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**BUSINESS | Page 1**

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## Cold wave set to grip Qatar, Gulf as New Year approaches

By **Joey Aguilar**  
Staff Reporter

A spell of cold weather is expected to affect Qatar and several Gulf countries in the days leading up to the New Year, as meteorologists warn of a cold air mass moving southwards across the region. In Qatar, temperatures are forecast to drop steadily, prompting residents and visitors to brace for cooler days and chilly nights. According to AccuWeather, nighttime temperatures in the coming days are expected to range between 12C and 16C, while daytime highs will hover between 20C and 24C. The Qatar Meteorology Department (MET) said temperatures between midnight and 6am on December 29 will range from 20-22C, but will feel closer to 19°C, with less than a 5% chance of rain during the day. MET forecasts also indicate that the cold will intensify further in the days ahead, with “feels-like” temperatures dropping to around 12C, particularly during the early morning hours. Visibility is expected to remain moderate to good from midnight to late morning through much of the coming week. As winter conditions set in, jackets and sweatshirts have become a common sight across Doha. Outdoor enthusiasts, including walkers and joggers, as well as gym-goers, have been taking extra precautions during workouts as temperatures dip. Elsewhere in the Gulf, similar conditions are expected. In Kuwait, meteorologist Issa Ramadan warned that a cold wave driven by the passage of a cold air front will bring noticeably lower temperatures, especially at night and during early mornings. North-westerly winds, ranging from moderate to occasionally strong, are expected to increase the sensation of cold, particularly in open and desert areas. Residents have been urged to take precautions during late-night and early-morning hours. Other Gulf countries are also likely to feel the effects of the cold air mass, with cooler-than-usual temperatures expected across parts of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain as the New Year approaches. Meteorologists across the region continue to advise caution, particularly for those outdoors at night, as the Gulf experiences one of its coldest spells of the season.

# Amir affirms support for Somalia

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani expressed Qatar's full support for Somalia's sovereignty and territorial integrity as well as its keen interest in Somalia's security and stability and in the protection of its brotherly people's interests. This came during a phone call received by President of the Federal Republic of Somalia Dr Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. During the call, the Somali president expressed his sincere thanks and appreciation to His Highness the Amir for his role and support in adopting an international stance rejecting the Israeli decision to recognise the so-called Somaliland. The call also discussed bilateral relations and ways to support and develop them, in addition to addressing developments in the Somali arena. A Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) statement yesterday also expressed its firm rejection of a joint declaration between the Israeli occupation and the Somaliland region recognising one another, stressing that the step was

● **Qatar backs territorial integrity of the republic; rejects Israeli attempt to undermine its unity**



a dangerous precedent in contrast with international law. It underlined the move as undermining the sovereignty and unity of the Federal Republic of Somalia.

**21 Arab, Islamic and African nations reject ‘Somaliland’**  
→ **Page 2**

MoFA emphasised Qatar's firm rejection of any attempts to estab-

lish or impose parallel entities that could undermine the unity of Somalia, stressing its full support for legitimate Somali state institutions and its commitment to maintaining the security and stability of Somalia as well as the interests of its people. It also stressed that the Israeli occupation would be better off recognising a Palestinian state, which the international community agreed has a right to be established. The ministry also added



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani

that the occupation should work to permanently end the war in Gaza, instead of undermining international legitimacy and maintaining its reckless policies that play a role in intensifying tensions and instability in the region. The ministry renewed Qatar's firm position of supporting the

sovereignty of the Federal Republic of Somalia and its unity, and its call to commit to international law and respect international legitimacy resolutions. The ministry also renewed Qatar's call to intensify international efforts to maintain security and stability in the Horn of Africa region. **(QNA)**

## Winners of camel races crowned



HE the Minister of Interior and Commander of the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya) Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani crowned the winners of the final races of the Founder Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani Festival for Purebred Arabian Camels for the 2025-2026 season at the Al Shahaniya Camel Racetrack yesterday. The Golden Sword was presented to Saeed Jaber Abdullah al-Harbi for winning the sixth race, designated for open Hail camels. **Page 12**

## Artemiev stuns World No 1 at Rapids



Vladislav Artemiev (right) defeated World No 1 Magnus Carlsen yesterday to move joint top of the standings with Hans Niemann at the FIDE World Rapid Chess Championship after day two at the Sports and Events Complex of Qatar University in Doha. Both Grandmasters are on 7.5 points from nine games, with four rounds remaining today before the champion is decided. **Sport Page 1**

# Qatar has set a global benchmark in peace-led development: UNDP

By **Joseph Varghese**  
Staff Reporter

Qatar's global leadership has been praised as ‘outstanding’ by the country head of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) in Qatar. “Qatar's global leadership has been outstanding: principled, consistent, agile, and increasingly focused on scalable, systems-level impact. Qatar has demonstrated leadership by anchoring its foreign policy in dialogue, mediation, and multilateral solutions,” Dr Biplove Choudhary, UNDP representative in Qatar, said. In an exclusive interview with *Gulf Times*, Choudhary said Qatar is emerging as a platform for just and inclusive development, and the establishment of the UN House in Doha was a landmark step which strengthened co-operation across humanitarian, development, peace and human rights pillars. He explained: “Doha has become a trusted convening space when dialogue elsewhere stalls, supporting mediation efforts across complex contexts. These efforts are a precondition for development. When political dialogue advances, services resume, schools reopen, markets recover, and communities rebuild livelihoods with dignity.” Choudhary also quoted the UNDP administrator, Alexander De Croo who had recently remarked that Qatar, under the



Country head of UNDP Dr Biplove Choudhary.

### INTERVIEW

leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani, is demonstrating – “in an increasingly fragmented world – how it can convene diverse actors, build trust, and find practical solutions.” “UNDP's presence in Qatar, first and foremost, is that of a strategic partnerships office. We serve as an interlocutor between Qatar and UNDP's global network – listening closely to national development co-operation priorities and linking them to UNDP's global reach, operational capacity, and presence across programme countries to deliver sustainable, high-impact results,” noted Choudhary. **To Page 5**

# Amber: From ancient resin to living history

By **Tawfik Lamari**  
Staff Reporter

*Amber from Tree Sap to Magnificent Artifact*, authored by Salman Ali Ahmed al-Hail, adds a rare and meticulously researched work to the Qatari literary landscape. A law graduate of Ajman University of Science and Technology in the United Arab Emirates, al-Hail brings an unexpected yet compelling scholarly rigour to a subject that

### INTERVIEW

has long been treated superficially in the Arab world. “I have had a passion for amber since I was very young, particularly from my teenage years,” the Qatari author told *Gulf Times* in an interview that traced both a personal fascination and years of scientific inquiry into one of the world's oldest natural materials. That early curiosity soon revealed

### Best-selling Qatari author on one of the world's oldest natural materials

a striking gap in Arabic-language literature. Books available in Qatar, the Gulf and the wider Arab region, he observed, tend to offer only brief and simplistic descriptions of amber, in sharp contrast to European publications, particularly those from regions where amber originates. This imbalance became the starting point for years of research that would ultimately culminate in the book.

Amber, he notes, is widely misunderstood. It is not a precious stone but an organic one, formed exclusively from the resin of pine trees. Its lifespan ranges from 40-150mn years, placing it among the oldest natural materials still in circulation today. Historically, amber has played a critical role in scientific discovery: insects and extinct organisms preserved within it helped

scientists reconstruct prehistoric life, including the era when dinosaurs roamed the earth, much as fossilised remains aided the understanding of ancient ecosystems and oil formation. At its origin, amber begins as resin secreted by pine trees when their bark is damaged or infected. This resin acts as a natural defence against disease. Over millions of years, under pressure and heat, it hardens and transforms into amber, concealing within it a record of biological and geological history. **To Page 5**



Salman Ali Ahmad al-Hail







# Almana Group and Uniview Reinforce Strategic Partnership Through Customer Engagement Event

Almana Trading Company, one of Qatar's leading diversified business groups, recently hosted an exclusive customer engagement event in collaboration with its distribution partner, Uniview – a leading and renowned name in the surveillance industry.

The event brought together key customers, partners and industry stakeholders to showcase the latest innovations, advanced features and the strong joint value proposition delivered through this strategic partnership.

Designed as a platform for knowledge sharing and collaboration, the event highlighted Uniview's latest advancements in CCTV and video surveillance technologies, while reinforcing Almana Trading Company's continued commitment to delivering excellence across every customer engagement. Attendees gained valuable insights into how the combination of Almana Trading Company's deep local market expertise and Uniview's global innovation leadership creates a powerful ecosystem that enables customers to compete, differentiate and succeed in an increasingly dynamic security landscape.

Speaking at the event, Mr. Umer Zubairi, General Manager of Almana Security Systems & Trading Business Unit, emphasized the organization's focused commitment to future-ready surveillance solutions.

"We are driven by a clear commitment to deliver intelligent, resilient and future-ready CCTV and video surveillance solutions that protect what matters most and enhance safety across diverse environments," he said.

"Through our strong partnership with Uniview, we combine deep industry expertise with continuous innovation to provide high-performance surveillance systems that offer robust security, reliability, and long-term value. Our solutions are designed to evolve with the pace of technology, enabling smarter monitoring, faster response and improved operational efficiency."



**We are driven by a clear commitment to deliver intelligent, resilient and future-ready CCTV and video surveillance solutions that protect what matters most and enhance safety across diverse environments**

**Umer Zubairi,**  
General Manager of Almana Security Systems & Trading Business Unit

He further highlighted the strategic importance of effective video surveillance as a foundation for secure and digitally enabled environments.

"By focusing on quality, scalability, and trust, we ensure every system we deliver ensures compliance and provides peace of mind to our customers. Together with Uniview, we remain committed to building smarter, safer, and more secure environments for the future."

Almana Trading Company also emphasized that its partnership with



Uniview extends well beyond distribution, reflecting a shared vision built on trust, technical excellence, and long-term value creation. The collaboration is anchored in strong synergy, aligned objectives, and a mutual commitment to customer success, ensuring that every engagement delivers tangible outcomes and supports customers in winning every deal they pursue.

The event showcased the end-to-end approach adopted by Almana Trading

Company and Uniview, supporting customers across the entire project lifecycle, from solution design and technology selection to deployment, optimization, and ongoing support. This comprehensive and collaborative model ensures reliability, scalability, and future readiness, enabling customers to respond confidently to evolving operational and market demands.

Representatives from Uniview highlighted the strategic importance of the

Qatar market and praised Almana Trading Company's role as a National Distributor with deep market knowledge and a strong track record of delivery excellence. The partnership continues to play a vital role in introducing advanced, secure, and high-performance surveillance solutions tailored to the needs of enterprises, system integrators, and government entities across the country.

A key focus of the event was empowering customers with practical insights, technical expertise, and strategic guidance. By enabling organizations to leverage the latest innovations and features, Almana Trading

Company and Uniview's aim is to enhance competitiveness, improve operational efficiency, and support sustainable long-term growth.

The successful event reaffirmed Almana Trading Company's position as a customer-centric organization dedicated to building lasting partnerships and delivering value beyond products. As Qatar continues its digital transformation journey in line with national development goals, Almana Trading Company and Uniview remain committed to supporting customers with future-ready solutions and an unwavering focus on excellence.







## Family Food Centre concludes 47th anniversary celebrations

Family Food Centre has concluded its 47th anniversary celebrations with the completion of its special “Shop & Win” campaign.

Launched as part of the brand’s anniversary celebrations, the campaign ran from September to December 2025 and invited customers to shop in-store or online for a chance to win Jetour cars.

The grand draw was held on December 25 at the Family Food Centre Al Kheesa branch, conducted under the supervision of officials from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.



try of Commerce and Industry.

In addition to the giveaway, the anniversary season featured promotions on a wide range of locally sourced favourites and international products.

Family Food Centre expresses sincere appreciation to all customers who participated and contributed to making the 47th anniversary a memorable milestone.



# Role of culture and art for freedom and justice examined at seminar

Katara Cultural Village has organised a seminar on “The Role of Culture and Art in Supporting Freedom and Achieving Justice”.

Held at Katara Hall 15 in co-operation with Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, the seminar was attended by a select group of intellectuals, researchers, and media professionals, in the presence of Katara Research and Studies Department director Dr Nadia al-Mudahka.

It was moderated by Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) consultant Mona al-Kuwari.

Dr al-Mudahka stressed that the seminar is part of a knowledge partnership between Katara and Al Jazeera Centre, aimed at promoting cultural and intellectual development and reinforcing societal awareness.

She noted that the seminar’s title reflects the two institutions’ belief in the pivotal role played by culture, the arts, and various forms of expression in shaping awareness, constructing meaning, and promoting the values of freedom and human dignity.

Dr al-Mudahka stressed that culture and art constitute a fundamental driving force in addressing humanitarian issues and entrenching justice.

The seminar discussed the role of culture and art as effective forces in supporting the values of freedom and justice and in highlighting humanitarian and social issues.

Participants affirmed that art is not limited to aesthetic expression, but rather represents a vital tool for free expression, preserving collective memory, documenting historical events, and conveying the experiences, suffering, and resilience of people, ensuring that these stories remain present in the collective consciousness and counter attempts at marginalisation and erasure.

The interventions also focused on the importance of the role of cultural institutions and civil society in transforming individual initiatives into influential mass movements, through research centres, museums, publishing houses, and cultural festivals.

These platforms allow artistic works to engage with the public and help shape a cultural and social discourse that promotes human values and contributes to building a more aware and responsible society.

The seminar devoted significant attention to the Palestinian cause, with participants discussing ways to employ

culture and art to present it as an issue of freedom and justice to the international community.

This was illustrated through artistic and literary experiences that embodied the steadfastness and struggle of the Palestinian people and helped convey their voice and human rights to global public opinion.

The participants emphasised that art can be a strategically influential tool in shaping international awareness.

The seminar concluded by reaffirming that culture and art constitute a cornerstone in supporting human rights and promoting the values of freedom and justice, opening horizons for constructive societal dialogue, contributing to sustainable intellectual and cultural development, and strengthening societies’ ability to confront contemporary challenges.

It featured contributions from journalist, documentary filmmaker and researcher in issues of identity, memory, and power Awad Jumaa; poet, journalist, and deputy editor-in-chief at Al Jazeera.net Hussein Jallad; and Mahmoud Hamed al-Eilali, poet and researcher specialising in conflict studies and humanitarian action.

## A shared legacy of learning HEC Paris, Doha marks 15 years and Qatar Foundation’s 30th anniversary

By Dr Pablo Martín de Holan  
Dean, HEC Paris, Doha



HEC Paris was entrusted with the mission of training persons to support France’s transition from an agricultural society to one shaped by the Second Industrial Revolution, with its emerging jobs and changing needs, which seemed as unfamiliar then as the jobs of the future appear today.

Over time, HEC Paris expanded its reach to Europe and then globally, assisting in successive transitions – from industry to services, from services to knowledge, and today, toward the decarbonised and sustainable economy the world so urgently needs.

Our work in Doha has benefited from being part of the select and distinguished group of Partner Universities in Education City, a multi-institutional ecosystem like no other, brought to life through the determination of Her Highness Sheikha Moza.

We have collaborated with our colleagues in Education City, creating programmes that rank among the best in the world, and we are grateful for that opportunity.

We are as proud to be part of Education City here in Doha as we were 15 years ago.

HEC Paris has also benefited from Qatar’s commitment to establishing an educational hub in Doha, collaborating with institutions like Qatar University and numerous public and private organisations to achieve our shared goal of advancing national development in Qatar, the Gulf, and beyond.

Like other partner universities, HEC Paris, Doha stands and aspires to remain at the frontier of knowledge in our disciplines, contributing to solutions for global challenges through dialogue and a profound commitment to positive impact in every society where we operate.

These anniversaries are not only an opportunity to reflect on what has been achieved, but also a reminder of our collective responsibility for the future.

Today, we are not simply celebrating our successes because our work will never be done; we are building the future by adapting to the world’s evolving realities and needs, always guided by the same values and commitment to excellence we have always had, enhancing our impact one student at a time.

Learning is an essential part of life, and as such, learning should never stop.

We are proud of what we have achieved together, and we intend to continue our mission for many more years to come.

## Katara to open 2022 World Cup Legacy exhibition

Katara Cultural Village, in collaboration with the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy, will host the “FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Legacy” exhibition at 5.30pm tomorrow (December 29), at Building 45.

The exhibition will highlight the cultural, humanitarian, and sporting legacy of the first World Cup to be held in the Arab region and the Middle East.

It will offer an interactive experience showcasing the milestones of Qatar’s hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup and its exceptional organisational successes.



## QATAR FERTILISER COMPANY INVITATION TO TENDER

### QAFCO ANNOUNCES THE FOLLOWING TENDER

TENDER NO.	DESCRIPTION OF WORKS	TENDER FEE (QAR)	TENDER BOND (QAR)	TENDER FEE RECEIPT SUBMISSION DATES	TENDER CLOSING DATE
RFQ-6000004500	Replacement of the drum screen for Qafco 4 Turnaround	500/- (Non-refundable)	150,000 QAR One Hundred and fifty thousand only	28.12.2025 29.12.2025 30.12.2025 31.12.2025 01.01.2026 02.01.2026 03.01.2026	01.02.2026

#### GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

- During the period this tender is offered, the interested bidders shall first deposit appropriate Tender Fee amount in cash (Cheque will not be accepted) into Company’s following Account at any QNB branch:
  - Account Name : **QATAR FERTILISER COMPANY P.S.C. (QAFCO)**
  - Account Number : **0013-025828-058**
  - IBAN : **QA51QNBAA00000000013025828058**
  - Bank Name : **QATAR NATIONAL BANK**
- The interested Bidders shall mention their company’s name and Tender Number on the payment receipt provided by the bank and submit it as Tender Fee receipt.
- Besides the Tender fee receipt (which should have the Tender Number and bidder’s name clearly mentioned on it), interested bidders shall also submit a copy of the valid Commercial Registration, an authorization letter from their company with the name, telephone, fax and e-mail ID of the focal point for this tender (**Very Important**), during the submission of Tender Fee Receipt for ensuring electronic receipt of the Tender Document.
- Tender Fee Receipt along with the specified documents shall be submitted to [jhafek@qafco.com.qa](mailto:jhafek@qafco.com.qa) and on the dates indicated above, after payment of Tender Fee (nonrefundable).
- After submission of the above documents to the above email, Tender Document will be provided through an electronic platform separately.
- For any queries related to non-receipt of the tender documents after the submission Tender Fee receipt at the QAFCO Supply Chain, you may contact at [jhafek@qafco.com.qa](mailto:jhafek@qafco.com.qa) or on 44227740
- Technical & Commercial details and Submission Procedures will be specified in the Tender Documents.
- The Company will not consider any offer without the enclosure of Tender Bond. -Not Applicable
- The Tender shall be strictly submitted using the QAFCO’s Supply Chain Portal – SAP / Ariba, on or before the “Tender Closing Date”. Tenderers who fail to adhere to this requirement will result in the disqualification of their Tender.

## Ministry announces subscription period for 35th DIBF

The Ministry of Culture has announced the subscription period for the 35th Doha International Book Fair (DIBF), running from January 1 to February 12, 2026.

The ministry added that online registration will be available via the fair’s official website, amid expectations of a surge in the number of participants compared to the previous edition.

The fair, one of the most prominent and largest book fairs in the region, continues to gain significant momentum and widespread confidence among Arab and international publishers.

The official website offers an opportunity for publishing houses, libraries, cultural institutions, think tanks, associations, universities, as well as international organisations and ministries to submit subscription requests after fulfilling the approved subscription conditions, which are published on the website.

Applicants can participate in the fair through the official website: [www.dohabookfair.qa](http://www.dohabookfair.qa)

First held in 1972, the upcoming 35th edition of the fair is scheduled to take place from May 14-23, 2026.

– QNA



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

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

Sl No.	Tender Reference and Description	(i) Deadline for Submission of Information & Interest for Bidding	(ii) Tender fee (non-refundable); Date	(iii) Tender Publication on ARIBA	(iv) Tender Bond	Bid Closing Date
1	RFQ PD-AUC-16-2025 Sale of Used Oil for Five Years	31 <sup>st</sup> December 2025	QAR 500. 00 01 Jan 2026	04 <sup>th</sup> January 2026	QAR. 35,000. 00	10 <sup>th</sup> January 2026 12:00 Noon

- Interested bidders to communicate their willingness to bid and contact details to QAPCO Procurement ([procurement@qapco.com.qa](mailto:procurement@qapco.com.qa)) indicating company name, address, telephone, official E-mail, etc. latest by the deadline for Submission of Information & Interest for Bidding indicated above. Reference Number and Description of the tender must be mentioned in the email.
- Non-refundable tender fee as indicated above is payable to QAPCO through QNB account # 0013-001688-060 only at any QNB branch latest by 01 January 2026. (Tender Number, Subject and bidder name are to be stated in the payment receipt)
- Tender link will be sent via email notification from ARIBA system to the confirmed bidders. Tender Document will be accessible only after attaching the evidence of the tender fee payment in ARIBA by the bidder followed by Qapco approval. QAPCO shall reply with the access to “ARIBA eSourcing RFP event” along with necessary instructions and guidelines for the bid submission. ARIBA Registration: Bidders who are not registered in QAPCO are requested to complete the registration process during the tendering period (Details on ARIBA registration can be accessed via QAPCO website [www.qapco.com](http://www.qapco.com))
- Tender Bond (Bank Guarantee):** Original tender bond must be submitted by hand to the following address latest by the Bid closing date & time:  
Qatar Petrochemical Company (QAPCO) Q.P.J.S.C.  
QAPCO HEADQUARTERS, P.O. Box 756,  
Building: 12, Zone No. 92, Street No. 556, Mualither Leafawiyat Steet  
Mesaleed, Qatar  
Tel: 4033 8109 / 102  
**Attention: Procurement Group Manager**  
Bidder to attach copy of tender bond to the offer in ARIBA. **Offer without Tender Bond will not be considered.**  
Tender Clarifications: Please send your queries with tender reference and description to email [procurement@qapco.com.qa](mailto:procurement@qapco.com.qa)  
**Notes:**  
1. ARIBA Registration: Bidders who are not registered in QAPCO are requested to complete the registration process during the tendering period (Details on ARIBA registration can be accessed via QAPCO website [www.qapco.com](http://www.qapco.com))

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



# Drones disperse seeds in Rawdat Umm Al Sahanat

The Wildlife Development Department at the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change has organised an on-site environmental field activity to disperse large quantities of wild plant seeds in Rawdat Umm Al Sahanat in the Al Kaa-ban area, using drones, with the contribution of Q Dron, a leading company in drone applications.

The drones, equipped with GPS and smart spraying technologies, dispersed a total of 5,000 local seeds, including wild sidr, Qatari ghaf, salam, and samar trees. These seeds were collected from the same environment, then treated and coated with a natural, biodegradable organic material that ensures their protection and enhances germination upon contact with the soil. The drones distributed the seeds evenly and accurately across the Rawda (wild meadow), as part of the ministry's ongoing efforts to enhance natural vegetation cover and combat desertification.

Dr Dhafi Heedan, assistant director of the Wildlife Development Department, explained that this step comes as part of a package of national initiatives adopted by the ministry to support the rehabilitation of degraded Rawdas and to increase vegetation cover, relying on innovative and environmentally friendly technological solutions.

He noted that the use of drone technologies and artificial intelligence represents one of the most prominent future ap-



proaches to accelerating cultivation processes and restoring ecological balance in terrestrial areas, adding that this is one of the most important and prominent strategic projects of the department, contributing to expanding green areas and combating desertification in the country.

Dr Heedan also thanked Q Dron for this voluntary initiative and its effective contribution to environmental protection efforts and the sustainability of natural resources, calling on all entities and the private sector to adopt similar initiatives that contribute to achieving Qatar's national objectives and its international environmental commitments.

Similarly, Hamad Rashid al-Ward, director of Q Dron, lauded

the ongoing co-operation with the ministry, praising the advanced national environmental efforts in the country. He affirmed that the initiative was implemented entirely voluntarily by the company, in support of the state's environmental goals and in pursuit of localising environmental expertise and modern technologies in the field of biodiversity conservation.

The organisers of the activity worked on identifying the appropriate site through field studies and used drones to disperse seeds over wide areas, taking into account appropriate timing during the rainy season, thereby enhancing the chances of natural germination and the success of environmental rehabilitation of the Rawda.

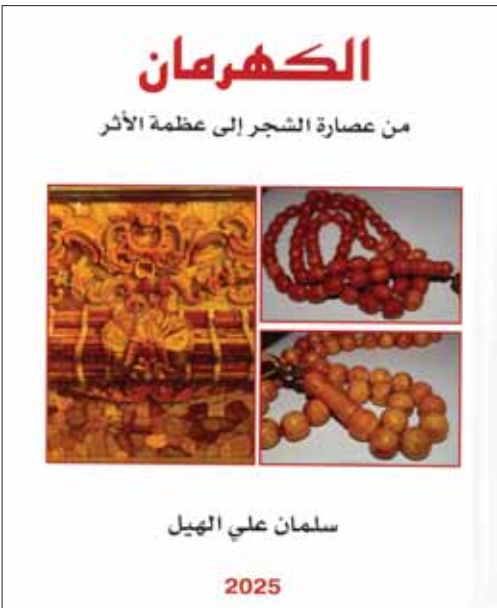
# Amber: From ancient resin to living history

## From Page 1

One of the book's central contributions is its systematic classification of amber. Long believed to originate primarily from Poland, Germany and the Baltic region, amber is in fact far more diverse. After four years of intensive scientific research, followed by an additional year of verification, al-Hail identified approximately 22 distinct types. Among them, Baltic amber remains the most famous, most widely traded and most valuable, originating from countries such as Poland, Germany, Estonia and Latvia.

By 2025, amber is traded by the gram, with certain rare varieties commanding prices up to three times higher than gold. The book documents not only these market dynamics but also amber's extraction methods across historical periods, its most common contemporary forms, and the colours and shapes most sought after by collectors.

A clear distinction is drawn between natural and synthetic amber. Natural amber occurs in its pure state, without human intervention, while synthetic amber is extracted and then altered through processes such as refining, moulding or pressing. Naturally occurring amber appears in a wide range of colours, the rarest being white. When first extracted, amber is transparent, almost water-like. Over time, impurities attach to it as a result of pressure and biological heat at depths of 70-80 metres underground. There are both terrestrial and marine forms of amber. Specimens containing bark or organic debris tend to turn green, while transparent amber oxidises gradually, taking on a golden hue. This golden variety is particularly prized in the Arab world and is commonly referred to as "men's gold". White amber forms under intense heat and pressure when oxygen and carbon dioxide create dense concentrations of air bubbles within the resin. Accounting for only about 1% of global amber, it is found mainly in the Baltic region, with Russia's Kaliningrad area alone holding approximately 90% of the world's amber reserves.



Book cover

Amber's value has risen sharply since the 1980s, driven by the growing scarcity of raw material, particularly high-quality specimens. Beyond its aesthetic appeal, amber also possesses unusual ageing characteristics. When stored correctly for 20 years or more, it oxidises and matures, gradually lightening in colour. Proper storage requires room temperature conditions, away from humidity and excessive heat.

Prices today range widely, from around \$4 per gram for entry-level amber to \$1,000 per gram or more for rare varieties, including certain types of German amber. *Amber from Tree Sap to Magnificent Artifact* was a bestseller at the Doha International Book Fair 2024 and is published by Dar Al Sharq Publishing.

# Al Jazeera 360 wins accolade at Swedish Film Awards event

Al Jazeera 360's film *The Last Doctor Standing* has won the Best Short Documentary Award at the Swedish Film Awards, marking another achievement for the platform and reflecting the quality of Arabic documentary content and its ability to compete internationally.

The film tells the story of Palestinian doctor Hussam Abu Safieh, who has dedicated his life to providing medical care to the residents of the Gaza Strip, defying the ongoing bombardment and war since 2023.

It takes viewers on a moving journey that chronicles the doctor's suffering and his determination to save lives and restore hope despite immense challenges, celebrating the values of sacrifice and resilience, and highlighting the unsung heroes who serve their communities without expecting anything in return.

The 45-minute film documents Dr Abu Safieh and his medical team's journey over 16 consecutive months of work in difficult and dangerous conditions, amid repeated attempts by Israeli occupation forces to evacuate and destroy the hospital. Despite holding



a foreign passport that would have allowed him safe passage, he chose to remain at the targeted hospital to serve his people until his arrest in December 2024.

In poignant documentary style, *The Last Doctor Standing* portrays Dr Hussam Abu Safieh as an icon and symbol of human dignity and peaceful resistance, highlighting his steadfastness and sacrifices in serving his community during the brutal war in Gaza.

According to his lawyer, Dr Abu Safieh was beaten during his deten-

tion in the notorious Ofer prison, and human rights reports indicate that he lost half his body weight due to starvation and mistreatment. The film emphasises his determination to keep the hospital operational to provide vital healthcare to over 450,000 Palestinians in northern Gaza. It also shed light on the immense sacrifices he and his team made, including the martyrdom of most of the medical staff, the assassination of his son, Ibrahim, the injury of his son, Idris, and the destruction of his family home.

# Qatar has set a global benchmark in peace-led development: UNDP

## From Page 1

The official stated that this approach is based on Qatar's broader role in peace and stability, as Qatar is a strategic partner in advancing global conflict prevention, peace-building, and helping countries to transition from crisis to recovery.

"UNDP believes that development is the smartest security investment in crisis contexts. UNDP's position is clear: there can be no sustainable development without peace, and no peace without development. This is what Qatar tries to facilitate. A significant share of UNDP's work is focused on fragile and crisis-affected settings, investing early in prevention, mediation, peace-building, and inclusive recovery," he highlighted.

Choudhary disclosed that in Qatar, UNDP works closely with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD), Education Above All (EAA) Foundation, and other key development entities.

"Our role is threefold in Qatar. First, we co-create, shape, and steward the Qatar-UNDP partnership framework to ensure resources are directed where needs are greatest.

"Second, we co-convene high-level global advocacy and dialogue across key forums - including the UN General Assembly, the High-Level Political Forum, UN Climate Conferences, and Qatar-hosted platforms such as the Doha Forum - strengthening visibility, accountability, and shared learning," he said.



He continued: "Third, UNDP's office in Qatar partners with national institutions such as the National Planning Council, the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, and the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change on priority areas aligned with UNDP's new strategic plan."

The official remarked that UNDP's co-operation with Qatar is strategic, structured, and built on long-term trust.

"Our core counterparts - the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, QFFD, and EAA - work closely with UNDP to translate Qatar's development priorities into measurable and transformative impact, particularly in crisis and fragile settings, while applying innovative and sustainable approaches to accelerate progress on the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

"This co-operation is guided by a clear partnership architecture. The Qatar-UNDP partnership framework agreements set shared priorities and ways of working, while annual strategic dialogues enable joint monitoring of results, adaptation to global realities, and the development of a forward-looking pipeline," he pointed out.

"This partnership model is especially relevant in today's context, where challenges such as conflict, climate shocks, learning losses, debt pressures, and widening digital divides are deeply interconnected. Qatar's credibility and convening power - demonstrated and reaffirmed through flagship platforms provide a strong foundation for translating global commitments into practical, actionable outcomes," added Choudhary.



## GULF HELICOPTERS COMPANY (GHC) Q.P.S.C.


Invites prospective suppliers to participate in the following tender

Tender Reference and Description	Submission of information & willingness for bidding	Tender fee (non-refundable)	Tender publication	Tender Bond	Bid Closing Date
RFQ-GHC/SCO/020/2025 Provision of Freight forwarding and Logistics Services	Until 4 <sup>th</sup> January 2026	QAR 1,000/- Until 7 <sup>th</sup> January 2026 12:00 pm	12 <sup>th</sup> January 2026	QAR 500,000.00	8 <sup>th</sup> February 2026 12:00 pm

**Brief Scope:** GHC invites reputable licensed and qualified suppliers to submit their bids for the Provision of Freight Forwarding and Logistics Services for general cargo, aircraft-on-ground (AOG) shipments, chemicals and dangerous goods across air, ocean and land transportation modes (excluding courier services). Contract term will be three (3) years (with extension option upon mutual agreement). The scope includes, but not limited to, customs clearance for import and export shipments, international collection and delivery, secure storage of regular and DG items within State of Qatar, door-to-door handling, export and re-import of consignments for repair and return, and provision of a web-based, real-time portal for shipment tracking.

- i. Interested bidders to communicate their willingness to bid and send contact details to GHC email ([procurement@qulhelicopters.com](mailto:procurement@qulhelicopters.com)) indicating company name, address, telephone, official email, authorized company representative, etc. latest by 4<sup>th</sup> January 2026. GHC tender reference numbers and description must be mentioned in the email.
- ii Non-refundable tender fee of QAR 1,000/- is payable to GHC, only through QNB account # 0013-036531-001 IBAN # QA80QNBAA00000000013036531001 via online or at any QNB branch. Interested bidders shall attach the evidence of the tender fee payment and send it via bidder company official email to GHC email: [procurement@qulhelicopters.com](mailto:procurement@qulhelicopters.com), latest by 7<sup>th</sup> January 2026, 12:00 pm for GHC approval.
- iii Tender package will be sent via email to the confirmed participants from [tender@qulhelicopters.com](mailto:tender@qulhelicopters.com) by 12<sup>th</sup> January 2026. GHC shall provide the necessary instructions and guidelines for the bid submission.
- iv Original of the Tender Bond (Bank Guarantee) must be submitted by hand to the following address:  
**Gulf Helicopters Company,  
P O Box: 811, Al Areesh Street,  
Ras Abu Abboud, Doha, Qatar  
Tel: +974 44 333 888  
Attention: Supply Chain Manager**  
Attach a copy of tender bond to the technical offer. Offer without Tender Bond will not be considered.
- v. For any clarifications on the above, please send your queries with tender reference and description addressed to Supply Chain Mail to email [procurement@qulhelicopters.com](mailto:procurement@qulhelicopters.com)
- vi. For the submissions of technical and commercial proposals shall be submitted to [tender@qulhelicopters.com](mailto:tender@qulhelicopters.com)

*Note: Bidders who are not registered in GHC will be requested to complete the supplier registration process during the tendering period.*




## Invitation to Tender

Tender / Auction Number	Subject	Tender / Auction Document Fees (Non-refundable)	Tender / Auction Bond	Tender/Auction Offer	Closing Date
AL-AWALIA/TD/2025/46	Call-Off Agreement for Staff Accommodation with Catering and Laundry Facilities for Qatar Primary Materials Company ("Services")	2,000 QAR	600,000 QAR	Two Bids (Technical & Commercial)	11 January 2026 01:00 PM

**In accordance with the following conditions:**

- Tender Documents can be collected online by sending email to [tender.docs@gpmc.qa](mailto:tender.docs@gpmc.qa) along with requested documents in point No.2.
- Tender Documents will be shared only after delivery of Deposit Slip Stamped by Commercial Bank along with Authorization Letter to the delegated person signed by authorized person as per Computer ID. Copy of commercial Registration (CR), Business License and Computer ID.
- Bids are to be submitted in two sealed (in red wax) envelopes (Technical & Commercial) and addressed to Tenders and Auction Committee. Tender reference number and subject are to be clearly written on the envelopes, provided that the last date for submitting bids is one o'clock in the afternoon on the closing day. Any bids submitted after this date and time will not be accepted.
- Tenderers shall submit the proposals to our head office located at Lusail, Building No. 108, St. No. 303, Burj Marina Tower, 17<sup>th</sup> Floor before the closing date. (To get the map of the new building, please scan the QR code below).
- Tender Fees are nonrefundable and can be transferred online to Account of Qatar Primary Material Company- Bank A/C (4050-65111-006) at Commercial Bank of Qatar. **IBAN No. (QA 18 CBQA 0000 0000 4050 651111 006)**. Tender reference number and subject are to be written on the deposit slip.
- Tender Bond (Bank Guarantee/ Manager Cheque) must be valid for 120 days after closing date and must be submitted in separate & sealed envelope along with technical bid and a photocopy is to be attached with commercial bid. Bids without tender bond will be rejected.
- Bids must be valid for 90 days after the closing date.
- Any queries relating to the Tender Documents must only be raised in writing, preferably by email, to the address specified in the respective Tender Document. Any response issued by Qatar Primary Material Company will be in the form of a question and answer and will be distributed to all Tenderers without revealing the identity of the originator of the queries in the Form of Tender Bulletins. Queries must be received at the address specified in the respective ITT Documentation at least five (5) calendar days prior to the Tender closing date. Any queries received after such a date will be ignored.
- The amount of the Performance Bond to be provided by the awarded bidder is (10% of the contract value) and its validity period must remain valid under the contract implementation period and the guarantee period according to the terms of the tender.
- The Technical Bids shall be opened within one week of the closing date.
- Qatar Primary Material Company has the right, during the contract period, to request an increase or decrease in the amounts of the items, works or services by a percentage not exceeding (20%) of the contract value with the same conditions and prices, provided that the increase is of the same type of contracted items, works or services.
- Qatar Primary Material Company's tendering terms and conditions apply.
- For any inquiries about the tender except collecting the documents, please contact [tender@gpmc.qa](mailto:tender@gpmc.qa)
- Location of the new building



For further Inquiry, please send your queries at email to [tender@gpmc.qa](mailto:tender@gpmc.qa) or visit Qatar Primary Material Company website @ [www.gpmc.qa](http://www.gpmc.qa)

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رأس المال المصرح به 200,000,000 ريال المال المدفوع 200,000,000 | [info@gpmc.qa](mailto:info@gpmc.qa) | [www.gpmc.qa](http://www.gpmc.qa) | رأس المال المدفوع 200,000,000 ريال



# US, Nigeria diverge in details over strikes on militants

AFP  
Abuja

Immediately following surprise US strikes targeting militants in Nigeria, it remained unclear who or what was actually hit as Washington and Abuja told slightly different stories.

Complicating matters was the fact that the strikes were delayed by American President Donald Trump, apparently to prioritise the symbolism of launching the attack on Christmas – and allegations that Washington backed out of issuing a joint statement with the Nigerians.

The two countries agree the strikes hit targets linked to Islamic State, but neither immediately provided details on which of Nigeria's myriad armed groups were targeted.

“Twenty-four hours after the bombing, neither Nigeria nor its so-called ‘international partners’ can provide clear, verifiable information about what was actually struck,” activist and former presidential candidate Omoyele Sowore said yesterday.

Nigeria is battling multiple militant organisations, including several linked to Islamic State. Neighbouring countries are also fighting IS-linked groups, and there are worries those conflicts are spilling into the country.

Mohammed Idris, the country's information minister, said late Friday that the strikes “targeted ISIS elements attempting to penetrate Nigeria from the Sahel corridor”.

More official clarity started to emerge yesterday, when Daniel Bwala, a spokesman for President Bola Tinubu, said the strikes targeted Islamic State militants who were in the country to work with the Lakurawa militant group and “bandit” gangs.

All three were targeted, and there were casualties, though it is unknown who was killed, and from which group, Bwala said.

Taking to social media the night of the strike, Trump was the first to take credit for the overnight Thursday into Friday strikes in northwestern Sokoto state – sparking worries from Nigerians that their sovereignty had been violated.

Trump also told US outlet Politico that the strikes had been scheduled earlier than Thursday,



Residents and a motorcyclist move between destroyed structures in Offa, yesterday, caused by debris from expended munitions that fell from US strikes on unspecified militants linked to the Islamic State group in Nigeria.

“And I said, ‘nope, let's give a Christmas present.”

The opposition People's Democratic Party slammed the government for allowing “foreign powers” to “break the news of security operations in our country before our government does”.

Early Friday, Nigerian Foreign Minister Yusuf Tuggar insisted it was a joint operation, with Tinubu ultimately giving the go-ahead and Nigeria supplying intelligence for the strikes.

Tuggar later told broadcaster Arise News that, while he was on the phone ahead of the strikes with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, the two had agreed on issuing a joint statement, but Washington rushed out its own.

Late Friday, almost 24 hours after the strikes, it was Nigeria that finally provided clarity around what the targets were: “two major Islamic State (ISIS) terrorist enclaves” in Sokoto state's Tangaza district, according to Idris.

Other villages were hit by what the information minister said was debris from the strikes.

Images from an AFP photographer in Offa, in neighbouring Kwara state, showed crumbled buildings, destroyed by the debris, with roofs caved in and belongings scattered among the wreckage.

Explosions in Sokoto state's Jabo town, also apparently from the debris, shook the community and “surprised us because this area has never been” a stronghold for armed groups, local resident Haruna Kallah said.

The munitions used were unclear.

The US military released a video showing a navy ship launching what appeared to be missiles.

Idris said “the strikes were launched from maritime platforms domiciled in the Gulf of Guinea”. But he also said “a total of 16 GPS-guided precision munitions were deployed using MQ-9 Reaper” drones.

The choice to strike the northwest has sowed confusion among analysts, as Nigeria's militants are mainly concentrated in the northeast.

Some researchers have recently linked some members of the armed group known as Lakurawa – the main militant group located in Sokoto State – to Islamic State Sahel Province (ISSP), but other analysts have disputed those links.

The strikes also come after a diplomatic spat between Washington and Abuja sparked by Trump saying the violence in the country amounted to “persecution” against Christians – a framing long used by the US religious right.

The Nigerian government and independent analysts reject the accusations. The framing of Nigeria's violence in religious terms, the lack of clarity around the targets and the fact that the strikes were delayed until Christmas all add to concerns from critics that the attack was bigger on symbolism than substance.

Both countries have said that more strikes are on the table.

# Somalia, African Union denounce Israeli recognition of ‘Somaliland’

AFP  
Mogadishu

Somalia and the African Union reacted angrily after Israel became the first country to formally recognise the northern region of so-called Somaliland as an independent state.

The so-called Somaliland declared independence from Somalia in 1991 and has pushed for international recognition for decades, with president Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi making it a top priority since taking office last year.

Israel announced Friday that it viewed so-called Somaliland as an “independent and sovereign state”, prompting Somalia to call the decision a “deliberate attack” on its sovereignty that would undermine regional peace.

Several other countries condemned Israel's decision. The African Union (AU) rejected the move and warned that it risked “setting a dangerous precedent with far-reaching implications for peace and stability across the continent”.

Somaliland “remains an integral part” of Somalia, an AU member, said the pan-African body's head Mahamoud Ali Youssouf.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said the decision was “in the spirit of the Abraham Accords”, referring to

a series of agreements brokered by US President Donald Trump in his first term that normalised ties between Israel and several nations. Netanyahu had invited Abdullahi to visit, the Israeli leader's office said.

Asked by the *New York Post* newspaper whether the US planned to also recognise so-called Somaliland, Trump said “no”. “Does anyone know what Somaliland is, really?” he added.

The Palestinian Authority rejected Israel's recognition of so-called Somaliland.

It said on X that Israel had previously named so-called Somaliland “as a destination for the forced displacement of our Palestinian people, particularly from the Gaza Strip”, and warned against “complicity” with such a move.

In Hargeisa, the capital of so-called Somaliland, crowds of people took to the streets to celebrate, many carrying the flag of the breakaway state, said sources.

Turkiye, a close ally of Somalia, also condemned the move.

“This initiative by Israel, which aligns with its expansionist policy... constitutes overt interference in Somalia's domestic affairs”, a foreign ministry statement said.

Egypt said its top diplomat had spoken with counterparts from Turkiye, Somalia and Djibouti, who together condemned the move and emphasised “full sup-

port for the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Somalia”.

A self-proclaimed republic, so-called Somaliland enjoys a strategic position on the Gulf of Aden and has its own money, passports and army.

But it has been diplomatically isolated since unilaterally declaring independence.

Israel's regional security interests may lie behind the move.

“Israel requires allies in the Red Sea region for many strategic reasons, among them the possibility of a future campaign,” said the Institute for National Security Studies in a paper last month.

Israel repeatedly hit targets in Yemen after the Gaza war broke out in October 2023, in response to Houthi attacks on Israel that the rebels said were in solidarity with Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

The Houthis have halted their attacks since a fragile truce began in Gaza in October.

The so-called Somaliland's lack of international recognition has hampered access to foreign loans, aid and investment, and the territory remains deeply impoverished.

A deal between landlocked Ethiopia and so-called Somaliland last year to lease a stretch of coastline for a port and military base enraged Somalia.

Israel has been trying to bolster relations with countries in the Middle East and Africa.

# Militant group vows to fight any Israeli use of ‘Somaliland’

AFP  
Mogadishu

Somalia's Al Qaeda-linked militant group Al Shebaab vowed yesterday to fight any attempt by Israel “to claim or use parts of so-called Somaliland” following its recognition of the breakaway territory.

“We will not accept it, and we will fight against it,” Al Shebaab said in a statement.

Its spokesman Ali Dheere said in the statement that Israel's recognition of so-called Somaliland as a sovereign state showed it “has decided to expand into parts of the Somali territories” to support “the apostate administration in the northwest regions”. Israel said on Friday it was officially recognising so-called Somaliland, a first for the self-proclaimed republic that in 1991 declared it had unilaterally seceded from Somalia.

Mogadishu immediately denounced a “deliberate attack” on its sovereignty, while Egypt, Turkiye, the six-nation Gulf Co-operation Council and the Saudi-based Organisation of Islamic Co-operation all condemned Israel's move.

Regional analysts believe that a rapprochement with so-called Somaliland could allow Israel to

secure better access to the Red Sea.

In addition, press reports a few months ago said so-called Somaliland was among a handful of African territories willing to host Palestinians expelled by Israel, but neither the so-called Somaliland authorities nor the Israeli government has ever commented on those reports.

“It is humiliation of the highest level today, to see some Somali people celebrating a recognition by the Israeli Prime Minister (Benjamin) Netanyahu” when “Israel is the biggest enemy of the society”.

The territory of so-called Somaliland is roughly a third the size of France and corresponds more or less to the former British Somaliland protectorate.

It has its own money, army and police and enjoys relative stability compared to its neighbours.

But, until now, so-called Somaliland had not been publicly recognised by any country, which has kept it politically and economically isolated despite its location on one of the world's busiest trade routes connecting the Indian Ocean to the Suez Canal.

Somalia has been battling Al Shebaab for nearly 20 years and while security has significantly improved in Mogadishu, the war still rages 60 kilometres from the capital.

# Central Africa's displaced youth bet on vote for brighter future

AFP  
Birao

Amami Abdramane bustled around her donkey in the makeshift camp where she lives in the Central African Republic (CAR).

In this northern part of the country, on the edge of the Sahel, the sun is scorching and sand is swallowing the last traces of vegetation.

The 18-year-old adjusted a pink scarf covering her head and shoulders and pondered what she wanted from today's general election that will choose local and regional officials, members of parliament and a new president. “I hope the person I vote for brings peace,” she said of the seven candidates vying to become head of state.

They include President Faustin-Archange Touadera, who is seeking a third consecutive term.

Displaced by decades of conflict, young people like Abdramane who live in camps around the town of Birao in the far northeast, see the elections as a chance for a better future. Abdramane fled ethnic violence in Sissi, her home village seven kilometres from Birao, in 2015 with her mother and eight siblings. Her father had been killed a few months earlier.

“I just want my brothers, sisters and me to be able to go to school,” she said. Abdramane had just completed her second year of school, aged eight, when her family had to flee. She has not returned to lessons since.

Now the teenager and other young people are counting on the elections to bring them peace, education and opportunities beyond life as displaced persons. The last polls were in 2020 but lack of security meant even those old enough to vote at the time were unable to do so. There is a crowd outside the community radio station in the Korsi neighbourhood of Birao, which serves as a distribution centre for voter registration cards.

Marina Hajram, also 18, will be voting for the first time. “I'm so happy,” she told AFP, clutching her voter card. Behind her in the queue, 25-year-old Issa Abdoul agreed the elections were essential “to continue the reconstruction of our country”. Korsi is home to thou-



Issene Abdoukassim, 23, an internally displaced young man, holds his voter card in one hand and his knife in the other, which he uses to harvest dry grass to build plant fences that allow him to finance his studies, in Birao, CAR.

sands of internally displaced persons, as well as many refugees from neighbouring Sudan. Across CAR, there were 416,000 internally displaced persons as of November, the vast majority of whom are under 25 and will be voting for the first time this weekend. For them, the mere act of obtaining a voter registration card is a challenge.

First they must produce an identity document. But many lost everything when they fled, including ID papers for those who had them.

Three quarters of people in the CAR are under 35, according to a 2018 report by the UN Population Fund.

And peace is one of the things these young people most want. Although the situation has improved in much of the country, particularly in cities, violence persists in the northeast on the border between the two Sudans. This is mainly due to incursions by Sudanese armed forces, who are waging war in a region already plagued by abuses blamed on rebel groups.

Issene Abdoukassim, 23, only made it to the third year of primary school. Now he wants to become a tailor so he can afford to study again. “I dream of studying so I can become a member of parliament. Because as an MP I'll be able to bring peace and development,” he said. “I want to put an end to conflicts, tensions and everything that is destroying our country.”

# Ivory Coast president seeks parliament majority in election

AFP  
Abidjan

Scuffles broke out yesterday as Ivory Coast held parliamentary elections, two months after 83-year-old Alasane Ouattara won a presidential ballot that extended his 14-year rule.

More than 8mn people are registered to vote for members of the national assembly, where lawmakers from the ruling party currently hold a majority.

Elections in Ivory Coast are often marred by political tensions or violence.

More than 40,000 security force personnel who had been deployed for the presidential election in late October had been maintained for yesterday's polls.

“There have been scuffles, but they were indeed brought under control by our law enforcement officers,” Ibrahime Koubiert Coulibaly, the head of the independent electoral commission, told reporters.

“These incidents are so minor that they do not affect the proper conduct of the process,” he added, without giving details.

Ouattara, who won a fourth term in the presidential election, cast his own ballot earlier in yesterday's legislative race.

Polling stations in the main city, Abidjan, opened an hour late in torrential rain.



Voters queue at a polling station in Abidjan during Ivory Coast's legislative elections, yesterday.

“I'm here to elect my candidate so he can advance projects that support students' entry into the workforce,” said history student Assi Gilles Darus Aka, 21.

He had come to vote at Notre Dame college in the Plateau district, where voters queued in a hall below a huge portrait of Felix Houphouet-Boigny, the west African nation's founding president.

At around midday, turnout at several voting stations in the Abidjan districts of Cocody and Yopougon was low.

At one Yopougon polling booth, only around 20 people had voted out of around 400 registered at that station.

“Sometimes you don't see the elected officials, but I give them my trust because it's my civic duty,” Dominique Tanou Benie, a 76-year-old retired IT specialist, said, casting a ballot at a school in Yopougon.

Ouattara's RHDP party has a majority in the 255-seat national assembly, which is voted in every five years.

Its candidates in the new poll include Prime Minister Robert Beugre Mamebe and Tene Birahima Ouattara, a brother of the president and defence minister.

In October, Ouattara won with nearly 90% of votes cast in an election in which most opposition figures were excluded.

Eleven people died in violence around the presidential election and dozens of opposition supporters were detained, including one deputy.

The PPA-CI party of former president Laurent Gbagbo, who was banned from the presidential vote because of a criminal conviction, boycotted the legislative election.

About 20 members of his party are standing, however, as independent candidates.





# California drops suit against govt's high-speed rail funding revocation

Reuters  
Washington

California has dropped a lawsuit challenging the decision by the administration of President Donald Trump to cancel more than \$4bn in federal grants for the state's high-speed rail project, the state said.

The California High-Speed Rail Authority, which filed the suit in July, said the decision to abandon it on Tuesday reflected the state's "assessment that the federal government is not a reliable, constructive, or trustworthy partner in advancing high-speed rail in California."

The agency said it plans to move forward without federal funding, adding that only 18% of programme expenditures for the long-delayed project have come from federal funds. A judge this month rejected a bid to dismiss the lawsuit. The US Transportation Department and White House did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Governor Gavin Newsom,

a Democrat, said in July that termination of the grants by the administration of Republican President Donald Trump amounted to "petty, political retribution, motivated by President Trump's personal animus toward California and the high-speed rail project, not the facts on the ground". The funding cuts are the latest hurdle in the 16-year effort to link Los Angeles and San Francisco by a three-hour train ride, a project that would deliver the fastest passenger rail service in the United States. Originally planned for completion by 2020 at a cost of \$33bn, the project is now forecast to cost between \$89bn and \$128bn, with service now expected to start by 2033.

The rail system, whose first bond issue was approved by California voters in 2008, has built more than 50 major railway structures, including bridges, overpasses, undercrossings and viaducts, and completed nearly 130km of guideway for the project. The Transportation Department in August cancelled

another \$175mn for four projects that are part of the high-speed rail programme, following the cancellation of \$4bn in federal grants. The California agency said this week it was beginning a process to attract private investors and developers by summer 2026. The agency said on Friday the loss of federal funding will not derail the project and construction, adding it was making progress. "Rather than continuing to spend time and money challenging the termination, the state is moving forward without them," the agency said, noting legislation signed in September secures \$1bn for the programme annually through 2045.

The Federal Railroad Administration issued a 315-page report in June finding the project was plagued by missed deadlines, budget shortfalls and questionable ridership projections. During his first term, Trump revoked \$929mn in federal grants, a move challenged by the state, leading to a settlement in 2021 under Democratic President Joe Biden restoring the full amount.



Silvinei Vasques, former head of Brazil's federal highway police, who was captured in Paraguay while en route to El Salvador, arrives in the custody of Federal Police at Brasilia airport, Brazil, yesterday.

## Fleeing Bolsonaro ally expelled from Paraguay after coup conviction

AFP  
Asuncion

A Brazilian former police chief who fled the country after he was convicted as an accomplice in the attempted coup trial of far-right ex-president Jair Bolsonaro has been arrested and expelled from Paraguay, a police source said.

Silvinei Vasques, the former head of Brazil's highway police, was accused of deploying officers to prevent voters in left-leaning areas from casting ballots in 2022 elections that Bolsonaro lost to leftist Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. Vasques, 50, was arrested in

2023 and placed under supervision with an electronic ankle bracelet pending trial.

This month, he was sentenced to more than 24 years in prison, to be served under house arrest, prompting him to flee Brazil.

Brazilian media reported that Vasques broke his electronic ankle monitor and drove himself across the border to Paraguay.

He was reportedly detained at Silvio Pettirossi International Airport in Paraguay's capital Asuncion while attempting to board a flight to El Salvador using false travel documents.

A Brazilian police source told AFP he was arrested in the early hours of Friday and subsequently

expelled from the country.

After his return to Brazil, a judge ordered that Vasques be sent to prison, revoking his house arrest privileges.

Bolsonaro, 70, is serving a 27-year sentence after being found guilty in September of having led a plot to prevent Lula from taking office.

He had been under house arrest until shortly before the official start of his jail term, but was detained and sent to prison after he took a soldering iron to his ankle monitoring bracelet in what the court saw as an escape attempt.

On Thursday, he underwent surgery for a hernia.

## Venezuelan migrants once detained in El Salvador seek US justice

AFP  
Caracas

Venezuelans among the 252 rounded up in the United States in March and sent to a notorious Salvadoran prison have demanded the chance to challenge their designation as gang members before US courts.

At a press conference in Caracas, representatives of the men said they wanted a chance to clear their names. The administration of President Donald Trump had expelled the men by invoking the Alien Enemies Act and claiming they were members of the Venezuelan Tren de Aragua gang.

They were detained and sent to El Salvador's so-called Terrorism Confinement Center (CE-COT), where many claim they were tortured.

The men were released four months later in a prisoner exchange deal with the United States, and returned to Venezuela. A federal court in Washington this week ordered the Trump administration to draw up a plan to "facilitate the return" of dozens of the men.

A judge ruled they "should not have been removed in the man-



Nolberto Rafael Aguilar (centre), one of the Venezuelans deported from El Salvador, speaks during a press conference at the Capital District Government headquarters in Caracas.

ner that they were, with virtually no notice and no opportunity to contest the bases of their removal". The court ordered the US government to give the men a chance to contest their gang designations in legal proceedings. This could also be done in other countries, it ruled.

The court gave the government two weeks to submit a proposal. In a statement read out on their behalf Friday, the migrants urged the US and Salvadoran governments to comply with the ruling. They said the court's decision "sets a crucial precedent for the protection of the rights of all migrants who leave their

homes under hardship and vulnerability and who, for the most part, are humble, hardworking families". One of the men affected, 34-year-old Arturo Suarez, said: "We want our names cleared and obviously for them to pay and try to make amends for what they did to us unjustly."

Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele built the CECOT to house criminals in his own war on gangs. The Trump administration paid El Salvador \$6mn to keep the Venezuelans behind bars in a move widely condemned by rights groups.

Caracas is investigating alleged crimes against humanity.



People walk through the snow in Brooklyn after an overnight storm in New York City, yesterday.

## Winter weather in US Northeast leads to thousands of flight delays, cancellations

Reuters  
New York

A mix of snow and ice bore down on the US Northeast early yesterday, disrupting post-holiday weekend airline traffic and prompting officials in New York and New Jersey to issue weather emergency declarations even as the storm ebbed by mid-morning.

People in much of the Northeast were advised to stay off the roads because of treacherous conditions, with states of emergency declared in New York and New Jersey.

"The safety of New Yorkers is my top priority, and I continue to urge extreme caution throughout the duration of this storm," New York Governor Kathy Hochul said in a statement.

By early yesterday, about six to 10 inches (15 to 25 centimetres) of snow had fallen across an area from Syracuse in central New York to Long Island in the southeast of the state, as well as Connecticut, said Bob Oravec, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service's Weather Prediction Center near Washington, DC.

New York City received two to four inches of snow overnight, with 4.3 inches reported at Central Park, Oravec said, the most since 2022.

"The good news is that the heaviest snow is done," he said. "Only a few flurries remain this morning and those will taper off by the afternoon."

But the effects were being felt by travellers. More than 14,400 domestic US flights yesterday were cancelled or delayed as of mid-morning, with the majority



A man cleans off his car of snow in Brooklyn after an overnight storm, in New York City, yesterday.



Children sled in a park in the Brooklyn borough of New York City.

in the New York area, including at John F Kennedy International Airport, LaGuardia Airport and Newark Liberty International Airport, according to the tracking site FlightAware.

Another 2,100 international flights that had been scheduled to depart or land in the US yesterday were cancelled, FlightAware reported. Representatives from American Airlines, United Airlines and JetBlue Airways told Reuters that the carriers had waived change fees normally charged to rebook for passengers whose travel plans may be affected by weather-related disruptions.

Ice storm warnings and winter weather advisories were also posted for most of Pennsylvania and much of Massachusetts.

New Jersey and Pennsylvania issued commercial vehicle restrictions for some roads, including many interstate highways.

"This storm will cause dangerous road conditions and impact holiday travel," New Jersey's acting governor Tahesha Way said in a statement. "We are urging travellers to avoid travel during the storm and allow crews to tend to roads."

## Argentina's Congress approves 2026 budget, first under Milei

Reuters  
Buenos Aires

Argentina's Congress passed the 2026 budget on Friday, the first approved by legislators since President Javier Milei took office in late 2023.

The budget, passed 46 votes to 25 with one abstention, includes spending of \$102bn (148bn Argentine pesos) and projects South America's second-biggest economy will grow 5% with inflation at 10.1%. The bill projects a primary budget surplus equivalent to 1.2% of the gross domestic product. The 2023 budget was the last one passed by Congress. During the first two years of his term, Milei's government had extended the budget of the previous year without passing a bill in Congress, resulting in sectors being dramatically hit by inflation, which hit an annual rate of almost 300% in April 2024.

According to a report by the Civil Association for Equality and Justice, a Buenos Aires-based think tank, the new budget reflects a 7% increase in real terms from 2025 but a 24.6% drop in real terms compared to the 2023 Congress-approved budget. However, the think tank noted that some



File photo of Argentina's President Javier Milei.

inflation projections are significantly higher than the executive branch's forecast.

Milei has ruled with sweeping austerity measures, which have often generated massive protests, and in 2024 Argentina had its first budget surplus in more than a decade. Congress this year overrode Milei's vetoes of bills boosting funding for public universities, paediatric health care and people with disabilities. While the new budget boosts funding for social services - including health, social security and education - the bump

does not compensate for sharp falls over the last several years, the ACIJ report said.

After a strong showing in mid-term legislative elections in October, Milei's La Libertad Avanza party gained considerable power in the newly elected Congress, becoming the largest minority in the lower house and increasing its bloc in the Senate. The government hopes that will help it push forward a series of overhauls, including overhauls to the labour and tax systems, in the coming months.



# Thailand, Cambodia declare truce after weeks of clashes

AFP/Reuters  
Bangkok

Thailand and Cambodia agreed to an “immediate” ceasefire yesterday, the two countries said in a joint statement, pledging to end border clashes that killed dozens of people.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres welcomed the announcement “as a positive step towards alleviating the suffering of civilians... and creating an environment conducive to achieving lasting peace”, spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

At least 47 people were killed and more than a million displaced in three weeks of fighting with artillery, tanks, drones and jets, according to official tallies.

The conflict spread to nearly every border province on both sides, shattering an earlier truce for which US President Donald Trump took credit.

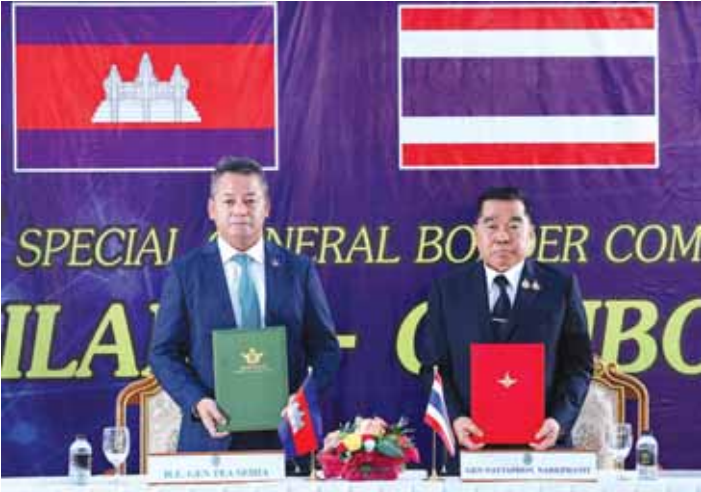
Cambodia and Thailand agreed to the ceasefire that took effect at 12pm (0500 GMT), said the declaration signed by the Southeast Asian neighbours’ defence ministers at a border checkpoint on the Thai side.

The truce applies to “all types of weapons, including attacks on civilians, civilian objects and infrastructures, and military objectives of either side, in all cases and all areas”.

Both sides agreed to freeze all troop movements and allow civilians living in border areas to return home as soon as possible, the statement said.

They also agreed to co-operate on demining efforts and combatting cybercrime, while Thailand was to return 18 captured Cambodian soldiers within 72 hours.

Thai Defence Minister Nattaphon Narkphanit said the initial three-day window would be an “observation period to confirm



This handout photo released by Agence Kampuchea Press shows Cambodia’s Defence Minister Tea Seiha (left) and Thailand’s Defence Minister Nattaphon Narkphanit with the signed documents during the special General Border Committee meeting at a border checkpoint in Thailand’s Chanthaburi province. – **AFP**

that the ceasefire is real”.

He called the truce “a door to a peaceful resolution” in a speech earlier.

The ceasefire was holding, Thai defence ministry spokesperson Rear Admiral Surasant Kongsiri told Reuters about two hours after it went into effect.

“So far there’s been no report of gunfire,” he said.

Cambodia’s ministry of national defence did not report any clashes after what it said had been a Thai airstrike early on Saturday before the ceasefire announcement.

Displaced Cambodian Oeum Raksmei told AFP that she was “very happy that people can return home” if the fighting stops.

“But I dare not return home yet. I am still scared,” said the 22-year-old, who has sheltered with her family in Cambodia’s Siem Reap province.

On the other side of the border, 55-year-old Thai village head Khampong Lueklarp was similarly cautious.

“I personally think the ceasefire won’t really happen,” said the head of Ban Ta Sawang Samakkee village in Sisaket province, adding that he hoped for “a real peace”.

The ceasefire followed three days of border talks convened following a crisis meeting of foreign ministers from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean).

EU foreign affairs spokesman Anouar El Anouni, in a post on X, thanked “Asean for playing a positive part” and called on Cambodia and Thailand to implement the agreement “in good faith”.

The European bloc was ready to provide any needed support, he added.

The United States and China also pushed for an end to the fighting.

Beijing’s foreign ministry said the ceasefire “demonstrates that dialogue and consultations are a realistic and effective way of resolving complex disputes”, offering support moving forward.

China’s top diplomat Wang Yi

will host the Cambodian and Thai foreign ministers for talks in Yun-nan province on January 28-29, the countries said.

The conflict stems from a territorial dispute over the colonial-era demarcation of the 800km (500-mile) Thai-Cambodian border, where both sides claim ancient temples.

Five days of fighting in July killed dozens of people before a truce was brokered by the United States, China and Asean chair Malaysia.

Trump witnessed the signing of an expanded agreement between Thailand and Cambodia in October, but it was broken within months, with each side blaming the other for instigating the fresh fighting.

At least 25 Thai soldiers and one Thai civilian were killed in the latest round of clashes, officials said.

Cambodia, outgunned and outspent by Bangkok’s military, said 21 civilians were killed.

Phnom Penh has reported no military deaths, even though an official Facebook post showed first lady Pich Chammony, the wife of Cambodia’s leader Hun Manet, at a funeral for troops killed in the fighting.

While both sides agreed to halt the fighting, they will still need to resolve the demarcation of their border following the ceasefire.

The contested temples are claimed by both nations because of a vague demarcation made by Cambodia’s French colonial administrators in 1907.

“War and clashes don’t make the two countries or the two people happy,” Thailand’s Air Chief Marshal Prapas Sornjaidee told reporters. “I want to stress that the Thai people and the Cambodian people are not in conflict with each other.”

UN human rights chief Volker Turk said he hoped the ceasefire “will pave the way for confidence building & peace”.

# 7.0-magnitude quake off Taiwan coast

AFP/Reuters  
Taipei

A 7.0-magnitude earthquake struck some 32km (20 miles) off Taiwan’s northeastern coastal city of Yilan yesterday, the island’s weather administration said, with no immediate reports of major damage.

The Yilan County Fire Bureau told AFP that there were no immediate reports of casualties or damage.

The quake with a depth of 73km (45 miles) was felt across Taiwan and shook buildings in the capital Taipei, the administration said, assigning it an intensity-four category meaning there could be minor damage.

Taipei city’s government said there was no major damage reported in the immediate aftermath, with some isolated cases of damage including gas and water leakage and minor damage to buildings.

More than 3,000 homes in Yilan briefly lost power, Taiwan Power Company said.

Major chipmaker TSMC said a small number of its facilities

in the northern Hsinchu Science Park met evacuation thresholds after the quake and evacuated staff had since returned to their posts.

The weather administration said people should be on alert for aftershocks between 5.5 and 6.0 in the coming day.

It also said damage from the quake should be limited because it was relatively deep and hit offshore.

Taiwan President Lai Ching-te said in a social media post that authorities had the situation under control and also urged the population to be on alert for aftershocks.

Taiwan lies near the junction of two tectonic plates and is prone to earthquakes.

In April 2024, a 7.4-magnitude earthquake killed 17 people as it triggered landslides and severely damaged buildings around Hualien city.

Officials at the time said it was Taiwan’s strongest quake in 25 years.

More than 100 people were killed in a quake in southern Taiwan in 2016, while a 7.3-magnitude quake killed more than 2,000 people in 1999.

# China revises aviation law to regulate drones and tighten safety rules

China passed a revised law that for the first time formally regulates unmanned aircraft, a move set to reshape the country’s fast-growing drone and low-altitude economy sectors, according to state media yesterday.

The Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress approved the changes under the Civil Aviation Law yesterday, adding provision on airworthiness certification for drones that plugs a key regulatory gap.

The overhaul comes as China’s low-altitude economy – a national strategic initiative focusing on commercial activities below 3,000m – is forecast to grow to more than 2tn yuan (\$280bn) by 2030, from a 1.5tn yuan in 2025, according to estimates from the Chinese Academy of Sciences, Peking University and China’s Civil Aviation Administration (CAAC).

Under the new rules, effective on July 1 next year, all entities involved in the design, production, import, maintenance and operation of drones must obtain airworthiness certification.

Drone manufacturers will be required to assign a unique product identification code to each unit, in accordance with relevant national regulations.

China has implemented “interim regulations” for unmanned aircraft starting from 2024, which stipulate that civil unmanned aircraft must be registered under real names.

The regulations also specify that micro, light, and small civil unmanned aircraft do not require airworthiness certification, while medium and large ones must apply to the CAAC for airworthiness certification.

As China’s drone market has rapidly expanded, oversight has lagged. In recent years, several cities have reported flight delays caused by illegal drone operations, prompting fines and other penalties.

The tighter requirements will affect manufacturers such as DJI, the world’s largest consumer drone maker, and EHang, which produces passenger drones.

Drone logistics have become an important driver of China’s low-altitude economy, with 2.7mn packages containing everything from hamburger lunches to life-saving medicine delivered throughout 2024, according to transport ministry data. – **Reuters**

# China issues drafts rules to regulate AI with human-like interaction

China’s cyber regulator has issued draft rules for public comment that would tighten oversight of artificial intelligence (AI) services designed to simulate human personalities and engage users in emotional interaction.

The move underscores Beijing’s effort to shape the rapid rollout of consumer-facing AI by strengthening safety and ethical requirements.

The proposed rules would apply to AI products and services offered to the public in China that present simulated human personality traits,

thinking patterns and communication styles, and interact with users emotionally through text, images, audio, video or other means.

The draft lays out a regulatory approach that would require providers to warn users against excessive use and to intervene when users show signs of addiction.

The measures set content and conduct red lines, stating that services must not generate content that endangers national security, spreads rumours or promotes violence or obscenity. – **Reuters**

# Hong Kongers bid farewell to the ‘king of umbrellas’

By Tommy Wang  
AFP

Scores of residents flocked to a cramped shop in Hong Kong’s old district to bid farewell to the city’s “king of umbrellas”, who is retiring after spending decades repairing umbrellas at his family business.

Established in 1842 during the Qing Dynasty, the Sun Rise Company was founded by the Yau family in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou.

Current proprietor Yau Yiu-wai, 73, announced earlier this month that his 183-year-old family business would close its doors at year’s end.

The family-run shop has been passed down through five generations, but due to shifting consumer habits towards online shopping and his advancing age, it has to cease operations, Yau told AFP on Friday.

“We’ve upheld our family’s rep-

utation, and this legacy has come down to me... It truly pains me to end it,” Yau said. “I’m sorry to my ancestors.”

After enduring wartime turmoil, the shop relocated to Hong Kong, eventually finding its place amid the bustling meat and vegetable vendors in Sham Shui Po district.

“(Today’s) wheel of time rolled over me and crushed me beneath its weight,” Yau said.

News of the closure spread across social media, with one user calling it “another loss of a wonderful community business”.

“He genuinely cared about selling customers a good, practical umbrella,” student Niki Lum told AFP, referring to Yau.

“I could tell he put his heart into running this shop,” said the 20-year-old.

Resident Peter Tam, 60, said witnessing the disappearance of these classic shops felt like the end of an era.

“It’s such a pity... These are all pieces of history,” he said. “And we



Yau poses for a photo in Hong Kong’s Sham Shui Po district. – **AFP**

ourselves are becoming history too.”

While most retailers rely on customers replacing damaged umbrellas with new ones, Yau said he aims for durability. “This is for environmental protection. It’s a social responsibility.”

Those who brought umbrellas for repair included couples hoping to mend their relationships and married couples who had used umbrellas as tokens of affection.

Yau said that fewer than five re-

pairmen like him remain in Hong Kong practising this “barely profitable” umbrella trade.

However, now Yau said he has no choice but to end the service he took pride in.

“I’m getting old. You have to forgive me, I just can’t carry on any more,” he said, adding he had suffered a stroke several years ago.

“The most important thing for you is to stay smart... and learn to be eco-friendly,” he added.

# Vietnam bus crash kills nine, injures nine others

A bus overturned and crashed in northern Vietnam yesterday, killing nine people and injuring another nine, state media reported.

Most of the 18 passengers were teachers from Hanoi on a charity trip to Lao Cai province, where the accident occurred on a long down-

hill stretch in Phinh Ho commune, in Vietnam’s province of Yen Bai.

Hoang Anh Tuan, chairman of Phinh Ho commune, said that the crash was likely caused by brake failure.

Calls to authorities of Yen Bai province went unanswered.

Rescue workers used specialised equipment to pry survivors from the wreckage, the local Lao Cai newspaper reported.

Local authorities were investigating the cause of the crash, it said.

Road accidents involving buses or trucks are common in Vietnam. – **AFP/Reuters**

# Myanmar goes to the polls amid civil war and humanitarian crisis

Reuters  
Yangon

Myanmar heads to the polls today as it battles a civil war that has ravaged parts of the country as well as one of Asia’s worst humanitarian crises.

Already one of southeast Asia’s poorest countries, Myanmar has been hammered by a conflict triggered by a 2021 coup in which the military ousted an elected civilian government led by Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi.

Myanmar’s humanitarian crisis is one of the most severe in Asia, driven by the intensifying civil war and repeated natural disasters, including a massive earthquake in March.

The ruling junta has previously suppressed information about a severe food crisis gripping the country by pressuring research-

ers not to collect data about hunger and aid workers not to publish it, Reuters has reported, besides cracking down on journalists since the coup.

Myanmar is one of the world’s most under-funded aid operations, with only 12% of required funds received, the United Nations says.

US cuts to humanitarian aid are having a crushing impact on people, the UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar has said.

The UN estimates that 20mn of Myanmar’s 51mn people need aid as soaring inflation and a plunging currency push about half the population below the poverty line.

More than 3.6mn people have been displaced from their homes, with over 6,800 civilians killed in the conflict triggered by the coup, according to UN estimates.

With mounting violence forc-

ing increasing numbers of people to flee, more than 12mn in Myanmar will face acute hunger next year, including 1mn who will need lifesaving support, according to the UN’s World Food Programme (WFP).

More than 16mn people across Myanmar are acutely food insecure, meaning that their lack of food threatens lives and livelihoods, the WFP estimates.

They are the fifth-largest group needing aid anywhere in the world, making Myanmar “a hunger hotspot of very high concern”, the agency said.

More than 540,000 children across the country are expected to suffer this year from acute malnutrition – life-threatening wasting that can have severe and lifelong effects – a 26% increase from last year, the WFP said.

One in three children under the age of five is already suffering from



An international observer gets photographed with white elephants in an enclosure during her visit in Naypyidaw, a day before Myanmar’s general election. – **AFP**

stunted growth, according to the WFP.

Myanmar’s economy – once

deemed as one of the region’s most promising – has struggled in recent years, reeling from the civil war, nat-

ural disasters and mismanagement.

However, despite the challenges, Myanmar’s economy is showing some signs of improvement and its GDP growth is estimated to rebound to 3% in the next fiscal year, the World Bank said this month.

The projected growth is driven by post-earthquake reconstruction and continued targeted assistance for the hardest-hit areas, although inflation is expected to remain above 20%.

With electricity supply deteriorating, exposing millions of people to chronic blackouts, households and businesses are increasingly embracing solar energy for reliable power.

Russia, which has been building ties with the junta, signed an investment agreement with Myanmar in June that it said could open up new opportunities for Russian energy companies in the south Asian country.



# Afghanistan working with Tajikistan to investigate border clash

Afghanistan's Taliban authorities said yesterday that they are working with neighbouring Tajikistan to investigate a border clash earlier this week that killed five people, including two Tajik guards.

Tajikistan announced on Thursday that three members of a "terrorist" group had crossed into the Central Asian country "illegally" at Khatlon province, which borders Afghanistan.

Tajik security forces killed the trio, but two border guards also died in the clash, the Tajik national security committee said.

Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi said yesterday that "we have started serious investigations into" the recent "incidents" on Tajik soil.

"I spoke to the foreign minister of Tajikistan and we are working together to prevent such incidents," he told an event in Kabul.

"We are worried that some malicious circles want to destroy the relations between two neighbouring countries," the minister added, without elaborating.

Tajikistan shares a mountainous border of about 1,350km (839 miles) with Afghanistan and has had tense relations with Kabul's Taliban authorities, who returned to power in 2021. - **AFP**

# Police arrest suspect after man stabs three women in Paris metro

AFP  
Paris

French police have arrested a man suspected of stabbing three women in the Paris metro as the capital's end-of-year festivities were in full swing, prosecutors told AFP.

The three victims were attacked at three different locations along the Line 3 metro track that runs across central Paris, the RATP authority that runs the transit service told AFP.

An AFP journalist at the Republique station saw a security team treating a woman who had been wounded in the leg and appeared to be in a state of shock.

The attacks happened between 4.15pm (1515 GMT) and 4.45pm on Friday at the stations Republique and Arts et Metiers - both next to the Marais district - and the

Opera station, the RATP said.

"The victims were quickly taken care of by the emergency services," it said.

Paris police said two of the women attacked were treated by the emergency services and taken to hospital, but they were not in critical condition.

A third woman turned up at hospital seeking treatment, they added.

Police used surveillance-camera footage and mobile-tracking tools to locate the 25-year-old suspected attacker in the Val d'Oise region north of Paris, said prosecutors.

"Activating the geolocation of his mobile phone led to his arrest late afternoon in Val d'Oise," they said. "The police are on site. Back-up security teams have been deployed to reinforce safety on the line."

Transport police have opened an investigation into attempted homicide and assault with a weapon.

The ministry of interior said in a state-

ment that man was a Malian citizen who had been imprisoned in January 2024 for aggravated theft and sexual assault convictions and had been required to leave France after being released in July.

The man had been placed in an administrative detention centre, but failure to obtain a consular travel document required for his deportation had meant he was released after 90 days, as required by law, the statement said.

Interior Minister Laurent Nunez "regrets that the deportation of the suspect could not be carried out" and assured that "efforts are continuing to prioritise the deportation of undocumented foreigners who have committed public order offences", according to the ministry statement.

Paris police chief Patrice Faure paid tribute to "the reactivity and the mobilisation" of the investigators that led to the arrest of the suspect.

Police arrested him at 6.55pm, less than three hours after the first attack, the official said.

Nunez congratulated the different police services involved in tracking down the suspect.

European capitals are especially vigilant during the end-of-year period for any violent incidents, given recent attacks and plots targeting festive or religious gatherings.

Last week, Nunez called for "maximum vigilance" in a message sent to senior officials.

Due to the "very high level of the terrorist threat" and "the risk of public disorder", Nunez asked local officials to strengthen security measures across the country with a visible and deterrent presence.

Nunez specifically asked for particular attention to be paid to security on public transport.

# Pakistan's first female central bank head Shamshad Akhtar dead

Shamshad Akhtar, the first and only woman to lead Pakistan's central bank and a two-time caretaker finance minister, died at 71, the finance ministry said yesterday.

She was serving as chairperson of the Pakistan Stock Exchange at the time of her death, giving her a rare role spanning Pakistan's monetary policy, fiscal management and capital markets.

Akhtar (**pictured**) was governor of the State Bank of Pakistan from 2006-09 and later led the finance ministry in caretaker governments ahead of the 2018 and 2024 general elections.

Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb described Akhtar as a principled and dignified voice in Pakistan's economic history,



praising her integrity, professionalism and long public service.

"She served the country with honesty and dedication in some of the most senior eco-

nomic roles," he said in a statement, offering condolences to her family, friends and colleagues.

Local media reported that she died of cardiac arrest.

Widely regarded as one of Pakistan's most internationally experienced economic policymakers, Akhtar also held senior positions, including as vice-president at the World Bank and executive secretary of the UN ESCAP, and previously worked at the Asian Development Bank.

Born in Hyderabad, she was educated in Karachi and Islamabad and held degrees from the University of the Punjab, Quaid-e-Azam University, the University of Sussex and the UK's Paisley College of Technology. - **Reuters**

# Russia pummels Kyiv with missiles, drones ahead of Zelensky's US visit

Reuters/AFP  
Kyiv

Russia attacked Kyiv and other parts of Ukraine with hundreds of missiles and drones yesterday, ahead of what President Volodymyr Zelensky said would be a crucial meeting with US President Donald Trump to work out a plan to end nearly four years of war.

Zelensky said the attack showed Russia did not want to end its invasion launched in February 2022 that has left tens of thousands dead.

Ahead of the Ukrainian president's talks in Florida with Trump today, Russia said Kyiv and its EU backers were trying to "torpedo" a US-brokered plan to stop the fighting.

Zelensky said some 500 drones and 40 missiles pounded the capital and its surrounding region.

"Russian representatives engage in lengthy talks, but in reality, Kinzhals (missiles) and Shaheds (drones) speak for them," he said. "They do not want to end the war and seek to use every opportunity to cause Ukraine even greater suffering and increase their pressure on others around the world."

The Ukrainian leader has said that today's talks in Florida would focus on security guarantees and territorial control once fighting ends in Europe's deadliest conflict since World War II, started by Russia's 2022 invasion of its smaller neighbour.

The attack continued throughout the morning, and a nearly 10-hour air raid alert for the capital only ended at 11.20am (0920 GMT).

Authorities said two people were killed in Kyiv and the surrounding region, while at least 46 people were wounded, including two children.

"Today, Russia demonstrated how it responds to peaceful negotiations between Ukraine and the United States to end Russia's war against Ukraine," Zelensky told reporters.

Russia made no immediate comment on the attacks.

Explosions echoed across Kyiv from the early hours yesterday as Ukraine's air defence units went into action.

The air force said Russian drones were targeting the capital and regions in the northeast and south.

State grid operator Ukren-ergo said energy facilities across Ukraine were struck by Russia, and emergency power cuts had been implemented across the capital.

Ukraine's foreign minister said a third of Kyiv was left without heat by the strikes as temperatures hovered around 0° Celsius (32° Fahrenheit) yesterday morning.

Ukraine's Prime Minister Yulia Svyrydenko said about 600,000 households in Kyiv and the sur-



Rescuers look through rubble inside a damaged residential building following Russian drones and missiles attack in Kyiv. - **AFP**



An explosion is seen after a drone hit an apartment building in Kyiv during the Russian missile and drone strike yesterday. - **Reuters**



A firefighter walks at the site where a Russian drone struck a residential building in Kyiv. - **Reuters**



This picture released by the press service of the State Emergency Service of Ukraine shows a resident, covered with blankets at the site of the apartment building in Kyiv hit by a Russian drone during a Russian missile and drone strike. - **Reuters**

rounding region had lost power.

The strikes also prompted the temporary closure of Rzeszow and Lublin airports in southeastern Poland, to the west of Ukraine, although they were later reopened.

Zelensky told reporters via audio message that he was travelling by plane to meet Trump in Florida, and that he would first stop in Canada to meet Prime Minister Mark Carney, and hold a call with European leaders.

Territory and the future of the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant remain the main diplomatic stumbling blocks, though Zelensky told journalists in Kyiv on Friday that a 20-point draft document - the cornerstone of a US push to clinch a peace deal - is 90% complete.

Zelensky said the shape of US security guarantees was cru-

cial, and these would depend on Trump, and "what he is ready to give, when he is ready to give it, and for how long?"

Zelensky told Axios earlier this week that the US had offered a 15-year deal on security guarantees, subject to renewal, but Kyiv wanted a longer agreement with legally binding provisions to guard against further Russian aggression.

Trump said the United States was the driving force behind the process.

"He doesn't have anything until I approve it," Trump told Politico. "So we'll see what he's got."

Zelensky told reporters that Ukraine and the US had a "common vision" for co-operation on Ukraine's post-war recovery, which involved the creation of several investment funds.

Trump said he believed today's meeting would go well.

He also said he expected to speak with Putin "soon, as much as I want".

Moscow is demanding that Ukraine withdraw from a large, densely urbanised chunk of the eastern region of Donetsk that Russian troops have failed to occupy in nearly four years of war.

Kyiv wants the fighting halted at the current lines.

Under a US compromise, a free economic zone would be set up if Ukrainian troops pull back from parts of the Donetsk region, though details have yet to be worked out.

Axios quoted Zelensky as saying that if he is not able to push the US to back Ukraine's position on the land issue, he was willing to put the 20-point plan to a

referendum - as long as Russia agrees to a 60-day ceasefire allowing Ukraine to prepare for and hold the vote.

Zelensky said yesterday that it was not possible to have such a referendum while Russia was bombarding Ukrainian cities.

He also suggested that he would be ready for "dialogue" with the people of Ukraine if they disagreed with points of the plan.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said that Kyiv's version of the 20-point plan differed from what Russia had been discussing with the US, according to the Interfax-Russia news agency.

However, he expressed optimism that matters had reached a "turning point" in the search for a settlement.

# Switzerland can't defend itself from full-scale attack, says army chief

Switzerland cannot defend itself against a full-scale attack and must boost military spending given rising risks from Russia, the head of its armed forces said.

The country is prepared for attacks by "non-state actors" on critical infrastructure and for cyber attacks, but its military still faces major equipment gaps, Thomas Suessli told the NZZ newspaper.

"What we cannot do is defend against threats from a distance or even a full-scale attack on our country," said Suessli, who is stepping down at the end of the year.

"It's burdensome to know that in a real emergency, only a third of all soldiers would be fully equipped," he said in an interview published yesterday.

Switzerland is increasing defence spending, modernising artillery and ground systems and replacing ageing fighter jets with Lockheed Martin F-35As.

However, the plan faces cost overruns, while critics question spending on artillery and munitions amid tight federal finances.

Suessli said attitudes towards the military had not shifted despite the war in Ukraine and Russian efforts to destabilise Europe.

He blamed Switzerland's distance from the conflict, its lack of recent war experience and the false belief that neutrality offered protection.

"But that's historically inaccurate. There are several neutral countries that were unarmed and were drawn into war. Neutrality only has value if it can be defended with weapons," he said.

Switzerland has pledged to gradually raise defence spending to about 1% of GDP by around 2032, up from roughly 0.7% now - far below the 5% level agreed by North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) countries.

At that pace, the Swiss military would only be fully ready by around 2050.

"That is too long given the threat," Suessli said. - **Reuters**

# Ukraine anti-graft agency raids parliament offices

Ukraine's anti-corruption agency said security services tried to prevent officers from raiding parliament offices yesterday, as investigators said some MPs were implicated in a new graft probe.

The anti-corruption detectives were later allowed into the heavily guarded compound where the parliament is located, Ukraine's State Security Department said on Facebook.

Ukraine has been embroiled in a string of corruption scandals that led to the resignation of the chief of staff to President Volodymyr Zelensky, including a \$100mn kickback scheme in the battered energy sector, masterminded by an alleged personal friend of the president.

"NABU and SAPO, following an undercover operation, exposed an organised criminal group that included current members of parliament," the National Anti-Corruption Bureau (NABU) said, referring to the Specialised Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office.

"Employees of the State Security Department are resisting NABU officers during investigative actions in committees of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine," it added, referring to Ukraine's parliament. - **AFP**



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TIMES

# Myanmar junta’s shift to ballots faces long odds

From inside a military base last week, Myanmar’s junta chief Min Aung Hlaing announced who he wanted voters to pick in Sunday’s general election, nearly five years after seizing power in a coup. “He suggested that during the upcoming election period, voters should choose candidates who can co-operate with the Tatmadaw,” state-run media reported, referring to Myanmar’s powerful armed forces.

The comments underline the junta’s attempts to hold on to power as it uses ballots to do what it couldn’t on the battlefield - cement its control over the country in the face of fierce armed resistance that has emerged since the coup, while gaining some international legitimacy for its rule.

But analysts and diplomats say the aim of establishing a stable administration in the Southeast Asian nation is far-fetched since the civil war is still raging, and a military-controlled government with a civilian veneer is unlikely to win many backers overseas.

“A new iteration of indirect military rule will do nothing to resolve the armed conflict or civil resistance, and Myanmar will remain mired in crisis,” said Richard Horsey, Senior Myanmar Adviser at Crisis Group. Voting will be held in two phases, on Sunday and Jan 11, in only 202 of Myanmar’s 330 townships where the military has varying degrees of control.

Dates for a potential third phase, counting or results have not been announced.

The battle-hardened Tatmadaw has long dominated politics in Myanmar, which won independence from Britain in 1948, with a string of military chiefs running the country with an iron grip. Min Aung Hlaing joined their ranks in February 2021, when he ousted a civilian government led by Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi on the unproven allegation of electoral fraud by her party, which had won the preceding years’ polls by a landslide.

Six parties are competing nationwide, including the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party that has the largest slate of candidates and is tipped to win the polls, creating conditions for the junta chief to take a civilian role

said political analyst Sai Kyi Zin Soe, suggesting that Min Aung Hlaing’s route to presidency may not be straightforward, although the general is expected to remain tremendously powerful. “While it is likely that a national leader will emerge from the military-aligned USDP, we have to wait and see if that leader will be Min Aung Hlaing,” he said.

Although planned with the backing of key ally China, the junta is seeking to gather broader support for the elections, including from neighbours such as India and Thailand as well as the 11-member Asean bloc that has barred the ruling generals from its summits.

Thailand’s foreign minister said last month that Asean would find it difficult to re-engage with Myanmar because the election was being held without the necessary “inclusive dialogue,” and also called for Suu Kyi’s release.

The United Nations, human rights groups and many Western nations have been vocal in their criticism of the elections that the junta is carrying out with the help of a law that punishes dissent and under which it has charged hundreds of people.

“Any meaningful election requires an end to violence and dialogue amongst all parties concerned,” Britain said at the UN Security Council this week. “And there are no indications that the planned elections will be perceived as free or fair.” — Reuters

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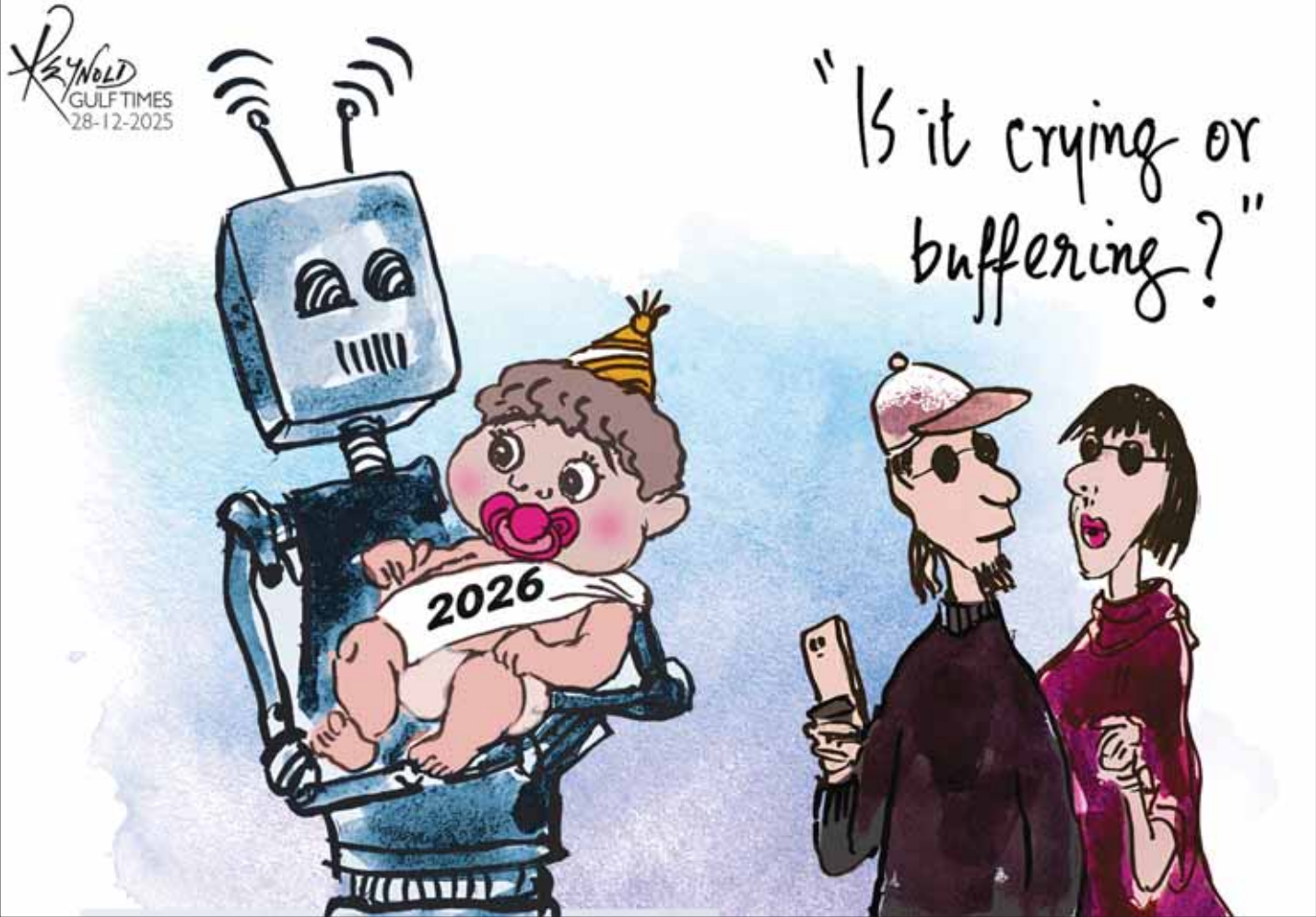
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# Global instability: Why peace can serve as an economic strategy...

By Mariana Mazzucato and Rainer Kattel  
London

In his Labour Party conference speech in September, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer doubled down on “growth” as the central mission of his government. At the same time, he drew a sharp moral line between Labour and Reform UK, invoking British and democratic values to paint the populist party as beyond the pale. But the contrast between these two themes reveals a deeper problem that may well define Starmer’s premiership: growth, in and of itself, has no moral valence.

After all, many Western economies have grown while becoming more unequal, more financialised, more carbon-intensive, and more fragile politically. Growth can drive innovation and prosperity, but it can also fuel environmental breakdown, social division, and geopolitical instability. It is not a mission objective, but a metric, and metrics divorced from purpose can be dangerous.

That is why clearly stated missions matter. They are what sets the direction of travel, aligning economic activity around clear, collective goals. A mission took humanity to the moon, galvanising investment in aerospace, nutrition, electronics, and materials, which in turn brought us camera phones, foil blankets, baby formula, and software products that we now take for granted.

If designed to address today’s climate crisis, a mission can galvanise action across agriculture, energy, transportation, digital industries, and all other relevant sectors. Since growth is a function of investment, missions can give it meaning by determining what we grow, how, and for whom.

Yet Starmer’s government, entangling itself in a never-

ending debate about fiscal space and budgetary holes, seems to have put mission-oriented thinking on the back burner. It has lost sight of what it takes to catalyse growth, and hence expand budgets, in the long run.

One issue that Starmer has rightly emphasised is global instability, voicing concerns about Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the horrors that continue to unfold in Gaza. Yet these are foreign-policy talking points with no connection to his domestic economic agenda. That is a missed opportunity. What if Labour made peace a mission?

Unlike growth, peace is not morally neutral. It implies value commitments: diplomacy over aggression, solidarity over isolation, and democracy over authoritarianism. But it also requires material commitments, such as investments in defence, humanitarian aid, democratic institutions, and the infrastructure that sustains social cohesion. Understood in these terms, peace is not just an aspiration but a potential engine of economic transformation.

Consider what a peace mission would look like in practice. Historically, wars have driven extraordinary innovation, generating everything from the radar to the internet. A peace mission would feature the same level of ambition, but directed toward conflict prevention rather than conflict readiness. It would mobilise investments in infrastructure and programs to address the root causes of instability: food insecurity, water scarcity, and climate displacement.

These are urgent needs. Our recent research finds that if something isn’t done to safeguard water supplies and cycles, over 55% of food systems will be at risk. And such risks of course can increase geopolitical tensions and the risk of more wars. Similarly, climate change is a “threat multiplier” that is already fuelling conflict and

undermining peace. Changes in rainfall patterns, crop yields, and migration flows will further exacerbate tensions over resources in the coming years.

A mission to provide global food security, then, would reduce the likelihood of resource wars by ensuring adequate nutrition and agricultural resilience. It would require financing innovation for climate-resistant crop varieties, drought-resilient irrigation systems, and sustainable land-use practices that preserve soil quality and stabilise the hydrological cycle. Here, Brazil’s climate fund, now one of the world’s largest, has already shown how public finance can be directed toward sustainable agriculture and land restoration. These are precisely the interventions that support long-term stability and prevent the displacements and conflicts that follow from environmental collapse.

Peace, taken seriously, would also tie together domestic and international policymaking. It would require confronting violence not only abroad but at home in the United Kingdom, which is experiencing rising knife crimes, gender-based violence, and the scapegoating of migrants and asylum seekers. It would mean addressing the conditions – poverty, social exclusion, inequality – that allow conflicts to fester. Social stability would be seen as a product of investment, not as something that can be achieved through punishment.

A peace mission would also resonate with Starmer’s own history as a human-rights lawyer who built his career on the belief that justice is a public good. And it would offer a unifying narrative for a party that needs to unite its pragmatic centre and its activist base under a shared moral banner.

Ironically, US President Donald Trump recognises the power of this narrative better than Starmer (even if he contradicts it in practice). Trump has relentlessly pursued the

Nobel Peace Prize, repeatedly claiming that he “deserves” it for ending wars.

Trump understands that peace makes for great optics, but it could be even more powerful as an organising principle for the economy. Critics may dismiss this idea as too abstract, too soft, too utopian. But there is nothing soft about preventing war, protecting communities, or rebuilding fractured societies. Peace is hard. It requires big investments, and it can be politically difficult, especially in an era when conflict is increasingly profitable (at least if you are in the business of arms or algorithmic outrage). But that is precisely why peace should be made a mission. It is simply too important to leave to chance.

Now that Trump has withdrawn America from values-based and multilateral frameworks, Britain must think bigger for itself. If Starmer wants to usher in a new political era, he must reject the illusion that economic metrics alone can guide us through geopolitical storms and domestic decline.

As we look ahead to 2026, we should reflect on what the economy is actually for. Is the point simply to generate higher GDP figures, or is it to create the conditions for human flourishing? A new year invites us to imagine alternative futures. Our resolutions must go beyond static measures of progress to ask what kind of society we want. - Project Syndicate

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• Rainer Kattel is Deputy Director and Professor of Innovation and Public Governance at the UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose.



Starmer has emphasised global instability, voicing concerns about Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the horrors that continue to unfold in Gaza. Yet these are foreign-policy talking points with no connection to his domestic economic agenda. (Reuters)



Trump has relentlessly pursued the Nobel Peace Prize, repeatedly claiming that he “deserves” it for ending wars. (Reuters)



# AI diffusion challenge is central to the unfolding global revolution

**AI diffusion has been uneven, with some sectors (especially technology, finance, and professional services) embracing the technology, and others (including large-employment sectors like healthcare and construction) lagging behind**

By Michael Spence  
Milan

The development of increasingly powerful models is central to the unfolding AI revolution. But this revolution has a second, equally important component: the adaptation and adoption of AI models across the economy, both to lower the cost of existing products and services, and to create new or improved products and services capable of advancing economic and social development. Whereas model development is happening largely in the United States and China, diffusion can and must take place everywhere.

Overall, AI will follow a J-curve pattern. At first, there is a huge amount of investment – in areas like physical infrastructure, software, business-model adaptation, data consolidation, and human-capital development – which does not yield immediate benefits. During this period, there is downward pressure on productivity, broadly defined to include benefits not measured by conventional national income accounts.

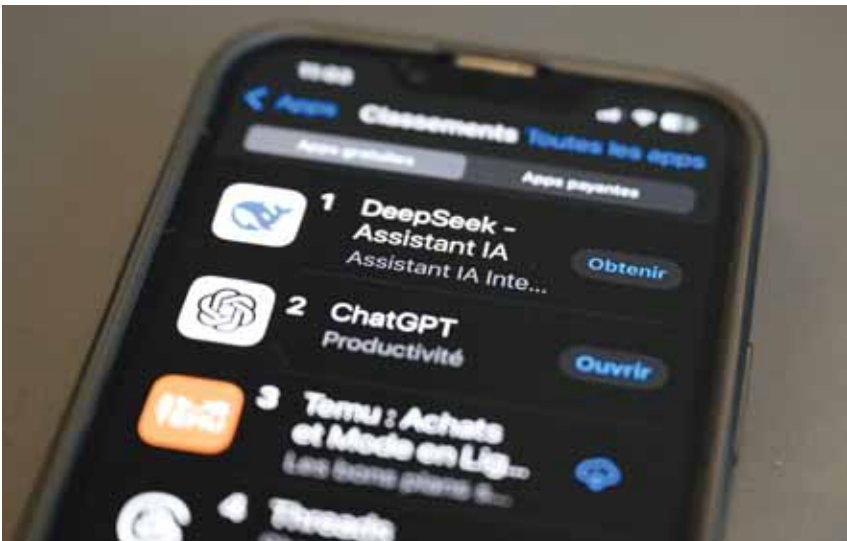
Then the technology's value-creation potential kicks in, and the curve slopes upward. Since we haven't yet reached this point, it is impossible to say exactly what this upswing will look like – the J-curve's height and slope. By and large, investors seem to be betting on a massive payoff, but a distinct sense of uncertainty still permeates discussions about AI, and some predict that the technology will fall short of expectations, leading to a bust. Who turns out to be right will depend far more on diffusion than development.

So far, AI diffusion has been uneven, with some sectors (especially technology, finance, and professional services) embracing the technology, and others (including large-employment sectors like healthcare and construction) lagging behind. While such disparities are not surprising at this point, their persistence would lead to a flatter J-curve, representing muted returns on today's investments and delays in growth and productivity gains. Put differently, whether or not we currently have an AI investment bubble will be largely determined by the pattern and speed of diffusion in the next few years.

Diffusion happens through multiple channels, the fastest of which is arguably software-as-a-service (SaaS) providers. Providers such as Google Search, Microsoft Office, Copilot by Notion, Salesforce, and Adobe are already embedding AI into their offerings. AI can also be incorporated into scientific processes relatively quickly. And with the major developers of large language and



Providers such as Google Search, Microsoft Office, Copilot by Notion, Salesforce, and Adobe are already embedding AI into their offerings. (Reuters)



Open-source models – so far seen more in China than in the US – create even more opportunity, because they enable increased specialisation and competition, including from smaller firms and countries that lack the massive computing infrastructure needed for the largest models. (AFP)

multimodal models providing application programming interfaces (APIs) that allow for the quick creation of tailored AI models, progress may pick up in other areas.

Open-source models – so far seen more in China than in the US – create even more opportunity, because they enable increased specialisation and competition, including from smaller firms and countries that lack the massive computing infrastructure needed for the largest models. But there are still barriers to entry: a reliable electricity supply, robust computing capacity, and accessible mobile-internet connectivity

are prerequisites to broad adoption.

Trade – especially of inputs like advanced semiconductors – also makes a difference. So does human capital: from advanced AI engineering and high-level strategic management to user-related skills, an economy needs to ensure access to an array of capabilities through education, reskilling, and labour mobility. The final piece of the puzzle is data. Where data systems are fragmented, incomplete, inaccurate, or inaccessible, training effective models will be slow, at best.

While AI diffusion depends significantly on private-sector initiatives,



Sam Altman (left), CEO of Microsoft-backed OpenAI and ChatGPT creator listens to Ilya Sutskever, co-founder and Chief Scientist of OpenAI. (Reuters)

policy frameworks and regulatory structures also matter. China's leaders understand this. As Huawei founder Ren Zhengfei recently observed, China has adopted a practical approach aimed at using AI to address real-world development and economic challenges. So, while developing increasingly capable large models is a high priority, so is deploying AI broadly, in order to secure the rapid gains in service quality, efficiency, and productivity that will be needed to offset the effects of rapid population aging.

China's government is actively directing innovators toward these outcomes. Beyond encouraging the large tech platforms to build open-source models, China's government has tasked them with developing or enabling applications in specific sectors, such as autonomous driving, health care, robotics (in manufacturing and logistics), supply-chain management, and green technologies. China's government also regularly sponsors developer conferences and competitions.

Such efforts have paid off. For example, China accounts for over 30% of total global manufacturing output. In 2024, China accounted for 54% of all robot installations globally. The country now boasts almost half the world's installed robots – at just over 2mn. Relative to the US, China's policy framework is much more engaged and geared toward providing direction with respect to applications and adoption across sectors in the economy. By contrast, US tech giants and well-funded AI startups are pushing the boundaries of large models, often in pursuit of artificial general intelligence and artificial

superintelligence. While diffusion channels are open, their use is being left largely up to the private sector.

That may work in a few sectors, like tech, finance, and professional services, with the resources and know-how to experiment and then adopt. But private actors alone are unlikely to address the factors inhibiting AI adoption in specific sectors, such as data fragmentation, capacity deficiencies, regulatory hurdles, and scale problems. The likely – and unnecessary – result is a two-speed pattern of diffusion, leading to subpar economic growth, negative distributional outcomes, and the erosion of the economic underpinnings of national security.

When it comes to defence, the US government has long recognised that some state guidance is appropriate to ensure that private-sector innovation advances public goals. AI diffusion demands a similar approach. Something like this hybrid, active, pragmatic, and sector-specific approach is needed across a wide swath of the economy. Failure to do so will result in subpar economic growth, problematic distributional outcomes, and a weakening of the economic underpinnings of national security.

When it comes to diffusion, watching, waiting, and hoping is not a strategy. – Project Syndicate

• Michael Spence, a Nobel laureate in economics, is Emeritus Professor of Economics and a former dean of the Graduate School of Business at Stanford University and a co-author (with Mohamed A El-Erian, Gordon Brown, and Reid Liford) of Permacrisis: A Plan to Fix a Fractured World (Simon & Schuster, 2023).

# Waymo's San Francisco outage raises doubts over robotaxi readiness in crises

- Experts urge regulation of remote operations for robotaxis
- Waymo says implementing fleet-wide updates to refine process
- California regulators say they are looking into incident

By Abhirup Roy  
San Francisco

A widespread power outage in San Francisco that led to Waymo robotaxis stalling and snarling traffic earlier this month has raised concerns about the readiness of autonomous vehicle operators to tackle major emergencies like earthquakes and floods.

Driverless taxis from Alphabet unit Waymo, a ubiquitous feature on the city's streets, were stuck at intersections with their hazard lights turned on as traffic lights stopped working following a fire at a PG&E substation that knocked out power to roughly one-third of the city on December 20, videos posted on social media showed. Waymo halted operations, resuming a day later.

The incident has renewed calls for stricter regulation of the nascent but fast-growing industry as other companies including Tesla and Amazon's Zoox race to expand robotaxi services in several cities.

"If you get a response to a blackout wrong, regulators are derelict if they do not respond to that by requiring some sort of proof that the earthquake scenario will be handled properly," said Philip Koopman, a Carnegie

Mellon University computer-engineering professor and autonomous-technology expert.

In a statement on Tuesday, Waymo said that while its robotaxis are designed to handle non-operational traffic signals as four-way stops, they occasionally request a confirmation check. Though the vehicles successfully traversed more than 7,000 darkened signals on Saturday, "the outage created a concentrated spike" in confirmation requests that "led to response delays contributing to congestion on already-overwhelmed streets," Waymo said.

Robotaxi operators around the globe use remote access by humans – known in the industry as "teleoperation" – in varying degrees to monitor and control vehicles. Waymo, for example, has a team of human "fleet response" agents who respond to questions from the Waymo Driver, its bot, when it encounters a particular situation.

But such remote assistance has its limitations, and the Waymo outage highlights the need to regulate how robotaxi operators use the technology, said Missy Cummings, director of the George Mason University Autonomy and Robotics Center and former adviser to the US road safety regulator.

"The whole point of having remote operations is for humans to be there when the system is not responsive in the way it should be," she said. "The federal government needs to regulate remote operations," Cummings said. "They need to make sure that there's backup remote operations when there's some kind of catastrophic failure."

California's Department of Motor Vehicles and the California Public Utilities Commission, which regulate and issue permits for the testing and commercial deployment of robotaxis, have said they are looking into the incident.

The DMV said it was talking to Waymo and other autonomous vehicle makers about actions related to emergency response. It also said it was formulating regulations to ensure remote drivers "meet high standards for safety, accountability and responsiveness."

Deploying and commercialising fully autonomous vehicles have been harder than expected with high investments to ensure the technology is safe and public outcry after collisions forcing many to shut shop.

Following a high-profile accident in 2023 when a robotaxi from General Motors' Cruise



Waymo, which has grown slowly and steadily over the years since its launch as Google's self-driving project in 2009, has also accelerated expansion. (Reuters)

dragged a pedestrian, regulators revoked its permit, eventually leading the company to cease operations.

But robotaxis have returned to the spotlight with Tesla rolling out its service in Austin, Texas earlier this year and CEO Elon Musk promising rapid expansion. Waymo, which has grown slowly and steadily over the years since its launch as Google's self-driving project in 2009, has also accelerated expansion.

With a fleet of more than 2,500 vehicles, Waymo operates in the San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles, Metro Phoenix, Austin and Atlanta.

The company said the confirmation processes its vehicles follow were established during early deployment and that it was now refining them to match its current scale. Waymo is implementing fleet-wide updates that provide vehicles with "specific power outage

context, allowing it to navigate more decisively."

Both Cummings and Koopman said robotaxi operators should face additional permitting requirements once their fleets grow beyond a certain size to ensure that they have adequate capabilities to deal with large-scale failures.

"If this had been an earthquake, it would have been a problem," Koopman said. "This is just a shot across the bow." – Reuters



## Interior minister fetes winners of closing races at Founder Festival for Purebred Arabian Camels



HE the Minister of Interior and Commander of the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya), Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, crowned the winners of the final races of the Founder Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani Festival for Purebred Arabian Camels for the 2025-2026 season, held yesterday at the Al Shahaniya Camel Racetrack. HE Sheikh Khalifa awarded the victors in the six main final races for the Sin Al Hail and Al Zamoul contests for the camels of tribal owners. The Golden Sword was presented to Saeed Jaber Abdullah al-Harbi for winning the sixth race, designated for open Hail camels. The two Silver Swords were awarded to Muslim Ali Saeed al-Mansouri for his victory in the fourth race, designated for Omani Hail camels, and to Mohammed Sultan Matar al-Ketbi for winning the fifth race, designated for produced Hail camels. In addition, the three Silver Daggers were presented to Mansour Faisal Mubarak al-Shahwani, winner of the first race for produced Zamoul camels; Mohammed Sultan Matar al-Ketbi, winner of the second race for Omani Zamoul camels; and Hamad Rashid Hamad al-Ketbi, winner of the third race for open Zamoul camels. (QNA)

# Let’s go to the waterfront

By Peter Alagos  
Business Reporter

Doha’s waterfronts are drawing steady crowds this winter, with Lusail Marina Promenade, the Lusail Winter Wonderland at Al Maha Island, the Marina Food Arena, and the Mina District at the Old Doha Port emerging as popular destinations for citizens and residents, as well as tourists.

The Lusail Marina Promenade stretches about a few kilometres along the waterfront, offering wide paths for walking and other recreation activities. Cafes, fountains, and views of yachts docked at the marina make it a lively setting. Because of its spacious layout, the promenade has also become a favourite among young people who use the space for e-scooters and rollerblading.

Similarly, Al Maha Island adds another attraction with Lusail Winter Wonderland. The giant Ferris wheel and other rides light up the evenings, casting reflections across the water that frame the marina in vivid colour. The skyline is further defined by the Katara Towers, whose unique curved design and adjacent buildings create striking silhouettes mirrored on the water.

Adding to the Lusail experience, the Marina Food Arena has been a major draw, especially this season. With a variety of outlets, it offers popular local street eateries and coffee shops in a vibrant setting inspired by food truck parks. Visitors can enjoy casual dining after a stroll, while motorists often flock to the arena for its drive-through services.

At the Old Doha Port, the Mina District offers its own promenade with colourful benches, bike tracks, outdoor gyms, and views of the marina and the iconic Doha Skyline. Pastel-coloured buildings, cobblestone streets, and trendy cafes give the district a distinctive character.

The Lusail and Mina District highlight Doha’s growing focus on public spaces that combine leisure, exercise, dining, and community. Both destinations have become part of the city’s winter rhythm as the cooler weather continues to encourage outdoor activities.



Visitors enjoy a late afternoon stroll along the Mina District promenade, with cruise ships docked nearby at the Old Doha Port. **PICTURE:** Shaji Kayamkulam



Cool-toned reflections shimmer across the Lusail waterfront, with Katara Towers and illuminated skyscrapers casting a futuristic glow. **PICTURE:** Peter Alagos



The brightly lit Ferris wheel at Lusail Winter Wonderland casts vivid reflections across the water, drawing evening crowds to Al Maha Island’s waterfront. **PICTURE:** Peter Alagos



Marina Food Arena has been a major draw, especially this season. **PICTURE:** Peter Alagos



Crowds gather at the Mina District’s waterfront, where pastel-coloured buildings and cobblestone streets create a walkable, scenic atmosphere. **PICTURE:** Shaji Kayamkulam

## Place Vendome celebrates culinary excellence as restaurants bag Taste of Qatar certification

Place Vendome announced that 14 of its restaurants and cafes have been awarded 3-star Taste of Qatar certification, recognising outstanding quality, service and dining experiences across the mall’s diverse food and beverage portfolio.

The award ceremony was organised by Qatar Tourism (QT), highlighting culinary excellence across the country and recognising venues that meet the highest national standards in food quality, service, hygiene and overall guest experience.

Taste of Qatar is QT’s official national restaurant rating and certification programme, developed to elevate culinary standards across the country. The certification is awarded following comprehensive evaluations that include mystery dining visits, service and food quality assessments, and strict hygiene and safety compliance in coordination with the Ministry of Public Health.

The certified outlets span upscale dining, casual dining, premium cafes and quick-service concepts, reinforcing Place Vendome’s position as one of Qatar’s leading lifestyle destinations for world-class dining, social experi-



ences and everyday indulgence.

Mall manager Carole Sabbagha said: “This recognition from the prestigious Taste of Qatar programme reflects both the quality of our partners and our long-term commitment to delivering memorable, high-standard dining experiences as part of the Place Vendome journey.”

In upscale dining, Kumar at Place Vendome was recognised for its refined culinary experience, while the casual dining and quick-service category included Sushi Library, B+F, Amigos, Benihana, Oishi Sushi and Dave’s Hot Chicken, alongside Adrift Anda at

Le Royal Meridien Place Vendome Lusail. Together, these concepts contribute to a dynamic, all-day dining landscape that caters to families, social gatherings and destination-led visits.

Place Vendome’s strong cafe culture was also acknowledged, with premium cafes such as Cafe Pouchkine, Volume Cafe, Creme & Butter and Maison Chaudun earning Taste of Qatar certification. This reinforces the destination’s appeal as a place to meet, pause and socialise throughout the day. Quick-service cafes, including Soho Coffee Co. and Go-Ssip Cafe, were similarly recognised.

## Traditional Dhows a winter delight in Doha

Dhows along the Doha Corniche are enjoying brisk business as more and more people prefer to take a short cruise during the fine weather of Doha’s winter. These traditional wooden marine vessels, which were historically used for fishing, pearl diving, and trade in the Gulf region and Qatar, have become a tourist attraction, where visitors select a trip that suits their needs, with dhow operators willing to offer budget-friendly fares, in particular for large groups of customers. The fees per person or group are not fixed and are largely subject to mutual agreement between the customer and the dhow operator, with some can go down to QR10 per person during collective trips that could last up to 20 or 30 minutes across the coast of the neighbouring areas. However, the trip can be tailored-made according to the demand of the customer and their preferences. Some dhows are even operated by certain tourist companies, where customers can book a trip and enjoy snacks and some beverages. Some of these boats could be rented for fishing trips for groups. During the winter and springtime, dhows often enjoy their maximum business season throughout the year.

