in the US; and Dr Mohamed al-Hajjaji (Class of 2016), an associate programme director for the Paediatric Residency Programme and the Paediatric Hospital Medicine Fellowship Programme at Sidra Medicine.

To ensure alumni living abroad also had the opportunity to share their experiences with WCM-Q students, a live online session was held with alumna guest speaker Dr Nour

Barakat (Class of 2014), an ophthalmologist specialising in cornea and oculoplasty who currently practices in Australia.

Dr Marco Ameduri, associate professor of physics and senior associate dean for pre-medical education and Education City collaborative curricular affairs, said: "We are proud of our distinguished alumni, who have chosen to pursue diverse training and career opportunities, both here in Qatar and abroad. Their stories offer current students valuable insights into the varying possibilities available to them in the medical field."

Dr Rachid Bendriss, associate dean for foundation, student outreach and educational development programmes, added: "It is extremely valuable for WCM-Q students to hear directly from experienced medical experts about the journeys that have helped shape them into the health professionals they are today. Their personal experiences will ultimately encourage students to start considering their own interests and future career paths."



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# Doha to celebrate completion of milestone Arabic dictionary

By Tawfik Lamari  
Staff Reporter

Under the patronage of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, the Arab cultural and scientific landscape will witness an exceptional event celebrating the completion of the Doha Historical Dictionary of the Arabic Language, one of the largest linguistic projects in the Arab world and internationally.

The ceremony is organised by the Doha Historical Dictionary of the Arabic Language and the Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies, and will take place tomorrow, at the Fairmont Raffles Hotel – Katara Hall, Lusail City, at 9am. It will be broadcast live on Alaraby 2 and Alaraby Plus.

The completion of the dictionary represents a milestone in the study of the Arabic language and its semantic history. It stands as the most significant Arab project accomplished in accordance with modern international standards for historical dictionaries, providing researchers with thoroughly documented linguistic material spanning from the earliest attested Arabic texts to the present day, covering 20 centuries.

The dictionary offers a comprehensive historical map of the linguistic development of words and their meanings across the ages. Through its vast linguistic corpus and verified data, the dictionary



has helped lay new knowledge foundations that contribute to the development of linguistic and research applications and support efforts to build Arabic language models in the AI era.

The ceremony will be attended by a distinguished audience reflecting the project's importance and scholarly stature, including representatives of regional and international organisations, leading scholars of Arabic, heads of language academies, a select group of prominent Orientalists interested in Arabic linguistic studies, members of the Scientific Council of the Doha Historical Dictionary, and dictionary experts from across the Arab world.

The event will also feature the honouring of scholars and experts from various disciplines who contributed to the completion of the Doha Historical Dictionary of the Arabic Language, in the presence of His Highness the Amir, in appreciation of their fruitful scholarly efforts.

The ceremony will be followed by the 'AI and the Characteristics

of the Arabic Language' conference, organised by the Doha Historical Dictionary and the Arab Centre on Dec 22-23.

The conference will bring together a select group of linguists, researchers in natural language processing, and language model developers. The conference aims to examine the relationship between the linguistic characteristics of Arabic and computational processing and AI applications; analyse the challenges of Arabic language modelling; assess contemporary experiences and initiatives in building linguistic resources that support the development of Arabic AI; stimulate co-operation between linguists and computer scientists to build effective Arabic knowledge models; and outline a roadmap for the development of AI technologies tailored to the Arabic language.

The conference will also attract universities, research institutions, and scientific laboratories specialising in computational linguistics and natural language processing.

The event represents a prominent Arab scientific occasion that combines the celebration of completing a historical Arabic lexicographical project with the launch of an in-depth scholarly discussion on the future of Arabic in the AI age – enhancing Doha's position as a leading knowledge and linguistic hub in the region and reaffirming its role in supporting Arabic linguistic research and modern language technologies.

## Arabic language symposium forges civilisational connections

The Sheikh Abdullah bin Zaid Al Mahmoud Islamic Cultural Centre organised its annual Arabic language symposium on the impact of teaching Arabic to non-native speakers in Qatar. Attending the symposium were HE the Minister of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs Ghanem bin Shaheen bin Ghanem al-Ghanem, HE Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education Dr Ibrahim bin Saleh al-Nuaimi, alongside a contingent of university teachers, researchers, specialists in teaching Arabic to non-native speakers, and representatives of the nation's cultural and educational institutions. The event was held concurrently with the Qatar National Day celebrations and the UN Arabic Language Day observed annually on Dec 18 to embody the profound connection between the Arabic language and national identity, in addition to deepening the language's standing as a core pillar of building humans and forging people-to-people and



civilisational connections. Director of the Islamic Cultural Centre Dr Saleh bin Ali al-Marri stated that the symposium convened during a unifying national and linguistic occasion where the legacies of the National Day converge with the UN Arabic Language Day, reflecting Qatar's cherishing of its language and cultural identity. Awqaf gives foremost priority to the Arabic language and strives to propagate its teachings in wide-ranging countries of the world through direct support and follow-up from HE the minister, Dr

al-Marri highlighted. He said that the centre's programmes in teaching Arabic to non-native speakers have witnessed a remarkable expansion both at home and abroad, with external courses extending to several countries, including Cambodia, Mauritius, and Bosnia, in addition to hosting students from Mongolia and South Africa, as part of the nation's vision to promote cultural, civilisational, and people-to-people connections in pursuit of forging understanding among nations. **(QNA)**

## Lawh Wa Qalam: M F Husain Museum launches programme to connect art, learning

Lawh Wa Qalam: Maqbool Fida Husain Museum, established by Qatar Foundation, has launched a learning and outreach programme, beginning a new phase of educational programming following the museum's recent opening to the public.

The programme will run from Dec 21-31, with sessions designed for different age groups, and registration is now available at <https://lawhwaqalam.org.qa/>. It comprises guided tours and workshops for children, young people, and families, with close engagement with artworks as the starting point for discussion and creative exploration.

Sessions are structured to provide participants with dedicated time in the galleries before moving into hands-on work developed in response to what they have seen. Across five sessions for different age groups, the programme explores key ideas present in Husain's work, including colour and form, storytelling, movement, and abstraction.

For younger audiences, the programme begins with 'Shapes and Colors', a workshop for children aged 4-7 that introduces primary colours and basic shapes through time spent in the galleries, followed by hands-on collage-making.

Children aged 8-12 can ex-



plore visual storytelling through 'Stories in the City: Reimagining Urban Life Through M F Husain's Eyes', which explores how artists make use of composition and symbols to construct meaning, leading participants to create mixed-media city scenes inspired by everyday life.

The programme also extends beyond the galleries through 'Art in the Park: Collective Outdoor Mural Experience', a family workshop that brings observation and expressive painting together in an outdoor setting, resulting in a shared mural shaped by place and community.

For teenagers aged 13-17, 'Dynamic Narratives: Movement, Story & Abstraction' offers a more exploratory session focused on gesture, rhythm, and abstraction as tools for visual expression.

Manager of Communications Outreach, Jowaher al-Marri said: "Lawh Wa Qalam's learning and outreach programme reflects the museum's significance as a space for active learning. These workshops give children, young people, and families the opportunity to engage with the artworks in ways that are immersive, creative, thoughtful, and personal."

Located in Education City, the museum opened its doors last month and is dedicated to the life and work of M F Husain, one of the greatest modern painters. The museum brings together more than 150 of Husain's original works and personal objects, spanning painting, film, tapestry, and photography, and tracing the ideas and cultural references that shaped his artistic practice. **(QNA)**

## HIA transforms into global stage for QND

Hamad International Airport (HIA) marked Qatar National Day through a multi-day cultural programme delivered in collaboration with Qatar Duty Free (QDF), bringing together Qatari cultural expression and local heritage for a uniquely global audience of international and transfer passengers.

At the heart of the celebrations, a cultural moment unfolded at the airport's iconic Lamp Bear art installation through a series of live concerts presented under the Qatar National Day theme, 'With You It Rises, From You It Awaits'. The performances took place during peak operating hours, with co-ordinated efforts to maintain security, airport operations, and passenger services, ensuring the experience is integrated seamlessly into the flow of travel.

Led by the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra, the concerts allowed passengers and visitors to encounter the performances while on the move. The programme featured Qatari compositions, including a live performance of the Qatar National Anthem, alongside

globally recognised works with traditional influences, reflecting the airport's role as a point of cultural connection.

The performances brought symphonic excellence into the heart of the terminal, positioning one of the world's busiest global gateways as a platform for national expression and artistic exchange. The cultural showcase combined music and poetry, with vocal performances by Aisha al-Ziani and a poetry rendition by Hamad al-Beraidi.

As part of the wider Qatar National Day celebrations across the airport, Qatar Duty Free activated Souq Al Matar in the North Plaza with immersive cultural experiences. Passengers engaged with traditional crafts, falconry displays, Ardah performances, and live cultural demonstrations, complementing the concert programme and extending the celebration across the terminal. The programme reinforced HIA's position as a global gateway where national culture is actively experienced and shared with the world.

### ARPM Tender Committee announces the following Tender


Tender No.	(Tender Title) Scope of work	Tender Fee	Tender Bond	Opening Date	Closing Date
ARPM/238/2025/TEN/DOH	Tender for Provision of Housekeeping Services at AL Bidda Park-2 Year Term	2000	50,000	21-Dec-2025	18-Jan-2026
ARPM/239/2025/TEN/DOH	Provision and Installation of Flooring Tiles Around the Swimming Pool at Retaj Resort, Salwa Road	500	10,000	21-Dec-2025	18-Jan-2026

- Interested parties can collect copies of the tender documents from ARPM Purchasing Department, via email to [m.aseef@arpm.com.qa](mailto:m.aseef@arpm.com.qa) and [j.castillo@arpm.com.qa](mailto:j.castillo@arpm.com.qa) during working hours 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. (Fri & Sat Closed)
  - A payment of a non-refundable document's fees should be deposited in cash to:
    - Beneficiary Name:** Al-Rayyan Projects Management (ARPM)
    - Account No.** 0013-022375-004 (Qatar National Bank)
    - IBAN No.** QA86QNBA000000000013022375004
- And the original deposit receipt should be submitted upon receiving of the terms and conditions.
- A tender bond (as stated above), issued by a bank operating in the State of Qatar and valid for 180 days from the closing date should accompany tenders. **The executed tender bond should be included with the technical offer.**
  - All tenderers MUST collect their original bonds from ARPM – Purchasing department upon expiry of the Tender Bond, unless alternative instructions are issued by ARPM.
  - Proposal to be submitted in sealed envelopes as per the RFP requirements in both HARD COPY & SOFT COPY on CD or USB.
  - Copies of valid **Company Commercial Registration, Establishment ID & Authorization Letter** must be submitted in order to collect the tender documents.
  - The successful tenderer is required to submit a performance bond issued by a bank operating in the State of Qatar equivalent to 10% of the total contract sum and shall be valid for a period expiring 180 days after contract expiry.
  - Offers should be valid for 180 days commencing from the closing date (as stated above).
  - ARPM has the right to increase or decrease the scope of services by 20% with the same terms and conditions.
  - ARPM is not bound to accept the lowest tender or any other tender and is under no obligation to show any reasons thereof.
  - Bids should be submitted not later than 12:00 noon on the closing date and must be deposited into the Box, provided in the ARPM Purchasing office, located at the 9<sup>th</sup> Floor, ARPM, Head office and should be in sealed envelopes addressed to the Chairman - Tenders Committee, quoting the Tender Number and Subject.
  - Deadline for accepting requests and inquiries, 7 days prior to closing date.
  - Offers arriving thereafter may not be considered.

CHAIRMAN – TENDER COMMITTEE  
TEL: 40341804

## Registration for Marmi 2026 festival begins today

Registration for the 17th Qatar International Falcons and Hunting Festival (Marmi 2026) kicks off at the Qatari Society of Al Gannas (QSA) headquarters in Katara Cultural Village today. It will continue until Dec 23, from 4pm-8pm. The festival features numerous competitions, most notably Al Tal'a, which specialises in falcon hunting of houbara bustards; Al Da'wa, a high-speed falcon racing competition across several categories; Haddad Challenge, which pits falcons against homing pigeons; the Saluki Haddad Championship; as well as the Promising Falconer Championship, in addition to other contests that the public has come to eagerly anticipate each year. Director of Championships at QSA and President of the Marmi Festival Metab al-Qahtani stated that registration for the promising falconer championship will be at the festival headquarters in Sabkhat Marmi in Sealine. The date for the participation of the promising falconers will be announced after finalising the total number of registrations across all festival competitions and conducting the draw for contestants in all championships. The organising committee is keen to have the largest number of young people participate and is allocating valuable prizes for them. **(QNA)**



**Invites qualified bidders to participate in the following tender:**

Effective from 01<sup>st</sup> July 2023, Bids from Local Suppliers and Contractors (companies established under the Law of State of Qatar) who are not in possession of an ICV score in the ICV portal (<https://icv.qa/en-US>) by Tender closing date (or commercial bid submission date if separately mentioned / notified) will not be accepted. Local companies that have been established for less than 2 years are exempted from this requirement. For further details, please visit ICV portal (<https://icv.qa/en-US>).

Sl No.	Tender Reference and Description	(i) Deadline for Submission of Information & Interest for Bidding	(ii) Tender fee (non-refundable); Date	(iii) Tender Publication on ARIBA	(iv) Tender Bond	Bid Closing Date
1	RFP- P10-01-368 Manpower Services for Testing, Data Reconciliation and Validation for the S/4HANA solution Migration Program	25 <sup>th</sup> Dec. 2025	QAR 750. 00 25 December 2025	29 <sup>th</sup> Dec 2025	QAR 100,000.00	25 <sup>th</sup> Jan 2026, 12:00 Noon
2	RFP- P09-04-149 Provision of General Cleaning and Façade Cleaning Services for 5 Years	25 <sup>th</sup> Dec. 2025	QAR 1000. 00 25 December 2025	29 <sup>th</sup> Dec 2025	QAR 150,000.00	25 <sup>th</sup> Jan 2026, 12:00 Noon

i. Interested bidders to communicate their willingness to bid and contact details to QAPCO Procurement ([procurement@qapco.com.qa](mailto:procurement@qapco.com.qa)) indicating company name, address, telephone, official E-mail, etc. latest by the deadline for Submission of Information & Interest for Bidding indicated above. Reference Number and Description of the tender must be mentioned in the email.

ii. Non-refundable tender fee as indicated above is payable to QAPCO through **QNB account # 0013-001688-060** only at any QNB branch latest by 25 December 2025. (Tender Number, Subject and bidder name are to be stated in the payment receipt)

iii. Tender link will be sent via email notification from ARIBA system to the confirmed bidders. Tender Document will be accessible only after attaching the evidence of the tender fee payment in ARIBA by the bidder followed by Qapco approval. QAPCO shall reply with the access to "ARIBA eSourcing RFP event" along with necessary instructions and guidelines for the bid submission. ARIBA Registration: Bidders who are not registered in QAPCO are requested to complete the registration process during the tendering period (Details on ARIBA registration can be accessed via QAPCO website [www.qapco.com](http://www.qapco.com))

iv. **Tender Bond (Bank Guarantee):** Original tender bond must be submitted by hand to the following address latest by the Bid closing date & time:  
Qatar Petrochemical Company (QAPCO) Q.P.J.S.C.  
QAPCO HEADQUARTERS, P.O. Box 756,  
Building; 12, Zone No. 92, Street No. 556, Mualtheer Leafawiyat Steet  
Mesaieed, Qatar  
Tel: 4033 8109 / 102  
**Attention: Procurement Group Manager**

Bidder to attach copy of tender bond to the offer in ARIBA. **Offer without Tender Bond will not be considered.**  
Tender Clarifications: Please send your queries with tender reference and description to email [procurement@qapco.com.qa](mailto:procurement@qapco.com.qa)

**Notes:**  
1. ARIBA Registration: Bidders who are not registered in QAPCO are requested to complete the registration process during the tendering period (Details on ARIBA registration can be accessed via QAPCO website [www.qapco.com](http://www.qapco.com))

**For more information about QAPCO please visit our website: [www.qapco.com](http://www.qapco.com)**



## Reyada Medical Centre expands its ophthalmology department

Reyada Medical Centre has announced the expansion of its Ophthalmology Department, reinforcing its commitment to delivering comprehensive, patient-centred eye care to a multi-faceted audience.

The expansion marks a significant step in strengthening Reyada's multidisciplinary healthcare services and improving access to specialised ophthalmic care under one roof.

The enhanced Ophthalmology Department is led by Dr Manju Venugopal and Dr Rubeena, experienced ophthalmologists known for their patient-focused approach and clinical expertise. The department now offers a wider range of diagnostic, medical, and preventive eye care services, catering to patients across all age groups. The Ophthalmology Department is operational Saturday to Thursday, from 9am-9.30pm, ensuring convenient access for patients.

Jamsheer Hamza, managing director & CEO of Reyada Medical Centre, stated: "At Reyada, we continuously evolve to meet the healthcare needs of our community. The expansion of our Ophthalmology Department strengthens our commitment to delivering high-quality, patient-centred eye care." Dr Abdul Kalam, executive director & CMO, commented: "Vision health is essential to overall well-being. Through enhanced ophthalmology services, we aim to provide timely, accurate, and compassionate eye care aligned with international clinical standards."

With the expansion, Reyada Medical Centre continues to strengthen its position as a reliable, quality-driven healthcare provider, offering integrated medical services focused on excellence, accessibility, and patient trust. In addition to ophthalmology services, Reyada also offers in-house optical services, enabling



**Dr. Manju Venugopal**  
Specialist - Ophthalmology



**Dr. Rubeena**  
Specialist - Ophthalmology

patients to receive comprehensive and expert eye care conveniently in one location.

Reyada Medical Centre, a JCI-accredited multi-speciality healthcare facility located along C-Ring Road, stands as a beacon of excellence in medical care with 18 specialities and

a dedicated team of more than 30 expert doctors.

The centre offers an extensive range of services, including radiology, laboratory, pharmacy, optical, and physiotherapy, among others, designed to provide patients with comprehensive, affordable, and quality care.

## Vodafone Qatar congratulates FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025 champions

Vodafone Qatar has extended its congratulations to Morocco following their win at the FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025.

As the official 'Technology Sponsor' of the FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025, Vodafone Qatar supported the delivery of the tournament by providing advanced technology infrastructure, including nationwide 5G network coverage, high-speed fibre connectivity, and secure communication links across tournament venues. The solutions contributed to the smooth operation of the tournament and enabled reliable co-ordination and broadcasting throughout the event.

As part of its ongoing commitment to elevate fan experiences and bring sup-

porters closer to the excitement of the games, Vodafone Qatar also engaged fans across the tournament venues through its interactive activation booths.

The tournament final, which was held on Qatar National Day, highlighted the country's ongoing commitment to excellence, innovation, and global connectivity in line with Qatar National Vision 2030.

Vodafone Qatar continuously aims to enhance sporting events across Qatar, fostering a deeper connection with the community and reinforcing its commitment to the values of competition, teamwork and achievement. To find out more about Vodafone Qatar's products and services, visit [www.vodafone.qa](http://www.vodafone.qa)

## A season to remember: Festive experiences at Radisson Blu Doha

The festive season is a time for reconnecting, sharing traditions, and creating moments that stay in the heart long after the celebrations end.

Radisson Blu Hotel, Doha is inviting families and loved ones to gather and celebrate the magic of the season with curated experiences crafted for the season, designed to bring everyone closer together, making it the go-to destination for family gatherings, celebrations, and festive cheer.

From comforting festive feasts to joyful celebrations filled with warmth and laughter, Radisson Blu Doha offers something for everyone. Guests can enjoy a cozy Festive Lunch with a specially crafted four-course menu at The Italian Job, or a Festive Eve Dinner at Bentley's Grill, featuring five-course classic favourites with a modern twist.

For those celebrating at home, Radisson Blu Doha's take-away offerings bring the holiday spirit straight to your doorstep. Options include Turkey To-Go, Beef Wellington, stollen, chocolate Santas, truffles, and more – available from the life-size Gingerbread House.

Outdoor catering options are also available, perfect for sharing, gifting, and creating new holiday traditions. Meanwhile, New Year's Eve events promise a fun-filled way to welcome 2026 with friends and family, whether it's a casual or elegant NYE dinner at Chingari, Sakura, Bombay Balti, or Ruby Wu's, followed by a lively countdown with a guest DJ at QUBE.

To make the season even more special, guests can enjoy special room packages that combine festive dining with a comfortable stay, turning holiday gatherings into cherished mini getaways.

"I am pleased to invite guests to celebrate the joy of the season with us and experience memorable moments together, shared meals, and meaningful conversations," said Emre Kocamustafaogullari, general manager of Radisson Blu Hotel, Doha.

Radisson Blu Hotel, Doha is proud to be a festive destination this holiday season, especially for families seeking heartfelt cele-



Gingerbread House



brations, joyful celebrations, and memories that will be treasured for years to come.

For enquiries and reservations, contact Room Reservations: +974 5560 1806/+974 4428 14500/reservations.doha@radissonblu.com; Food and Beverages: +974 5200 2177/+974 4428 1555/fbreservations.doha@radissonblu.com; Meetings and Events: +974 5126 4511/+974 4428 1636/meetings.doha@radissonblu.com; and Cabana Club: +974 3340 9128/+974 4428 1622/cabana.doha@radissonblu.com

## Ooredoo Qatar powers connectivity at major events with over 1.5mn attendees

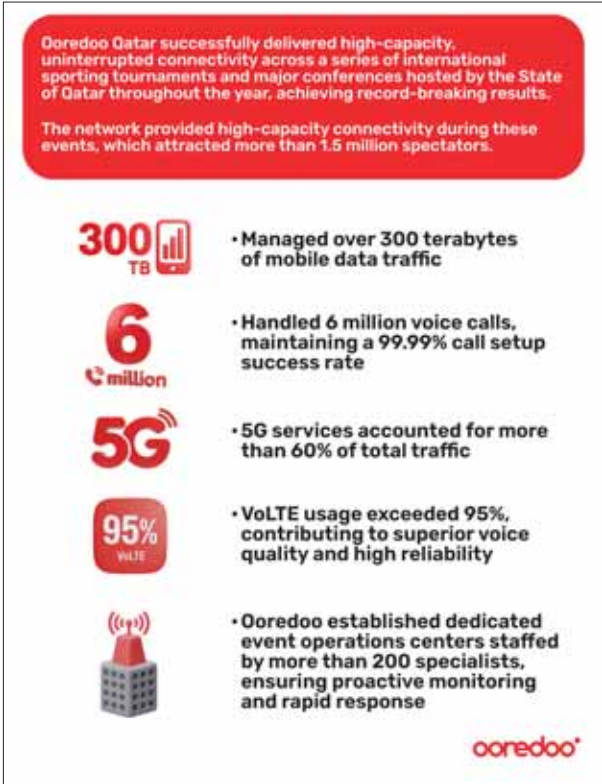
Ooredoo Qatar has delivered uninterrupted, high-capacity connectivity across a series of major international sporting championships and conferences hosted in the country throughout this year.

The network delivered high-capacity connectivity across events that collectively welcomed more than 1.5mn spectators and delegates, handling over 300 terabytes of mobile data traffic and 6mn voice calls, while maintaining a 99.99% call setup success rate.

Peak moments generated extreme surges in data and voice traffic, with 5G services accounting for more than 60% of total traffic and VoLTE usage exceeding 95%, delivering superior voice clarity and reliability.

Ooredoo Qatar CEO Sheikh Ali bin Jabor bin Mohammad al-Thani said: "As Qatar continues to attract major international gatherings and position itself as a global destination, our role extends beyond providing connectivity.

"We are building the intelligent, resilient digital infrastructure that enables the nation's long-term objectives. Every successful event reinforces Qatar's global reputation and demonstrates what's possible when technology, planning, and execution align."



## Sudan PM 'heads to New York for UN talks'

AFP  
Port Sudan

Sudan's Prime Minister Kamil Idris left for New York yesterday to meet the UN chief and other officials and discuss humanitarian access and a possible ceasefire, two government sources said.

The trip comes as fighting between Sudan's army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), which erupted in April 2023, intensifies in southern Kordofan, raising fears of new atrocities similar to those reported in the city of El-Fasher in late October.

Reports of mass killings, physical violations and abductions followed the RSF's capture of the army's last stronghold in the western Darfur region.

A Sudanese government source told AFP, on condition of anonymity, that

Idris is expected to meet UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, with the aim of "putting an end to the worsening humanitarian crisis" in Sudan.

Idris's adviser Mohamed Abdel Qader also said the talks would focus on "facilitating aid access" and reaffirm the government's commitment to a roadmap handed over to the UN, including a "conditional ceasefire linked to the withdrawal of the RSF from areas and cities it occupies".

Earlier this month, Guterres said the UN was preparing talks with both sides in Geneva, but without specifying a date. Renewed hopes for diplomacy emerged last month when US President Donald Trump pledged to help end the conflict after Saudi Arabia's crown prince Mohammed bin Salman, urged him to intervene.

Sudan's army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan said last week he was ready to

work with Trump to resolve the conflict, following talks in Riyadh with Prince Mohammed.

Saudi Arabia is part of a four-nation mediation group, alongside the US, United Arab Emirates and Egypt, that has stepped up diplomatic efforts in recent months.

Talks have stalled, however, after Burhan accused the mediators of bias.

Sudan's army-aligned government has accused a nation of arming and supporting the RSF – allegations that have been repeatedly denied.

The RSF says it supports the international ceasefire plan, but heavy fighting continues, notably in Kordofan.

Egypt, a key ally of Sudan's army, warned on Thursday that escalating violence "directly affects Egyptian national security" and stressed that preserving Sudanese state institutions remains a "red line".

## UAE-France joint military drill

French soldiers from the 5th Tank Regiment take part in a training exercise at a military field in Yayed Military City, near Abu Dhabi, UAE, yesterday.



## QatarEnergy LNG Tender Invitation

No.	TENDER NUMBER / DESCRIPTION	TENDER ISSUE PERIOD	TENDER FEE (USD)	TENDER BOND (USD)	TENDER CLOSING DATE
1	SUP/C/OFS/7341/25 PROVISION OF WEB-BASED VESSEL TRACKING & ALERT SYSTEM SERVICES	17/12/2025 to 12/01/2026	N/A	N/A	12/01/2026

### Scope of Work:

The brief Scope of this Contract is for the provision of Vessel Tracking system to monitor in realtime all vessel movements within and around COMPANY's Offshore field and Ras Laffan port area. This includes any other port in Qatar with strong signal strength, to avert collision, ensuring the safety and operational integrity of COMPANY's offshore assets. The duration of Contract shall be five (05) years with a sole option for COMPANY to extend it further for up to two (02) years.

**Bid Validity:** Bid Offer should be valid for 180 calendar days from the Tender Closing Date.

### Place for Tender Collection and Bid Submission:

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

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





# Gazans mourn six killed in Israeli shelling on shelter

AFP  
Gaza City

Dozens of Palestinians gathered at a Gaza City hospital yesterday to mourn six people, including children, that the civil defence said were killed by the Israeli shelling of a shelter for displaced people.

The Israeli military said late on Friday that troops had fired at “suspicious individuals”, adding that it was reviewing the incident and “regrets any harm to uninvolved individuals”.

Gaza’s civil defence agency, which operates as a rescue force under Hamas authority, initially said on Friday that the Israeli shelling of a school-turned-shelter killed five people in the Tuffah neighbourhood east of Gaza City.

Agency spokesman Mahmud Bassal updated the toll to six, including children, yesterday, adding that two people were unaccounted for under the rubble.

The director of Gaza City’s Al-Shifa Hospital, Mohammed Abu Salmiya, said the victims were a four-month old infant, a 14-year-old girl, two men and two women.

Inside the hospital’s morgue yesterday, relatives peered beneath blankets to get a last glimpse of their loved ones.

Outside, a grief-stricken man clutched an infant’s body wrapped in a white shroud, AFP footage showed.

Five other body bags were laid out on the ground

as mourners prayed over the dead.

“This is not a truce, it is a bloodbath,” said Nafiz al-Nader, who witnessed the attack.

“We want the bloodshed to stop and we don’t want to lose our loved ones every day,” he said.

Under the US-brokered ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, Israeli forces have withdrawn to positions east of the so-called Yellow Line.

“Shortly after identification, the troops fired at the suspicious individuals,” the military said, adding that it was “aware of the claim regarding casualties in the area, and the details are under review”.

Abdullah al-Nader, who lost his relatives, told AFP that the shelling suddenly erupted in the evening.

“It was a safe area and a safe school and suddenly... they began firing shells without warning, targeting women, children and civilians,” he said.

In a statement yesterday, Hamas denounced “a brutal crime committed against innocent civilians and a flagrant, recurring violation of the ceasefire agreement”.

The Palestinian movement urged the ceasefire mediators and US President Donald Trump’s administration “to assume their responsibilities regarding these violations and intervene immediately”.

The ceasefire remains fragile with both sides alleging violations, and mediators fearing that both Israel and Hamas are stalling.

The health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said yesterday that at least 401 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire in the territory since the ceasefire came into effect on October 10.



Mourners react during the funeral of Palestinians killed in an Israeli strike on Friday, according to medics, at Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, yesterday.

## Syria monitor says US strikes killed at least five IS members

AFP  
Damascus

A Syria monitor said yesterday that five Islamic State (IS) militant group members were killed in US strikes overnight as Jordan confirmed it participated in the raids, after a deadly attack on American troops last weekend.

US forces said they struck more than 70 IS targets in what President Donald Trump described as “very serious retaliation” for the December 13 attack that killed two US soldiers and a US civilian.

Washington had said a lone IS gunman carried out the attack in central Syria’s Palmyra, which is home to Unesco-listed ancient ruins and was once controlled by militant fighters.

It was the first such incident since the overthrow of long-time ruler Bashar al-Assad in December last year, and Syrian authorities said the perpetrator was a security forces member who was due to be fired for his “extremist ideas”.

IS has not claimed the attack.

Rami Abdel Rahman, head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, told AFP that “at least five members of the Islamic State group were killed” in eastern Syria’s Deir Ezzor province, including the leader of a cell responsible for drones in the area.

Jordan’s military said its air force joined the operation “to prevent extremist organisations from exploiting these areas as launching pads to threaten the security of Syria’s neighbours and the region, particularly after terrorist organisation IS reconstituted itself and rebuilt its capacities in southern Syria”.

A Syrian security source told AFP that the US strikes targeted IS cells in Syria’s vast Badia desert including in Homs, Deir Ezzor and Raqa provinces, and



In this US Army photo taken from an undisclosed location shows an US Army AH-64 Apache Attack Helicopter prepares to support Operation Hawkeye Strike in the US Central Command area of responsibility.

did not include ground operations.

Most of the targets were in a mountainous area running north of Palmyra including towards Deir Ezzor, the source said, requesting anonymity.

US Central Command (Centcom) said in a statement that the US “struck more than 70 targets at multiple locations across central Syria with fighter jets, attack helicopters and artillery”.

“The operation employed more than 100 precision munitions targeting known ISIS infrastructure and weapons sites,” Centcom said, using an acronym for the Islamic State group.

A Syrian security official, also requesting anonymity, told AFP that “the bombardment was intense” and lasted around five hours. “The targets were far from population centres,” the official said, adding that no displacement of residents had been reported and government forces had not been ordered to deploy to the targeted areas.

Syria’s foreign ministry, while not directly commenting on the strikes, said on X that the country was committed to fighting IS and “ensuring that it has no safe havens on Syrian territory, and will continue to intensify military operations against it wherever it poses a threat”.

Trump

said in a post on his Truth Social network that the US was “inflicting very serious retaliation, just as I promised, on the terrorists responsible” for the Palmyra attack.

Centcom said that since the attack, US and allied forces have “conducted 10 operations in Syria and Iraq resulting in the deaths or detention of 23 terrorist operatives”, without specifying which groups the militants belonged to.

The US personnel who were targeted were supporting Operation Inherent Resolve, the international effort to combat IS, which seized swathes of Syrian and Iraqi territory in 2014.

IS was territorially defeated in Syria in 2019 but still maintains a presence particularly in the country’s vast desert.

US forces are currently deployed in Syria’s Kurdish-controlled northeast as well as at Al-Tanf near the border with Jordan.

Jordan played a key role in the US-led coalition against the IS, carrying out strikes and making military bases available, while the country has also been the target of IS attacks.

In December 2014, an aircraft belonging to the Royal Jordanian Air Force crashed in Syria and the pilot was later burned alive after being captured by IS.

## Rubio says new governance plan for Gaza will be in place soon

Reuters  
Washington

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio has said that a new governance structure for Gaza — made up of an international board and a group of Palestinian technocrats — would be in place soon, followed by the deployment of foreign troops, as the US hopes to cement a fragile ceasefire in Israel’s war in the Palestinian enclave.

Rubio, speaking at a year-end news conference, said the status quo was not sustainable in Gaza, where Israel has continued to strike Hamas targets while the group has reasserted its control since the October peace agreement brokered by President Donald Trump’s administration.

“That’s why we have a sense of urgency about bringing phase one to its full completion, which is the establishment of the Board of Peace, and the establishment of the Palestinian technocratic

authority or organisation that’s going to be on the ground, and then the stabilisation force comes closely thereafter,” Rubio said.

Rubio said progress had been made recently on identifying Palestinians to join the technocratic group, and said Washington was aiming to get the governance bodies in place “very soon”, without offering a specific timeline.

Rubio was speaking after US Central Command hosted a conference in the Middle East this week with partner nations to plan the International Stabilisation Force (ISF) for Gaza.

Two US officials told Reuters last week that international troops could be deployed in the strip as early as next month, after the UN Security Council voted in November to authorise the force. It remains unclear how Palestinian Hamas group will be disarmed and countries considering contributing troops to the ISF are wary that Hamas will engage their soldiers in combat.

Rubio did not specify who

would be responsible for disarming Hamas, and conceded that countries contributing troops want to know what the ISF’s specific mandate is and how it will be funded.

“I think we owe them a few more answers before we can ask anybody to firmly commit, but I feel very confident that we have a number of nation states acceptable to all sides in this who are willing to step forward and be a part of that stabilisation force,” Rubio said.

Establishing security and governance was key to drawing donors to pay for reconstruction in Gaza, Rubio added.

“Who’s going to pledge billions of dollars to build things that are going to get blown up again because a war starts?” Rubio said, discussing the possibility of a donor conference to raise reconstruction funds.

“They want to know who’s in charge, and they want to know that there’s security so and that there’ll be long term stability.”

## Lebanon close to completing disarmament of Hezbollah south of Litani River, says PM

Reuters  
Lebanon

Lebanon is close to completing the disarmament of Hezbollah south of the Litani River, Prime Minister Nawaf Salam said yesterday, as the country races to fulfil a key demand of its ceasefire with Israel before a year-end deadline.

The US-backed ceasefire, agreed in November 2024, ended more than a year of fighting between Israel and Hezbollah and required the disarmament of the fighter group, starting in areas south of the river adjacent to Israel.

Lebanese authorities, led by President Joseph Aoun and Salam, tasked the US-backed Lebanese army on August 5 with devising a plan to establish a state monopoly on arms by the end of the year.

“Prime Minister Salam affirmed that the first

phase of the weapons consolidation plan related to the area south of the Litani River is only days away from completion,” a statement from his office said.

“The state is ready to move on to the second phase — namely (confiscating weapons) north of the Litani River — based on the plan prepared by the Lebanese army pursuant to a mandate from the government,” Salam added. The statement came after Salam held talks with Simon Karam, Lebanon’s top civilian negotiator on a committee overseeing the Hezbollah-Israel truce. Since the ceasefire, the sides have regularly accused each other of violations, with Israel questioning the Lebanese army’s efforts to disarm Hezbollah. Israeli warplanes have increasingly targeted Hezbollah in southern Lebanon and even in the capital.

Hezbollah, has tried to resist the pressure from the US and others to disarm, saying it would be a mistake while Israel continues its air strikes on the country.

## Lebanon drafts law to address funding shortfalls in financial system



Lebanon’s Prime Minister Nawaf Salam speaking during a press conference in Beirut.

Reuters  
Beirut

Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam has said the government had put forward a draft law to address a financial crisis that has crippled the economy for six years, saying it conforms to International Monetary Fund standards and would restore faith in Lebanon.

The draft law, which will be discussed by the cabinet on Monday, aims to address a vast funding shortfall in the financial system and allow depositors who have been frozen out of their savings to gradually recover their money.

It needs to be approved by Lebanon’s fractious parliament.

The draft law is the first to surface since

Lebanon’s financial system collapsed in 2019 after decades of corruption, waste and unsustainable financial policies.

The World Bank ranks the crisis among the worst globally since the mid-19th century. It froze depositors out of dollar accounts, prevented withdrawals and drove the Lebanese pound down by more than 90%.

In 2022, the government put losses from the crisis at about \$70bn, a figure that is now likely higher.

The draft law, which was distributed to the media ahead of Salam’s press conference, envisions repayments to small depositors — or those with deposits valued at less than \$100,000 — in monthly or quarterly instalments over four years.

Deposits larger than \$100,000 will be repaid via asset-backed securities to be issued by the central bank, with no less

than 2% of the value paid annually to holders, according to the draft law.

The maturity period for those securities will be set at 10 years for deposits valued at up to \$1mn, at 15 years for deposits valued from \$1mn to \$5mn, and at 20 years for deposits valued at more than \$5mn.

The certificates to be issued by the central bank for the repayment of some deposits will be backed by the income, revenues and returns of assets owned by the central bank and any proceeds from the sale of assets, if any occur.

The draft law requires an international auditing firm to carry out an evaluation of the central bank’s assets within one month of the law’s adoption, to determine the size of the funding shortfall.

Debt owed by the Lebanese state to the central bank will be converted into “a bond whose maturity and annual inter-

est rate shall be agreed upon between the Ministry of Finance and the Banque du Liban”.

“The draft law puts the responsibility of reimbursing the cash component of the deposits on commercial banks essentially, and deflects any responsibility of the State”, said Nassib Ghobril, chief economist at Byblos Bank.

The draft law also seeks to force the repatriation of large transfers out of Lebanon during the months leading up to the collapse.

It said people, including major shareholders in banks, would have three months to repatriate the funds or face a tax of 30% on their value.

“The draft law may not be perfect — and it is not — but it is a realistic and equitable step toward restoring rights and addressing the collapse,” Salam added.



## Abidjan gears up for legislative election



Residents walks past a campaign poster of Ivory Coast's Defence Minister Tene Birahima Ouattara, the younger brother of Ivory Coast's President Alassane Ouattara, candidate of the Rally of Houphouetists for Democracy and Peace (RHDP) in the Abobo commune legislative race, in Abidjan, yesterday. The legislative elections are scheduled for December 27.

## Ethiopian civilians ‘caught in the crossfire’ of Amhara conflict



Belete Melke, 25, a farmer who was caught in crossfire during the last rainy season in an area about six hours from Bahir Dar, inside the Physical Rehabilitation Center in Bahir Dar.

AFP  
Bahir Dar

A few months ago, farmer Belete Melke was sheltering from a heavy downpour in a remote village in Ethiopia's Amhara region when suddenly gunfire erupted around him.

"We were caught in the crossfire," he said, after being struck by a stray bullet.

Northern Amhara is Ethiopia's second most populated region with roughly 23mn inhabitants, and has endured nearly three years of conflict between the federal army and the "Fano", Amhara's self-defence militias.

There is scant public information about the conflict, which sprawls across an area that foreign embassies advise their citizens to avoid thanks to the fighting and risks of kidnapping. And no death toll, which is nonetheless high, has ever been made public.

After Belete was wounded, he travelled to capital Addis Ababa for treatment.

"In Addis, they told me that my vein had been cut and (my leg) would no longer function," he said.

"I cried in anguish, and then they amputated my leg."

The present conflict stems from the 2020-2022 Tigray War, which killed more than 600,000 people, according to the African Union. The Fano, like many in Amhara, felt betrayed by the November 2022 peace deal after their support to the government against the neighbouring Tigrayan forces. It came to a head in April 2023, when an attempt by the federal government to disarm the Fano and Amhara forces ignited the conflict.

And a year-long regional state of emergency imposed by the government has failed to stop the fighting. "I can't understand this war," said Belete, who does not know which side wounded him.

"When you meet the Fanos, they say they are fighting for our country, Ethiopia.

"And when you meet the National Defence Forces, they say they are fighting for our country, Ethiopia."

Whoever is fighting, civilians are the ones on the front lines.

Unicef estimates roughly 4.5mn children are out of school in Amhara, and UN's OCHA puts the number of displaced at over 600,000 people.

"Federal forces roughly control the cities while Fano controls the countryside," a security



Yosef Debasu, 19, who was injured by a landmine explosion while driving his tuk-tuk in Merawi around August-September 2024, performs rehabilitation exercises with his prosthetic limb while holding parallel bars inside the exercise room of the Bahir Dar Physical Rehabilitation Center.



Orthopaedic technician Bashawgize Getie arranges foot models used for the fabrication of prosthetic limbs inside the technical workshop of the Bahir Dar Physical Rehabilitation Center, supported by the International Committee of the Red Cross, in Bahir Dar.

source said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Both sides are regularly accused of abuses against civilians.

The Fano are alleged to carry out kidnappings for ransom, while federal forces have been accused of conducting drone strikes.

At a federal medical centre in Amhara's capital Bahir Dar, Yoseph Debasu sways as he grips parallel bars, re-learning how to walk with his prosthesis.

Despite his frustration, the 19-year-old is grateful for his care at the institution, which is supported by International Committee for the Red Cross.

After leaving school because of the war, Yoseph's family in Merawi, a town roughly 30 kilometres from Bahir Dar, bought him a tuk-tuk so he was able to begin earning.

But as the conflict spread, he ran over an improvised explosive device (IED) in a contested area. It destroyed both his vehicle and his leg. While doctors attempted to save it, the swelling grew too much, he told AFP, and "it had to be amputated".

Still, he said that having the prosthesis was amazing, "like I

am born again". In another room at the rehabilitation centre, orthopaedic technician Bashawgize Getie, 33, gently polishes a prosthesis.

Bashawgize has worked at the centre for almost a decade, and said the Tigrayan conflict had already heaped pressure on their facilities.

"Now with this new conflict added on top of it, the number of patients is increasing," he said.

"We are struggling to accommodate them," he said.

There are also worries that many of the wounded cannot reach the facility as roadblocks prevent access.

And Red Cross officials worry the situation could deteriorate.

"We can see that the forces are building on their capacity," said ICRC's Sabrina Denuncq in Bahir Dar, a reference to both the Fano and other armed groups.

While the conflict has subsided enough in Merawi town for Yoseph to return to school, he remains fearful. "When one side comes and tells us to go to school, we go. Then the other side comes and tells us to stop, and fighting starts again," he explained.

"That is our situation."

## Ghana's president urged to rally African leaders behind push for slavery reparations

Reuters  
Accra

Ghana's President John Dramani Mahama held talks with a global delegation seeking reparations for transatlantic slavery and colonialism, who urged him to rally other African leaders to choose "courage over comfort" and support the growing movement.

The delegation, made up of experts from Africa, the Caribbean, Europe, Latin America, and the United States, presented Mahama with priority actions under the African Union's (AU) reparations agenda, it said in a statement.

In February, the AU launched a drive to create a "unified vision" on what reparations may look like, from financial compensation and

formal acknowledgments of past wrongs to policy reforms. At least 12.5mn Africans were kidnapped and forcibly transported by European ships, then sold into slavery from the 15th to the 19th centuries.

Advocates say action is needed to confront today's legacies, including racism. Calls for reparations have gained momentum but there is also a growing backlash. Many European leaders have opposed even discussing the matter, with opponents arguing today's states and institutions should not be held responsible for historical wrongs.

While Ghana has been at the forefront of reparations advocacy in Africa, the delegation emphasised the need for "strategic coherence and unity" among political leaders across the continent.

They urged Mahama to en-

courage other leaders to "choose courage over comfort" by standing with civil society and affected communities in Africa and the diaspora in demanding reparations.

The delegation also met on Wednesday with Ghana's Foreign Minister Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa and Mahama's envoy on reparations Ekwow Spio-Garbrah.

At a European Union-AU summit in Luanda, Angola's capital, last month, leaders from both regions acknowledged the "untold suffering" caused by slavery and colonialism but stopped short of committing to reparations.

During the summit, Ghana's Vice President Jane Opoku-Agyemang urged EU member states to support a UN resolution Ghana is preparing to recognise slavery as one of the "gravest crimes against humanity".

## Benin detains ex-defence minister over foiled coup

AFP  
Cotonou

Benin yesterday placed former defence minister and prominent opposition politician Candide Azannai in pre-trial detention as part of an investigation into the west African country's failed early December coup.

According to an AFP journalist, Azannai was accused of plotting against the state and incitement to rebellion, after being arrested last week at his party's headquarters

in Cotonou in the wake of the attempted takeover. The detention of the prominent opposition figure, who condemned the coup, is the latest in the wake of the foiled takeover, after some 30 people, mostly soldiers, were jailed Tuesday on treason grounds.

Soldiers announced on national television on December 7 they had toppled President Patrice Talon, but loyalist army forces swiftly defeated the coup plotters with the help of the Nigerian air force.

Several people were killed in the attempted uprising, while

some of the mutineers, including alleged coup leader Lieutenant-Colonel Pascal Tigri, remain on the run. After several hours of questioning at Benin's anti-terrorism court, Azannai was escorted away at dawn by police before being taken into custody, an AFP reporter saw.

While Talon has been praised for spurring economic growth, critics accuse the president of creeping authoritarianism in a country once praised for its democracy, while in recent years Benin has been hit by militant violence in the north.

## Tech tackles human-wildlife conflict in Zimbabwe

AFP  
Hwange

In the sun-scorched lands bordering Zimbabwe's largest wildlife sanctuary, Takesure Moyo pedals through his village each morning on a mission to help his community coexist with the elephants and predators that roam nearby.

The 49-year-old is among several locals trained as community monitors under an initiative by the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) and Zimbabwe's National Parks and Wildlife Authority (Zimparks).

Equipped with a mobile phone, he uses an app to log sightings, spoor and incidents — data that enables authorities to respond swiftly and issue alerts to prevent potential confrontation with dangerous animals, including ones straying from the nearby Hwange National Park.

"We have always lived with wild animals around us, but our responses to human-wildlife conflict were rather individual and unco-ordinated," said Moyo, speaking in vernacular Ndebele.

"The initiative has helped the community become more knowledgeable about animal behaviour and ultimately minimise conflict."

Wild animals have killed around 300 people in Zimbabwe over the past five years, according to Zimparks, with crops and livestock also suffering heavy losses. Nearly 70% of reported incidents occur in communities bordering national parks such as Hwange, it says.

A few years ago, Moyo lost six cattle to lions. It prompted him to become involved in the project to protect his community.

Equipped with a bicycle provided by IFAW, he patrols the area around his village daily, sending updates to Zimparks with a focus on "problem animals" like elephants and lions.

His input complements data received by satellite from GPS collars fitted to 16 elephants in the

area, both feeding a mobile application called EarthRanger that allows real-time monitoring and rapid response.

Zimbabwe is home to nearly 100,000 elephants, the world's second-largest population of savannah elephants after neighbouring Botswana, according to a 2022 aerial survey conducted under the Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area.

"During the dry season, elephants sometimes come for water at the nearby dam, which is the source of water for our communal gardens," Moyo said. "And during the cropping season, they can come to eat our crops."

The EarthRanger app — used in 80 countries, according to its developers — is "highly effective," Zimparks acting public relations manager, Tamirirashé Mudzingwa, told AFP.

As a live early warning system, it gives communities time to protect themselves, their livestock and property from approaching wildlife, he said.

A separate project collects data from collars fitted to some elephants that have been rescued, rehabilitated and reintroduced to free-roaming herds by the Wild Is Life organisation.

At a monitoring centre, technical officer Simbarashe Mupanhwa pointed to multi-coloured lines on his computer screen that tracked the movements of Samson, a seven-year-old elephant back in the bush after being saved when he was abandoned at birth.

"Other than helping monitor the elephants' movements, the

application is also able to track the organisation's rangers and vehicles, helping ensure that if there are any incidents of poaching, reaction is as swift as possible," Mupanhwa said.

The satellite telemetry "offers critical spatial insights into habitat use, movement patterns, and the identification of frequently utilised areas, including ecological corridors and dispersal zones," said Phillip Kuvawoga, IFAW's conservation senior director.

Community-based conservation has become a common ground for IFAW and Zimparks, which have different philosophies over Zimbabwe's ballooning elephant population.

The government argues the country cannot sustain so many of the animals and has lobbied for the lifting of a global ban on the trade in tusks, saying its ivory stockpile is worth millions of dollars that could be used to bolster ranger welfare and conservation.

Zimparks, a government agency, supports "consumptive tourism" such as safari hunting, including of elephants, while IFAW promotes photographic safaris.

"The collaboration embodies a pragmatic agreement: conservation efforts must be inclusive, science-based, and adaptable," said Alleta Nyahuye, country director of IFAW, which flags as its mission the ideal of "helping animals and people to thrive together".

In villages like Moyo's, the impact is tangible.

"It's not just about protecting animals," Moyo said. "It's about protecting our way of life, too."



Elephants drink at a watering hole at Hwange National Park, where communities are helping to track the animals to avoid human-wildlife conflict.



## Musk wins US court appeal of Tesla pay package

Reuters/AFP  
Wilmington

Elon Musk's 2018 pay package from Tesla, once worth \$56bn, was restored by the Delaware Supreme Court on Friday, two years after a lower court struck down the compensation deal as "unfathomable".

The ruling overturns a decision that had prompted a furious backlash from Musk and damaged Delaware's business-friendly reputation.

The court said a 2024 ruling that rescinded the pay package had been improper and inequitable to Musk.

The remedy of total rescission "leaves Musk uncompensated for his time and efforts over a period of six years", the 49-page ruling issued on Friday stated.

The 2018 pay package is now worth about \$139bn based on the price of Tesla's stock at the close of trading on Friday.

Tesla shares were up less than 1% in after-hours trading following the ruling.

Tesla did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

In a statement posted online on Friday, attorneys representing Tesla shareholders said they were considering next steps.

Musk posted on X that he was "vindicated".

The pay package was by far the largest ever until Tesla shareholders approved a new, even larger pay plan in November.

The ruling means that Musk can finally get paid for his work since 2018, when he transformed Tesla from a struggling startup to one of the world's most valuable companies.

If Tesla's appeal had failed, it could have triggered a \$26bn hit to profit over two years to account for the replacement stock-compensation package it had promised Musk - at today's much higher stock price.

The 2018 pay deal provided Musk options to acquire about 304mn Tesla shares at a deeply discounted price if the company hit various milestones, which it did.

The options represent around 9% of

Tesla's outstanding stock.

Musk never collected his stock options because soon after shareholders approved the 2018 compensation, the board was sued by Richard Tornetta, an investor with just nine Tesla shares.

In 2024, after a five-day trial, Delaware Judge Kathaleen McCormick concluded that Tesla's directors were conflicted and key facts were hidden from shareholders when they voted to approve the plan.

She ordered that the 2018 plan be rescinded.

Musk accused Delaware judges of being activists who are hostile to tech founders and he urged businesses to follow Tesla and reincorporate elsewhere.

Dropbox, Roblox, Trade Desk and Coinbase were among the handful of large companies that moved their legal homes to Nevada or Texas.

However, Delaware remains by far the most popular legal home for US public companies.

Tesla's board had warned that Musk, the world's richest person who also leads the



Musk's 2018 pay package is now worth about \$139bn.

SpaceX rocket venture and artificial intelligence (AI) startup xAI, could leave the electric car company if he did not get the pay he wanted and an increase in his voting power.

In November, shareholders approved a new pay package that could be worth \$878bn if Tesla meets targets for self-driving vehicles, a robotaxi network and sales of humanoid robots.

Tesla has taken steps to reduce the risk

## US military action in Venezuela would be catastrophic, says Lula

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said yesterday that US military action in Venezuela would spark a "humanitarian catastrophe", as he opened a summit of the South American Mercosur bloc.

Lula's comments come amid spiralling tensions between Washington and Caracas - and after US President Donald Trump left open the possibility of war against the government of Venezuelan strongman Nicolas Maduro.

The US military has beefed up its presence in the Caribbean in recent months and carried out air strikes against alleged drug boats in the region and in the Pacific, claiming that it is combatting narcotics trafficking.

However, Maduro says the campaign is part of a wider effort to carry out regime change in Caracas.

"Four decades after the Falklands war, the South American continent is once again haunted by the military presence" of a foreign power, Lula said in the southern city of Foz do Iguaçu, referring to the 1982 UK-Argentina conflict over disputed islands in the South Atlantic.

"An armed intervention in Venezuela would be a humanitarian catastrophe for the hemisphere and a dangerous precedent for the world," he said.

In an interview with NBC News conducted on Thursday, when asked about the potential for war, Trump replied: "I don't rule it out, no."

On Thursday, Lula said he was "very worried" about the mounting crisis on Brazil's doorstep and was prepared to serve as a mediator to avert armed conflict.

At least 104 people have been killed in the US strikes on alleged drug boats, though the Trump administration has not yet provided any concrete evidence that the boats it has targeted were ferrying drugs. - **AFP**

## Epstein files release features hundreds of redacted pages

Reuters/AFP  
Washington

The US Justice Department released thousands of heavily redacted documents related to the late financier and convict Jeffrey Epstein on Friday that made scant reference to President Donald Trump but extensively featured Democratic former president Bill Clinton.

The absence of references to Trump was notable given that pictures and documents related to him have trickled out of previous Epstein releases for years.

Trump's name appeared in flight manifests listing passengers on Epstein's private plane that were part of a first batch of Epstein material the Justice Department released in February, for instance.

Celebrities who appeared in photos made available as part of Friday's release include the late news anchor Walter Cronkite, singers Mick Jagger, Michael Jackson and Diana Ross, British entrepreneur Richard Branson and the former Duchess of York, Sarah Ferguson.

Many of the photos were undated and provided without context, and none of those figures have been accused of any wrongdoing in connection with Epstein.

The partial release of the documents on Friday was intended to comply with a law overwhelmingly passed by Congress in November that mandated the disclosure of all Epstein files, despite Trump's months-long effort to keep them sealed.

The scandal surrounding Epstein has become a self-inflicted political wound for Trump, who for years had promoted conspiracy theories about Epstein to his supporters.

It was not immediately clear how substantive the new ma-

terials were, given that many Epstein-related documents have previously been made public since his 2019 death in jail, which was ruled a suicide.

Many of the files were heavily redacted - several documents with 100 pages or more were entirely blacked out - and the Justice Department acknowledged it was still reviewing hundreds of thousands of additional pages for possible release.

The sweeping blackouts across many of the documents - combined with tight control over the release by officials in the Trump administration - stoked scepticism over whether this disclosure will silence conspiracy theories of a high-level cover-up.

In one example, a 119-page document labelled "Grand Jury-NY" is entirely redacted.

Also, seven pages listing 254 masseuses have every name buried beneath thick black bars alongside the note, "redacted to protect potential victim information".

The material included evidence from several investigations into Epstein, along with photos of Clinton, long scorned by Republicans.

However, they appeared to include few if any photos of Trump or documents mentioning him, despite Trump and Epstein's well-publicised friendship in the 1990s and early 2000s before they had a falling out prior to Epstein's first conviction in 2008.

Trump has not been accused of wrongdoing and has denied knowing about Epstein's crimes.

The Justice Department sought to draw attention to Clinton, with two agency spokespeople posting on social media images that they said showed him with Epstein victims.

Clinton's deputy chief of staff, Angel Urena, said in a statement that the White House was attempting to "shield themselves"



Newly-released documents from late Jeffrey Epstein, including a sheaf of entirely redacted pages, are seen in this handouts released by the US Justice Department and printed and arranged for a photograph by Reuters in Washington, DC. - **Reuters**

from scrutiny by focusing on the former president.

"They can release as many grainy 20-plus-year-old photos as they want, but this isn't about Bill Clinton," he wrote.

Trump ordered the Justice Department last month to investigate Clinton's ties to Epstein, in what critics viewed as an effort to shift the focus away from his own relationship with Epstein.

Clinton has previously expressed regret for socialising with Epstein and said he was not aware of any criminal activity.

There were more than 1,200 victims or their relatives whose names must be redacted from the files, said Deputy Attorney-General Todd Blanche in a letter to Congress.

In a statement, the White House claimed that the release demonstrated its transparency and commitment to justice for Epstein's victims, criticising previous Democratic administrations for not doing the same.

The statement ignored that the disclosures occurred only because Congress forced the administration's hand, after Trump officials declared earlier this year

that no more Epstein files would be made public.

Some lawmakers immediately criticised the administration for failing to release all of the files.

"This set of heavily redacted documents released by the Department of Justice today is just a fraction of the whole body of evidence," Democratic Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer said in a statement.

Republican US Representative Thomas Massie, a driving force behind the legislation, said on X that Friday's release "grossly fails to comply with both the spirit and the letter of the law".

The disclosure law required the Justice Department to turn over information about its handling of the Epstein investigation, including internal reports and e-mails.

None of those materials appeared to be in the batch of documents the government released on Friday.

The law allowed the Justice Department to withhold personal information about Epstein's victims as well as material that would jeopardise an active investigation.

## Honduras on edge as vote count enters third week

In a warehouse the size of two basketball courts, hundreds of electoral staff and political delegates on Friday pored over thousands of votes cast nearly three weeks ago in the presidential election in Honduras, where tensions are sky-high.

The manual recount of nearly 2,800 tally sheets with suspected "inconsistencies" will determine a victor between Nasry Asfura, a 67-year-old businessman backed by US President Donald Trump, and fellow conservative Salvador Nasralla, a 72-year-old TV star.

Nasralla leads the count by just a few thousand votes, but this could well change with nearly 500,000 ballots affected by the recount that has the Central American country on edge.

Outside the CNE electoral council's headquarters and elsewhere in the capital Tegucigalpa, Hondurans expressed distrust in the protracted count, marred by computer system failures and accusations of fraud.

"We don't trust the authorities," said Carlos Castillo, a 53-year-old supporter of the ruling leftist Libre party, whose candidate, Rixi Moncada, was trailing in a distant third place.

"They're committing the same old frauds," Castillo told AFP outside the electoral centre where staff carried out their work wearing latex gloves under the watchful eye of CCTV cameras.

The count was streamed live on the CNE's YouTube channel, viewed by many Hondurans with rising suspicion despite observers from the Americas and Europe saying they saw no evidence of fraud.

After clashes between protesters and law enforcers earlier in the week, soldiers on Friday patrolled the perimeter of the CNE centre, from which journalists were barred.

On the wall outside, someone had put up a poster demanding a "vote by vote" recount and calling CNE officials "rats".

The CNE legally has until December 30 to announce a winner.

On Wednesday, thousands of Libre supporters staged a demonstration in Tegucigalpa, during which a soldier was injured.

The previous day, at least eight civilians were hurt when police broke up a similar protest.

By Friday, relative quiet had been returned to the capital.

"Everything's calm now because there's going to be a president. Before we thought there wouldn't be, but now they're counting," 68-year-old attorney Sandra Suazo told AFP, assuaged by the start of the special recount.

An undercurrent of fear remained, however.

Used car salesman Norman Sierra, 56, said business has been slow as he avoids venturing out to bring vehicles to potential clients.

"It's scary because there could be protests and there could be stone-throwing," he said. - **AFP**

## A person who uses a wheelchair flies into space, a first

AFP  
Houston

German woman engineer became yesterday the first wheelchair user to blast into space, taking a brief ride on a Blue Origin flight.

The space company owned by American multi-billionaire Jeff Bezos launched its New Shepard suborbital mission at 8.15am (1415 GMT) from its site in Texas.

Michaela Benthous, an aerospace and mechatronics engineer at the European Space Agency (ESA), was among the passengers to cross the Karman line, the internationally recognised boundary of space, during the approximately 10-minute flight.

Benthous suffered a spinal cord injury after a mountain biking accident and now uses a wheelchair.

"After my accident, I really, really figured out how inaccessible our world still is" for people with disabilities, she said in a video released by the company.

"If we want to be an inclusive society, we should be inclusive in every part, and not only in the parts we like to be," Benthous added.



This still image taken from video shows Michaela 'Michi' Benthous being to a wheelchair from the capsule door of a Blue Origin New Shepard rocket after landing in Van Horn, Texas. - **Reuters**

The small, fully automated rocket took off vertically, and the capsule carrying the tourists detached in flight before descending back to the Texas desert, slowed by parachutes.



Jair Bolsonaro

AFP  
Brasilia

Brazilian Supreme Court judge has rejected a fresh appeal by jailed former president Jair Bolsonaro against his coup conviction, declaring it inadmissible, according to a court document seen by AFP.

Bolsonaro, 70, began serving a 27-year sentence in November after the country's highest court declared he had exhausted all appeals.

Nevertheless, his attorneys filed an appeal on the merits of the case three days after he was jailed.

Bolsonaro's earlier failed legal effort targeted "ambiguities, omissions, and contradictions" in the trial.

Judge Alexandre de Moraes, who oversaw the trial against Bolsonaro, said that he did not recognise the fresh appeal, which requires two judges to have voted against a conviction.

Only one of five judges on the Supreme Court panel voted not to convict Bolsonaro.

The far-right firebrand, in office from 2019-2022, was found guilty of having led a scheme to prevent President Luiz Inacio

Lula da Silva from taking office after Bolsonaro's failed re-election bid.

He has maintained his innocence, declaring he was a victim of political persecution.

The conservative-controlled Congress this week passed a law that could reduce Bolsonaro's sentence to just over two years.

Lula has vowed to veto the law, but Congress has the last word and can override him.

See also Page 10





This picture taken on May 5 this year shows Prince William and Prince George with World War II veterans at a tea party in Buckingham Palace, central London, following the military procession to mark the 80th anniversary of VE Day. - Reuters

## Prince William and son George volunteer at homelessness charity

Reuters  
London

Britain's Prince William took his oldest son, Prince George, to a homelessness charity in London where the pair helped make Christmas lunch for people in need, Kensington Palace said yesterday.

The visit was particularly poignant for William, heir to the throne, because his late mother Princess Diana had taken him to the same charity when he was 11 years old, an experience which inspired him to set up a programme aimed at ending homelessness.

During the trip to the charity's centre, named The Passage, George signed the visitor's book on the same page previously signed by Diana, who was killed in a car crash in Paris in 1997 when William was 15 years old.

Wearing aprons, George, 12,

and his father worked in the kitchen, placing food in baking trays, while they talked and laughed with the centre's catering staff, before heading out to lay long tables with napkins and Christmas crackers.

"It was important to the Prince of Wales to share with Prince George the work of The Passage and to spend time volunteering alongside the team," a spokesperson for Kensington Palace said. "They both greatly enjoyed meeting staff, volunteers and service users as well as learning more about the charity's work."

As well as working to try to stop people becoming homeless, William also champions environmental causes and campaigns for more openness about mental health issues.

William, his wife Kate and their three children are expected to spend Christmas at King Charles' Sandringham estate in eastern England.

## Taiwan president vows full inquiry into metro attack

Taiwan's President Lai Ching-te has pledged a full, public inquiry into a deadly metro stabbing attack as he visited victims in hospital yesterday.

A 27-year-old suspect set off smoke bombs in Taipei's main metro station during rush hour on Friday evening before launching into a stabbing rampage, according to authorities.

He killed three people in an attack that spanned the main station, an underground shopping district and another metro stop, while at least 11 others were wounded, according to a revised count from the police yesterday.

Police said the suspect, identified by his family name Chang, was wanted for being absent from reserve service.

He had served in the military but was discharged over drunk driving.

The suspect died by jumping off a building to evade arrest, in an apparent suicide, Taipei's mayor said at a briefing.

Officials called the attack a "deliberate act" but said the motive was not immediately clear.

Louis, a 36-year-old finance worker, told AFP that he saw the assailant at Zhongshan station, shortly after hearing about the first attack at the main station.

"I saw him walking to the middle of the road. I wondered why he was crouching in the middle of the road and then I saw him throw a smoke bomb," said Louis, who asked to be identified by his first name.

"When he threw it, I felt something was wrong, so I turned around and ran," added Louis, who was meeting a friend for dinner in the bustling shopping area when the attack occurred. "There were many people there at the time, and it was very chaotic. I still feel shaken."

President Lai offered sympathy and pledged transparency during hospital visits yesterday.

"I want to express condolences to those who tragically lost their lives in last night's horrific, violent attack, and to extend my sympathy to their families," he said.

Lai said he had ordered a "full and thorough investigation" and would "give the public a full account of the truth".

At a police briefing later in the day, he said authorities should be "more cautious and proactive" and improve emergency protocols.

Violent crime is rare in Taiwan. The last similar incident was in 2014, when a man killed four people in a stabbing spree in the metro.

Metro Taipei announced that it had shut down a Christmas market near Zhongshan station, the site of the second wave of attack.

The market will remain closed for three days in honour of the victims. - AFP

## Malaysia seizes \$375mn in drugs

Malaysian police busted a crime syndicate and seized \$375mn-worth of cocaine, ketamine and other drugs, calling it in one of country's largest hauls to date.

Four sting operations around Kuala Lumpur netted more than four tonnes of cocaine and 14 tonnes of ketamine, as well as the synthetic drug MDMA and drug-making equipment, police said in a statement released yesterday.

During Tuesday's raids, police arrested six suspects: three local men and three foreign women.

Cars, forklifts and a truck were also confiscated.

Narcotics Crime Investigation Department chief Hussein Omar Khan told journalists at a press conference that the haul was "definitely one of the biggest drug seizures ever" in Malaysia.

"The drugs could have supplied 68.5mn users," he was quoted as telling local media.

According to the investigation, a Malaysian man served as storekeeper and assistant chemist, with two other locals acting as his trusted aides.

They oversaw residential houses and business premises turned into illicit drug labs, Hussein said.

The syndicate is believed to have been operating since April, supplying the international market.

"Our investigations showed the syndicate had been making various shipments overseas before the raids," added Hussein.

The six suspects have been remanded in custody until Tuesday.

Malaysia is commonly used as a transit point for smugglers transporting goods ranging from endangered animals to drugs.

In 2019, Malaysian police seized 12 tonnes of cocaine in the northern state of Penang, worth an estimated \$573mn. - AFP

# Thousands attend funeral of Bangladesh student leader

AFP/Reuters  
Dhaka

Massive crowds gathered in Bangladesh's capital yesterday for the funeral of a slain student leader, held under tight security after two days of protests and violence.

Tens of thousands of people joined the funeral procession to pay their respects to Sharif Osman Hadi, a key figure in last year's pro-democracy uprising who was set to contest the general elections in February.

Hadi, 32, was shot in the head by masked assailants in Dhaka last week while launching his campaign for an election due in February.

He died on Thursday in Singapore after six days on life support.

His death has prompted a wave of unrest in the South Asian nation that included co-ordinated mob attacks on major newspapers and cultural institutions.

"You are in our hearts and you will remain in the heart of all Bangladeshis as long as the country exists," interim leader Muhammad Yunus said in an emotional speech in front of the parliament building, where funeral prayers were held. "Today, we have come to promise you (Hadi) that we will fulfil what you stood for."

Police wearing body cameras were deployed in the area, and flags were flown at half-mast to mark a day of state mourning.

Hadi's body was then buried at the central mosque of Dhaka University.

Hadi, 32, was an outspoken critic of India, where Bangladesh's ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina has taken refuge since fleeing Dhaka in the wake of the 2024 uprising.

Iqbal Hossain Saikot, a government employee who travelled to the capital to attend the funeral, told AFP that he believed Hadi was killed because of his staunch opposition to India.

"The millions of Bangladeshi people who love the land and its sovereign territory" will carry on Hadi's legacy, said Saikot, 34.

Hadi's death has triggered unrest, with protesters across the South Asian nation demanding the arrest of those responsible.

Bangladeshi police said they had launched a manhunt for his killers but have yet to report progress.

As news of Hadi's death spread on Thursday, people set fire to several buildings in Dhaka including the offices of leading newspapers *Prothom Alo* and the *Daily Star*, accused by critics of favouring India.

Cultural institutions and the residence of a former minister were also attacked by rampaging mobs.

Fuelled in part by growing anti-India sentiments in the majority Muslim nation, the violence this week also saw a garment worker killed.

Yunus said seven suspects had been arrested in connection with the killing of the worker, Dipu Chandra Das, in the central district of Mymensingh on Thursday.

Rights group Amnesty International expressed alarm yesterday over Das's "lynching",

while urging Bangladesh's interim government to carry out "prompt, thorough, independent and impartial" investigations into Hadi's killing and the violence that followed.

Political parties across the spectrum condemned the violence and expressed concern over public order and security in the build-up to the elections - Bangladesh's first polls since Hasina's autocratic government was ousted.

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party accused a "long-identified group" - a likely reference to Hasina's Awami League party - of "trying to push the country towards anarchy".

Awami League has been banned from contesting in the upcoming polls.

Nahid Islam, convener of the National Citizen Party set up largely by students who took part in the 2024 uprising, slammed the government for failing to rein in rogue elements.

"There are elements within the government opposed to the mass uprising, and they are actively at play," he said in a statement.

Ties between neighbours Bangladesh and India have deteriorated since the uprising, with Dhaka demanding New Delhi extradite Hasina, who has been sentenced to death in absentia after being charged with crimes against humanity.

Hasina, 78, has denounced her trial and the verdict, calling it a "travesty of justice" and vowed to continue serving her people.

At a protest on Friday, a 20-year-old student told AFP that he believed Hadi's killers were also hiding in India.

## Lifeguards fall silent for Bondi Beach victims

AFP/Reuters  
Sydney

Australian surf lifesavers lined the shore of Sydney's Bondi Beach and fell silent yesterday to honour the 15 people shot and killed when gunmen fired into crowds at a Jewish festival by the sea.

Scores of rescuers stood by the water's edge along the entire length of the beach, six days after the two alleged assailants carried out one of the deadliest mass shootings in Australia's history.

The elder gunman, 50-year-old Sajid Akram, was shot and killed by police.

His 24-year-old son Naveed survived and remains in hospital under police guard facing charges including terrorism and 15 murders.

Facing the ocean while wearing their red-and-yellow uniforms, the lifeguards observed three minutes of silence.

Some cried or hugged each other at the morning ceremony, with a surf lifesaving helicopter hovering overhead, television images showed.

Volunteer surf lifesavers across the country, who number more than 200,000, were being asked to join the homage in solidarity with those affected by the Bondi attack before starting their morning patrols.

Ocean rescuers wanted to recognise the "tragedy that has unfolded at Bondi while also reflecting on our respect and compassion for the Jewish community targeted by this attack", Bondi's two lifesaving clubs said in a message.

"We pay respects to those who lost their lives, those who risked their lives, those who worked so hard to save lives, and all of us who will never forget."

Lifeguards at Bondi have been widely praised for their courage on the day of the December 14 attack, dragging people to safety, bandaging and resuscitating victims, and pulling panicked swimmers from the waves.

A photo shared widely online showed lifeguard Jackson Doolan running barefoot down the road from a neighbouring beach towards the Bondi shooting, carrying a defibrillator to help victims.

The local mayor described his actions as "remarkable".

Australia will hold today a national day of reflection with the theme "light over darkness" marking a week after the attack started



Mourners gather yesterday in front of tributes in memory of the victims of a shooting at Bondi Beach, in Sydney. - AFP

Albanese (right) has announced national measures to crack down on gun ownership and hate speech.

with a minute's silence at 6.47pm (0747 GMT).

Flags will fly at half-mast, and Australians are being asked to light a candle in their windows to honour the victims and stand by the Jewish community, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said.

"Sixty seconds carved out from the noise of daily life, dedicated to 15 Australians who should be with us today," he told reporters yesterday. "It will be a moment of pause to reflect and affirm that hatred and violence will never define us as Australians."

Federal and state authorities are talking with Jewish community leaders about establishing a permanent memorial at Bondi Beach, as well as holding a national day of mourning in the new year, Albanese said.

The prime minister has announced a suite of national measures to crack down on gun ownership and hate speech, promising stricter federal laws and harsher penalties.

Albanese is under pressure from critics who say his centre-left government has not done enough to curb a surge in antisemitism since



the start of the Gaza war.

New South Wales Premier Chris Minns outlined plans yesterday for his state to ban "hateful" slogans and symbols, such as Islamic State (IS) group flags, while giving police greater powers.

"The displaying of these symbols can only be done by someone who's either deranged or has an intention to insult and intimidate and scare," Attorney-General Michael Daley said in a televised media conference in Sydney.

A joint counter-terrorism team including police and intelligence services is pursuing a broad investigation into the alleged gunmen's contacts and movements before the shooting.

Authorities believe the pair drew inspiration from the IS group.

Australian police are investigating whether they met with religious extremists during a visit to the Philippines weeks before the shooting.

Detectives carried out raids with search warrants in Australia as recently as Friday, police said, without revealing the locations.

"We are leaving no stone unturned in Australia and overseas," Australian Federal Police Commissioner Krissy Barrett told a news conference yesterday.

Police were gathering evidence to prosecute the surviving alleged gunman, she said. "We will identify the methods, capability and connections of these alleged offenders to determine who the alleged offenders communicated with leading up to the attack."

## Seven elephants killed by train accident in India



Bodies of elephants lie in between railway tracks in Hojai district, Assam. - Reuters

A passenger train smashed into a herd of elephants in India's northeast, killing seven animals on the spot, officials said yesterday.

No travellers were injured in the accident in Assam state, home to more than 4,000 of the roughly 22,000 wild elephants in India.

Senior Assam police official V V Rakesh Reddy told AFP that seven jumbos were killed, and one elephant sustained an injury.

Five coaches of the train, which was headed to New Delhi from remote Mizoram state, were derailed.

The authorities have introduced speed restrictions along routes designated el-

ephant corridors, but the latest accident occurred outside of these zones, Kapinjal Kishore Sharma, an Indian Railways spokesman said.

"The loco pilot, on observing the herd of elephants, applied emergency brakes. However, elephants dashed with the train," he said.

Deforestation and construction activity near their habitats force elephants to stray further afield for food, often bringing them into conflict with humans.

According to parliamentary figures, 629 people were killed by elephants across India in 2023-24. - AFP



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GULF TIMES

Changing hands: What is so special about TikTok’s algorithm?

The content recommendation algorithm that powers the online short video platform TikTok has once again come under the spotlight after the app’s Chinese owner ByteDance signed binding agreements to form a joint venture that will hand control of operations of TikTok’s US app to American and global investors, including cloud computing company Oracle. Here is what we know so far about its fate, following the establishment of the joint venture.

While the creation of this new entity marks a big step toward avoiding a US ban, as well as easing trade and tech-related tensions between Washington and Beijing, there is still uncertainty surrounding the ownership of the recommendation algorithm, considered TikTok’s crown jewel.

Rush Doshi, who served at the National Security Council under President Joe Biden, said on X it was unclear whether the algorithm had been transferred, licensed or was still owned and controlled by Beijing, with Oracle merely providing “monitoring”.

The algorithm is deemed core to TikTok’s global success and until a few months ago, ByteDance’s position was that it would rather shut down the app in the US than sell it.

But in September, Reuters reported, citing sources, that ByteDance would maintain ownership of TikTok’s US business operations but cede control of the app’s data, content and algorithm to the joint venture.

The joint venture would serve as the back-end operation to the US company and handle US user data and the algorithm, sources said at the time, adding a separate division that will continue to be wholly owned by ByteDance would control the revenue-generating business operations such as e-commerce and advertising.

Those arrangements formed the deal contour announced earlier this week, two sources with knowledge of the matter told Reuters.

The ByteDance-controlled TikTok US entity would be the revenue-generating one, while the new joint venture will receive a portion of the revenue for its technology and data services, said the sources.

The Chinese government has yet to declare its stance on the signed deal. Beijing made changes to its export laws in 2020 that give it approval rights over any export of algorithms and source codes, adding a layer of complexity to any effort to sell or spin off the US app.

Analysts have said that it is not just the algorithms, but also how they work with the short-video format, that have made TikTok so successful globally. But TikTok showed that an algorithm, driven by the understanding of a user’s interest, could be more powerful. Rather than building its algorithm on “social graph” like Meta has, TikTok executives have said that its algorithm is based on “interest signals”.

The short-video format enables TikTok’s algorithm to become much more dynamic and even capable of tracking changes in users’ preferences and interests across time, going as granular as what a user may like during a certain period of time during the day.

And the positioning of TikTok as an app built for mobile devices from the beginning also gave it an advantage over rival platforms that had to adapt their interfaces from computer screens. TikTok’s early entry into the short-video market also gave the company a big early-mover advantage. Meta’s Instagram did not launch Reels until 2020 while Alphabet’s YouTube launched Shorts in 2021, both of which lag TikTok in years of data and product development experience.

TikTok also regularly recommends content that falls outside of users’ interests, which the company’s management has repeatedly said is essential to TikTok’s user experience.

A study, which researchers from the US and Germany published last year, found TikTok’s algorithm “exploits user interests in 30% to 50% of the recommendation videos”, after examining data from 347 TikTok users and five automated bots.

“This finding indicates that the TikTok algorithm opts to recommend a large number of explore videos in an attempt to either infer better the user interests or maximise user retention by recommending many videos that are outside of the user’s (known) interests,” the researchers wrote in the paper titled ‘TikTok and the Art of Personalization’ — Reuters

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Beyond boundaries in space



Michaela Benthaus, a German aerospace and mechatronics engineer at the European Space Agency on Blue Origin New Shepard NS-37 rocket, which brings the passengers beyond the Karman line — the internationally recognised boundary of space, in Van Horn, West Texas. A person who uses a wheelchair, Benthaus blasted off into space for the first time yesterday, taking a brief ride as a passenger on a Blue Origin flight. (AFP) Full report on Page 8

How Trump is moulding 2028 Democratic contenders

By James Oliphant  
Washington

President Donald Trump’s aggressive policy agenda is doing more than reshaping the economy and immigration enforcement — it’s also giving a handful of Democratic governors a national stage to position themselves as potential 2028 presidential contenders.

California’s Gavin Newsom, Illinois’ J B Pritzker, and Maryland’s Wes Moore have seized on Trump’s moves to rally their party’s base, sharpen their contrasts with the White House, and build networks beyond their home states.

Trump’s push for Republican states to redraw their congressional districts to favour his party in next year’s midterm elections, his military-style immigration raids in Democratic cities and deep federal spending cuts have triggered fierce resistance among Democrats. That opposition has become a political asset for governors looking to raise their profiles.

California Governor Gavin Newsom pushed back against Trump’s redistricting effort by successfully championing a ballot measure in his state that may allow Democrats to take extra seats in next year’s congressional elections. Newsom, who is weighing a 2028 presidential run, celebrated his win with a speech to Democrats in Houston, Texas, a move viewed as raising his profile beyond his home state.

Illinois’ Pritzker, meanwhile, has positioned himself as a defender of immigrant communities against Trump’s enforcement surge. Last week, he signed legislation barring federal arrests at schools and courthouses. He has also headlined Democratic events in New Hampshire and Minnesota, where he has urged his party to be bolder against Trump.

Moore has blasted Trump’s efforts to shrink the federal

workforce and slash SNAP food benefits for low-income families during a recent government shutdown. He responded by restoring full SNAP benefits in Maryland and campaigning for Democrats in swing states, framing his actions as a direct counter to Trump’s policies.

Their actions have been greeted by relief and excitement in a party that is looking for a jolt after Trump trounced Democratic presidential nominee Kamala Harris last year, and Republicans gained control of Congress.

Mike Doyle, chair of the Harris County Democratic Party in Houston, attended Newsom’s speech and said the crowd “was as enthusiastic” as he had ever seen. He credited Newsom for coming to Texas, a state in which Democrats are hoping to boost their electoral fortunes in the midterms and beyond.

Newsom’s “decision to essentially kick off his 2028 presidential campaign in Houston demonstrated to a lot of folks on the ground exactly the kind of aggressive, mathematically sophisticated thinking Democrats need nationally,” Doyle said in an interview.

Democratic strategists say the governors are tapping into frustrations among many Democrats over their party’s struggle to define itself and what it stands for in the Trump era.

“If you ask Democrats in polling what they want most from their elected officials, it is to put a check on Trump,” said Cornell Belcher, a Democratic pollster.

Belcher has seen this before. He was a pollster for Barack Obama as the then largely unknown Illinois politician rose in national prominence during the George W Bush administration largely through his opposition to the Iraq war.

As the governors’ profiles grow, Trump has sharpened his attacks.

Asked for comment, the White House referred

Reuters to the Republican National Committee, which said Newsom, Pritzker and other Democratic governors were out of touch with mainstream voters.

“In far-left states, extremists like Pritzker and Newsom can attack law enforcement and enable illegal immigrants, but once they step out their Democrat bubbles, they’ll find most Americans don’t support these radical policies,” said RNC spokeswoman Delanie Bomar.

Newsom, Pritzker and Moore did not respond to requests for comment.

They aren’t the only Democratic governors considered to be in the 2028 mix. Michigan’s Gretchen Whitmer, Pennsylvania’s Josh Shapiro and Kentucky’s Andy Beshear could also enter the race.

But Trump has not taken aim at their states the way he has with California, Illinois and Maryland, denying those governors the same kind of platform.

Strong opposition to Trump has boosted not just Democratic governors. In New York City, Zohran Mamdani’s unlikely victory in the mayoral race was made possible, in part, by his willingness to confront Trump on issues such as the rising cost of living and protecting immigrant communities.

Newsom, arguably, has taken most advantage of the moment. On social media — a critical battleground for any politician with presidential ambitions — he trolls Trump with spoof posts that routinely go viral.

This month alone, Newsom has mocked Trump for receiving a “peace prize” from FIFA, soccer’s global governing body, calling it a participation trophy, and for seemingly falling asleep during a cabinet meeting.

In July, he travelled to South Carolina, which likely will hold the first Democratic presidential primary in 2028. He also took centre stage at the recent global climate

conference in Brazil that Trump refused to send a delegation to, blasting the Trump administration’s economic and energy policies.

Newsom has acknowledged in interviews he is considering running for the 2028 Democratic nomination and will decide after next year’s midterms.

“A lot of people in public life are understandably intimidated by Trump and how he operates. Newsom has shown he is not one of those people,” said Brian Brokaw, a political adviser to Newsom.

Similarly, Moore spoke at a Democratic dinner in South Carolina in May and followed that in June by addressing the NAACP, the biggest US civil rights group, in Michigan, a key swing state. He campaigned for recent Democratic gubernatorial candidates in New Jersey and Virginia, both of whom won.

Last month, Moore launched his own effort to redraw Maryland’s congressional map, a direct response, he said, to Trump.

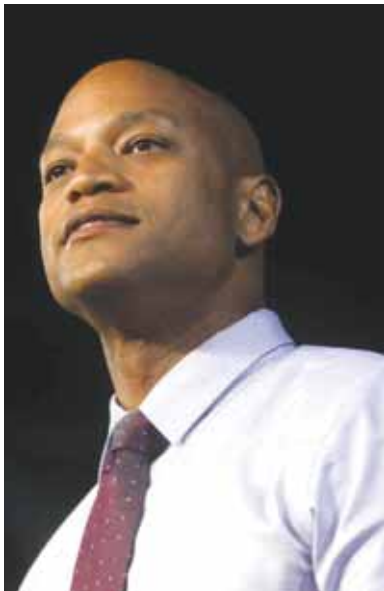
“Because of the way Trump has governed, it has elevated issues to a national level that may have otherwise not become national issues,” said a Moore adviser, who asked not to be identified so as to be able to speak freely about the governor’s actions.

Pritzker has also been making the rounds. In April, he gave a no-holds-barred speech attacking Trump in New Hampshire, another potential early-voting state, where he said he was “contemptuous” of Trump, while blasting his own party as “timid”. He also headlined a Democratic dinner in Minnesota in June and another dinner in the swing state of North Carolina in July.

In a Reuters/Ipsos poll conducted last month, 64% of Democrats had a favourable opinion of Newsom. A majority of Democrats said they were unfamiliar with Pritzker or Moore, suggesting both have work to do to build their national brands. — Reuters



Illinois Governor J B Pritzker.



Maryland Governor Wes Moore.



California Governor Gavin Newsom.



# French presidential silverware keeper faces trial

Reuters  
Paris

France's presidential silverware keeper and two other men are set to stand trial over the suspected theft of porcelain and other precious tableware, the Paris prosecution office said.

The Elysee, the president's official residence, had reported the disappearance of silverware and tableware pieces used for state dinners and other events, with the value of the missing items estimated between €15,000-40,000 (\$17,500-46,800), the prosecution office said.

Prosecutors said the silverware keeper Thomas M and his partner Damien G were arrested on suspicion of theft on Tuesday.

They said another man, Ghislain M, was arrested on suspicion of receiving stolen goods.

Their full names were not given due to French privacy customs.

The French presidency did not immediately reply to a request for comment.

Interviews with presidential staff pointed suspicions at Thomas M, whose suspected downward inventory adjustments appeared to anticipate future thefts, prosecutors said.

They said about 100 objects were discovered in Thomas M's personal locker, his vehicle and home, including copper pots, Sevres porcelain and Baccarat champagne glasses.

Investigators found an air force-stamped plate and ashtrays on his Vinted account, prosecutors said.

Vinted did not immediately reply to a request for comment.

French paper *Le Parisien*, which first reported the case, said Ghislain M worked as a guard at

the Louvre museum, citing his lawyer as saying that his client's motivation for his suspected involvement was his "passion" for rare antique goods.

A court banned him from returning to his Louvre post pending trial, the paper reported.

The museum and the prosecutors did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the report.

The museum suffered its own spectacular daylight heist in October when thieves disguised as construction workers stole priceless pieces from France's crown jewels, sparking a debate about security standards at the country's landmarks.

The Sevres porcelain factory, one of the Elysee's main suppliers, identified a number of items on auction websites, prosecutors said, adding that some items had been returned.

The trial is scheduled for February.

# US 'mooted direct talks on ending war'

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said yesterday that Washington had proposed the first face-to-face negotiations between Ukraine and Russia in half a year, as diplomats converged on Miami for fresh talks on ending the war.

Russian envoy Kirill Dmitriev said he was heading to Miami, while Ukrainian and European teams were also in the sunny Florida city for the negotiations, mediated by US special envoy Steve Witkoff and President Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner.

"They proposed this format as far as I understand: Ukraine, America, Russia," Zelensky said in Kyiv, adding that the Europeans could be present and it would be "logical to hold such a joint meeting".

Trump's envoys have pushed a plan in which the United States would offer security guarantees to Ukraine, but Kyiv will likely be expected to surrender some territory, a prospect resented by many Ukrainians.

However, on Friday US Secretary of State Marco Rubio promised not to force Ukraine into any agreement, saying that "there's no peace deal unless Ukraine agrees to it".

He added that he may join the weekend talks in Miami, his hometown.

Zelensky said that only the United States was capable of persuading Russia to end the war, and he called on Washington to increase pressure on Moscow to make that happen.

"America must clearly say: if not diplomacy, then there will be full pressure... Putin does not yet feel the kind of pressure that should exist," he said, stressing the need for more arms supplies to Ukraine and sanctions on the entire Russian economy.

Russian envoy Dmitriev wrote in an X post that he was "on the way to Miami", adding a peace dove emoji and attaching a short video of a morning sun shining through clouds on a beach with palms.

The last time Ukrainian and Russian envoys held official direct talks was in July in Istanbul, which led to prisoner swaps but little else in the way of concrete progress.

Russian and European involvement marks a step forward from before, when the Americans held separate negotiations with each side in different locations.

However, it is unlikely Dmitriev would hold direct talks with European negotiators as relations between the two sides remain extremely strained.

Moscow, which invaded Ukraine in February 2022, argues that Europe's involvement in the talks only hinders the process. - *AFP*

# Escalating Russian air strikes aim to cut Ukraine off from sea: Zelensky

Reuters/AFP  
Kyiv

Russia is trying to sever Ukraine's access to the Black Sea, President Volodymyr Zelensky said yesterday, following days of ramped-up air strikes on ports and energy facilities in the Odesa region and a critical route to the Moldova border.

Russia has unleashed an almost continuous drone and missile campaign against a region where ports key to Ukraine's foreign trade and fuel supplies operate, after Moscow threatened to cut "Ukraine off from the sea".

Strikes have escalated even as the US pursues an uphill diplomatic drive to coax a deal to end the war.

Ukraine held talks with the US team on Friday, and American negotiators were set to meet Russian officials in Florida this weekend.

"The situation in the Odesa region is harsh due to Russian strikes on port infrastructure and logistics," Zelensky told reporters in Kyiv. "Russia is once again trying to restrict Ukraine's access to the sea and block our coastal regions."

Russia's aim is "to sow chaos, to exert moral pressure during winter... so that there is no fuel, no food supplies, so that there are problems with medical supplies", he said.

Zelensky added that he ordered the quick implementation of "temporary infrastructure solutions so that people would have all the necessary resources".

Russia's attack on Pivdennyi port yesterday hit reservoirs, Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Oleksiy Kuleba said on the Telegram messaging app, a day after a missile strike on the port killed eight people and injured at least 30.

Geneva-based vegetable oil producer Allseeds said three tanks storing sunflower oil at the site were set ablaze in Pivdennyyi.

"Ukraine's largest vegetable oil terminal, Allseeds Black Sea, was struck by a bombardment early on Saturday" in the Pivdennyyi port, Allseeds director of trade Cornelis Vrans told AFP, adding that one employee was killed and two wounded.

"Thousands of tonnes of sunflower oil" were lost in the attack,



A firefighter at the site of a Russian missile and drone strike in Odesa.

- Reuters

which has inflicted the biggest damage on the company since the beginning of the war, the co-founder of one of Ukraine's top seed oil traders said.

Ukraine, with its large agricultural sector, is the world's leading sunflower oil producer, according to analysts' estimates, and attacks on export infrastructure may disrupt markets and hinder state revenues.

Russia's defence ministry was not available for immediate comment.

The Kremlin has said Ukraine's economic infrastructure is a legitimate military target in the almost four-year-old full-out war.

Since Thursday, Russian forces have hit a bridge on the Dniester River near the village of Mayaky, southwest of Pivdennyyi, at least five times, Kuleba told reporters.

The bridge, which connects parts of the region divided by the river and sea inlets, is the main transport route westward to border crossings with Moldova, and is not operational now.

The route accounts for around 40% of fuel supplies to Ukraine, Kuleba said.

Ukrainian authorities have set up a pontoon bridge and re-routed logistics through other regions, securing civilian and freight logistics.

"The focus of the war may have shifted towards Odessa," Kuleba said, adding that the "crazy" attacks could escalate even further as Russia tries to undermine Ukraine's economy.

Last week, one of the war's biggest Russian air attacks on the Black Sea region damaged energy facilities and prompted a blackout in the biggest seaport Odesa, plunging hundreds of thousands of civilians into darkness for days.

Airstrikes on ports also damaged three Turkish-flagged vessels in December.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has vowed to cut Ukraine's access to the Black Sea in retaliation for Kyiv's recent drone strikes on Moscow's sanctions-busting "shadow-fleet" tankers.

Ukraine says those vessels are used to transport oil, Russia's main revenue source for funding its almost four-year-old full-scale invasion of its neighbour.

# Ex-PM Khan given 17-year sentence in gifts case

AFP/Reuters  
Islamabad

Pakistani court sentenced former prime minister Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi to 17 years yesterday for corruption involving gifts the jailed leader received while in office.

The former prime minister faces dozens of cases filed since he was ousted from office in 2022, ranging from corruption to anti-terrorism and state secrets charges.

Khan has denied wrongdoing in all the cases, which his party says are politically motivated.

"The court announced the sentence without hearing the defence and sentenced 17 years imprisonment to Imran Khan and Bushra Bibi with heavy fines," Khan's family lawyer Rana Mudassar Umer told Reuters.

They were handed 10 years' rigorous imprisonment under Pakistan's penal code for criminal breach of trust and a further seven years under anti-corruption laws, the special court of Pakistan's Federal Investigation Agency said in its verdict.

Khan's jail term from yesterday's ruling would begin after he has served the 14 years from the land graft case, Information Minister Attaullah Tarar said.

Under Pakistani law, government officials must declare all gifts, but are allowed to keep those below a certain value or buy them back at a discount.

Yesterday's sentencing came on charges of undervaluing a jewellery set made by the Italian luxury brand Bulgari that Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman presented to Khan and his wife in May 2021.

The case is separate from an earlier case, linked to luxury watches also presented by Prince Mohammed, in which Khan was sentenced to 14 years and Bibi seven.

In a post on X, the former prime minister's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party said that the latest conviction by a "kangaroo court is just to prolong Imran Khan's illegal, unjust incarceration".

"The entire world knows these



Imran Khan 'has told his legal team to appeal the decision at the Islamabad High Court'.

cases are politically motivated," it added.

Party spokesman Syed Zulfikhar Bukhari told AFP that the ruling "ignores basic principles of justice".

"Criminal liability has been imposed without proof of intent, gain or loss, relying on a retrospective reinterpretation of the rules," he said.

Khan has told his legal team to appeal the decision at the Islamabad High Court, Salman Safdar, another one of his lawyers, told reporters outside the jail where the trials were being held, Geo News reported.

Khan's family have ratcheted up their efforts to draw attention of his prison conditions.

In a recent interview with Sky News, the former leader's son Kasim Khan said that his father was in "complete isolation" and not even allowed to communicate with guards.

"It's all kind of psychological torture tactics. No contact with family, no contact with personal physician or anything like that. They use these tactics to try and completely isolate him," he said.

Pakistan's government has repeatedly rejected such allegations.

Following yesterday's verdict, the PTI announced plans for protests across Punjab today.

Khan, a former cricket star turned politician, remains one of Pakistan's most polarising figures, with his legal battles unfolding as the PTI remains sidelined from power.

# Three migrants die of cold in attempt to cross into Iran

Three Afghans died from exposure in freezing temperatures in the western province of Herat while trying to illegally enter Iran, a local army official said yesterday.

"Three people who wanted to illegally cross the Iran-Afghanistan border have died because of the cold weather," the Afghan army official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

He added that a shepherd was also found dead in the mountainous area of Kohsan from the cold.

The migrants were part of a group that attempted to cross into Iran on Wednesday and was stopped by Afghan border forces.

"Searches took place on Wednesday night, but the bodies were only found on Thursday," the army official said.

More than 1.8mn Afghans were forced to return to Afghanistan by the Iranian authorities between January and the end of November 2025, according to the latest figures from the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR), which said that the majority were "forced and coerced returns".

"These mass returns in adverse circumstances have strained Afghanistan's already overstretched resources and services" which leads to "risks of onward and new displacement, including return movements back into Pakistan and Iran and onward", UNHCR posted on its site dedicated to Afghanistan's situation.

This week, Amnesty International called on countries to stop forcibly returning people to Afghanistan, citing a "real risk of serious harm for returnees".

Hit by two major earthquakes in recent months and highly vulnerable to climate change, Afghanistan faces multiple challenges.

It is subject to international sanctions particularly due to the exclusion of women from many jobs and public places, described by the UN as "gender apartheid".

More than 17mn people in the country are facing acute food insecurity, the UN World Food Programme said on Tuesday. - *AFP*

# Italian police arrest 384, seize 1.4 tonnes of drugs

Italian police said yesterday that they had arrested 384 people and seized 1.4 tonnes of drugs in a large-scale operation against drug trafficking.

In addition to the arrests, officers had put under investigation 655 individuals, including 39 minors, and confiscated 35kg of cocaine and more than 40 firearms, police said in a statement.

The operation, concluded on Friday in several provinces, led

to the temporary closure of five cannabis shops in three cities after 312 inspections.

During the checks, the police said they had seized 296kg of cannabis products which initial tests had shown to be illegal drugs.

In June Italy approved a security decree banning so-called "legal" cannabis and outlawing the trade of "cannabis light", or hemp, which unlike marijuana has no psychoactive effects. - *Reuters*

# Beetles block mining of Europe's biggest rare earths deposit

By Pierre-Henry Deshayes  
AFP

As Europe seeks to curb its dependence on China for rare earths, plans to mine the continent's biggest deposit have hit a roadblock over fears that mining operations could harm endangered beetles, mosses and mushrooms.

A two-hour drive southwest of Oslo, in the former mining community of Ulefoss home to 2,000 people, lies the Fensfeltet treasure: an estimated 8.8mn tonnes of rare earths.

These elements, used to make magnets crucial to the auto, electronics and defence industries, have been defined by the European Union as critical raw materials.

"You have rare earths in your pocket when you carry a smartphone," said Tor Espen Simonsen, a local official at Rare Earths Norway, the company that owns the extraction rights. "You're driving with rare earths when you're at the wheel of an electric car, and you need rare earths to make defence materiel like F-35 jets."

"Today, European industry imports almost all of the rare earths it needs - 98% - from one single country: China," he added.

"We are therefore in a situation where Europe must procure more of these raw materials on its own," Simonsen said.

In its Critical Raw Materials Act (CRMA) aimed at securing Europe's supply, the EU has set as an objective that at least 10% of its needs should be extracted within the bloc by 2030.

No rare earth deposits are currently being mined in Europe.

Due to environmental concerns, Rare Earths Norway has already been forced to push back its schedule.

Now it aims to begin mining in the first half of the 2030s.

Its so-called "invisible mine" project is intended to limit the mine's environmental footprint.

It plans to use underground extraction and crushing - as opposed to an open-pit mine - and re-inject a large part of the mining residue.

However, the location of the mineral processing park, where ore extracted underground would be handled and pre-processed, has posed a problem.

The company had planned to transport the minerals on an underground conveyor belt emerging above ground behind a hill, in an area out of sight from the town and largely covered by ancient natural forests, rich in biodiversity.

However, experts who examined that site found 78 fauna and flora species on Norway's "red list" - species at risk of extinction to varying degrees.

They included saproxylic beetles (which depend on deadwood), wych elms, common ash trees, 40 types of mushrooms, and various mosses.

As a result, the county governor formally opposed the location during a recent consultation process.

Adding to concerns was the fact that disposing of waste rock would take place within a protected water system.

"We need to start mining as quickly as possible so we can bypass polluting value chains originating in China," said Martin Molvaer, an adviser at Bellona, a Norwegian tech-focused environmental non-governmental organisation (NGO).

"But things should not move so quickly that we destroy a large part of nature in the process: we must therefore rush slowly," he said.

Faced with such objections, the municipality has been forced to review the plans and take a closer look at alternate locations for the above-ground part of the mine.

While there is another less environmentally sensitive zone, neither the mining developers nor the local population favour it.

"We accept that we will have to sacrifice a significant part of our nature," local mayor Linda Thorstensen said. "It comes down to choosing the lesser of two evils."

She supports the mine project, given the small town has seen jobs and young people move elsewhere for decades. It is "a new adventure", she said.

"Many people live outside the job market, many receive social welfare assistance or disability pensions. So we need jobs and opportunities," Thorstensen said.

In the almost-empty streets of Ulefoss, locals were cautiously optimistic.

"We want a dynamic that makes it possible for us to become wealthy, so that the community benefits. We need money and more residents," Inger Norendal, a 70-year-old retired teacher, told AFP. "But mining obviously has its downsides too."





# Darb Al Saai highlights inclusive heritage for all



By Shaima Sheriff  
Doha

**D**arb Al Saai has highlighted Qatar's commitment to inclusive cultural celebrations by offering accessible heritage experiences, interactive workshops and awareness initiatives, ensuring people of all abilities can participate fully. The event, once again, demonstrated how Qatar's National Day celebrations extend beyond tradition, placing inclusivity and accessibility at the centre of cultural expression. Organised under the Ministry of Culture, the event welcomed families, visitors, and people of determination, ensuring meaningful participation for the deaf and visually impaired.

Among the key contributors was the Qatar Social and Cultural Centre for the Blind, which took part through an awareness-focused booth aimed at educating the public about visual impairment. Chairman Faisal al-Koheji said the centre's role at Darb Al Saai was vital in connecting the community with lived experiences.

"We are participating in Darb Al Saai as part of the Ministry of Culture, and through our booth, we try to increase awareness about different aspects related to visual impairment in Qatar," al-Koheji said.

The booth featured interactive Braille activities, assistive technologies and demonstrations promoting independence. "We try to introduce to the visitors what Braille is through interactive activities, so they take a good overview of it," al-Koheji explained.

He added that tools such as screen-readers and note-takers enable visually impaired individuals to use smartphones, tablets and online platforms independently. Inclusivity was further strengthened through sign language engagement sessions led by interpreter Mu'tasim Barra'a Arif Mahmoud, who has more than eight years of experience.

"Our participation in Darb Al Saai helps us combine the culture of the deaf with the culture of the speakers. This raises the level of awareness and removes the barrier between speakers and the deaf," he said.

Mahmoud noted that teaching visitors basic sign language encouraged communication and understanding. "This is what we aim to do, to make it easy to communicate and suitable for everyone," he also said.

By integrating accessibility into its cultural programming, Darb Al Saai reflected Qatar's broader vision of hosting family-friendly events where heritage, education and inclusion go hand in hand, ensuring that no one is left behind.



Organised under the Ministry of Culture, the event welcomed families, visitors, and people of determination, ensuring meaningful participation for the deaf and visually impaired.

Among the key contributors was the Qatar Social and Cultural Centre for the Blind, which took part through an awareness-focused booth aimed at educating the public about visual impairment.

## Pair of elephants, gift from Nepal, find their new home in Al Khor Park

By Tawfik Lamari  
Staff Reporter

**T**he Ministry of Municipality announced the arrival of two Asian elephants at Al Khor Park. The elephants are a gift from the government and people of Nepal, which embodies the depth of bilateral relations and the bonds of friendship and co-operation.

The ministry said the male elephant, Khagendra Pradsad, is six years old and weighs 1,190kg, while the female, Rudra Kali, is seven years old and weighs 1,200kg. They were born and bred in the Elephant Breeding and Training Centre, Sauraha, Chitwan National Park, Nepal.

The couple were seen off from Chitwan National Park on December 17, according

**The ministry explained, via X, that the public can visit the Asian elephants at the Al Khor Park by booking through the Oun app or the ministry's website**

to a *The Himalayan Times* report. The paper cited Dr Haribhadra Acharya, Information officer at the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, who said the calves would be transported to Qatar via a chartered cargo plane from Bhairahawa International Airport. The preparations were underway to move the calves from Sauraha to Bhairahawa a day earlier to meet the flight schedule and road conditions.

According to Acharya, two mahouts are accompanying the elephants under the supervision of park animal technician Dinesh Dhakal, who will return to Nepal

after ensuring the proper management of the elephants. Nepal has previously gifted elephants to friendly nations as part of efforts to strengthen bilateral relations and highlight the country's biodiversity internationally.

The Elephant Breeding and Training Centre initially received 16 elephants from India, two from Myanmar, and two from Thailand. To date, the centre has bred and raised 68 elephants, six of which have died, while 61 have undergone formal training.

The decision to gift elephants to Qatar was first announced during the official visit of then Nepal president Bidya Devi Bhandari in 2018. The ministry explained, via X, that the public can visit the Asian elephants at the Al Khor Park by booking through the Oun app or the ministry's website.

