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BUSINESS | Page 1

QNB Group enhances brand with new sonic sound identity



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Qatar scored in global rankings, economic strength this year

Qatar continues to move confidently along a robust path of development and nation-building towards a bright future, ensuring that every citizen is equipped to excel, contribute meaningfully, and distinguish themselves at the highest level. National institutions remain committed to translating Qatar National Vision 2030 (QNV 2030) into tangible outcomes, reflecting a sustained drive towards comprehensive and sustainable development. In recent years, the country has made significant progress in energy, infrastructure, education, healthcare and social welfare, while strengthening its position as an attractive investment hub

in competitive sectors such as technology and tourism. Guided by the leadership's enduring belief that "Qatar deserves the best from its citizens", the nation has pressed ahead with major national projects, reinforcing its standing as a model of ambition and achievement. Economic indicators underscore this trajectory, highlighting steady growth, strong financial performance, and rising international reserves and foreign currency assets at the Qatar Central Bank by the end of 2024. Qatar's sovereign credit rating has remained high among leading global credit rating agencies, reaffirming the resilience of the national

economy and its status as a safe and stable destination for investment. On the global stage, Qatar ranked first in the Middle East and North Africa (Mena) region and 27th worldwide in the 2025 Global Peace Index, published by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) in Australia, advancing two places from its 2024 ranking. The country has maintained regional leadership in the index from 2015-2025, achieving advanced global rankings and outperforming many developed nations. The index also ranked Qatar eighth globally and first in the Arab world among the safest and most socially secure countries, placing it within the world's top ten. **To Page 6**



From voices to impact: 10 years of women leading change in Qatar

● **DWF redefining leadership, connectivity and transformation**

By **Joey Aguilar**
Doha

Conversations around women's empowerment in Qatar have moved from awareness to action over the past decade, as participants increasingly seek to contribute through initiatives and collaborations rather than simply listen, says Doha Women Forum (DWF) founder Conchita Ponce.

Marking 10 years since the launch of DWF in 2015, she told *Gulf Times* that the platform has evolved well beyond its original purpose, reflecting broader social and professional shifts in the country.

"What began as a small gathering where women shared challenges and inspired one another through personal success stories has grown into a movement rooted in participation, contribution, and impact," she said.

In its early years, Ponce noted that the forum focused heavily on storytelling as a way to inspire confidence and spark conversation. While that element remains important, Ponce stressed that



Conchita Ponce with Snoonu founder and CEO Hamad al-Hajri. (Supplied picture)

the mission has clearly shifted.

"The forum has transitioned from inspiration to action. Women are no longer just attendees, they are active participants and contributors to a shared cause," she pointed out.

Ponce said that members of the DWF community are now leading or supporting concrete initiatives, including training

sessions, workshops and an upcoming mentorship programme. "These opportunities directly empower other women," she said, adding that the focus is increasingly on practical support and skills-building rather than dialogue alone.

According to Ponce, that evolution has also changed how the forum is viewed by institutions and stakeholders. "Today, DWF is known not only for hosting annual events, but for producing tangible outcomes. Institutions now engage with DWF as a partner rather than merely a platform, and the forum has become a recognised reference point in women-related discourse in Qatar."

Ponce says the impact of the forum can be seen across different levels of participation. "We have seen speakers grow and thrive after being part of the Forum, attendees connect with the right people and platforms, and women-led businesses gain visibility and opportunities for growth," she said. "These outcomes reflect a clear shift toward influence, collaboration, and real-world results." **To Page 6**

Arab League rejects Israeli recognition of 'Somaliland'

● **International action urged to safeguard Somali sovereignty**

QNA
Cairo

The Arab League Council, at the level of permanent representatives, strongly condemned Israel's recognition on December 26 of the secession of Somalia's northwestern region, known as "Somaliland", describing the move as driven by political, security and economic agendas that are categorically rejected.

In a statement issued at the conclusion of an extraordinary session held at the Arab League's headquarters in Cairo, convened at the request of the Federal Republic of Somalia, the council rejected any measures arising from what it described as an invalid recognition. It warned against attempts to exploit northern Somali ports for military purposes or to facilitate plans aimed at the forced displacement of the Palestinian people.

The council reaffirmed the longstanding Arab position, as enshrined in Arab League resolu-



tions and international charters, that the northwestern region of Somalia is an integral part of the Federal Republic of Somalia. It rejected any attempt to recognise its secession, directly or indirectly.

Somalia's reaction → Page 6

The statement said the Israeli move formed part of broader efforts to undermine international peace and security and violate Arab national security, calling for legal, political, economic and diplomatic measures in response.

The council expressed full support for Somalia's unity, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and stability,

and for the Federal Government's efforts to safeguard its sovereignty on land, sea and air. It affirmed Somalia's right to legitimate self-defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter and pledged support for any lawful measures Somalia may take to counter aggression.

The Arab League also declared its full solidarity with Somalia's position that any recognition of the so-called "Somaliland" is null and void, unacceptable, and a blatant violation of international law. Such actions, it said, constitute interference in Somalia's internal affairs and risk destabilising Somalia, the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Horn of Africa.

PSG bags 7 Globe Soccer Awards



French football giants and European champions Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) picked up seven awards at the Globe Soccer Awards in Dubai held at Atlantis, The Palm, Dubai, UAE, yesterday. The awards included PSG Best Club, Best Player Ousmane Dembele, Best Midfielder Vitinha, Emerging Player Désiré Doué, Best Coach Luis Enrique, Best President Nasser al-Khelaifi, and Best Sporting Director Luis Campos. (@PSG_English)

Winter rains batter displaced Gazans

AFP
Khan Yunis

It only took a matter of minutes after the heavy overnight rain first began to fall for Jamil al-Sharafi's tent in southern Gaza to flood, drenching his food and leaving his blankets sopping wet.

The winter rains have made an already precarious life worse for people like Sharafi, who is among the hundreds of thousands in the Palestinian territory displaced by the war, many of whom now survive on aid provided by humanitarian organisations.

"My children are shivering from cold and fear... The tent was completely flooded within minutes," Sharafi, 47, said yesterday. "We lost our blankets, and all the food is soaked," added the father of six, who lives in a makeshift shelter with his children in the coastal area of Al-Mawasi.

A fragile ceasefire between Israel and Hamas has been in place since October 10, following two years of devastating fighting. But despite the truce, Gazans



Displaced Palestinian children pose for a photograph outside their tent-home as the region experiences rain and cold winter conditions in Gaza City yesterday. (AFP)

still face a severe humanitarian crisis, and most of those displaced by the war have been left with little or nothing.

Families are crowded into camps of tents hastily erected from tarpaulins, which are often surrounded by mud and standing water when it rains.

"As an elderly woman, I cannot live in tents. Living in tents means we die from the cold in

the rain and from the heat in the summer," said Umm Rami Bulbul. "We don't want reconstruction right now, just provide us and our children with mobile homes."

Nighttime temperatures in Gaza have ranged between eight and 12C in recent days.

Nearly 80% of buildings in the Gaza Strip have been destroyed or damaged by the war, according to United Nations data.

And about 1.5mn of Gaza's 2.2mn residents have lost their homes, said Amjad al-Shawa, director of the Palestinian NGO Network in Gaza.

Of more than 300,000 tents requested to shelter displaced people, "we have received only 60,000", Shawa told AFP, pointing to Israeli restrictions on the delivery of humanitarian aid into the territory.

The UN refugee agency for Palestinians, UNRWA, said the harsh weather had compounded the misery of Gazans.

"People in Gaza are surviving in flimsy, waterlogged tents & among ruins," UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini wrote on X.

"There is nothing inevitable about this. Aid supplies are not being allowed in at the scale required."

COGAT, the Israeli defence ministry body responsible for Palestinian civilian affairs, said in mid-December that "close to 310,000 tents and tarpaulins entered the Gaza Strip recently" as part of an increase in aid under the ceasefire. **Page 6**

Al-Khulaifi meets adviser to Saudi FM on Lebanese Affairs



HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi, met yesterday with the visiting Adviser to the Saudi Foreign Minister on Lebanese Affairs, Prince Yazid bin Mohammed bin Fahd al-Farhan. Talks throughout the meeting focused on strengthening bilateral co-operation between the countries, as well as on the developments in Lebanon and the joint co-ordination efforts between the two countries on the Lebanese matter. The Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reiterated Qatar's supportive position for Lebanon and its brotherly people. (QNA)

Deputy PM holds phone call with Syrian defence minister

HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Sheikh Saud bin Abdulrahman bin Hassan bin Ali al-Thani held yesterday a phone call with Syrian Defence Minister Major General Murhaf Abu Qasra. The two sides discussed a host of topics of mutual interest, as well as the latest regional and international developments. (QNA)

Qatar Post celebrates 75th anniversary with commemorative stamp

Qatar Postal Services Company (Qatar Post) has issued a commemorative postage stamp to mark the 75th anniversary of the establishment of Qatar Post.

The stamp documents Qatar Post's journey since 1950 and reflects its national role in supporting the services of Qatar and strengthening the postal and logistics services sector.

This issuance represents a significant milestone in the history of Qatar Post, which has witnessed rapid development in its operational and service infrastructure in recent decades. These advancements include the modernisation of the postal network, expansion of logistics services, acceleration of digital transformation programmes, development of tracking and delivery systems, and enhancement of operational ef-

ficiency, in line with the highest standards adopted locally and internationally.

Qatar Post has also strengthened its presence on the international stage through its active participation in international postal forums, foremost among them the Universal Postal Union, in addition to building international partnerships and relations that have contributed to the exchange of expertise, supported development pathways, and opened new horizons for growth and co-operation. The issuance of this commemorative stamp serves as a documentation of a distinguished legacy of service and as an appreciation of the efforts of national cadres who have contributed to the success and development of Qatar Post across its various stages. It also reaffirms Qatar Post's commitment to continuously improve service

quality and enhancing operational efficiency, in support of the State's strategic directions.

On this occasion, Chief Executive Officer of Qatar Post Hassan Jassim al-Sayed affirmed that the transfer of expertise from one generation to another has constituted a solid foundation upon which Qatar Post has relied to ensure the continuity of its journey and achieve renewed success over time. He emphasised Qatar Post's commitment to continued development and service enhancement in line with the aspirations of the next phase.

The public and stamp collectors may purchase the commemorative stamp and the accompanying gold medallion through the Qatar Post online marketplace, or via the Stamp Collectors' Office at the General Post Office building, or through Qatar Post's website. (QNA)



MoCI holds workshop on 'beneficial ownership' rules

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) organised a specialised training workshop titled 'Beneficial Ownership Identification Procedures within the Implementation of Due Diligence Measures' with the participation of several trust and company service providers, auditors, and dealers in precious metals and gemstones.

Held at the ministry's headquarters, the event addressed several key topics related to the concept of due diligence, its procedures and varying levels, customer verification mechanisms, and the identification of the beneficial owner, contributing to enhanced compliance with anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing requirements.

The workshop also introduced the concept of the beneficial owner, in accordance with the standards of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the provisions of Law No 20 of 2019 on Combating Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing and its Executive



Regulations, as well as Ministerial Decision No 48 of 2020 issued by HE the Minister of Commerce and Industry Sheikh Faisal bin Thani bin Faisal al-Thani regarding the issuance of rules governing the obligations of statutory auditors, dealers in precious metals and gemstones, and trust and company service providers in relation to anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing requirements.

Within the workshop, the principles underlying the concept of beneficial ownership were discussed,

along with the criteria for identifying the beneficial owner of customers within the implementation of due diligence measures, the core principles of compliance, and the penalties resulting from violations of obligations related to identifying and documenting the beneficial owner.

In addition, examples of suspicious indicators related to beneficial ownership were presented, with the aim of raising awareness and enhancing participants' capabilities in this area.



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Gambia president hails Qatar Charity's empowerment projects for vulnerable groups

The Gambia President Adama Barrow lauded Qatar Charity (QC)'s significant role in economically empowering vulnerable communities by providing income-generating projects.

He emphasised that this initiative would create new opportunities for youth employment, enhance women's participation in economic activities, and strengthen rural co-operatives to foster local development.

The remarks were made during an official ceremony held in Banjul, under the patronage of Barrow, where QC implemented the second phase of the Empowerment and Economic Development Project.

The project, carried out in partnership with The Gambia's National Disaster Management Agency, aims to strengthen livelihoods and promote sustainable development.

The event was attended by Barrow, Qatari deputy ambassador to Gambia Abdulla al-Kaabi and Jassim Abdullah al-Jassim, adviser to



the CEO of QC, along with senior Gambian government officials and representatives of local and international organisations.

The second phase of the project included the distribution of 130 three-wheeled vehicles, 130 passenger "tuk-tuks", and 100 diesel-powered grain mills. These

resources aim to boost job opportunities for youth and support women's co-operatives in rural areas, in line with the national development strategy and the Yiriwa programme, which focuses on improving livelihoods and driving economic growth. The ceremony also featured the distribution of



school bags and stationery to orphans to support education and promote social solidarity.

Barrow thanked QC's support, describing the initiative as "a true embodiment of international solidarity." He noted that it provides vital backing for government efforts to build a more resilient so-

ciety and stressed the importance of collaboration between the National Disaster Management Agency, civil society organisations, and the Ministry of Gender and Social Welfare in implementing the project.

Al-Jassim affirmed that the initiative reflects QC's commit-

ment to supporting The Gambia's sustainable development goals. He explained that the first phase of the project included the distribution of essential equipment in health, education, and livelihood improvement, such as blood pressure monitors, water purification tools, school desks, sewing machines, solar lamps, and relief kits.

He added that since 2019, QC implemented development projects in The Gambia worth approximately \$5mn, covering health, education, water and sanitation, orphan sponsorship, and income-generating initiatives – underscoring the strong humanitarian partnership between Qatar and The Gambia.

Last month, QC signed a memorandum of understanding with Gambia's Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Welfare to strengthen co-operation in social protection, economic empowerment, and improving the quality of life for vulnerable groups.

Over 21mn benefit from Qatar Charity's initiatives in 2025

Qatar Charity (QC) has reached 21mn people in 2025 through humanitarian aid, development projects, and social care across nearly 70 countries.

Qatar Charity delivered more than 14,000 development projects worth about QR925mn, benefiting over 11mn people worldwide.

These included 1,489 food security projects reaching 17,490 individuals, 1,551 education and culture projects supporting 280,054 persons, and 1,825 economic empowerment projects assisting 43,023 people. The achievements also covered 432 social care projects benefiting 32,124 individuals, 286 housing projects serving 33,688 people, and 160 health projects reaching more than 7.8mn beneficiaries. Additionally, 8,233 water and sanitation projects improved access for over 2.3mn people, while 29 multi-service centres benefited 400,835 individuals. QC carried out 391 humanitarian interventions worth over QR645mn, benefiting nearly 10mn people. These efforts covered emergency relief, food aid, shelter, health, education, water, and livelihood support.

QC's humanitarian operations in 2025 focused heavily on crisis-hit regions, particularly Gaza. In Palestine overall, particularly in Gaza, the organisation carried out 61 interventions, benefiting about 5mn people at a cost of QR346mn. Among these was a major land-bridge aid initiative, which sent hundreds of trucks loaded with tents and relief supplies from



Qatar through Jordan and Egypt into Gaza, reaching more than 200,000 individuals.

In Sudan, QC carried out 17 humanitarian interventions in 2025, benefiting more than 370,000 people at a cost exceeding QR21mn. In Syria, the organisation implemented 61 interventions, reaching around 2mn people with an investment of QR55mn. The number of individuals sponsored by QC through its 'Rafaqa' initiative reached 224,200, including 198,411 orphans, 11,160 families, 8,086 students, 4,421 persons with disabilities, and 2,204 teachers, with total spending exceeding QR537mn.

QC's orphan care programmes included Ramadan Iftar, Zakat al-Fitr, Eid clothing, Udhiyah, Umrah trips, medical treatment, and Holy Qur'an educa-

tion through the 'Furqan' programme.

In a major step, the 'Rafaqa' initiative raised the sponsorship age to 23 years, allowing orphans to complete higher education or vocational training for a better future. In September 2025, QC opened a new office in Lebanon, bringing the number of field offices in its global network to 34, covering more than 70 countries through direct presence and strategic partnerships.

In 2025, QC continued its journey of innovation and excellence, earning several awards. In October, the organisation was awarded first place jointly with Qatar Airways in the category of Best Digital Experience – Organisations & Corporates – recognising its tech solutions, such as the QC app, the 'Al Agraboon' app, and Tap to Donate devices.

QRCS delivers medical services to over 77,000 in Yemen

Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS)'s representation office in Yemen announced that more than 77,000 refugees and locals in Sanaa received comprehensive healthcare services, as part of a healthcare project with a \$904,005 funding from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Two medical facilities are covered by the project: Al-Hafi and Al-Rahbi healthcare complexes. The project also involves referrals for the patients requiring emergency or advanced care to government hospitals and specialised medical centres/clinics.

From January to November 2025, the number of beneficiaries reached 42,113 and 35,270 locals, who received a wide range of primary healthcare services for free, including consultations; medical examinations; medications; radiology; mental health; reproductive health; maternity and child healthcare; vaccinations; and health education on pregnancy care, reduction of pregnancy complications, benefits of breastfeeding, prevention of infectious diseases and cholera, and personal hygiene.

Moreover, 2,260 refugees benefited from the referral programme, with significant medical services provided, including 300 surgeries, at specialised government hospitals. The procedures included open-heart surgeries, therapeutic catheterisations, thoracic surgeries, orthopaedics, and advanced tests at private-sector laboratories



and medical centres.

Ibrahim Issa, a 57-year-old Somali refugee is one of the beneficiaries who shared their experience, saying: "For two years, I had been suffering from a severe neck pain. Recently, I underwent a cervical spine fixation surgery at the Al-Jumhuri Hospital's Department of Orthopedics. I received comprehensive and free-of-charge healthcare from my admission to full recovery. I am deeply grateful and overjoyed to be free from pain, which had plagued me for years." The Ethiopian refugee Fareed Siraj, 15, expressed his

gratitude, saying: "My mother received full medical care at the Al-Thawra Hospital's Department of Cardiac Catheterisation. She underwent a therapeutic catheterisation and stent placement in the right artery. I am extremely happy and thankful for this project, which saved her life from imminent danger. We could never afford the procedure's cost of \$4,000." For seven consecutive years, QRCS has been providing regular support for Al-Hafi and Al-Rahbi primary healthcare complexes, including medications, medical solutions, stationery, fuel, water, and operational expenses.

New Alaraby 2 programme revives Arab musical heritage

Alaraby 2 Channel has continued broadcasting its new programme, *Angham Alsharq* (Eastern Melodies), a major musical production that celebrates the Arab vocal heritage.

The programme presents a contemporary vision that blends authentic classical song performances with modern musical styles, offering an artistic experience that seeks to revive the spirit of the Arab song and highlight its authenticity and diversity from the Atlantic to the Gulf. The programme features a group of prominent Arab artists from Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Palestine, Jordan, and Syria, reflecting the richness of Arab music and the diversity of its schools. This elite group will revive timeless works by icons of Arab classical songs, including Qari'at al-Finjan, Maqadir, Ana Albi Dalili, Lamouni Elli Gharou Menni, Layali al-Ons, and Al-Atial, performed by singers distinguished by exceptional voices. Among them are Waed



Iman Abdel Ghani and George Nehme.

al-Bahri, Aseel Hameem, Jannat, Hamidou, Marwa Nagy, Hoda Saad, Yaqoub Shaheen, Mehdi Ayachi, Mohammed al-Fares, and Mohammed Shaheen, with the participation of prominent musicians from various Arab countries. The programme is also distinguished by the presence of critics and specialists who discuss these artistic works, including

Faisal al-Tamimi, Yahya al-Mouji, Fadia al-Haj, Abdelkader Ben Daamache, Yasmine Farrag, and Assem Bakri. They explore the contexts in which these works were produced and the reasons behind their lasting place in the collective memory and taste of Arab audiences.

Speaking about *Angham Alsharq*, Alaraby 2's programming director, Mohammed Osama, explained: "It is not merely a series of musical evenings, but a bridge between generations, connecting the past with the present by reintroducing the Arab song in the spirit of the times, while preserving its authenticity and artistic beauty." The programme airs every Monday at 9pm. It was filmed in one of the most important studios in the Lebanese capital, Beirut, and is hosted by Egyptian artist Iman Abdel Ghani, known for her powerful voice and career at the Cairo Opera House, and Lebanese artist George Nehme, who blends Eastern classical songs with modern pop in his performances.

QCDC launches winter edition of 'My Career-My Future Programme'

The Winter Edition of 'My Career-My Future Programme' organised by Qatar Career Development Center (QCDC), a member of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development (QF), in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour (MoL) and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE), kicked off yesterday. The programme will run until Jan 1, 2026.

Taking place at Multaqa (Education City Student Center), the winter edition offers participating students structured field experience in real-world work environments through practical training and mentorship with industry professionals. Participants who complete the programme will receive a certificate detailing the number of training and professional development hours completed. This edition focuses specifically on the financial services sector, along with selected entities from the healthcare, logistics,



manufacturing, information technology and digital services, and construction sectors. This specialised approach aims to deepen participants' experience in key sectors. Executive Director of QCDC Saad Abdulla al-Kharji said the value of professional immersion lies in its ability to transform theoretical perceptions of career aspirations into tangible experience. He explained that students' engagement in real work environments, their interaction with specialists, and their firsthand exposure to required skills contribute to enhancing their awareness and confidence when

making academic decisions. He added that the winter edition represents a focused, practical model made possible through close collaboration with the Center's partners at the MoL and the MoEHE, as well as the host institutions that opened their doors to the students. Assistant Undersecretary for Educational Affairs at MoEHE Maha Zayed Qaqaa al-Ruwaili emphasised that this experience is a vital bridge connecting education and work, knowledge and skills, and theory and practice. Acting Director of Rehabilitation and Skills Development at MoL Mohamed Salem al-Khulaifi stated that launching the winter edition of the My Career-My Future programme helps introduce students to the work environment and the principles of professional conduct. It also provides them with opportunities to directly observe the nature of professional roles and interact with specialists, thus enhancing their readiness for their professional futures. (QNA)



Leo Fayyad



Michele Bou Harb

Qatar Foundation opens global horizons for young musical talent

For the young musicians of Qatar Music Academy (QMA), part of QF's Pre University Education, a one-week camp at the Reina Sofia School of Music in Madrid offered far more than intensive training – it was a transformative experience that boosted confidence, broadened horizons, and opened new pathways for the future.

Through QF's partnership with the Reina Sofia School of Music, QMA provides students with advanced training and the opportunity to attend the annual Madrid camp.

The partnership includes advanced training programmes, student exchanges, and pathways for QMA graduates to pursue higher education programmes at the music school in Madrid. It also explores integrating the school's Virtual Reality technologies into music education across QF schools.

For Loujaïen Sassi, a QMA violin student who participated in the Madrid camp, the experience was life changing. "I had an incredible time at the Reina Sofia camp," she says. "As a violinist, I learned so much from exceptional teachers and performed with students from all over the world."

Loujaïen's father, Moez Sassi, who accompanied her to Spain, still recalls the moment he realised her talent was more than a hobby. "When Loujaïen joined QMA, I discovered her true potential," he says. "After submitting a short video of her performance, she was selected – among only five students – to travel to Spain. I never imagined I would witness such a rapid transformation in her character."

Returning to Doha, Loujaïen carried more than just memories with her. "I came back with greater confidence, a wider perspective, and determination to keep going," she says. "In those spacious rehearsal halls, surrounded



Loujaïen Sassi



Anton Bou Harb

by instruments and students from around the globe."

For Leo Fayyad, the programme was a natural continuation of a journey that began eight years earlier, when he first walked into QMA carrying a violin almost too big for him to hold.

His father, Hadi Fayyad, recalls every step of that growth: "Leo started as an enthusiastic beginner," he says. "Today, he is a focused and disciplined violinist. Through years of training, performances, and orchestral projects, he has matured musically and emotionally, developing confidence on stage and a strong sense of responsibility."

Leo's talent secured him a place as one of the youngest members of the Orchestre des Écoles Françaises à l'Étranger, an international orchestra bringing together students from French schools around the world. This achievement, combined with a full scholarship from QMA, paved the way for his journey to Madrid.

"The Reina Sofia camp was an incredibly rich experience," Leo shares. "I made new friends from different countries, gained self-

confidence, and found a warm and supportive environment. I even practised my Spanish every day."

For Michele and Anton Bou Harb, being selected to travel to Madrid was recognition of their dedication and passion for music.

"I felt proud and excited; it was an important step in my musical journey," Anton says. "The excellence of the school, along with supportive professors and peers from around the world, strengthened my confidence and motivation."

His sister Michele explained how the experience was a mix of emotions: pride, passion, and a longing for a broader musical future, saying: "I was so excited when I was selected. It felt like a huge step in my career as a musician."

Nadine Chamoun, Michele and Anthony's mother, expressed her pride in her sons. "Despite their different musical personalities, they share one piano, one dream, and a path that began at QMA," she says. "We're incredibly proud of their growth and achievements – it's been an experience full of learning and musical excellence."

UDST awarded CIPS accreditation for IT and IS diploma programmes

The University of Doha for Science and Technology (UDST) has received full accreditation from the Canadian Information Processing Society (CIPS) for its Diploma in Information Technology (Dip. IT) and Diploma in Information Systems (Dip. IS), offered through the College of Computing and Information Technology (CCIT). This recognition affirms that both diploma programmes meet internationally recognised standards for academic rigour, programme design, and industry relevance. It strengthens UDST's growing portfolio of accredited programmes and reinforces the university's reputation as Qatar's leading applied institution for technology-focused education.

UDST continues to expand specialised programmes in artificial intelligence, digital communication, software engineering, and cybersecurity to meet the country's increasing demand for advanced digital skills.

The accreditation also confirms the strong alignment of the IT and IS diplomas with labour market needs, ensuring graduates are well prepared for careers in IT operations, systems administration, and business technology support. Students

will additionally benefit from CIPS membership, enhancing their professional profile and competitiveness in the job market.

UDST president Dr Salem Al-Naemi said: "This accreditation reaffirms the quality of our applied education in technology fields and reflects the university's continued commitment to offering academic programmes that keep pace with rapid developments in the digital sector.

"The recognition from CIPS for our Information Technology and Information Systems diploma programmes demonstrates our ability to prepare highly skilled graduates who are ready to contribute to Qatar's innovation-driven digital economy.

"At UDST, we take great pride in supporting the national efforts toward human development and advancing the objectives of Qatar National Vision 2030," he said. UDST extends its appreciation to faculty, staff, and strategic partners whose contributions supported the accreditation process. The university remains committed to continuous improvement and close collaboration with industry leaders to build digital competencies that contribute to Qatar's innovation-driven economy.




College of Information Technology and Artificial Intelligence Department.

Captured seagulls set free and violators penalised

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC)'s Marine Protection Department has detected a violation of environmental laws and regulations involving the hunting of nine seagulls that were found aboard a marine vessel. The Marine Protection Department patrols took the necessary legal measures against the violators in accordance with the country's environmental protection laws. The birds were also released back into their natural habitat, contributing to the conservation of local biodiversity, protecting these

wild species from the risk of extinction, and supporting the sustainability of the marine ecosystem. Meanwhile, the ministry has urged all marine environment users to preserve it and all its natural components, as well as to comply with environmental legislation and to refrain from hunting endangered wildlife or species. The MoECC reaffirmed its continued monitoring and follow-up of such violations and its commitment to taking all necessary measures to ensure the protection of the marine environment and its natural resources.





INVITATION TO TENDER

Tender Reference	Description	Tender Fee (QAR)	Tender Bond Value (QAR)	Bid Closing Date
CO-RFQ-406	Supply of energy efficient LED lamps for various QF Facilities	1000.00	N/A	25-Jan-2026 2:00 PM
QF-RFQ-1128	Supply, Installation, Commissioning, & Training including Comprehensive Warranty, Maintenance and Service Support of Gym Equipment in Recreation Centre	1000.00	N/A	27-Jan-2026 2:00 PM
QNL-RFQ-49	Supply of 10th Anniversary Publication for Qatar National Library	500.00	N/A	25-Jan-2026 2:00 PM

Qatar Foundation (QF) Procurement Directorate is inviting companies to participate in the above listed public tenders. To receive the tender documents, please follow the below steps:

- Supplier Registration** It is mandatory to be registered as a supplier with QF in order to participate in the above tender(s). Only QF registered suppliers will be allowed to pay the tender fees online. Therefore, please visit QF website at <https://www.qf.org.qa/supplier-registration> to complete the Supplier Registration process.

Tender Fee: Interested bidders can Sign in by visiting this link <https://suppliers.qf.org.qa/abstract> and pay the respective non-refundable and non-transferable tender fee online.

All Tender Fees are to be paid using credit cards only.

Tender Fee Payment Dates: Payment of Tender Fee online will be from 29th December 2025 to 4th January 2026.

- All bidders, who are registered and have paid the required tender fees online to QF, will then be granted access to download the Tender Document.
- Technical and commercial bids need to be submitted and attached online in QF Supplier Portal as per instructions provided in the "Supplier Portal" work instruction.

- The commercial bid must be valid for 180 days from Bid Closing Date.
- The commercial bid must be accompanied by a bank guarantee (tender bond) issued by a local bank in Qatar and should be valid for 180 days from the bid closing date (where applicable as per the Tender documents).
- The successful tenderer will be required to submit a performance bond as prescribed in each of the above tender documents.
- Qatar Foundation special qualifications, terms and conditions shall apply as stipulated in the tender document.

Note: All work instructions for Supplier registration and Supplier portal can be found in below link: <https://www.qf.org.qa/supplier-registration>


MoECC extends deadline for removal of abandoned cabins at Sealine, Al Ghariya

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC) called on the owners of cabins (caravans) stored in designated areas at Sealine and Al Ghariya to remove the abandoned cabins and rectify their legal status by the end of January 2026.

The ministry said in a statement yesterday that this procedure includes cabins whose owners have not completed obtaining the necessary permits from its Nature Reserves Department, stressing the importance of adhering to the applicable laws and regulations to preserve the civilised and environmental appearance of those areas.

The ministry pointed out that the deadline for voluntary removal extends to the end of January 2026, and legal action will begin against non-compliant cabins starting from February 1, 2026, if compliance is not achieved within the specified period.

MoECC emphasised that this step comes as part of its efforts to regulate the exploitation of beaches and nature reserves, and to reduce the phenomenon of abandoned cabins due to the environmental damage they cause and the distortion of the general view in vital tourist and environmental areas, especially Sealine and Al Ghariya. The ministry called on cabin owners to cooperate and comply quickly to avoid legal accountability, pointing out the possibility to contact MoECC through its official platforms or via the hotline 16066 for more information about permit procedures. **(QNA)**



The Transport Company
MOWASALAT (KARWA)

Mowasalat (Karwa) announces the following tender:

Tender Ref. No.	Tender Title	Tender Fee	Electronic Tender Fee Payment Dates	Tender Bond	Bid Closing Date
TC-075-LTS-2025	Supply & Maintenance of Sedan Cars (BEV/PHEV/HEV/REEV)	QAR 2000	29th December 2025 to 04th January 2026	QAR 390,000	25th January 2026

CONDITIONS:

► Interested bidder shall pay the tender fee to Mowasalat Bank Account details as shown:

► Bidder must submit proof of tender fee payment (Bank Deposit Slip + a Signed & Stamped Expression of Interest (indicating Tender Ref. No. and Title / Company Name and details of nominated contact person i.e., Tel. No., Fax No., and Email address) + Copy of valid Commercial Registration to Mowasalat Secretary - Tender Committee at email: tenders@mowasalat.com

► Tender documents will be released via email on the next working day after the tender fee payment due dates to all bidders who have submitted the bank deposit slip and other documents requested (i.e., 05th January 2026).



► **Bonds: Tender Bond & Performance Bond:** Bids must be accompanied by Bonds issued by a local bank operating in the State of Qatar as per the Qatar Central Bank template. Further details of bonds can be found in the tender documents. *Bids without Tender Bond shall not be considered.*

► **Tender validity:** Bid validity period shall be 180 days from the bid closing date.

► **Tender documents submission:** Bids must be submitted in 3 separate sealed (**IN RED WAX**) envelopes addressed to **Secretary - Tender Committee** clearly highlighting the Tender Ref. No. & Tender Title:

- Envelope 1# must include the Technical Bid submission (1 Original + 1 non-Editable copy in a USB)
- Envelope 2# must include Commercial Bid submission (1 Original + 1 Editable MS Excel spreadsheet copied in a USB)
- Envelope 3# must include the Tender Bond (1 Original)

► **Bid Closing Date:** Bid submission deadline is **12.00 noon Doha Local Time** as on the Bid closing date shown above. The 3 envelopes must be handed over to the Office of The Secretary - Tender Committee, located at Mowasalat Head Office, Industrial Area, Any tender submitted after the deadline will not be considered.









Tel.: 4458 8724

Fax: 4458 8850

Supplier Registration

Mowasalat Location





Part of Bin Ghannam Island.



People at Sealine.



Khor Al Udaid Dunes

Great potential for ecotourism during winter in Qatar

Ecotourism has a great potential in Qatar, especially during winter and spring months as the country enjoys moderate weather and plenty of sunshine due to its ample coastline, adequate number of islands and natural wild reserves, sand dunes, caves and plenty of modern gardens.

Around 27% of the total space of the country is covered by wild natural reserves that are well maintained and kept in excellent shape by the concerned departments. Most of these are easily accessible for individual or group visitors.

These include 12 reserves spreading over various locations across the country: Al Shahaniya Reserve, Riffa Reserve in Al Rayyan area, Al Mashabiya Reserve in Abu Samra area, Al Reem Reserve in Al Jumailiya area, Al Wasail Reserve, Irkiya Reserve, Saina Reserve, Um Qarn Reserve, and Um Al Amad Reserve.

Besides, these wild reserves Qatar has maintained more than 1,270 different gardens that are home to around 371 various species of flowers and plants, with some of these considered home to protected fauna species such as the Arabian Oryx, and the greater spotted eagle, among other migratory birds, especially near the coastal areas.

One of the best eco-spots in the country is Bin Ghannam Island, known as 'The Purple Island', considered natural havens in Qatar and a perfect place for nature lovers and with its ample mangroves, quiet beach and serene desert. It was named in



Al Shahaniya Reserve

2022 among the 50 Best Islands in the World by global travel site Big 7 Travel. Just around 50km away north of Doha, the island is easily accessible through the highway leading to Al Khor City.

Qatar has an huge coastline extending for 563km long with clear waters of a depth that ranges from 0-60m. The protected marine areas are currently around 2.5% of the total areas of the country with ambitious plans to cover 30% as protected areas.

Many well-equipped and sophisticated beaches are open for the visitors across the country with some of them equipped with the necessary services and facilities for convenience of the visitors. Most of these are free

of charge and easily accessible for the public. Some beaches are designated as family beaches only while some others are earmarked for women and children on specific days of the week.

Qatar territorial water contains a rich ecosystems, well-protected and maintained by the concerned authorities, with some of these having some wonderful coral reef that attract diving enthusiasts. These areas attract a good number of migratory organism such as dugongs, whale sharks and flamingos among others. In addition some of these considered a natural habitat for the endangered hawksbill turtles. Fuwairit Beach is considered the most critical nesting site with 90%

of the nesting activity taking place there during season.

Further, Qatar is home to up to nine different islands with unique features and distinctive scenery that holds a wide range of biological diversity of animals, plants and birds in addition to various formations of landscape.

These islands include: Al Ashat Island, Safliya Island, Al Aaliya Island, Shroah Island, Halul Island, Bin Gannam Island, and others along with some artificial island such as the Banana Island, Gewan Island, Al Maha and The Pearl-Qatar.

Qatar also enjoys some of the best sand dunes, with some reaching up to 40m high, in particular near Khor Al Udaid and the Sealine Areas.

These areas are considered hot tourist destinations with their stunning nature and scenery, where visitors can enjoy camel riding, 4x4 dune bashing and quad biking, besides taking spectacular photos.

Qatar wild nature includes 31 deep land caves known locally as Dahls of different sizes and shapes. Dahl Al Mesfer is the most important Qatari Dahl, in addition to Dahl Al Dark, named due to the darkness at the bottom. While being protected sites, these are open for visitors and can be excellent day trips for nature and desert lovers.

(Sources: Visit Qatar, Ministry of Environment and Climate Change)



Dahl Al Mesfer. (Screengrab from Visit Qatar)



Purple Island

Darwish Interserve marks Landmark Year with major wins at Big 5 Global Impact Awards and MEFMA Confex 2025



Darwish Interserve Facility Management (DIFM) has marked a landmark year of achievement, securing multiple prestigious awards across two of the most influential industry platforms: the Big 5 Global Impact Awards 2025 and the MEFMA Confex 2025.

On 25 November 2025, DIFM received the esteemed 'Award for Impact on Asset Lifecycle' at the Big 5 Global Impact Awards, one of the largest and most respected gatherings in the global construction and built-environment sectors. The award recognises DIFM's excellence in delivering long-term asset value through the integration of advanced technologies, sustainable strategies, and data-driven lifecycle optimisation. The recognition highlights the company's commitment to innovation and operational excellence on a global stage.

This international recognition followed DIFM's strong performance at the MEFMA Confex 2025, held on 28-29 October and widely regarded as the region's premier facilities management event. At the Confex, DIFM was honoured with three major awards: Excellence in Sustainable FM Practices, Excellence in FM Consultancy and Advisory Services, and a Highly Commended 'Visionary Leader' award presented to its General Manager, Mohamed Saadeh.

During the conference, Mr. Saadeh also participated



as a distinguished speaker, delivering a session titled 'Artificial Intelligence: Enhancing Operations in the GCC'. His presentation focused on the role of artificial intelligence, digital transformation, ESG frameworks, and predictive strategies in enhancing operational efficiency and long-term asset performance across the facilities management sector.

Reflecting on the company's accomplishments, Mr. Saadeh stated: "Receiving these prestigious awards from MEFMA Confex to the Big 5 Global Impact Awards, is truly an honor for DIFM. These recognitions reflect our team's dedication, the excellence we strive for every day, and our commitment to delivering sustainable and impactful FM solutions that transform assets and communities."

DIFM attributes its continued success to the strategic direction and leadership of Chairman Mr. Yousuf Al Darwish and CEO Mr. Abdul Rahman Al Darwish, whose support has fostered a culture of innovation, sustainability, and operational excellence across the organisation.

With gratitude for these prestigious honors and a renewed commitment to excellence, Darwish Interserve continues to shape a smarter, more sustainable, and future-ready facilities management landscape for Qatar, the region, and beyond.

QYH organises sightseeing tours for Egyptian Youth Hostels Association delegation

Qatar Youth Hostels (QYH) organised sightseeing tours for a youth delegation from the Egyptian Youth Hostels Association (EYHA) from December 20-26 as part of the "Discover Qatar in 144 Hours" programme.

This is the second experience for EYHA in the "Discover Qatar in 144 Hours" programme, following the success of the first experience in 2024.

The delegation visited several tourist attractions and archaeological sites throughout the country, from north to south and east to west, including: Al Zubarah Fort and City, Ras Brouq, Ain Mohammed Village, Old Doha Port, Museum of Islamic Art, National Museum of Qatar, Education City, Qatar National Library, Sheikh Faisal Bin Qassim Al Thani Museum, Souq Waqif, Msheireb Downtown Doha, Katara Cultural Village, and 321 Qatar Olympic Sports Museum, in addition to a safari at Sealine, and a dhow tour around Doha's towers.

"Through this programme, we aim to promote domestic tourism in Qatar, introduce Qatari culture, customs, and traditions, and showcase the beauty of historical and archaeological sites. Additionally, we employ Qatari nationals who have completed our tourist guide training programme as tour guides for the delegations we host throughout the year. This will convey a positive and welcoming image of Qatar, showcasing its hospitality to the world in Doha," YHA said.



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 th January 2026	QAR 1,000/- Until 7 th January 2026 12:00 pm	12 th January 2026	QAR 500,000.00	8 th 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@gulhelicopters.com) indicating company name, address, telephone, official email, authorized company representative, etc. latest by 4th 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 # QA80QNBAD00000000013036531001 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@gulhelicopters.com, latest by 7th January 2026, 12:00 pm for GHC approval.

iii. Tender package will be sent via email to the confirmed participants from tender@gulhelicopters.com by 12th 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@gulhelicopters.com.

vi. For the submissions of technical and commercial proposals shall be submitted to tender@gulhelicopters.com.

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



Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art

Mathaf encyclopaedia: A digital platform for modern and contemporary art

The *Mathaf* encyclopaedia, recently relaunched by Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art and Qatar Museums (QM) in South West Asia and North Africa, offers free and detailed information on artists from across the Arab world and neighbouring regions, it is learnt. Building on Mathaf's ongoing mission to support research and knowledge production about its permanent collection, the encyclopaedia represents a significant contribution to the study of modern and contemporary art in West Asia and North Africa. First launched in 2013, the initiative was developed by Mathaf's research and curatorial teams in collaboration with leading academics and independent researchers, with support from QM's Digital Experience Department. The encyclopaedia is more than just a digital archive, it is a living, digital extension of Mathaf's mission to make knowledge accessible to all. It combines a large number of artist biographies, multimedia, and in-depth academic studies, highlighting artists from diverse backgrounds and artistic practices.

One of the most distinctive features of the encyclopaedia in its new format is its interactive tool, which helps users explore how different artists, events, ideas, and places are interconnected. Users can visually navigate a network of relationships, revealing the connections that have shaped the history of Arab art. Artists are linked to institutions, countries of origin, artistic movements, and more, providing a dynamic and user-friendly way to navigate the encyclopaedia. Since its launch in 2013, the encyclopaedia has become an essential resource for researchers, students, and art enthusiasts interested in modern and contemporary art. As a complement to the museum, the encyclopaedia aims to be the primary online reference for modern and contemporary art in the Southwest Asia and North Africa region. This globally accessible platform offers comprehensive information, including biographies, articles, and visual content that explores research, artistic perspectives, and educational programmes related to the museum's collection.

From voices to impact: 10 years of women leading change in Qatar

From Page 1

She explained that DWF's "core objective is to empower women through meaningful dialogue". She underlined the importance of helping women recognise their potential, understand their rights and access strong professional networks that enable growth and leadership. Ponce acknowledged that Qatar has undergone significant change since the forum's inception, crediting the country's leadership for creating new opportunities for women. "Qatar has changed tremendously, largely due to the visionary leadership of Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser. Her strong commitment to education, human development, and women's empowerment has expanded opportunities for women across leadership, entrepreneurship, and the workforce," she said.

As a result, she said, Qatar is now recognised as one of the leading countries in the GCC and the wider Middle East and North Africa region in advancing women's empowerment. Looking at how conversations around empowerment have evolved, Ponce said they have become "more open, real, and impactful" over time. "With each edition of DWF, awareness has grown, and more importantly, people have moved from listening to actively wanting to be involved and contribute," she said. While she acknowledged that translating dialogue into policy takes time, Ponce said she remains optimistic: "When you give people space to engage honestly, minds begin to shift, and once that happens, action naturally follows. We are laying the right foundations through continued conversation, collaboration, and steady progress."

Qatar scored in global rankings, economic strength this year

From Page 1

Qatar recorded another milestone by ranking ninth globally in the 2025 Global Competitiveness Report issued by the International Institute for Management Development (IMD) in Switzerland, marking its first entry into the top ten. The report assesses 67 economies based on more than 330 indicators across four pillars: economic performance, government efficiency, business efficiency, and infrastructure. Significant gains were recorded in business efficiency, with Qatar rising from 11th to fifth globally, reflecting reforms to enhance labour market flexibility, support entrepreneurship, and empower the private sector. The country maintained seventh place globally in both economic performance and government efficiency, while advancing three positions in infrastructure due to sustained investment in transport, education, healthcare, and digital systems. Qatar also ranked among the top 20 countries globally in the 2025 Global Digital Competitiveness Index, covering 69 economies. It rose from 26th in 2024 to 20th in 2025, in line with QNV 2030 and the Third National Development Strategy (NDS3) 2024–2030, which place

digital transformation and innovation at the core of national development. The country ranked 13th in Knowledge, 36th in Technology, and 14th in Future Readiness, reflecting strong human capital, advanced digital infrastructure, and adaptability to future demands. Qatar won three awards at the GCC e-Government Award 2025, held in the State of Kuwait, in recognition of outstanding government initiatives in digital transformation and smart services. In innovation, Qatar ranked 48th globally in the Global Innovation Index 2025 issued by the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO), advancing 22 positions over six years from 70th to 48th, highlighting its sustained commitment to research, development, and innovation. The country led the Arab world and Mena region in the Numbeo Healthcare Index, ranking first regionally and 18th globally in the mid-2025 index, reflecting the high standard and continued advancement of its healthcare sector in line with NDS3. In food security, Qatar ranked second in the Arab world and 24th globally in the Global Food Security Index 2025, reflecting ongoing efforts to strengthen local production and reduce reli-

ance on imports. Qatar secured 22nd place globally in the Global Soft Power Index 2025 issued by Brand Finance, highlighting its growing international influence. The country also achieved advanced rankings in public transport at global, Arab, and regional levels, according to the 2025 "Transport Report in the Middle East and North Africa" published by the International Association of Public Transport (UITP). During 2025, Mwani Qatar played a key role in strengthening maritime trade, handling more than 1.11 million standard containers (TEUs) during the first nine months of the year. Hamad Port achieved first place in the Gulf region for the first time and ranked 11th globally in the Container Port Performance Index 2024, issued by the World Bank in collaboration with S&P Global Market Intelligence. Meanwhile, Hamad International Airport expanded its annual passenger capacity to more than 65mn following the completion of its latest expansion project. It retained the title of best airport in the Middle East for the 11th consecutive year and was named the world's best airport for shopping for the third consecutive year. (QNA)

AFP/QNA
Mogadishu

Israel's recognition of "Somaliland" is a "threat" to security and stability in the Horn of Africa and encourages secessionist groups, Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud said yesterday. Addressing an emergency parliamentary session, Mohamud said the move was "tantamount to a blunt aggression against the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, and the unity of the people of the Somali Republic". He added that "the violations of (Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin) Netanyahu and his attempts to divide the Federal Republic of Somalia is (a) threat to the security and stability of the

world and the region, and encourage the hardline groups and secessionist movements, which exist or can exist in many regions of the world". Meanwhile, Somali Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre has strongly condemned Netanyahu's move, describing it as null, void, and legally unacceptable. In remarks published by Somali National News Agency yesterday, Barre emphasised that the recognition has no legal effect, underlining that Somalia is an independent and sovereign state with internationally recognised borders. He stated that any violation of Somalia's sovereignty or borders constitutes an illegal act and a blatant attack on the country's unity and the principles of international law. Barre further confirmed that

both the Somali people and the Federal Government categorically reject this declaration. The prime minister described Netanyahu's position as reckless, adding that it would have been more appropriate for Israel to recognise the State of Palestine, whose land continues to suffer occupation and aggression. He stressed that Somalia does not require recognition from Netanyahu or any other party. Barre further highlighted that the Federal Government has taken urgent diplomatic measures by engaging with sister and friendly nations as well as international organisations, noting that regional and global responses have supported Somalia's stance. The government, Barre stressed, will continue its diplomatic efforts to mobilise interna-

tional public opinion and utilise all available legal mechanisms to defend Somalia's territorial integrity and sovereignty. The prime minister also warned that Israel's position could be part of an attempt to establish a foothold in the Horn of Africa, control the Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb Strait, and set up military bases, posing a serious threat to the safety and security of citizens in northern Somalia. Finally, Barre affirmed that Somalia maintains constant communication with the United States, noting that the US President's supportive position on Somalia's sovereignty is appropriate and reflects respect for the Somali state. He added that no self-respecting nation would follow the path taken by Israel.

Israel committed 969 ceasefire breaches in Gaza

QNA
Gaza

The Israeli occupation army has committed 969 violations after 80 days since the ceasefire agreement came into force, the Gaza Government Media Office has reported. In a statement issued yesterday, the office said these breaches resulted in 418 Palestinian fatalities and 1,141 injuries, in addition to the detention of 45 Palestinians, warning that the Gaza Strip is gripped by a slow death as the humanitarian crisis continues to deepen. Since Oct 10 until now, the Israeli army has committed serious and systematic violations of the deal, constituting a clear breach of international humanitarian law and a deliberate undermin-

ing of the ceasefire and the provisions of the attached humanitarian protocol, the statement read. It said that 289 incidents of direct gunfire against Palestinian civilians were documented, in addition to 54 military incursions into residential areas and 455 shelling and targeting incidents against unarmed civilians and their homes. The statement further indicated that during the 80-day period, Israel committed 162 cases of razing homes, institutions, and civilian facilities. The Media Office stressed that the Israeli army has failed to comply with the minimum agreed quantities of humanitarian aid, noting that only 19,764 aid trucks rolled into Gaza over 80 days out of 48,000 trucks that were supposed to enter, averaging 253 trucks per day instead of

the agreed 600 trucks daily. It warned of acute shortages of food, medicine, water, and fuel, further worsening the catastrophic humanitarian conditions in the enclave. The statement added that only 425 fuel trucks rolled into Gaza during the same period, out of 4,000 fuel trucks that were supposed to enter under the deal, averaging five trucks per day instead of 50, representing a compliance rate of around 10%. Arbitrary Israeli policies, combined with weather depression systems engulfing Gaza at the onset of winter, led to the collapse of 49 homes and buildings that had previously been damaged or bombed, killing as many as 20 people as buildings collapsed on them after they had sought shelter there following the destruction of their original

homes, the office warned. It added that three Palestinians remain languishing under bombed-out buildings due to weather depression and had previously been targeted by Israeli bombardments. The statement further reported the deaths of two children from severe cold inside displacement tents, while over 127,000 tents are now out of service and no longer able to provide minimum protection for over 1.5mn displaced people. The Hamas-Israeli ceasefire deal came into effect in October, following the withdrawal of Israeli forces from populated areas of the Gaza Strip and the beginning of the return of displaced residents to northern Gaza, as part of the first phase of US President Donald Trump's initiative to end the war on Gaza.

Two fatalities recorded since the onset of weather depression

QNA
Gaza

The Gaza Civil Defence has recorded two fatalities since the onset of the weather depression, with a child drowning in a water-filled pit north of Gaza City and a woman dying after a wall collapsed near the Gaza Port. Spokesman for the Civil Defence Authority, Mahmoud Bassel, told Qatar News Agency (QNA) that stormwater rendered the displaced tents submerged, while strong winds decimated entire tents. The Civil Defence personnel received distress calls from hundreds of individuals reporting drowning cases, Bassel stated, indicating that rescuers intervened in several shelter centres despite their limited potential and shortages of equipment due to the Israeli offensives. Bassel warned that the days ahead will be tough for the displaced and Gazans in general amid the dramatic plummeting of temperatures and expectations of consecutive weather depression, cautioning against the dangerous consequences of these weather manifestations at all levels. Meanwhile, Bassel called on international organisations to spring into action and deliver shelter essentials to put an end to the anguish and humanitarian catastrophes gripping the Gaza Strip, and to work to provide services and the means of a dignified life for Gazans. This depression, which has gripped the Gaza enclave since Saturday, has aggravated residents' suffering, especially displaced people in tents, as a result of their tents being submerged in stormwater and their belongings being damaged by strong winds. In essence, nearly 1.5mn individ-



A displaced Palestinian stands among tents at a beach tent camp, after it was flooded by rising seawater during a winter storm in Khan Younis, southern Gaza Strip, yesterday. **Below:** A woman collects wet clothes at the tent camp.



uals live in tents after the Israeli occupation forces destroyed residential cities and neighbourhoods during their recent onslaught on the Gaza Strip. Tents of displaced persons in Gaza were destroyed due to rain and wind that have been hitting the area since Saturday, amidst a lack of resources and protective supplies. The displaced Palestinians had to spend their nights in severe cold weather and wind that destroyed what remains of their unusable tents that are installed in roads, sport fields,

public areas, and schools. The humanitarian disaster in the Gaza Strip continues to intensify as the displaced persons face harsh weather conditions in unsuitable tent materials, unequipped to handle rain and storms. The lack of gas worsens the situation as many families are unable to secure any form of heating as nighttime temperatures drop sharply. This has had serious consequences for children in particular, with several deaths reported as a result of the extreme cold.

Israeli forces intrude into Syrian territory, detaining 6 people

The Israeli occupation forces renewed their incursion into Syrian territory yesterday, detaining six people. The Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) said that the Israeli forces detained five young men from the Daraa governorate as they were searching for wild mushrooms in farmlands near the town of Qudna, in the southern Quneitra countryside.

SANA added that the occupation forces transferred the detainees to the Tal Al Ahmar Al Gharbi military base, with no information available regarding their fate or the reason behind their detention. The Israeli forces, driving four military vehicles, also carried out an incursion into Saïda Al Hanout village in southern Quneitra countryside, where it detained a local young man. (QNA)



UK govt restricts DR Congo visas over migrant returns

AFP
London

Britain has imposed visa restrictions on nationals from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) over the country's "poor co-operation" on returning illegal migrants, the UK government said.

Further measures, up to a complete halt on visas, will follow unless co-operation "rapidly improves", Britain's interior ministry said in a statement late Saturday.

The DRC said yesterday it has started discussions with Britain to resolve the matter.

The curbs mean that DRC VIPs and decision makers will lose preferential treatment on visas, while fast-track visa processing has been revoked for all DRC nationals.

They come after Britain's interior minister, Shabana Mahmood, in November threatened the DRC, Angola and Namibia with visa bans unless they accepted the return of irregular migrants.

The interior ministry said the

three African countries had "continually frustrated" efforts to remove thousands of illegal migrants and criminals.

It said they had "unacceptably poor and obstructive returns processes" and accused the countries of refusing to process paperwork and requiring individuals to sign their own documents - effectively allowing them to block their own deportations.

Angola and Namibia had, however, agreed "to improve their processes" and accept the return of "illegal migrants and criminals", and so will not face such restrictions, the interior ministry said.

There had been some recent engagement by the DRC, but Mahmood warned the central African nation needed "to play by the rules". "If one of their citizens has no right to be here, they must take them back," she said.

"I thank Angola and Namibia and welcome their co-operation. Now is the time for the Democratic Republic of Congo to do the right thing: Take your citizens back or lose the privilege of entering our country." The visa meas-

ures came as part of a package of reforms Mahmood announced in November seeking to tighten up Britain's asylum rules.

Reacting to Britain's announcement, the DRC said discussions were ongoing between its interior ministry and the UK embassy in Kinshasa. "The framework of the procedure has been clarified and operational points identified," government spokesperson Patrick Muyaya said.

He said a technical meeting had been scheduled for tomorrow "to get to a convergence of views and find agreement".

The return of migrants had to be undertaken with "respect for norms", he said. The measure announced by Britain "cannot be applied while discussions are ongoing", Muyaya said, adding that both sides were aiming for a resolution of the issue by January 30.

Immigration has become a bitterly divisive issue in Britain in recent years, fuelling support for the anti-immigration Reform UK party, which is currently well in front in opinion polls ahead of next May's local elections.



People wait to cast their vote at a polling station during the presidential election in Bangui, Central African Republic, yesterday.

Central African Republic president Touadera tipped to win third term

AFP
Bangui

The Central African Republic's (CAR) incumbent president, Faustin-Archange Touadera, was widely expected to win a third term in an election yesterday in which he touted his efforts steadying a nation long plagued by conflict.

Part of the opposition called for a boycott of the poll, in which 2.3mn people were eligible to vote, condemning it as a sham and lacking political dialogue.

Provisional results from the presidential election were expected on January 5.

Touadera went into the election in pole position in a seven-strong field, after a new constitution was adopted in 2023 allowing him to seek a third term.

Voters cast ballots not only for their choice of president, but also in parliamentary, municipal and regional elections that were held at the same time.

Voting ended at 1700 GMT. Nazaire Patchbale, in charge of the polling station in the city hall in the capital Bangui, said "people were able to vote in calm, without incident".

In another polling station, a 37-year-old who gave only his first name, Beranger, said he did not vote, explaining that he saw some people not on electoral rolls being allowed to cast ballots, and others on the rolls but without electoral cards barred from doing so.

Touadera, 68, turned up to vote escorted by members of the presidential guard - and by contractors with Russia's Wagner paramilitary group, which has established itself as one of the government's main security partners.

Streets in Bangui were quiet through the day, with armoured vehicles of the UN peacekeep-



President of the Central African Republic and United Hearts Movement presidential candidate Faustin-Archange Touadera, casts his vote during the presidential election at a polling station in Bangui, yesterday.

ing mission Minusca deployed at road junctions and heavy security outside voting stations.

Since Touadera was first elected in 2016, in the middle of a civil war, the Central African Republic has seen unrest ease, although feuds persist between armed groups and the government in some regions.

The main challenger to Touadera for the presidency Anicet-Georges Dologuele voted in Bangui earlier yesterday. He came in second place in the last two elections.

Afterwards, he said: "I will respect the choice of the ballot box, since I'm going to win."

More than 1,700 national and international observers have been accredited for the polls, the electoral body said.

The ballot, along with a Guinea presidential vote yesterday, capped a packed year of elections across Africa.

During campaigning, Touadera held rallies in Bangui stadium, but Dologuele and another top rival, former prime minister Henri-Marie Dondra, were prevented from flying to the provinces to hold rallies and had to do neighbourhood walkabouts and events in schools or party offices.

Dologuele and Dondra also faced the prospect of being barred from standing over allegations they held another country's citizenship.

Dologuele was stripped of his Central African passport in October even after giving up his French citizenship. He has filed a complaint to the UN's human rights office.

Touadera, in the lead-up to yesterday's election, boasted of improvements in security, paved roads, public lighting on major avenues and renovated rainwater drainage canals in the capital.

But life for many in the country - 71% of whom live below the poverty line - remains precarious, with a lack of basic services, an absence of passable roads, widespread unemployment, poor training and a steadily rising cost of living.

Despite being pushed back, anti-government fighters are still at large on main highways, as well as in the east near the borders with war-battered Sudan and South Sudan.

Nearly 90% of the country is now under government authority, compared to 80% being held by armed groups four years ago, analysts have said.

Ivory Coast ruling party ahead in parliamentary vote

AFP
Abidjan

The ruling party in Ivory Coast has a clear lead in parliamentary elections, according to early results announced yesterday, and appears headed for a big majority in the national assembly.

The voting, carried out on Saturday, was marked by a poor turnout following a boycott call by opposition parties.

The election came two months after 83-year-old Alassane Ouattara won a presidential ballot that extended his 14-year rule.

The Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) said early yesterday the provisional participation rate was 32.34%, lower than the previous legislative elections in 2021 when turnout was 37.88%.

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

The RHDP was ahead in most of the around 100 constituencies for which results were available yesterday, including in the south and west of the country where the op-



An electoral agent of the Independent Electoral Commission pours ballots onto a table during the counting of votes for Ivory Coast's legislative elections in Le Plateau, Abidjan's business district.

position had strongholds.

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

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 were standing, however, as independent candidates.

Results for the economic capital Abidjan were not yet known yesterday afternoon.

The 255-seat national assembly is voted in every five years.

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

Guinea junta chief headed for victory in presidential vote

AFP
Conakry

Guineans voted in a presidential election yesterday with Mamady Doumbouya, a general who led the junta that seized power four years ago, the clear favourite, and the main opposition leaders barred from standing.

As the polling stations began to close from 1800 GMT, officials began counting the votes.

By running, the strongman reneged on a pledge not to stand for office and to hand the west African country back to civilian rule by the end of 2024.

Since seizing power in 2021, Doumbouya has cracked down on civil liberties, and protests have been banned while opponents have been arrested, put on trial or driven into exile.

Some 6.8mn people were eligible to choose between the nine approved candidates. Doumbouya, 41, is running as an independent.

Earlier, escorted by dozens of special forces personnel, the junta chief voted with his wife in a central district of the capital Conakry.

Dressed in a boubou and white cap, Doumbouya - who did not hold any rallies during the campaign - greeted supporters but made no statement.

AFP journalists saw a large security presence, including armoured vehicles, patrolling the



Guinea President and presidential candidate Mamady Doumbouya and his wife Lauriane Doumbouya (left) arrive to vote at a polling station in Conakry, yesterday, during the presidential election.

capital's streets. Security forces said they had "neutralised" members of an armed group with "subversive intentions threatening national security" on Saturday in the Conakry suburbs.

"I am here to fulfil a civic duty," Colle Camara, a 45-year-old teacher, said, as he cast his ballot in what he hoped would be a "peaceful" election.

Doumbouya looked set to win in the first round of voting, against eight relatively unknown remaining rivals. Provisional results are expected within two days.

The opposition called for a boycott of the vote, in a country rich in minerals but where 52% of the population lives in poverty,

according to World Bank figures.

Turnout in Conakry was steady at the polling stations visited by AFP journalists, but less than for a constitutional referendum in September.

"What's the point of getting worked up about going to vote when the outcome is already known in advance?" a voter in a suburb told AFP on condition of anonymity.

UN human rights chief Volker Turk said Friday the campaign had been "marked by intimidation of opposition actors, apparently politically-motivated enforced disappearances, and constraints on media freedom".

Foreign observers contacted by AFP said turnout was also down



Officials of the General Directorate of Elections count ballots at Federico Mayor Primary School in Conakry, yesterday, after polls closed.

in other towns such as Labe in the north, Kankan in the east and southern N'Zerekore.

Guinea's electoral authority put overall voter participation at a provisional 85% shortly after voting ended.

"Voting began calmly, with no incidents or violence reported," observers from the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) said in a statement published around midday.

The vote, which fell on the same day as elections in the Central African Republic, caps a busy electoral year in Africa - marked by authoritarianism and oppression, as well as wins for several longstanding leaders, including in Cameroon and Ivory

Coast where the main rivals were also barred. Guinea experienced a rare democratic transition with the 2010 election of Alpha Conde, its first freely elected president.

Doumbouya overthrew him in September 2021.

Guinea's new constitution allowed junta members including Doumbouya to stand for election and lengthened presidential terms from five to seven years, renewable once. Unlike its neighbour Mali and nearby Burkina Faso and Niger, all of which are also under military rule, Guinea has maintained good relations with former colonial master France and other international partners.

Opposition leader and former

prime minister Cellou Dalein Diallo has condemned the vote as "an electoral charade" aimed at giving legitimacy to "the planned confiscation of power".

He is one of three opposition leaders barred from standing in the vote by the new constitution.

Diallo was excluded because he lives in exile and his primary residence is not in Guinea. Former president Conde and ex-prime minister Sidya Toure, who also live in exile, are over the maximum age limit of 80.

In a social media video, Doumbouya touted his infrastructure achievements, promised to fight corruption and expressed his ambition to "make Guinea an emerging country".



Putin issues stark warning over Ukraine

Reuters/AFP
Moscow/Palm Beach

Russian President Vladimir Putin said Ukraine was in no hurry for peace and if it did not want to resolve their conflict peacefully, Moscow would accomplish all its goals by force.

Putin's remarks on Saturday, carried by state news agency Tass, followed a vast Russian drone and missile attack that prompted Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to say that Russia was demonstrating its wish to continue the war while Kyiv wanted peace.

Zelensky was due to meet US President Donald Trump in Florida to seek a resolution to the war Putin launched nearly four years ago with a full-scale invasion of Russia's smaller neighbour.

The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Putin's remarks.

Russian commanders told Putin during an inspection visit that Moscow's forces had captured the towns of Myrnohrad, Rodynske and Artemivka in Ukraine's eastern region of Donetsk, as well as Huliaipole and Stepanivka in the Zaporizhzhia region, the Kremlin said on the Telegram messaging app.

Ukraine's military rejected Russia's assertions about Huliaipole and Myrnohrad as false statements.

The situation in both places remains "difficult" but "defensive operations" by Ukrainian troops are ongoing, the General Staff of Ukraine's Armed Forces said

'Russia will achieve its Ukraine aims by force if Kyiv doesn't want peace'



Putin is seen in this image taken from footage on the official Telegram account of the Russian presidential press office. -AFP

in a statement on social media.

The Southern Command of Ukraine's Armed Forces said on Telegram that "fierce fighting" continued in Huliaipole. "However, a substantial part of Huliaipole continues to be held by the Defence Forces of Ukraine."

Verifying battlefield claims is difficult as access on both sides is restricted, information is tightly controlled and front lines shift quickly, with media relying on satellite and geolocated footage that can be partial or delayed.

Zelensky meanwhile said he would push a new peace plan for Ukraine when he sits down with Trump in Florida, bolstered by the backing of European leaders but with his capital Kyiv still reeling



Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, on Saturday. -Reuters

from a massive Russian bombardment.

The US president has been non-committal on the revised 20-point proposal for ending the nearly four-year conflict, while Putin has offered no indication that Moscow would find it acceptable.

Trump has made ending the Ukraine war a centrepiece of his second term as a self-proclaimed "president of peace", and he has repeatedly blamed both Kyiv and Moscow for the failure to secure a ceasefire.

The meeting, to be hosted by Trump at his Mar-a-Lago residence at 1pm (1800 GMT), will be their first in-person encounter since October, when the US president refused to grant Zelensky's request for long-range Tomahawk missiles.



Trump has made ending the Ukraine war a centrepiece of his second term, and has blamed both Kyiv and Moscow for the failure to secure a ceasefire.

And the Ukrainian leader could face another hard sell this time around, with Trump insisting that he "doesn't have anything until I approve it".

The talks are expected to last an hour, after which the two presidents are scheduled to hold a joint call with the leaders of key European allies.

The revised peace plan, which emerged from weeks of intense US-Ukraine negotiations, would stop the war along its current front lines and could require Ukraine to pull troops back from the east, allowing the creation of demilitarised buffer zones.

As such, it contains Kyiv's most explicit acknowledgement yet of possible territorial concessions.

It does not, however, envisage Ukraine withdrawing from the 20% of the eastern Donetsk region that it still controls - Russia's main territorial demand.

Before landing in Florida, Zelensky made a stopover in Canada during which he held a conference call with European allies, who pledged their full support for his peace efforts and vowed to maintain pressure on Moscow.

The Ukrainian leader said he hoped the talks in Florida would be "very constructive".

He also told reporters that he would press Trump on the importance of providing security guarantees that would prevent any renewed Russian aggression if a ceasefire were secured.

"We need strong security guarantees. We will discuss this and we will discuss the terms," he said.

Ukraine insists it needs more European and US funding and weapons - especially drones.

Russia has accused Ukraine and its European backers of trying to "torpedo" a previous US-brokered plan to stop the fighting.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told state news agency Tass that Moscow would continue its engagement with US negotiators but criticised European governments as the "main obstacle" to peace.

"They are making no secret of their plans to prepare for war with Russia," Lavrov said, adding that the ambitions of European politicians are "literally blinding them".

France's screen siren Brigitte Bardot dies at 91

AFP
Saint-Tropez, France

French film sensation Brigitte Bardot, an icon in the 1950s and 1960s who reinvented herself as an animal rights defender and embraced far-right views, died yesterday aged 91, her foundation said.

She passed away in her Saint-Tropez home, La Madrague, on the French Riviera.

"The Brigitte Bardot Foundation announces with immense sadness the death of its founder and president, Madame Brigitte Bardot, a world-renowned actor and singer, who chose to abandon her prestigious career to dedicate her life and energy to animal welfare and her foundation," it said in a statement sent to AFP.

It did not give the cause of death. However, Bardot was briefly hospitalised in October for what her office called a "minor" procedure.

Bardot at the time had lambasted "idiot" Internet users for speculation that she had died.

Tributes were immediately paid to the star who was known as "BB" in her home country, with President Emmanuel Macron calling her a "legend" of the 20th century.

An AFP reporter in Saint-Tropez saw a hearse enter then leave her property, as a handful



This picture taken earlier this month shows Bardot being led into a Paris court where she faced accusations of inciting racial hatred. -Reuters

of fans came to lay bunches of flowers near a police car that was blocking the road to her home.

Julia Gangotena, 36, was among the few to have made it up to Bardot's blue front gate, where she left some white roses near a Christmas wreath and a dog's bowl full of water, she said, showing AFP a picture.

"She's a woman who lived as much in the thronging crowd as she did alone - profoundly alone," she said.

Born on September 28, 1934 in Paris, Bardot was raised in a well-off traditional Catholic household.

Married four times, she had one

child, Nicolas-Jacques Charrier, with her second husband, actor Jacques Charrier.

Bardot became a global star after appearing in *And God created Woman* in 1956, and went on to appear in about 50 more movies before giving up acting in 1973.

She turned her back on celebrity to look after abandoned animals, saying that she was "sick of being beautiful every day".

"Brigitte Bardot embodied a life of freedom," Macron wrote on X.

The president's tribute, though, made no reference of Bardot's alignment with far-right views in her post-cinema years, which al-



This picture taken in 1965 shows Bardot giving an unplanned press conference upon her arrival at Kennedy airport in New York, where she came to attend the preview of *Viva Maria*. -AFP

ienated many of her fans.

After retiring from cinema, Bardot withdrew to her home in the Riviera resort of Saint-Tropez where she devoted herself to fighting for animals.

Her calling apparently came when she encountered a goat on the set of her final film, *The Edifying and Joyous Story of Colinot*.

To save it from being killed, she bought the animal and kept it in her hotel room.

Bardot went on to found the Brigitte Bardot Foundation in 1986, which now has 70,000 donors and around 300 employees, according to its website.

Man fatally stabs nine in Suriname, including five children

AFP
Paramaribo

A man stabbed to death nine people, including five children, overnight in Suriname's capital Paramaribo, police said yesterday, adding the suspect was wounded and arrested.

"During the night from Saturday, December 27, to Sunday, December 28, a male individual killed... four adults and five children with a sharp object.

"A sixth child and an adult were seriously injured and were transported" to the hospital, according to a police statement, which said officers had to open fire on the suspect, who was wounded in the legs and is hospitalised.

Brazil's Bolsonaro undergoes treatment for hiccups

AFP
Brasília

Former Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro (*pictured*) underwent a medical procedure on Saturday to treat recurrent hiccups he has been dealing with for months, according to his medical team.

The 70-year-old ex-president, who is serving a 27-year prison sentence for an attempted coup, had been released from prison on Wednesday to undergo surgery for a groin hernia at the DF Star Hospital in Brasília.

That surgery was performed on Thursday without incident, and Bolsonaro remained hospitalised for several days for evaluation.

During that time, Bolsonaro's medical team determined it was necessary to perform an anaesthetic block of the phrenic nerve - which controls the diaphragm - to treat his recurring hiccups.

Bolsonaro's doctor, Claudio Birolini, told reporters on Thursday that the procedure involved locating the nerve using an ultrasound machine and then injecting it with a local analgesic.

The procedure on Saturday "went well", according to another of the doctors, Mateus Saldanha.



Birolini said the process took about an hour, adding that "it's not surgery... it does not involve any incisions".

The right side of the nerve was treated on Saturday, and a procedure to treat the left side of the nerve is set for today.

"My love just went to the surgical centre to have his phrenic nerve blocked," former first lady Michelle Bolsonaro wrote in an Instagram post on Saturday. "It's been nine months of struggle and anguish with daily hiccups."

The far-right former president, who was in power from 2019-2022, has for years been

dealing with the aftermath of an abdominal stab wound he suffered during a 2018 campaign rally, requiring several major surgeries.

In September, Brazil's Supreme Court found Bolsonaro guilty of conspiring to stay in power after losing the 2022 election to leftist Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, and handed him a 27-year prison sentence.

The coup failed due to a lack of support from top military brass.

The far-right ex-president has claimed his innocence, claiming that he was being persecuted by the Supreme Court.

Bolsonaro was under house arrest from August until his imprisonment on November 22.

Once discharged from the hospital, Bolsonaro will return to serving his sentence at a federal police jail in the capital.

Brazil's Supreme Court on Saturday also ordered house arrest for 10 officials from Bolsonaro's administration who were involved in planning the coup plot, sought legal justification for it, or spread disinformation about it on social media.

The 10 officials had been convicted but were out of prison due to pending appeals.

One of the officials, Silvinei Vasques, was detained in Paraguay on Friday after he allegedly tried to board a flight with false papers.

'World's first' Green lawmaker dies aged 75

AFP
Geneva

Daniel Brelaz, celebrated in Switzerland as the first Green politician elected to a national parliament anywhere in the world, died overnight, his family said yesterday. He was 75.

Brelaz was elected to the National Council, the lower house of Switzerland's Federal Assembly, in 1979.

He died following a heart attack, his son told Switzerland's domestic Keystone-ATS news agency.

Brelaz, upon his retirement in 2022, told Swiss national broadcaster that "I am proud because I got it right" regarding environmental consciousness in politics.

"I entered the National Council (parliament) with new concerns such as sustainable economics and recycling, not just renewable energy. Forty years later, these concerns have shaped the future of the country's politics."

Born in 1950, Brelaz graduated in mathematics from Lausanne's EPFL university in 1975 and became a teacher.

After joining environmental politics in a campaign against the construction of a nuclear power plant, he was elected to the Vaud cantonal legislature in the French-speaking western region in 1978.

Brelaz then stood for parliament, and was elected aged 29. He was still living with his parents at the time.

He served three spells in the National Council: from 1979-1989, from 2007-2011, and finally from 2015-2022, retiring before the end of his term following a domestic fall.

The Green Party is currently the fifth-largest in the 200-member National Council with 23 seats, followed by the Green Liberal Party with 11.

In 2001, Brelaz became the first directly-elected Green mayor in Switzerland, spending 15 years as mayor of Lausanne, the country's fifth-biggest city.

"Daniel Brelaz was, a remarkable figure in every respect, thanks to his stature, his keen intelligence, and his mental arithmetic skills," the Vaud cantonal executive said in a statement.

Louis Gerstner, former IBM chief who revitalised 'Big Blue', dies at 83

Louis Gerstner, the former chief executive and chairman of IBM, died on Saturday, aged 83.

IBM chairman and chief executive Arvind Krishna announced Gerstner's death in an e-mail sent Sunday to employees, but did not provide a cause of death.

"Lou arrived at IBM at a moment when the company's future was genuinely uncertain," Krishna said in his e-mail. "His leadership during that period reshaped the com-

pany. Not by looking backward, but by focusing relentlessly on what our clients would need next."

Gerstner moved to IBM from being the chief executive of RJR Nabisco in April 1993 after stints at American Express and the consultancy McKinsey, becoming the first outsider to run "Big Blue", as IBM was called.

During the nine years he led the computer giant, he was widely credited with turning around a company that was facing potential



Gerstner in 1993. -Reuters

bankruptcy, pivoting the company to business services.

He radically changed IBM's

culture and focus while slashing expenses, selling assets and repurchasing stock.

Gerstner retired as chief executive of IBM in 2002, with the stock some 800% higher than when he had started, moving to become the chairman of Carlyle Group until his retirement in 2008.

The author of *Who Says Elephants Can't Dance* and co-author of *Reinventing Education: Entrepreneurship in America's Public Schools*, Gerstner was on the board of several companies including Bristol-Myers, the *New York Times*, American Express,

AT&T and Caterpillar.

Gerstner was passionate about public education in the US, launching an initiative at IBM to use company technology in schools.

He established the Gerstner Philanthropies in 1989, which included the Gerstner Family Foundation, emphasising support for biomedical research, environmental and education initiatives, and social services serving New York City, Boston, and Palm Beach County, Florida. -Reuters

Trump, China congratulate Thailand, Cambodia leaders on ceasefire

AFP
Washington

US President Donald Trump yesterday congratulated the leaders of Thailand and Cambodia on a ceasefire agreed the previous day after weeks of border clashes that have killed dozens.

“I want to congratulate both great leaders on their brilliance in coming to this rapid and very fair conclusion,” said Trump, who has claimed credit for a previous truce that was broken earlier this month when the border conflict reignited. In a post on his Truth Social platform, Trump called the eventual outcome “fast & decisive, as all

of these situations should be!” He added that Washington, which has been involved in mediation efforts along with China and Malaysia, was “proud to help.” Ahead of talks with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky later yesterday, Trump lauded his self-proclaimed role in ending world conflicts, saying “perhaps

the US has become the real United Nations.” “The United Nations must start getting active and involved in world peace!” US Secretary of State Marco Rubio welcomed the Thailand-Cambodia ceasefire on Saturday, calling on both sides to “immediately honour this commitment.” At least 47 people were killed and

more than a million displaced in three weeks of fighting that spread to nearly every border province on both sides, according to official tallies. Announcing their agreement on Saturday, Thailand and Cambodia pledged to cease fire, freeze troop movements and allow civilians living in border areas to return home

as soon as possible. China too yesterday congratulated Cambodia on reaching a ceasefire. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, in a meeting with his Cambodian counterpart, called the ceasefire “an important step towards restoring peace” and said it was “in line with the shared expectations of countries in the region”.

Weak turnout seen in Myanmar’s phased election

Reuters
Naypyidaw

Under the shadow of civil war and questions over the poll’s credibility, the initial round of Myanmar’s phased general election closed yesterday, with signs of low voter turnout for the first polls since a military coup in 2021. The junta, having crushed pro-democracy protests after the coup and sparked a nationwide rebellion, said the vote would bring political stability to the impoverished Southeast Asian nation, despite international condemnation of the exercise. The United Nations, some Western countries and human rights groups have said the vote is not free, fair or credible, given that anti-junta political parties are out of the running and it is illegal to criticise the polls. Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, deposed by the military months after her National League for Democracy won a general election landslide in 2020, remains in detention and the party she led to power has been dissolved. The military-aligned Union Solidarity and Development Party, led by retired generals and fielding one-fifth of all candidates against severely diminished competition, is set to return to power, said Lalita Hanwong, a lecturer and Myanmar expert at Thailand’s Kasetsart University. “The junta’s election is designed

to prolong the military’s power of slavery over people,” she said. “And USDP and other allied parties with the military will join forces to form the next government.” In the lacklustre canvassing ahead of the polls, the USDP was the most visible. Founded in 2010, the year it won an election boycotted by the opposition, the party ran the country in concert with its military backers until 2015, when it was swept away by Suu Kyi’s NLD. Voter turnout in yesterday’s polls appeared much lower than in the 2020 election, 10 residents of cities spread across Myanmar said. Further rounds of voting will be held on January 11 and January 25, covering 265 of Myanmar’s 330 townships, although the junta does not have complete control of all those areas. Armed groups formed in the wake of the coup and long-established ethnic armies are fighting the military across swathes of the country, displacing some 3.6mn people and creating one of Asia’s worst humanitarian crises. A date for the final election result has not been declared. Dressed in civilian clothes, junta chief Min Aung Hlaing voted in the heavily guarded capital city of Naypyitaw, then held up an ink-soaked little finger, smiling widely, footage on state media MRTV showed. Voters must dip a finger into indelible ink after casting a ballot to ensure they do not vote more than once. Asked by reporters if he would like to become the country’s presi-

dent, an office that analysts say he has ambitions for, the general said he was not the leader of any political party. “When the parliament convenes, there is a process for electing the president,” he said. The junta’s attempt to establish a stable administration in the midst of war is fraught with risk, and broad foreign recognition is unlikely for any military-controlled government with a civilian veneer, according to analysts. Tom Andrews, the UN special envoy for human rights in Myanmar, said yesterday the election was not a pathway out of the country’s crisis and must be strongly rejected. Zaw Min Tun, a junta spokesperson, acknowledged international criticism of the vote. “However, from this election, there will be political stability,” he told reporters after voting in Naypyitaw. “We believe there will be a better future.” Nevertheless, Myanmar’s voters did not come out in numbers close to the previous election conducted under Covid-19 restrictions, including in the commercial capital of Yangon and the central city of Mandalay, residents said. The junta’s legal framework for the election has no minimum voter turnout requirement, said the Asian Network for Free Elections poll monitoring group. Turnout was about 70% in Myanmar’s 2020 and 2015 general elections, according to the US-based nonprofit International Foundation for Electoral Systems.

It’s a bird, it’s a plane!



An aircraft flies above birds in the sky in Ahmedabad, India, yesterday.

New alliance vows to address youth demands in Nepal polls

AFP
Kathmandu

Two of Nepal’s most popular political leaders yesterday united to forge a new alliance ahead of next year’s election, a move that is likely to challenge the traditional parties. Television host Rabi Lamichhane, the 51-year-old chairperson of the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), and Kathmandu mayor Balendra Shah pledged to address the demands of the younger generation following September’s deadly anti-corruption protests that ousted the government.

Swarnim Wagle, vice-chairman of RSP, called the alliance a “rare combination of courage, sacrifice and hope” for the country as it gears up for the March 5 election. “The new generation leaders have united by putting nation above self, in tune with the aspirations of the youth of Nepal,” Wagle told AFP. At least 77 people were killed during the September 8-9 youth-led uprising that was triggered by anger over a brief government ban on social media, building on public frustration after years of economic stagnation and allegations of entrenched political corruption. According to the agreement,

Lamichhane will remain the party’s chairman, while rapper-turned-mayor Shah, 35, will be the candidate for prime minister. “Consensus should not be as the leader seeks, it should be what the country needs,” Lamichhane said in a statement on social media after the deal was signed. Lamichhane, who was recently released on bail in connection with cooperative fraud and organised crime, is a popular television host in country. He set up the RSP in 2022, tapping into widespread discontent at Nepal’s elderly political leadership and becoming the deputy premier and interior minister.

Bangladesh police say student leader’s killers fled to India

Bangladesh police yesterday said the alleged killers of popular student leader Sharif Osman Hadi had fled to India, in comments likely to further strain relations with its neighbour. Hadi, a vocal India critic who took part in last year’s mass uprising, was shot by masked assailants in Dhaka earlier this month and later succumbed to his injuries at a hospital in Singapore. His death set off violent protests with angry mobs torching several buildings, including two major newspapers deemed to favour India as well as a prominent cultural institution. With protests being held across the country almost daily, pressure has been growing on Bangladesh’s interim government to arrest the killers of Hadi, who was set to contest general elections in February next year. “The killing was premeditated. Those behind it have been identified,” S N Nazrul Islam, a senior Dhaka Metropolitan Police officer, said at a news conference.

Kim Jong-un meets women footballers



North Korean leader Kim Jong-un meets women footballers and coaches who won the first place in the 2025 FIFA U-17 Women’s World Cup, at the Mansudae Assembly Hall in Pyongyang.

Bangladesh uprising leaders in new poll pact

AFP
Dhaka

Bangladesh’s largest Islamist party yesterday announced a seat-sharing agreement with a political grouping formed by students who spearheaded last year’s uprising, some of whose members oppose the alliance. Jamaat-e-Islami appears determined to gain a foothold in government through next year’s general election, the first polls since the student-led revolt toppled prime minister Sheikh Hasina in August 2024. Islamist movements that were crushed under Hasina’s 15-year autocratic rule have regrouped since her fall, and the Jamaat regards the February 12 vote as its biggest opportunity in decades. The Jamaat yesterday said it had reached an agreement with the student-led National Citizen Party following marathon talks, during which some NCP

members warned against the move. Jamaat leader Shafiqur Rahman announced a separate agreement with the small Liberal Democratic Party. “We were eight parties in the alliance. Now two new political parties have joined us,” he said at a press conference. The Jamaat-led alliance is dominated by fringe Islamist political parties, most of which held only a handful of seats in previous parliaments. The nation of 170mn has been in turmoil since the 2024 uprising, and the resurgence of Islamist forces has sparked concern among religious minorities. Ahead of the tie-up with the Jamaat, at least 30 NCP members wrote to party chief Nahid Islam, opposing the plan to join hands. In a letter on Saturday, they said NCP’s ideology and its commitment to democratic values contradicted those of the Jamaat.

Noise complaints spark Vietnam pickleball wars

AFP
Hanoi, Vietnam

The piercing pop-pop of pickleball paddles starts before sunrise and ends after midnight at dozens of newly built courts across Hanoi, as residents relish one of Vietnam’s fastest-growing sports - or rage at the noise it makes. The initial craze saw more people in Vietnam pick up a paddle per capita than anywhere else in Asia, according to one survey. Now unwitting spectators are yelling fault, filing noise complaints and petitions to curb playing hours that have left authorities in a pickle.

In the country’s densely packed cities, courts are wedged between tight alleyways and nestled beneath high-rises, disturbing thousands of people at once. “It drives me nuts,” said Hoa Nguyen, 44, who lives with her family behind a multicourt complex in Hanoi’s northeastern outskirts. “People are playing in the middle of the night and there’s nothing we can do about it,” Nguyen said, adding that she had filed a complaint with local authorities. “The noise makes it impossible for me to sleep. It just keeps going pop-pop-pop.” Most noise complaints on the capital’s iHanoi app stem from

pickleball, according to state media, which has dubbed the sport an “acoustic hazard”. Associated noise-related issues range from unruly crowds to honking horns in overcrowded parking lots. Lam Thanh, 50, who manages a dormitory for workers near one of Ho Chi Minh City’s estimated 1,000 courts, says the cacophony is proving to be costly. “Many tenants couldn’t stand the noise and have moved elsewhere,” she said. “There’s the popping sound of paddles, cheering, shouting and joking around - it’s all extremely exhausting for us.” Vietnam’s pickleball boom began

around two years ago, players and coaches say, well after its popularity surged in the US and Canada. But the country is now the sport’s second-fastest-growing market in Asia after Malaysia, according to pickleball rating company DUPR. Regional professional circuit PPA Tour Asia says more than 16mn people in Vietnam have picked up a paddle, though that figure is extrapolated from a survey of around 1,000 respondents. Hanoi’s Long Bien district, its pickleball centre, has more than 100 courts, up from 54 in less than a year, according to state media. Pickleholics Club, Victory Pickleball and Pro Pickleball Vn are all within a five-minute walk, with

dozens more a short drive away. Coach Pham Duc Trung, 37, said the sport’s accessibility was key to its popularity. “The paddle is light and the ball is light... Children can play it, and so can adults,” he said. “The sound of the ball hitting the paddle is quite appealing,” he added. Not everyone agrees. Around the world, the plinks and pops of pickleball have spawned outrage, provoking protests and even lawsuits. But Vietnam’s widespread embrace of the sport, and its cities’ rapid growth in recent decades as the economy boomed, help explain the intense frustration. Ho Chi Minh

City already ranks among the loudest cities in Asia, according to the United Nations, with noise pollution levels high enough to damage hearing. And experts say pickleball sounds are louder and higher-pitched than tennis or badminton. A nationwide noise ordinance is supposed to limit the din, especially late at night, but residents say the courtyard clatter often goes unmuted. Hanoi high school student Duong, 16, cannot focus on his homework. “The sound made by this ball is very unpleasant,” he said. “My mind feels blank because I cannot concentrate.”

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GULF**TIMES**

Antitrust delayed is antitrust denied

When a US federal judge ruled in late November that Meta does not maintain an illegal monopoly in social media, it was a reminder that even the strongest evidence can look weak when enforcers act too late.

Rejecting the US Federal Trade Commission's narrow market definition, the court instead concluded that Meta, formerly known as Facebook, competes against a broad array of rivals such as TikTok and YouTube. While legal scholars can and will dissect the opinion, the biggest takeaway is that timing matters in dynamic markets, implying that antitrust authorities must develop a preventive approach, rather than relying solely on reactive measures.

The case centred on Facebook's acquisitions of Instagram in 2012 and WhatsApp in 2014, when both were unmistakably competitive threats. Facebook said so itself

But the case collapsed under the weight of today's market reality. Instead of considering the world as it existed when the mergers occurred, the court (incorrectly) cited the rise of TikTok, Snapchat, and YouTube Shorts as evidence that Facebook lacked monopoly power. The flaws in the court's reasoning reflect a deeper problem with litigating consummated mergers: it asks judges to travel back in time and forget what they now know. Questions like "Would Instagram have become this significant without Facebook's investment?" or "What competition might have emerged if the acquisitions had not taken place?" are inherently counterfactual. It is very difficult to measure the impact of competition that never existed.

This suggests that the acquisitions should have been challenged when they were first proposed – a difficult task, but not as hard as challenging consummated deals. Predicting the future is less formidable than reconstructing the present on the basis of an imaginary past.

The flaws in the court's reasoning reflect a deeper problem with litigating consummated mergers: it asks judges to travel back in time and forget what they now know

The flaws of late enforcement were also on display in the Google antitrust trial. Even as a US federal judge ruled in 2024 that Google had illegally monopolised general-search services, the remedy was softened by the perception that AI chatbots were already reshaping the market. Even the boldest proposed remedies centred less on restoring competition in search and more on ensuring that the next tech frontier remains open.

Regulators should have prevented Facebook from acquiring Instagram and WhatsApp in the first place, but erred on the side of caution, fearing false positives and believing that the market would self-correct. But that decision has proved impossible to unwind, even though Facebook's acquisition of direct competitors in a competitive market should have been a straightforward win for antitrust authorities – the very kind of textbook harm the law is designed to prevent.

To their credit, the FTC and the department of justice under former US president Joe Biden had begun to develop and use their preventive toolkit. They challenged several mergers (including Nvidia-Arm, Illumina-GRAIL, and Microsoft-Activision Blizzard), examined practices in nascent industries such as AI partnerships, and launched early probes into emerging monopolies in the cloud computing and semiconductor markets. But the pendulum has swung back under Donald Trump's second administration, which has pursued merger settlements, dialled back investigations into AI giants, and revived the myth that tech firms are the guardians of innovation and national security. It doesn't have to be this way. US antitrust regulators now have stronger merger guidelines and a clearer understanding of how digital markets work. What they need is the political will to act early and decisively.

The same applies to other governments. The most consequential tech mergers are reviewed simultaneously in multiple jurisdictions, and regulators in the European Union and the UK also have powerful preventive tools, including merger review and market studies. Even just initiating an investigation can create enough friction and uncertainty for parties to abandon a deal, as happened with Nvidia-Arm and Visa-Plaid. But the global scramble to attract AI investment has pushed competition enforcement into retreat. Amid increasing geopolitical turbulence, regulators are forgetting the hard-earned lessons of the platform era and pulling back precisely when they should be applying those lessons to block anti-competitive AI mergers and prevent the emergence of AI monopolies. The result is a classic collective-action problem, even though all it takes is one courageous competition authority to block a global deal and change the trajectory of an entire market.

The Meta decision can seem like much ado about nothing: one case that was too difficult to win despite overwhelming evidence. But viewed in a broader context, it becomes clear that timing makes all the difference in antitrust enforcement. Regulators must learn to flex their preventive muscle to have any hope of taming Big Tech. – Project Syndicate



Getting the AI story right

By Jeffrey Wu
Hong Kong

For the past two years, the dominant narrative about AI has been one of boundless possibility. Larger models, trillion-token training runs, and record-breaking capex (capital expenditure) cycles have reinforced a sense of uninterrupted acceleration. But technological change is rarely so straightforward, and this time is no exception. As AI moves from experimentation to real-world applications, the limits imposed by the physical world, capital markets, and political systems clearly matter more than its theoretical potential.

The most immediate constraint is electricity. Nowhere is this more evident than in the US, where data-centre power demand is expected to rise from roughly 35GW to 78GW by 2035. Northern Virginia, the world's largest cloud-infrastructure cluster, has already effectively exhausted its available grid capacity. Utilities in Arizona, Georgia, and Ohio warn that new substations may take almost a decade to build. A single campus can require 300-500MW, enough to power an entire city. Silicon can be manufactured quickly; high-voltage transmission cannot.

Markets are responding with the speed and ambition one would expect. Hyperscalers (the major tech firms building advanced AI models on the back of ever-greater computing capacity) have become among the world's largest buyers of long-dated renewable energy. Private solar and wind farms are being built expressly to serve cloud facilities, and some firms are exploring next-generation small modular reactors as a way to bypass slower municipal infrastructure.

These efforts will eventually expand the frontier of what is possible, but they do not eliminate the constraint so much as redirect it. The next wave of AI capacity will likely be concentrated not in Northern Virginia or Dublin, but in regions where land, power, and water remain abundant: the American Midwest, Scandinavia, parts of the Middle East, and western China. The geography of AI is being written by physics, not preference.

Silicon is the next constraint, and here the story is becoming more complicated. While Nvidia once appeared to be the universal substrate beneath all AI development globally, that era is ending. In a significant milestone, Google trained its latest large language model, Gemini 3, entirely on its own Tensor Processing Units – and Amazon's Trainium2, Microsoft's Maia, and Meta's MTIA chips are all being developed for similar purposes. Similarly, in China, Huawei's Ascend platform has become the strategic backbone for domestic model training in the face of US export controls.

Some of this shift reflects natural technological maturation. As workloads increase, specialised accelerators become more efficient than the general-purpose GPUs originally adapted for AI. But the timing is not accidental. Scarcity, geopolitical friction, and cost pressures have pushed hyperscalers to assume a role once reserved for semiconductor firms. Given that departing from Nvidia's CUDA ecosystem carries enormous organisational costs, the growing willingness to incur it signals how severe the constraint has become. What will follow is a more fragmented hardware landscape, and with it, a more fragmented AI ecosystem. Once architectures diverge at the silicon level, they rarely reconverge.

The third constraint, capital, operates in a more subtle way. Hyperscaler investment plans for 2026 now exceed \$518bn, a figure that has risen by nearly two-thirds just in the past year. We are already witnessing the largest private-sector infrastructure buildout in modern history. Meta, Microsoft, and Google revise their capex guidance so frequently that analysts struggle to keep pace.

Yet it is still early days for economic returns. Baidu recently reported CN¥2.6bn (\$369mn) in AI-application-related revenue, driven largely by enterprise contracts and infrastructure subscriptions, and Tencent says it has lifted profitability through AI-enhanced efficiencies across its mature businesses. But in the US, most companies still bury their AI earnings within broader cloud categories.

The gap between AI adoption and monetisation is wide but familiar. In past technological waves, infrastructure spending routinely preceded productivity gains by years. The constraint comes not from weak investor sentiment, but from the strategic pressure enthusiasm creates: different firms pursue different conceptions of value because their business models and cost structures demand it.

Many sectors simply cannot adopt AI at the pace that new models are being released. Large banks, for example, remain bound by security and compliance frameworks that require air-gapped, on-site, fully auditable software deployments.

Such rules instantly cut them off from the most advanced frontier models, which rely on cloud-side orchestration and rapid iterations through new versions. Healthcare systems face similar limits, and governments even more so. The problem is not AI's theoretical

capabilities, but the difficulty of incorporating such tools into legacy systems built for a different era.

Taken together, these forces suggest a future very different from the one implied by the standard media narrative. AI is not converging toward a single universal frontier. Diverse regional and institutional architectures are being shaped by different limits – from power shortages in the US to land and cooling constraints in Singapore and Japan, “geopolitical” scarcity in China (where Western export controls limit access to advanced chips and cloud hardware), regulatory friction in Europe, and organisational rigidities across the corporate world. Technology may be global, but implementation is local.

Fortunately, real-world constraints are not the enemy of progress. Often, they form the scaffolding around which new systems take shape. The fibre-optic glut of the late 1990s, initially derided as wasteful overshoot, later underpinned the rise of streaming, social media, and cloud computing.

Today's constraints will play a similar role. Power scarcity is already shifting the geography of AI. Silicon fragmentation is creating new national and corporate ecosystems. Capital asymmetries are pushing firms into different strategic equilibria. Institutional limits are shaping the first real use cases.

The next decade of AI will belong not to the systems with the greatest theoretical capability, but to the ecosystems most adept at turning real-world limits into design advantages. Possibility defines the horizon, but constraint will determine the route the world ultimately takes. – Project Syndicate

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Kosovo votes in bid to break a year-long political deadlock

AFP/Reuters
Pristina

Kosovo went to the polls yesterday, with nationalist Prime Minister Albin Kurti's party seeking a majority to end a year-long political deadlock that has paralysed parliament and delayed international funding for Europe's youngest nation.

The vote is the second this year in Kosovo after Kurti's Vetevendosje (VV) party fell short of a majority in February.

Months of failed coalition talks prompted President Vjosa Osmani to dissolve parliament in November and call an early election.

Failure to form a government and reopen parliament would prolong the crisis at a critical time.

Lawmakers must elect a new president in April and ratify €1bn (\$1.2bn) in loan agreements from the European Union and World Bank that expire in the coming months.

Polls opened at 7am (0600 GMT) and close at 7pm (1800 GMT), with the first official results expected soon after voting ends.

VV won the most votes in February's parliamentary elections, but its 42% was not enough to secure a majority in the 120-seat parliament.

MPs needed more than 50 sessions to agree on a speaker, but no coalition or government emerged, forcing the country to go back to the polls.

By 11am local time (10 GMT), 8.27% of citizens had voted, broadly in line with turnout in February, which ended with just

40.6% of voters turning out.

Arben Xhelili, 42, an economist from Pristina, was not optimistic after casting his vote.

"I expect the same situation after the elections," he said.

Brikenda Rexhepi, editor-in-chief of Koha Media Group, said that "beyond political instability and public disappointment, the deadlock has had clear economic and diplomatic costs".

She said this election offers the opportunity to form "functioning institutions after a year of failed attempts".

In front of one of the polling stations in Pristina, Arefik Mexhmeli, a 66-year-old pensioner, said whoever wins "should work harder for the economy".

"We want the next government to create conditions for the youth to stay here and not leave," one voter, 58-year-old Rexhep Karakashi, told Reuters.

Opinion polls are not published in Kosovo, giving no clues to the possible outcome, and some voters said they did not expect the vote to bring significant change.

"There wouldn't be great joy if Kurti wins, nor would there be if the opposition wins. This country needs drastic changes, and I don't see that change coming," said Edi Krasiqi, a doctor.

Seen as the frontrunner, Kurti hopes, after a rapid two-week campaign, to "win by a wide margin" and "go beyond 50%," he told AFP in an interview on Tuesday.

While he campaigned in February on a promise to govern Kosovo "from one end to the other" - including Serb-majority areas where Belgrade's influence often out-

weighs Pristina's - Kurti has now focused on the economy, sidelining relations with Serbia - which has never recognised the secession of its former province in 2008.

"Beyond the controversies, the economy is doing very well and this year again we will record GDP growth of 4%. Throughout my term, we have never fallen below 4%," Kurti told AFP.

In recent days, he has also announced that the government would pay €100 (\$117) to pensioners and to every family with young children by the end of the year.

"Electoral corruption," responded the two other main parties, the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) and the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK).

They have also campaigned on the economy and the most vulnerable groups - but by attacking the government record.

"Kosovo has been poorly governed. Prices have risen by 40-50%, electricity has become more expensive, while wages and pensions have remained almost unchanged. That will change with a PDK government," promised PDK leader Bedri Hamza.

"Development projects have never progressed because of poor political choices," and "inflation has eaten away at incomes," echoed Lumir Abdixhiku, the LDK candidate.

He criticised Kurti's hardline policy towards the Serb minority, which has also been lambasted by allies, including the United States.

"We have lost allies, we have lost the trust of the international community, institutions have been blocked," Abdixhiku accused.



A child helps to cast a ballot at a polling station in Pristina during a snap parliamentary election. - Reuters

Right: A polling official makes arrangements at a polling station in Pristina, ahead of the snap parliamentary election. - Reuters

More than 2mn people are eligible to vote - including tens of thousands registered abroad - in the election.

"We expect better than what it is now," Suzana Simnica, 53, said after voting in Pristina.

High expectations were also voiced by Fatmir Vehapi, 65, who came from Switzerland just to vote.

In addition to the three main parties, voters must also choose representatives for the 20 seats reserved for minorities - 10 for the Serb minority, four for Roma, Ashkali and Balkan Egyptians, three for Bosniaks, two for Turks and one for Gorani.

Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in 2008 with US backing, including a 1999 North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) bombing campaign against Serbian forces trying to crush an uprising by the 90% ethnic Albanian majority.



Despite international support, the country of 1.6mn has struggled with poverty, instability and organised crime.

Kurti's tenure, which began in 2021, was the first time a Pristina government completed a full term.

Serbia's students gather signatures for early elections goal

AFP
Belgrade

Protesting students in Serbia swapped massive street demonstrations yesterday for a push to collect citizens' signatures, to gauge whether they had support to demand snap parliamentary elections.

A wave of large-scale student-led protests has gripped Serbia since November 2024, after the collapse of a railway station roof killed 16 people in Novi Sad, the country's second-largest city.

The tragedy at the newly renovated station became a symbol of entrenched corruption, with demands for a transparent investigation escalating into calls for early elections - which have so far been rejected by authorities.

"We are counting to get a rough idea of how many people support us," Jana, a first-year philosophy student, told AFP in Belgrade, while staffing one of nearly 500 stands nationwide.

She declined to give her last name.

After a more than a year of faculty blockades, protests drawing hundreds of thousands of people, and awareness-raising marches across the country, students were now engaging passers-by at the stands, collecting their signatures and contact details.

For Branimir Jovancevic, 63, the new approach was more effective than organising a large rally.



Citizens sign a petition calling for snap parliamentary elections during a student-led protest campaign, in Belgrade yesterday. - Reuters

"It is meant to show how many citizens in Serbia support calling elections," he said after giving his contact details to students in central Belgrade.

"Too much time has passed, and no one has been held accountable," said Eva Manojevic, 24.

So far, three investigations have been launched into the fatal canopy collapse, but

only one has resulted in an indictment confirmed by a court.

However, the court ruled on Wednesday that there were no grounds to further prosecute the former construction minister who was suspected of a "serious crime against public safety".

Nebojsa Vladislavjevic, a political science professor, saw the students entering

"a new phase of mobilisation".

"The goal is to turn the support gained through protests into votes and an electoral victory," he said.

Vladislavjevic expected a new organisation to arise that would be able "to carry an election campaign" and eventually "take part in governing after the elections".

The students said they would announce the survey results in the coming days.

So far, the only indicator of the strength of the student movement has been the number of people attending protests and a handful of opinion polls.

A September survey by independent election watchdog CRTA suggested that candidates backed by the student movement could secure 44% of the vote.

The survey also found that two-thirds of citizens, regardless of political affiliation, see snap elections as a way out of the crisis.

However, a separate poll conducted the same month by Ipsos, which did not include a potential student-backed list, found that the ruling party would win 48% of the vote, virtually unchanged from its 2023 result.

Public uproar over the Novi Sad disaster triggered the resignation of the prime minister and the collapse of the government earlier this year.

However, a new cabinet was formed through a reshuffle, and President Aleksandar Vucic said elections would not be held before late 2026, accusing them of attempting to overthrow the government.

Three missing in southern Spain after flooding

Three people went missing after torrential rains caused flooding in southern Spain, the Guardia Civil police said yesterday, calling on the population to exercise extreme caution.

Spain has been exceptionally strongly affected by climate change in recent years, resulting in longer heatwaves and more frequent episodes of heavy rain.

Videos posted yesterday on social media showed villages in southern Spain inundated overnight.

The Guardia Civil said it was looking for two missing people near Malaga, and for another person around Granada.

The neighbouring region of Murcia was also still hit by heavy rain. - AFP



This picture taken in 2017 shows a surfer riding the Eisbach (ice creek) wave during freezing conditions on the Isar River in the English Garden in Munich. - AFP

Row deepens over vanished river wave in Munich

Row over the disappearance of a famous river surfing wave in Munich escalated yesterday as authorities removed a beam inserted over Christmas to recreate the attraction.

The Eisbach wave on a side branch of the Isar River had been a landmark in the Bavarian city since the 1980s but it vanished in October after annual cleanup work along the riverbed.

Activists had placed a beam in the water early on December 25 to partially recreate the wave, according to German media reports, and hung a banner above the water that read "Merry Christmas".

However, a spokesman for the Munich fire service told AFP that the "installation was removed" yesterday at the request of city authorities.

Activists have made several attempts to reinstate

the wave in the city's Englischer Garten park since October - only to see them reversed.

The local surfers' association IGSM on Thursday posted a statement on its website saying that it had abandoned its campaign to save the wave, accusing city authorities of dragging their feet.

The Eisbach wave was considered the largest and most consistent river wave in the heart of a major city and had become a tourist attraction in Bavaria's state capital.

Franz Fasel, head of the IGSM, told AFP in July that 3,000-5,000 local surfers were using it.

Access to the wave was cut off for several months earlier this year after the death of a 33-year-old Munich woman who became trapped under the surface while surfing at night. - AFP

470kg WWII bomb removed in Belgrade

AFP
Belgrade

A 470kg (1,000-pound) World War II aerial bomb was safely removed yesterday from a construction site in a central district of Serbia's capital, Belgrade, police said.

The US-made AN-M44 bomb was used during Allied air raids on German positions during the liberation of Belgrade from Nazi occupation in 1944.

Ahead of the bomb's removal, the site, which is near a residential area and a shopping mall, underwent detailed reconnaissance "to ensure safe conditions", police said.

The bomb was transported to an army arms training ground 180km (110 miles) from Belgrade, where it will be destroyed in the coming days.

Several unexploded bombs dating back to past wars have been discovered in Serbia in recent years, all of which were safe-

ly removed without detonating.

In September 2024, a century-old artillery shell weighing nearly 300kg (660 pounds) was cleared from a construction site near the Serbian parliament in Belgrade.

Earlier that year, in April, a large bomb from the 1999 North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) bombing campaign was found in Nis, southern Serbia.

In 2021, a 242kg (530-pound) World War II bomb was also removed from a construction site in a Belgrade suburb.



Dr Sultan bin Khamis al-Yahyaiei (third from left) and Sadiq Mohammed al-Ammari (centre).



QPC discusses future of regional tourism with media delegation

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

The Qatar Press Centre (QPC) has welcomed a delegation of Gulf and Arab media professionals visiting Doha under the auspices of the Arab Federation for Sports Tourism.

The delegation, which was participating in a forum on “The Cultural Dimension in Sports Tourism and Media”, was received by QPC director-general Sadiq Mohammed al-Ammari, who was accompanied by *Arrayah* Managing Editor Majid al-Jabara and *Al Sharq* Managing Editor Abdulaziz Ahmed al-Maarifi.

During the visit, al-Ammari presented an overview of the QPC’s vision, mission, and role in the media landscape.

He emphasised that the centre serves as a comprehensive platform for journalists in Qatar and a professional centre of expertise dedicated to developing journalistic culture and elevating media performance, in line with the demands of the current era and the media’s role in supporting national development and comprehensive progress.

Al-Ammari said that the QPC is an active member of the Arab Journalists Union



The delegation with QPC officials.

and the Gulf Press Union, and is pursuing membership in the International Federation of Journalists, which will enhance its presence on the global media scene.

He noted that intra-Gulf and Arab tourism possesses strong potential, and explained that Arab tourists are among the highest spenders compared to other foreign tourists.

This necessitates targeted tourism and media policies and programmes, al-Ammari said, that reflect the region’s unique characteristics and cultural values, and support sustainable development.

Arab Federation for Sports Tourism secretary-general Dr Sultan bin Khamis al-Yahyaiei affirmed that Qatar is witnessing

rapid progress in various fields, enabling it to attain a prominent position both regionally and internationally, particularly in the field of sports tourism.

He considered Qatar’s experience a commendable model in planning, implementation, and investment in human resources and infrastructure.

Dr al-Yahyaiei said that the delegation’s visit is aimed at co-ordinating and learning from this pioneering experience, which has proven its excellence and effectiveness.

He added that the delegation’s presence at the QPC reflects a deep and important milestone for co-operation and mutual support, amid the expanding scope of major sporting events, which have become a



Abdulaziz Ahmed al-Maarifi (left), Majid al-Jabara (second left), Sadiq Mohammed al-Ammari and Dr Sultan bin Khamis al-Yahyaiei (right).

driving force for tourism, the economy, and culture.

Gulf Association for Tourism Media president Khalid al-Dughaim described the visit as “a home for the written word and a platform for dialogue and the advancement of journalistic work”.

He noted that Qatar has presented a pioneering and exemplary media model, and that the Qatar’s media experience has become a valuable resource for several countries.

Al-Dughaim commended the role of Qatar’s media in conveying the true image and culture of the Arab world.

He also lauded Qatar’s achievements during its hosting of major tournaments,

most notably the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

He added that these events showcased Qatari and Arab culture in the best possible light and consolidated Qatar’s position on the global tourism map.

Emirates Tourism Media Association chairman Hussein Ali al-Mannai said that the delegation learned about the significant role that Qatar plays in sports tourism and hosting major events during the visit.

He said their presence at the “House of Words” reflects the advanced position journalism in Qatar has reached, having successfully conveyed the country’s voice and image to the world, particularly during the World Cup, where Qatar’s media “appeared at its professional best”.



Youssef al-Khulaifi and Mohammed al-Amri lead the ribbon-cutting ceremony, in the presence of LuLu Hypermarket Qatar director Shaijan M O and LuLu Hypermarket Qatar regional director Shanavas P, as well as several dignitaries and ministry officials, during the launch of the ‘Made in Qatar – Qatari Product Our First Choice’ campaign at LuLu Hypermarket, Al Gharafa branch yesterday. **PICTURES:** Shaji Kayamkulam



LuLu launches campaign to support products made in Qatar

Reinforcing its commitment to supporting local production and food security, LuLu Hypermarket Qatar, in co-operation with the Ministry of Municipality’s Agricultural Affairs Department, officially launched the “Made in Qatar – Qatari Product Our First Choice” campaign at LuLu Hypermarket, Al Gharafa branch.

The launch ceremony was attended by Agricultural Affairs Department director Youssef al-Khulaifi, and Mohammed al-Amri, director of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry’s Department of Specialised Licensing and Market Control.

Senior officials, including LuLu Hypermarket Qatar director Shaijan M O and LuLu Hypermarket Qatar regional director Shanavas P, along with several dignitaries and ministry officials, were also present at the event.

The festival, which runs across LuLu stores until January 3, highlights Qatar’s finest food and non-food products, celebrating the nation’s agricultural achievements, cultural heritage, and traditions.

Customers can explore a wide range of Qatar-produced goods, including fresh vegetables, herbs, chicken, eggs, Arabic lamb, dairy products, frozen foods, delicatessen and bakery items, groceries, and health and beauty products.

Speaking on the occasion, an official from the Ministry of Municipality stated that the primary objective of the initiative is to support local farm owners while ensuring consumers receive fresh, high-quality products.

The official thanked LuLu management for their continued support of local farmers and for actively promoting this national programme.

An official spokesperson from LuLu management said that the “Qatari Product Our First Choice” campaign marks the beginning of the agricultural season in Qa-

tar, during which local farms supply large quantities of fresh produce to the market.

“The government’s support enables local farmers to offer high-quality produce at very competitive prices, especially during the harvest season,” the spokesperson said. “Every year, LuLu Hypermarket places great importance on celebrating and promoting locally grown agricultural produce.”

“As a responsible retailer, it is our social commitment to ensure a sustainable market for local industries,” the spokesperson added. “This initiative not only supports farmers but also strengthens Qatar’s food security and self-reliance goals. The event also celebrates the remarkable progress made by local farms, with production volumes significantly higher this year compared to previous years.”

The festival features premium-quality vegetables from local farms at competitive prices.

As a strong advocate of Qatari products throughout the year, LuLu Hypermarket has created exclusive displays showcasing prominent local brands, including Baladna, Dandy, Ghadeer, Al Maha, Qbake, Athba, Rawa, QFM, Rayyan, Qatar Pafki, Pearl, Flora, Gourmet, Jerry Smith, Agrico Qatar, Paramount Agricole, Napoli Bakeries, Al Waha, Korean Bakeries, Al Manhal, Dana, Aqua Gulf, Safa, Sidra, Lusail, Doha, and Napico.

LuLu Hypermarket Qatar has maintained long-standing partnerships with local farmers and has played a pivotal role in marketing Qatari agricultural produce for many years.

In recent times, LuLu Hypermarket has further strengthened its focus on promoting locally produced goods as part of its social and economic responsibility to support national food security and sustainable development initiatives.