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# GULF TIMES



THURSDAY Vol. XXXXVI No. 13600

December 25, 2025

Rajab 5, 1447 AH

[www.gulf-times.com](http://www.gulf-times.com) 2 Riyals

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## BUSINESS | Page 1

Government seen  
as first customer  
in Qatar's  
innovation drive



## Saudi cabinet endorses Qatar high-speed rail agreement

Saudi Arabia's cabinet has formally endorsed the landmark agreement to build a high-speed electric railway linking Riyadh and Doha, hailing it as a project that will boost mobility and tourism across the Gulf. The weekly meeting chaired by the Custodian of Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud praised the development, according to *Arab News*. The 785km line, scheduled to begin operations in June 2026, will cut travel time between the two capitals to just two hours, creating new opportunities for economic and cultural exchange. The initiative aligns with Qatar National Vision 2030 and Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, both of which prioritise sustainable transport and tourism development. By offering a fast, eco-friendly alternative to air and road travel, the railway is expected to reshape regional connectivity while reducing carbon emissions.

For tourism, the impact is significant. Easier cross-border travel will encourage multi-destination visits, allowing international and regional tourists to explore both countries more freely. Qatar's luxury and cultural offerings, alongside Saudi Arabia's blend of heritage and modern attractions, will benefit from increased visitor flows. The project is also expected to strengthen partnerships with private sector operators, diversify tourism experiences, and extend visitor stays. Beyond tourism, the railway will enhance economic integration by facilitating the movement of goods, services, and professionals. This efficient transport link is anticipated to attract foreign investment, support trade, and deepen bilateral ties. Regionally, the project sets a precedent for sustainable infrastructure in the Gulf.

## 14 countries slam Israeli expansion, call for reversal

Fourteen countries, including France, Britain, and Germany, condemned yesterday Israel's recent approval of new Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank. "We, States of Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Iceland, Ireland, Japan, Malta, The Netherlands, Norway, Spain and the United Kingdom condemn the approval by the Israeli security cabinet of 19 new settlements in the occupied West Bank," said a joint statement released by the French foreign ministry. "We recall our clear opposition to any form of annexation and to the expansion of settlement policies," it added. The countries urged Israel "to reverse this decision, as well as the expansion of settlements".



2025 witnessed a qualitative leap in the progress of HMC.

## Qatar tops Arab world in health services

Ranked 18th globally in Numbeo Index, Qatar's health sector advances with expanded capacity and innovation

Qatar ranked first in the Arab world and 18th globally in health services, according to the Numbeo Index – an international ranking based on a range of criteria, including the quality of healthcare, ease of access to services, efficiency of infrastructure, and levels of beneficiary satisfaction.

Throughout 2025, the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) has continued to play a pivotal role as the body responsible for formulating national health policies, regulating the health sector, and ensuring the integration of its services in a manner that achieves the highest levels of quality, efficiency, and sustainability.

According to MoPH data, there are around 58,000 workers in the public and private

sectors, representing various medical, nursing, technical, and administrative specialities. The number of available hospital beds in health facilities stands at 5,485, which reflects the expansion of the health sector's capacity to keep pace with population growth, urban expansion, and the increasing demand for health services.

Further, 2025 has seen a qualitative leap in the progress of Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC), which continued to strengthen its position as the main provider of specialised and secondary healthcare in the country and as one of the leading regional models in quality performance and clinical excellence.

HMC's achievements ranged from strategic partnerships and

service development to the introduction of advanced technologies and the realisation of unprecedented medical achievements at the national level. As part of efforts to improve access to health services and reduce waiting times, HMC signed partnership agreements with a number of private hospitals, with the aim of referring Qatari citizens who experience long waiting periods in certain specialities to receive timely care.

Similarly, HMC opened a musculoskeletal physiotherapy clinic for seniors at Qatar Rehabilitation Centre, reflecting its commitment to developing specialised health care services that support the independence of older adults and enhance their quality of life. [To Page 6](#)

## Cabinet hails US strategic dialogue, Doha Declaration

HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Sheikh Saud bin Abdulrahman bin Hassan al-Thani chaired the Cabinet's regular meeting held yesterday morning at the Amiri Diwan.

At the outset of the meeting, the Cabinet welcomed the outcomes of the Seventh Strategic Dialogue between Qatar and the United States, co-chaired by HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani and US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, in Washington on December 17, 2025, with the participation of senior Qatari and American officials.

The Cabinet affirmed that the joint statement issued at the conclusion of the dialogue reflected the depth and strength of the relations between the two countries, the solidity of their partnership in various fields, and their shared will to develop and expand their fruitful and constructive co-operation for the benefit of their peoples, and in a way that contributes to maintaining security, peace and stability in the region and around the globe.

The Cabinet commended the outcomes of the Doha Declaration 2025, issued at the end of the Eleventh Session of the Conference of the States Parties (COSP11) to the United Nations Convention Against Corruption, which was hosted by Qatar for five days. The session's discussions focused on the opportunities for using ar-

ificial intelligence systems in preventing and combating corruption. The clear message that was conveyed through this session suggested that building the integrity of the future requires harnessing technology responsibly and strengthening international co-operation to confront the growing challenges associated with corruption and transnational financial crimes.

Afterwards, the Cabinet considered the topics on its agenda, as it approved a draft law on animal health. Prepared by the Ministry of Municipality, this draft law replaces Law No 1 of 1985 on animal health, as part of updating the law to keep pace with changes in this field.

The Cabinet also approved a draft cabinet decision to establish the Medical Committee for the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya) and define its responsibilities. Prepared by Lekhwiya, the draft decision aims to deal with all cases requiring medical attention, starting from the medical examination stage to recruitment as well as injury cases in need of rapid evaluation according to the requirements of the job nature assigned to the injured force members and other cases.

The Cabinet also approved a draft decision of the President of Civil Service and Government Development Bureau regarding training courses and training alternatives scheduled for employees who are candidates for promotion. [To Page 6](#)

## Qatar in first paediatric stem cell transplant

Brother's stem cells  
give young cancer  
patient new hope

sents a key milestone in Sidra Medicine's paediatric HSCT programme, and follows the opening of its dedicated HSCT ward in June 2025.

Chair of Pediatric Medicine at Sidra Medicine, Dr Ahmed al-Hammadi, said: "Completing our first paediatric allogeneic stem cell transplant is a significant achievement for Sidra Medicine and for paediatric care in Qatar. It reflects our commitment to providing world-class speciality care, strengthening national capabilities in advanced cellular therapies, and ensuring that children have access to highly specialised, life-saving treatment within the country".

The patient's treatment journey at Sidra Medicine began in 2019, when he underwent



Dr Ahmed al-Hammadi, chair of Pediatric Medicine at Sidra Medicine.

standard chemotherapy over two years. Following relapses in May 2022 and December 2024, the medical team determined that an allogeneic stem cell transplant offered the best

chance for long-term recovery.

Children facing this type of relapse have very limited treatment options without HSCT, highlighting the importance of timely access to this specialised therapy.

Acting Chief of Pediatric Hematology, Oncology and HSCT and Director of the Advanced Cell Therapy Core at Sidra Medicine, Dr Chiara Cugno, said: "The continued growth of Sidra Medicine's paediatric HSCT programme reflects the advanced expertise of our haematology and oncology teams. Our services are available to both local and international patients, addressing a critical national need, with more than 50 children in Qatar currently on the transplant waiting list." [\(QNA\)](#)

## Qatar welcomes Yemen prisoner exchange pact

Qatar welcomed the agreement to exchange prisoners and detainees in Yemen, signed in Muscat, Oman, considering it a significant step toward addressing humanitarian issues and strengthening security and stability efforts. In a statement yesterday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed Qatar's full appreciation for the tireless efforts of Oman and Saudi Arabia in this context, in addition to the Office of the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for Yemen and the International Committee of the Red Cross. The ministry reiterated Qatar's unwavering support for Yemen and its continued assistance to its fraternal people in achieving their aspirations for security, stability and development. [\(QNA\)](#)

Today's **GULF TIMES**  
includes a 4-page supplement on  
**4WD & SUV**







HE Sheikha Sheikha bint Jassim bin Ahmed al-Thani



## Qatar takes part in child online safety conference in Azerbaijan

QNA  
Baku

Qatar has taken part in an international conference in Azerbaijan on protecting children from harmful content in the digital environment, as concerns grow globally over online risks facing young people.

The conference was held in the capital, Baku, and brought together officials, experts and policymakers from different countries. Qatar's delegation was led by HE Sheikha Sheikha bint Jassim bin Ahmed al-Thani, As-

sistant Undersecretary for Family Affairs at the Ministry of Social Development and Family.

Addressing the conference, she said safeguarding children online has become a global priority amid rapid technological advances and the expansion of open digital spaces.

She warned that digital risks extend beyond inappropriate content to include behavioural and psychological effects, such as reduced attention, weakened family communication and exposure to harmful behavioural models. She stressed that tackling these challenges requires

shared responsibility among governments, educational institutions and civil society.

HE Sheikha Sheikha outlined Qatar's efforts to enhance child protection online, including the establishment of a cybercrime prevention centre, the strengthening of relevant legislation and the launch of the "Safe Space" initiative aimed at raising awareness among children and adolescents about digital safety.

She also highlighted Qatar's legal framework, including laws on cybercrime and personal data protection, noting that child welfare is a key pillar of the coun-

try's National Vision 2030. This, she said, is reflected in policies related to education, capacity building and healthcare, as well as Qatar's commitment to international children rights agreements.

She pointed to the ministry's national strategy for 2025-2030, which includes digital safety awareness programmes and initiatives to combat cyberbullying in schools and also referenced the creation of several national committees and strategies, including the Child and Youth Digital Safety Committee established in 2025 and the National Cybersecurity Strategy 2024-2030.

## QMIC's Smart Parking Solution a big success during Arab Cup



Dr Mohammed al-Sada



Qatar Mobility Innovations Centre (QMIC), a leading national innovation entity established by Qatar University (QU), announced the successful deployment of its Smart Parking Solution for the Supreme Committee during the recently concluded Arab Cup.

This accomplishment highlights QMIC's vital role in transforming innovation into practical solutions that support Qatar's growing reputation as a global hub for major events.

Throughout this deployment, QMIC's dedicated team executed over 960 hours of comprehensive system monitoring, operational activities, and field support. Its commitment to excellence resulted in zero system downtime, ensuring that the parking operations ran seamlessly and efficiently in high-traffic situations.

By utilising cutting-edge technologies, the Smart Parking Solution provided real-time insights into parking availability, empowering event organisers to

optimise traffic flow and better manage parking capacity.

QMIC noted that its Smart Parking Solution exemplifies the power of homegrown technology in enhancing visitor experiences at large-scale events. The deployment of this system is part of QMIC's larger mission to enhance mobility and sustainability in Qatar while showcasing the transformative potential of innovation developed within the country.

Dr Mohammed Abdulaziz

al-Sada, executive director of QMIC, said: "This deployment is a continuation of our legacy of participation in significant events, including the FIFA World Cup 2022."

"Our commitment to utilising innovative solutions has been ongoing, and we have plans for the Smart Parking Solution to be deployed in future events as well, reinforcing our dedication to enhancing mobility and connectivity for all."

Mohamed Makled, Deliv-

ery and Technology Operations manager, added: "We successfully delivered our Smart Parking Solution across six stadiums during the Arab Cup, showcasing our operational efficiency and capability to manage logistics on a large scale."

As Qatar looks to host a range of international sporting and cultural events in the future, QMIC said it remains dedicated to providing innovative solutions that foster intelligent connectivity and mobility across the nation.

## QC distributes food baskets to needy people in Côte d'Ivoire



Qatar Charity (QC) has launched a humanitarian initiative to distribute food baskets to vulnerable groups in several villages and underserved neighbourhoods in the Yopougon district of Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire.

The project benefited about 7,200 individuals, including widows, retirees, and low-income families. This intervention is part of QC's ongoing efforts to ease the living burdens faced by these communities, particularly amid the economic challenges confronting societies across West Africa.

The distribution was carried out in the presence of Adama Bictogo, president of the National Assembly of Côte d'Ivoire, alongside Mubarak bin Hussein al-Marri, Qatar's ambassador to Côte d'Ivoire, and Engineer Hasan Owda, country director of QC's office in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire.

Al-Marri emphasised that the launch of QC's food assistance, attended by the president of Parliament, reflects the Ivorian leadership's deep commitment to social solidarity and supporting the most vulnerable. He described the initiative as a practical embodiment

of noble humanitarian values.

He added that this effort underscores Qatar's pioneering humanitarian role in assisting disadvantaged groups worldwide. Humanitarian work, he noted, remains a solid bridge fostering fraternal ties between nations, strengthening the robust bilateral relations between Qatar and Côte d'Ivoire, built on mutual respect and constructive co-operation in social and humanitarian fields.

The envoy affirmed that these efforts help alleviate the financial strain on needy families

and provide them with a sense of food security.

For his part, Owda said that this project continues QC's humanitarian mission through a series of initiatives, including food basket distributions, which reached a total of 7,179 beneficiaries across the most underserved villages.

He pointed out that QC's interventions in Côte d'Ivoire go beyond emergency relief, involving development projects such as building classrooms, mosques, and water wells, as well as providing tools and equipment for economic empowerment programmes. In 2025 alone, the organisation implemented around 100 projects benefiting more than 12,000 people in Abidjan.

Owda added that a memorandum of understanding was recently signed with the UN Development Programme to collaborate in the fields of health, economic empowerment, and youth capacity-building.

Plans for 2026 include major initiatives to expand education, healthcare, and water projects, aiming to promote sustainable development and deliver tangible impact on the lives of local communities.

## RACA chief named among Arab world's most influential figures

The head of Qatar's Regulatory Authority for Charitable Activities (RACA) has been named among the Arab world's most influential figures in the field of social responsibility for 2025, organisers have announced. Ibrahim Abdulla al-Dehaimi was selected by the Regional Network for Social Responsibility in

recognition of his role in strengthening the governance and impact of charitable and humanitarian work. The network said the decision reflected al-Dehaimi's efforts to modernise and regulate the charity sector, promote transparency and sustainability, and enhance the social impact of

initiatives at both national and regional levels. The recognition also highlights RACA's growing role in improving the efficiency and credibility of charitable organisations, a key objective as countries across the region seek to align humanitarian work with long-term development goals. (QNA)

### Amir sends cable of condolences to Libyan leader

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani and HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani sent cables of condolences to Chairman of the Presidential Council of Libya Dr Mohamed al-Menfi on the passing of Chief of the General Staff of the Libyan Army Lieutenant-General Mohammed Ali al-Haddad and those on board in a plane crash. (QNA)

## Health screenings in Qatar show progress: study

By A Staff Reporter

The screening programmes for non-communicable diseases in Qatar have achieved notable results in recent years in terms of participation rates and detection levels, a recent medical study published in *Qatar Journal of Public Health*, issued by Hamad Bin Khalifa University Press, has revealed.

Arabic daily *Arrayah* reported that based on the data presented in the study, the participation rate in the annual health screening for 2023 reached about 12.2% among eligible citizens, while the rate among expatriates reached 13.2%, which is considered an important first step toward strengthening investment in prevention.

The screening results revealed a noticeable prevalence of risk factors associated with non-communicable diseases, such as diabetes, obesity, and hypertension. A total of 1,255 cases of pre-diabetes were recorded, in addition to an obesity rate of about 14.5%, highlighting the need for early intervention and continuous awareness of healthy lifestyle practices.

The study, titled "Insights into Non-Communicable Disease Screening in Adult Primary Care in Qatar", also showed a gradual increase in government-approved screening programmes for breast, colorectal, and cervical cancers. Coverage of breast cancer screening reached 41.8% in the most recent screening round, while participation in colorectal cancer screening rose to 26.7%. Cervical cancer screening, being relatively new, remains limited to opportunistic screening, pending an ongoing evaluation by the Ministry of Public Health to consider the possibility of converting it into a comprehensive national programme.

Regarding mental health, the study indicated that incorporating mental health screenings into the preventive care pathway at the Primary Health Care Corporation was an important strategic step, with psychological screening tools integrated into routine visits, which contributed to raising coverage to 79.5% during 2024.

The study also recorded a significant increase in the number of beneficiaries of psychiatry and psychology services in primary health care facilities, reflecting that integrating mental healthcare into the core system had a direct impact on increasing utilisation and improving service quality.

Further, the study confirmed that Qatar is gradually building a coherent preventive model based on early detection, regular follow-up, and activating the role of primary healthcare as a fundamental component of the national health system. It also emphasised that the annual health screening, which began for citizens in 2017 and was expanded to include expatriates in 2022 at primary health care centres, plays a pivotal role in identifying common risk factors in the community, such as prediabetes, high blood pressure, and obesity.

However, the study noted that cancer screening coverage remains lower than that achieved by some high-income countries. Yet, it highlighted that the performance of mental health screenings in Qatar clearly surpasses that of several advanced countries, including the US and the UK.

Further, the study also identified a number of challenges that screening programmes still face, most notably the need to increase participation rates, improve referral pathways across different levels of care, and overcome communication barriers in a multilingual and multicultural society.

## Rumailah Hospital achieves landmark recognition

Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC)'s Rumailah Hospital has achieved a major international milestone after its Department of Geriatrics became the first service worldwide outside the United Kingdom to receive Developmental Accreditation from the Memory Services National Accreditation Programme (MSNAP) of the Royal College of Psychiatrists in the UK.

This recognition positions Rumailah Hospital's Memory Services as a global leader in memory and cognitive care and reflects HMC's commitment to delivering safe, compassionate and evidence-based services for people living with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia in Qatar.

Following an in-person peer review, the MSNAP assessment confirmed that the hospital's Memory Services meet internationally recognised quality standards. This places the service among a small group of memory services recognised for excellence, strong co-ordination and patient-centred care, benchmarked against UK best practice.

The achievement builds on HMC's leadership in dementia care, following the Department

of Geriatric's designation in 2023 as a World Health Organisation Collaborating Center for Healthy Ageing and Dementia.

The MSNAP review highlighted several strengths, including strong leadership, a clear shared vision and close collaboration across multidisciplinary teams. The review noted that staff are well aligned, supported and committed to delivering high-quality, patient-focused care.

The assessment also commended RAHA, Qatar's National Alzheimer's and Memory Services Helpline, highlighting positive feedback from patients and caregivers, effective multidisciplinary teamwork and strong governance systems that support quality and patient safety.

Established in 2012, Rumailah Hospital's Memory Services serve as Qatar's national centre for memory and cognitive health. The service supports older adults and their families through early assessment, co-ordinated care pathways, dignified and person-centred care, reduced caregiver burden, and continuity of care across clinical, rehabilitation, social and community settings, in line with international best practices. (QNA)

## Submissions for Tasweer Festival's photography programme closes today

The Tasweer Photo Festival (Tasweer) has announced that submissions for the second programme "Creativity and Mastery in Photography: Advanced Photography Course", closes today. This 14-week intensive professional residency programme is organised in collaboration with the VII Foundation and the Qatar Photographic Society, serving as a regional benchmark, aiming to empower photographers to advance their practices from technical mastery to international standards of visual storytelling. In addition, the programme offers an overarching approach that covers documentary photography, portraiture, architecture, and landscape photography, with a special focus on the art of visual storytelling and writing for images, as well as development of digital processing skills. Participants benefit from the guidance of a world-class roster of photographers, including Gary Knight, Rena Efendi, Ziyah Gafic, and M'hammed Kilito. (QNA)



## Dukhan Bank launches UK Winter Spend campaign for Visa credit cardholders



Dukhan Bank has launched its UK Winter Spend campaign, offering customers additional DAwards when using their Dukhan Bank Visa credit cards in the UK during the winter season. The campaign, which will run until Jan 31, 2026, aims at enhancing the travel and lifestyle experience of customers visiting the UK by providing added value on eligible card transactions across shopping, dining, and leisure. Throughout the campaign period, customers can earn double DAwards on eligible spends of up to QR35,000, while

any amount spent above this threshold qualifies for triple DAwards. To participate, customers are required to meet a minimum spend of QR5,000, with only purchase and e-commerce transactions completed in the United Kingdom during the campaign period being eligible. The offer is available exclusively on Dukhan Bank Visa credit cards and reflects the bank's ongoing commitment to delivering customer-focused, Shariah-compliant banking solutions that support modern lifestyles and international travel needs.



## INVITATION FOR TENDER

Tender Reference	Description	Tender Fee (QAR)	Tender Bond Value (QAR)	Bid Closing Date
ASP-2025-SS-5204	Supply of Medical consumables under Call-Off Agreement for Al Shaqab for a period of 3 years	250.00	50,000.00	20 <sup>th</sup> January 2026
ASP-2025-SS-5190	Supply of Laboratory supplies under Call-Off Agreement for Al Shaqab for a period of 3 years	250.00	50,000.00	18 <sup>th</sup> January 2026
ASP-2025-SS-5033	Supply and Installation of Black Rubber mats at Area-1,2,3	250.00	50,000.00	22 <sup>nd</sup> January 2026

Al Shaqab Procurement is inviting companies to participate in the above-listed public tenders. 1) Tender Fee: Interested bidders shall first deposit the respective non-refundable and non-transferable tender fee as mentioned above into the following Qatar Foundation bank account mentioning "Al Shaqab Tender Reference Number" and "Bidder's Name".

Account Name : QATAR FOUNDATION – AL SHAQAB  
Account Number : 0 013 - 0 24 171- 0 55  
Swift Code No : QNBAQQA  
IBAN : QA16 QNBA 0000 0000 0013 024171055  
Bank Name : Qatar National Bank

Tender Fee Payment and collection dates: From 25<sup>th</sup> December 2025 until 5<sup>th</sup> January 2026 between 9:00 AM and 2:00 PM, except Friday and Saturday. The tender fees should be paid to the QF account before 4<sup>th</sup> January 2026, 2:00 PM. Tender documents will not be issued if the tender fees are paid after the specified deadline.

2) All bidders who have paid the required tender fees shall collect the tender documents from the address below by submitting the following:

1. A copy of the bidder's tender fee receipt clearly highlighting "Tender reference number", "bidder's name", and
2. An Authorization letter on the company's letterhead detailing the full name, telephone number and email ID of the bidder's focal point for all tender communications along with commercial registration(CR) copy.

The tender collection address will be  
Al Shaqab Procurement,  
Gate 9, Administration Building, Building No 25, Zone 52, Street 2720, Education City, Doha, Qatar

- The commercial bid must be valid for 90 days from the bid closing date.
- The commercial bid must be accompanied by a bank guarantee (tender bond) issued by a local bank in Qatar. The bond should be valid for 90 days from the bid closing date.
- The successful tenderer will be required to submit a performance bond as prescribed in each of the above tender documents.
- Qatar Foundation tendering qualifications, terms and conditions shall apply as stipulated in the tender document.
- For any queries, please write to [asp@qf.org.qa](mailto:asp@qf.org.qa) 44541183/44546210

# Doha Debates event explores future of urban life in Buenos Aires

## Argentine, Chilean and Qatari students in cultural dialogue

QNA  
Buenos Aires

Qatar Foundation's Doha Debates, in collaboration with Qatar's Years of Culture, a national initiative that brings people together through cultural exchange, has released its first Latin America town hall, "How Should We Reinvent the City?"

Held at Buenos Aires' Usina del Arte, the event brought together students from Argentina, Chile and Qatar, alongside global experts, to explore the future of urban life.

Moderated by Malika Bilal, the debate featured Guadalupe Granero Realini, urban economist and researcher at CIPPEC Think Tank; Akel Ismail Kahera, programme director and professor of Islamic architecture and urbanism at Hamad Bin Khalifa University; and Ni-

cholas Boys Smith, founding director of Create Streets (UK). Students contributed questions and reflections, highlighting intergenerational and cross-cultural dialogue.

The Adviser on Latin America for the Years of Culture Mohammed al-Kuwaiti said: "In Arab culture, dialogue has always been at the heart of community life, from the tradition of the majlis to the exchange of ideas. Debate is about listening, learning, and finding common ground more than simply winning or losing."

Managing Director of Doha Debates Amjad Atallah said: "Bringing students from different regions into the same conversation creates space for serious questioning and mutual understanding. Partnering with Years of Culture for this town hall reflects our shared belief that dialogue across cultures deepens how young people engage with

the ideas shaping their societies."

As for students reflecting on the programme's impact, Jamila al-Humaidi from Qatar said the experience was proof that honest conversation is the bridge that connects us. Camila Regueiro, from Argentina, added: "I truly think we all learned so much about each other's culture."

Chilean student, Javiera Eugenio Guzmán, noted: "This experience made me feel heard and reminded me of the deep connections that unite us across countries."

The expert guests praised the students' engagement, as Akel Ismail Kahera said: "The youth showed maturity and deep understanding of sustainability, urban planning, and global

inequities." Guadalupe Granero Realini added: "Their ability to debate fearlessly and challenge experts was impressive."

# QRCS project aims to conduct 850 eye surgeries in Gaza

Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS), in partnership with the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS), launched a vital project to support Al-Amal Hospital in Khan Yunis amid escalating health and humanitarian challenges in the Gaza Strip.

The initiative aims to perform 850 eye surgeries and equip several medical facilities within the hospital to ensure the continuity of healthcare services for the wounded and sick.

The project activities include fully equipping two operating rooms at Al-Amal Hospital with all necessary tools and medical supplies for the ENT department, as well as providing surgical instruments and equipment for other departments. Additionally, comprehensive maintenance will be carried out on the two operating rooms to enhance their operational efficiency.

Dr Akrum Nassar, director of QRCS' office in Gaza, stated: "This new project is a direct response to the urgent need for eye treatment amid a severe shortage of medicines and medical supplies caused by the war and the closure of crossings. It also involves operating two surgical rooms at the hospital to enable medical teams to provide continuous care for patients." Nahid Blata, chairman of the Administrative Committee of PRCS in Gaza and the North, said: "This project represents an extension of the fraternal relationship and ongoing partnership with our



brothers at QRCS. We look forward to sustaining this co-operation to ensure the continuity of medical services for our people inside the homeland, especially given the immense challenges facing the health sector."

He noted that the ophthalmology surgical team has already begun performing the first and second batches of eye surgeries despite the current situation on the ground.

QRCS noted that these efforts come at

a time when the suffering of eye patients in Gaza is deepening. A recent statistic from the Palestinian Ministry of Health revealed that more than 1,500 people have completely lost their sight since the outbreak of the war on Gaza in October 2023, due to lack of treatment and malnutrition.

The QRCS project offers a glimmer of hope for thousands of patients awaiting treatment under dire humanitarian condition.



## QatarEnergy LNG Tender Invitation

No.	TENDER NUMBER / DESCRIPTION	TENDER ISSUE PERIOD	TENDER FEE (QAR)	TENDER BOND (USD)	TENDER CLOSING DATE
1	LTC/C/IOFS/7387/25 Charter of Offshore Support Vessel Services	24/12/2025 to 08/01/2026	0	250,000	19/01/2026

### Scope of Work:

OWNER/CONTRACTOR to provide well designed, fully equipped and properly maintained Offshore drilling supply & support Vessels to support COMPANY/CHARTERER's offshore operations and installations.

The Contract duration will be for an initial period of five (5) years, with a tentative Vessel requirement by Q2, 2027 and the Contract will have a provision for further optional extensions on yearly basis up to five (5) years, at Company's sole discretion.

**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.

## MoCI shuts Professional Kitchen Trading and Services Co for a month



The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) has issued Administrative Decision No 32/2025 to temporarily close Professional Kitchen Trading and Services Company for one month, for violating the provisions of Article 7 of Law No 8 of 2008 on Consumer Protection and its Executive Regulations.

The violation relates to the company's description and advertising of a product using false and misleading information that could deceive consumers. As part of its ongoing efforts to strengthen market oversight and ensure suppliers' compliance with applicable laws and regulations, the ministry stressed that it will not tolerate any violations that undermine consumer rights or negatively affect the business environment in the country.

The ministry also called on all citizens and residents to report any violations or illegal practices through the following channels: Contact Centre (16001); the ministry's official social media accounts (@MOCIQATAR).

## QatarEnergy LNG Tender Invitation

No.	TENDER NUMBER / DESCRIPTION	TENDER ISSUE PERIOD	TENDER FEE (USD)	TENDER BOND (USD)	TENDER CLOSING DATE
1	LTC/C/SPE/7479/25 PROVISION OF 3D SEISMIC DATA ACQUISITION SERVICES – PROJECT QUEST	24/12/2025 to 11/01/2026	0	2,000,000	18/02/2026

### Scope of Work:

Contractor shall acquire marine 3D seismic data in offshore Qatar, utilizing Ocean Bottom Node (OBN) seismic acquisition technology. QatarEnergy LNG requires survey to be commenced in Q1-2027.

Term of the Contract shall be continued for the time necessary to complete the work and all other obligations of the parties under the Contract have been performed until issuance of the Service Acceptance Certificate. Further extension of the Contract shall be at Company's sole discretion for any additional work.

**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 on QatarEnergy LNG website under Suppliers tab >Current Open Tenders. Part III of the ITT document shall only be released to the interested companies upon submitting the form of Secrecy Declaration duly signed and sealed/stamped. 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.

# QF students test skills at ISF volleyball tourney in China

Two under-15 teams, boys and girls, from Qatar Foundation (QF) schools competed against teams from 18 countries in the ISF World Schools Volleyball Championship in Shangluo, China.

The event enabled the students to test their athletic abilities, in addition to building cross-cultural connections. The participation also reflected QF's commitment to its holistic education approach, which leverages sport to develop leadership

skills, enhance self-confidence, and foster teamwork, alongside academic excellence.

Lina al-Khater, a student at Qatar Academy Doha (QAD) and captain of the girls' volleyball team, said: "Participating in the championship was a special experience, and we are proud to be the first QF Schools team to take part in a tournament of this scale. Standing on the court while representing Qatar was a historic moment that carried a strong sense of pride and re-

sponsibility." Al-Khater added that the experience strengthened communication and teamwork skills, in addition to learning new techniques that contributed to improving performance. She noted that competing against teams with higher levels and international experience presented a real challenge.

In a message to fellow students, al-Khater concluded by encouraging them not to hesitate in seizing available opportunities, emphasising that Qatar provides a supportive environment that encourages young people to engage in the international sports community.

Laila Hussain Zada, another student at QAD, said: "I felt very proud to be selected to participate. This experience helped me understand how I can continue to develop in future matches and championships, particularly in terms of my performance on the court."

Khalifa Mohammed al-Darwishi, a student at Qatar Academy Al Wakrah (QAW) and captain of the boys' volleyball team at QF Schools, said: "It was a valuable experience through which we learned a great deal from every match we played, whether in terms of playing style or how to handle different situations on the court, which helped us gain greater experience and improve our performance."

Mishal al-Muftah, a student at QAW, said: "My experience in China was a distinctive and rewarding one. We met students from different countries and gained new experiences both on and off the court. During the matches, we realised which skills we needed to develop, which helped us understand our strengths and the areas we could improve."



QF students take part in ISF World Schools Volleyball Championship in Shangluo, China.



## DDD, Slane House host sport, fashion and lifestyle pop-up

Doha Design District (DDD), in collaboration with Slane House, successfully concluded a three-day fashion and sports pop-up at the DDD Atrium.

The activation, held during the final week of the Arab Cup, brought together sport, lifestyle, design and culture, positioning the district as a platform for creative exchange and community engagement.

In a press statement, DDD director Dana Kazic said: "The pop-up demonstrated how design-led environments can bring people together through shared experiences and conversation. Our collaboration with Slane House and with many other entities, continue to activate spaces that celebrate creativity, support regional talent, and connect local and international perspectives at culturally significant moments for the city."

Slane House co-founder Nabil Guedioura said: "As a former professional football player, I've seen

firsthand how sport shapes culture and brings people together. With Slane House, we're creating a space where ideas cross disciplines, where sport meets design, and where young talent helps define what the future of lifestyle can look like."

Doha Design District shares this vision, and together we're building something meaningful for the region."

The pop-up opened with an exclusive VIP night, followed by two days open to the public, welcoming a diverse audience of designers, athletes, creatives, media and visitors. A key highlight of the activation was the exclusive pre-launch by FIFA 1904, which added an international sporting dimension and reinforced the event's role as a meeting point between global brands and regional creative voices. Throughout the three days, Slane House offered a curated environment in DDD that went beyond retail, creating a space for dialogue, discovery and collabora-

tion. Local and regional designers were spotlighted, while panel discussions and informal conversations explored the evolving relationship between sport, culture, and design.

Organisers noted that the activation encouraged interaction between brands, creators, and audiences, reflecting a shared commitment to community-centred cultural experiences. This collaboration amplified DDD's role as a connector between design, retail and lifestyle, providing platforms that support independent brands and emerging talent.

Set against the cultural and sporting significance of the Arab Cup, the pop-up became a timely cultural moment in Doha's calendar. Interactive installations, branded environments and media engagement opportunities enhanced the visitor experience, reinforcing DDD's position as a hub for design-led activations that encourage conversation, creativity and connection.

# HUAWEI FreeClip 2 Unveiled with Innovative C-bridge Design and Adaptive Open-ear listening

The HUAWEI FreeClip 2, officially unveiled on December 11, inherits the innovative C-bridge architecture of the previous generation, which blends beauty and technology into an iconic design. The new model is a lighter version of the open-ear bud with an improved fit, so you can securely wear it all day, without even noticing. The earbuds also pack a powerful dual-diaphragm driver, making listening smarter, more immersive, and more comfortable than ever.

HUAWEI FreeClip 2 can be pre ordered at HUAWEI Experience Stores in Place Vendôme, Doha Festival City, and Al Nasr, or through HUAWEI official online Store.

The HUAWEI FreeClip 2 is priced at QAR 649 with gifts worth to QAR 178 and 31% discount on the bundle offer.

### Enhanced style and comfort

The FreeClip 2 breaks new ground in design, serving as a fashion accessory as well as a listening device. The earbuds come in a range of stylish color schemes—Blue, White, and Black—each designed to offer a unique style. The Blue and White editions feature a fine-grained denim surface to evoke a sense of freedom and comfort.

These earbuds are as comfortable to wear as they are fashionable to flaunt, thanks to the enhanced C-bridge design, Comfort Bean, and Acoustics Ball. Each earbud weighs just 5.1 g, providing a near weightless listening experience. The earbuds' C-bridge is made of skin-friendly liquid silicone and a high-performance shape-memory alloy, which ensures a cloud-like, comfortable fit. With micrometer-level tuning based on over 10,000 ear samples worldwide, the Comfort Bean is lighter and smaller than that on previous earbuds, fitting snugly



### HUAWEI FreeClip 2

Pre-order Now QAR 649

12th Dec. 2025 - 04th Jan. 2026

FREE Gifts worth QAR 178

QAR 50 Case HUAWEI Lens Care

Up to 31% OFF Bundle Offer

in the ear without falling out. The Acoustics Ball has been enhanced as well, to deliver powerful sound from within a compact form.

### Adaptive open-ear listening

FreeClip 2 is bolstered by an NPU AI processor that provides 10 times the computing power. This supports next-level features like real-time awareness, adaptive volume, and adaptive voice enhancement, which ensure clear listening whether you're in a quiet room or a busy street. These tiny earbuds really pull their weight, with volume and bass that are 100% stronger, powered by a cutting-edge dual-diaphragm driver. They can accurately reproduce all the nuances produced by the artist, from delicate vocals to powerful percussion, and from booming bass to clear treble.

HUAWEI FreeClip 2 uses a three-mic call noise cancellation system and multi-channel DNN noise cancellation algorithms to ensure that calls remain clear on both ends. The NPU AI processor improves noise cancellation by filtering out background sounds and enhancing the caller's voice, to keep calls clear even in challenging environments. The reverse sound waves system minimizes sound leakage, to ensure that conversations remain private.

### Convenient features

The earbuds are interchangeable, with self-adaptive left-right audio, so you can wear either one in either ear. They are also IP57 dust and water-resistant, making them more than capable of handling the sweat, rain, and splashes you might encounter in daily life. And with 38 hours of battery with the charging case and 9 hours on a full charge, FreeClip 2 has the staying power to last through long journeys, meetings, and events.

**Aftermath of strikes in Gaza**

This picture taken from west of Jabalia in the Gaza Strip shows smoke rising after explosions carried out by the Israeli army inside the Green Line, northeast of Beit Lahia, yesterday.



A Palestinian woman stands with a child next to the rubble of destroyed buildings in the Jabalia refugee camp, in the northern Gaza Strip, yesterday.

**Qatar tops Arab world in health services****From Page 1**

The new clinic aims to provide advanced and comprehensive care for seniors through specialised therapeutic programmes that help improve muscle strength, increase mobility, and enhance balance.

In October 2025, HMC strengthened its regional and international leadership in the development of healthcare systems by organising the Middle East Forum on Person-Centred Care. The forum served as a pivotal platform for the exchange of global expertise and for highlighting the latest trends in delivering integrated, sustainable, and

human-centred health services.

Qatar's National Immunisation Programme has continued to achieve coverage rates exceeding 95% for most essential childhood vaccines, as the outcome of the success of preventive policies, the effectiveness of community awareness campaigns, and society's commitment to the importance of immunisation as the first line of defence against infectious diseases.

Besides, MoPH has developed a comprehensive five-year national action plan during 2025 aimed at strengthening monitoring and surveillance activities for various additives across all types of locally produced and imported

foods. As such, the ministry obtained renewed international accreditation from the American Accreditation Body for food inspection and sampling in accordance with the international standard ISO/IEC 17020, which enhances public confidence in the food control system.

On the digital transformation efforts, the launch of the LBAIH application has made a qualitative shift in managing the patient experience. The app enables patients to view their medical appointments, reschedule or cancel them, and access their health records, test results, and prescriptions, in addition to receiving alerts and reminders.

**Cabinet hails US strategic dialogue, Doha Declaration****From Page 1**

The Cabinet decided to approve a draft MoU on joint co-operation in the areas of training, capacity building and exchange of experiences for customs officials between the governments of Qatar and Turkmenistan.

The Cabinet concluded its meeting by reviewing

two reports and taking the appropriate measures in their regard.

The documents included a report on the outcomes of the visit in October of HE the Minister of Labour to Sweden, and a report on the outcomes of participation in the sixth session of the Qatar-Pakistan Joint Ministerial Commission for Economic, Trade, and Technical Co-operation in October in Islamabad. (QNA)

**Nigeria mosque bombing kills at least seven****AFP**  
Maiduguri

An explosion ripped through a mosque in the northeastern Nigerian city of Maiduguri and killed at least seven worshippers yesterday, witnesses and security sources said.

No armed groups immediately claimed responsibility for what anti-militant militia leader Babakura Kolo said was a suspected bombing.

Maiduguri is the capital of Borno state, home to a years-long insurgency by militant groups Boko Haram and an offshoot, Islamic State West Africa Province, though the city itself has not seen a major attack in years.

The bomb went off inside a crowded mosque in the city's Gamboru market, as Muslim faithful gathered for evening prayers, according to witnesses.

One of the leaders of the mosque, Malam Abuna Yusuf, put

the toll at eight dead, though officials have not yet released a casualty count.

Kolo said that seven were killed.

He said it was suspected that the bomb was placed inside the mosque and exploded midway into prayers, while some witnesses described a suicide bombing.

It was not immediately clear how many people were injured, though witness Isa Musa Yusha'u said: "I saw many victims being taken away for medical treatment."

Videos taken in the aftermath and seen by AFP showed a person covered in blood writhing on the ground, and what appeared to be bodies covered by a sheet.

Nigeria has been battling a militant insurgency since 2009 and the conflict has killed at least 40,000 and displaced around 2mn from their homes in the northeast, according to the UN.

Though the violence has waned since its peak a decade ago, it has split into neighbouring Niger,

Chad and Cameroon. And concerns are growing about a resurgence of violence in parts of the northeast, where insurgent groups remain capable of mounting deadly attacks despite years of sustained military operations.

Maiduguri itself - once the scene of nightly gun battles and bombings - has been calm in recent years, with the last major attack recorded in 2021.

But reminders of the conflict are never far off in the state capital, where major military operations are headquartered.

Military pick-ups lumber through town daily, their beds filled with soldiers whose helmets shield them from the hot afternoon sun.

Evening checkpoints are still in effect, even as markets that once closed in the early afternoon throng into the night.

Meanwhile, in the countryside, the insurgency continues to rage, with analysts warning of an uptick in militant violence this year.

**Rights group warns on worsening health of Palestinian prisoners****QNA**  
Ramallah

The health situation of the Palestinians languishing in the Israeli occupation's custody is deteriorating due to persistent medical negligence, severe shortages of medicines, and lack of medical follow-up, the Commission of Detainees and Ex-Detainees Affairs in Palestine reported in a statement yesterday.

The statement further explained that this situation has engendered numerous morbidities among the prisoners, with the commission's legal crew documenting an extremely complex humanitarian situation engulfing them in various Israeli dungeons.

Following field visits to these prisons, the statement highlighted that the situation reflected a harsh, dehu-

manised environment at the detention and interrogation sites, with repeated complaints reported about daily repression and intimidation, marked by dehumanised inspections and collective punishment, the statement warned. After the crew huddled with those prisoners, they complained about severe shortages of blankets and clothing, as well as being constantly bereft of familial visits and subjected to sudden relocation between sections in a repeated manner, which is manipulated as a vehicle for psychological pressure.

The Palestinian Prisoners' Media Office reported that the Israeli occupation has ramped up repression during December with prison units conducting campaigns throughout the month, marked by beatings and collective dehumanisation against the prisoners. It further noted heightened and harsh solitary confinements amid extreme cold and deprivation of basic life necessities.

**Libyans united in grief for army chief killed in crash****AFP**  
Tripoli

People on either side of the divide cutting through Libya grieved yesterday for the head of the country's armed forces, who was killed when his plane crashed in Turkey.

General Mohammed al-Haddad and his four aides died on Tuesday after a visit to Ankara, with Turkish officials saying an electrical failure caused their plane to crash less than 15 minutes after takeoff.

"It will be hard to find a man of his calibre," Nasreddine al-Maghribi told AFP at a cafe in Libyan capital Tripoli.

The father of six also directed several socially conscious documentaries about the situation of Palestinian citizens of Israel.

army", said Maghribi, who is in his sixties.

Libya has been divided since a NATO-backed revolt toppled and killed longtime leader Muammar Gaddafi in 2011.

Haddad had been the army's chief of general staff since August 2020.

In Tripoli, seat of the internationally recognised Government of National Unity (GNU), celebrations to mark Libya's independence day were cancelled.

Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah heads the GNU in the west, while commander Khalifa Haftar's administration runs the east. Both Dbeibah and Haftar have declared a three-day mourning period in the areas they control.

Civil society activist Nouri Ben Othman described Haddad as "an emblematic figure for our nation".

**Renowned Palestinian filmmaker Bakri dies**

Palestinian filmmaker Mohammed Bakri in a file picture.

lung problems, according to his family.

Bakri was born in Galilee in 1953 into a Muslim family.

He appeared in leading Israeli films but was also directed by the French-Greek director Costa-Gavras and Italian filmmakers Paolo and Vittorio Taviani.

His role as a Palestinian inmate in an Israeli prison in the 1980s film *Beyond the Walls* earned him critical acclaim in Israel and around the world.

But his international renown grew with the release of 2002's *Jenin, Jenin*, which denounced alleged Israeli war crimes in the Jenin refugee camp in the occupied West Bank during the Second Intifada.

The Israeli Supreme Court upheld a ban on the film in 2022, deeming it "defamatory".

The father of six also directed several socially conscious documentaries about the situation of Palestinian citizens of Israel.

**ANNOUNCEMENT**

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THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE FOR  
NATIONALITY AFFAIRS

within 15 days from the publication of this notice.



A recent photo shows police officers standing guard in front of supporters of Guinean leader Mamadi Doumbouya who hold campaign signs, as they wait for him to submit his candidacy at the Supreme Court ahead of the presidential election scheduled for December 28, in Conakry.

## Coup leader expected to stay in power in Guinea presidential vote

Reuters  
Conakry

**G**uinea coup leader Mamadi Doumbouya is expected to coast to victory in a presidential election on Sunday, buoyed by the launch of a long-awaited iron ore megamine and weak competition from a fragmented field of challengers.

Four years ago, Doumbouya, then a special forces commander, ousted President Alpha Conde in one of nine coups that have roiled West and Central Africa since 2020.

He initially vowed not to run for office, but a new constitution approved in September removed language that would have barred him and extended the presidential term from five to seven years.

Conde and longtime opposition leader Cellou Dalein Diallo are in exile and other potential challengers were disqualified for failing to submit required documents. That leaves eight challengers who are unlikely to give Doumbouya much trouble.

"Let's not kid ourselves: there can be no other opponent who can challenge him," said Guinean political analyst Bella Bah. "But that's not the most important thing. (After the election) the president needs to take a step back and realize that he now has to exercise power," Bah added, urging Doumbouya to engage in dialogue with actors beyond the military.

Political debate has been limited under Doumbouya, and civil society groups accuse his government of banning protests, curbing press freedom and restricting opposition activity.

### MINING MILESTONE

Guinea holds the world's largest reserves of bauxite and the richest untapped iron ore deposit at Simandou, which was officially launched last month.

Production at Simandou, originally scheduled for 1997, had been long delayed. Doumbouya's junta ordered development to be paused in 2022, saying it wanted to review how national interests would be safeguarded once it came online.

Simandou is central to Doumbouya's vision for Guinea: the country's national development strategy is called Simandou 2040.

Annual production at the 75% Chinese-owned project is expected to peak at some 120mn metric tons, and supporters say Doumbouya will ensure Guinea gets its share of the proceeds.

"Dear Guineans, Guinea is no longer for sale," government spokesperson Ousmane Gaoual Diallo declared at a campaign event this month. "Guinea is no longer up for grabs, Guinea is standing tall."

Doumbouya's transitional government also revoked EGA subsidiary Guinea Alumina Corporation's license after a refinery dispute, transferring its assets to a state-owned firm.

The turn towards resource nationalism – also seen in other countries in the region with military rulers, including Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger – has bolstered Doumbouya's popularity.

"The way politics was done before and now is different. We no longer have violent campaigns, but there is enthusiasm," said Conakry resident Mohamed Keita, 65.

"People are out in the field, everyone expresses their opinions without violence."

### WARMING REGIONAL TIES

The campaign has unfolded peacefully, though Doumbouya's tight grip means it is hardly a level playing field, said Gilles Yabi, founder of West African think tank WATHI.

"This is obviously a context that doesn't allow for any hope of a free and fair presidential election," Yabi said.

"The mere fact of holding a presidential election will not change the reality of power, which will remain primarily in the hands of the military."

Despite such concerns, the West African regional bloc Ecowas is sending observers, a sign of "growing rapprochement" even though Guinea has been formally suspended since the 2021 coup, consultancy Signal Risk said in a note.

About 6.7mn people are registered to vote, with provisional results expected within 48 hours of polls closing.

## Sellers under strain in Ivory Coast's struggling shea industry

AFP  
Korhogo

**W**ith nuts scarce as the shea season draws to a close, buyer Souleymane Sangare's warehouses in Ivory Coast's northern city of Korhogo are empty.

In a country where shea production is modest and largely based in the north, sellers made up for the shortfall by sourcing from Mali and Burkina Faso.

But last year, the neighbouring countries – among the world's top shea crop producers – halted shea nut exports to boost local production.

The shea tree is a symbol of the dry African savannah. Its fruit contains a nut that women collect and sell raw, or process into butter for skincare or the food industry.

"Since they suspended exports, it has been hard to get nuts. And on top of that, this year Ivorian production has not been profitable enough," said Sangare, a buyer at Korhogo market and vice-president of the Ivorian Shea Network.

Gone are the mountains of nuts in his two warehouses – only a few sacks remain this year.

"I normally have between



Women rely on making a living from shea at the Chigata co-operative near Korhogo.

3,500 and 4,000 tonnes of nuts per season. This year, I haven't even managed 500 tonnes, two months after the start of the season" from mid-August to October, he said.

In January, Ivory Coast also suspended exports of its nuts to secure supply for its own industry.

"We can't criticise other countries for doing the same," Mamadou Berte, head of the Cotton, Cashew and Shea Council, said.

Korhogo is home to the country's first modern shea butter processing plant.

"I signed a contract to supply nuts to this plant, but I'm struggling to meet it because I can't find enough," Sangare said.

Togo and Nigeria have also frozen raw nut exports. Ghana, for its part, plans a gradual ban starting in 2026.

Those decisions, combined with strong global demand – driven by shea butter's use as a cheaper alternative to cocoa butter – have left the west African market under strain, according to consultancy N'Kalo.

As a result, prices have soared, while trade has faltered.

In Ivory Coast, the minimum farmgate price of 250 CFA francs (\$0.44) per kilo has climbed to 350 CFA. Factory prices sit at 305 CFA per kilo now range between 386 and 400 CFA, N'Kalo noted at the end of November.

## US signs health pacts with African nations, warns against failure

Reuters  
Washington

**T**he US has signed four new global health memorandums of understanding (MoUs) with Madagascar, Sierra Leone, Botswana, and Ethiopia, which total nearly \$2.3bn in funding, the State Department said.

The Trump administration unveiled its "America First Global Health Strategy" in September, a new approach to overseas aid that seeks to improve target countries' self-reliance in managing their health sectors.

"Each MoU includes clear benchmarks, strict timelines, and consequences for non-perform-

ance – ensuring US assistance delivers results against priority disease threats and reduces long-term dependence on US assistance," the State Department said in a statement. "Across the four MoUs, which total nearly \$2.3bn, the United States has committed almost \$1.4bn, with recipient countries co-investing more than \$900mn of their own resources."

The US embassy in Ivory Coast's commercial capital Abidjan said a signing of a five-year health cooperation memorandum between the two countries was scheduled for Thursday.

The MoU is aimed at strengthening disease detection and health worker capacity, the embassy said, adding that the State Department

planned to provide up to 273bn CFA francs (\$491mn) in health support, while Ivory Coast commits to increasing its national funding to 252bn CFA francs.

Earlier this month, the US signed a five-year health cooperation agreement with Eswatini to provide up to \$205mn for investments in health data collection, disease monitoring and response and HIV prevention and treatment.

Eswatini, in turn, will increase domestic health spending by \$37mn during the five-year period.

The US has also signed health co-operation agreements with Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and Lesotho.

## Ghana police arrest dozens of Nigerians over online fraud ring

AFP  
Accra

**G**hanaian police and security authorities have arrested nearly 50 Nigerians in a sting operation against online scammers, Accra said yesterday.

A nighttime raid on the outskirts of the capital "resulted in the arrest of 48 suspected cyber-crime operatives... believed to be Nigerian nationals", information minister Sam George said.

Nigeria, home to a bustling fintech sector, also has a reputation

for Internet fraudsters known in local slang as "Yahoo Boys".

At the same time, Nigeria itself has also become a target for foreign scammers, with a massive raid in Lagos last year leading to the arrest of 792 people, 148 of whom were Chinese nationals.

Those arrested in Ghana – 46 men and two women – are accused of conducting "romance scams, online investment fraud, impersonation schemes and illicit online gold trading," George said in a post on X.

Ghana has tightened gold trade regulations – including by re-

stricting purchases by foreigners – this year as part of reforms trying to rein in informal mining that has ravaged the environment.

Within Ghana, online scams have become popular among young people who say they have few other economic prospects.

Earlier this year, AFP documented Accra's tech-savvy teens turning to phishing scams and setting up fake online stores to rack up thousands of cedis in just a few hours.

In the raid, police recovered 54 laptops, 39 mobile phones and a Starlink Internet kit.

## Travel frenzy in Nairobi



Passengers sit on their luggage as they wait for buses to travel to the countryside ahead of Christmas holiday celebrations, from the main bus terminal in downtown Nairobi, Kenya, yesterday.

## Somali migrants in Yemen long to return home

AFP  
Aden

**I**n makeshift homes lacking even the most basic necessities surrounded by piles of rubbish and flanked by dirt roads, thousands of Somalis in Yemen live in poverty in Aden's "Little Mogadishu".

At the Chigata co-operative in Natio-Kobadara, near Korhogo, dozens of women toiled under a blazing sun to make butter.

Sacks of nuts were stacked in the yard, while mills whirred nonstop, churning out dense, chocolate-coloured shea paste.

"Last year, we sold a kilo of shea butter for between 4,000 and 4,500 CFA francs – that's something we have never seen in our lifetimes," said Noulourou Assiata Soro, secretary general of the co-operative, which brings together more than 120 women.

She lamented, though, the lack of market outlets for their products. However, "when it's expensive, the market is slow," said Tenin Silue, 49, who has been selling shea butter at Korhogo market for 10 years.

The 150-kilo sack of nuts that the co-operative used to buy for 60,000 CFA francs now costs 70,000, according to Soro.

The upward trend in the prices is expected to continue in the coming months, marking the end of the harvest season in the west African shea market, where the supply of nuts remains very limited, according to N'Kalo.

"Some days we eat, some days it's up to God. That's life," said Abdullah Omar, a 29-year-old Somali father of four in Aden.

Over a year ago, Omar decided to take his chances, shellacking out \$500 to traffickers to board a boat with his family in hopes of escaping Somalia's instability and finding a better life abroad.

But in Yemen, it has only been

misery. To survive, Omar washed cars, making the equivalent of just a few dollars a day.

After years working in construction in Mogadishu, Omar had hoped to find better conditions and pay in Yemen – where he had passed through as a teenager en route to Saudi Arabia.

But that was before years of civil war killed hundreds of thousands of civilians, destroyed vast amounts of infrastructure and left the country effectively partitioned between the Houthi fighters and Yemen's internationally recognised government.

"Here I have nothing," he said, while explaining his decision to enrol in a UN programme that paved the way for his repatriation to Somalia. "There's no work, no money and no schooling for the children."

Despite the poor conditions roughly 17,000 Africans arrived in Yemen in October, mostly from nearby Djibouti and Somalia, an increase of 99% from the month prior, according to the UN.

Somalis make up about 63% of the 61,000 registered refugees and asylum seekers in Yemen, UN data shows. Across Aden, where unemployment is already staggeringly high among Yemenis, African migrants are hard-pressed to gain a foothold. Nearly 19.5mn people in Yemen – more than half its population – are in need of humanitarian aid, including 4.8mn internally displaced people, according to early 2025 UN data.



# Top court blocks Trump's National Guard deployment in Chicago

**AFP**  
Washington, US

The US Supreme Court dealt a blow to President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown by blocking his deployment of National Guard troops in Chicago.

The conservative-dominated

court kept in place for now a lower court order barring the deployment of troops on the streets of the city in the midwestern state of Illinois.

"At this preliminary stage, the government has failed to identify a source of authority that would allow the military to execute the laws in Illinois," the court said in an unsigned order. Three con-

servative justices - Samuel Alito, Clarence Thomas and Neil Gorsuch - dissented.

The Republican president has sent National Guard troops to three Democratic-led cities this year - Los Angeles, Washington and Memphis - but his efforts to deploy soldiers in Portland and Chicago have been tied up in the courts.

White House spokeswoman Abigail Jackson, reacting to the court ruling, said the president "activated the National Guard to protect federal law enforcement officers, and to ensure rioters did not destroy federal buildings and property." "Nothing in the ruling detracts from that core agenda," Jackson said. J B Pritzker, the Democratic governor of Illinois,

who strongly opposed the deployment along with the Democratic mayor of Chicago, welcomed the ruling, calling it a "big win for Illinois and American democracy." After two lower courts blocked Trump from sending troops into Chicago, his administration made an emergency appeal to the Supreme Court.

In his filing with the top court,

solicitor general John Sauer claimed federal agents in Chicago were being "forced to operate under the constant threat of mob violence."

The court order blocking deployment of the National Guard "improperly impinges on the president's authority and needlessly endangers federal personnel and property," Sauer added.

# Democrats urge Trump to reverse mass ambassador recalls

**Reuters**  
Washington

Democratic senators yesterday urged President Donald Trump to reverse a recall of nearly 30 career ambassadors, warning the move leaves a dangerous leadership vacuum that allows adversaries like Russia and China to expand their influence.

The Trump administration in recent days has ordered career diplomats serving across Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America back to Washington to ensure US missions abroad reflect its "America First" priorities.

The state department did not indicate how or when it would replace the ambassadors. A senior department official on Monday said the recalls were "a standard process in any administration."

But the 10 Democrats on the Senate foreign relations committee who penned the letter to Trump said the abrupt mass recalls were an "unprecedented move" that no other administration has undertaken since Congress established the modern Foreign Service a century ago and that there was no plan to replace the envoys with qualified candidates.

The removals bring the number of empty US ambassadorial posts to well over 100, about half of all such posts worldwide, the senators said in their letter. They said 80 posts had been vacant before the decision.

"As the over 100 US embassies lacking senior leadership await

a new US ambassador, China, Russia and others will maintain regular communications with the foreign leaders that we will have effectively abandoned, allowing our adversaries to expand their reach and influence to limit, and even harm, US interests," Democrats said in their letter.

The White House referred questions on the letter to the state department. A spokesperson for the department did not address questions on the contents of the letter but accused Democrats of blocking ambassadors' appointments.

"Senate Democrats engaged in unprecedented obstruction of President Trump's nominees, including ambassadors and other senior diplomats," the spokesperson said.

Republicans, who control the Senate, changed the rules in September in response to what they say was Democrats slowing the installation of Trump's picks to many government positions.

In yesterday's letter, the Democratic senators, who included Senate foreign relations committee ranking member Jeanne Shaheen as well as Chris Murphy and others, provided examples of how Washington would lack top-level US presence in crucial locations as Beijing and Moscow make inroads.

In regions from the Indo-Pacific to Africa and the Balkans as well as Latin America, Washington would be on the back foot countering China's expanding economic reach, the senators said. The recall leaves the US without a high-level presence in more than half of the countries

in sub-Saharan Africa. "These ambassadors have demonstrated their commitment to faithfully execute the policies of administrations of both parties for decades," the senators said. "We urge you to reverse this decision immediately before more damage is done to America's standing in the world."

Political appointees leave their posts when a new administration takes office but career diplomats, while serving at the pleasure of the president, are often considered bipartisan and typically serve three to four years in their overseas posts regardless of a change in government.

But Trump has long been suspicious of the bureaucracy and has repeatedly pledged to "clean out the deep state" by firing bureaucrats whom he deems disloyal and placing loyalists in senior roles.

In February, Trump ordered

Secretary of State Marco Rubio to

revamp the US foreign service to

ensure that the Republican president's foreign policy is faithfully implemented.

In July, the Trump administration fired more than 1,300 state department diplomats and civil servants as Washington grappled with multiple crises on the world stage: Russia's war in Ukraine, the almost two-year-long Gaza conflict, and the Middle East on edge due to high tension between Israel and Iran.

The department's workforce reduction in the US totalled roughly 3,000 after deferred resignations and early retirements, accounting for more than 11% of its total foreign and civil service officers.



Firefighters work at the site after a gas explosion caused a partial building collapse at the Silver Lake Nursing Home in Bristol, Pennsylvania, US.

# Two killed, 20 hurt in fire at Pennsylvania nursing home

**Reuters**  
Bristol, Pennsylvania

A pair of explosions and a fire, apparently sparked by leaking gas, ripped through a nursing home near Philadelphia, killing a female employee and a resident, and injuring 20 people, officials said.

All residents and staff of the Silver Lake Nursing Home in Bristol Township, about 33km northeast of Philadelphia, have now been accounted for and the injured taken to local hospitals, police chief Charles Winik said.

Winik said people had been feared missing for a number of hours as flames and blasts gutted

the nursing home. Fire Marshal Kevin Dippolito said numerous patients and staff were initially trapped inside a demolished portion of the building.

Dippolito said the first firefighters arriving on the scene, some from a fire-and-rescue station across the street, encountered "a major structural collapse" with part of the building's first floor crumbling into the basement below.

He said numerous victims were extricated from debris, blocked stairwells and stuck elevators, while firefighters ventured into the collapsed basement zone and pulled at least two more people to safety before retreating amid lingering gas fumes.

"We got everyone out that we could, that we could find, that we could see, and we exited the building," Dippolito said. "Within approximately 15 to 30 seconds of us exiting the building, knowing there was a heavy odour of natural gas around us, there was another explosion and fire."

The front of the structure appeared to have been blasted away from the inside, but the majority of the facility remained standing, though most of its windows were shattered, according to a Reuters photographer on the scene.

News footage from WPVI-TV, an ABC News affiliate, showed roaring flames and smoke billowing from the crippled building shortly after the first explosion.

## Mexico releases water to US



Mexico opened the floodgates of the El Cuchillo Dam to send water through the San Juan River to the US to settle its water debt under the 1944 Water Treaty, which requires delivery of 1.75mn acre-feet of Rio Grande Basin water to the US every five years, in China, Nuevo Leon state, Mexico.

## Court upholds \$100,000 fee to process US tech visas

**AFP**  
Washington, US

A US federal judge has upheld President Donald Trump's \$100,000 fee to process H-1B visa applications, acknowledging it could "inflict significant harm on American businesses and institutions of higher education."

In a 56-page opinion, US district judge Beryl Howell wrote that the president has "broad statutory authority" to address "a problem he perceives to be a matter of economic and national security."

The \$100,000 application fee announced in September gave companies just 36 hours notice before it went into effect, triggering chaos and confusion over how it would work and who would be hit.

The H-1B fee is part of a larger immigration crackdown by Trump, who has unleashed a massive push against migrants

since returning to the White House - though until now it had not targeted the visa on which Silicon Valley relies heavily.

Trump argued that the H-1B visa system was being abused to replace American workers with people willing to work for less money.

The US awards 85,000 H-1B visas per year on a lottery system. India accounts for around three-quarters of the recipients.

Tech entrepreneurs - including Trump's former ally Elon Musk - have warned against targeting H-1B visas, saying that the US does not have enough homegrown talent to fill important tech sector job vacancies.

The lawsuit was brought by the US Chamber of Commerce, a pro-business lobbying group, and the Association of American Universities, which represents 69 US-based research universities.

Together, the plaintiffs claimed the affected workers "contribute enormously to American productivity, prosperity and innovation."

# US Coast Guard 'lacks forces to seize Venezuela-linked tanker for now'

**Reuters**  
Washington/London

The US Coast Guard is waiting for additional forces to arrive before potentially attempting to board and seize a Venezuela-linked oil tanker it has been pursuing since Sunday, a US official and a source familiar with the matter said.

The ship, which maritime groups have identified as the Bella 1, has refused to be boarded by the Coast Guard. That means that the task will likely fall to one of just two teams of specialists - known as Maritime Security Response Teams

- who can board vessels under these circumstances, including by rappelling from helicopters.

The days-long pursuit highlights the mismatch between the Trump administration's desire to seize sanctioned oil tankers near Venezuela and the limited resources of the agency that is mainly carrying out operations, the Coast Guard.

Unlike the US Navy, the Coast Guard can carry out law enforcement actions, including boarding and seizing vessels that are under US sanctions.

Trump earlier this month ordered a "blockade" of all sanctioned oil tankers entering and leaving Venezuela, in Washington's latest move

to increase pressure on Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.

The Coast Guard has in recent weeks seized two oil tankers near Venezuela. After the first seizure, on December 10, US attorney general Pam Bondi posted a 45-second video showing two helicopters approaching a vessel and armed individuals in camouflage rappelling onto it.

A Saturday social media post by the department of homeland security, which oversees the Coast Guard, showed what appeared to be Coast Guard officers aboard the Gerald Ford aircraft carrier getting ready to depart and seize the Centuries tanker, the second of the

ships boarded by the US.

A US official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the Coast Guard officials on the Ford were from a Maritime Security Response Team and at the time too far from Bella 1 to carry out a boarding operation.

"There are limited teams who are trained for these types of boardings," said Corey Ranslem, chief executive of maritime security group Dryad Global and previously with the US Coast Guard.

The department of homeland security did not immediately respond to a request for comment and Reuters could not determine what, if any other reasons, have led to the

Coast Guard not seizing the vessel yet.

The administration could ultimately choose to not board and seize the vessel.

The White House said that the US was still in "active pursuit of a sanctioned dark fleet vessel that is part of Venezuela's illegal sanctions evasion."

The US Coast Guard is a branch of the armed forces but a part of the department of homeland security.

The US has assembled a massive military force in the Caribbean, including an aircraft carrier, fighter jets and other warships. Ospreys and additional MC-130J Commando II aircraft arrived in Aguadilla,

Puerto Rico in recent days, according to a separate source.

The Coast Guard has far fewer resources in place. The service has long said that it lacks the resources to effectively carry out a growing list of missions, including search and rescue operations and drug seizures.

In November, the Coast Guard announced that it had seized about 49,000 pounds of drugs worth more than \$362mn in the eastern Pacific.

"The Coast Guard is in a severe readiness crisis that is decades in the making," Admiral Kevin Lunday, who leads the Coast Guard, told lawmakers in June.

# India simplifies import checks as it eyes US trade deal

Reuters  
New Delhi

India's government yesterday announced reforms to cut red tape and simplify its import quality checks, addressing a con-

cern raised by the US over what it described as the South Asian country's "burdensome" import-quality requirements.

New Delhi and Washington have been working to thrash out a trade agreement, which India hopes will bring relief from a 50%

tariff imposed by President Donald Trump on some of its main exports as punishment for its Russian oil purchases.

The reforms on import checks include reduced paperwork, shorter timelines, and fewer inspections for quality approvals, the trade

ministry said in a statement. "The reforms aim to accelerate processes, reduce turnaround times, and leverage technology-driven systems to make quality assurance faster, more transparent, and more accessible for enterprises, institutions, and citizens," said Jaxay

Shah, the chairman of the Quality Council of India.

India expects to secure a trade deal with the US before the end of this year as most issues have been resolved, New Delhi's trade secretary said on November 28.

Earlier this month, US Presi-

dent Donald Trump said that talks with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had been going well. Trump's administration has pressured India to reduce oil purchases from Russia and to bring down tariffs including across sensitive sectors like agriculture.

# Lilly and Novo lock horns in India's obesity drug race

Reuters  
Hyderabad, India

Global pharma giants Eli Lilly and Novo Nordisk are scrambling to cement their lead in India's booming obesity drug market before cheaper generic versions hit shelves in March next year.

Novo's strategy emphasises price cuts and accelerated launches, while Lilly's products benefited from hitting the market early. Both companies focused on aggressive outreach to doctors, heavier advertising about obesity, tie-ups with clinics, patient incentives and distribution deals with local drugmakers, according to doctors, analysts, medical representatives, patients and distributors.

Lilly has even teamed up in India with well-known Bollywood actors in a social media ad campaign about obesity.

India, projected to have the world's second-largest overweight or obese population by 2050 in absolute numbers, is becoming a key battleground for obesity drugs. Analysts expect the global market for such drugs to hit \$150bn a year by the end of this decade. Although the US remains the largest market for obesity drugs, early sales figures in India show rapid uptake, even though most patients in the world's most populous nation pay for the medication out-of-pocket.

"We believe that this market can be more than \$1bn within

two years," said Shrikant Akolkar, vice-president at research firm Nuvama Institutional Equities.

Data analytics firm Pharmarack said in July that the market was estimated to be worth Rs6.28bn (\$70.23mn) at present, growing fivefold since 2021.

US drugmaker Lilly's Mounjaro, approved for diabetes and weight loss in India, became the top-selling therapy by value in October, with sales doubling within months of its March launch, outpacing Danish drugmaker Novo's Wegovy, which entered the Indian market in June.

"We realised just after a couple of months that for accessibility, we had to take a price cut," said Vikrant Shrotriya, Novo Nordisk's managing director in India, referring to Wegovy's price cut in November. Shrotriya spoke earlier this month while launching Novo Nordisk's blockbuster diabetes drug, Ozempic, in the country.

Ozempic, a once-weekly injection approved by the US drug regulator in 2017 for Type 2 diabetes, became a global bestseller and is widely used off-label for weight loss due to its appetite-suppressing effects.

More than 20 Indian drugmakers, including Dr Reddy's, Cipla, Sun Pharma, Zydus and Lupin, plan to launch cheaper versions of Novo's weight-loss drug in India once its patent on semaglutide, the active ingredient in Wegovy and Ozempic, expires in March 2026.

Analysts expect generic drugs to cost about 60% less, intensi-

fying the fight - particularly for Novo - for dominance in India's price-sensitive market.

Shrotriya played down concerns over looming patent expiries, saying Novo will focus on quality, trust and affordability rather than on patents or competition in India.

Lilly's Mounjaro has quickly gained traction in India. A 2.5mg Mounjaro KwikPen costs about Rs13,125 (\$146.79) for a month's usage, with the highest 15mg dose going up to Rs25,781 (\$288.33).

In response, Novo cut the price of Wegovy in India by up to 37% in November, pricing its lowest dose of 0.25 mg at Rs10,850 (\$121.34) for a one-month pack. It launched Ozempic last week for a monthly price of Rs8,800 (\$98.42) for 0.25mg.

While Wegovy is catching up, Mounjaro's early launch helped it penetrate the market, and the latter drug's claim of offering greater weight loss makes it a popular choice among patients, said five doctors who spoke with Reuters.

"Mounjaro clearly has first-strike advantage and continues to have strong demand, but price-sensitive patients are reassessing alternatives," said Dr Anoop Misra, an endocrinologist and executive chairman of Fortis C-DOC Hospital. Mounjaro also differentiates itself by targeting people with severe obesity, said Vishal Manchanda, analyst at Systematic Institutional Equities. He added that Lilly faces no immediate pressure to cut prices, given its strong position.

## Meat auction



Workers sell off cuts of meat including joints of beef during a traditional auction at Smithfield meat market in the city of London, yesterday.

# Bangladesh leader set to return from exile today

Reuters  
Dhaka

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party aims to gather 5mn supporters to welcome its leader Tarique Rahman home from nearly 17 years in exile today, a show of strength as he emerges as a leading contender for prime minister in February elections.

Rahman, 60, is the son of ailing former prime minister Khaleda Zia and acting chairman of the party that is widely expected to come out on top in the parlia-

mentary vote set for February 12.

His return from London comes as his BNP is on the ascendant following the ouster of its arch foe, long-time prime minister Sheikh Hasina, in a student-led uprising last year. Apart from brief transition administrations, Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina have alternated in power since 1991.

A December survey by the US-based International Republican Institute suggests the BNP is on course to win the largest number of parliamentary seats, with the Islamist Jamaat-e-Islami party also in the race. Hasina's Awami

League party, which has been barred from the election, has threatened unrest that some fear could jeopardise the vote.

Rahman's decision to return is driven by both political developments and personal circumstances. His mother has been seriously ill for months, prompting what party insiders describe as an urgent trip home.

BNP leaders said they are preparing for what they call an "unprecedented" gathering in the capital, aiming to draw more than 5mn supporters along the route from the airport to the reception venue.

# India space agency launches its heaviest satellite

India's space agency launched its heaviest ever payload yesterday, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi calling the deployment "a significant stride" for the space sector.

The LVM3-M6 rocket launched the US-built AST SpaceMobile communications satellite into low-Earth orbit.

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) said yesterday that the rocket was the "heaviest payload to be launched from Indian soil".

The launch is a boost for India's ambitious low-cost space programme, with plans for an uncrewed orbital mission and human spaceflight in the coming years.

The satellite, weighing 6,100kgs, was launched on a modified version of a rocket that India plans to use for its future space missions.

India is vying for a larger slice of the booming commercial satellite business as phone, internet and other companies seek expanded and more high-end communications.

Modi said the launch marked "a proud milestone in India's space journey".

"It strengthens India's heavy-lift launch capability and reinforces our growing role in the global commercial launch market," he said in a statement.

Earlier this year, ISRO launched the CMS-03 communication satellite, which weighs about 4,410kgs.

For these heavy launches, India has deployed an upgraded version of the rocket it used to send an unmanned craft to the Moon in August 2023.

The world's most populous nation has flexed its spacefaring ambitions in the last decade with its space programme growing considerably, and rivalling the achievements of established powers at a much cheaper price tag.

It has said it plans to launch an uncrewed orbital mission before its first human spaceflight in 2027.

Modi has also announced plans to send an astronaut to the Moon by 2040. — Reuters



# Thailand, Cambodia hold talks on resuming ceasefire

Reuters  
Bangkok/Phnom Penh

Military officials from Thailand and Cambodia yesterday began talks, both countries said, days after the neighbours agreed to discuss resumption of a ceasefire after 16 days of fierce border clashes that have killed at least 86 people. The talks come two days after a special meeting in Kuala Lumpur of Southeast Asian foreign ministers convened to try to salvage a truce first brokered by ASEAN chair Malaysia and US President Donald Trump after a previous round of clashes in July.

Thai defence ministry spokesman Rear Admiral Surasant Kongsiri said yesterday's meeting of the general border committee would last three days and could pave the way for an agreement.

The talks were held at a border checkpoint towards the southern

end of their 817km frontier.

"If the secretariat meeting goes smoothly and leads to an agreement, then there will be a meeting between the defence ministers of the two countries on December 27," Surasant told reporters.

Cambodian defence ministry spokeswoman Maly Socheata said the talks began at 4.30pm local time, led by generals from both sides. The meeting is the most significant step since fighting re-erupted and follows separate, unsuccessful efforts by Malaysia, China and the US to bring the two countries to the table.

Cambodia and Thailand have each accused the other of aggression and violations of an enhanced ceasefire reached in October in Malaysia in Trump's presence, during which they committed to demining and withdrawing troops and heavy weapons from areas over which sovereignty has been contested bitterly for decades.

# Australian state passes tougher gun, protest law

Reuters  
Sydney

Australia's most populous state yesterday passed sweeping new gun and anti-terror rules following the mass shooting on Bondi Beach, tightening firearm ownership, banning public display of terror symbols and strengthening police power to curb protests.

The New South Wales state parliament passed the Terrorism and Other Legislation Amendment Bill early morning after the

upper house approved the bill by 18 votes to eight during an emergency sitting.

Premier Chris Minns said not all residents of New South Wales would support the tough reforms but his government was doing everything possible to keep people safe, in the wake of the December 14 shooting, where 15 people were killed and dozens wounded.

"Sydney and New South Wales has changed forever as a result of that terrorist activity," Minns told reporters.

The bill passed the lower house

on Tuesday with support from the governing centre-left Labor and the opposition Liberal party. The rural-focused National Party, the Liberal's junior coalition partner, opposed the gun reforms arguing the ownership caps would unfairly disadvantage farmers.

The Bondi Beach gun attack, Australia's deadliest in almost three decades, prompted calls for stricter gun laws.

Under the new gun laws, which Minns described as the toughest in Australia, individual licences will be capped at four, while

farmers will be permitted to own up to 10 guns.

Gun club membership will be mandatory for all firearms licence holders.

Police will be granted more powers to impose restrictions on protests for up to three months after a declared terror attack.

Public display of flags and symbols of prohibited militant organisations has been outlawed and offenders will be jailed for up to two years or fined A\$22,000 (\$14,742).

Minns added that hateful statements used to vilify and in-

timidate people must be banned.

Police believe the two alleged gunmen were inspired by the Islamic State. Sajid Akram, 50, was shot dead by police, while his 24-year-old son Naveed has been charged with 59 offences, including murder and terrorism.

Activist groups have condemned the law and signalled plans for a constitutional challenge. In a statement, they said it would file a legal challenge against what they described as "draconian anti-protest laws" rushed through the state parliament. "It is clear that the (state)

government is exploiting the horrific Bondi attack to advance a political agenda that suppresses political dissent and curtails democratic freedoms," the groups said.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has also vowed a crackdown on hate speech, with his centre-left federal government planning to introduce legislation to make it easier to prosecute those promoting hatred and violence, and to cancel or deny visas to people involved in hate speech. Albanese has proposed a gun buyback plan as well.

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**GULF TIMES**

## How German engineers are building future-proof forests

Once visitors who braved the 200 steps of the Lormecke-Turm tower in Germany's Arnsberg forest park would be rewarded with a stunning view across a dense canopy of giant Norwegian spruce.

Now all they see from the 35m viewing tower is a denuded plateau. The trees have gone, struck down after a devastating infestation of bark beetles in 2018.

The "calamity", as experts call it, happened so fast that 60-year-old trees were lost in just weeks here in the forest, a paradise for nature-lovers in North Rhine-Westphalia, along Germany's border with the Netherlands and Belgium.

"It's shocking for me and every forester," said Petra Trompeter, who works for Arnsberg city's forestry department, squinting through the low winter sun from the base of the tower. The foundations for mass dieback were laid over many years as storms and drought created the perfect conditions for the bark beetles to devour row-upon-row of spruce trees.

Foresters know that worse might yet be to come as global warming reaches above 1.5C above the 1850-1900 pre-industrial period, with 2024 confirmed as the first year to breach this level, according to the World Meteorological Organisation.

In a hotter world, climate change-related disasters are expected to increase in frequency and intensity, threatening forests' ability to absorb carbon, as well as thousands of jobs in the tourism and timber sectors.

In May, Germany's independent Expert Council on Climate Issues said the country could miss post-2030 climate targets as forests and wetlands shift from functioning as carbon sinks to become sources of emissions due to forest degradation.

### Forest engineers use biodiversity to future-proof forests; Spruce plantations vulnerable to climate change, pests; Financial challenges hinder long-term forest restoration

Now, forest engineers are working on ways to future-proof forests in North Rhine-Westphalia under a European Union-funded scheme that includes mixing tree varieties to build resilience.

Fast-growing spruce plantations sprung up in Germany after World War II as a way to pay off some reparations owed to Allied Forces by harvesting timber.

Timber producers have continued to favour the species for its quick uniform growth.

But these single-species plantations have made North Rhine-Westphalia's forests particularly vulnerable to heat, drought and pests.

"It's high-risk forestry," Siim Kureoso, a campaigner with Fern, a Dutch forest protection NGO, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

If everything goes right, there are good returns, but when mass tree losses occur due to extreme weather, they are viewed as "inevitable".

Diversification is seen as a solution, and it is being trialled across Europe.

Under the 20mn-euro SUPERB project, led by the European Forest Institute and funded under the EU's Green Deal, forestry experts have set up 12 demonstration sites from Sweden to Spain, including in Arnsberg, to restore habitats and transform monocultures.

The Arnsberg site covers 34 hectares of public and private land. Forestry experts carefully selected a mix of four species of conifers and broad leaf trees that they believe could adapt to the altitude and climate and withstand the hotter, drier conditions likely in the future.

Trees also play critical role in the economy, supplying 76mn cu m of timber every year, 750,000 jobs in forestry and timber, as well as boosting rural economies through eco-tourism, according the German Agriculture Ministry.

The hilly Sauerland region of North Rhine-Westphalia is a popular destination for hikers, but the mass dieback made the area unrecognisable for some visitors, said Rouven Soyka, press officer for the Sauerland Tourism board.

"Nature tourism is affected in every way. We are a classic outdoor region, it's important to have intact nature."

But many forest owners cannot afford reforestation without state subsidies, which do not cover all costs. At the Jungermann tree nursery, owner Peter Jungermann, says he has to think twice before investing in growing more high-maintenance broad leaf varieties over market-friendly conifers, especially given financial pressure on forest owners.

And it is not clear yet how much money will be allocated to forest restoration in the 2028-2034 EU budget, worth 2tn euros (\$2.35tn). Negotiations will be held over the next two years. Germany's 2026 budget prioritises defence and infrastructure spending as the government attempts to revive the sluggish economy.

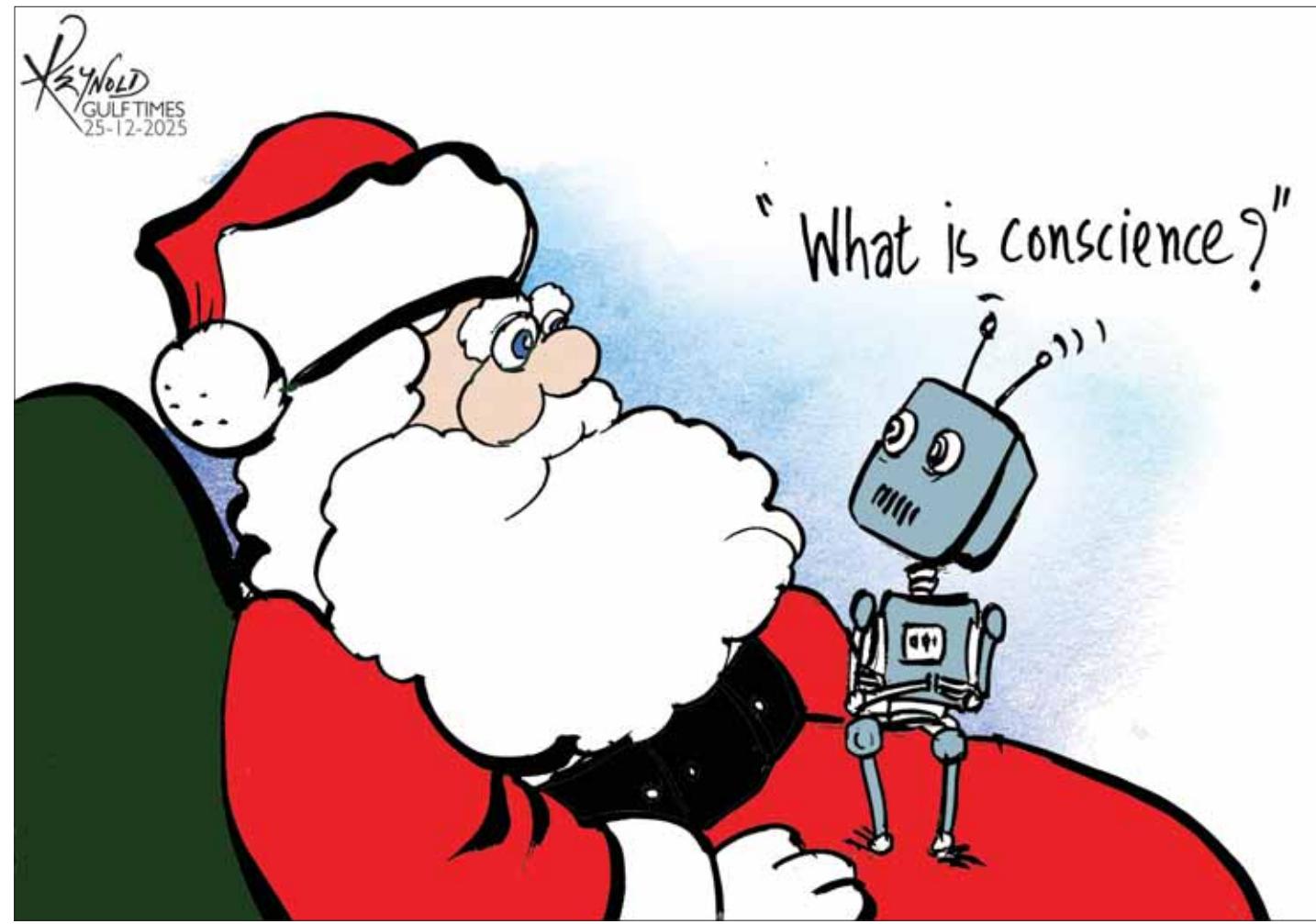
"Forests are the basis of life for us humans, for the entire planet," said Trompeter. "Where else should it be spent than to preserve nature and make it climate-resilient?" — Thomson Reuters Foundation

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## How the Fed became a lender of immediate resort

By Amit Seru

Stanford

The greatest threat to the independence of the US Federal Reserve does not come from President Donald Trump's attacks or a Supreme Court ruling that might expand his authority. It is the Fed's longer-term shift from lender of last resort to lender of immediate resort. Without a clear distinction between temporary liquidity support and protection for insolvent institutions, the Fed's independence turns into a hostage of weak institutions and authorities' reluctance to admit supervisory failure.

With each successive crisis over the past decade and a half, from 2007-08 to the 2020 Covid-19 shock and the mid-size bank turmoil of 2023, the Fed has steadily expanded the scope and scale of its interventions. What began as emergency liquidity support has become a recurring feature of financial-market management.

When every disruption is said to generate "spillovers" and every balance-sheet wobble prompts intervention, the distinction between containing panics and propping up failing institutions collapses, and with it goes the discipline that keeps moral hazard in check. At that point, independence can no longer enforce restraint; it merely shields open-ended emergency measures.

The benchmark for central-bank restraint was set by Walter Bagehot more than a century ago: lend early and freely, but only to solvent institutions, against good collateral, and at a penalty rate. Under this elegant framework, the

central bank supplies liquidity, the fiscal authority provides capital, and markets impose accountability. Viable institutions are insulated from liquidity panics, while insolvent ones are restructured or shut down.

That framework endured so long as the boundaries between regulated banks and the rest of the financial system were clearly defined, and the line between liquidity and solvency was easier to draw. Modern crises have made it harder to sustain the latter distinction, as sharp asset-price declines can quickly undermine institutions that appear stable.

With non-bank entities increasingly performing bank-like functions without comparable oversight, the Fed extended its reach in 2008 and again in 2020, broadening collateral standards and creating new lending facilities on the fly. By the time the pandemic hit, interventions once considered extraordinary had become routine. While each step may have been defensible in isolation, together they pushed the Fed beyond the limits that preserved its legitimacy.

Whereas illiquidity is a short-term funding problem, insolvency reflects long-term balance-sheet weaknesses that can be addressed only through new equity, mergers, or orderly resolution. The key challenge facing policymakers is to determine whether an institution is solvent yet temporarily illiquid, or insolvent and therefore in need of restructuring. If regulators cannot draw this distinction for banks, despite having granular supervisory data, they certainly cannot do so for non-banks, where visibility is limited.

The turmoil of 2023 underscored the risks created by the Fed's mission creep. My co-authors and I estimated that hundreds of banks

faced large mark-to-market losses on long-duration assets, operated with thin capital buffers, and relied heavily on uninsured deposits. Yet instead of calling for restructuring or new equity, the episode was widely framed as a liquidity crisis. New facilities effectively extended support to roughly \$9tn in uninsured deposits, vastly expanding the safety net.

By acting as a lender of immediate resort, the Fed may have steadied markets, but it also left the underlying incentives unchanged, setting the stage for the next crisis and putting its independence under strain. Higher interest rates, though necessary to rein in inflation, exposed widespread interest-rate risk across the banking system. This left the Fed in a bind: raise rates dramatically and risk breaking the weakest banks, or hold back and allow inflation to run wild. Financial fragility, in effect, became an undeclared ceiling on monetary tightening.

The Fed's dual role as bank supervisor and monetary authority magnifies the conflict. The problem is that admitting supervisory failures or concealed solvency problems is politically costly. That creates a strong incentive for the Fed to characterise balance-sheet weaknesses as liquidity issues, leading to a pro-intervention bias that runs counter to the very purpose of central-bank independence.

The answer is not to abandon Bagehot's framework but to update it. To this end, the Fed should set clear conditions for when emergency facilities can be activated, publish transparent eligibility rules that restrict lending to solvent institutions, impose robust penalty rates and haircuts, and publicly disclose how each facility was used

once it is wound down. Most importantly, the Fed should limit itself to liquidity support and leave solvency issues to markets and fiscal authorities. Without that separation, the Fed will continue to drift toward industrial policy, undermining its legitimacy and independence.

While some may argue that these safeguards already exist, recent interventions have lacked the one constraint capable of limiting moral hazard: automatic mechanisms that force markets to determine whether an institution deserves to survive. Banks that receive liquidity support should be required to raise equity commensurate with that support within a defined window or face restructuring or consolidation. If markets are unwilling to provide capital, the institution is not illiquid — it is insolvent.

Central-bank independence must rest on sound governance, transparency, and accountability. That includes acknowledging supervisory failures when a solvency problem is misjudged as a liquidity one, and explaining how those failures will be addressed rather than masking them through intervention. After all, a central bank that cannot refuse intervention during a crisis cannot be expected to hold its ground when tightening monetary policy.

To protect its credibility, the Fed must resist the temptation to treat every problem as systemic. Otherwise, the financial system will remain fragile by design, and the Fed's credibility will erode every time it rescues another institution that should have been allowed to fail. — Project Syndicate

• Amit Seru is Professor of Finance at the Stanford Graduate School of Business and a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution.



US Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell speaks as he holds a press conference of the Federal Open Market Committee, at the US Federal Reserve in Washington, DC. (Reuters)

## Flag carrier PIA to be run by new owners from April: Pakistan official

Reuters  
Karachi

Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) is expected to be run by a new owner from April next year and receive fresh capital under a deal to privatise the flag carrier, the country's privatisation chief said yesterday.

A consortium headed by the Arif Habib Corporation emerged

as the top bidder in a live-television auction for a 75% stake in PIA on Tuesday, marking a breakthrough for the government's long-delayed privatisation of the carrier.

The Arif Habib consortium offered 135bn rupees (\$482.14mn), surpassing a government reserve price of 100bn rupees, in a sharp turnaround from last year's failed sale attempt.

Muhammad Ali, the privatisation adviser to the prime minister,

said in an online interview that the state expects a new owner to be running the airline by April, subject to approvals.

The process now moves to final approvals by the Privatisation Commission board and the cabinet, expected within days, with contract signing likely within two weeks and financial close after a 90-day period to meet regulatory and legal conditions.

Ali said the government would

receive about 10bn rupees in cash upfront and retain a 25% stake valued at around 45bn rupees.

The deal was structured to inject fresh capital into the airline rather than simply transfer ownership, he said.

"We did not want a situation where the government sells the airline, takes its money and the company still collapses," Ali said.

The winning consortium also comprises fertiliser maker Fa-

tim, private school network City Schools and real estate firm Lake City Holdings Ltd.

Ali said Fauji Fertilizer Company, a military-run conglomerate, did not bid but could still join the winning consortium as a partner, noting the buyer can add up to two partners - including a consortium partner or a foreign airline - if they meet the qualifying criteria.

Allowing partners adds financial strength and could bring glo-

bal aviation expertise, he said.

Ali said safeguards, including retained earnest money and an additional payment on signing, would allow the government to move to the second-highest bidder if the deal fails to close.

On labour, Ali said the buyer must retain all employees for 12 months after the transaction, with contracts unchanged, adding that the PIA workforce has already shrunk in recent years.

## Zelensky reveals US-Ukraine plan to end Russian war, key questions remain

AFP  
Kyiv, Ukraine

Ukraine won some limited concessions in the latest version of a US-led draft plan to end the Russian invasion, President Volodymyr Zelensky has revealed, though key questions remain over territory and whether Moscow could accept the new terms.

The 20-point plan, agreed on by US and Ukrainian negotiators, was being reviewed by Moscow. The Kremlin has previously not shown a willingness to abandon its hardline territorial demands for full Ukrainian withdrawal from the east.

Zelensky conceded there were some points in the document that he did not like, but that Kyiv had succeeded in removing immediate requirements for Ukraine to withdraw from the Donetsk region or that land seized by Moscow's army would be recognised as Russian.

Nevertheless, the Ukrainian leader still indicated the proposal would pave the way for Kyiv to pull some troops back, including from the 20% of the Donetsk region that it controls, where demilitarised zones would be established.

It also got rid of demands that Kyiv must legally renounce its bid for Nato membership.

Zelensky presented the plan during a two-hour briefing with jour-

nalists, reading from a highlighted and annotated version.

"In the Donetsk, Lugansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson regions, the line of troop deployment as of the date of this agreement is de facto recognised as the line of contact," Zelensky said of the latest version.

"A working group will convene to determine the redeployment of forces necessary to end the conflict, as well as to define the parameters of potential future special economic zones," he added.

This appears to suggest the plan opens the way for, but delays, options that Ukraine was previously reluctant to consider - a withdrawal of troops and the creation of demilitarised zones.

"We are in a situation where the Russians want us to withdraw from the Donetsk region, while the Americans are trying to find a way," Zelensky said.

"They are looking for a demilitarised zone or a free economic zone, meaning a format that could satisfy both sides," he continued.

US President Trump is trying to broker an end to the four-year war, triggered by Russia's 2022 invasion.

Tens of thousands have been killed, eastern Ukraine decimated and millions forced to flee their homes.

Russian troops are advancing on the front and hammering cities and Ukraine's energy grid with nightly missile and drone barrages.

Moscow's defence ministry yesterday said it had captured another Ukrainian settlement in the southern Zaporizhzhia region.

Russia in 2022 claimed to have annexed four Ukrainian regions - Donetsk, Kherson, Lugansk and Zaporizhzhia - in addition to the Crimean peninsula which it seized in 2014.

President Vladimir Putin has shown no willingness to compromise, doubling down on his hardline demands for a sweeping Ukrainian withdrawal and a string of political concessions that Kyiv and its European backers have previously cast as capitulation.

Any plan that involves Ukraine pulling back its troops would need to pass a referendum in Ukraine, Zelensky said.

"A free economic zone. If we are discussing this, then we need to go to a referendum," Zelensky said, referring to plans to designate areas Ukraine pulls out from as a demilitarised free trade zone.

On Nato, Zelensky said: "It is the choice of Nato members whether to have Ukraine or not. Our choice has been made. We moved away from the proposed changes to the Constitution of Ukraine that would have prohibited Ukraine from joining Nato."

Nevertheless, the prospects of Ukraine being admitted to the bloc appear slim-to-none, as it has been ruled out by Washington.

## Three killed in Moscow bomb blast



Investigators work at the scene where two traffic police officers and another person were killed in a blast in Moscow, Russia, yesterday. The blast occurred when the two officers approached a man acting suspiciously near the site where a senior general was killed two days ago by a car bomb that Russia said was planted by Ukrainian intelligence.

## Russia plans nuclear power plant on moon within a decade

Reuters  
Moscow

Russia plans to put a nuclear power plant on the moon in the next decade to supply its lunar space programme and a joint Russian-Chinese research station, as major powers rush to explore the earth's only natural satellite.

Ever since Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first human to go into space in 1961, Russia has prided itself as a leading power in space exploration, but in recent decades it has fallen behind the US and, increasingly, China.

Russia's ambitions suffered a massive blow in August 2023 when its unmanned Luna-25 mission smashed into the sur-

face of the moon while attempting to land, and Elon Musk has revolutionised the launch of space vehicles - once a Russian speciality.

Roscosmos did not say explicitly that the plant would be nuclear but it said the participants included Russian state nuclear corporation Rosatom and the Kurchatov Institute, Russia's leading nuclear research institute.

Roscosmos said the purpose of the plant was to power Russia's lunar programme, including rovers, an observatory and the infrastructure of the joint Russian-Chinese International Lunar Research Station.

"The project is an important step towards the creation of a permanently functioning scientific lunar station and the transition from one-time missions to a long-term lunar exploration programme," Roscosmos said.

The head of Roscosmos, Dmitry Rogozin, said in June that one of the corporation's aims was to put a nuclear power plant on the moon and to explore Venus, known as earth's "sister" planet.

Russia is not the only one with such plans. NASA in August declared its intent to put a nuclear reactor on the moon by the first quarter of fiscal year 2030.

### Serbia court drops case against ex-minister for train station disaster

A Serbian court yesterday dropped charges against a former construction minister over the Novi Sad railway station canopy collapse that killed 16 people, citing a lack of evidence.

The case is one of three probes linked to the tragedy in November 2024 that sparked a huge protest movement that has still not abated, with the disaster at the newly renovated station being seen as a symbol of entrenched corruption. Goran Vesic, 56, who resigned days after the accident, was charged in September along with 12 others with a "serious crime against public safety" by the Novi Sad chief prosecutor. However, the Novi Sad High Court said there was "insufficient evidence to support reasonable suspicion" that Vesic and five other defendants committed the offences set out in the indictment, while confirming charges against the remaining seven. - AFP

### Winter fun



People skate on an artificial ice rink in Gouda, Netherlands, yesterday.

## Kosovo, Serbia 'need to normalise' relations

AFP  
Pristina

Kosovo and Serbia need to "normalise" their relations, Kosovo's Prime Minister Albin Kurti said yesterday, several days before legislative elections where he is seeking to extend his term with more solid backing.

Kurti has been in office since 2021 and previous accords signed with Serbia - which does not recognise the independence of its former province - have yet to be respected.

"We need to normalise relations with Serbia," said Kurti. "But normalising relations with a neighbouring authoritarian regime that doesn't recognise you, that also doesn't admit to the crimes committed during the war, is quite difficult," he added.

Tensions between the two neighbours are regularly high, and renewed unrest would provide Russia with means of destabilising his country.

"We do have a normalisation agreement," Kurti said, referring to the agreement signed under the auspices of the European Union in 2023.

"We must implement it, which implies mutual recognition between the countries, at least de facto recognition."

But to resume dialogue, Serbia "must hand over Milan Radovic," a Serb accused of plotting an attack in northern Kosovo in 2023, Kurti asserted, hoping that "the EU, France, and Germany will put pressure" on Belgrade to do so.

Russia's shadow also looms over relations with Serbia, which has never severed ties with Moscow and on which it depends for its energy needs.

## European leaders hit out at US visa bans

Reuters  
Paris

The European Union, France and Germany yesterday condemned US visa bans on five Europeans combatting online hate and disinformation, after President Donald Trump's administration took its latest swipe at long-standing allies across the Atlantic.

Washington imposed visa bans on Tuesday on five European citizens, including French former EU commissioner Thierry Breton. It accuses them of working to censor freedom of speech or unfairly target US tech giants with burdensome regulation.

The bans mark a fresh escalation against Europe, a region Washington argues is fast becoming irrelevant due to its weak defences, inability to tackle immigration, needless red tape and "censorship" of far-right and nationalist voices to keep them from power.

They come just weeks after a US National Security Strategy document warned Europe faced "civilisational erasure" and must course-correct if it is to remain a reliable US ally.

That document - and other comments by senior Trump officials, including a bombshell February speech by Vice-President J D Vance in Munich - have upended postwar

assumptions about Europe's close relationship with its strongest ally, and concentrated minds across European capitals on the urgent need to diversify away from reliance on US technology and defence. In Brussels, Paris and Berlin, senior officials condemned the US bans, and defended Europe's right to legislate on how foreign companies operate locally. A European Commission spokesperson said it "strongly condemns the US decision," adding: "Freedom of expression is a fundamental right in Europe and a shared core value with the US across the democratic world."

The spokesperson said the EU would seek answers from Washington, but said it could "respond

swiftly and decisively" against the "unjustified measures."

French President Emmanuel Macron, who has been travelling across France to warn about the dangers that disinformation poses to democracy, said he had spoken with Breton and thanked him for his work.

"We will not give up, and we will protect Europe's independence and the freedom of Europeans," Macron said on X.

Breton, a former French finance minister and the European commissioner for the internal market from 2019 to 2024, was one of the architects of the EU's Digital Services Act.

A landmark piece of legislation, the DSA aims to make the internet

safer by compelling tech giants to do more to tackle illegal content, including hate speech and child sexual abuse material.

But the DSA has riled the Trump administration, which accuses the EU of placing "undue" restrictions on freedom of expression in its efforts to combat hateful speech, misinformation and disinformation.

It also argues that the DSA unfairly targets US tech giants and US citizens. Trump officials were particularly upset earlier this month when Brussels' sanctioned Elon Musk's X platform, fining it 120mn euros for breaching online content rules.

Musk and Breton have often sparred online over EU tech regulation, with Musk referring to him as the "tyrant of Europe."

The bans also targeted Imran Ahmed, the British CEO of the US-based Center for Countering Digital Hate; Anna-Lena von Hodenberg and Josephine Ballon of the German non-profit HateAid; and Clare Melford, co-founder of the Global Disinformation Index, according to US Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy Sarah Rogers.

Germany's justice ministry said the two German activists had the government's "support and solidarity" and the visa bans on them were unacceptable, adding that HateAid supported people affected by unlawful digital hate speech.



# Municipality ministry holds public cleanliness march to highlight sanitation workers' efforts

QNA  
Doha

The Ministry of Municipality, represented by the Public Cleanliness Department, in co-operation with Qatari Diar, organised a Public Cleanliness march yesterday in Lusail Boulevard, under the slogan 'One March... A Cleaner City'.

The march was held under the patronage of HE the Minister of Municipality Abdullah bin Hamad bin Abdullah al-Attiyah, and with the participation and attendance of several officials from various government and private entities.

In this context, Assistant Undersecretary for Public Services Affairs engineer Abdullah Ahmed al-Karani emphasised that the aim of the march was to highlight the significant efforts made by sanitation workers and to shed light on their vital role in maintaining public health and enhancing the urban landscape of Qatar.

He pointed out that this initiative comes within the framework of providing support, appreciation, and respect to this group, noting that the Ministry of Municipality is keen, through these

events, to convey a message of gratitude to them, in addition to urging the community to appreciate their work and cooperate with them in a way that contributes to facilitating their daily tasks.

The Assistant Undersecretary for Public Services at the Ministry of Municipality explained that the initiative reflects the true importance of partnership between government institutions, community organisations, and the private sector, which strengthens efforts in the sanitation sector and embodies collaborative work on the ground.

Regarding development, he indicated that the ministry has introduced modern mechanisms into its operational system, including smart vehicles equipped with sensors to read waste and collect refuse, especially on beaches.

Al-Karani also mentioned the launch of the smart cities solutions project last year, which involved installing sensors in waste containers. This has contributed to reducing travel times, lowering carbon emissions, and improving operational efficiency.

He explained that the project was implemented in Al Wakrah Municipality and is being gradually rolled out to other municipalities, as a national awareness platform,

in addition to future plans to modernise the sanitation fleet.

For his part, Director of the Public Cleanliness Department at the ministry, Muqbil Madhour al-Shammary, stated that the second edition of the Public Cleanliness March, under the slogan "One March... A Cleaner City", builds upon the success of the previous edition, with improved organisa-

tion and collective pride, and that the goal of the march is to instil these values in every member of society.

This event, he continued, highlights the efforts of sanitation workers who dedicate themselves daily to keeping the cities clean

**The march was held under the patronage of HE the Minister of Municipality Abdullah bin Hamad bin Abdullah al-Attiyah, and with the participation and attendance of several officials from various government and private entities**

tion and enhanced co-operation with the ministry's partners in the public and private sectors, most notably Qatari Diar and several other leading national entities.

Al-Shammary explained that the march aims to promote a culture of public cleanliness and make it an integral part of daily life, considering it a shared societal responsibility and a national value directly linked to improving the quality of life and preserving the beauty and sustainability of our cities.

He added that the march serves as a national awareness platform,

and safe, adding that the march is a well-deserved tribute to them that reflects deep respect for manual labour and the values of social solidarity. He explained that the march included various field activities, from informational booths about smart services and the efforts of the Public Cleanliness Department, to competitions and interactive activities for children and families, and the distribution of symbolic gifts that encourage positive environmental behaviours.

He also pointed out that city cleanliness is not just a duty, but

a symbol of national identity and collective pride, and that the goal of the march is to instil these values in every member of society.

The Director of the Public Cleanliness Department, concluded his statement by emphasising that the march is not merely an event, but a powerful national message affirming the ministry's commitment to achieving Qatar National Vision 2030 in the areas of environmental and human development, and building a smart and sustainable city that combines innovation, beauty, and social responsibility.

For his part, Head of the Awareness and Education Section at the Public Cleanliness Department Hamad Hassan al-Tamimi revealed that the second edition of the march, held in Lusail, took on an interactive, carnival-like atmosphere, reflecting the event's educational and awareness-raising purpose.

Al-Tamimi stated that the march aimed to integrate environmental awareness and public cleanliness with entertainment and community engagement. He explained that the event was designed to be an enjoyable experience for all participants, promoting a sense of

social responsibility towards the environment in an innovative and engaging way.

The march saw the participation of approximately 600 workers from various participating entities and 32 specialised vehicles. He noted that this large number displays the efforts exerted to maintain the city's cleanliness and highlights the level of co-operation between government agencies and private sector partners.

The Head of the Awareness and Education Section stressed that the march's objective was not only to clean the city but also to instil a culture of environmental respect and teamwork, that allows participants to sense that they have a real role in preserving the beauty of the city, and that environmental awareness can be both enjoyable and beneficial.

It is worth noting that the Public Cleanliness march is an annual field march held in Lusail Boulevard, bringing together government entities, national companies, the private sector, community organisations, media, and the public in a shared awareness experience about the community's responsibility in maintaining the city's cleanliness, beauty, and sustainability.

## WEEKEND DEALS

العرض متاح في جميع منافذ سفاري بتاريخ: ٢٥-١٢-٢٠٢٥ في جميع منافذ سفاري  
Promotion available at all Safari outlets on: 25-12-2025 at all Safari Outlets

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28.75 QR WAS 30 QR	35.50 QR WAS 44 QR	20.00 QR WAS 32 QR	5.50 QR	11.75 QR
لحم بقرى الجله العلوي حنوب أفريقيا اكجم South African Beef Topside 1 Kg	لحم ضاني هندي اكجم Indian Mutton 1 kg	لحم جاموس هندي اكجم Indian Buffalo Meat 1 kg	ماكيريل صغير سعودي اكجم Fresh Mackerel Small KSA 1 kg	حبار صغير سعودي اكجم Fresh Squid Small KSA 1 kg
11.75 QR WAS 15 QR	5.50 QR	3.75 QR	3.50 QR	1.75 QR
بيض ابيض ٣٠ حلة Fresh White Eggs Tray 30's	بروكلي صيني اكجم Broccoli China 1 kg	جزر استراليا اكجم Carrot Australia 1 kg	شمندر عمان اكجم Beetroot Oman 1 kg	طماطم مصرى اكجم Tomato Egypt 1 kg
2.50 QR	6.75 QR	9.25 QR	10.00 QR WAS 13 QR	9.50 QR WAS 12 QR
مو اكواذر اكجم Banana Ecuador 1kg	دراكون فروت فيتنام اكجم Dragon Fruit Vietnam 1kg	افوكادو اوغندا اكجم Avocado Uganda 1kg	بلقيس زيت دوار الشميس ١.٨ لتر + اعية Belkis Sunflower Oil 1.8 Ltr x 1 pc	ساديا دجاج شواية اكجم - اعية Sadia Chicken Griller 1100 gm x 1 pc

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2nd Lucky Draw: 19-02-2026  
at Safari Hypermarket, Ezdan Mall- Al Gharaffa (1 Winner)  
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**30**

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IN EVERY LUCKY DRAW

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2nd Lucky Draw on: 05-01-2026 15-02-2026 29-03-2026 10-05-2026 21-06-2026 02-08-2026 13-09-2026

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31st Lucky Draw on: 05-01