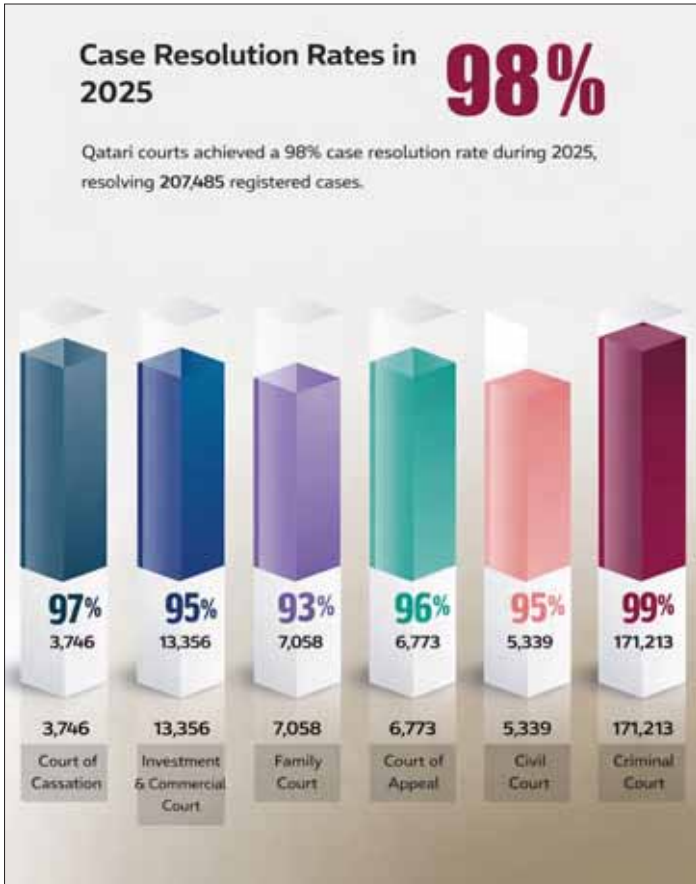




QATAR

Qatar courts achieved 98% case resolution last year



The courts in Qatar achieved a notable judicial milestone in 2025, recording a case resolution rate of 98%, according to data issued by the Supreme Judicial Council.

The council explained that the total number of cases registered during the year reached 207,485, the vast majority of which were adjudicated, indicating the efficiency of the judicial system and the speed of case resolution.

The Criminal Court recorded

the highest resolution rate at 99%, having handled 171,213 cases, followed by the Court of Cassation 7,058 cases with a rate of 97%. The Investment and Commercial Court had 13,356 cases, and the Family Courts had 6,773, with each achieving a resolution rate of 95%.

Meanwhile, the Court of Appeal, which saw 3,746 cases, recorded a resolution rate of 93%, and the Civil Court, which handled 5,339 cases, recorded a 92% resolution rate.

Singapore president receives credentials of Qatar's envoy

President of Singapore Tharman Shanmugaratnam received the credentials of ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Qatar to Singapore Abdulaziz bin Ahmed al-Malki al-Jehani. The ambassador conveyed greetings of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani to the Singapore president, as well as the Amir's wishes of good health and happiness to the Singaporean president, and continued progress and prosperity to the government and people of Singapore. President of Singapore conveyed his greetings to the Amir, wishing him good health and happiness, and Qatar continued progress and development. (QNA)



CRA launches public consultation on revised radio spectrum fees

The Communications Regulatory Authority (CRA) has launched a public consultation on the proposed update of fees for the use of radio spectrum in Qatar.

The consultation comes as part of the periodic review conducted by CRA of the national spectrum fee framework implemented under Ministerial Decision No 15 of 2015 following the approval by the Cabinet in the same year.

The authority said that this review reflects ongoing ad-

vancements in wireless services, the release of new bands following recent World Radio-communication Conferences (WRC-19 and WRC-23), and the increasing demand for radio frequencies. CRA has assessed both current and future uses of the spectrum to ensure that spectrum fees remain transparent, equitable, and consistent with international regulatory practices.

The proposed framework maintains CRA's existing formula-based methodology,

which ties fees to key parameters such as bandwidth, frequency band, coverage area, and duration of use, while incorporating targeted improvements.

These improvements include updated fee tables for terrestrial radio services, refined structures for satellite services that account for differences across system types, and the introduction of a new dedicated category for emerging direct-to-device satellite services.

The framework also introduces a simplified fee table for Wi-Fi,

wireless cameras, and temporary event-related uses, along with clearer administrative fees for spectrum-related services. Together, these refinements aim to promote efficient spectrum use, support innovation, and ensure that valuable frequency resources are managed sustainably.

CRA called all stakeholders to submit their comments and feedback by e-mail to spectrumaffairs@scra.gov.qa no later than Feb 19, 2026. The consultation document and guidelines can be found on CRA's website. (QNA)

MoPH stresses support for national pharma industry

The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) affirmed its commitment to supporting the national pharmaceutical industry in a way that meets local needs and meets the best international standards.

In this context, the MoPH organised an extensive introductory meeting on the national pharmaceutical industry, attended by representatives of local pharmaceutical manufacturers, private and semi-government hospitals.

The meeting aimed to strengthen and develop the national pharmaceutical in-

dustries and to enhance effective communication between local manufacturers and hospitals, hence contributing to greater medicines security.

Director of the Pharmacy and Drug Control Department at the MoPH Dr Aisha Ibrahim al-Ansari emphasised the ministry's commitment to supporting the national pharmaceutical industry, and showcasing the production capabilities of local pharmaceutical manufacturers, which is crucial for meeting local market needs while adhering to the highest international standards.

Dr al-Ansari said: "This meeting contributes to building a robust national pharmaceutical industry that meets the community needs, within the framework of implementing the national health strategy."

Representatives from the local manufacturers, Qatar Pharma, QLife Pharma, and Qatar Pharmaceutical Industries (QPI) presented an overview of their production facilities, modern production lines, achievements, and some international accreditations for their manufacturing plants. (QNA)

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 QAR 39.50 QAR 28.00 Indus Valley Extra Long Basmati Rice 5kg	 QAR 21.00 QAR 17.50 Downy Fabric Softener Dilute Asstd 3ltr x 1pc	 QAR 89.00 QAR 49.00 CeraVe Acne Foaming Cream Cleanser 150ml x 1pc

8 - 10 January

10 - 8 يناير

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7 - 13 January

13 - 7 يناير

<p>WOW!</p> <p>19.75 QR</p> <p>Per PC</p> <p>كنزة للرجال</p> <p>Men sweater</p>	<p>WOW!</p> <p>14.75 QR</p> <p>Per PC</p> <p>75CM X 140CM</p> <p>منشفة حمام</p> <p>Bath towel</p>	<p>WOW! VIP</p> <p>109.00 QR</p> <p>Also available</p> <p>70 CM 139.00 QAR 229.00 QAR</p> <p>81 CM 159.00 QAR 289.00 QAR</p> <p>55CM 4 WHEEL</p> <p>حقية سفر متنوعة</p> <p>VIP Z-plus spinner hard trolley assorted</p>	<p>WOW!</p> <p>899.00 QR</p> <p>55"</p> <p>سكايرت تلفاز</p> <p>Skyworth QLED UHDTV 55Q6800H</p>
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Al-Misnad meets Cyprus first lady and foreign minister



HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation Dr Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad met in Nicosia yesterday with First Lady of Cyprus Philippa Karsera-Christodoulides. During the meeting, they discussed relations between the countries and ways to support and strengthen them, particularly in the fields of education and cultural diplomacy. They also discussed support for unaccompanied children, in addition to several other topics of mutual interest. (QNA)



HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation Dr Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad met in Nicosia yesterday with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Cyprus Dr Constantinos Kombos. During the meeting, they discussed bilateral co-operation and ways to support and strengthen them, particularly in the humanitarian and development fields, in addition to discussing prospects for co-ordination on issues of common interest, especially on Syria, the Gaza Strip, and Ukraine. (QNA)

CMC discusses protection of rights in real estate sector



CMC members discussed diverse issues during the session.

The Central Municipal Council (CMC) on Tuesday reviewed proposals affecting public services, road safety, and real estate regulation during its 47th meeting of the seventh term, chaired by Mohamed bin Ali al-Athba.

The CMC approved the minutes of its previous meeting and examined incoming correspondence before discussing recommendations from the Services and Public Utilities Committee. These included proposals to develop public facilities, name

streets and areas across several districts, and assign an official name to a cemetery in the Nineteenth District.

Members also reviewed measures to regulate the distribution of waste collection containers and improve the scheduling of waste transport vehicles, as well as a member's proposal to allocate designated truck parking areas on main roads to ease traffic congestion and enhance road safety.

In a separate agenda item, the CMC reviewed plans presented by the Real Estate Regulatory

Authority (Aqarat) aimed at strengthening regulatory frameworks and policies to develop the real estate sector and protect the rights of all stakeholders.

Members' inquiries were addressed in the presence of Aqarat president Engineer Khalid Ahmed Saleh al-Obaidli, Legal Affairs director Jassim al-Dirham, and adviser to the president Fahd al-Hajri, highlighting efforts to promote transparency and co-ordination among relevant institutions.

HMC treats 2,000 older adults at Geriatric Dermatology Clinic

A total of 2,000 older adults received specialised care through the Geriatric Dermatology Clinic (GeriDerm) in 2024 and 2025, a unique collaborative service delivered in partnership with Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC)'s Rumailah Hospital and Department of Dermatology and Venereology.

The clinic provides an innovative model of integrated care, redefining how skin conditions in older adults are diagnosed, managed and understood within the broader context of ageing and chronic disease.

The GeriDerm Clinic brings together geriatric medicine and dermatology within a single, co-ordinated care pathway, recognising that skin changes in older adults are often key indicators of underlying systemic illness rather than isolated conditions. By combining expertise across specialities, the clinic enables precision diagnosis, timely intervention and holistic care for some of the most clinically complex patients in the health system.

Operating as a structured, weekly interdisciplinary clinic, GeriDerm delivers same-visit, joint clinical decision-making,



This approach is particularly critical for older adults living with frailty, multiple long-term conditions, and prescribed multiple medications, where delayed or misinterpreted diagnoses can lead to avoidable complications and hospital admissions.

In 2024 and 2025 alone, the clinic recorded 2,000 patient encounters, reflecting a sustained increase in referrals and a growing role as a tertiary-level service for complex geriatric dermatology care.

Notably, 2025 data demonstrated a higher proportion of female patients, consistent with the epidemiology of chronic inflammatory and autoimmune skin conditions in later life.

The most common conditions managed include autoimmune blistering diseases, pruritus, atopic dermatitis, and complex skin infections. The clinic has also become a national referral point for

severe, age-related inflammatory skin disease.

One of the GeriDerm Clinic's key roles is the early detection of rare and serious conditions. In older adults, these conditions are often missed or mistaken for normal ageing. Through careful assessment, unusual or long-lasting skin changes are investigated quickly, with timely biopsies and referrals to specialist teams. This helps reduce delays in diagnosis and allows treatment to begin earlier.

By using skin findings to identify wider health concerns, the clinic supports early care planning, safer medication use and well-co-ordinated follow-up. This approach has improved patient outcomes, helped older adults maintain their independence, and reduced unnecessary hospital visits, showing how integrated, person-centred care can make a real difference for ageing patients.

Inaugural Doha Legal Forum to explore emerging trends

The Ministry of Justice, in collaboration with the Qatar International Court and Dispute Resolution Centre (QICDRC), will host the inaugural Doha Legal Forum under the theme "Emerging Trends and Forward-Looking Insights" from January 26-27 at the Marsa Malaz Kempinski, The Pearl Island.

The event, under the patronage of HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani, aligns with Qatar National Vision 2030 and the Ministry of Justice Strategy 2025-2030.

The forum will welcome high-level participation from ministers of justice, legal scholars, policymakers, and experts from around the world, reflecting Qatar's growing standing as a centre for international legal dialogue and exchange.

The forum aims to highlight the key features of Qatar's legislative and regulatory environment and its role in attracting foreign investment, through focused discussions on investment-related legal frameworks,



emerging technologies, governance, and mechanisms for resolving investment disputes under Qatari law. It will also showcase the legislative and institutional measures adopted to address legal challenges that may affect investment, reinforcing confidence in the business environment and supporting sustainable development and economic transformation.

As a leading international platform, the Doha Legal Forum seeks to strengthen the rule of law, explore future directions in legislation and judicial practice, and highlight the legal frameworks governing key economic sectors and their role in creating a secure and attractive investment environment.

The forum will also provide opportunities to exchange expertise and discuss recent developments in both Qatari law and comparative legal systems.

As the largest legal event to be held in Qatar, the forum holds particular significance in clarifying the legislative and regulatory characteristics of vital and emerging sectors, enabling investors to better understand the applicable legal frameworks. It also promotes constructive dialogue between government entities, the private sector, and legal experts, contributing to improvements in the business environment and supporting public-private partnerships.

The forum aims to deliver practical recommendations that contribute to legislative development in line with international standards, support domestic and foreign investment, address legal challenges related to digital transformation and artificial intelligence, strengthen governance and transparency, and advance legal frameworks across the financial, corporate, and energy sectors. Together, these efforts seek to foster a stable and reliable business environment and reinforce Qatar's position as a regional and global legal hub supporting economic growth and sustainable development.



QNB main sponsor of 'Empower Ability' programme to support students with disabilities



QNB has reaffirmed its commitment to social inclusion and youth empowerment by serving as the main sponsor of the 'Empower Ability' programme, organised by the Qatar Career Development Centre (QCDC), founded by Qatar Foundation.

As part of the initiative, QCDC delivered a series of intensive workshops and practical training sessions tailored for students with disabilities, equipping them with essential skills to prepare them for participation in National Day



celebrations and volunteering opportunities across Qatar.

The programme focused on enhancing participants' confidence, workplace readiness, and community engagement, while promoting equal opportunities and inclusion within society.

Through interactive sessions and real-life training scenarios, students were empowered to contribute meaningfully to national events and volunteer initiatives.

QNB's sponsorship reflects

the group's ongoing commitment to corporate social responsibility and its dedication to supporting initiatives that foster inclusivity, personal development, and sustainable community impact, in line with Qatar National Vision 2030.

By partnering with QCDC on the 'Empower Ability' programme, QNB continues to play an active role in enabling individuals with disabilities to unlock their potential and participate fully in social activities.

Undersecretary of Ministry of Interior meets Sudanese ambassador

HE the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior Abdullah bin Khalaf bin Hattab al-Kaabi met with Sudan's ambassador to Qatar Badreddine Abdullah Mohammed Ahmed. During the meeting, they discussed several topics of mutual interest, as well as co-operation in security fields and ways to support and enhance them. (QNA)



GCC meeting on documents and studies convenes in Doha

The 38th meeting of the General Secretariat for Centers of Documents and Studies of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) countries convened in Doha yesterday, with the participation of representatives of national documentation and archive authorities and centres in the member states.

Secretary-General of the National Archives of Qatar Dr Ahmed Abdullah al-Buainain led Qatar's delegation at the meeting. He praised the vital role of the General Secretariat in supporting the efforts of member states to protect and preserve documentary heritage for future generations.

He said that this meeting embodies the depth of the fraternal ties that unite the GCC countries, and reflects the shared commitment to strengthening co-operation and integration in the fields of

documentary and archival work, given its pivotal role in preserving national and Gulf memory and safeguarding the historical legacy for future generations.

GCC Deputy Secretary-General of the Centers of Documents and Studies Dr Ali bin Ibrahim al-Marri stressed the importance of the meeting and its role in consolidating joint Gulf documentary work and enhancing the status of archives as a living memory for societies. The meeting concluded by emphasising the importance of supporting digital initiatives in the areas of archiving and document preservation, intensifying training programmes and exchanging experiences between national centres, as well as promoting awareness of the shared Gulf memory through media and cultural platforms. (QNA)

Minister of state for foreign affairs receives copies of credentials of Haiti and Bulgaria ambassadors



HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi received yesterday copies of the credentials of ambassador of Haiti Pierre-Richard Cajuste and ambassador of Bulgaria Dimitar Mihaylov. HE al-Muraikhi wished both ambassadors success in fulfilling their duties and affirmed the state's readiness to provide all necessary support to advance bilateral relations between Qatar and their respective countries to achieve closer co-operation in various fields. **(QNA)**



MoPH warns against using some baby formula products

The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) warned consumers of using specific Nestle baby formula milk products, due to suspicion of contamination with cereulide toxin. The ministry, in a post on X yesterday, warned consumers who purchased specific sets of those products to return them to retail outlets or to dispose of them to ensure the safety of themselves and their children. The ministry's post included a table with a list of the specific products suspected of being contaminated with the toxin. The ministry, represented by the Food Safety Department,

added that it has taken the necessary measures to urgently withdraw all related or suspected products from the local market and to communicate with various sales outlets to ensure that the product withdrawal is implemented without delay. The ministry confirmed that there were no cases reported so far on these products. It added that lab tests are constantly carried out to ensure the safety of the products, in addition to communication with the manufacturer. The ministry noted that it will provide any updates as soon as they are available. **(QNA)**

Tamim bin Hamad Chair launched at Granada university

From Page 1

This collaboration reflects the deep historical and cultural ties connecting the Arab world and Andalusia, where Arabs and Muslims played a distinguished role in human civilisation. It will also broaden the horizons of research and knowledge exchange in the fields of language and culture."

Professor of Islamic Studies and History of Religion at HBKU's College of Islamic Studies, Dr Ibrahim Zein, said: "We are pleased to launch the Tamim bin Hamad Chair for Arabic Language and Andalusian Culture, which adds to our college's record of distinguished cultural and knowledge initiatives. The Chair not only contributes to advancing Arabic language teaching, but also opens new horizons for intellectual dialogue between the Arab World and Europe."

Rector of the University of Granada Dr Pedro Mercado said: "The establishment of the Tamim bin Hamad Chair marks a significant academic achievement for our university, and a great opportunity to deepen our relations with Qatar. It also highlights the historic role of Granada as a centre for learning and culture and contributes to promoting the values of dialogue and co-operation among civilisations."

Professor Jose Miguel Puerta Vilchez, Arabist and Professor of Art History at the University of Granada, called the Chair "a great honour for the University of Granada and the entire Spanish community", emphasising it represents "an exceptional opportunity to strengthen academic and cultural relations between Qatari and Spanish scholars and students." **(QNA)**

Dukhan Bank unveils FIFA World Cup campaign in collaboration with Visa

Dukhan Bank has announced the launch of its FIFA World Cup 2026 campaign, in collaboration with Visa, offering eligible Dukhan Bank Visa credit cardholders the opportunity to enter a draw for a premium hospitality experience at one of the world's most anticipated sporting events. The campaign is open to Dukhan Bank Visa credit cardholders and is designed to elevate everyday card usage by linking it to a global sporting moment. Eligible customers who meet the campaign requirements will be entered into a draw to win one of two exclusive FIFA World Cup 2026 experiences. Each winner will receive an experience for themselves and one guest, including match tickets, accommodation, travel, curated hospitality, and more. The campaign will conclude on February 25, 2026, with the draw scheduled to take place on March 4, 2026, in coordination with the

relevant authorities. Full details, eligibility criteria, and terms and conditions are available on Dukhan Bank's official channels. Talal Ahmed al-Khaja, Chief Marketing and Communications officer at Dukhan Bank, said: "This campaign reflects our approach to marketing as a value-driven extension of the customer experience. By partnering with Visa on a global platform like the FIFA World Cup, we are creating meaningful engagement that connects our customers to moments that matter, while reinforcing Dukhan Bank's modern, customer-focused brand positioning." Through the collaboration, Dukhan Bank continues to strengthen its card proposition, combining global partnerships with relevant lifestyle experiences, in line with its commitment to delivering innovative, Shariah-compliant financial solutions.



Xiaomi Experience Store opens at Alif Store in Dafna Corniche

The Xiaomi Experience Store, in collaboration with Alif Store and Intertec, was officially inaugurated at Alif Store, Dafna Corniche. The event commenced with the presence of Alif Store CEO Ramzi Rizek and Intertec Group CFO George Thomas, along with senior representatives and the teams from Xiaomi, Intertec and Alif store.

Other guests and customers also joined the celebration, marking an important milestone in Xiaomi's retail expansion in Qatar. The opening ceremony highlighted the shared vision of Xiaomi, Alif Store, and Intertec to deliver a comprehensive Xiaomi Experience, offering customers hands-on access to the brand's latest smartphones, smart devices, and ecosystem products in a modern retail environment.



The store also features an extensive AIoT portfolio, including smart home appliances, televisions, and e-scooters, all thoughtfully displayed to enable

an immersive and interactive customer experience. Following the inauguration, guests explored the store through interactive product demonstrations and engagements with brand specialists. The presence of influencers added to the vibrancy of the event, as live content was created and shared across digital platforms.

To further enhance the celebration, exclusive gifts were presented to the first set of customers, creating an energetic and festive atmosphere throughout the store. The ceremony concluded with customer interactions, media engagement, and networking among partners and guests. The Xiaomi Experience Store at Alif Store - Dafna Corniche is now open, offering customers a complete brand experience supported by expert guidance and after-sales service.

Doha Marathon by Ooredoo 2026 set for record turnout

By Shaima Sherif
Doha

The Doha Marathon by Ooredoo returns on January 16 with more than 20,000 runners expected, as organisers promise a bigger, more inclusive event celebrating sport, community and Doha's growing global appeal. The marathon this year is preparing to welcome its largest field yet, with organisers confirming a record number of participants, new inclusive initiatives and an expanded programme designed to turn race week into a city-wide celebration.

Speaking at a press conference yesterday at Fairmont Hotel, Ooredoo Qatar Public Relations director Sabah Rabiah al-Kuwari said: "This will be the largest Doha Marathon to date. We anticipate about 20,000 competitors, representing over 160 nationalities, including roughly 2,200 international runners who will come to Doha specifically for the race."

The marathon route begins and ends at Hotel Park, offering runners scenic views of Doha's iconic Corniche skyline and waterfront. Participants will have access to hydration stations every 3km, on-site medical coverage, volunteer support, and comprehensive safety protocols throughout the course.

According to the organisers, the Doha Marathon by Ooredoo 2026 features five race categories, offering opportunities for runners of all ages and abilities across the



Olympic champion Mutaz Barshim and other officials at the Ooredoo press conference yesterday. **PICTURE:** Thajudheen

5km, 10km, 21km, and 42km distances. The event is becoming more popular both domestically and abroad, as evidenced by about 35% increase in participation over the previous year.

The Blue Race for children with autism will take place on January 15 and is one of the year's most significant additions. The race, held in collaboration with the Autism Parents Platform, aims to ensure that children with autism and their families can fully participate in the marathon experience.

Al-Kuwari said: "We wanted to create a space where our children with autism and their parents can feel comfortable and celebrated as part of the Doha Marathon. A major component of what this event stands for is inclusion."

Cash prizes totalling QR1mn will be awarded across a number of categories, the organisers said, giving participants a competitive edge in addition to a sense of community. The runner experience begins well before race day. From January 13-16, the Marathon Vil-

lage at Hotel Park will serve as the central hub for participants and visitors.

Al-Kuwari stated: "It's not just about the race. We want people to come, take part in the activities, explore Doha, and be a part of something unique."

Olympic champion Mutaz Barshim echoed this view, highlighting the personal and social side of the marathon, saying: "What I look forward to most is running alongside my family and friends. Many of my friends bring their children, especially for the kids' races, and it becomes a shared experience."

Barshim added that the atmosphere around the marathon is what truly sets it apart: "It's not just a race day. It feels like a festival, with activities and energy all around, and that's what excites me."

While ambitions to one day join the ranks of the world's major marathons remain a long-term goal, organisers say the focus for now is on delivering a memorable, safe and inclusive event.

Qatar Photography Center hosts 'City Speaks' exhibition tomorrow

The Qatar Photography Center, a Ministry of Culture-affiliate, announced that it will host the GPU Photography Exhibition 'City Speaks' in its headquarters in the Katara Cultural Village Foundation on Friday, in co-operation with the Global Photographic Union (GPU). The exhibition comes in celebration of the Qatar Photography Center being accredited as an official GPU centre and as the union's regional representative. This development is a high-level international recognition of the centre's role in supporting photography and one that reinforces the State of Qatar's position as a

leading destination for creatives and photographers globally. Director of the Qatar Photography Center Jassim Ahmed al-Buainain said that the exhibition offers a unique visual experience consisting of 96 photographs taken in different cities around the world, curated into 48 paired panels, with the aim of revealing hidden connections among geographically distant urban experiences. Al-Buainain continued by saying that the exhibition seeks to create a visual dialogue between two different locations in each panel, where scenes overlap and intersect, illuminating one another

in unexpected ways. Through this harmonious arrangement, the exhibition explores the concept of global interconnectedness, presenting parallel rhythms of daily life and architectural forms that echo across places separated by thousands of kilometres, he added. The Director of the Qatar Photography Center said that the 'City Speaks' is not merely a display of separate photos, but an invitation to view the world as an interconnected whole, in which the voice of each city contributes to telling a broader human and geographical story. **(QNA)**

Open Fire Food Festival headed to QIFF 2026

The Open Fire Food Festival is set to bring a bold celebration of outdoor cooking and flame-grilled flavours on January 16-17 at the Stadium 974 precinct as part of the Qatar International Food Festival's 15th edition. The two-day activation, curated and presented by Steve Harvey, will bring together award-winning pitmasters and outdoor chefs from the US. It will

showcase live-fire cooking, signature flame dishes, and interactive culinary demonstrations within a lively, family-friendly setting.

Alongside Steve Harvey, the Open Fire renowned chefs are Melissa Cookston, Moe Cason, and Bob Trudnak, exploring themes around cooking, barbecuing, and their journeys within the world of open-fire cuisine.





UN rights chief accuses Israel of West Bank ‘apartheid’

AFP
Geneva

The UN yesterday said decades-long discrimination and segregation of Palestinians by Israel in the West Bank were intensifying, and called on the country to end its “apartheid system”.

In a new report, slammed by Israel, the UN rights office said “systematic discrimination” against Palestinians across the occupied Palestinian territories had “drastically deteriorated” in recent years.

“There is a systematic asphyxiation of the rights of Palestinians in the West Bank,” UN rights chief Volker Turk said in a statement.

“Whether accessing water, school, rushing to hospital, visiting family or friends, or harvesting olives – every aspect of life for Palestinians in the West Bank is controlled and curtailed by Israel’s discriminatory laws, policies and practices,” he added.

“This is a particularly severe form of racial discrimination and segregation, that resembles the kind of apartheid system we have seen before.”

A number of independent experts affiliated with the UN have described the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories as “apartheid” but this marks the first time a UN rights chief has applied the term.

Israel’s diplomatic mission to the UN in Geneva slammed the report.

The report said the Israeli authorities “treat Israeli settlers and

Palestinians residing in the West Bank under two distinct bodies of law and policies, resulting in unequal treatment on a range of critical issues”.

“Palestinians continue to be subjected to large-scale confiscation of land and deprivation of access to resources,” it added.

This had led to “dispossessing them of their lands and homes, alongside other forms of systemic discrimination, including criminal prosecution in military courts during which their due process and fair trial rights are systematically violated”.

Turk demanded yesterday that Israel “repeal all laws, policies and practices that perpetuate systemic discrimination against Palestinians based on race, religion or ethnic origin”.

The discrimination was compounded by continuing and escalating settler violence, in many cases “with the acquiescence, support and participation of Israel’s security forces”, the rights office said.

More than 500,000 Israelis currently live in settlements in the West Bank, occupied since 1967 and home to around 3mn Palestinians.

Violence has risen in recent years, surging especially since Hamas’s October 2023 storming of Israel.

Since the start of the war, Israeli troops and settlers have killed more than 1,000 Palestinians in the West Bank, including many fighters as well as dozens of civilians, according to an AFP tally based on figures from the Palestinian health ministry.

Since the Gaza war began, Israeli authorities had also “further expanded the use of unlawful force, arbitrary detention and torture”, the report said.

Increased “repression of civil society and undue restrictions on media freedoms (and) severe movement restrictions” had also characterised “an unprecedented deterioration of the human rights situation” in the West Bank, it said.

There had also been rapid expansions of settlements, considered illegal under international law, even as unlawful killings of Palestinians were taking place “with almost complete impunity”, the report warned.

Of the more than 1,500 killings of Palestinians that took place between the start of 2017 and September 30 last year, Israeli authorities had opened just 112 investigations, resulting in only one conviction, it pointed out.

The report said it had found “reasonable grounds to believe that this separation, segregation, and subordination is intended to be permanent... to maintain oppression and domination of Palestinians”.

This, it stressed, amounts to a violation of an international anti-racism convention, “which prohibits racial segregation and apartheid”.

The UN rights office yesterday urged Israel to end its “unlawful presence in the occupied Palestinian territory, including by dismantling all settlements and evacuating all settlers, and to respect the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination”.

‘Dire’ financial crisis forces UNRWA to fire 571 Gazan staff

AFP
Geneva

The UN’s beleaguered agency for Palestinian refugees said yesterday that a “dire” financial crisis had this week forced it to fire hundreds of Gazan staff who had left the territory.

“On Tuesday, 571 local UNRWA staff, outside Gaza, were informed that they were being separated from the agency with immediate effect,” a spokesperson said in an e-mail.

For more than seven decades, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) has provided aid and assistance to Palestinian refugees across Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria.

But the agency has seen the voluntary contributions it relies on dwindle as it has become the focus of increasingly harsh Israeli criticism and attacks, causing what the spokesperson called an “unprecedented financial crisis”.

While the work UNRWA was mandated to do cost around \$880mn in 2025, the agency received only around \$570mn in contributions, the spokesperson said.

“As things stand, we expect a substantial shortfall in 2026,” they added.

All of the staff affected by this week’s announcement had originally worked in the Gaza Strip,



File photo shows a Palestinian woman walk past a damaged wall bearing the UNRWA logo at a camp for internally displaced people in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip.

but had managed to leave early in the war sparked by Hamas’ storming of Israel in October 2023.

Most had been unable to carry out their duties remotely since leaving Gaza, but had remained on UNRWA’s payroll until last March, when they were placed on exceptional unpaid leave, the spokesperson said.

“The affected staff have been without pay for over 10 months, and it is impossible to foresee when or if they could resume their duties due to circumstances entirely beyond UNRWA’s control,” the spokesperson said.

“Recognising that UNRWA’s financial situation remains dire, the agency took a decision which at least allows them to access

financial resources rapidly, including separation indemnities.”

The spokesperson stressed that UNRWA, which has seen more than 300 of its employees killed in Gaza since the start of the war, still had around 12,000 staff working inside the Palestinian territory.

Israel has barred UNRWA from operating on its soil, accusing the agency of providing cover for Hamas fighters, and claiming that some of the agency’s employees took part in the storming of Israel.

A series of investigations found some “neutrality-related issues” at UNRWA, but stressed that Israel had not provided conclusive evidence for its headline allegation.

Clashes in Syria’s Aleppo deepen

Reuters
Aleppo

Fierce fighting in Syria’s northern city of Aleppo between government forces and Kurdish fighters killed at least four people yesterday and drove thousands of civilians from their homes, with Washington reported to be mediating a de-escalation.

The violence, and statements trading blame over who started it, signalled that a stalemate between Damascus and Kurdish authorities that have resisted integrating into the central government was deepening and growing deadlier. Clashes broke out

on Tuesday, when at least six people were killed, including two women and a child, in an exchange of shelling between Syrian government troops and the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

After relative calm overnight, shelling resumed yesterday and intensified in the afternoon, Reuters reporters in the city said. Aleppo’s health directorate said a further four people were killed and more than two dozen wounded.

By evening, fighting had subsided, the Reuters reporters said. Ilham Ahmed, who heads the foreign affairs department of the Kurdish administration, told Reuters that international mediation efforts were underway to de-escalate. A source familiar with the matter told Reuters the US was mediating.

CAR opposition leader condemns election ‘fraud’

AFP
Bangui

Opposition leader Anicet-George Dologuele yesterday said official election results in the Central African Republic (CAR) showing Faustin-Archange Touadera had won a third term as president were down to “massive fraud”.

Touadera, 68, who had been widely expected to win, was re-elected with more than 76% of the vote in the December 28 ballot, according to provisional results released by the National

Election Authority (ANE) on Tuesday. Dologuele, his main opponent, came second with 15%. “I’m speaking out to refuse a lie,” Dologuele told journalists in the capital Bangui. “I’m speaking out not out of political calculation but out of a duty towards the Central African people,” he added. He said the declared results “do not reflect the people’s vote, but are the product of massive, organised, methodical fraud, covered up by the ANE itself”.

He accused the ANE of having “failed in its mission” and “deliberately given up its in-

dependence by serving a candidate”. Dologuele, who is also a former prime minister, said he was awaiting final results from the constitutional council – expected later this month – and that he did not rule out taking action to lodge an appeal.

Turnout was more than 52% in the polls, which also included national, municipal and local elections. Touadera had presented himself as the stability candidate in an impoverished country that has endured a succession of civil wars, coups and authoritarian governments since gaining independence from France in 1960.

Somalis protest against Israel



Somali clerics gather during a demonstration against what they describe as Israel’s interference in Somalia’s sovereignty and its recognition of the self-declared Somaliland as an independent and sovereign state, in Hodan district, Mogadishu, yesterday.

ANNOUNCEMENT

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from
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to
SHAIK MUNAWAR

Any objection, please contact
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NATIONALITY AFFAIRS
within 15 days from the publication of this notice.

Birth of rare gorilla twins recorded in Congo park

Reuters
Kinshasa

A mountain gorilla has given birth to twins in war-ravaged eastern Congo, a national park said yesterday, in what it described as “a major event” for the endangered subspecies.

The birth of the two male gorillas to a mother named Mafuko was discovered on January 3 and the twins “appeared to be in healthy condition at the time of the observation”, Virunga National Park said in a statement. Spanning more than 3,000 square miles, Africa’s oldest national park is home to many of the world’s last mountain gorillas, yet much of the park is under rebel control and fighting has accelerated forest loss.

Caring for twins can be challenging, “particularly during the early months

when infants are entirely dependent on their mother for care and transport”, the park’s statement said. The newborns are being closely monitored to help ensure their survival, it said. Pictures released by the park’s press service showed the 22-year-old Mafuko holding the two baby gorillas, sitting on the ground and partly obscured by branches with green leaves. Mafuko was born into the Kabirizi family but joined the Bageni family six years after her mother was killed by “armed individuals” in 2007, the park’s statement said.

“The birth of these twins represents a major event for the dynamics of the Bageni family and for ongoing conservation efforts to support the continued growth of the endangered mountain gorilla population within Virunga National Park,” the statement said. In total, Mafuko has now had seven offspring, including a set of twins which died a week after being born in 2016.



Mafuko, a female mountain gorilla from the Bageni family holds her newly born twins at the Virunga National Park, Democratic Republic of Congo, in this undated handout picture released yesterday.

US federal agent fatally shoots driver in Minneapolis

Reuters
Minneapolis

A US immigration agent shot and killed a driver in Minneapolis yesterday amid an immigration enforcement surge, according to local and federal officials, the latest violent incident

during President Donald Trump's nationwide crackdown on migrants.

The shooting drew protesters into the streets near the scene, some of whom were met by heavily armed federal agents wearing gas masks who fired chemical munitions at the demonstrators.

Tricia McLaughlin, a spokes-

woman for the department of homeland security said in a post on X that the immigration and customs enforcement officer began firing after a "violent rioter" attempted to run over ICE officers.

"The alleged perpetrator was hit and is deceased," she wrote. "The ICE officers who were hurt are expected to make full recoveries."

Reuters could not immediately confirm the details of how the incident unfolded.

Minneapolis mayor Jacob Frey blamed the Trump administration in a post on X for heightening tensions around immigration enforcement. "The presence of federal immigration enforcement agents is causing chaos in our city," Frey,

a Democrat, said on X. "We're demanding ICE to leave the city immediately. We stand rock solid with our immigrant and refugee communities."

Trump, a Republican, has deployed federal immigration agents to Democratic-led cities across the US through his first year in office, leading to backlash from residents.

In recent weeks, agents have been sent to Minneapolis following allegations of fraud involving Somali immigrants.

A dark-coloured SUV with a bullet hole through its windshield and blood splattered across the headrest was seen rammed into a pole on the snowy street where the shooting took place.

Trump plots to buy Greenland as Nato ally Denmark seethes

AFP
Washington, US

US President Donald Trump is considering making an offer to buy Greenland, the White House said yesterday, despite the island's people and controlling power Denmark making clear they are not interested.

Trump has repeatedly refused to rule out force to seize the strategic Arctic island, prompting shock and anger from Denmark and other longstanding European allies of the US. After a request from Copenhagen, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said he would soon hold discussions with Danish representatives. "I'll be meeting with them next week. We'll have those conversations with them then," Rubio told reporters.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said that Trump and his national security team have "actively discussed" the option of buying Greenland.

"His team is currently talking about what a potential purchase would look like," she told reporters.

Leavitt reiterated that Trump believed it was in the US interest to acquire sparsely populated Greenland, whose size is around that of the largest US state of Alaska. "He views it

in the best interest of the US to deter Russian and Chinese aggression in the Arctic region. And so that's why his team is currently talking about what a potential purchase would look like," Leavitt said.

Neither Leavitt nor Rubio ruled out the use of force. But Leavitt said, "The president's first option, always, has been diplomacy."

House Speaker Mike Johnson, speaking as Rubio and Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth briefed lawmakers, also downplayed the potential for a US attack.

"I don't think anybody's talking about using military force in Greenland. They're looking at diplomatic channels," Johnson said.

Johnson, however, has acknowledged he had no prior notice when Trump on Saturday ordered a deadly attack on Venezuela, in which US forces removed the president, Nicolas Maduro.

The at least tactical success of the operation has appeared to embolden Trump, who has since mused publicly about US intervention in Greenland, Cuba, Mexico and Colombia. Senator Thom Tillis, a Republican who is retiring, criticised Trump's threats in a joint statement with Democrat Jeanne Shaheen, the top Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. "When Denmark and Greenland make it clear

that Greenland is not for sale, the US must honour its treaty obligations and respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Denmark," they said in a joint statement.

"We must stay focused on the real threats before us and work with our allies, not against them, to advance our shared security"

Greenland Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen has repeatedly insisted that the island is not for sale and that only its 57,000 people should decide its future.

Denmark holds sovereignty over Greenland, which has semi-autonomous status. Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen warned Monday: "If the US decides to military attack another Nato country, then everything would stop - that includes Nato and therefore post-World War II security."

Denmark is a founding member of Nato and has been a steadfast US ally, including controversially sending troops to support the 2003 US invasion of Iraq.

Trump, in sharp contrast to previous US presidents, has criticised Nato, seeing it not as an instrument of US power but as smaller countries freeloading off US security.

"We will always be there for Nato, even if they won't be there for us," Trump wrote yesterday on his Truth Social platform.



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio speaks to the media on the day of a briefing for the House of Representatives on the situation in Venezuela, on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, US, yesterday.

Russia-linked oil tanker seized by US navy

AFP
Washington, US

The US yesterday seized a Russian-linked oil tanker in the North Atlantic after pursuing it from off the coast of Venezuela, in an operation condemned by Moscow.

Washington says the tanker is part of a shadow fleet that carries oil for Venezuela, Russia and Iran in violation of US sanctions, and seized it despite the ship being escorted by the Russian navy.

The vessel had thwarted an earlier attempt to board it last month near oil-rich Venezuela, where a US raid on Saturday toppled the country's president,

Nicolas Maduro, a close ally of Moscow.

"The vessel was seized in the North Atlantic pursuant to a warrant issued by a US federal court," US European Command, which oversees American forces in the region, said in a statement on X.

As Washington adopts a more assertive foreign policy under President Donald Trump, Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth posted that the US blockade on Venezuelan oil was in full effect "anywhere in the world". But Russia's transport ministry criticised the seizure, saying "freedom of navigation applies in waters on the high seas". Its foreign ministry urged Washington to al-

low the swift return of Russian crew members from the ship, but White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told journalists that they may be taken to the US for prosecution.

The vessel, formerly known as the Bella-1, in recent weeks switched its registration to Russia, changed its name to the Marinera and the tanker's crew reportedly painted a Russian flag on the tanker.

Leavitt said Washington deemed the ship to be stateless.

The US military also announced a second sanctioned tanker had been seized in the Caribbean Sea, bringing the total number of ships Washington has taken control of since last month to four.

Canada premier to visit China from Jan 13

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney will visit China from January 13-17, his office announced yesterday, signalling a thaw in relations that have been strained for years. The trip, the first to China by a Canadian leader since 2017, aims to "strengthen co-operation in the areas of trade, energy, agriculture and international security", a Carney spokeswoman said. The first sign of improving ties came in late October when Chinese leader Xi Jinping and Carney met in South Korea on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) summit. Xi invited Carney to visit China following their meeting, which the Canadian premier had called a "turning point" in the strained relationship. The last Canadian leader to visit China was Justin Trudeau, in December 2017. Ties fell into a deep freeze in 2018 after the arrest of a senior Chinese telecom executive on a US warrant in Vancouver and China's retaliatory detention of two Canadians on espionage charges.

Bolsonaro admitted to hospital



Supporters of former Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro protest against his arrest in front of the Federal Police headquarters in Brasilia yesterday. Bolsonaro was admitted to a hospital in Brasilia yesterday, after being transferred from prison, a day after he fell in his cell and hit his head.

\$10bn assistance funds to five US states frozen

Reuters
Washington

US President Donald Trump's administration is freezing more than \$10bn in federal childcare and family assistance funds to California, Colorado, Illinois, Minnesota and New York, the department of health and human services (HHS) said, citing what it called concerns about fraud and misuse.

The Trump administration has threatened federal funding cuts to organisations and states over a number of issues since taking office - ranging from alleged fraud in programmes in states governed by Democrats to diversity initiatives.

On Tuesday, HHS said it notified the five states, all with Democratic governors, that its

freeze applied to the "Child Care and Development Fund" worth \$2.4bn, the "Temporary Assistance for Needy Families" worth \$7.35bn, and the "Social Services Block Grant" worth \$869mn.

In a statement, the department said the states' access to those funds would be restricted pending further review.

Democrats condemned the plan.

"Our children should not be political pawns in a fight that Donald Trump seems to have with blue state (Democratic states) governors," New York governor Kathy Hochul said, adding the step was "vindictive" and "cruel." Illinois governor JB Pritzker also called the step "wrong and cruel."

California governor Gavin Newsom's office said that since taking office, Newsom has blocked over \$125bn in fraud.

US advises more protein, less sugar in new dietary guidelines

Reuters
Washington

The administration of US President Donald Trump yesterday announced a new slate of dietary guidelines that recommends Americans eat more protein and less sugar than previously advised and that consumers avoid highly processed foods to achieve a healthy diet.

The guidelines are the latest product of the Trump administration's "Make America Healthy Again" agenda, named for the social movement that backs Health Secretary Robert F Kennedy Jr.

He and other officials, includ-

ing Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins, have implemented MAHA policy goals such as curbing childhood vaccines and restricting access to unhealthy foods for people receiving food stamps.

Kennedy and Rollins had pledged to simplify the guidelines and remove what they described as the undue influence of food companies over their recommendations.

The guidelines are published every five years by the department of health and human services and the department of agriculture.

The new guidelines implement some changes promised by Kennedy, like strongly dissuading the consumption of highly

processed foods and added sugar. Kennedy and his MAHA supporters have pointed to high consumption of sugar and processed foods in the American diet as contributors to rising rates of chronic disease.

"Today, our government declares war on added sugar," Kennedy said at a White House press briefing.

Recommendations for prioritising fruits, vegetables and whole grains and capping intake of saturated fat at 10% of daily calories, remain the same. Kennedy said adherence to the guidelines would lower the cost of healthcare. Healthcare affordability is a key issue for Republi-

cans heading into the 2026 mid-term elections.

"The new guidelines recognise that whole nutrient-dense food is the most effective path to better health and lower healthcare costs," Kennedy said.

The administration's MAHA Commission, led by Kennedy, said in a September strategy report that the USDA and HHS plan to reform the process for developing future dietary guidelines, including the structure and members of its advisory committee, which makes recommendations on the contents.

Some advocacy groups have criticised the advisory committee for being overly influenced by the food industry. The committee

that advised on this year's dietary guidelines was appointed by the administration of president Joe Biden.

The dietary guidelines form the basis of federal nutrition programmes for school meals consumed by nearly 30mn children, and inform medical advice and national disease prevention efforts.

This iteration recommends adults eat 1.2-1.6 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight per day, up from the prior recommended daily consumption of 0.8gm.

It also encourages the consumption of full-fat dairy, a shift from decades-old guidance to opt for lower-fat dairy products to miti-

gate the health risks of high-fat diets. Dairy groups have argued that farmers are disadvantaged by policy that advises against consumption of full-fat dairy products.

A White House official said the recommendations reflect sound science and will support better public health outcomes as they are implemented.

"The American Medical Association applauds the administration's new dietary guidelines for spotlighting the highly processed foods, sugar-sweetened beverages, and excess sodium that fuel heart disease, diabetes, obesity, and other chronic illnesses," Bobby Mukkamala, the group's president, said in a statement.



S Korea's Lee urges Xi to help curb Pyongyang's nukes

AFP
Shanghai

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung yesterday said he had urged Chinese leader Xi Jinping to help him curb Pyongyang's nuclear programme and suggested a freeze in its development of weapons of mass destruction was "feasible" with the right conditions.

Lee's visit to China this week was the first by a South Korean leader in six years, with Seoul seeking a broad reset in relations with its largest trading partner as well as help with the recalcitrant North. He met with Xi in Beijing on Monday - a day after the nuclear-armed North fired two ballistic missiles into the Sea of Japan. Speaking to journalists in Shanghai as he wrapped up the visit, he said he had urged Beijing's

help in bringing Pyongyang back to the negotiating table. He said he told Xi he would "like China to play a mediating role on issues related to the Korean Peninsula, including North Korea's nuclear programme". "All our channels are completely blocked," he said. "We hope China can serve as a mediator - a mediator for peace," he added. The Chinese leader in response

urged Seoul to show "patience" with Pyongyang given how frayed ties between the two Koreas have become, Lee added. "And they're right. For quite a long period, we carried out military actions that North Korea would have perceived as threatening," Lee said. China's foreign ministry did not respond specifically to Lee's Shanghai comments when asked yesterday.

"Maintaining peace and stability on the (Korean) Peninsula is in the common interests of all parties. China will continue to play a constructive role towards this in its own way," spokeswoman Mao Ning told a regular press briefing. Lee yesterday also laid out a plan whereby Pyongyang would freeze its nuclear programme in exchange for "compensation". "Just stopping at the current level - no additional production

of nuclear weapons, no transfer of nuclear materials abroad, and no further development of ICBMs (Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles) - would already be a gain," he said. "In the long term, we must not give up the goal of a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula," he added. North Korea has repeatedly declared itself an "irreversible" nuclear state and relations between the two Koreas have fallen to their worst levels in years.

Japan flays China's dual-use export ban as rare earths curbs loom

Reuters
Tokyo

Japan yesterday called China's ban on dual-use exports for its military "absolutely unacceptable", amid a looming threat of broader curbs on vital rare earths in an escalating dispute between Asia's top two economies. Dual-use items are goods, software or technologies that have both civilian and military applications, including certain critical minerals essential for making drones and chips.

Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi touched off the dispute late last year by saying a Chinese attack on democratically-governed Taiwan could be deemed an existential threat to Japan. China regards Taiwan as part of its territory, a claim the island rejects.

Beijing has demanded she retract the remarks, which she has not done, prompting a series of countermeasures, the latest of which was Tuesday's ban on exports to military users or for any purposes that contribute to Japan's military strength.

"A measure such as this, targeting only our country, differs significantly from international practice, is absolutely unacceptable and deeply regrettable," said Japan's top government spokesman, chief Cabinet secretary Minoru Kihara.

At a daily press conference yesterday, he declined to comment on the possible impact on Japanese industry, saying it remained unclear exactly what items would be targeted. Japan's Nikkei share index

fell about 1% yesterday, bucking a trend of record highs in US and European benchmarks.

Stocks of major military contractors Kawasaki Heavy and Mitsubishi Heavy were among the biggest losers, down about 2%.

Beijing is considering further clamping down on exports of rare earths to Japan, the *China Daily*, a newspaper owned by the ruling Chinese Communist Party, said on Tuesday, citing sources with knowledge of the matter.

Such a move could have sweeping implications for the manufacturing powerhouse, including its key automotive sector.

Japan has sought to diversify its supply of rare earths since China last throttled exports of the minerals in 2010, but still relies on China for about 60% of imports.

For some heavy rare earths, such as those used for magnets in electric and hybrid vehicle motors, for example, Japan is almost totally dependent on China, analysts say.

Japanese automaker Subaru said it was closely monitoring the situation, while peers such as Toyota and Nissan did not immediately comment.

A three-month curb on Chinese exports of rare earths, similar to that of the 2010 dispute, could cost Japanese businesses 660bn yen (\$4.2bn) and shave 0.11% off annual gross domestic product, Nomura Research Institute economist Taka-hide Kiuchi said in a note yesterday.

A year-long ban would knock 0.43% off GDP, he added.

Tokyo will not likely sit idly by if Beijing's bans do start to target Japanese business more broadly, said

Cameron Johnson, a senior partner at supply chain consultancy Tidal-wave Solutions in Shanghai.

"If there are Japanese civilian or commercial entities targeted, you could see the Japanese retaliate," he said.

Such responses could target areas such as semiconductors or other high-end manufacturing materials China needs for its own supply chain, he added.

Separately yesterday, China launched an anti-dumping probe into imports from Japan of dichlorosilane, a key chemical for the semiconductor industry, the commerce ministry said on its website.

Since Takaichi's offhand remark on Taiwan in early November, Beijing has urged citizens not to visit Japan, halted imports of Japanese seafood and cancelled meetings and cultural events.

US President Donald Trump, who brokered a fragile trade war truce with Chinese President Xi Jinping late last year and plans to travel to Beijing in April, has asked Takaichi not to escalate the dispute further, sources said.

The quarrel does not, however, appear to have damaged Takaichi's robust popularity at home, opinion polls show. Analysts liken the rift to one triggered by Tokyo's 2012 decision to nationalise disputed islands that set off mass anti-Japan protests in China, and halted meetings of the two countries' leaders for two-and-a-half years.

"I think this will drag on for quite a while," Keita Ishii, president of Itochu Corp, one of Japan's biggest trading houses, said in a television interview.

Fans head for annual Parkes Elvis Festival



Elvis fans stand on board the Elvis Express from Sydney's Central Station, heading to the country town of Parkes for the annual Parkes Elvis Festival, in Sydney, Australia, yesterday.

Intense heatwave grips Australia's southern states

Reuters
Sydney

Australia's south sweltered through a brutal heatwave yesterday that delivered temperatures above 40C (104F) in some cities, triggering health warnings, straining power grids and causing bushfires to flare.

Meteorologists said the conditions were at their worst in six years, when catastrophic bushfires destroyed wide swathes of southeastern Australia, killing 33 people, in what became known as the Black Summer. The nation's weather bureau

issued severe or extreme heat warnings for the states of New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania. It also warned of extreme fire danger across Victoria and South Australia.

"These elevated fire dangers are being driven by a very hot air mass that extends all the way from Western Australia with maximum temperatures in excess of 45C," said senior meteorologist Sarah Scully. In Victoria, where temperatures reached up to 44C, and 41C in the state capital Melbourne, authorities advised residents to stay indoors and keep hydrated.

Victoria's emergency management commissioner Tim Wiebusch said firefighters were battling several fires across the state and conditions would worsen tomorrow. "We already have a statewide advice warning message out for severe to extreme intensity heatwave, and are now seeing those conditions kick in across the state," he said.

"We are particularly wanting Victorians to make sure they are alert to their conditions, make sure you are staying in cool places."

Temperatures also soared to 31C in Sydney, 32C in Perth and 43C in Adelaide.

Earthquake strikes off Philippines' southern islands

A 6.7-magnitude earthquake struck off the Philippines' southern islands yesterday, the US Geological Survey (USGS) said, and there were no immediate reports of damage or injuries. USGS said the quake struck at a depth of 10km around 68km east of Baculin, a village in the southern town of Hinatuan in Surigao del Sur province.

Philippine seismology agency Phivolcs, which measured the tremor at 6.4-magnitude and depth of 23km, warned of damage and aftershocks.

Police and disaster officials near the quake's epicentre said there were no immediate reports of damage or injuries from the earthquake.

"It was not that strong, but people rushed outside," said Joey Monato, the local police chief of Hinatuan. Phivolcs director Teresito Bacolcol said by phone that the earthquake's epicentre was situated less than 10km from where a pair of strong earthquakes hit in October, killing seven people.

Fire brigade exercise in Tokyo



A helicopter flypast over fire trucks is seen during the Tokyo Fire Department's new year fire brigade exercise in Tokyo.

Surgery 'not good option' for ex-PM Mahathir: son

AFP
Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia's 100-year-old former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad will not undergo surgery for a hip fracture sustained from a fall at home due to his age, his son said yesterday. Mahathir has suffered health problems in recent years and was previously hospitalised for fatigue after a picnic celebration for his centenary in July.

He was taken conscious by ambulance to the National Heart Institute in Kuala Lumpur on Tuesday after the fall at his home, his aide Sufi Yusoff said.

Doctors confirmed a fracture to his right hip and the former premier was expected to stay in the hospital "for the next few weeks for treatment and observation", according to Sufi.

The patriarch's son Mukhriz yesterday said Mahathir fell inside the house after his daily brisk walking exercise.

"Especially considering his age, which has now reached 100... therefore, surgery is not a good option," Mukhriz said in a video posted on his political party's WhatsApp group chat.

"As such, we have been advised by hospital specialists for him to undergo a standard rehabilitation process, which will take some time. "The goal, of course, is for him to return to his usual state of health and to be able to continue carrying out his duties as he has done all this while," he added.

Mukhriz also thanked those who conveyed their well wishes as well as prayers, and appealed for privacy.

"I plead with everyone to give Tun Mahathir the space to rest and to fully recover and heal," he said.

China's top diplomat tours Africa with focus on vital trade routes

Reuters
Beijing

China's top diplomat yesterday began his annual New Year tour of Africa, focusing on strategic trade access across eastern and southern Africa as Beijing seeks to secure key shipping routes and resource supply lines.

Foreign Minister Wang Yi will travel to Ethiopia, Africa's fastest-growing large economy; Somalia, a Horn of Africa state offering access to key global shipping

lanes; Tanzania, a logistics hub linking minerals-rich central Africa to the Indian Ocean; and Lesotho, a small southern African economy squeezed by US trade measures. His trip this year runs until January 12.

Beijing aims to highlight countries it views as model partners of President Xi Jinping's flagship "Belt and Road" infrastructure programme and to expand export markets, particularly in young, increasingly affluent economies such as Ethiopia, where the IMF forecasts growth of 7.2% this year.

China, the world's largest bilat-

eral lender, faces growing competition from the European Union to finance African infrastructure, as countries hit by pandemic-era debt strains now seek investment over loans.

"The real litmus test for 2026 isn't just the arrival of Chinese investment, but the 'Africanisation' of that investment. As Wang Yi visits hubs like Ethiopia and Tanzania, the conversation must move beyond just building roads to building factories," said Judith Mwai, policy analyst at Development Reimagined, an Africa-focused consultancy.

"For African leaders, this tour is an opportunity to demand that China's 'small yet beautiful' projects specifically target our industrial gaps, turning African raw materials into finished products on African soil, rather than just facilitating their exit," she added.

On his start-of-year trip in 2025, Wang visited Namibia, the Republic of Congo, Chad and Nigeria.

His visit to Somalia will be the first by a Chinese foreign minister since the 1980s.

Further south, Tanzania is central to Beijing's plan to secure

access to Africa's vast copper deposits. Chinese firms are refurbishing the Tazara Railway that runs through the country into Zambia. Li Qiang made a landmark trip to Zambia in November, the first visit by a Chinese premier in 28 years.

The railway is widely seen as a counterweight to the US and European Union-backed Lobito Corridor, which connects Zambia to Atlantic ports via Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

By visiting the southern African kingdom of Lesotho, Wang

aims to highlight Beijing's push to position itself as a champion of free trade. Last year, China offered tariff-free market access to its \$19tn economy for the world's poorest nations, fulfilling a pledge by Chinese President Xi Jinping at the 2024 China-Africa Cooperation summit in Beijing.

Lesotho, one of the world's poorest nations with a gross domestic product of just over \$2bn, was among the countries hardest hit by US President Donald Trump's sweeping tariffs last year, facing duties of up to 50% on its exports to the US.

UK builders suffer longest downturn since global financial crisis

Reuters
London

An industry survey released yesterday, revealed that British construction output contracted for the 12th consecutive month in December – the longest decline in nearly 20 years – though outlooks for 2026 remain optimistic.

In December, the S&P Global UK Construction Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) edged up

to 40.1, marginally exceeding the five-and-a-half-year low of 39.4 recorded in November.

The sector's 12-month downturn is its longest continuous decline since the global financial crisis that spanned from 2007-2009.

Yesterday's reading was below a median forecast of 42.5 in a Reuters poll of economists, and the 50 level that separates growth from contraction.

"UK construction companies once again reported challenging business conditions and falling

workloads in December, but the speed of the downturn moderated from the five-and-a-half-year record seen in November," said Tim Moore, economics director at S&P Global Market Intelligence.

"Many firms cited subdued demand and fragile client confidence. Despite a lifting of Budget-related uncertainty, delayed spending decisions were still cited as contributing to weak sales pipelines at the close of the year," he added.

Some recent business surveys

have shown similar worries about demand, investment and hiring, ahead of Finance Minister Rachel Reeves' second annual Budget in late November, which included £26bn (\$50bn) in tax rises, although the introduction of most of them was delayed.

The output in the commercial sector in December dropped at the sharpest pace in more than five-and-a-half years. While the downturn in civil engineering eased, it remained the weakest performing category in December.

The residential building activity subindex dropped to 33.5, the weakest reading since May 2020, when lockdowns during the coronavirus pandemic halted construction work. Britain's government is trying to boost the pace of house-building.

However, firms showed signs of confidence about the outlook, with business activity expectations for the coming 12 months hitting their highest since July, helped by the prospect of lower borrowing costs, as well as

the lifting of uncertainty about Reeves' Budget.

Rising infrastructure spending and weaker inflationary pressure also raised hopes of a turnaround.

Total new orders and employment in December fell but to a lesser extent than in November. The all-sector PMI – which includes previously published services and manufacturing reports for December, and the construction data – edged up at 50.4 from 50.1 in November.

German major weighs sale of TKSE to Jindal Steel

Reuters
New Delhi

Germany's Thyssenkrupp could sell its steel division to India's Jindal Steel International in several steps, four people familiar with the talks said, as the two sides try to strike a deal for the complex business.

Jindal Steel has been conducting due diligence on Thyssenkrupp Steel Europe (TKSE) since October after making an indicative bid for Europe's second-largest steel-maker. The deal is key for Thyssenkrupp as the submarines-to-car parts group seeks to become leaner and more focused.

One option under discussion would see Jindal take a majority stake in TKSE, likely 60%, in a first step, with the remaining 40% acquired later in two 20% tranches or in one go, depending on progress in restructuring, the people said.

A phased transaction would give Thyssenkrupp more flexibility to

address about 2.5bn euros (\$2.9bn) in pension liabilities tied to TKSE – a major hurdle in previous sale attempts, one of the people said.

Details of how a gradual takeover could be structured and its impact on debt obligations have not previously been reported. Due diligence is ongoing and terms could still change, the people said.

Shares in Thyssenkrupp rose as much as 4.9% to the top of Frankfurt's midcap index following the report, with one trader saying a sale of TKSE was "getting more concrete after years of finding no buyer".

A sale of TKSE would end years of efforts to find a buyer for an asset that, while central to Germany's industrial heritage, has been volatile and costly to run amid tougher Asian competition.

For Jindal Steel International, the international steel arm of the Naveen Jindal Group, it would mark a major expansion into Europe after buying smaller Czech peer Vitkovice Steel in 2024. Thys-

senkrupp said in a statement that all aspects of the transaction – including valuation, obligations and future investments – would be discussed during due diligence and any contract talks.

"We cannot comment on individual statements, which at this stage can only represent an interim status," it said.

Jindal Steel International had no immediate comment.

A second source said a Jindal delegation was scheduled to visit Germany in January for a technical review of TKSE's Duisburg plant, after a planned December trip was postponed.

A phased takeover would also keep Thyssenkrupp involved in TKSE's restructuring, a third source said.

Thyssenkrupp CEO Miguel Lopez said last month that Jindal Steel was an optimal fit for TKSE, adding that a sweeping restructuring plan to cut jobs and capacity had prompted the Indian group's interest.

Snow-covered Kashmir hill station draws tourists



Tourists gather on a snow-covered hill station in Sonamarg, one of the main tourist attractions in Ganderbal district, Indian-administered Kashmir, yesterday.

India government seeks fare data from airlines

Reuters
New Delhi

The government has asked IndiGo, Air India, SpiceJet and Akasa to provide data on average fares charged, a document shows, as Competition Commission of India authorities investigate unprecedented travel disruptions in December.

Pilot shortages at IndiGo,

which dominates India's aviation market with a 65% share, forced it to cancel about 4,500 flights last month, stranding thousands of passengers and disrupting air travel nationwide.

Fares of certain airlines surged during the crisis, prompting the government to impose temporary caps.

The CCI in December said it was proceeding against IndiGo to assess whether it had abused

its market position. IndiGo has not commented on the case.

The directorate general of civil aviation, which oversees safety, has written to airlines asking for average fares on each route they operated on, for economy and premium economy seats, over the period December 1-15, according to a Reuters review of a January 1 government email to IndiGo, Air India, Air India Express, SpiceJet and Akasa.

India's fuel demand hits highest on record in December

India's fuel consumption hit 21.75mn metric tonnes in December, up 5.3% year-on-year and the highest monthly number recorded in oil ministry data going back to April 1998. India is the world's third-largest consumer and importer of oil and the largest buyer of Russian seaborne crude, taking advantage of discounts on Russian oil as Europe and the US shun those barrels over Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Data released by the oil ministry's Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell (PPAC) showed sales of gasoline, or petrol, stood at 3.56mn metric tonnes in December, up 1.1% from November and 71% from a year earlier. Diesel consumption was at 8.46mn tonnes, up 5% from a year earlier but down 1.1% month-on-month. Liquefied petroleum gas consumption rose 11.2% from a year earlier to 3.08mn tonnes. Naphtha sales fell 0.4% year-on-year to 1.01mn tonnes, while consumption of bitumen, used primarily in road construction, rose 0.3% from November and 18.8% on an annual basis at 0.91mn tonnes.

UK cold weather continues



Robert Hazell, 77, of London, skates across a frozen flood plain, as a spell of cold weather continues across the UK, at Port Meadow in Oxford, Britain, yesterday.

UK watchdog fines former Carillion finance directors

Reuters
London

Britain's financial watchdog yesterday said it had fined two former Carillion finance directors after they dropped appeals against findings that they misled investors about the company's financial health before it collapsed in 2018.

The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) said that Richard Adam and Zafar Khan knew of serious problems in Carillion's UK construction arm, but failed to disclose them in market statements or alert the board or the audit committee.

Carillion, which was once one of Britain's biggest contractors with 43,000 employees, collapsed in January 2018 under £7bn (\$9.45bn) of liabilities, disrupting public services and major projects.

Adam and Khan had been

fined £232,800 and £138,900, respectively, after dropping their appeals, the FCA said in a statement, less than the £318,000 and £154,400 penalties the regulator set out in its 2022 decision notices.

The FCA said the former finance directors acted recklessly and were "knowingly concerned" in breaches of market abuse and listing rules, including the publication of misleading information and failures to maintain adequate controls. "Those in positions of responsibility have a duty to keep the market accurately and adequately informed," said Steve Smart, the FCA's joint executive director of enforcement.

Khan, who stepped down as Carillion's finance director after just nine months in September 2017, said in a statement he had agreed to settle because after nearly eight years he no longer had the resources to continue defending the case.

Reform UK picks Muslim ex-lawyer to run for London mayor



Reform UK leader Nigel Farage (left) poses with Westminster City councillor Laila Cunningham at the end of a party press conference in London yesterday.

AFP
London

The anti-immigration Reform UK party yesterday named Muslim businesswoman Laila Cunningham as its candidate to run in London's 2028 mayoral elections.

Reform leader Nigel Farage announced Cunningham, a former lawyer, as the Reform UK party's pick to contest the post held since 2016 by current mayor Sadiq Khan.

Khan, a Labour party politician who became the UK capital's first

Muslim mayor, has been fiercely criticised by the far-right over his policies, which often celebrate London's diversity and large immigrant population. The Labour mayor has not announced if he intends to run for a fourth term in office.

Born to Egyptian immigrant parents, 48-year-old Cunningham is Reform's first local councillor in London.

Cunningham would lead the party in an ambitious bid to win big in local elections in London in May, Farage said.

Reform could struggle to win over voters in the diverse, busy

UK metropolis, despite growing popularity across other parts of the country.

At a press conference yesterday, Farage described Cunningham as "articulate... passionate" and "a mother".

Elected in the central borough of Westminster in 2022 as a Conservative, Laila Cunningham defeated to Reform last year.

Born in the capital to parents of Egyptian origin who arrived in the UK in the 1960s, she called London the "greatest city in the world".

"But I am not blind to what it has become," she added, vowing

there would be a "new sheriff in town".

Cunningham worked as a lawyer for the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), but had to resign last year after making comments considered too politically partisan.

"People that come to London have to embrace British culture. You don't come to London expecting London to change for you," she said yesterday.

She announced her priority would be to fight crime, arguing that London "is no longer safe" particularly for women, and attacking Khan's policies.

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GULF TIMES

Study casts doubt on potential for life on Jupiter’s moon Europa

Jupiter’s moon Europa is on the short list of places in our solar system seen as promising in the search for life beyond Earth, with a large subsurface ocean thought to be hidden under an outer shell of ice. But new research is raising questions about whether Europa in fact has what it takes for habitability.

The study assessed the potential on Europa’s ocean bottom for tectonic and volcanic activity, which on Earth facilitate interactions between rock and seawater that generate essential nutrients and chemical energy for life. After modelling Europa’s conditions, the researchers concluded that its rocky seafloor is likely mechanically too strong to allow such activity.

The researchers considered factors including Europa’s size, the makeup of its rocky core and the gravitational forces exerted by Jupiter, the solar system’s largest planet. Their evaluation that there probably is little to no active faulting at Europa’s seafloor suggests this moon is barren of life.

“On Earth, tectonic activity such as fracturing and faulting exposes fresh rock to the environment where chemical reactions, principally involving water, generate chemicals such as methane that microbial life can use,” said planetary scientist Paul Byrne of Washington University in St Louis, lead author of the study published in the journal *Nature Communications*.

“Without such activity, those reactions are harder to establish and sustain, making Europa’s seafloor a challenging environment for life,” Byrne added. Life may have emerged on Earth billions of years ago in the dynamic environment around seafloor hydrothermal vents. But Europa may lack these features.

Study assessed seafloor tectonic activity and volcanism; study’s findings suggest Europa’s ocean is barren of life; Nasa in 2024 launched spacecraft on mission to Europa

diameter of roughly 1,940 miles (3,100km), is slightly smaller than Earth’s moon. Its icy shell is believed to be 10-15 miles (15-25km) thick, sitting atop an ocean perhaps 40-100 miles (60-150km) deep.

The fourth-largest of Jupiter’s 95 formally recognised moons, Europa is about a quarter Earth’s diameter. But its ocean of salty liquid water may contain double the water present in Earth’s oceans. Europa possesses traits suggesting potential habitability. “There are three major factors thought to be critical for supporting life: liquid water, organic chemistry and energy,” Byrne said.

“Europa’s subsurface ocean satisfies the first requirement. We’ve identified organic chemicals on this moon’s exterior icy shell, and there may very well be such chemicals inside the ocean. So that’s the second requirement. And Europa’s particular orbit means that Jupiter drives tidal heating within Europa - requirement three,” Byrne said.

Nasa in 2024 launched the robotic Europa Clipper spacecraft on a mission to examine whether Europa has conditions suitable to support life. The US space agency is planning for Europa Clipper to conduct dozens of close flybys, starting in 2031. “While geology operates similarly across the solar system, every planetary body that we have explored has been found to have some unique process to them. Given what we know about Europa, it is still the best place to look for extraterrestrial life,” Klimczak said.

Jupiter’s gravitational pull affects its numerous moons in different ways. Io, Jupiter’s innermost large moon, is the solar system’s most volcanically active body. Jupiter’s gravity, coupled with gravitational forces from other moons, creates strong tidal forces on Io, generating internal friction and heat. But Europa orbits much further from Jupiter than Io.

“The effect of this tidal heating drops off quickly with distance, so although there’s enough tidal heating to keep Europa’s ocean from freezing solid, according to our calculations at least there’s not nearly enough to tectonically deform the ocean floor. So, in short, there probably isn’t the kind of thing happening on Io taking place deep within Europa,” Byrne said.

The study evaluated only Europa’s current conditions. “There are reasons to think that Europa might once have been much more geologically active than it is today, albeit a few billion years ago. So perhaps for a time that world really was just not habitable but actually inhabited, before those conditions changed and the chemical energy for life ran out,” Byrne said. - Reuters

“Based on our findings, the seafloor would probably not contain major tectonic landforms, such as long ridges or deep troughs. There would likely not be any underwater volcanoes or seamounts, and we would not have any hydrothermal activity such as black smokers. Having said that, I hope I will stand corrected one day,” said University of Georgia geologist and study co-author Christian Klimczak.

Europa, with a diameter of roughly 1,940 miles (3,100km), is slightly smaller than Earth’s moon. Its icy shell is believed to be 10-15 miles (15-25km) thick, sitting atop an ocean perhaps 40-100 miles (60-150km) deep.



HE Sheikhha Hind bint Hamad al-Thani with other dignitaries at the reception.

Redefining sustainability: Earthna, King’s Foundation mark first year of partnership

Education City reception showcases QF’s commitment to advancing contemporary sustainability practices and solutions through traditional knowledge

Qatar Foundation (QF) highlighted its commitment to advancing contemporary sustainability through traditional knowledge at a high-level reception in Education City. The event marked the first anniversary of the partnership between the Earthna Centre for a Sustainable Future and The King’s Foundation, featuring pilot projects across four countries.

At the heart of this approach is QF’s Earthna Centre for a Sustainable Future, which seeks to redefine sustainability through locally grounded, context-driven solutions rooted in indigenous knowledge. In January 2025, Earthna and The King’s Foundation, a UK charity founded by King Charles III, launched a two-year collaboration to develop four pilot urban projects demonstrating how cultural heritage can inform modern sustainable practices.

Twelve months on, a high-level reception at Al Khater House in Qatar Foundation’s Education City reviewed progress on partnership projects in India, Guyana, Sierra Leone, and Zanzibar. The historic house, preserved as a hub for inclusive cultural heritage and sustainability, also underscored the value of drawing on past knowledge to shape 21st-century solutions.

Highlighting the value of balance in traditional design, HE Sheikhha Hind bint Hamad al-Thani, Vice-Chairperson of QF, said people feel at ease in traditional Qatari homes such as Bayt Al Khater because they work in harmony with nature.

“This sense of ease is not a coincidence; it is in resonance with the principle of mizan or balance – a universal law found in all wisdom traditions. It is through this sacred harmony – this keeping of the scales – that life truly prospers,” HE Sheikhha Hind said.

“Our tradition and religion



counsel a measured life: take what is needful, cultivate without pillaging, and steward the creatures whose well-being is bound to our own.

“These principles of stewardship underpin Qatar Foundation’s sustainability work. We see it in the revival of traditional crafts at Herfah; in the values-based educational pedagogies taught in our schools; and in the policy research and test-bedding work of Earthna, where indigenous knowledge is used to shape a sustainable future,” HE Sheikhha Hind said.

Kristina Murrin CBE, CEO of The King’s Foundation, said:

“Our partnership with Earthna is much valued, so it is fantastic to have had the opportunity to celebrate our joint passion for protecting traditional heritage skills and the natural world.”

The event saw students in QF’s Academyti school demonstrate how, through the Rihla programme, sustainability is being embedded into their learning experience, through progressive educational approaches rooted in culture, heritage and Islamic Principles.

Experiential hands-on learning practices allow students to embrace traditional sustainable practices and the Islamic values and ethics that

encourage environmental responsibility and stewardship. Participants and instructors from QF’s Herfah programme highlighted the importance of preserving crafts woven into Arab and Islamic cultural heritage, showcasing the projects they have developed through the programme and allowing guests to experience these time-honoured crafts for themselves.

Earthna also outlined the full spectrum of its work and research focused on promoting the role of traditional knowledge in shaping a sustainable future, and updated guests on the four projects established through its partnership with The King’s Foundation.

The pilot projects supported by the partnership between Earthna and The King’s Foundation were selected to represent traditional sustainability practices across different regions, each illustrating how, amid contemporary challenges, cultural heritage plays a central role in informing sustainable urban planning.

The projects highlight the value of traditional methods and locally sourced materials in modern architecture and construction.

They also aim to strengthen global understanding of how traditional knowledge can advance environmental sustainability, social resilience, and economic development, while serving an educational role within their communities.

Insights from the four projects will be shared with countries facing similar challenges, including Qatar, in the form of research publications and policy recommendations. In India, the project team will convene a “Winter School” in February, where students, including participants from Qatar, will engage with traditional water management and land regeneration practices at Dhun, Jaipur, advancing knowledge exchange for sustainable solutions in Qatar and other hot and arid regions.

In Zanzibar, the project focuses on the revival of Stone Town’s traditional craftsmanship and built heritage, underscoring cultural linkages with the Arabian Gulf and the enduring value of craftsmanship in preserving identity.

In Guyana, the project strengthens Earthna’s coastal resilience and ecosystems agenda by studying mangrove ecosystems and traditional architecture, incorporating both in a visitor centre that will serve as a platform for mangrove education and regeneration practices.

In Sierra Leone, the project promotes sustainable construction by designing a community facility as a primary health unit, offering replicable lessons on integrating wellness infrastructure with sustainable building practices.

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Ukraine pushes EU membership bid as Cyprus takes bloc’s presidency

Reuters
Nicosia

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky yesterday pressed allies for ironclad security guarantees against any renewed Russian attack while also seeking progress on EU membership talks and tougher sanctions on Moscow.

Zelensky met Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides in Nicosia as Cyprus took over the European Union’s rotating presidency, which runs for six months.

“We are working to make as much progress as possible during this period on opening negotiating clusters and on Ukraine’s accession to the European Union,” Zelensky said after the meeting, in a statement posted on X.

Ukraine applied to join the EU



Cyprus’ President Nikos Christodoulides and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen attend the official opening ceremony of Cyprus taking over the EU presidency at the THOC theatre in Nicosia, yesterday.

days after Russia launched its full-scale invasion in February 2022, seeking to anchor itself politically

of the war and opposition from EU member Hungary to a fast-track process for Kyiv.

“The president and I talked about strengthening sanctions against Russia, which must remain in place as long as Russia’s aggression and occupation continue,” Zelensky said.

The two leaders also discussed reinforcing Ukraine’s air defence and the production and supply of drones. “We hope that support for Ukraine will remain strong,” he said. Zelensky later met with European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Antonio Costa. Yesterday’s meetings, he said, would provide an opportunity to discuss details of a meeting in Paris on Tuesday, where the United States backed a broad coalition of Ukraine’s allies in promising to provide secu-

rity guarantees in the event of a ceasefire to support the country if Russia attacks again.

Zelensky, who is seeking solid post-war security guarantees to deter Russia from attacking again, told reporters he had not received a clear answer from Ukraine’s partners of what their response to such an attack would be.

“As long as we don’t have such security guarantees, legally binding, supported by parliaments, supported by the United States Congress, this question cannot be answered,” Zelensky said in a Whatsapp group chat.

Cyprus, which traditionally had close political and cultural ties with Russia, has fully backed sanctions on Moscow. Many on the island draw parallels between Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and Turkey’s invasion of north Cyprus in 1974 after a brief coup engi-

neered by the military then ruling Greece.

“Cyprus reaffirms its steadfast commitment to Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.

As a country that still lives with the consequences of illegal invasion and ongoing military occupation, we fully understand what is at stake,” Christodoulides wrote in a post on X after meeting Zelensky.

“Ukraine will be a central priority of our Presidency, and will work to ensure sustained support at all levels,” he said.

A ceremony later in Nicosia marking the start of its six-month term will include Middle Eastern leaders, including Lebanese President Joseph Aoun, highlighting the ambition of the eastern Mediterranean island to serve as a bridge between Europe and the region.

Pakistan, Saudi in talks on JF-17 fighter jets-for-loans deal

Reuters
Islamabad

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia are in talks to convert about \$2bn of Saudi loans into a JF-17 fighter jet deal, two Pakistani sources said, deepening military co-operation months after the two nations signed a mutual defence pact last year.

The talks underscore how the two allies are moving to operationalise defence co-operation at a time when Pakistan is facing acute financial strain and Saudi Arabia is reshaping its security partnerships to hedge against uncertainty about US commitments in the Middle East.

The mutual defence deal was signed following Israel’s strikes on what it said were Hamas targets in Doha, an attack that shook the Gulf region. One of the sources said the discussions were limited to the provision of JF-17 Thunder fighter jets, the light combat aircraft jointly developed by Pakistan and China and produced in Pakistan, while the second said the jets were the primary option among others under discussion. The first source said the total deal was worth \$4bn, with an additional \$2bn to be spent on equipment over and above the loan conversion. The sources close to the military with knowledge of the matter spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to speak on the deal.

Pakistan’s Air Chief Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu was in Saudi Arabia for bilateral talks including on “military co-operation between the two sides”, Saudi media outlet SaudiNews50 said on social media platform X on Monday.

Amir Masood, a retired Air Marshall and analyst, said Pakistan was in talks about or had finalised deals with six countries to provide equipment including JF-17s and electronic systems and weapons systems for the jets.

He said those countries included Saudi Arabia, but could not confirm any details about the negotiations. The JF-17s marketability has been increased because “it is tested and has been used in combat,” he told Reuters, adding that it’s also cost effective. Pakistan has said the aircraft was deployed during its conflict with India in May last year, the heaviest fighting between the

neighbours in decades. Pakistan’s military and finance and defence ministries and military did not immediately respond to requests for comment. Saudi Arabia’s government media office also did not respond.

The mutual defence pact, signed in September, committed both sides to treat any aggression against either country as an attack on both, significantly deepening a decades-old security partnership.

Pakistan has long provided military support to the kingdom, including training and advisory deployments, while Saudi Arabia has repeatedly stepped in to support Pakistan financially during periods of economic stress. In 2018, Riyadh announced a \$6bn support package for Pakistan, including a \$3bn deposit at the central bank and \$3bn worth of oil supplies on deferred payment.

Saudi Arabia has since rolled over deposits multiple times, including a \$1.2bn deferment last year, helping Islamabad stabilise its foreign exchange reserves amid chronic balance-of-payments pressures.

Pakistan has in recent months stepped up defence outreach as it seeks to expand arms exports and monetise its domestic defence industry.

Last month, Islamabad struck a weapons deal worth more than \$4bn with Libya’s eastern-based Libyan National Army, officials said, one of the country’s largest-ever arms sales, which includes JF-17 fighter jets and training aircraft.

Pakistan has also held talks with Bangladesh on the possible sale of JF-17s, as it widens its arms supply ambitions beyond South Asia and the Middle East.

On Tuesday, Pakistan’s defence minister said the success of its weapons industry could transform the country’s economic outlook. “Our aircraft have been tested, and we are receiving so many orders that Pakistan may not need the International Monetary Fund in six months,” Khawaja Asif told broadcaster Geo News. Pakistan is currently under a \$7bn IMF programme, its 24th, which followed a short-term \$3bn deal that helped avert a sovereign default in 2023.

It secured the Fund’s support after Saudi Arabia and other Gulf allies provided financial and deposit rollovers.

Zelensky is seeking new meeting with Trump

Reuters
Kyiv

Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky is seeking a new meeting with US President Donald Trump as their officials revisited the two most problematic issues in peace talks aimed at ending Russia’s war in Ukraine.

Kyiv is under US pressure to secure peace quickly but wants security guarantees from allies and is pushing back on Russian demands to cede its eastern Donetsk region and give up control of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant.

Speaking to reporters over WhatsApp yesterday, Zelensky said he wanted to meet Trump again soon to gauge his openness to a Ukrainian proposal that Washington provide security guarantees for more than 15 years in the event of a ceasefire.

He also urged Trump to step up pressure on Russia, which has been cool on the US-backed peace push and is continuing its massive air attacks on Ukrainian cities and the country’s energy grid.

“The Americans, in my view, are being productive right now; we have good results... They need to put pressure on Russia. They have the tools, and they know how to use them,” Zelensky said.

The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the suggestion



From left: Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky, France’s President Emmanuel Macron and Britain’s Prime Minister Keir Starmer sign the declaration on deploying post-ceasefire force in Ukraine during the Coalition of the Willing summit on security guarantees for Ukraine, at the Elysee Palace in Paris.

of a new meeting between Zelensky and Trump.

Citing the US operation to seize Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro, Zelensky suggested Washington could similarly move against Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, a Vladimir Putin ally whose troops became known for their brutality in Ukraine.

“Maybe then Putin would see it and think twice,” he said.

Talks in Paris this week produced commitments from Kyiv’s allies to back up a ceasefire with guarantees such as a multinational troop presence.

But Zelensky said the expression of “political will” had yet to be translated into legally binding pledges backed by national par-

liaments. Zelensky spoke as US and Ukrainian officials in Paris discussed the matter of territory and the fate of the Zaporizhzhia plant, Europe’s largest nuclear facility, which he described as the two thorniest issues in the talks.

Kyiv has refused to pull out of the industrialised Donetsk region, which Russia has failed to seize entirely despite occupying wide swathes of it. Zelensky has said the US has floated the idea of a free economic zone there if Ukraine withdraws from the parts of the region that it still controls.

On Tuesday, US and Ukrainian officials had already talked through “some ideas” to address the issue of territory.

White House special envoy Steve Witkoff said “land options” had been discussed and that he hoped for compromise to be reached.

Any compromises on land should be put to a referendum for Ukrainians, Zelensky has previously said.

According to an opinion poll last month, around three-quarters of Ukrainians are prepared for a deal that would freeze the current front line, but oppose ceding territory.

The US has also proposed tri-lateral operation of the Zaporizhzhia plant, which Moscow captured in 2022 and connected to its own power grid, with an American chief manager, Zelensky said last month.

European leaders work to dispel doubts on Mercosur trade pact

Reuters
Brussels

The European Commission will seek to dispel the concerns of some EU members over a free trade agreement planned with South American bloc Mercosur and 25 years in the making that could be signed as early as next week. Proponents of the deal say it would be the EU’s largest in terms of tariff reductions, is vital to

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

The executive Commission, backed by countries such as Germany and Spain, needs to garner the majority of 15 EU members representing 65% of the EU population to authorise the bloc to sign the deal.

It would still need to win the support of the European Parliament, however.

European commissioners for agriculture, trade and health are expected to give reassurances at a meeting on Wednesday with national agriculture ministers in Brussels on future funding for farmers under the bloc’s Common Agricultural Policy, along with a review of import controls, including permissible maximum levels of pesticide residues.

Italy and France, the EU’s largest agricultural producer, last month dashed hopes for a De-

cember signing, saying they were not ready to support the pact until farmers’ fears of an influx of cheap commodities from Mercosur, including beef and sugar, were addressed.

On Tuesday, the Commission appeared to have won the support of Italy after proposing to accelerate 45bn euros (\$52.61bn) of support for farmers.

Poland and Hungary remain opposed to the deal, and France is also still critical of it.

Europe faces transport chaos as cold snap toll rises

AFP
Paris

Snow, ice and high winds brought transport chaos to swathes of Europe for a third day yesterday, with hundreds of flights cancelled and passengers stranded.

Airports in Paris and Amsterdam were the worst affected, with the Dutch authorities saying more than 1,000 travellers had been forced to spend the night at Schiphol, one of Europe’s busiest hubs.

Seven people have died in weather-related accidents as the continent reels from the most bitter cold snap of the winter so far.

Hungary’s interior ministry said yesterday that a woman had died after a car skidded on ice and crashed into another vehicle, adding to five people killed in France and one in Bosnia since the winter freeze descended on Monday.

With snowfall continuing yesterday, skiers and snowboarders enjoyed hurtling down the steep hills of the Montmartre district in Paris.

But the cold snap came as a bitter shock to the French capital’s many homeless people. Guinean teenager Boubacar

Camara, who is sleeping in a tent on the city’s outskirts, told AFP he had “no choice but to keep on going”.

“You just have to stay strong, make sure you don’t die, you know,” said the 19-year-old. “We can’t do anything about the cold - I’m not used to this at all.”

Hundreds of schools were closed for a third day across Scotland, and English authorities were warning of a snowstorm across parts of the country in the coming days.

More than 100 flights were cancelled on Wednesday at Paris Charles de Gaulle airport and 40 more at the French capital’s other main hub, Orly.

Almost half of mainland France was on alert for heavy snow and black ice, and lorries were banned from the roads in some areas, forcing truckers off the road while waiting for permission to get going again. “It’s better to be here than stuck on the road,” said driver Carle Bruno, who managed to get to a roadside service station in the northern port city of Le Havre to wait out the weather.

In the Netherlands, Schiphol Airport said more than 700 flights had been cancelled so far and warned that the number



A lane of trucks stuck in traffic jam on the A2 motorway near Onnaing, northern France, yesterday, ahead of the Gorette snowstorm.

was likely to increase. Brussels Airport confirmed 40 cancellations on Wednesday, and Budapest Airport in Hungary said 20 flights had been cancelled overnight.

Andras Vaszko, a meteorologist at the

Hungarian national weather service HungaroMet, told AFP it was the heaviest snow in the capital for 15 years.

Forecasters said temperatures could fall to -20C in some places in Hungary, and

in neighbouring Austria the mercury plummeted even further to -24C in the Alps overnight. Britain also saw temperatures plunging, with the authorities warned some rural communities in Scotland could be “cut off” by snow.

The Eurostar rail service connecting London with continental European cities was also disrupted again yesterday, with passengers facing cancellations and delays.

The Balkans region has been hit by heavy snow and floods in recent days and thousands were still without power in Serbia after a snowstorm tore down power lines on Tuesday.

The Albanian port city of Durres was hit by torrential downpours on Tuesday that inundated hundreds of homes and forced around 200 people to flee, though officials said conditions were easing yesterday.

Nordic countries were also facing snow-related chaos, with officials in eastern Sweden warning that power cuts were “likely” because of heavy snowfall.

Trams were suspended in the western city of Gothenburg, and the authorities in the wider region warned people not to drive and stay at home if possible.

Qatar Museums launches season 1 of ‘Lusail Museum Conversations’

Qatar Museums (QM) announced the launch of the Lusail Museum Conversations, an ongoing series of public lectures and events. The inaugural season, titled The Late Ottoman World: At the Roots of the Modern Middle East, runs from January-April and will take place at Georgetown University in Qatar.

Across five in-depth talks, the series examines questions of authority, artistic expression, reform, and belonging during the 19th century, revealing the foundations of many dynamics that continue to shape the region today. This is the first of a longer cycle of thematic seasons.

Designed as a platform for dialogue, scholarship, and cultural exchange, the programme invites audiences to explore, with leading speakers, the cities, stories, and figures of the 19th-century Middle East and beyond.

Through conversations led by internationally recognised historians and cultural figures who are also acclaimed storytellers, audiences will learn unexpected stories about late Ottoman culture and the roots of the modern Middle East, discovering how people negotiated the challenges and appeal of European modernity in a world rooted in its own history.

The inaugural season brings together five lectures and a film screening, each delving into key aspects of the late Ottoman world. From exploring the intersections of art, authority, and reform, to questions of identity and cultural exchange, the talks examine how pivotal figures and events shaped the cultural and artistic landscapes of the 19th-century Middle East.

Audiences will gain insight into palace culture, diplomacy, the experiences of imperial elite

The inaugural season brings together five lectures and a film screening, each delving into key aspects of the late Ottoman world

es, the contributions of women artists, and the legacies of memory and migration in the region. Season One traces art, power, and identity across the late Ottoman world and its peripheries. It opens on January 13 with Edhem Eldem's Princes, Patrons, and Painters, which examines how the last Ottoman caliph, Abdülmecid (1868–1944), used painting to project modernity and responsibility after the 1908 Young Turk Revolution, revealing the paradoxes of imperial modernisation.

On January 27, Ridha Moumni's At the Empire's Edge explores 19th-century Tunis, showing how rulers reshaped political imagery, ceremony, and

architecture, beginning with the Bey's 1846 visit to Paris, to position the country between Ottoman reform, Mediterranean exchange, and emerging statehood.

The third talk, on February 16, features Mostafa Minawi's Arab-Ottoman Imperialists of Istanbul, which draws on archival research and his book 'Losing Istanbul' (2022) to reconsider nationalism through the lives of Arab imperial elites navigating loyalty and belonging at the empire's end.

On April 1, Gizem Tongo's painting 'Like a Man' centres on the painter Mihri, examining women artists' challenges to Orientalism and institutional hierarchies. The season concludes on April 14 with a screening of Philippe Aractingi's Héritages (2014), followed by a public conversation with the director, hosted by Alain Fouad George of the Lusail Institute.



Osman Hamdi Bey (Ottoman Turkish, 1842-1910) La mosquée verte de Brousse (The Green Mosque, Bursa), 1890 Oil on canvas (Lusail Museum, Qatar Museums).

UDC brings Qanat Quartier to life with Italian evenings at The Pearl Island



United Development Company (UDC) is set to host 'Qanat Quartier Evenings... An Italian Experience', a curated lifestyle event designed to enhance community engagement and enrich outdoor living experiences at The Pearl Island. Taking place from January 11-February 11, 2026, the event will run daily from 5pm-10pm, extending until 11pm on weekends, within the open-air surroundings of Qanat Quartier - Boardwalk.

Inspired by the timeless charm of Italy's Venice, the initiative celebrates Qanat Quartier's distinctive architectural identity, defined by its picturesque canals, vibrant facades, and open piazzas. Visitors and residents will enjoy a refined evening atmosphere featuring live bands, daily artists, curated food and beverage carts, and scenic water taxi rides, all thoughtfully integrated into the waterfront setting.

The experience brings together culture, leisure, and social interaction, creating an engaging destination that reflects the lifestyle aspirations of The Pearl Island community.

Qanat Quartier Evenings forms part

of UDC's ongoing strategy to activate public spaces through carefully curated community-oriented experiences that elevate the quality of life. By aligning with seasonal outdoor living trends, the event reinforces Qanat Quartier's position as a vibrant, welcoming destination that encourages connection, walkability, and shared experiences.

The initiative further supports UDC's corporate commitment to enhancing everyday experiences, fostering inclusive communities, and creating destinations that seamlessly blend residential living with culture, leisure, and open spaces. Through such programmes, UDC continues to add value beyond real estate development, delivering meaningful lifestyle offerings that resonate with residents and visitors alike.

As the master developer of The Pearl and Gewan Islands, UDC remains dedicated to shaping integrated, sustainable destinations that reflect global inspirations while responding to local lifestyles, strengthening Doha's position as a dynamic urban and leisure hub throughout the year.

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WOW 13.75 QR Fresh Brown Egg 30's Tray	WOW 1.75 QR Onion India 1 kg	WOW 4.50 QR Broccoli China 1 kg	WOW 9.00 QR Pomegranate India 1 kg	WOW 2.50 QR Mandarin Pakistan 1 kg	WOW 3.00 QR Banana Ecuador 1 kg
WOW 5.00 QR Apple Gala Spain 1 kg	WOW 3.75 QR Indian Yellow Banana Big 1 kg	WOW 18.50 QR Rozana Indian Basmati Rice 5 kg x 1 pc	WOW 9.75 QR Belkis Sunflower Oil 1.8 Ltr x 1 pc	WOW 12.50 QR Sadia Chicken Griller 1300 gm x 1 pc	

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