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## VoPay to set up global headquarters in Qatar

VoPay International Inc, a global fintech infrastructure platform, yesterday announced the establishment of its global headquarters in Qatar. The move positions Qatar as VoPay's primary hub for advancing digital financial infrastructure and supporting scalable financial modernisation across the Middle East and North Africa (Mena), Africa, Southeast Asia, and other high-growth regions, while continuing to serve the company's operations across North America, Europe, and Latin America. From its Doha headquarters, VoPay will expand and operate foundational financial infrastructure that supports

central banks, financial institutions, government and public-sector entities, and large enterprises in modernising financial systems and connecting regional markets to global financial ecosystems. As part of this expansion, VoPay plans to hire more than 400 professionals in Qatar over the next three years across engineering, technology, security, compliance, data, and platform operations, reinforcing the country's role as a long-term centre for financial infrastructure development. "Our decision to establish VoPay's global headquarters in Qatar reflects a deep alignment with the country's long-term vision for economic diversification and digital leadership,"

### Move to boost digital finance in Mena, Africa, Southeast Asia



said Hamed Arbab, Founder and CEO of VoPay. "Qatar offers a unique platform for scaling financial infrastructure that connects regions, institutions, and markets. With the support of Invest Qatar and the Qatar Financial Centre, we are investing for the long term by building world-class talent and advancing financial infrastructure that operates across borders with scale, intelligence, and resilience."

VoPay's global headquarters decision aligns with Qatar's emergence as a platform for innovation and digital transformation, shaped by the country's long-term national vision under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad

al-Thani. As articulated in Qatar National Vision 2030, which builds a bridge between the present and the future, the direction continues to support the development of a diversified, knowledge-based economy with global reach and creates an environment where technology companies can scale internationally while operating from the region. VoPay's expansion into Qatar has been supported by Investment Promotion Agency Qatar (Invest Qatar), whose leadership and engagement played a meaningful role in facilitating the company's decision to establish its global headquarters in Doha. (QNA) **To Page 3**

## PM, Egyptian FM discuss ties over phone

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani received a phone call from Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Emigration and Egyptian Expatriates Badr Abdellaty yesterday to discuss regional developments. The two discussed bilateral relations and ways to strengthen co-operation, and exchanged views on the situation in Gaza and the occupied Palestinian territories. Both stressed the importance of intensifying regional and international efforts to ensure the full implementation of the Gaza ceasefire agreement and to reduce tensions in the region through dialogue and peaceful means. (QNA)

## Scientific Excellence Award names 108 winners for 2026

A total of 108 winners have been selected for the 2026 Scientific Excellence Award from a competitive pool of 371 applicants, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education announced yesterday. The award's chief executive, Maryam Abdullah al-Muhannadi, said the selection reflected the high calibre of submissions and increasing familiarity with the award's rigorous standards. She highlighted the diverse backgrounds of winners, spanning public and private schools, specialised institutions, and both civilian and military universities. The success rate remained consistent with previous editions, she noted, reflecting the reliability of the evaluation process. In some instances, multiple family members earned recognition, underscoring the influence of supportive home environments whilst adhering to merit-based criteria. **Page 12**

## QF awards grants to seven cross-university projects

Qatar Foundation (QF) has awarded this year's Multiversity Grants to seven cross-university projects at Education City, marking a shift towards interconnected academic collaboration that breaks down institutional silos.

The initiative leverages Education City's academic ecosystem to catalyse new forms of knowledge sharing, resource amplification, and community stewardship through co-ordinated collaboration in service of academic excellence.

"The Multiversity Grants reflect a deliberate shift in how we think about higher education collaboration. Rather than operating singularly and in parallel, these projects bring universities together to work at the intersections of disciplines, institutions, and student needs. This is how we move from excellence in isolation to impact at scale," said Dr Samah Gamar, director of Academic Affairs at QF's Higher Education Division.

This year's funded projects span priority areas including innovative pedagogy, interdisciplinary dialogue, Arabic Large Language Models and responsible artificial intelligence, environmental futures, student mobility, and the

recognition of undergraduate student scholarship. All initiatives place student learning at their core whilst modelling new approaches to collaborative stewardship across Education City.

Among this year's awardees is "Games for Playful and Impactful Pedagogy", a cross-university initiative that develops game-based teaching toolkits to support experiential and hands-on learning. The project brings together faculty from Hamad Bin Khalifa University, Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar (CMU-Q), and Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts (VCUarts Qatar) to translate abstract concepts into interactive learning experiences for students across disciplines and universities.

Another awarded initiative, "The Multiversity Majlis: Dialogue Across Disciplines", reimagines the traditional majlis as a contemporary academic platform for interdisciplinary dialogue. Developed collaboratively by Georgetown University in Qatar (GU-Q) and VCUarts Qatar, the project engages students in structured dialogue on global challenges, including climate change, food security, migration, and sustainable economies. (QNA) **To Page 3**



An aerial view of QF Education City.

## Qatar pushes for second phase of Gaza ceasefire

By A Staff Reporter  
Doha

Qatar is working with its mediation partners - Egypt, Türkiye, and the United States - to ensure the implementation of the second phase of the ceasefire agreement in the Gaza Strip, the reopening of the Rafah crossing, and the delivery of humanitarian aid to the Strip, HE the Adviser to the Prime Minister and Official Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Majid bin Mohammed al-Ansari said yesterday.

Speaking at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' weekly media briefing, Dr al-Ansari said contacts are still ongoing to reach the second phase of the agreement. However, there are still obstacles under discussion, in addition to several on which agreements have been reached.

From day one, Qatar has called for humanitarian aid not to be used as a tool for political blackmail in any conflict anywhere in the world, he said.

On recent events in Venezuela, Dr al-Ansari reiterated Qatar's position calling for restraint, de-escalation, and dialogue as the means to address all outstanding issues. He noted Qatar's support for any attempts or efforts aimed at finding a peaceful solution to the crisis there.

On Yemen, the official spokesperson said Qatar welcomed the



HE Dr Majid bin Mohammed al-Ansari addressing the news conference yesterday.

efforts undertaken by the Yemeni government, the legitimate representative of the Yemeni people, within the framework of the Yemeni-Yemen dialogue process.

He commended the invitation extended by the president of the Yemeni Presidential Leadership Council to hold a conference in Riyadh to sit down at the negotiating table and discuss solutions to various outstanding issues.

He said Qatar emphasised the necessity of the participation of all components of the Yemeni political landscape and their positive engagement in this conference, adding that Qatar highly values the position of Saudi Arabia and its support for this dialogue, the natural outcome of which will be reaching agreements on various issues, including the southern issue in Yemen.

He said there is co-ordination amongst the various Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries to support their brothers in

Yemen in reaching a settlement and de-escalating the conflict there, noting that relations between the brothers in the region are ongoing and do not require special efforts.

He also said Qatar supports the legitimate government in Yemen, pointing to the continued flow of Qatari aid to Yemen through UN agencies and in co-ordination with its brothers, whilst welcoming any international effort that supports the brothers in Yemen, whether on a humanitarian level or in reaching political agreements.

Dr al-Ansari said the situation in Sudan is the biggest humanitarian catastrophe this year, calling on all parties to exert more efforts to resolve the crisis and deliver humanitarian aid to the Sudanese people, especially in conflict zones.

He said Qatar continues its communication with various parties in Sudan and its efforts to deliver humanitarian aid, whilst emphasising that it will not be used for political or military purposes.

On the threats issued against Iran, Dr al-Ansari said any escalation in the region is not only a threat to stability, but also to international peace and security.

He said Doha continues its communication with Tehran and Washington, and supports any dialogue aimed at preventing escalation in the region, adding that there is still room for diplomatic solutions in this context.

## Manufacturing sector shows record results in 2025

### Growth driven by LNG, petrochemicals, food, medicine industries

By Ayman Adly  
Staff Reporter

Qatar's manufacturing sector achieved record results in 2025, contributing more than QR69.3bn to the national economy, with expectations to surpass QR70bn this year as the sector posts an annual growth rate of around 3.5%. The growth is supported by

the expansion of the LNG and petrochemical industries, as well as open policies adopted by concerned entities to diversify the national economy and transform towards smart and green manufacturing to overcome challenges such as high production costs and swings in international markets.

This year, manufacturing industry prospects are projected to grow by 4% due to investment activity in major industrial areas in Qatar, such as Mesaieed, Ras Laffan, and other major sites. The food, medicine, and textile industries are

mainly driving these positive outcomes.

The number of factories operating in Qatar rose from around 920 in 2023 to over 1,000 during 2025. Similarly, the number of national products rose from around 1,720 in 2023 to over 1,815 locally produced products in early 2025.

Such a constant increase in locally produced items shows clear expansion in manufacturing and factories, supported by government strategies that aim to empower and engage the private sector, in particular by promoting small and medium

sized enterprises (SMEs), whilst enhancing consumer trust in local products and improving their ability to compete in the market.

Sales of national products at local market outlets increased by almost 75% last year, with more high-quality products expected to hit the market this year. In addition to food and beverage products, there are industries that process plastics, chemicals, rubber, basic metals, cement, and metallic minerals, as well as refined petroleum products.

The sector is expected to attract around QR2.75bn in annual

investment, which will continue to create more jobs, with a focus on the skilled workforce, as the manufacturing sector in Qatar places great importance on innovation. It is also expected to adopt the latest technological advancements and improve workers' skills to maintain sustainable growth in the field.

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) has introduced various initiatives to encourage investment in manufacturing, offering businesses and SMEs various facilities to make the process hassle-free. **To Page 3**





## Qatar Charity lays foundation stone for educational complex in Sri Lanka

**Q**atar Charity, in collaboration with the Sheikh Eid Bin Mohammad Al Thani Charitable Foundation, has laid the foundation stone for Sheikh Eid Bin Mohammad Al Thani Educational Complex in Trincomalee, Sri Lanka.

The project is fully funded by Sheikh Eid Bin Mohammad Al Thani Endowment.

The ceremony was attended by prominent local figures, officials from the Ministry of Education, and representatives from Qatar Charity's Sri Lanka office.

The new complex, to be built within Fathima Balika Maha Vidyalaya in Trincomalee, will span approximately 1,560sq m and is valued at QR2.4mn. It will feature four main buildings housing 12 classrooms, a large hall, a library, a science laboratory, administrative and staff rooms, as well as a service building, a water well, and essential facilities – creating a safe, inspiring, and well-equipped educational space

**The complex will feature four main buildings housing 12 classrooms, a large hall, a library, a science laboratory, administrative and staff rooms, as well as a service building, a water well, and essential facilities – creating a safe, inspiring, and well-equipped educational space**

essential facilities – creating a safe, inspiring, and well-equipped educational space.

Zeenah al-Munawara Mohamed Naleem, zonal director of education – Kinniya Zone, expressed his heartfelt gratitude to the family of Sheikh Eid Bin Mohammad Al Thani and Qatar Charity and emphasised that the new facilities would significantly improve the quality of education and ease the difficulties currently faced by the school.

Abdul Fareed Lareef, principal of Fathima Balika Maha Vidyalaya,

echoed the sentiments, stating that the project marks "the beginning of a new chapter for education and students at this school". Mahmoud Abu Khalifa, director of Qatar Charity's Sri Lanka office, emphasised that this landmark project is part of a broader educational strategy that includes building schools, science labs, and providing learning materials, alongside interventions in health, food security, housing, water, and economic empowerment – all aligned with national sustainable development plans.

## CMU-Q in pact with ME Council to expand research co-operation

**C**arnegie Mellon University in Qatar (CMU-Q) and the Middle East Council on Global Affairs (ME Council) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to establish a comprehensive framework for co-operation in research, education, and professional development across the region.

The agreement was signed by CMU-Q's Dean Michael Trick and Dr Khalid al-Jaber, executive director of the ME Council, alongside representatives from both institutions.

The collaboration underscores the shared commitment of both organisations to advance knowledge exchange, support strategic research, and build capacity to address key regional policy challenges.

The partnership will leverage CMU-Q's world-class expertise in artificial intelligence (AI), Business Administration, Computer Science, and Information Systems, as well as resources from Carnegie Mellon's campuses and research institutes in the US.

Dean Trick emphasised the

significance of the partnership: "Our collaboration creates meaningful opportunities for our students and researchers to engage with critical policy questions facing the region. By combining our academic strengths with the Council's deep understanding of regional dynamics, we can contribute to evidence-based analysis and solutions that support the development of Qatar and the entire Middle East region."

Dr Khalid al-Jaber stressed that this partnership marks an important step towards strengthening a research and educational environment capable of addressing the rapidly evolving challenges facing the region.

He added that collaborating with Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar, with its global expertise and academic excellence, opens new horizons for advancing knowledge and developing innovative, research-driven solutions. He expressed his confidence that this collaboration will help build the capacities of future generations and empower

them to drive positive change in Qatar and the wider Middle East. Under the agreement, CMU-Q will provide education and training programmes to the ME Council on Global Affairs, while both organisations will exchange expertise among their academic and research teams.

They will also jointly organise conferences, seminars, and workshops to promote knowledge sharing and professional development.

The ME Council on Global Affairs will offer internship and employment opportunities for CMU-Q students who will also be encouraged to participate in voluntary activities supporting the Council's community service initiatives in Qatar.

This partnership reflects CMU-Q's ongoing effort to create meaningful learning experiences for students and support research that contributes to the community. Through this collaboration, both institutions aim to encourage thoughtful exchange and a deeper understanding of the region. (QNA)

**(QNA)**



Labseer, from January 11 to February 10, with significant participation from the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) countries.

Dr Bofareih emphasised that the club places special importance on Qatari camel owners, supporting them and recognising their vital role in preserving the authentic camel heritage and strengthening national identity through their active participation in the various rounds and competitions organ-

## QNB brings its Visa credit cardholders closer to FIFA World Cup 2026

**Q**NB Group has launched an exclusive campaign for its Visa credit cardholders, offering them the chance to win hospitality packages to the FIFA World Cup 2026, courtesy of Visa.

Running until March 31, 2026, the campaign rewards customers who spend a minimum cumulative amount of QR10,000 using their QNB Visa credit cards during the promotional period. For every additional QR1,000 spent beyond the initial qualifying amount, cardholders will earn one additional entry into the draw.

The winners will embark on an unforgettable FIFA World Cup 2026 journey for two, featuring business-class flights, a four-star accommodation, and Category 1 match tickets. The hospitality packages grant access to the tournament's most anticipated matches – the



opening match, round of 16, quarter-final, semi-final and the final.

As the only bank in Qatar offering opening and final match packages, QNB is proud to deliver a once-in-a-lifetime experience exclusively for its Visa credit cardholders. The official draw will take place on April 6, 2026.

Through the campaign, QNB

aims to bring customers closer to the excitement of the FIFA World Cup by combining everyday spending with access to world-class experiences. In partnership with Visa, the initiative underscores QNB's commitment to delivering innovative rewards and exceptional service while leveraging Visa's global acceptance and trusted security.

## Qatar to host GCC meeting on documents and studies today

**Q**atar will host the 38th meeting of the General Secretariat for Centers of Documents and Studies of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) countries today.

The meeting will discuss the development of documentary work and the integration of efforts aimed at preserving the historical and cultural identity of the Arab Gulf states.

High-level delegations from various GCC countries will take part in the meeting as follows: Qatar (host country) will be represented by the National Archives of Qatar and the Documentation and Research Department at the Amiri Diwan; Saudi Arabia will be represented by the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives (Darah) and the National Center for Archives and Records.



The United Arab Emirates will be represented by Dr Sultan Al Qasimi Centre, the Sharjah Archives, National Library and Archives, and Hamdan Bin Mohammad Heritage Center and Bahrain will be represented by the National Archives and the Historical Documents Centre.

The Sultanate of Oman will be represented by the National Records and Archives Authority and Kuwait will be represented by the Gulf and Arabian Penin-

sula Studies Center at Kuwait University, Al Diwan Al Amiri Historical Documents, Museums And Libraries Center, and Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait.

The Qatari delegation to the meeting will be headed by Secretary-General of the National Archives of Qatar Dr Ahmed Abdulla al-Buainain.

The meeting's programme includes an accompanying exhibition in which GCC delegations will participate through dedicated pavilions showcasing their key publications, initiatives, and experiences in the fields of documentation, digitisation, and document preservation.

The exhibition will highlight achievements, contribute to the exchange of expertise, and strengthen joint documentary work. (QNA)

## Municipality ministry's undersecretary meets Ethiopian minister for livestock and fisheries

**H**E the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Municipality, Ali bin Mohammed al-Ali, met with the visiting State Minister for the Livestock and Fisheries Resources Development Sector at the Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture, Dr Fikru Regassa. Discussions during the meeting focused on ways to reinforce bilateral co-operation in areas of shared interest, in addition to advancing avenues of co-operation in the field of livestock and fisheries development sector. (QNA)



## Qatar Camel Festival 'Jazilat Al-Atta' reflects commitment to preserve heritage

**P**resident of the Qatar Camel Mzayen Club Dr Mabkhout Bofareih has affirmed that the Qatar Camel Festival "Jazilat Al-Atta" has become a distinctive feature on the heritage festival calendar and a leading platform reflecting Qatar's commitment to preserving authentic camel heritage.

He added that the festival organises competitions based on fair principles and standards, with broad participation from camel owners both within and outside Qatar.

During a press conference yesterday, Dr Bofareih stated that the fifth edition of the Qatar Camel Festival "Jazilat Al-Atta" is not merely about competitions and prizes, but rather a message of preserving heritage, strengthening identity, supporting camel owners, and solidifying Qatar's position as a leading destination for organising camel festivals, according to the highest standards.

He commended the significant role of Qatari camel owners in preserving authentic camel heritage and strengthening national identity through their active participation in the festival's competitions. He also welcomed all participants from the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) countries.

The president of the Qatar Camel Mzayen Club stated that the club has allocated valuable prizes for the winners of the fifth edition of the Qatar Camel Festival 2026, which will feature 119 rounds across three categories: Maghatir (with its three varieties: Sha'al – yellow, Shaqah – red, and Wadah) (37 rounds), Asayel (44 rounds), and Majahim (38 rounds). These categories encompass various age groups, from young camels (Mafarid) through three-year-olds (Haqayiq, Laqaya, Jatha'a, Thanaya, Daq, and Jal).

The fifth edition of the Qatar Camel Festival will take place over 31 days at the Mzayen area in

isied by the club annually. Regarding the anticipated large Gulf participation in the festival, the club president welcomed all participants from the GCC countries.

Labseer, from January 11 to February 10, with significant participation from the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) countries.

Dr Bofareih emphasised that the club places special importance on Qatari camel owners, supporting them and recognising their vital role in preserving the authentic camel heritage and strengthening national identity through their active participation in the various rounds and competitions organ-

ers in the races for spears, rifles, and swords, and a car will be given to the winner of the dagger races and the Challenge Cup races for various categories (young camels, yearlings, two-year-olds, and older camels).

Concerning the prizes allocated for the various rounds throughout the festival, he explained that the prizes include 56 cars and 387 sashes, which will be awarded during the competitions.

A total of 1,090 winners will be selected, with prizes awarded to the top 10 finishers in all rounds except for the dagger, spear, rifle, and sword rounds in the various categories, where prizes are awarded only to the top five finishers.

He added that the prize money has been increased to unprecedented levels in the fifth edition of the grand annual festival, following an increase in the number of races compared to the previous year. He noted that cars will be awarded to the top three finish-

ers before participating in individual or group competitions, after paying a pre-testing fee of QR3,000 per camel.

The club president emphasised that this year's edition includes several new prestigious awards, most notably the "Ra'i Al Nazar" accolade, which aims to discover promising local talents, develop the judging skills and abilities of those involved in camel beauty contests, and underscored the festival's commitment to developing young national talent.

He added that the festival will also include an award for the best poem, titled "Poet of Jazilat Al-Atta", worth QR30,000, in recognition of literary creativity and to encourage the preservation of popular and literary heritage related to camels and Qatari traditions. He noted that the terms and conditions for participation in both competitions will be announced soon through the club's social media platforms. (QNA)

## QIIB signs sponsorship deal with Al Gharafa SC for two football seasons

QIIB has signed a sponsorship agreement with Al Gharafa SC as part of its ongoing strategy to support Qatari sports and to build strong, long-term partnerships. Under the agreement, QIIB will be the club's official sponsor for the 2025-2026 and 2026-2027 football seasons. The partnership reflects the close and successful relationship between the two sides and highlights QIIB's active role in supporting clubs, national teams, and major sporting events in Qatar.

The agreement was signed by QIIB chairman Sheikh Dr Khaled bin Thani bin Abdulla al-Thani and Al Gharafa SC president Sheikh Jassim bin Thamer al-Thani during a ceremony attended by senior representatives from both sides. The event was also attended by QIIB CEO Dr Abdulbasit Ahmed al-Shaibei; Sheikh Mohammed bin Jassim al-Thani, head of Football at Al Gharafa; and Rashid Issa al-Dossary, general manager of the club; along with several senior officials from both parties. The agreement reflects QIIB's continued commitment to supporting Qatari sports and building strong national partnerships with leading clubs, including Al Gharafa SC. With a proud history, strong presence in local and regional competitions, and a wide, loyal fan base, Al Gharafa SC remains a key name in Qatar's sporting landscape.

The sponsorship will include

the bank's presence across the club's various platforms, support for its sports and media programmes, and contributions to strengthening the club's professional environment, all aimed at enhancing team performance and helping the club achieve its competitive and fan-driven ambitions, in line with its future vision and goals. Sheikh Dr Khaled said: "This sponsorship reflects QIIB's continued commitment to supporting national sports clubs and our firm belief in the vital role of sports in personal development, fostering national pride, and keeping pace with the comprehensive progress taking place in Qatar under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani. "The bank has supported the club across several football seasons in the past, a successful and valued partnership that we take great pride in. It laid the foundation for a relationship built on trust, mutual respect, and true collaboration." He added: "At the heart of this strategy is our sponsorship of Qatar's national football teams and our three-year sponsorship of the prestigious Amir Cup, in addition to our support for several national and international sporting events. This reflects our commitment to contributing to the remarkable progress of Qatari sports across all fields and



The agreement was signed by QIIB chairman Sheikh Dr Khaled bin Thani bin Abdulla al-Thani and Al Gharafa SC president Sheikh Jassim bin Thamer al-Thani. The event was also attended by QIIB CEO Dr Abdulbasit Ahmed al-Shaibei; Sheikh Mohammed bin Jassim al-Thani, head of Football at Al Gharafa; and Rashid Issa al-Dossary, general manager of the club; along with several senior officials from both parties.

keeping pace with Qatar's rise as a leading global sports hub." Sheikh Jassim confirmed that Qatar's remarkable sporting progress and its global recognition are the result of the country's outstanding success in hosting major international events. He said: "Thanks to the generous patronage of His Highness the Amir and his unwavering commitment to advancing Qatari sports, our country has rightfully earned its place as the sporting capital of the Middle East. "From our perspective, QIIB's sponsorship is more than just support; it reflects a shared

vision and deep alignment with the national direction set by His Highness the Amir. This is exactly what we've come to expect from QIIB, a leading Qatari institution with a strong and proven commitment to sports. The bank's ongoing partnerships with clubs and federations across the country stand as a model for meaningful, long-term collaboration in the sporting sector." Sheikh Jassim also said: "I'm confident that this sponsorship will deliver meaningful results for both sides, especially given Al Gharafa's strong standing in Qatari and Asian football, its

proud history of achievements, and its large and loyal fan base. In recent years, the club has remained a serious contender for domestic titles, earned back-to-back appearances in Asia's elite competitions, and, most recently, won the prestigious Amir Cup. "Our current position at the top of the league table is further proof of our momentum, and we hope that this progress will inspire more Qatari institutions and sponsors to follow QIIB's example in supporting national sports." Dr al-Shaibei said: "QIIB's sponsorship reflects the bank's ongoing commitment to supporting national sports. We

see sports as a key driver of community development and a powerful platform for promoting positive values such as teamwork, discipline, and ambition."

He added: "At QIIB, we are committed to forming partnerships that deliver real, lasting impact, both in sports and within the broader community. We believe that supporting established national clubs like Al Gharafa SC contributes to building a strong, achievement-driven sports ecosystem."

"This sponsorship also aligns with our institutional direction and the Third Financial Sector Strategy launched by Qatar Central Bank, which emphasises governance, sustainability, and social responsibility, all key pillars of Qatar National Vision 2030."

Sheikh Mohammed said: "We are very pleased with this partnership, which brings together two respected names with strong standing in Qatari society. QIIB, in particular, holds significant economic weight as a leading institution with a well-established role in the national banking sector." He added: "This sponsorship is a natural extension of QIIB's commitment to national engagement. We believe it also strengthens the social role of both parties, as we remain united by a shared goal: to contribute, each in our own way, to the continued progress and prosperity of the people of Qatar."

# Arab Centre announces results of AOI regional survey conducted in '25

By Tawfik Lamari  
Staff Reporter

A region-wide survey of over 40,000 people across 15 Arab countries found broad optimism about political direction and overwhelming support for democracy, even as economic hardship remains widespread, according to the Arab Opinion Index (AOI) 2025 results announced yesterday in Doha by the Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies.

The AOI 2025 results was announced by Arab Centre executive director Dr Mohammad al-Masri, researcher Dr Laila Omar, data analyst and field work team head Abdulhafidh Hassine at a press conference. The survey was conducted in Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Sudan, Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Qatar, in addition to Syria, where the Arab Centre carried out its first survey of this kind since the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime. The AOI aims to identify trends in Arab public opinion on a range of political, economic, and social issues, and has been conducted regularly by the Arab Centre since 2011.

The survey consisted of face-to-face interviews with sample of 40,130 respondents representative of their respective countries, with a margin of error of ±1.2-3% across all countries. It was conducted between October 2024 and August 2025.

This ninth edition of the AOI constitutes the largest public opinion survey ever undertaken in the Arab region, in terms of sample size, scope of topics, and number of countries covered. A total of 1,000 researchers participated in its implementation, which required more than 413,000 hours of work and more than 1,000,000km travelled by field researchers. The continuity of this large-scale survey, together with its diverse themes,



(From left) Dr Laila Omar, Dr Mohammad al-Masri and Abdulhafidh Hassine.

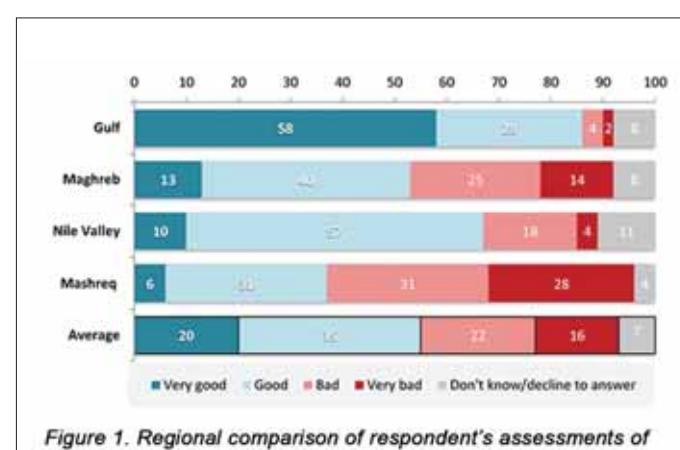


Figure 1. Regional comparison of respondent's assessments of political situation in their countries

has made the AOI a critical data source for Arab and international research institutions, scholars, and experts.

The results are presented both by individual country and as an overall regional average for the Arab world. The findings are presented both at the national level and as an overall regional average for the Arab world. For comparative analysis, the surveyed countries are grouped by geographic subregions: the Maghreb (Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya), the Nile Valley (Egypt and Sudan), the Mashreq (Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Syria), and the Gulf (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Qatar).

The results of the survey concerning living conditions reveal a

general sense of optimism among Arab citizens about the direction their countries are heading; overall, 57% of respondents said things in their countries are headed in the right direction, while 37% felt they are headed in the wrong direction. Those who said things are going in the wrong direction cited several reasons: 40% attributed it to economic factors, 14% cited poor and unstable political conditions, such as political turmoil and the failure of the political system, 9% cited poor state management and policy, and 7% pointed to a general lack of stability.

Meanwhile, of the respondents who answered that their countries are headed in the right direction, 83% provided reasons:

19% stated that the conditions in the country had improved, 15% noted the security and safety in their countries, 13% attributed their answer to good governance, 7% to an improvement in the economic situation, 5% to political stability, and another 5% to a sense of optimism about the future.

Some 55% of respondents reported that the political situation in their countries was generally good (very good/good), compared to 38% who reported it was bad (bad/very bad). Eighty-six percent of respondents in the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) countries rated the political situation as good, compared to a lower rating in other parts of the region, particularly in the Mashreq, where the figure was 37%.

The AOI results reveal far from satisfactory economic conditions for Arab citizens; 41% reported that their family income covers only their basic needs, leaving no room for savings, while 28% stated that their families live in poverty, as their income does not cover their basic needs. Most of these families in need rely on aid and loans to meet their needs. Apart from respondents from the Gulf countries, the majority of citizens in Arab countries live hand to mouth or unable to meet basic needs.

On Arab Public Opinion and Democracy, the index results showed that 83% of citizens in the Arab region could provide a definition of democracy that emphasised guaranteeing political and civil liberties, the peaceful transfer of power, the separation of powers, and ensuring justice and equality. Public opinion is almost unanimous in support of democracy; 68% of respondents support the democratic system, compared to 20% who oppose it. Sixty-seven percent of respondents indicated that a pluralistic democratic system is the most suitable political system for their country.

## MoCI announces recall of RAM, Lincoln, Jeep, Durango models

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI), in co-operation with United Cars Almana, Qatar's RAM dealership, announced the recall of RAM 1500 and RAM 2500-2025 models. The recall is due to the Instrument Panel Cluster (IPC) containing software that causes the cluster to go blank at start up or while driving.

The ministry also announced the recall of Jeep Grand Cherokee and Dodge Durango 2019 models. The recall is due to the possibility that the hydraulic control unit (HU)/anti-lock braking system (ABS) unit may give an incorrect pressure reading in the main hydraulic circuit. This pressure reading error may cause the brake lights to illu-

minate (up to 4.5mph), disable the anti-lock braking system and the electronic stability control (ESC) system, and allow the vehicle to move from a standstill without the brake pedal being pressed.

MoCI, in co-operation with Almana Motors Company, Qatar's Lincoln dealership, also announced the recall of Lincoln Aviator 2020-2025 models. The recall is due to the possibility of wind and clicking noises occurring while driving, resulting from separation of the rear pillar cover from the rear doors.

The ministry said the recall campaign comes within the framework of its ongoing efforts to protect consumers and ensure that car dealers follow up on vehicle defects and

repairs. MoCI said that it will coordinate with the dealer to follow up on the maintenance and repair works and will communicate with customers to ensure that the necessary repairs are carried out.

The ministry urged all consumers to report any violations or breaches by contacting the Consumer Protection and Combating Commercial Fraud Department, which receives complaints, suggestions, and inquiries through the following communication channels: Call Centre: 16001, e-mail: info@moci.gov.qa, ministry's accounts on social media: @mociqatar, ministry's Mobile App: MOCIQATAR (available on iOS and Android devices).

studio involving GU-Q, CMU-Q, HBKU, and VCUarts Qatar, in partnership with Qatar Museums, Earthna Centre for a Sustainable Future, and the architectural firm OMA, exploring how Qatar's desert and rural landscapes can become sustainable, liveable, and culturally vital spaces.

"OneEC: Connecting Campuses, Simplifying Cross-Registration" is a planning platform developed by NU-Q and GU-Q to enhance access to academic information, advising, and support services for students considering cross-registration opportunities.

Finally, "Launching a First-Year Showcase Collection: Recognising Student Work Across Education City" is a collaborative initiative led by CMU-Q, GU-Q, NU-Q, and HBKU that highlights exemplary academic writing by first-year students and reflects the diversity of student voices across Education City. (QNA)

## Manufacturing sector shows record results in 2025

From Page 1

The Ministry has introduced digital platforms to streamline necessary procedures, with multiple e-services that have significantly reduced the time required to issue an industrial licence and establish new projects.

One of the key initiatives is the "1,000 Opportunities" programme, an ongoing collaboration between MoCI and the Qatar Development Bank (QDB) that provides local investors with investment opportunities from major companies in Qatar. The programme received over 1,300 applications by the end of 2024 and is integrated into the MoCI's Single Window digital platform. The main target of this programme

is to support local SMEs by helping them develop their products and services, making them more competitive in the local market, which, in turn, would reduce dependence on imported products, enhancing self-sufficiency. Qatar achieved 5th place globally on the business efficiency axis of the 2025 IMD World Competitiveness Report, a significant jump from 11th place in 2024. This clearly reflected the various effective labour reforms adopted by the country, making the local labour market more flexible and attractive for the workforce, and the government's serious efforts to stimulate and engage the private sector in productive projects.

## VoPay to set up global headquarters in Qatar

From Page 1

Through strategic dialogue and ongoing collaboration, Invest Qatar supported VoPay's market entry and long-term growth strategy in alignment with Qatar's national economic priorities.

In this context, Sheikh Ali bin al-Waleed al-Thani, CEO of Invest Qatar, said: "We are pleased to welcome VoPay to Qatar as it establishes its global headquarters and expands its international footprint. This investment reinforces our commitment to building a diversified, knowledge-based economy and positioning Qatar as a leading hub for advanced financial technologies. Through strategic partnerships and a supportive

regulatory environment, Qatar continues to attract companies that are shaping the future of financial technology."

From its global headquarters in Doha, VoPay is scaling an established financial infrastructure platform that brings together mature technology, applied artificial intelligence, and global financial connectivity.

Through partnerships across the global financial ecosystem, VoPay enables institutions operating from the region to integrate with international markets and financial infrastructure, supporting the flow of capital, data, and financial activity across geographies while maintaining strong regional alignment. (QNA)

**Homes destroyed, lives lost as Israeli strikes hit Gaza**

Palestinians walk past the rubble of residential buildings destroyed during the war, in Jabalia, northern Gaza Strip, yesterday.



Mourners react as they attend the funeral of Palestinians who, according to medics, were killed in an Israeli strike on Monday, at Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip, yesterday.

# Red Crescent says Israeli army gunfire wounds five in West Bank

AFP  
Birzeit

The Palestinian Red Crescent said Israeli troops shot and wounded five people yesterday at a university in the occupied West Bank, while the military said its forces fired to break up a violent confrontation.

Military vehicles entered the campus of Birzeit University late in the morning, according to several witnesses who spoke to AFP and whose accounts were confirmed by the institution's president Talal Shahwan.

Videos posted to social media showed the intervention, while AFP journalists saw several military vehicles leave the campus, escorted by Israeli soldiers on foot.

The Israeli military said it intervened to disperse an "anticipated gathering in support of fighters" that was about to take place at the university, according to "intelligence indications" it received.

The military said that a "violent con-

frontation broke out... during which rocks were hurled from rooftops in the area toward the forces."

"The forces responded with riot dispersal means and precise fire towards the main violent individuals," the military added.

The Red Crescent said 11 people were wounded in total, including five from live ammunition, four through gas inhalation and two as a result of falls.

The university's communications department said that students had thrown stones at the troops, adding that all of the wounded were students.

An AFP journalist saw ambulances take away several people.

"Unfortunately, the university has been a recurring target, but this time the brutality crossed all limits," Shahwan told a news conference.

Israeli forces had previously entered the campus several times.

In September 2024, the army confiscated property belonging to the student council, according to the university.

## Drone attack kills 10 in Sudan's El-Obeid

A drone strike on the Sudanese city of El-Obeid killed 10 people including seven children on Monday, a medical source said, AFP reported from Port Sudan.

An eyewitness said the strike hit a house in the centre of the army-controlled capital of North Kordofan, which the rival paramilitary Rapid Support Forces have sought to encircle for months. Since April 2023, Sudan has been gripped by a war between the army and the RSF, with some of the worst violence currently unfolding in Sudan's strategic southern Kordofan region. El-Obeid, the region's main city, lies on a key crossroads connecting the capital Khartoum with the vast western Darfur region – where the army lost its last major position in October. Following its victory in Darfur, the RSF has pushed through Kordofan, seeking to recapture Sudan's central corridor and tightening its siege with its local allies around several army-held cities.

## Foreign media group slams Israel govt for refusing to lift Gaza press ban

AFP  
Jerusalem

An international media association yesterday criticised the Israeli government for maintaining its ban on unrestricted media access to Gaza, calling the move disappointing.

The government had told the Supreme Court in a submission late Sunday that the ban should remain in place, citing security risks in the Gaza Strip.

The submission was in response to a petition filed by the Foreign Press Association (FPA) – which represents hundreds of journalists in Israel and Palestinian territories – seeking immediate and unrestricted access for foreign journalists to the Gaza Strip.

"The Foreign Press Association expresses its profound disappointment with the Israeli government's latest re-

sponse to our appeal for full and free access to the Gaza Strip," the association said yesterday. "Instead of presenting a plan for allowing journalists into Gaza independently and letting us work alongside our brave Palestinian colleagues, the government has decided once again to lock us out" despite the ceasefire in the territory, it added.

"This is for security reasons, based on the position of the defence establishment, which maintains that a security risk associated with such entry still exists," the government submission said. The FPA said it planned to submit a "robust response" to the court, and expressed hope the "judges will put an end to this charade."

"The FPA is confident that the court will provide justice in light of the continuous infringement of the fundamental principles of freedom of speech, the public's right to know and free press," the association added.

## Israeli strikes on Lebanon kill two ahead of ceasefire monitors meeting

AFP  
Beirut

Israeli strikes on south Lebanon killed two people yesterday, the health ministry said, a day before the next meeting of the committee monitoring the year-long ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah.

Israel has intensified its strikes on southern and eastern Lebanon in recent days, saying it is targeting Hezbollah and Hamas targets.

The strike on Kfar Dunin, south Lebanon, killed two people, according

to the health ministry. In a statement, Lebanese President Joseph Aoun said that "Israel's continued attacks aim to thwart all efforts made locally, regionally and internationally to stop the ongoing Israeli escalation, despite the response shown by Lebanon to these efforts at various levels".

In spite of the ceasefire, Israel has carried out frequent strikes on Lebanon, usually saying it is bombing Hezbollah sites and operatives, and occasionally Hamas targets.

Yesterday, the Israeli military said its operations the day before had struck infrastructure "belonging to the Hezbollah

and Hamas organisations in several areas in Lebanon". According to the military, the targets included "several weapon storage facilities and military structures, both above and below ground".

A strike early yesterday targeted Ghazieh, near the southern coastal city of Sidon, destroying a building and damaging its surroundings, causing a fire on site which firefighters deployed to combat, according to an AFP photographer.

The attacks came as the committee monitoring a year-long ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah – which includes the US, France, Lebanon, Israel and the UN – prepared to meet today.

## Arab League condemns Israeli minister's visit to Hargeisa

The Arab League strongly condemned the visit made yesterday morning by the Israeli Foreign Minister to the Somali city of Hargeisa, considering it a failed attempt to push through Israeli recognition of the secession of the northwestern region from the Somali state, QNA reported from Cairo.

In a statement yesterday, Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit reiterated the League's total rejection of any official or semi-official dealings with the authorities of the secessionist region outside the framework of the national sovereignty of the Federal Government. He stated that such dealings constitute a blatant violation of Somalia's unity and sovereignty, which would undermine regional peace and security and exacerbate political tensions in Somalia, the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the Horn of Africa. Aboul Gheit noted that this move, which has been rejected and condemned internationally and by Arab states, was deemed null and void by the Council of the Arab League at its meeting on December 28. He said that it seeks to facilitate plans for the forced displacement of the Palestinian people and to seize Somali ports to establish military bases there. He added that the Arab League will continue to provide political and technical support to Somali state institutions.

شبكة الجزيرة الإعلامية  
ALJAZEERA MÉDIA NETWORK

### Al Jazeera Media Network announces the following tender:

Sr. No	Tender Ref. No.	Description	Tender Bond (QAR)	Tender Fee Non-Refundable (QAR)	Bid Closing Date and Time
1	LTC095-25	Call off Agreement for Pest Control Services	12,500	500	08-Feb-2026 (13:00 Hrs.)

- Tenderer qualification requirement:** The Service Provider must be minimum Grade II certified by the Ministry of Finance for pest control, have at least seven (7) years of pest control service experience in the State of Qatar, and hold valid ISO 9001, ISO 14001, and ISO 45001 certifications applicable to pest control management systems.
- Tender documents:** Tender documents can be collected from Al Jazeera Media Network, Procurement & Contracts Directorate Building 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, behind Al Jazeera Media Institute Building, TV Intersection Area, Doha by submitting an authorization letter showing the tender number and ID number of collecting person under the company letterhead, after paying the tender fee (as applicable) at QIB Branch inside Al Jazeera's Support Services building.
- Tender documents collection:** Tender documents are to be collected from 07-Jan-2026 to 15-Jan-2026, between 8:00 AM to 1:00 PM (excluding Friday & Saturday).
- Offer validity:** The offer must be valid for a period of 180 days from the bid closing date.
- Submission instructions:** The Technical and Commercial offers shall be submitted as per the instructions in the tender documents which shall bear the tender number and bid closing date.
- Last acceptance date:** The last date for accepting the Tender offers shall be 01:00 PM of the bid closing date.
- Information source:** For more information, please call 44897131.



### Dolphin Energy Limited

#### Invitation to Tender

Tender Number	Description	Tender Bond	Deadline for Tender Submission, 12 Noon (Qatar Time) on
ITT-QC-OPU-1901	Call-Off Contract for Cable Fault Identification and Rectification	QAR 10,000	31 <sup>st</sup> January 2026
ITT-QC-PCU-1903	Call-Off Contract for Freight Forwarding Services	USD 30,000	26 <sup>th</sup> January 2026
ITT-QC-PCU-1904	Call-Off Agreement for Courier Services	QAR 40,000	26 <sup>th</sup> January 2026
ITT-QC-OPU-1892	Call-Off Agreement for the Offshore and Onshore Crane Maintenance	QAR 18,000	27 <sup>th</sup> January 2026

Dolphin Energy Limited (Qatar) is inviting companies to participate in the above Tenders.

Only companies registered in the State of Qatar with proven experience, technical knowledge, as well as a demonstrated track record in the supply of the services required should apply.

**How to Tender**  
Expression of Interest (EOI) Form and Scope of Services/Works can be downloaded from the company's website:  
<https://www.dolphinenergy.com/en-US/Supplier/>  
Interested companies must complete the EOI Form and submit to company's email address within two (2) working days from the publication date of this advertisement.  
Following receipt of completed EOI Form, interested companies will receive a Request for Proposal (RFP) through Dolphin Energy's SAP Ariba to tender.

# Touadera re-elected as Central African Republic president

AFP  
Bangui

The Central African Republic has re-elected President Faustin-Archange Touadera, according to provisional results released by the electoral authority yesterday.

Touadera, 68, had been widely expected to win a third term and had touted his efforts to steady a nation long plagued by conflict.

Part of the opposition had called for a boycott, condemning the election as a sham and lacking political dialogue.

Touadera won more than 76% of the vote, the National Authority of Elections said.

His main opponent, Anicet-Georges Dologuele, came second with 15%. Henri-Marie Dondra was third with 3%.

Turnout was around 52% for the December 28 polls in which voters also cast ballots for national, municipal and local lawmakers. The final results will be announced in mid-January after the review of any appeals.

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.

Dologuele had claimed victory on Friday, alleging polls had been marred by major irregularities.

A spokesperson for Touadera said the claims were "false" and warned of the risk of "unrest".

Dondra had also called for the annulment of the polls.

African Union observers said last week that the elections had gone ahead peacefully. Touadera had presented himself as the stability candidate in an impoverished country that has endured a succession of



File photo shows Central African Republic's President Faustin Archange Touadera (centre) on stage.

civil wars, coups and authoritarian governments since gaining independence from France in 1960.

Since his first election in 2016, unrest has eased though feuds persist between armed groups and the government in some regions.

Touadera touted improvements in security, paved roads, public lighting on major avenues and renovated rainwater drainage canals in the capital.

Critics have branded him "President Wagner" for his perceived dependence on Moscow and the Russian paramilitaries that prop up the nation's security.

He struck a controversial 2019 peace accord with 14 armed groups involved in the civil war, essentially bringing warlords into the government in return for the disarming of their militias.

Touadera claims achievements – largely

funded by the international community – from the rebuilding of the army, to free health care for women and young children, as well as higher education spending.

But he did not fulfil a promise to hold political dialogue before the elections, and campaigning was marred by other controversies.

Dologuele and Dondra were prevented from flying to the provinces to hold rallies and had to do neighbourhood walkabouts and events in schools or party offices.

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

Around 71% of Central Africans live below the poverty line, suffering a lack of basic services, a lack of passable roads, widespread unemployment, low rates of education and training and a steadily rising cost of living.

# Nigeria 'to use intelligence from US recon flights to aid strikes'

AFP  
Abuja

Nigeria's air force will take the lead from the US after Washington's Christmas Day strikes on militants, making use of US reconnaissance flights to aid its own strikes, a Nigerian official said yesterday.

On the evening of Christmas Day, the US struck sites in northwest Nigeria's Sokoto state against what it said were targets linked to the Islamic State group.

Though Nigeria remains open to further American strikes, the Americans' primary role will now be providing intel, the source familiar with the new security arrangement with Washington said, asking for anonymity because of its sensitivity.

Africa's most populous country has been battling a militant insurgency since 2009, mostly concentrated in its northeast, while armed "bandit" gangs have taken hold across swathes of the country's rural northwest and north-central regions.

The strikes came after a diplomatic offensive starting in October in which President Donald Trump alleged that violence from armed groups in Nigeria amounted to "persecution" and "genocide" of Christians – accusations denied by Abuja and independent analysts. Days before the strikes, Nigeria's information minister said the "spat" had been resolved, "culminating in a strengthened partnership between America and Nigeria".

# Divisions in SA unity govt over Maduro toppling

AFP  
Johannesburg

President Cyril Ramaphosa yesterday voiced South Africa's opposition to the US military operation against deposed Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro as divisions emerged within his national unity government over the country's reaction.

The United States' strike on Caracas and capture of Maduro Saturday stunned the world, drawing praise and condemnation from Washington allies and foes alike.

Parties within South Africa's unity government reacted differently, with some accusing Ramaphosa's ANC of presenting its strong condemnation as the national response.

South Africa is itself under pressure from the Trump administration over a range of policy differences, with relations plummeting last year and Pretoria seeking to avoid US trade tariffs of 30%.

Washington boycotted the G20 summit in South Africa in November and has barred Pretoria's participation under its own presidency of the group of leading economies.

Speaking in front of a Venezuelan flag at a commemoration for a late anti-apartheid activist, Ramaphosa said South Africa was concerned by the US aggression and demanded the release of the deposed leader and his wife.



South Africa President Cyril Ramaphosa.

"We reject utterly the actions that the United States has embarked upon and stand with the people of Venezuela," Ramaphosa said, urging "decisive action" from the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

Earlier in the day, his ANC party called on "progressive forces" to "mobilise against the American imperialist aggression".

The second-largest party in the unity government, the Democratic Alliance (DA), accused the ANC of inconsistency and hypocrisy for failing to take a similar stance on Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

It said a foreign ministry statement critical of the US action showed the department had been "politicised to pursue party political interests instead of pursuing foreign policy in the national interest".

The right-wing Afrikaner Freedom Front Plus also criticised the foreign ministry's statement as "unilateral ANC action". It welcomed the toppling of Maduro, calling it "the end of the socialist failure".

Pretoria and Washington have fallen out over issues including South Africa's case accusing Israel of genocide in Gaza at the International Court of Justice, the UN's top court.

President Donald Trump has accused South Africa of alleged discrimination – and even "genocide" – of minority white Afrikaners and invited them to move to the United States. William Gumede, professor of public management at the University of Witwatersrand, said the ANC was misreading Trump and its leaders risked sanctions from Washington. "We are now in a period of might is right. The countries most powerful, can essentially do what they want to do," he said.

"If Trump now turns against South Africa, it will crash South Africa's economy," he said, urging the country to be more strategic about its relations with Washington. For 30 years after White-minority rule was replaced by democracy, the ANC held an absolute majority and elected a president from its own ranks.

It was forced into a coalition government after losing its majority in 2024 elections amid anger over corruption and mismanagement, and against a backdrop of high crime rates, slow economic growth and a crippling energy crisis.

# Israeli FM accused of incursion over controversial visit to 'Somaliland'

AFP  
Mogadishu

The Israeli foreign minister arrived in so-called Somaliland yesterday in a high-profile visit, condemned by Somalia as an "unauthorised incursion", after Israel recognised the breakaway region in the Horn of Africa.

Israel announced last month it was officially recognising so-called Somaliland, a first for the self-proclaimed republic since it declared independence from Somalia in 1991.

"Somaliland" enjoys a strategic position on the Gulf of Aden and has its own currency, passport and army, but has struggled to win international recognition, amid fears of provoking Somalia and encouraging other separatist movements in Africa. Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar, whose delegation was welcomed at the airport by senior government officials, said recognising had been "the moral thing to do".

Somaliland President Abdirahman Abduallah Mohamed praised the decision.

Somalia reacted furiously to news of the visit, labelling it an "illegal" and "unauthorised incursion".

In a statement, Somalia's foreign ministry said it "reserves the right to take all appropriate diplomatic and legal meas-

ures... to safeguard its sovereignty, national unity, and territorial integrity".

A special meeting of the African Union Peace and Security Council yesterday condemned "in the strongest terms" the recognition by Israel and called for its "immediate revocation".

During the Israeli delegation's short stay, sources said roads were blocked, with civilian movements restricted.

Following Israel's recognition, Al Shabaab militant group which has fought the Somaliland government for around two decades – said they would fight any attempt by Israel to use so-called Somaliland as a base.

Analysts say the deal with so-called Somaliland could provide Israel with better access to the Red Sea, enabling it to hit Houthi fighters in Yemen.

Somaliland's location alongside one of the world's busiest shipping lanes has made it a key partner for foreign countries.

Israel's recognition was supported by the United States, but criticised by Egypt, Turkey, the six-nation Gulf Co-operation Council and the Saudi-based Organisation of Islamic Co-operation. The European Union insisted Somalia's sovereignty should be respected.

Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud called the Israeli decision a "threat" to stability in the already volatile Horn of Africa.

# Guinea's Doumbouya to be sworn in as president on Jan 17

AFP  
Conakry

Guinea's junta leader Mamady Doumbouya will be sworn in as president on January 17 following his electoral victory last month, the presidency announced yesterday on social media.

Doumbouya, who has not been seen publicly since voting in the election, will be inaugurated at the General Lansana Conte Stadium on the outskirts of the capital Conakry, according to the Facebook post.

Although he had initially pledged not to run for president after seizing power four years ago, Doumbouya ultimately stood for election in a race in which all main opposition leaders were barred. Guinea's Supreme Court validated Doumbouya's victory on Sunday, crediting him with 86.7% of the vote. The junta leader's public appearances have been rare in recent weeks. Since his win, he has addressed the nation via a pre-recorded video, and leading up to the vote, he made only one campaign appearance.



File photo of Guinean leader Mamadi Doumbouya.

In September 2021, Doumbouya led a coup to topple Guinea's first freely elected president, Alpha Conde. During his time as junta leader, he has cracked down on civil liberties and banned protests, while opponents have been arrested, put on trial or driven into exile.

Several political parties and media outlets were additionally suspended and demonstrations were banned in 2022.

In late September, Guineans approved a new constitution in a referendum that permitted junta members to run for office, paving the way for Doumbouya's candidacy. It also lengthened presidential terms from five to seven years, renewable once.

SAIPEM

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HORIZON GEOSCIENCES

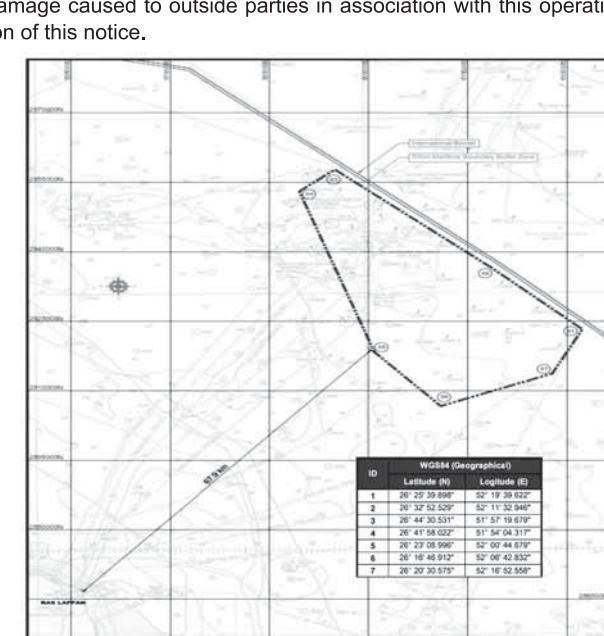
## Public Announcement

To all Ships, Fishermen and Mariners  
Marine Survey works in North Field by Vessel Quest Horizon  
Subsea Survey Works Offshore Qatar from 05-Jan-2026 to 30-Mar-2026

Pursuant to and under directives from the Registration and Seafarers Affairs Department, Ministry of Transport, State of Qatar, this announcement is to inform all Vessels, Mariners, and Fishermen that Horizon Geosciences intends to undertake Marine Survey works in North Field in the locations bound by the coordinates shown in the diagram below by Vessel Quest Horizon.

All Vessels, Mariners, and Fishermen are expected to keep clear of the survey locations during the operations.

Horizon Geosciences, QatarEnergy LNG or SAIPEM takes no responsibility for any loss or damage caused to outside parties in association with this operation, following publication of this notice.



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For Queries call +974 6688 5887



## CRISIS

**Australian premier to tour outback flood disaster zone**

Swollen rivers have cut off towns and swept away thousands of livestock in outback Australia, authorities said as Prime Minister Anthony Albanese flew into the disaster zone yesterday. Heavy downpours in recent days have flooded vast inland tracts of Queensland state, a farming region home to some of the country's largest cattle ranches. More than 16,000 livestock are missing or dead, state authorities have said, while hundreds of kilometres of fencing has been ruined. Albanese flew into the mining town of Conloury to assess the damage. Some towns, such as the small hamlet of Winton, have been entirely cut off by floodwaters. - AFP

## PEOPLE

**Taiwan launches search for fighter jet pilot**

Taiwan's Air Force yesterday said it has launched a search for a pilot believed to have ejected from a F-16 fighter jet over the sea during a routine training mission. The single-seat aircraft took off at 6.17pm local time from Hualien Air Base in eastern Taiwan, the Air Force said in a statement. "At 7.29pm, the pilot was suspected to have ejected about 10 nautical miles east of Fengbin Township in Hualien county," the statement said. Premier Cho Jung-tai has called for Taiwan's coastguard and nearby fishing vessels to assist in the search and rescue efforts. - AFP

## CRIME

**New indictments filed in Tokyo Electron trade secrets case**

Taiwanese prosecutors said they had filed additional indictments against the Taiwanese unit of Japan's Tokyo Electron and three defendants in a case over the alleged theft of trade secrets from chipmaker TSMC. The defendants include one previously indicted former TSMC employee surnamed Chen and two new suspects: another former TSMC employee also surnamed Chen and a former Tokyo Electron Taiwan employee surnamed Lu, the prosecutors said. The prosecutors are seeking prison terms of seven years for the first Chen, eight years and eight months for the other Chen, and one year for Lu, they said. - Reuters

## TRIBUTE

**N Korea's Kim inspects memorial for soldiers**

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and his daughter Ju-ae have inspected the construction of a memorial for North Korean troops who died fighting overseas, state media KCNA reported yesterday. Under a mutual defence pact with Russia, in 2024 North Korea sent some 14,000 soldiers to fight alongside Russian troops in Ukraine, where more than 6,000 of them were killed, according to South Korean, Ukrainian and Western sources. Kim described the dead soldiers as "heroes... who sacrificed themselves without hesitation", saying "no one in the world can overcome such an army that is absolutely loyal to the orders of the party". - Reuters

# Thailand claims Cambodia has violated truce with cross-border 'accident'

AFP  
Bangkok

**T**hailand yesterday accused Cambodia of violating a 10-day-old truce, saying cross-border mortar fire wounded a soldier, while Phnom Penh said a "pile of garbage" exploded, injuring two of its own troops.

Bangkok's foreign ministry said Thai forces "did not retaliate", opting instead to contact the Cambodian side to verify what happened, adding that Phnom Penh "claimed it was an accident".

The Thai ministry also urged Cambodia to "prevent such incidents from recurring" and issue an apology, according to a statement.

A decades-old border dispute between the Southeast Asian nations erupted into military clashes several times last year, with fighting in December killing dozens of people and displacing around 1mn on both sides.

The two countries agreed to a fragile truce on December 27, ending three weeks of clashes.

Cambodia "violated the ceasefire" yesterday morning, the Thai army said in a statement, accusing Cambodian forces of firing mortar rounds into Thailand's Ubon Ratchathani province.

One Thai soldier was hospitalised due to non-life-threatening shrapnel wounds to his right arm, the army said.

The Thai army said in a separate statement that the Cambodian side had contacted a Thai military unit and claimed "there was no intention to fire into Thai territory".

"The incident was caused by an

operational error by Cambodian personnel," it added.

Thailand's military also said it warned Cambodian forces that if a similar incident occurred, Thai forces may need to retaliate.

Cambodia's defence ministry spokeswoman Maly Socheata said two Cambodian soldiers were injured, one severely, yesterday morning when "an explosion occurred from a pile of garbage".

The incident happened while Cambodian forces were performing "organisation and orderliness" duties in Cambodia's Preah Vihear province, which sits opposite Thailand's Ubon Ratchathani, she said in a statement.

The two injured soldiers were hospitalised.

Maly Socheata did not mention the strike alleged by Thailand, but said both nations' border coordination teams had consulted on the incident involving the Cambodian soldiers and addressed the matter.

The explosion occurred in a frontier region known as the Emerald Triangle, where the borders of both countries and Laos meet, she said.

In May, a Cambodian soldier was killed in a firefight with Thai troops in the area, reigniting the border conflict.

Thailand's Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul said his government had lodged a protest with Phnom Penh, stating "the truce was violated".

"At the military-to-military level, we have been told the incident was an accident, but we are seeking clarification on how responsibility will be taken," Anutin told reporters in Bangkok.

He added that Thailand had the

"capability to respond" to Cambodia, which is vastly outgunned by its neighbour.

The nations' long-standing conflict stems from a dispute over the colonial-era demarcation of their 800km border, where both sides claim territory and centuries-old temple ruins.

Under the December truce, Cambodia and Thailand pledged to cease fire, freeze troop movements and cooperate on demining efforts along their border.

The US, China and Malaysia had brokered a truce to end the fighting between Cambodia and Thailand in July, but that ceasefire was short-lived.

On Saturday, one week after the December truce went into effect, Cambodia called on Thailand to pull out its forces from several border areas Phnom Penh claims as its own.

The Thai military has rejected claims it had used force to seize Cambodia territory, insisting its forces were present in areas that had always belonged to Thailand.

While the two nations agreed late last month to stop fighting, they still need to resolve the demarcation of their disputed border.

Cambodia's defence ministry said in a statement yesterday that Phnom Penh had proposed a bilateral border committee meeting with Thai counterparts to be held in Cambodia's Siem Reap province this month.

Bangkok has said previously that meetings to discuss border surveying and demarcation may need to be held by Thailand's next government, following elections scheduled for February 8.



People use a rope to cross a river in the aftermath of flash floods that destroyed adjacent villages in Ketol, Indonesia's Aceh highland province, yesterday.

# Indonesia flood kills 16, displaces hundreds

AFP  
Jakarta

**T**orrential rains battered Indonesia's Siau island, causing a flash flood that killed at least 16 people, with another three missing, authorities said yesterday.

An overflowing river flooded four towns on the small island north of Sulawesi on Monday, the national disaster mitigation agency said in a statement.

"Sixteen people have been reported dead due to the flash flood," agency spokesman Abdul Muhari said, adding that teams were searching for the three missing.

He said 22 people were injured and nearly 700 villagers displaced.

"The flash flood was triggered by heavy-intensity rain that had drenched the area since the early hours, causing the river's water flow to surge suddenly," Abdul said.

Images shared by the search and rescue agency showed big rocks and uprooted trees that were swept away.

The flood cut off access to some roads and damaged dozens of homes as well as public buildings and infrastructure, the spokesman said.

Floods are common in Indonesia during the rainy season, which typically lasts between

October and March.

Tropical storms and intense monsoon rains have pummelled parts of South and Southeast Asia late last year, triggering deadly landslides and floods from the rainforests of Indonesia's Sumatra to highland plantations in Sri Lanka.

Indonesian authorities say at least 1,178 people were killed in Sumatra, and more than 240,000 displaced.

While the annual monsoon season often brings heavy rain to Indonesia, the Sumatra deluge in November was among the worst disasters to strike the island since a magnitude-9.1 earthquake triggered a massive tsunami in 2004.

## Japan N-plant operator may have underestimated earthquake risks

AFP  
Tokyo

**A** Japanese nuclear plant operator said it may have presented data underestimating earthquake risks to regulators, as Japan moves to revive nuclear power nearly 15 years after the Fukushima disaster.

Chubu Electric Power's Hamaoka plant - located in an area of central Japan at risk of a potential "megaequake" - is undergoing regulatory safety checks, with the aim of restarting two reactors.

But the company's president said the estimated maximum seismic ground motion that the plant could experience during a quake "may have been underestimated".

"This incident could seriously affect the (safety) review process and undermine the trust of local communities and other stakeholders in our nuclear business, and potentially shake its very foundation," he told reporters during an emergency press conference.

Japan pulled the plug on nuclear power after a colossal earthquake and tsunami sent three reactors at the Fukushima atomic plant into meltdown in 2011.

However, the resource-poor nation now wants to revive atomic energy to reduce its heavy dependence on fossil fuels, achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 and meet growing energy needs from artificial intelligence.

The world's biggest nuclear plant, Kashiwazaki-Kariwa, is expected to restart operations later this month, pending final approval from the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA).



A stone wall collapsed after an earthquake hit the region in Houki, Tottori prefecture, western Japan, yesterday.

## Ex-Indonesia minister faces graft charges

Indonesian prosecutors have filed corruption charges against former education minister and the co-founder of startup Gojek, Nadiem Makarim, over alleged improper laptop procurement during the pandemic that led to \$125.64mn in state losses.

Makarim, who resigned as chief executive of ride-hailing company Gojek in 2019 to become education minister in 2024, was accused of enriching himself by around 809bn rupiah (\$48.34mn) from the procurement of Chromebook laptops and Chrome OS for schools between 2020 and 2022, prosecutors said in the first trial hearing. Makarim had created tender specifications that only fit the Chrome system to "make Google the sole controller of education ecosystem in Indonesia", prosecutors said.

The charges against Makarim carry a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison.

## ANNOUNCEMENT

I, JESHUA BERNADAS GALLAWAN

holder of

PHILIPPINES Passport No. P1319403B  
QID No. 28160814911

hereby change my name

from

JESHUA BERNADAS GALLAWAN

to

JESHUA PENASO BERNADAS

Any objection, please contact

THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE FOR  
NATIONALITY AFFAIRS

within 15 days from the publication of this notice.

# No major damage reported from strong Japan quake

AFF

Tokyo

**A** strong 6.2-magnitude earthquake shook western Japan yesterday but no tsunami warning was issued and no major damage was reported.

The tremor was recorded at 10.18am in Shimane prefecture at a shallow depth, the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA) said.

The US Geological Survey recorded a slightly lower 5.8 magnitude reading which it then lowered to 5.7.

The quake measured upper-five on Japan's Shindo scale of shakiness in the western city of Yasugi.

At that level, heavy furniture may fall and drivers can have trouble steering.

The JMA said that the same region was hit soon afterwards by smaller quakes with magnitudes of 4.5, 5.1, 3.8 and 5.4, also with no tsunami alerts.

No abnormalities were detected at the Shimane nuclear plant as of 10.45am, broadcaster NHK said, citing utility company Chugoku Electric.

Parts of the Shinkansen bullet train network were suspended due to a power blackout, operator JR West said. It was unclear which was related to the quakes.

The military said it was conducting an aerial damage assessment and had established a disaster response liaison office.

"The government is collecting in-

formation on damage... People in the regions that were hit by strong shakes please continue to be careful about more quakes of the same strength," Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi said.

Japan sits on top of four major tectonic plates along the western edge of the Pacific "Ring of Fire" and is one of the world's most seismically active countries. The archipelago, home to around 125mn people, experiences around 1,500 jolts every year.

The vast majority are mild, although the damage they cause varies according to their location and depth.

Japan is haunted by the memory of a massive 9.0-magnitude undersea quake in 2011, which triggered a tsunami that killed around 18,500 people.

# New Zealand health hackers seek cash and 'good reputation'

AFP  
Wellington

Hackers claiming to have accessed more than 100,000 people's health records in New Zealand have reportedly extended a ransom deadline until Friday, after saying they want to build

a "good reputation".

The privately owned Manage My Health platform said cybercriminals had accessed the records of six-to-seven percent of its 1.8mm users in the country.

New Zealand authorities have not named the suspects behind the data breach, discovered by Manage My Health on December 30 when it was

tipped off by a "partner".

But a Telegram user named "Kazu" has claimed to have broken into more than 428,000 files on the Manage My Health platform, offering samples for download.

"Kazu" said it had demanded a ransom of US\$60,000 to be paid by yesterday morning to prevent release or sale of the files.

New Zealand daily newspaper The Post yesterday said the hackers had confirmed directly that the ransom deadline had been postponed to 5am Friday. In an earlier Telegram post, "Kazu" said it was not a "hactivist" group with political motives.

"We know exactly how valuable health data is and how sensitive it can be," it said. "We are doing this as

a business. Our main goal is money and building a good reputation in the community."

The latest "Kazu" post on Telegram referred to the US capture of Venezuela's president, saying: "free Nicolas Maduro."

Manage My Health's portal in New Zealand stores patient medical records and personal information

such as phone numbers and addresses. The company says medical appointment and prescription information was not impacted by the breach.

In a statement released yesterday, the firm said it had identified all patients whose documents may have been accessed, and the first group of people had been notified.

# China bans dual-use goods exports for Japan military over Taiwan remarks

Reuters  
Beijing

China has banned exports of dual-use items to Japan that can be used for military purposes, according to a commerce ministry statement yesterday.

Beijing's latest move is in reaction to an early November remark by Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi about Taiwan.

Dual-use items are goods, software or technologies that have both civilian and military applications, including certain rare earth elements that are essential for making phones and chips.

Exports of such items to military users or for any purposes that contribute to Japan's military strength are banned, effective immediately, the statement said, adding that organisations or individuals from any country or region that violated the ban would be held legally liable.

Japan's foreign and trade ministries did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Ties between Beijing and Tokyo have deteriorated since Takaichi said a Chinese attack on the democratically governed island of Taiwan could be deemed an existential threat to Japan, in a remark that Beijing said was "provocative". China regards Taiwan as part of its territory, a claim that Taipei rejects.

The Chinese foreign ministry

later questioned Japan's motives around Taiwan, saying its "provocations" could be a pretext for building up its military forces and overseas missions.

In another statement related to the new measures, a commerce ministry spokesperson slammed Japan's recent "erroneous remarks concerning Taiwan, implying the possibility of military intervention in the Taiwan Strait".

The tightened export controls are "to safeguard national security and interests", the spokesperson said.

In late December, the Japanese cabinet approved a record spending package for the fiscal year starting in April, including a 3.8% increase in the annual military budget to 9tn yen (\$58bn).

In a commentary in December, China's state-run Xinhua news agency said it had been "alarming" in recent years that Japan had "drastically" readjusted its security policy, increased its defence spending year after year, relaxed restrictions on arms exports, sought to develop offensive weapons and planned to abandon its three non-nuclear principles.

China's own annual defence budget has more than doubled over the last decade. Japan reaffirmed its non-nuclear pledge in mid-December.

Beijing's statement yesterday did not specify which items fall under its new curbs. Around 1,100 items

are on China's export control list for dual-use goods and technologies, covering at least seven categories of medium and heavy rare earths such as samarium, gadolinium, terbium, dysprosium and lutetium.

Despite Japan's efforts to diversify, China still supplies around 60% of its imports of rare earths, macroeconomic research firm Capital Economics estimates.

"China has not provided a list of restricted items so at this stage it is impossible to say what impact the export curbs will have," an official at the Japan External Trade Organisation said, asking not to be identified because they are not authorised to talk to the media.

A Japanese government source who spoke on condition that they weren't identified called the move "symbolic", adding that: "Until now, China has avoided doing things that would seriously hurt Japan's business community. By taking this step and causing trouble for Japanese industry, they may be aiming to fuel domestic criticism of Takaichi."

China throttled exports of rare earths to Japan during a previous diplomatic dispute more than a decade ago. So far, China customs data have shown no sign of a decline in rare earth exports to Japan, though the data is released with some delay. In November, the latest month for which there was data, exports grew 35% to 305 metric tonnes, the highest tally last year.



South Korea's President Lee Jae Myung (left) and his wife Kim Hea Kyung (second left) take a selfie with China's President Xi Jinping (second right) and his wife Peng Liyuan (right) after a dinner at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing.

## South Korea's Lee snaps Xi selfie with Chinese 'backdoor' phone

AFP  
Beijing

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung snapped a selfie with Xi Jinping using a smartphone gifted to him by the Chinese leader, who had joked at their last meeting that the device might be capable of spying. Lee posted a selfie of himself, Xi and their wives on social media platform X yesterday during a visit to Beijing. "A selfie with President Xi Jinping and his wife, taken with the Xiaomi I received as a gift in Gyeongju," Lee wrote. "Thanks to them, I got the shot of a lifetime," he said. "I will communicate more frequently and collaborate more closely going forward." Lee's office also posted a short YouTube video of the scene, with Xi complimenting the South Korean leader's photo skills. The Xiaomi handset made

headlines in November when Xi cracked a joke to Lee on the sidelines of an Apec summit in South Korea.

When Lee asked if the communication line on the device was secure, the Chinese leader urged him to "check if there is a backdoor" - referring to pre-installed software that could allow third-party monitoring.

The banter was a rare display of humour from the Chinese leader, who is not often seen making jokes, let alone about espionage.

Lee has said Xi was "unexpectedly quite good at making jokes".

During their 90 minute summit on Monday, Xi urged Lee to join Beijing in making the "right strategic choices" in a world that is "becoming more complex and turbulent".

Lee's visit to China followed a US military operation in Caracas that captured Venezuelan

president Nicolas Maduro and brought him to New York to face narco-trafficking charges - a raid condemned by Beijing and Pyongyang.

Lee's selfie post sparked heavy interest online and was shared more than 3,400 times in the first few hours.

One user quipped: "Sir, Do you know Nicolas Maduro used the same phone?"

The South Korean leader, who took office in June following the impeachment and removal of his predecessor over a martial law declaration, has sought to improve ties with China after a years-long diplomatic deep freeze. He met in Beijing yesterday with Chinese Premier Li Qiang, charged with economic policy, hailing improving ties as the "irreversible trend of the times".

The South Korean leader then headed to China's economic powerhouse city of Shanghai. Xiaomi

## Ice and snow festival in China



People visit the Harbin Ice and Snow World during the 42nd Harbin China International Ice and Snow Festival in Harbin, in northeastern China's Heilongjiang province.

## Malaysia eyes 10-year term limit for prime minister

AFP  
Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia's Anwar Ibrahim said he would introduce legislation this year to limit the prime minister's term to a maximum 10 years, fulfilling one of his campaign promises.

Speaking to ministers and civil servants after a cabinet meeting, Anwar cautioned against clinging to power and reminded them that "everyone has a term limit" without exception. "We will table a bill to limit the term of the prime minister, not exceeding 10 years or two full terms," Anwar said.

After serving the term, "it is better for us to hand it over to the next generation", he added.

There is currently no term limit and former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad was in power for 22 years during his first tenure until he stepped down in 2003.

Mahathir then came out of retirement to lead a disparate op-

position coalition that ousted the graft-tainted government of then prime minister Najib Razak in the 2018 elections. He became world's oldest serving prime minister when he was sworn in again as Malaysia's leader at age 92 that year. Anwar did not say when the term limits bill would be filed. Parliament will hold its first session of the year this month.

Anwar's Pakatan Harapan (Alliance of Hope) coalition pledged in its 2022 election manifesto to limit the prime minister's tenure to two terms. Separately, Anwar announced the government would also introduce a freedom of information bill in parliament, along with legislation to set up the office of an ombudsman to strengthen the fight against corruption. "The ombudsman... allows the people to raise any issues because without exception, from the prime minister downwards, everyone must be accountable and open to be questioned," Anwar said.

# Climate-driven tree deaths speeding up in Australia: study

AFP  
Bangkok

Australia's forests are losing trees more rapidly as the climate warms, a new study examining decades of data said yesterday, warning the trend was likely a "widespread phenomenon".

The research used forest inventory data from 2,700 plots across the country, ranging from cool moist forests to dry savanna.

It excluded areas affected by

logging, clearance or fires to examine how "background tree mortality" has changed in recent decades.

"What we found is that the mortality rate has consistently increased over time, in all of the different forest types," said Belinda Medlyn, a professor at Western Sydney University's Hawkesbury Institute for the Environment.

"And this increase is very likely caused by the increase in temperature," she said.

The world has warmed by an average of nearly 1.2C since the pre-industrial era. Most of this

warming has occurred in the last 50 years.

The rate at which trees die off in a forest can vary in response to different types of disturbances, or as forests grow thicker and there is greater competition for resources.

But the research, published in the Nature Plants journal, excluded areas affected by fires or clearing, and also examined the stand basal area - the sum of the cross-sectional areas of all trees in an area.

"The (mortality) trend over time remains even after we correct for

basal area," explained Medlyn, who led the research.

The scale of the increase varied across the four different biomes surveyed, with the sharpest rise in tropical savannas.

There, the number of trees dying on average increased by 3.2% a year, from close to 15 per 1,000 in 1996, to nearly double that number by 2017.

The research found that the deaths were not being matched by tree growth, so forest stock overall is declining.

That makes it "very likely that

the overall carbon storage capacity in the forests is declining over time", said Medlyn.

And given the trend was observed across four ecosystems - tropical savanna, cool temperate forest, warm temperate forest and tropical rainforest - it is likely to be "a widespread phenomenon, not just an Australian thing", she added.

The rising mortality rate tracks warming and drying linked to climate change, and the study found the fastest rise in hotter, drier regions.

The research comes months after a study found Australia's tropical rainforests were among the first in the world to start emitting more carbon dioxide than they absorb.

Taken together, the findings paint a worrying picture of our continued ability to rely on forests to absorb our emissions.

"Forests globally currently sequester about one-third of anthropogenic carbon dioxide emissions," said Medlyn.

"Our study suggests their capacity to act as buffer will decline over time."



# UK electric car sales hit record high in 2025: industry

**AFP**  
London

All-electric vehicles accounted for nearly one quarter of new cars sold in the UK last year, a record high, industry data showed yesterday, as Britain phases out combustion engines.

The all-time annual high for EVs helped boost total car sales back above 2mn for the first time since before the Covid-19 pandemic, the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders said in a statement.

The SMMT called the two-million mark "a reasonably solid result amid tough economic and geopolitical headwinds".

With a record 473,348 all-electric vehicles registered in 2025, the SMMT said the UK ranked as Europe's second-largest EV market by volume.

Separate figures yesterday showed a sharp rise in EV sales in Germany, where registrations surged 43.2% last year to a total of 545,142 vehicles.

Although Norway registered far fewer vehicles last year, at almost 180,000, almost 100% were electric.

The UK is meanwhile sticking with a target to ban the sale of new combustion-engine vehicles as early as 2030, and hybrids in 2035.

That makes Britain one of the

most ambitious countries in the transition to electric vehicles, particularly after the European Union decided in December to roll back its proposed 2035 ban on new petrol and diesel cars.

"Divergence between the UK and the much larger market on its own doorstep is broadening," the SMMT noted yesterday.

It warned, however, that too few EV models are eligible for government purchase grants and criticised the introduction of a tax on electric vehicles in Labour's recent budget.

"Rising EV uptake is an undoubtedly positive, but the pace is still too slow and the cost to industry too high," the SMMT said.

# India probe 'finds Tata Steel, JSW Steel and SAIL breached antitrust law'

**Reuters**  
New Delhi

India's competition watchdog has found market leaders Tata Steel, JSW Steel, state-run SAIL and 25 other firms breached antitrust law by colluding on steel selling prices, a confidential document shows, putting the companies and their executives at risk of hefty fines.

The Competition Commission of India (CCI) has also held 56 top executives, including JSW's billionaire managing director Sajjan Jindal, Tata Steel CEO T V Narendran and four former SAIL chairpersons, liable for price collusion over varying periods of time between 2015 and 2023, according to a CCI order dated October 6, which has not been made public and is being reported for the first time.

JSW declined to comment, while Tata Steel, SAIL, and the executives did not respond to queries. The CCI also did not respond to requests for comment.

The CCI investigation - the most high-profile case involving the steel industry - started in 2021 after a group of builders alleged in a criminal case brought to a state court that nine companies were collectively restricting the supply of steel and increasing prices.

Reuters reported in 2022 the watchdog raided some small steel

companies as part of an investigation into the industry.

The probe was later expanded to as many as 31 companies and industry groups, as well as dozens of executives, the CCI's October order shows. Under CCI rules, details of cases related to cartel-like activity are not made public before they have concluded.

The CCI investigation has "found the conduct of the parties to be in contravention" of Indian antitrust law and "certain individuals have also been held liable," the order stated.

The findings are a critical stage of any antitrust case.

They will be reviewed by top CCI officials and companies and executives will also have the opportunity to submit any objections or comments in a process that is likely to take several months given the scale of the investigation.

The CCI will then issue its final order, which will be released publicly.

India is the world's second-largest producer of crude steel, and demand for the alloy has been rising as infrastructure spending has increased in the fast-growing major economy.

JSW Steel has 17.5% of the Indian market, Tata Steel 13.3% and SAIL 10%, according to data from commodities consultancy Big-Mint.

In the last fiscal year to March 2025, JSW Steel reported standalone

revenues of \$14.2bn, while Tata Steel's were \$14.7bn.

The CCI is empowered to impose penalties on steel companies of up to three times their profit or 10% of turnover, whichever is higher, for each year of wrongdoing. Individual executives can also be fined.

JSW and SAIL have denied the allegations before the CCI, according to two people familiar with the matter, who declined to be named because the case was confidential.

One of them said JSW had also submitted its response to the CCI, and denied the allegations.

The CCI opened the case after Coimbatore Corporation Contractors Welfare Association alleged in a case it brought before a Tamil Nadu state court in 2021 that steel companies had hiked prices by 55% during a six-month period to March 11 that year, and were artificially boosting prices by restricting supply to builders and consumers.

After the public prosecutor said the issue was an antitrust matter, the judge then ordered the CCI to take "appropriate action" on the complaint of the association, whose members are involved in road and highway construction.

Other companies in the CCI document that were found to have allegedly colluded on prices, were Shyam Steel Industries, state-run Rashtriya Ispat Nigam and other smaller-sized firms. Shyam and Rashtriya did not respond to queries.

also listed green energy and artificial intelligence as areas for enhanced co-operation but made no mention of beef or dairy.

Li described the two economies as "highly complementary" and called for upholding multilateralism and free trade, according to state broadcaster CCTV late yesterday.

In a clip posted earlier on Martin's X account, the prime minister said he pressed Chinese officials for the reopening of the Chinese market to Irish beef products, and raised issues related to China's new dairy tariffs.

China-EU ties have been tense since the EU imposed levies on Chinese EV imports in 2024, prompting Chinese retaliation including tariffs on EU dairy products.

The visit reflects Beijing's bid to strengthen ties with individual European nations amid strained China-EU relations.

Yesterday's Chinese readout

tin said on Irish radio.

Ireland exports the bulk of its output from its beef and dairy industries, which are major employers in the country. It is among Europe's largest exporters of dairy, shipping about 6bn euros (\$7.04bn) annually.

Irish beef exports to China have been suspended since 2024 after a mad cow disease case.

On a visit to China in November, Junior Minister for Agriculture Timmy Dooley said Dublin was making progress in persuading Beijing that Irish beef was safe but that there was "a way to go" to clear the resumption of exports.

Irish beef, which the country markets as a premium commodity in the UK and Europe, also faces competition from cheaper South American imports.

Last week, China also set import quotas and extra tariffs on beef imports from this year, hitting global suppliers.

## China keen for deeper co-operation with Ireland

**Reuters**  
Beijing

China wants to deepen co-operation with Ireland and broaden trade in sectors including aircraft leasing and healthcare, according to a Chinese state media readout yesterday following Premier Li Qiang's meeting with Irish Prime Minister Micheal Martin, who is in Beijing to push for agriculture talks.

Martin's meeting with Li came a day after his summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping, part of a five-day visit that the Irish leader said would have "a significant economic dimension" including talks on beef and dairy.

The visit reflects Beijing's bid to strengthen ties with individual European nations amid strained China-EU relations.

Yesterday's Chinese readout

### Indian cricketers honoured



Indian women's captain Harmanpreet Kaur (left), Blind Women's team captain Deepika T C (second left) and men's team player Rohit Sharma (right) stands along with Nita Ambani, founder and chairperson of the Reliance Foundation, at the United in Triumph felicitation event hosted by the Reliance Foundation to honour the country's national cricket teams in Mumbai.

### India banks allowed to sponsor pension funds under NPS

**Reuters**  
Mumbai

India's pension fund regulator has allowed banks to sponsor pension funds that will manage monies under the National Pension System (NPS), in a bid to bolster competition in the sector.

The Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA), which oversees assets worth more than \$177bn, said in a

statement it had given in-principle approval for banks to independently set up pension funds to manage the NPS, subject to eligibility norms aligned with the Reserve Bank of India's guidelines.

Banks will have to meet eligibility criteria linked to net worth, market capitalisation, and prudential soundness, it added. Currently, banks serve as points of presence, handling subscriber registrations, contributions, and other system services. Some existing pension funds have ties to financial institutions, including banks.

At present, there are 10 registered pension funds with the PFRDA. Besides, PFRDA also appointed three new trustees to the board of the NPS Trust following a formal selection process. The new trustees include former State Bank of India chairman Dinesh Kumar Khara, who has also been designated as the chairperson of the NPS Trust Board.

Additionally, the regulator also revised the Investment Management Fee structure for pension funds starting April 1, 2026 and introduced differentiated rates for government and non-government subscribers.

# UK urges Musk's X to urgently address 'deepfakes' by Grok

**Reuters**  
London

Britain yesterday urged Elon Musk's X platform to urgently address a proliferation of intimate 'deepfake' images created on demand via its built-in AI chatbot Grok, joining a European outcry over a surge in non-consensual imagery on the platform.

The comments follow reporting including from Reuters that Grok, prompted by users, was creating a flood of non-consensual images of women and minors.

Technology Minister Liz Kendal said in a statement the content was "absolutely appalling" and urged the social media platform to act swiftly.

No one should have to go through the ordeal of seeing intimate deepfakes of themselves

online," Kendall said. "We cannot and will not allow the proliferation of these demeaning and degrading images, which are disproportionately aimed at women and girls." "X needs to deal with this urgently."

X did not immediately respond to a request for comment following the minister's statement.

X's Safety account said on Sunday that it removes all illegal content on the platform

and permanently suspends accounts involved. "Anyone using or prompting Grok to make illegal content will suffer the same consequences as if they upload illegal content," it said. Asked about the subject recently, X told Reuters: "Legacy Media Lies."

Creating or sharing non-consensual intimate images or child sexual abuse material, including AI-generated imagery, is illegal in Britain. Additionally, tech plat-

forms must prevent British users from encountering illegal content and remove it once they become aware of it.

Musk has shrugged off concerns online, posting laughing emojis in response to edited bikini images of public figures.

The European Commission yesterday said it was aware that X was offering a "spicy mode" and condemned the images as unlawful. Also yesterday, Britain's

media regulator Ofcom said it had made "urgent contact" with X and its AI arm xAI to understand what steps they were taking to comply with legal duties to protect UK users. French officials have reported X to prosecutors and regulators, calling the content "manifestly illegal," while Indian authorities have also demanded explanations.

US regulators have yet to comment.

# US Capitol riot anniversary exposes a country still divided

AFP  
Washington

Washington yesterday marks five years since a mob overran the US Capitol, with rioters pardoned by Donald Trump retracing their steps even as Democrats revive hearings to hold the president accountable.

The anniversary highlights a nation divided between irreconcilable accounts of an attack that reshaped American politics - one supported by official findings of a violent bid to overturn an election, the other portraying it as a protest unjustly criminalised.

"Five years ago today, a violent mob brutally attacked the US Capitol on January 6. Their mission was to overturn a free and fair election. We will never allow extremists to whitewash their treachery," top House Democrat Hakeem Jeffries posted on X.

Trump supporters gathered in Washington on January 6 2021, after the president urged them to protest Congress's certification of his election defeat to Joe Biden.

Several thousand breached the Capitol grounds, overwhelming police lines and wounding more than 140 officers, smashing windows and doors, ransacking offices and forcing lawmakers into hiding as the electoral count was halted for hours.

Inside the Capitol yesterday, House Democrats convened an unofficial hearing featuring po-



People attend a rally ahead of a January 6 memorial march marking five years since the attack on the US Capitol Building by Donald Trump supporters who claimed the presidential election had been stolen in Washington, DC.

lice, former lawmakers and civilians who experienced the violence firsthand.

Many involved in the original congressional investigation say the aim is not to relitigate the past but to prevent it from being erased - particularly after Trump returned to office and pardoned nearly all defendants charged in connection with the attack.

A new Democratic report documents dozens of pardoned rioters later charged with new crimes, and the party warns that the clemency risks normalising political violence.

Outside the building Trump

supporters, including figures linked to the far-right Proud Boys, staged a march retracing the route taken by rioters in 2021.

The event is being promoted by the group's former leader Enrique Tarrio, who was serving a 22-year sentence for sedition conspiracy before Trump pardoned him.

Organisers say it will honour those who died, including pro-Trump rioter Ashli Babbitt, and protest what they describe as excessive force by police and politically motivated prosecutions.

The competing events mirror a broader political dispute, with Democrats saying Trump

incited the attack to overturn the election. Republicans reject that view, instead citing security failures and criticising the Justice Department.

Trump alluded briefly to the riot in remarks at a House Republican strategy retreat, accusing Democrats and the media of misrepresenting his role in the violence.

Republican leaders have dismissed yesterday's hearing as partisan and have shown little appetite for formal commemoration.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, an unwavering Trump ally, has yet to install a plaque honouring Capitol Police officers who defended the building that day, despite a federal law requiring it.

And Republican investigator Barry Loudermilk has argued that January 6 has been used to advance a political narrative against Trump and his allies.

The anniversary arrives against the backdrop of unresolved legal and historical questions.

Former special counsel Jack Smith has said the attack would not have occurred without Trump, but abandoned the federal case after the Republican leader's re-election, in line with Justice Department policy barring prosecution of a sitting president.

Trump was impeached soon after the riot by the Democratic-controlled House but acquitted by the Republican-led Senate.

## US Justice Dept says millions of Epstein files still not released

The US Department of Justice (DOJ) said it is still reviewing more than two million documents potentially related to convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein as it pushed more than two weeks past a deadline to release all files connected to him.

The department began releasing documents from the decades-long investigation into the late disgraced financier last month, but failed to meet the December 19 deadline mandated under the Epstein Files Transparency Act.

In a letter Monday to a federal judge, DOJ officials said more than two million documents remained "in various phases of review."

About 12,285 documents comprising more than 125,000 pages, the letter said, had already been publicly released in response to the law - less than one percent of the tranche currently in review.

The DOJ said it identified on December 24 more than one million files not included in its initial review.

Some of those documents appeared to be duplicates but would still need "processing and deduplication," the letter noted. "Substantial work remains to be done," said the letter, signed by Attorney General Pam Bondi and others involved.

More than 400 DOJ attorneys will spend "the next few weeks" reviewing the documents, the officials said.

At least 100 FBI employees trained in handling "sensitive victim information" will assist the effort. US President Donald Trump is facing strong pushback from Democrats for failing to release all files related to Epstein in a timely manner.

The Trump administration has defended its handling of the documents, noting the need to protect sensitive information about victims.

In Monday's letter, the DOJ officials said they must "manually" review the documents for "victim identifying information." (AFP)

## Ex-Canadian foreign minister appointed economic adviser in Ukraine

Liberal politician Chrystia Freeland, Canada's former minister of finance and foreign affairs, said yesterday she will leave Parliament in Ottawa to work as an economic advisor to Ukraine. Of Ukrainian origin, Freeland was appointed by President Volodymyr Zelensky while serving as the Canadian prime minister's special representative for the reconstruction of Ukraine, after holding several political leadership roles in recent years. "Ukraine is at the forefront of today's global fight for democracy, and I welcome this chance to contribute on an unpaid basis as an economic advisor to President Zelensky," Freeland wrote on X. Freeland, 57, a former journalist, speaks Ukrainian, English, French, Italian and Russian fluently. She was the first woman to be finance minister in Canada and served as deputy prime minister. Zelensky praised Freeland in a post announcing her appointment Monday, saying she "is highly skilled" and "has extensive experience in attracting investment and implementing economic transformations." (AFP)



Venezuela's Minister of Interior Diosdado Cabello attends a women's rally in support of ousted Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores in Caracas yesterday. (AFP)

## 'Nobody is going to run home': Venezuelan diaspora in wait-and-see mode

AFP  
Bogota

"A new dawn for Venezuela" is how a top US diplomat described the future awaiting the Caribbean country after Saturday's capture of president Nicolas Maduro by US special forces in a raid on Caracas.

But for some of the eight million Venezuelans who fled the country over the past decade of economic ruin and repression, the joy at seeing Maduro hauled before a New York court on Monday was tempered by the knowledge that his henchmen remain at the helm.

News of Maduro's demise initially triggered scenes of jubilation among the diaspora.

Several people choked up as they recalled the hardship they fled, and the family they left behind, over the course of his increasingly despotic rule.

But while many said they dreamed about returning to their homeland, they made it clear they had no plans to pack their bags just yet.

Most cited the country's battered economy as a reason to keep working abroad and sending home remittances.

Some also spoke of their fear of Venezuela's security apparatus, pointing to the paramilitaries who roamed the streets of Caracas on Saturday to crack down on anyone rejoicing over Maduro's ouster.

"There has been no change of regime in Venezuela, there is no

transition," said Ligia Bolivar, a Venezuelan sociologist and rights activist living in Colombia since 2019.

"In these circumstances nobody is going to run home," she told AFP.

Standing outside the Venezuelan consulate in Bogota, where he was waiting to renew his passport on Monday, Alejandro Solozano, 35, echoed that view.

"Everything remains the same," he said, referring to US President Donald Trump's decision to work with Maduro's administration rather than the democratic opposition.

Maduro's former deputy Delcy Rodriguez was sworn in as acting president on Monday, becoming the interim head of an administration that still includes hardline Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello and powerful Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino Lopez.

Cabello in particular is a figure of dread for many Venezuelans, after commanding a crackdown on post-election protests in 2024 in which some 2,400 people were arrested.

Many Venezuelans were particularly shocked by Trump's decision to sideline opposition leader Maria Corina Machado, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, from the transition.

The European Union on Monday demanded that any transition include Machado and her replacement candidate in the 2024 elections. Maduro is accused of stealing Edmundo Gonzalez Urrutia.

Andrea, a 47-year-old immigration advisor living in Buenos Aires, argued, however, that Machado's hour had not yet come.

"Until Trump sees that the situation is under control, until he has all these criminals by the balls, he won't be able to put Maria Corina in charge. Because that would be throwing her to the wolves," she said.

### No other way'

Luis Peche, a political analyst who survived a gun attack in Bogota last year suspected of being a political hit, also argued in favour of a negotiated transition.

"We have to see this as a process," Peche told AFP, referring to Venezuela's transition.

"You still need part of the state apparatus to remain," he said.

Tamara Suju, a leading Venezuelan rights expert based in Spain, said that keeping the same tainted cast in charge was a necessary evil - in the short term.

"They are the ones with whom the Trump administration is negotiating the transition because there is no other way to do it," she told Spain's esRadio, predicting they would eventually be forced by Washington to fall on their swords.

Edwin Reyes, a 46-year-old window installer living in Colombia for the past eight years, said that once Venezuela was "completely free" he would consider a move back.

"We've waited so long, another four or five months won't hurt."

## Toppling of Venezuela's Maduro stirs fear in Cubans

AFP  
Havana

Cubans weary from years of economic crisis, shortages of basic supplies and regular power blackouts, fear the US attack on Venezuela, a leftist ideological ally and its main oil supplier, will see life get even tougher.

After American forces seized Venezuela's leader Nicolas Maduro in an early-morning raid, US President Donald Trump over the weekend issued threats to other leftist leaders in the region and said he thought Cuba was "ready to fall." He played down the need for US military action on the island, saying it would be hard for Havana to "hold out" without Venezuelan oil, and "it looks like it's going down." "2026 is going to be tough, very tough," Axel Alfonso, a 53-year-old working as a driver for a state enterprise, told AFP in the capital Havana.

"If Venezuela is the main supplier, at least of oil, it's going to get a bit complicated," said Alfonso who, like the vast majority of Cubans, has lived his whole life under a bruising US trade embargo in place since 1962.

The communist-run island has seen 13 US administrations come and go, some more punishing than others.

"We've been fighting for 60 years, and we have to keep going," Alfonso said.

### Uncertainty'

Located roughly 90 miles (about 145km) from the coast of Florida, Cuba's last major economic test followed the implosion in 1991 of the Soviet Union, a major trade partner and source of credit.

It survived by opening up to tourism and foreign investment.

Since 2000, Havana has in-



The Cuban national flag flies at half-mast outside the US embassy in Havana. Havana declared two days of national mourning after a total of 32 Cubans were killed during the US attack on Caracas that culminated in the capture of Venezuela's president Nicolas Maduro. (AFP)

creasingly relied on Venezuelan oil under a deal struck with Maduro's predecessor Hugo Chavez, in exchange for Cuban doctors, teachers, and sports coaches.

In the last quarter of 2025, Venezuela sent Cuba an average of 30,000-35,000 barrels a day, "which represents 50 percent of the island's oil deficit," Jorge Pinon, an energy expert and researcher at the University of Texas, told AFP.

The number was much higher 10 years ago, slashed by the global oil price crash that sent Venezuela's own economy into turmoil.

For the past six years, Cuba has been mired in an ever-deepening crisis caused by a toxic combination of tighter US sanctions, poor domestic management of the economy and the collapse of tourism due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

GDP has fallen by 11 percent in five years and the government

faces a severe shortage of currency to pay for basic social services: electricity, healthcare and supplying subsidised food and other basic goods that many Cubans have learned to rely on.

Economic hardship was a trigger for the unprecedented anti-government demonstrations of July 11, 2021, when thousands of Cubans took to the streets shouting "We are hungry" and "Freedom!"

Since then, ever more frequent and longer power cuts and shortages of food and medicine have deepened discontent and led to sporadic, smaller protests, quickly contained by the government.

Now, many fear that the loss of Venezuelan oil will make matters even worse.

"We're living in a moment of uncertainty," attorney Daira Perez, 30, told AFP.

### No bailout

Pinon said it was "not clear whether shipments of Venezuelan oil to Cuba will continue," especially in the context of the recent US seizure of oil tankers in the Caribbean.

And he highlighted that "Cuba doesn't have the resources to buy that volume on international markets, nor a political partner to bail it out."

Despite concerns for the future, long-suffering Cubans put on a brave face.

"He (Trump) keeps making tough threats," said Havana resident Roberto Brown, 80, who was a young man during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis that brought the world to the brink of nuclear war.

"We already told him once: we're 90 miles away, and a long-range missile from over there reaches here, but the one from here reaches there too," said Brown.

## Brazil's Bolsonaro awaits court approval to go to hospital after fall

Reuters  
Sao Paulo

Brazil's imprisoned former president Jair Bolsonaro was awaiting Supreme Court authorisation yesterday to go to a Brasilia hospital for tests after falling and hitting his head, his wife said on social media.

"We are waiting for (Supreme Court) Justice Alexandre de Moraes to authorize it," Michelle Bolsonaro wrote on Instagram, after saying earlier in the day that he would be hospitalised.

"We are going to the hospital. My love will undergo exams," she wrote in the earlier post, adding that the 70-year-old right-wing leader fell while sleeping and hit his head on a piece of furniture.

Brazil's federal police said in a statement that Bolsonaro received initial medical treatment on Tuesday morning, adding that a federal police doctor "found minor injuries" and saw no need for hospitalisation.

"Any referral to a hospital depends on authorisation from the Supreme Court," it added.

Bolsonaro underwent a series of medical procedures in December to treat a hernia and hiccups.

He was discharged from hospital on January 1 and taken back to the Federal Police Superintendence in Brasilia, where he is serving a 27-year sentence for plotting a coup after losing the 2022 presidential election. The former president was stabbed in the abdomen during a 2018 campaign event and has a history of hospitalisations and surgeries related to the attack.

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**GULF TIMES**

# AI into 2026: Spending spree, crowded trade and bubble fears

The unstoppable run of artificial intelligence (AI) - especially since OpenAI's launch of its hugely successful chatbot, ChatGPT in November 2022 - is bringing about upheavals in the tech world and markets, while becoming a driving force across the global economy.

As continued investment in AI infrastructure fuels its growth across industries, worldwide spending in the technology is projected to have reached nearly \$1.5tn in 2025, and anticipated to exceed \$2tn in 2026, according to Gartner, Inc.

Capital spending on AI in hyperscaler companies is expected to climb still higher in the coming year. But investors are being more selective about AI stocks, according to Goldman Sachs Research.

The consensus estimate among Wall Street analysts for the group's 2026 capital spending is now \$527bn, up from \$465bn at the start of the third-quarter earnings season in 2025, continuing a trend of upward revisions. The S&P 500 Index jumped 16% in 2025, with AI winners Nvidia Corp, Alphabet Inc, Broadcom Inc and Microsoft Corp contributing the most.

Capital expenditures from Microsoft, Alphabet, Amazon.com Inc and Meta Platforms Inc are expected to rise 34% to roughly \$440bn combined over this year, according to Bloomberg data. Interestingly, OpenAI alone has committed to spending more than \$1tn on AI infrastructure, an eye-popping number for a closely held company that isn't profitable.

**Worldwide spending on AI is projected to have reached nearly \$1.5tn in 2025, and anticipated to exceed \$2tn in 2026, according to Gartner, Inc**

The spending spree underscores the extreme costs and resources consumed from the worldwide boom in AI ignited by the arrival of ChatGPT. Amidst the ever-growing AI euphoria, soaring global demand for semiconductors fuelled by a boom in AI sent South Korea's exports to their highest-ever level in 2025. Total exports last year were valued at over \$700bn, according to data from Seoul's industry ministry, up 3.8% from the previous year.

The worldwide surge in interest in AI saw semiconductor industry exports reach \$173.4bn in 2025 - a record high and an

increase of more than 20% from the previous year, the ministry said.

Global tech giants are racing to secure the scarce high-end chips and build the sprawling data centres the technology demands. They're each trying to convince Wall Street that these huge investments will make their future businesses more profitable than the current ones selling digital ads, goods and software.

But at the same time, concerns are mounting about the hundreds of billions of dollars Big Tech has pledged to spend on AI infrastructure.

With equity valuations creeping up and the S&P 500 just posting its third straight year of double-digit percentage gains, it makes sense that investors are growing concerned about how much upside is left and how much market value could be lost if AI doesn't live up to the hype.

Investors see an AI bubble as the biggest "tail risk" event, according to a poll by Bank of America in December. More than half of the respondents said the Magnificent Seven tech stocks were Wall Street's most crowded trade.

AI could contribute up to \$15.7tn to the global economy by 2030. While all regions of the global economy stand to benefit from AI, North America and China will see the largest GDP gains, according to a World Economic Forum report in 2023.

AI could widen the gaps between developed and developing countries, a UN report in December said, calling for policy measures to limit the impact. The report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) warns of a possible "great divergence" emerging between nations in terms of economic performance, people's skill sets and governing systems.

As such, the rampant euphoria over AI has again problematised the good-vs-bad tech debate. And AI is the subject of regulatory reviews and consideration worldwide with companies and governmental bodies in the process of negotiating how to level the playing field without stifling innovation.

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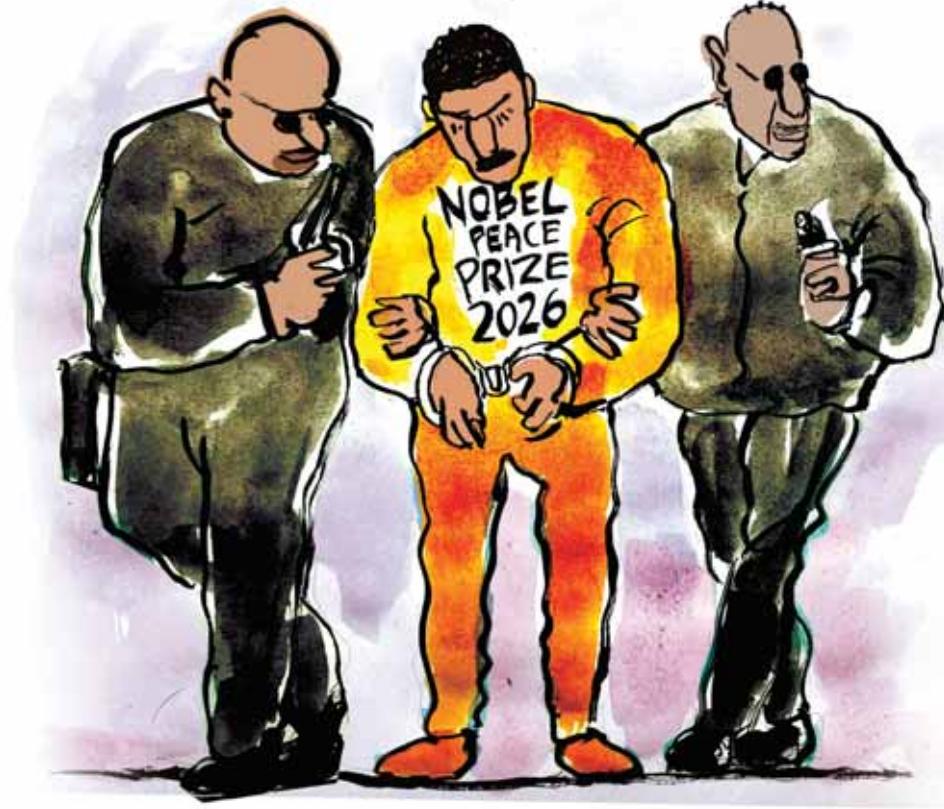
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**HOME DELIVERY**

# Was the US capture of Venezuela's leader legal?

- **President Maduro was captured in Venezuela and will face charges in New York**
- **Experts questioned the legality of the US operation under international law**
- **Congress was not notified before military operation, Rubio confirms**

**Reuters**  
Washington

**T**he US captured Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro in a military operation early on Saturday morning, culminating a months-long pressure campaign by President Donald Trump's administration that drew condemnation from some international leaders.

Maduro was on a warship bound for New York to face criminal charges, according to US officials. Here is a look at the legality of the US action. On Saturday, US forces attacked Venezuela and seized Maduro, who has been widely condemned as an illegitimate leader, and his wife Cilia Flores.

Trump had been urging Maduro to cede power and has accused him of supporting drug cartels that Washington designated as terror groups, alleging they were responsible for thousands of US deaths tied to illegal drug use. Since September, US forces had killed more than 100 people in at least 30 strikes on alleged drug trafficking boats from Venezuela in the Caribbean and Pacific, which legal experts said likely violated US and international law.

US authorities said the Justice Department sought military assistance to apprehend Maduro, who had been indicted by a New

York grand jury along with his wife, son, two political leaders and an alleged leader of an international gang. They were charged with crimes related to terrorism, drugs and weapons.

Attorney-General Pam Bondi said on social media that the defendants "will soon face the full wrath of American justice on American soil in American courts".

However, at a press conference, Trump blamed Venezuela for stealing US oil interests and said Washington would take them back and planned to run Venezuela for a period of time, without offering specifics.

Experts in international law said the Trump administration had muddled the legal issues by claiming the operation was both a targeted law enforcement mission and the potential prelude to long-term control of Venezuela by the US.

"You cannot say this was a law enforcement operation and then turn around and say now we need to run the country," said Jeremy Paul, a professor at Northeastern University specialising in constitutional law. "It just doesn't make any sense."

The US Congress has the power to declare war but the president is the commander-in-chief, and presidents of both parties have justified carrying out military action when it was limited in scope and in the national interest.

Trump's Chief of Staff Susie Wiles told 'Vanity Fair' magazine in an interview published late last year that if Trump were to authorise "some activity on land" in Venezuela he would need approval from Congress. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Congress was not notified before Saturday's operation.

International law prohibits the use of force in international relations except for narrow exceptions such as authorisation by the UN Security Council or in self-defence.

Drug trafficking and gang violence are considered criminal activity and do not rise to the accepted international standard of an armed conflict that would justify a military response, according to legal experts.

"A criminal indictment alone doesn't provide authority to use military force to depose a foreign government, and the administration will probably hang this also on a theory of self-defence," said Matthew Waxman, a law professor at Columbia University specialising in national security law.

The US has not recognised Maduro as the legitimate leader of Venezuela since 2019, following an election the US said was rigged.

The US has captured criminal suspects in foreign countries including Libya but it has sought

consent of local authorities. While the administration describes Maduro as an illegitimate leader, Washington has not recognised another Venezuelan leader who could have authorised the capture of Maduro.

In 1989, the US arrested General Manuel Noriega, then the leader of Panama, in similar circumstances. Noriega had been indicted on drug-related charges and Washington said it was acting to protect US citizens after Panamanian forces had killed a US soldier.

The United States had also alleged Noriega was an illegitimate leader and had recognised as the country's leader the candidate who Noriega had claimed to have defeated in a recent election. The former president of Honduras, Juan Orlando Hernández, was extradited to the United States in 2022 and later convicted on drug-related charges and sentenced to 45 years in prison. Trump pardoned Hernandez in December.

Legal experts were sceptical that the United States would face any meaningful accountability for its actions in Venezuela, even if they were unlawful given the lack of enforcement mechanisms in international law. "It's hard to see how any legal body could impose practical consequences on the administration," said Paul, of Northeastern University.



People celebrate at Caracas' Bolívar square after US forces captured Maduro. — AFP

## EU poised to secure vital Italy backing for Mercosur deal

Reuters  
Brussels

The European Commission appeared to have won the crucial support of Italy yesterday for a contentious free trade deal with South American bloc Mercosur, paving the way for the EU to sign the agreement as early as next week.

Italy and France last month dashed hopes for a December deal, saying they were not ready to support it until farmers' fears of an influx of cheap commodities from Mercosur, including beef and sugar, were resolved.

However, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni welcomed a letter sent by the Commission on Tuesday proposing to accelerate 45 billion euros of support for farmers,

describing it as a "positive and significant step forward".

Italian Agriculture Minister Francesco Lollobrigida said the European Union was now proposing to increase spending on Italian agriculture in 2028-2034 rather than to cut it.

An EU source subsequently said Italy would now vote in favour of the Mercosur trade deal at a meeting on Friday.

The executive Commission, backed by countries such as Germany and Spain, is seeking to garner the broad majority of 15 EU members representing 65% of the EU population required to authorise the EU signature, possibly as early as January 12.

They say the accord, which has been 25 years in the making and would be the EU's largest in terms of tariff reductions, is vital to boosting

exports hit by US import taxes and to reduce reliance on China by securing access to critical minerals.

With Poland and Hungary opposed to the deal and France still critical, Italy's stance is a key determinant of whether the deal can be signed.

The Commission has held discussions with member states over the past two weeks and the bloc is on track to sign the agreement soon, a spokesperson for the executive said.

The EU executive has invited all 27 EU agriculture ministers to a meeting in Brussels today.

European commissioners for agriculture, trade and health are expected to give reassurances on future funding for farmers under the bloc's Common Agricultural Policy, including a 6.3bn euro (\$7.4bn) crisis fund in the next EU budget.

## Snow-covered path in Britain



A woman walks her dog along a snow-covered path at the Pavilion Gardens park, as cold weather grips Britain.

## European leaders rally behind Greenland in face of renewed US threat

**European leaders affirm Greenland's autonomy amid US interest; 'Greenland belongs to its people', says joint statement; Nato allies emphasise Arctic security co-operation; Trump's special envoy eyes Greenland independence, trade; White House chief of staff dismisses diplomatic 'niceties'**

Reuters  
Copenhagen

Leaders from major European powers rallied behind Greenland yesterday, saying the Arctic island belongs to its people, following a renewed threat by US President Donald Trump to take over the Danish territory.

Trump has in recent days repeated that he wants to gain control of Greenland, an idea first voiced in 2019 during his first presidency, arguing it is vital for the US military, and that Denmark has not done enough to protect it.

White House Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller on Monday dismissed concerns about Danish sovereignty.

"You can talk all you want about international niceties and everything else," Miller told CNN. "But we live in a world, in the real world, that is governed by strength, that is governed by force, that is governed by power."

A US military operation over the weekend that seized the leader of Venezuela has rekindled concerns that Greenland might face a similar scenario. Greenland has repeatedly said it does not want to be part of the United States.

"Greenland belongs to its people. It is for Denmark and Greenland, and them only, to decide on matters concerning



The chairman of the Naalakkersuisut, Jens-Frederik Nielsen, holds a press conference in Nuuk, Greenland. He welcomed the European leaders' pledge of solidarity and renewed his call to the US for a "respectful dialogue".

Denmark and Greenland," said a joint statement issued by the leaders of France, Britain, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, and Denmark.

The leaders said security in the Arctic must be achieved collectively with Nato allies, including the United States.

"Nato has made clear that the Arctic region is a priority and European Allies are stepping up," the statement said. "We and many other Allies have increased our presence, activities, and investments, to keep the Arctic safe and to deter adversaries."

The Netherlands also fully supports the joint statement, Dutch Prime Minister Dick Schoof said on X.

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk told reporters in Warsaw: "No member should attack or threaten another member of the

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. Otherwise, Nato would lose its meaning if conflict or mutual conflicts occurred within the alliance."

Greenland's Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen welcomed the European leaders' pledge of solidarity and renewed his call to the US for a "respectful dialogue".

"The dialogue must take place with respect for the fact that Greenland's status is rooted in international law and the principle of territorial integrity," he said on Facebook.

To fend off US criticism over Greenland's defence capabilities, Denmark last year pledged 42bn Danish crowns (\$6.58bn) to boost its military presence in the Arctic.

US Special Envoy Jeff Landry, asked about the Europeans' joint

statement, told CNBC yesterday: "Security should be a major concern for the United States."

Asked whether security should be handled in conjunction with Nato, he said: "I think we should ask the Greenlanders."

Trump named Landry, the Republican governor of Louisiana, as his special envoy to Greenland last month, asking him to "lead the charge" for the island.

Landry said on Tuesday that Trump was offering Greenland economic opportunities but he did not think the president would take it by force.

"I think that the president supports an independent Greenland with economic ties and trade opportunities for the United States," Landry said, adding that the US had more to offer than Europe.

## Ukraine's European, US allies meet in Paris on security guarantees

AFP  
Paris

Key European allies of Ukraine yesterday and were expected to announce Washington would lead ceasefire monitoring if a peace deal is reached to end Russia's war against its neighbour.

The summit of the so-called "Coalition of the Willing" is focused on security guarantees Ukraine requires in the event of a ceasefire to deter further Russian aggression.

A draft statement seen by AFP before the talks started said the United States would lead a "ceasefire monitoring and verification mechanism" with European participation if a peace deal is agreed.

Washington would commit to "support" European-led multinational force - deployed in Ukraine after any ceasefire - "in case of" a new attack by Russia, the draft statement added.

Representatives of 35 countries, including 27 heads of state or government - including the leaders of Britain, Canada, Germany and Italy - took part in the summit, which the French presidency said would demonstrate the "alignment" between Washington, Kyiv and European allies on security guarantees for Ukraine. US-led diplomatic efforts to

reach a deal have ramped up in recent weeks. But this meeting is being held amid relentless fighting in Ukraine almost four years into Europe's deadliest conflict since World War II.

The capture by US forces of Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro, an ally of Russian leader Vladimir Putin, has unsettled some European countries and added a potential new element of transatlantic uncertainty.

US President Donald Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff and son-in-law Jared Kushner travelled to Paris for the meeting of the coalition, launched last year by France and Britain.

French President Emmanuel Macron welcomed Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky at the Elysee Palace for a one-to-one meeting before the summit.

Some members of the coalition aim to send a multinational force to Ukraine to deter any future Russian attack if the war sparked by Russia's February 2022 invasion ends.

But Ukraine and Russia remain at odds over territory in a post-war settlement.

Russia has also repeatedly opposed any Nato boots on the ground in Ukraine to monitor a halt in hostilities. European leaders have been at pains to not firmly condemn the US military operation to grab Maduro, while expressing discomfort at the implications for international law.

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"Nato has made clear that the Arctic region is a priority and European Allies are stepping up," the statement said. "We and many other Allies have increased our presence, activities, and investments, to keep the Arctic safe and to deter adversaries."

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Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk told reporters in Warsaw: "No member should attack or threaten another member of the

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## More than 100 win Qatar Scientific Excellence Award 2026

QNA  
Doha

Qatar's Ministry of Education and Higher Education has announced the winners of the Qatar Scientific Excellence Award 2026, with 108 candidates selected from a total of 371 applicants.

The results were approved by the award's Board of Trustees, chaired by HE the Minister of Education and Higher Education Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhater.

Speaking at a press conference yesterday, Maryam Abdulla al-Muhannadi, the award's chief executive, said the number of winners reflected strong competition and the high quality of submissions, as well as growing

awareness of the award's criteria and standards. She said the results showed a notable diversity in the educational institutions represented by the winners, including students from public, private and specialised schools, as well as civilian and military universities and colleges. This, she added, highlighted the spread of a culture of excellence across Qatar's education sector.

Al-Muhannadi noted that the overall success rate was in line with the average of the past five editions, underlining the consistency of the evaluation methodology. She also pointed to the role of supportive family environments, saying that in some cases more than one member of the same family had won, in accordance with the award's criteria.



She stressed that only candidates who achieved the required scores were selected, following

a comprehensive assessment process that included file reviews and interviews, ensuring fair-

ness, transparency and equal opportunities. Congratulating the winners, al-Muhannadi said this

year's edition had attracted strong interest and high-quality participation, reinforcing the award's status as a national platform that promotes excellence, quality and innovation. She also praised candidates who were not selected, saying that applying for the award itself demonstrated ambition and a commitment to excellence.

The main award ceremony will be held under the patronage of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, on Feb 15, 2026, marking 20 years since the launch of the award. The award aligns with Qatar National Vision 2030, particularly its human development pillar, by investing in national talent and fostering an educational environment that supports creativity, innovation and sustainable development.

## Pigeons continue to excel over the peregrine falcons for the second day

The peregrine falcons failed for the second consecutive day to catch the racing pigeons in the Hadd Al Tahadi Championship, held as part of the 17th edition of the Qatar International Falcons and Hunting Festival (Marmi 2026).

The festival is held under the patronage of HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani and is supported by the Social and Sports Activities Support Fund (Daam). It is taking place at Sabkhat Marmi in the Seaside Area, and will continue until January 24.

The competition between the peregrine falcons and the racing pigeons resulted in the pigeons prevailing in Group Five, as none of the falcons were able to catch the pigeons, which returned safely to their nests in Umm Ebairiya for the second day in a row.



Shawi al-Kaabi, chairman of Hadd Al Tahadi Committee, said that the falconers of Group Five were indeed unable to make a catch, and the advantage went to Abdullah Fakhro's pigeons for the second consecutive day, leaving the number of winners and qualifiers for the final round at eight falconers.

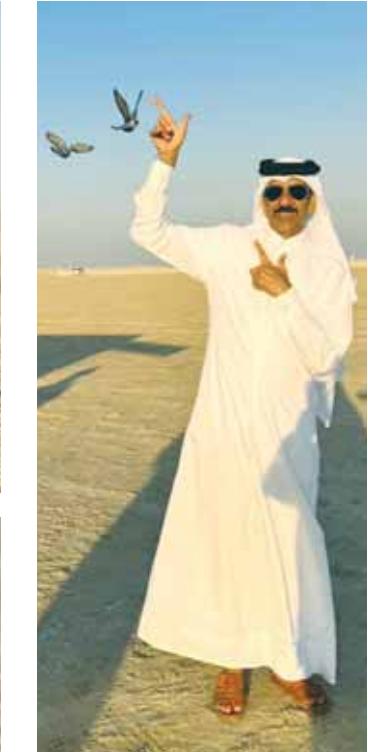
Al-Kaabi explained that it is difficult to say that the peregrine falcons are weak or poorly trained. During the competition, the falcons chased and attempted to trap the pigeons, but the pigeons remained faster thanks to their light weight and intense training. Racing pigeons are among the fastest birds, making the competition fierce, but luck did not favour the falcons.

He added that the Hadd Al Tahadi Championship will continue on Wednesday during the evening session with Group Six, calling on participants to arrive early so the

committee can begin its work in an organised manner to ensure better coordination of the championship.

Meanwhile, Abdullah Fakhro, owner of the racing pigeons, said that the pigeons' superiority for the second consecutive day in the Hadd Al Tahadi Championship within the Marmi Festival confirms that organised work and continuous training make the difference in such difficult competitions. He explained that the pigeons demonstrated a high ability to manoeuvre and accurately read the flight path of the peregrine falcons over the Seaside, enabling them to escape and return safely to their nests despite the falcons' powerful flight and rapid dives.

Fakhro added that the secret behind this success lies in his constant focus on diversifying and renewing his racing pigeons by introducing new types and young birds no older than one or two years, ages characterised by high vitality and better responsiveness to training and endurance. However, he stressed that he does not know in advance which competitor will be assigned a particular pi-



geon, which gives the competition greater credibility and makes the challenge fairer and more exciting.

The morning competitions of the Al Tala'a Championship were held, featuring falconers from Groups 21-25. Abdulhadi Jaber al-Buraidi from Group 21 and Hamdan Mohamed al-Nuaimi from Group 22 qualified for the next round, while the remaining groups failed to advance.

Rashdan bin Obaid al-Rashdan, vice chairman of the Al Tala'a Committee, said that Tuesday's Al Tala'a competitions took place under suitable and favourable hunting conditions. All participants were given ample opportunity and sufficient time for their falcons to ascend, but the falcons' performance was poor that day, particularly in Groups 23, 24, and 25. He noted that two falcons were disqualified because each repeatedly stopped mid-air and deviated from their intended path, indicating they could not see the houbara bustard. He added that the Al Tala'a Championship will continue on Wednesday for Groups 26-30, with the qualifiers concluding on

Thursday through the postponed group competitions (12, 13, 14, 15, 19, and 20). After that, a draw will be conducted among those quali-

fied for the semifinal round.

Besides, the registration for the International Da'w Championship concludes today (January 7). The championship includes three categories: Juniors (ages 14-18), to be held on January 9; Amateurs on January 10; and Professionals, whose competitions will take place on January 17.

## Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra to present 'Mozart y Mambo' featuring Sarah Willis

The Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra (QPO) is set to enchant audiences with its upcoming concert 'Mozart y Mambo' featuring Sarah Willis on the horn on January 9-10 at 7.30pm at the Qatar National Convention Centre.

A celebrated member of the Berlin Philharmonic, Willis brings her extraordinary talent and classical finesse to Doha, fusing traditional Mozart compositions with vibrant Cuban rhythms, a unique blend capturing the essence of both genres. This performance is expected to reflect Willis's widely acclaimed project that showcases Cuban music traditions while honouring European classical roots.

The event underlines the orchestra's commitment to diverse programming and cultural exchange, inviting patrons into a musical journey from Vienna's grand concert halls to Havana's lively streets. Such collaborations not only enhance the cultural tapestry of Qatar but also reinforce its position as a hub for world-class artistic endeavours, drawing in global talents and fostering an appreciation for varied musical genres among local audiences. The concert, conducted by Grammy-nominated maestro Alastair Willis, embarks on an exhilarating musical journey with the spirited overture to Mozart's Abduction from the Seraglio. Known for its vibrant orchestration and dynamic textures, this composition is a quintessential representation of Mozart's mastery in blending Western classical traditions with alluring Turkish influences.

The opening piece promises to captivate audiences with its rapid tempi and lively rhythms, setting an



invigorating atmosphere for the evening's performance. Under Willis's deft direction, each measure resonates with clarity and energy, immersing listeners in an experience that honours Mozart's genius while highlighting nuanced expressions within the score. This artful rendition reaffirms Willis's reputation as a conductor capable of transcending ordinary interpretations and delivering performances of remarkable depth and vitality. The orchestra's interpretation amplifies the lively Afro-Cuban rhythms and harmonies, creating an exciting dialogue between European classical paradigms and spontaneous Latin vibrancy. This dynamic programme not only showcases exceptional versatility but also celebrates an exhilarating cross-cultural convergence that resonates deeply with contemporary audiences seeking diverse musical experiences.

## Qatar to be guest of honour at New Delhi World Book Fair '26

Qatar is set to take part in the New Delhi World Book Fair 2026 (NDWBF 2026) as a guest of honour, held from January 10-18, 2026, in New Delhi, India.

The Ministry of Culture clarified that this participation is part of its commitment to projecting the Qatari presence on the global stage and showcasing the local thoughtful and literary genres to a diverse global audience, thereby demonstrating Qatar's standing as a crossroads for innovation, as well as cultural and civilisational diversity.

The participation is a continuation to build on the efforts the nation has undertaken in support of the Arab and global cultural arena, reinforcing co-operation with cultural institutions and publishing houses, in addition to emphasising the ministry's pivot towards promoting cultural exchange and openness to global experiences, which ultimately help forge communication bridges among innovators, publishers, and those interested in cultural affairs.

The ministry unveils a striking booth that showcases the essence

of traditional Qatari architecture to visitors, in terms of a bountiful and integrated cultural experience, offering them the opportunity to explore the Qatari culture, browse its releases, and familiarise themselves with the Qatari handcraft in an interactive experience that spotlights the time-honoured Qatari folklore legacy.

The Ministry of Culture is pleased to be a guest of honour at this fair and touts this selection that definitely reflects the cultural standing the nation earns on the global stage, said Director of the Doha International Book Fair, Jassim Ahmed al-Buainain.

He added that this selection confirms that culture is an effective bridge for cross-cultural engagement and fostering human dialogue, particularly on Indian soil, one of the most ancient human civilisations that helped nurture global thought and knowledge.

This participation overtly embodies the ministry's commitment to backing the publishing and knowledge movement, projecting the Qatari thoughtful production in the areas of literature, poetry,

thought, and arts, as well as boosting the presence of Arab culture in the global fora, al-Buainain underlined.

Al-Buainain elaborated that the Qatari booth is inspired from the nation's traditional architecture that embodies the national identity and showcases the connection between the past and present, with a style of melange of authenticity and the spirit of epochal creativity.

The booth is not merely limited to showcasing the genres, but offers a combined cultural experience that brings visitors closer to have a glimpse of the Qatari diverse cultural scene, in terms of literature, thought, and arts, to live heritage and traditional crafts, al-Buainain highlighted.

He further explained that this participation features a diverse cultural programme that includes thoughtful symposia and lectures, as well as the participation of the Qatari folk troupe featuring performances of the time-honoured Arda dance and other traditional folk arts, in a vivid scene that captures the spirit of Qatar's enduring cultural heritage.